

J.K. Rowling's broadening horizons

Year three of
Lily Evans Diary

Lily Evans' Diary – year three

Titles in the Lily Evans Diary series:

Year one: An Amazing Girl

Year two: Spreading your wings

Year three: Broadening Horizons

Year four: Choosing is Losing

Year five: Painful Confrontation

Year six: Possible Futures

Year seven: Permitted in Love and War?

Final year: Truth and Tears are Bitter

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Lily Evans Diary, Year three: Broadening Horizons

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Note from the author

All rights with regards to people, places, events, that are described in the “Harry Potter” books remains with J.K. Rowling.

The only reasons for this writing exercises are these:

- As an encouragement for my daughter reading English books,
- Narrative writing can be highly addictive,
- Much to my own surprise, I spent 300 pages for even just the first two years. Hence I had to break up story-lines, and transfer them elsewhere in time.
- Likewise, I had to split part two, as year 3 is over 280 pages.
- Although I realize the chance of any feedback is slim, I hope a reader might sense some of the emotions I tried to put into it.

My apologies in advance, if people feel offended by the language I used, or the scenes I pictured. I abhor any violence, any violence against women.

All names (of new persons) were generated by application, if people with the same name exists, they have absolutely no relationship with my stories.

FINALLY: I do not (REPEAT: NOT) seek any personal gains by writing this.

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Coming home

Just like previous year, Lily Evans' trip back home was very much unlike the return voyage of other students. She was accompanied by her friend and classmate Alexandra and her cat Duncan, but unlike all other students, she had the privilege of traveling in one of the compartments reserved for Hogwarts staff, as professor McGonagall traveled along with them.

However, much was not like other students returning home from a year at the private school. Not only was this a very long trip, because their school was far away from the inhabitant world, this was a school where wizards and witches were thought the fine tricks of the trade. Also, her friend's aunt was not only one of the teachers, but also a known and respected witch, teaching the subject of transfiguration, and also one of the few still existing few capable of doing an Animagus spell.

Alexandra had left her pet at Hogwarts. She very well her aunt saying: “Alexandra, I hope you don't mind saying, but I would suggest leaving your bird at school.”

“Why do you say so, aunt?”

“For several reasons, girl. We travel to Lily's parents and a phoenix isn't a bird you often see in a Muggle's home. And in case you can accompany Lily to the council, I don't think any bird would welcome such a sea voyage.”

“Then what to do?”

“Professor Dumbledore can take good care of your bird. He won't leave Hogwarts this summer as far as I know. And if he

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does, Hagrid know all about fable animals. It used to be his favorite subject.”

“You mean, Hagrid was also a student?”

“Yes, until he was unfortunately expelled, while in his third year.”

“What?”

“It is an episode he does not like to remember at. Some here at Hogwarts do not believe the accusations that led to his removal were true, but could not be proven otherwise. Since then, he works as one of our gamekeepers.”

And again like the previous year, Lily returned to her home, with mixed feelings. Just like previous year, she longed to be with her father, mother, and even her sister Petunia. But on the other hand, much troubled her mind. Until recently she, and any other person in a dream, was never able to perform lasting magic in a dream. But she had! And with what consequences? Two people dead. Had she really killed two people? It never was her intention to do that, only to stop them, nothing more. It must have something to do with the key. Every time she looked at the key, she remembered her stroll in the dark castle with one of the boys from her class, James. Weird fellow. Could be nice, if he tried hard enough. Walking hand-in-hand, in the dark. The memory made her heart glow. He had behaved very well. Too well perhaps? And then, going abroad, to Greece on an official invitation! What would her parent think about that...

“Professor?”

“Yes, Lily?”

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“Thank you for coming along, again.”

“My pleasure girl.”

“I wouldn't know how to explain about the council and so.”

“Let me tell you a small secret: Neither do I. As far as I know, this has never ever happened before in history. Even Dibbet and Dumbledore were stunned.”

“How so?”

“You should realize, most countries, though even not all of them, have a ministry of Magic. And the Prime Minister, president, king or queen, knows very well that whatever they like or do, the ministry of magic has the power to overturn any decision they make. So the real power lies in the end with them, even though they seldom use it. And even our minister of magic is nothing but a subordinate of this council. If they desire, they rule all the so-called Rulers. Never in history, an emperor, president, king or queen was ever invited. But they know about your existence, but you, an undergraduate student, you did get an invitation! Any activity by the council has earned a place in the history books, so many years from now, young students will learn about you, Lily. Think about that, for a change.”

That was more than enough to make the girls grin.

“But how do I speak with them? In what language? How do I address them? Your Highness? Your Wizardness? Your Strangeness? Would my parent let me go?”

“Well, I can only say something about your last question. You were very politely invited, but refusal is not one of your available options. I still wonder how I can make that clear to your parents. And what would they say about the travel arrange-

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ments? Oh dear, I feel just like a student being unprepared for an examination.”

But when they finally arrived at Lily's parents' house, they found out that news had traveled ahead of them.

Lily's mother welcomed the professor and both girls.

“We are so very glad to see you all! Last week we received very strange letters and also had a strange visit. But please, come in!”

The only one entering its home without any hesitations, was Duncan, Lily's cat.

After tea was served and done, Lily's father said “Last week we received a very strange letter. That you were invited to a certain council. It looked very foreign but I could not find anything about them, neither in our own encyclopedia nor the one in the local library. It looked genuine, but it could still be some sort of joke. Your mother and I were not able to decide to take it seriously or not, until...”

“Until what?”

Lily's mother continued “Do you remember the very first visit of the professor?”

“How could I forget!”

“That time a man came along, a clerk from the ministry, Fudge or something like that.”

“Two days ago, he came again. And again not alone.”

“Who accompanied him? Someone else from the ministry?”

“You can certainly say that again. His boss apparently. Mr. Twitchett, Mr. Jeremy Twitchett. The Minister of magic himself! He also goes to that council.”

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“So he received an invitation as well?”

“No, from what I understood, he was ordered, summoned to appear and give a full account of his doings lately.”

“What do you say? The Minister of magic get summoned to give an account of his doing?”

“I never met this minister, but several other ministers, he feared that they would either dispose him or tell him to hand over his resignation. That says something about the position of that particular council. And our daughter gets a polite invitation???? They must be mistaken.”

“Well, all I can say at the moment Mr. and Mrs. Evans is that you have an amazing daughter.”

Professor McGonagall fetched Lily's grade list from her bag.

“Here I have some further evidence to prove what I just said. I presume you remember your daughter's progress with regards to the subject of biology?”

“Yes, we do remember, she did the same amount of what other students learn in three years.”

“The entire staff of Hogwarts, especially myself, is pleased to inform you that your daughter managed to continue at that rate.”

“And that means?”

“It means that Lily has passed, for this subject only, her exam for biology! Again, with honors!”

“Wonderful, we are so proud! Does that implies she now has more time for the other subjects?”

“That is certainly one option.”

“What else is possible then?”

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“If -a very big if- she wants, she can contact Amanda Dibbet, the professor at Oxford. Obviously, she can not go there to study YET, but she can already study some parts, and gather points. That means when she finishes Hogwarts and still want to study at Oxford, she gets exemptions for several parts, perhaps it can shorten her study there with several months, perhaps even a complete academic year. So again if she wants and also if you as her parents agree, I can ask Miranda to come and visit us at Hogwarts in September.”

Both her father and mother got up and hugged their daughter and congratulated her.

But Lily replied, “Not just me! Alexandra did the same for classical languages. She passed for her Greek and Latin exam's.”

Alexandra blushed and replied, “It was just fun to do, and also easier, as I didn't have to do lab exercises. Just reading and writing.”

Lily's father answered, “That indeed is good cause for celebration, we will certainly not let you leave.”

Margareth added, “We sort off hoped, expected you all to stay, and adapted the dinner menu for tonight according to your destination.”

Much Ouzos, Tzatzikis, Giros, Souvlakis, Metaxas later, Lily's father asked, “Fudge mentioned something about possible travel arrangements to Greece. Do you know more about that? Or does he expect us to organize that all?”

“Two of our former students who graduated some years ago were apparently already planning on going in that direction and they offered to accompany Lily.”

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“It is quite something you ask of us. Entrusting our daughter to someone we've never seen or know about. Can you tell me more about them?”

“One of them, Margaret (sounds the same but spelled differently) is now a professor, also at Oxford. She has a degree in history and greek language. She will help my niece next school year with her undergraduate study. Her husband, Edward Potter has done something with oil, and has built his own boat.”

Bewildered Henry informed, “You don't mean Edward J.K.R. Pottermore? THE Edward JKR Pottermore?”

“Eh, yes. I think he uses that name in the Muggle world. Do you already know him?”

“Me? Oh no, not personally, but the reporters of the Financial Times certainly do! Or want to. There was a huge article about him, they gave him the nickname Edward Wright, as he is apparently never wrong. According to some, he has the reputation of having advanced information, even before the people involved.”

“And by the way, his son, James, is also in Lily's class.”

“Does he also comes along to Greece?”

“Certainly! And I understand that another schoolmate and friend, Sirius Black is also part of the crew. You can meet them all. They will be sailing to Brighton in a couple of days. And if you have no objections, Lily and Alexandra can start their voyage from there. If not, we have to arrange something else of course.”

“As you came with this suggestion, I presume that is an indication that you would trust them?”

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“Absolutely!”

“And this boat of him, is it safe, is she seaworthy?”

“Don't ask me such things! That is way beyond the scope of my knowledge, I'm just a professor. You can ask one of the officials at the harbor when his boat is in.”

“Now we know a bit more, but I still don't feel any wiser, to be honest. What do you think about it, Margareth?” he asked his wife.

“I was, we were hoping to spend our holiday this year in the Lake District. But we have made no commitments yet. Can you tell us anything at all about this council and it's meetings. How long will these meetings take? And are these Potters there all the time, do they also take care that Lily get back home again?”

“With regards to your last point, I can vouch for that, no doubt what so ever. Much less I can tell you about the council. I can only tell you what I found last weeks in our library. It is one of, or actually THE oldest still functioning organization. In one of the oldest records, it even points back to its existence 2000 years BC. In it are all the countries, or regions where wizards and witches live represented. I read that it very slowly follows up the political changes in the world. Countries come and go, but the regions remain the same. In northern America, all the tribes used to have their own representative. But I don't expect that is the case anymore. The last record about the council and its previous meeting predates 150 years ago. The council sees that it's decisions, mostly about secrecy nowadays are followed up. If there is a conflict, and it gets out of hand, they can intervene, but seldom do. The stupidities of Muggle politicians is not of their concern. They outlive them by far. The council is

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made up by some permanent members, each overseeing a large area. Most, not all countries nowadays have their own ministry of magic and its head, the minister may be invited to have a seat. Since medieval times, France has its seat, but its colonial territories in Africa have several independent seats. The oldest members are, I believe Egypt and Mesopotamia. I saw one record about the debate concerning gunpowder and another one whether or not there should be repercussions, retaliations for the massacres in South and Middle America. And also about the black death, the crusades. How much time those meetings require? No-one knows. But if they meet, it is not without urgent reasons.”

“In that case, I think it is not up to us to give permission for Lily to go or not.”

“I really hate to say this, but I think you are right, Mrs. Evans.”

“But why Lily? She is just a girl!”

“Indeed she is. We were all astonished when we heard about it. My only guess is that it has something to do with her dreaming capabilities. Or the item she inherited from her grand-grand-mother.”

Margareth sighed, her daughter grew up much too fast to her likings.

Atom

Next morning professor McGonagall left, in her usual way via the fireplace, but not after indicating she would meet them next Saturday in Brighton.

The final piece of information she gave was: “Look for a boat with the name ATOM, I'm not sure if it is registered by Potter or Pottermore or even his wife's name. Just look for a boat with that name.”

Saturday came, Alexandra, Lily and her parents and some luggage were heading towards the harbor of Brighton.

Henry went to the harbor office.

“Can you tell me, at which quay I should be looking for a boat ‘the atom’, coming from Scotland?”

“Cargo, personal carrier, or pleasure?”

“I'll guess, pleasure.”

“Try quay four. When you leave the office, straight to the right.”

“Thank you.”

Thankfully it was lovely weather, but it was difficult. Hundreds or even more yachts and power boats. Different size from twenty feet up to and over forty feet, some even fifty feet. But no sign of the Potters.

Finally, Henry returned to the office. “It's like a needle in a haystack.”

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“Do you have any more information, a ship coming from Scotland doesn't say much.”

“It carries the name *ATOM* and is owned by Potter or Pottermore.”

The clerk's attitude totally changed, from utterly bored to totally servile. “I beg your pardon, Sir, for not helping you better. Please follow me, I'll guide you to the ship. It had to dock at a different quay because of the required privacy and its size.”

Slightly surprised Henry followed the clerk, and waving the others to come along. Minutes later they understood why they were at the wrong quay. Here were the larger ships. The very much larger ships. It seems the *ATOM* never ended.

Impressed Henry said “How long..”

A for the girls' familiar voice answered, “The atom is about 120 foot, give or take some toes.”

Lily looked around and noticed James, Sirius, and professor McGonagall, who just had arrived.

“Hi, James, got any sea-lags?”

“Hi, Alexandra! I've sailed many times before, but for Sirius, it was the first time. He was glad to get ashore, and has been looking for a replacement for his stomach.”

This remark was rewarded by a good punch and some laughter.

“It is all his own fault, my father asked whether he wanted a quick or an adventurous voyage. Sirius choose the second one.”

“Please come aboard. My parents are waiting for you all.”

Meanwhile on board James' parent had a discussion....

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“Edward?”

“Yes, Margaret?”

“I think we have to talk about James.”

“Certainly, but you do really mean about James, not *with* James?”

“Later! Remember we've discussed about girls when James went to Hogwarts.”

“Yeah, you were afraid that girls would be attracted to a possible easy future life, without having to work.”

“Your work in the oil business and stock exchange earned you much more than even you anticipated. You know that it attracts treasure hunters like flies.”

“Yes, but on the other hand you feared our son might treat girls disrespectful, as a commodity.”

“So, any new development, or a change of hearts?”

“You noticed these two girls?” Margaret asked.

“Ah! A mother is worried for the well being of her son! I just thought you would like to learn a bit more about the girl who might help with your research. And the other girl was a good excuse for not going to Monte Carlo first, but directly to Athens.”

“No! You completely missed the point. How can you be so blind? This Evans-girl is apparently not *just a girl*. She got a personal invitation from THE council, I tell you she will become a Very Important Person.”

“So what?”

“All these years we considered our son some sort of bounty, that had to be protected against bounty-hunters. Perhaps this

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girl is not interested in James at all, because she herself is a way bigger treasure.”

“So? Are you saying what I think you are saying? It almost sounds like coupling or match fixing!”

“Edward, these are big words, I was merely thinking if we would consider her being a fitting candidate for our son, about applying some modest, eh encouragement.”

“You underestimate our son. James's head-strong. If he likes or dislikes someone, you can not change that easily. And you heard from the new head of Gryffindor. Both girls went through the accelerated learning program for two years long and succeeded. That means if they set their minds to something, they go for it and nothing will change their minds.”

“Perhaps you're right. In any case, there is certainly no need bothering James. Though there is one thing we can do.”

“Such as?”

“Make sure we learn as much as possible about her, getting her trust, letting them meet in different surroundings, outside of school. Inviting her frequently is far too obviously, but it seems that one of James' friends, Sirius has troubles at home. I heard something like he was thinking about running away. We can offer him shelter -if he wants-. And if Alexandra will visit us regularly, there is a fair chance that Lily comes along. And if they meet and learn each other in a different environment, perhaps...”

“Impressive! How long have you been breeding that idea?”

“Ever since I met her, last July.”

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“No problems with that. Plenty of room. Actually, I think I like the idea of having more youngsters around. Where we live there aren't many children of James' age. Neither boys or girls. Even if nothing comes from it, what I actually think. Still nice. Don't tell Sirius directly yet, just make a suggestion to James about it, and leave it there.”

“Hush now, I hear people arriving.”

And indeed many people climbed on board.

Professor McGonagall was welcomed as an old friend, what she actually indeed was.

Then, Lily's parents finally met James' parents.

“Mom, dad, may I introduce to you Lily Evans' parents,” James said.

And subsequently, Lily echoed, “Mom, dad, please meet James' parents.

“Pleased to meet you and welcome on board. I'm Edward, this my wife Margaret.”

“Pleasure is all ours. We are deeply impressed. I've seen yachts before but never a beauty like this. This is my wife Margareth, I'm Henry.”

James joked, “Funny coincident, two Margaret's!”

But Lily responded, “My mother's name is with an “H”, so that does not count.”

But James replied, “So my mother is H-less, you see: ageless.”

“My mother likes to make a difference, hence the extra 'H'!”

Both mothers burst out laughing.

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“How was your voyage so far?”

“She sails like a dream. We left Fort William three days ago and crossed the Irish sea. Just the wind and nothing else. My son has sailed many times before, but for his friend Sirius, it was the first time. The first day was the hardest, not Sirius?”

“Ay ay, captain!”

“We will make fine sailors of them. But you don't have to pretend, Sirius. Even my wife didn't enjoy all of the voyage very much.”

And to the girls he continued, “And ladies, looking forward to Greece?”

“Sure,” replied Alexandra with a big smile, “it looks like the holidays are getting better each year.”

“Indeed,” was all Lily added.

James' father added, “It's a big ship, very comfortable, but no crew. If we sail traditionally, also your hands will be needed. So when you hear 'all hands on deck' it also includes yours.”

Then Lily confessed, “Actually, I'm not feeling too well, I'm scared stiff, to be honest.”

James' mother immediately seized the opportunity, put her arm around her shoulder, and softly comforted her. “What is the matter, dear? Is it the sailing, the sea, afraid of getting sick? Don't worry, James wanted to teach Sirius a lesson so we sailed traditionally. Normally we never do that, except for some minutes when leaving port. Did you notice the name, ATOM? It certainly may refer to being indivisible, but it stands for how we normally travel, with A Touch Of Magic A-T-O-M. As soon

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as we are in open waters, with some spells the ships' deck is as solid as Hogwarts main hall.”

“Thank you, but it is also the council, the meeting, the country, the language, and being totally unprepared. I heard that even the minister wasn't happy looking forward to it. He seemed to be worried, even scared, my father said.”

“I see. Towards James, I would have said 'that's life', but to you: don't worry. Your friend Alexandra and I speak Greek as native as possible, and I know as much one can, about the council. We will stay close to you, we will not leave you alone.”

Thankfully Lily hugged James' mother, what wasn't unnoticed by her parents. Seeing they were responsible adults who could take good care of their daughter was a great relief to them. Hence they felt not uncomfortable with the idea of leaving their daughter and her friend in the hands of the Potters.

Acropolis

Shortly after a ships' lunch professor McGonagall left, as well as Lily's parents but only after her promise to let as soon as possible know when she arrived, how things were going on and the date she was going to return.

Edward walked along with them until they reached their car. Just before they got in, he said to them, "You don't have to worry. The voyage is as safe, as short and as comfortable as a short bus trip. When we arrive in Athens, my wife won't leave her out of her sight. We don't know how long we have to stay there, but if you do not have any objections we would like to add a bit of a proper holiday afterward. I noticed you looking at James and Sirius, I'll give you my word that they will behave properly."

He shook hands and replied, "Thank you, Edward, this is a huge relief for all of us, for taking care on such short notice. Save voyage!"

Just before sunset they left port, they all stayed on deck as long as there was some light, but finally, they were on the open sea. James mother asked the girls to help to prepare dinner, and after everything was cleared away, it was completely dark outside, except for the starry sky.

After some beers and strong stories, Edward told the youngsters to find themselves a cabin. "You can take any cabin, but no mixed sharing, boys! If the ladies want to share their cabin, that is, of course, fine by me." And so they did.

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After Alexandra slipped into her nightgown, she asked, “Lily, what do you think about James' parents?”

“In what respect?”

“None specific, generally speaking.”

“I think they are really nice people, and you?”

“They are so kind, thoughtful. Just like your parents but differently.”

“What do you mean, differently?” Lily inquired.

“A bit difficult to describe. Your father is a doctor, studied for years and working hard. Lots of responsibilities. And your mother as a teacher, she sometimes reminds me of aunt Minerva. At school very stern, but elsewhere so open, warm and friendly. You can not help liking them automatically.”

“I'll convey the compliment. But you feel differently about James' parents?”

“Yes. And no. They do feel OK, like I can trust them, but do they trust me? I feel something distant, protective, shielded, private.”

For a short time, they contemplated about it. Then Lily said, “A thought stroke my mind, James' mother is a professor, mostly doing research, perhaps something secret. His father used to do this, used to do that. What is he doing right now? I understood his parents have more than one place to live, one in London, and at least another one in Scotland. And did you look at this ship! It is not something that anyone can afford. They either inherit a lot of money or made their fortune otherwise. I think they have to protect that, and shield themselves from beggars.”

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“You are probably right, I never was in such position. We could always leave all doors unlocked. Nothing to steal.”

Before she could say *good night*, there was a soft knock on the door.

“Come on in.”

James' mother opened the door and came in.

She smiled at Alexandra, but asked Lily, “How are you feeling now, Lily. Any better?”

“Much better, thank you for asking. It is even more comfortable than a bus. And about the rest? Well, we'll have to wait and see.”

“Mrs. Potter?”

“Yes, Alexandra?”

“May I ask what kind of research you are doing, or is that a secret?”

“You may certainly, it is no secret, not even within the Muggle world as I work for a Muggle university. Though my intentions are different in the Muggle and in the magical world. I do my research on a single person, Medea. Have you ever heard of her?”

Lily had never heard the name, but Alexandra knew it from some of the oldest Hellenistic stories.

“She was one of the oldest witches we know of. Just read the stories of Jason and the Golden Fleece. We have proved about her existence. For my employer, I just dig to find more about the woman, but for our ministry, we try to find what she knew, like ancient spells and potions. Quite something different, not?”

“Do you think you can find something in Athens?”

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“Perhaps, she lived there in Athens after being abandoned and betrayed by her husband Jason, perhaps more south in Corinth, where she lived with Jason. She originally came from the former place known as Colchis, we can not visit, that is now Soviet territory. I hope there is enough time left after the council and before we return home. But you better not worry about it, that is for much much later. You better get some sleep now, tomorrow will be a busy day.”

“A long voyage, I presume.”

“Something like that. Good night, girls.”

“Good night, Mrs. Potter.”

Next morning they felt immediately they were not moving anymore. There were no sails in the ship's mast anymore. When she looked beside the small curtains she noticed that the ship was docked at a quay.

“Did something go wrong? Did we turn back during the night?”

“Not that I know of, why?” replied Alexandra sleepily.

“We lie motionless and are in a port. So let's get dressed to find out. James' father will know it all.”

A little later, they left their cabin and were greeted by James' mother, “Morning, ladies. Breakfast is ready and by the way, in the early hours this morning we reached Piraeus. So, welcome in Athens I should say!”

“How is that possible, we just left England?”

“Ah, I told you, simply a touch of Magic! Didn't I promise you a fair voyage! Why should we waste any precious time?”

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Directly after breakfast, they visited the Acropolis. Around the former temple were iron gates, to keep the tourists at bay, but when the wizardry-company arrived, they were welcomed by an old man, in simple clothes, who they initially had mistaken for a beggar. “Welcome! I am Alfredo Llewellyn, the Council clerk. We were expecting you.” He looked at each of them silently, then returned to Lily, “You, you are the keeper of the key! Who are your companions? They weren't invited!”

Lily introduced each of them, and finally asked, “Can at least my friend Alexandra and this lady come along with me?”

Alfredo looked surprised, took a step back, looked intense at Alexandra and Margaret, and seemed to be debating with himself, but finally answered cryptically, “It is allowed.”

To Edward, James, and Sirius he said, “You can visit the entire area without exceptions. You have extended permits from the Muggle ministry of Archeology.” To the women he said, “Ladies, will you follow me, please?”

They climbed on the hill, entered what used to be the temple, and opened a door, invisible for any Muggle. Behind it, a staircase led to a corridor and another door. Before he opened that, he paused and started to talk. “There is much to see and even more to explain. Excuse me, you probably noticed that speaking is a bit difficult for me, I hardly use words here, they often lead to misunderstandings and take way too much time.”

He noticed the in-comprehensive look of their faces.

“We, at the council normally speak without words. The receiving person does mind-reading, while the other is mind-speaking. Centuries ago it freed us from translating and all the mis-

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takes that came along with it. But the biggest advantage, however, was something else. When communicating this way, you simply can not tell a lie. Even among Muggles, the technique of mind-reading is known, though very rough. Within the magic-world few can master the technique of reading at will and even fewer can mind-speak. As it takes years to practice, later I will cast a temporary spell for you.”

Alfredo opened the door and showed them a huge conference hall. In the shape of an enormous semi-circle they saw desks and chairs, and on each desk stood a mirror.

Lily asked, “If there are several people in a room how does that work?”

“If you want to talk with someone, you concentrate on that person, and you will see him or her in the mirror. It gives us the chance to look each other straight in the eyes.”

Margaret pointed to a single desk at the open side, with what seemed a fractured mirror of hundred pieces. “Accident?”

“No, it is reserved for the head of the council. When in session, it is behind a veil, as the head's identity is not known, only that it is one of the members. It gives him, or her, the possibility to address all the members at once.”

Within the semi-circle, there was a smaller semi-circle.

On the council we have a sub-council, with permanent members, they meet regularly. Lily, you will sit along with the other permanent members. The rest of the desks are for individual regions or countries. The previous general assembly was 152 years ago, in what used to be Babylon.

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He walked along the empty seats and pointed:
Arabia, the oldest and one of the founding members.
Egypt, about the same.
Greece, some centuries younger, but still very old.
Ireland, Wales, Scotland,
England, that seat is reserved for your current minister of
magic: Jeremy Twitchett

Finally, he stopped and said, “I would suggest to go back and get something to drink, while you are waiting for the last members to arrive.”

Alfredo brought them to a small room with a table and some chairs. “I am sorry, we only have wine and water and fresh fruit. No tea or coffee.”

When Alexandra replied softly, “thank you,” Lily looked sharply at her, “Everything alright Alexandra? You look so pale!”

“No, I feel weird inside my head, like a snowstorm or a headache approaching.”

“Perhaps you haven't been drinking enough. Please lie down and rest a while.”

The council

Some time later, Alfredo came back, “I came to fetch you. All participants are here. The council will start shortly.” They walked through some corridors until he stopped before a huge door. But when he opened the door again to a big hall, Alexandra fell to the floor with both her hand to her ears, shouting loudly: “NO, NO, STOP THIS!”

Astonished Alfredo closed the door quickly again. “What?”

Bewildered Alexandra replied, “Voices, hundreds of voices, all mixed-up. All in my head, covering my didn't help at all.”

“So you are a natural reader, an untrained mind-reader. I am so sorry! Finding this out totally unprepared must have been a shock.”

“I sort off knew it, since I was a little girl. But only single persons, and just once in a while. And never that loud.”

“And actually a bit more. I could hear you.”

“We all could hear Alexandra complaining.”

“No! I heard her twice. With and without words!”

Alfredo drew his wand and said, “I'll deafen you a bit. Next, I will transfer the mind-reading and mind-speaking gift for a short while to your companions, so they can hear what is being said, and speak when the need is there.”

He opened the door again, looked at Alexandra and asked, “Are you OK now, do you manage?”

Clearly, Alexandra replied without words, as neither Lily, nor Margaret heard anything, but Alfredo smiled understandingly.

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Subsequently, he whispered a spell, and they heard a vague whispering in the background. With her lips tight together, Lily tried to communicate, “Alexandra? This would be fun at school!”

Her friend smiled, but Margaret replied, “No new way of cheating! If all the students and teachers can do it likewise!”

Satisfied, Alfredo lead them to an empty desk with some extra chairs at the smaller, inner semi-circle, inviting hem to take a seat. When they looked up, he was gone.

Suddenly they heard a voice, coming from nowhere, it seemed to originate inside of their heads.

“MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL!

Apologies for the small delay.

I now declare the 815th session for opened.

It has the usual agenda.

First, we start with the compulsory unbreakable vow.

Next, we will welcome the new members.

Then urgent matters will be discussed,

Finally, we will have our general rounds of discussion among each other.

Now please, take your wand, hold it upright listen carefully and repeated after me:

I, wizard or witch your-own-name, do solemnly swear that I keep all knowledge concerning Magic away from non-magic people, never reveal the Identity of fellow wizards or witches,

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and never disclose the locations of places where Magic is performed or taught. If needed I will protect them with my life.

I realize that like non-magic people, I am just a mortal human being, I am no God and will not act or pose as one.

This I do swear with my own free will.”

Lily tried hard to remember it, but when she finally succeeded, her wand was shining a bright white light. After everyone managed to do so, which took painfully long as some had to try many times, all lights dimmed.

The voice went on, “By now, we know we should and can trust each other. Next, the new, present and missing member positions. The map of the earth has changed uncountable times since the previous meeting. Many countries have disappeared, and evenmore have come to exist. Unclear how long they will last. Most importantly, let me remind you all, the ministry of Magic of northern America and also Muscovy remain hidden to their non-magical governmental organizations. The members of the permanent board have strong indications that if their presence became known to their president or prime minister, it would lead to disclosure and abuse. Both USSR and USA governments will try to use our magic for their own political and military aims, which is utterly unacceptable to us.

The alpine region still represents the area of Switzerland and Austria.

Likewise, Spain and Portugal are represented by the Iberian delegation.

The region known as Belgium has its own ministry now.

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Regrettably, no wizards or witches are detected in Holland, so their entire ministry remains empty and likewise their seat here.

Last century we have seen much turmoil in western Europe.

France is and remains an important area. However, most wizards and witches either moved to one of the mountain regions in either the southern or eastern France to found a new and detached small village. Or they had to choose to live in hiding under a double identity among Muggles. Some of their previous colonies have applied for an official membership of this council, though many regions are more than happy and willing to leave this all over to the France ministry of Magic.

I think we all should recognize the numerous efforts and problems the German ministry has faced the last century. Like all European countries they face a huge growing Muggle population, but they were involved several times in some horrible conflicts. On their ministry, there were fierce debates whether or not to come out in the open, and support either side during either war. On a personal title, I do say that I am appalled and shocked by the loss of human lives and the mindless destruction. Time after time, at the end of each conflict, the Muggle governments declare each time that the previous conflict was the war to end all wars, and it should never be repeated again, but they justify it nonetheless. After the atrocities committed in central Europe, it seems, yes seems, that likewise behavior has been detected in the far-east.

We have witnessed the rise of a new and large power-block that bears the name USSR that controls a number of satellite countries around it. Like the Muscovian ministry, all of the ministries have decided to go into hiding and wait for more favorable times. Our fellow members from Poland and Lithuania

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should know they have our sympathy as they still represent a large number of wizards.

Despite all political changes, Africa remains divided into large regions. Just related to population groups, not to countries they happen to live in currently. After the withdrawal of one of the main colonizing main members, the interests of most of the wizards in Norther Africa lies in the hands of the 'Atlas-group'. Concerning Northern Europe. Both in Iceland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden we have a small but strong magic community. Unfortunately, this isn't the case with Finland, where the number of Magicians remain countable on one single hand. For Denmark, even that is an unreachable target. The final two families have moved back to the Lithuanian region. Most of that area now fall under the Muggle jurisdiction of the soviets, however, that is of no concern for us, we hope at least.

Next point of the agenda, the important items.

We still have some old and unresolved items and I expect they will remain on our agenda for quite some time, even for us.

The ministries of Germany, France, and England have warned that the Muggle population is growing that fast, that the possibility of remaining undetected and have enough living space is becoming more and more difficult. That was, by the way, the reason that the Danish families moved back to Lithuania, where that problem is less imminent.

Another old item is the position of India, Siam, and Java. They still utterly refuse to join our council.

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That brings me to the final point. Even on Muggle timescale it is a new and 'hot' item and will also bring me to our guest.

Several European members have indicated that there is a wizard that has crossed several lines that we hold for inappropriate. The name is irrelevant as he can change that every heartbeat, but he treats Muggles as vermin, even worse than during our earliest council period, now 3500 years ago. The final straw, that triggered this assembly, is that he eagerly tries to control the realm of the living but also the realm of the death. Although the black-book his hidden safely, it seems that he had gained some knowledge from it. Therefore, I have to inform you all that I saw no other alternative but to bring Hecate's key back.”

Lily noticed that this announcement cause quite a stir.

“Yes, I am very much aware of its dangers, and that it took Paracelsus many years of his life to disable the key by slicing it. As a precaution, I summoned fate to judge whether my decision was justified or not. Regrettably, fate has decided I was correct. Behold the reforged key and its bearer. She has been chosen very carefully. I would like to urge you all that the re-forging of Hecate's key, and the identity of the keeper should not be common knowledge for the time being.”

From the words, Lily understood that she had to rise and show her golden key for all to see. She heard many cries of dismay and much whispering. “To avoid rumors and unfounded speculation, you are by now all informed. This mentioned wizard must be restrained to either realm or rather in my humble opinion, to neither.”

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After Lily sat down, she suddenly experienced a strange sensation of drowsiness while looking at her friends. Not only Lily but also Alexandra and Margaret were momentarily petrified.

Immediately a row broke out among the wizards.

“Did you forgot how many innocent lives were taken by the previous holder!” and “You should have consulted us first, before making such decision!” And finally “Who are they anyway?”

Finally, the head of the council replied, with a soft but determined voice not accepting different views.

“Perhaps you are right, but if I waited for a unanimously or even just a majority decision, many meeting would be required, and the outcome would have been uncertain.

The new keeper is indeed young. The youngest visitor ever here. In order to compensate for that, she and her friend will grow and age faster than normal. Twice as fast.”

“Although that means she will be able to learn and grow faster, doesn't it have consequences on her lifespan?”

“Yes. Just like our life spans. Ours is longer, theirs will be shorter. Tragically, but unavoidable.”

“Do they know that? And who are they anyway, can they be trusted, can they bear the weight of this task?”

“They haven't been told, and I don't intend to do either. I'll come to that later. Who they are? The new keeper has a long bloodline, dating back to our glorious Greek past. She values the gift of life as the highest possible. As a young girl, she already wore the rope of recurrence. That might be a sign. Her friend has a bloodline even older than hers. She is a direct de-

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scendant of Cassandra. She bears the gift as well as the curse. And the woman? That's the most intriguing part. Before I speak about her, I need to find out if this is just a twist of fate.”

“Will she be given the full power of the key?”

“No, she will be given none. She has to explore for herself. If needed she might be helped by one of us. But only if she runs out of time. Regarding time, this girl is the grand-grand-daughter of Diana, the former Greek representative. Before she passed away, she confided that her successor would not reach an old age. That is the reason why I don't have any second thoughts letting her age more rapidly.”

Twitchet, the UK-representative commented, “That is again something to be considered an action that should have been discussed.”

But he got quickly interrupted, “Of all the wizards present here, I would not expect any comment from you! Because you failed to control the 'Voldemort' figure and his followers, I had to take this drastic action. I give you here and now the opportunity to come forward, and explain all of your countermeasures you have taken so far. All this council has heard so far were cries of mayhem from people with and even without the gift of magic!”

Many hours later it was decided that the visitors could leave, and continue their journey. He lifted the spell and all three acted like they just had taken a small nap. Stretching their arms and legs like they got stiff.

“General discussions will now commence, I think it is not fair to trouble our guests with this. Your participation and presence

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might seem insignificant to you, but it was essential. Thank you.”

With a feeling of relief, Lily left the hall, accompanied by Alexandra and Margaret.

They noticed that Alfredo opened the door, and welcomed them back. “I hope it wasn't much of a disappointment? You had not much to do, just to show the entire world the reforged key. But it was very important, as no-one can deny its existence. I presume you have one or more questions to ask?”

“Can I ask you a question about the vow we started with?”

“Certainly!”

“That part, about Gods. What was that all about, a formality?”

“No, certainly not! Many years ago, before the founding of the council, wizards and witches reign like despots. They ruled and acted in the open, demanded sacrifices from non-magical people. Sometimes even human sacrifices, just for fun. That led to a war among the wizards of that time, resulting in the founding of this council and the list of rules that we all must abide. Few of them were pleased about it, but in the end, they understood that non-magical people had the right to live and the right to make their own choices of their free will, and not being the puppets of some wizard. But their actions have left a lasting impact on the world, many of them are still known by now.”

“Are you sure about that? To be honest I haven't the faintest idea about who you are talking.”

“Really? I am talking about the ancient Greek and Germanic gods from the legends and myths. They were no gods, but just

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extremely powerful wizards and witches. The wizards from northern and central Europe understood the consequence straight away, but most of them originate from here, opposed for a long time. And even still up to this day, the wizards from Asia would rather remain seen as Gods and be part of day-to-day life.”

“So, all those deities...”

After Alfredo smiled, he said, “If I were allowed to disclose any more than I already should have done, I could talk for weeks about our ancestral stories of arguments are even wars between the eldest. Finally, some moved and spread around the globe to avoid further confrontation. Some moved to America, some settled in Ireland of northern Europe. But many moved to Asia; India, Java, Australia.”

Margaret sank speechless down.

Finally, she said “After all these years studying, even as a witch myself, I never had that idea for a moment. I feel so silly, so stupid. That explains so much. So very much...”

Lily comprehended very much that Margaret whole world had tumbled upside down, but she had more pressing questions.

“Alfredo, this key, Hecate's key. What is it and what can I, or should I do with it?”

“For now, for you, it is a symbolic magical object. There is, as far as I know, no corresponding door lock. The wizard or witch wielding the key, has the capabilities to perform magic outside her own realm. Long ago, a revengeful wizard used it even after he died. From beyond the grave, he caused disaster and death among the living. A medieval wizard found a way to block it. Little or nothing is known about it, especially for a

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young who is in training. Let me inform you that every wizard fears its existence. Now it is functional again. Be careful! Be true to your heart when you use it. How to use it? Time will tell. It is not up to me to disclose anything else, at least not at this moment. It depends on your future development, when, how and how much you will be told and by whom.”

Suddenly Alexandra said, “Alfredo, you are dressed like a beggar, act and doing servants assignments, but it is you, you are the head of the council!”

He replied wearily “In my council's entire lifespan as head, fellow members have never been able to guess it correctly. Keep that information to yourself. Like your friend, you too are exceptionally gifted. I pray, use it to relieve your friend's burden. She will need to act, to know, without learning”

Slowly he turned his head to Margaret, “I understand that what you just heard changes quite a big deal for you. But as a grown witch, you should know how to cope with sudden changes. As you came as support, I trust you will support both of them, later in life? Growing up is already heard enough by itself.”

“Yes, Alfredo. You can count on me and my husband!”

Then he continued without words, “All of the members have commented about her young age and lack of experience, It is widely known that important events can turn small children into responsible adults with more sense of responsibility than many so-called adults will ever show. Tell those at her school, that caged birds can't learn to fly. There is so much for her to learn and too little time to experience, I fear.

Mediterranean holiday

Slowly, with much to contemplate, they walked up the staircase again, through the doorway, just in time to witness the sunset on the Acropolis. Time had passed faster than they were aware of. Edward and the boys welcomed them back, “And, what happened? Can you tell about it or are you bound in silence?”

“We have heard and seen a lot, perhaps world shocking news for your mother, but I’m still not much wiser. To be really honest, I find it a bit of an anticlimax, a disappointment. All I understood is that I have to wait. Few answers, less help, but much more open questions and riddles to solve.”

“And lads, what have you been doing all that time? For us, it felt like we have been away for an hour or so, but it seems like an entire day has passed here.”

“We have explored the entire surrounding. With the permits we got from that janitor, we were able to go anywhere. Much to the envy of all other tourists, and even archaeologists that work here.”

Margaret didn't want to give away Alfredo's secret, and so she just said “Appearances can be deceitful. Anything special you want to share with us?”

“Everything feels so very old, but still in place. There is one weird place, though. At one hand it seems out-of-place, but on the other hand, we were constantly drawn to it, like a magnet. Like a homing beacon for strangers.”

“Sounds intriguing. Can you show us while you can? I'm not sure how long that permit lasts.”

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“True. It is not far away, but the spot is indeed not accessible for regular tourists.’

While they walked among the ruins, they tried to imagine what the place must have looked like in its glory days. They finally had to climb a shallow hilltop. There they found a circular wall of about three feet high, apparently without any entrance. Intrigued they helped each other to pass that symbolic severance.

“Strange place, not?”

“You mean these huge stones?”

“Sure! But why does that wall have no door-entry?”

But neither Lily nor Alexandra said anything, they just stood there staring.

Sirius walked towards one of the stones, with the intention to climb onto it.

Simultaneously both girls yelled “No, don't do that Sirius! Stay away from that stone!”

The stone he wanted to climb on, was one of three other, almost identical ones. And it was blue. Just like the stones in Southern England and the one on the hill nearby school. There was one major difference with Stone-Henge, besides the number of stones: The central stone! Perhaps undetectable for Muggles, but it was glowing and shown a green light. And when they got near to it, it felt like humming.

When Lily mysteriously stated “It is still on!” they had some explanation to do.

When the purple sky turned darker, they had a perfect scenery for telling the sad story of professor Binns and his girl.

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“We feared that the same would happen to either of you, when you touched those stones. We know too little, we would not be able to do anything to help you.”

“So, how did you know what lay beneath the landslide?”

“We knew nothing, but suspected a lot.”

“Shouldn't we warn other people about this stone?”

“Who would believe us?”

“No-one!”

“Well, let's get back to the yacht and have something to eat.”

Next morning, they asked Edward and Margaret about their next plans.

“We could go straight home of course -if you really want so-.”

Alexandra closed her eyes, held her arms wide to catch every single sun-ray, and replied, “I am in no hurry, anyone else perhaps?”

Margaret stated “I think we all deserve a bit of holiday!” and thought silently “and have a good chance to get to know you better.”

“Any choices, wishes or vague dreams to consider?”

“Just go with the wind, like Odysseus.”

“Sounds tempting!”

“Sounds do-able!”

“Perhaps first Margaret wants to do some tourist shopping..”

“And if possible, I would like to send my parents a postcard from here, and explain what we will do the next couple of weeks.”

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James suggested, “Yeah, sending some cards to school, saying that we found something even older than those teachers!”

Edward just remarked, “Our stay here was short, much shorter than we expected, so no need for fresh provisions, perhaps except for some fresh local fruit.”

“So next stop. Sparta or Corfu?” Margaret asked.

“Corfu!”

“OK, we'll be back in about an hour or so.”

Edward complained later when they left port, “I'm glad we're gone. Stinking, smelly place. Too many cars.”

He plotted the course and cast a spell on the helm: “Course set!”

Margaret called for the girls.

“When we did our packing, I noticed my bathing suit was rather worn-out and Northern Scotland, how beautiful it might be, isn't the place for the latest fashion. Here I found the latest trending bathing clothing. It crossed my mind that it might even be something for you two, if you dare to wear it. Perhaps you've heard about it, they call them bikinis. It makes sure that your back and your belly will also enjoy the sun.”

Within no time, all three ladies had changed.

Lily giggled, “I certainly feel exposed!”

But Alexandra sighed “At least some more equality. I always envied boys with their short swimming suits.”

While she looked at the mirror, she continued, “Though I don't

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think it might be considered appropriate clothing at Hogwarts main hall. Wearing this, I know for sure I'll become a so-called head-turner.”

“Then you know how I feel when I wear that aubergine robe,” Lily replied. “Though this is considerably more, eh light clothing, perhaps even more challenging. Indeed more exposed.”

“Dare to try it out before a male audience?” Margaret asked.

“I wonder what they response will be,” Lily replied

Alexandra chuckled, “That is not so difficult to guess!”

When the ladies returned on deck, Edward just smiled at his wife understandingly.

Sirius felt the blood rushing to his eh eh head, and when James turned his head, he let go of his glass with lemonade and dropped it on deck.

Margaret concluded satisfied, “Well gentlemen, I see that the latest in trend in bathing clothing meets with your approval...”

Edward said “Normally I would say to my crew, 'Keep your eyes on the horizon, compass and helm', but that is not needed now. Come on boys, at least try to behave like a gentleman.”

Lily stated. “If it proves too hard for you, we can change back..”

After swallowing something, Sirius admitted, “Fine by me.”

And Edward whispered to his wife “Operation 'Getting Attention' totally, successfully completed.”

During two weeks they sailed from one island to another, that provoked Alexandra to say, “I have so much pity with those poor millionaires. It is a horrible life they have to live.”

Much to her surprise, Lily responded seriously, “Sure, a couple

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of weeks, perhaps a month is sheer delight. But after that, next?”

James said disbelievingly “Don't say you long for school!”

“No, I mean, not yet!” A remark that made her rise considerably in the opinion of James' parents. This girl seemed to have her priorities set herself and not easily distracted.

“Any particular place to see, while we are in the area?” Edward asked.

Lily responded hesitatingly “I am not sure if I might ask, I know it is much more southwards, but if possible I would like to visit the palace of Knossos at Crete awake, in real life.”

“Why that particular place, Lily?”

She smiled, “I was there a couple of weeks ago...”

“Really?”

“Well, not really, in a dream. But it felt so real.”

Margaret looked around, “Any objections? Other suggestions?”

“The distance perhaps?” Sirius asked.

“Nothing that can not be overcome with 'A Touch Of Magic',” Edward replied. But how about you Alexandra, Sirius, James. No specific places?”

The boys didn't mind, as long as the weather remained the same.

“And you, Alexandra, anywhere?”

“There is one place I am curious about, but perhaps that is not possible.”

“And that might be?”

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“The place founded by Alexander the Great, Alexandria.”

“I presume you want to find the remains of Pharos, the legendary lighthouse, and the library,” Margaret commented.

“Alright, why not, two targets then. But as you probably suspect, much has gone, and Alexandria is now the second biggest city in Egypt. So much traffic, people and new buildings.”

His wife confirmed, “If you want to save the best for last, we better do Alexandria first and Crete secondly. More to see.”

“OK, if someone would fetch me a beer, I'll have a look at the maps, and apply some auto-steering-spells to the helm.”

Next morning they found themselves near the northern coast of Egypt. “Before we go ashore, we better change, and dress a bit more like local population, to avoid unwanted attention. “

They used a taxi for driving them around, between the harbor and the city center, but when they arrived there, Alexandra confessed, “It is just a huge city like any other one. When you look around and listen, it might as well has been a city like Algiers or Lebanon. It all feels 'new' and despite the number of people, it feels sort of dead, nothingness, no shred of magic remained. Nothing that reminds me of its past. What a tragic waste. All the stones of the lighthouse have been re-used, and much of the papers and books from the library have either been burned or taken away.”

With a sad expression, she confessed to Edward, “I'm sorry, sir for the trouble getting us here.”

But Edward replied, “Don't feel sorry. It was no trouble at all. I've been here before and I could have told you, but seeing,

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feeling and believing is quite something else. Remember after the demise of the Greek realm, much of its wealth and glory was taken away, by the Roman Empire. And with regards to our magical world, Christian believers have rooted out much here. During one of its occupations, people have said, that if the books were according to their believe they were not needed anyway, and if they opposed their believe they had to get rid of them, so without any checking they burned them anyway. So you see, now local wizards are masters at the art of hiding and disguise. You will not be able to detect or sense anything. But wait a moment, I'll try something.” And with these words Edward dashed off in one of the many casbahs. Moments later he returned, saying “They don't want to meet us, even I could not change that, but they gave me a nice suggestion. Therefore we need to return to the ATOM.”

On his ship, he continued, “They said that much of the old town, was much more to the west.” And he sailed a quarter of an hour before dropping the anchor again, several hundred meters away from the shore.

“There is little around us here to see, but water!”

“Absolutely correct. Some earthquakes ago the coastline was moved. Parts of the ancient city lies submerged now, safely hidden from all human activity.”

“But what are we doing here now?”

“We swim and dive!”

“But it is much too deep for me,” replied Lily.

“True, it is even too deep for James and me. But have you ever wondered how it would feel to be a dolphin, for a short while?” The mere idea made Lily feel ecstatic.

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“Margaret, one of us have to remain here. What do you want?”

“Well I could say that you are much more capable of doing the 'Animagus-spell', which actually is so, but to be honest, I love to dive along with them.”

Resignedly he held his hands up, “Some you win, some you loose. Alright, change to bathing suits again and in the water you all. Be careful not to get trapped inside old buildings. What is still standing might collapse any moment!”

Jumping overboard was already delightful refreshing, but after Edward had drawn his wand, and performed his spell, she just wanted to submerge. Looking backward (as dolphins have no shoulder, it makes no sense to say 'looking over her shoulder'), she noticed that four other dolphins swam behind her.

Hundreds of feet deeper they reached the seabed. Initially, they only saw sandy hills, but a bit further away she detected objects with sharp edges. Houses. Hundreds, perhaps even more. Some two or more floors high! She swam through streets, over squares, noticed huge pillars. Some standing and some toppled centuries ago.

One dolphin surpassed her, and swam quickly ahead. It took Lily quite some effort to keep near to the other dolphin. A wide road led towards an underwater hill. She realized that era's ago this place must have given a spectacular view. Almost instantly she realized that the dolphin ahead was Alexandra. On the top of the hill she swam around a ring of large stones, that reminded her of previous set-ups. Being submerged, she could not distinguish any colors, but she simply knew that the huge monoliths had a particular color: blue!

Finding this, gave her the feeling they really had discovered

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and achieved something. She remembered that the spell only lasted shortly, and they had to be near the surface area before they changed back into their human appearance. Reluctantly they all swam up again. When she broke through the surface and felt the sun on her face, her spell was immediately broken. For a short while, she remained floating in the water.

“It has been a long time since someone has swept those streets!”

But Sirius had no eye for the beauty below. “Swimming like that, unbelievable. It blows your mind.”

Edward helped them back on board, “Perhaps I should warn you, this is a dangerous spell, if not done correctly you might not be able to breathe either below or above the surface. And when doing it correctly, it is highly addictive. If you change your form too often, too long, you start to forget your original form. It is unknown, how many wizard forgot about themselves while transformed into a seagull, albatross, dog or dolphin. Only another wizard can transform you back, but which animal?”

James softly said to Sirius, “just imagine we could do this at school... Wicked!”

“Indeed. We can fool Argus Filch anytime!”

But Alexandra was still overwhelmed, “Thank you, Sir. An experience I'll never forget. The swimming, the light, the sense of freedom, the submerged city. Temples, wonderful!”

Margaret said to her husband, “Well done, James.”

Edward grinned, “It reminds me of the first time I changed myself successfully into a bird. That felt even better than flying on a broomstick. If you dive into the kitchen, I'll prepare for

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our last stop.”

“Very well. Any wishes regarding dinner?”

“No, not really. As it will be our last dinner this holiday, I think, shall I ask for some support?”

“Eh, you can ask, but it is not needed.”

Nevertheless, Lily reported a little later in the galley “May I help?”

“You know your way around in a kitchen?”

“Helped my mother often enough.”

“Biggest challenge as always is what to cook. Suggestions?”

“You all have done so many things to help and to please us. I'm glad to do something in return. What is James' favorite meal?”

“How considerate! Mostly Italian food.”

“Is the furnace, the oven any good?”

“I think so, yes. Why?”

“Perhaps we can bake pizza's?”

“Good idea, I can assure you, you'll gain popularity with it, with all of us.”

Later on, Edward found two ladies, both kneading dough, and both of them were very pleased with their kitchen partner.

When Margaret looked sideways at Lily, the girl replied, “This is grateful work.”

“While the dough is rising, we can prepare the toppings. I hope we have oregano here. We can prepare basics, onions, garlic, tomato. Some pizza's with cheese, pork, and salami, if we have. The boys will certainly like that. Shall I make a salmon

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topping for your husband? You need some white wine to come along with it, red wine and salmon isn't a good combination. What would you prefer?"

"Be careful not to over do it Lily, or Edward will enslave you!"

Margaret stood brooding over something, "Would your parents object against offering you and Alexandra a glass of wine?"

"I never tried or even asked, to be honest. But I'll like to taste a little sip. And I don't think Alexandra would object."

Shortly after, it began to smell delicious, all over the ship.

When they all sat down at the dinner table, James remarked, "Mother, this is delicious. You've baked pizza's many time before, but none were as good as these! I love you. I'll never marry any girl unless she learns to cook like you do!" And his father confirmed, "Pizza with salmon, tasty but not predominant. You should do that again when we 're at home!"

Margaret laughed cordially, and added, "Both can be arranged. I was only helping Lily, she came up with the idea and did most of the work! I should suggest, you ask Lily to come and visit us at our home in the North!"

James immediately regretted his remark, while Sirius almost choked of laughing.

Lily just shrug her shoulders and said simply to Alexandra, "Boys!", which resulted in that they all started to laugh until they cried.

Well after darkness Edward was directing the ship to Rethymno, a port on the north coast of Crete. When his wife came along with two glasses of wine, he inquired "I don't know

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how you manage to pull off such a trick. You sly devil. You even played me! Yes, I know the saying, a man's love, through the stomach...”

Margaret simply replied, “I hardly did anything, really! It was all her idea. Even in the kitchen, the girl did most. Perhaps it is meant to be! But am I correct to believe that you do not object to seeing Lily more often?”

“Holidays is one thing. But what I extracted from Sirius, is that our son is far more interested in Quidditch and making fun than in girls. Or school-work for that matter. But she is nice company to have around.”

Next morning Alexandra woke Lily up, “Come on, sleepy head! I left some fruit and yogurt for you. James' parents were up early and hired a car.”

Lily knew that last night she ate too much. She had been fast asleep and had dreamed about something, but she could not remember it anymore, unfortunately. Something cozy, familiar, homey.

While driving, Edward explained, “The main port of Crete, the town of Heraklion is way too busy. So I decided to anchor in a smaller port, though we have to drive a bit, but as it is a beautiful island, I presume you don't mind. Enjoy it as long as you can, shortly we'll be back in cold, rainy Scotland.

Lily commented, “You know, I could live here easily.” But James replied, “You only see the tourist side of life. Most of the people that live near the coast rely on fishing, and land inwards, you'll find poor farmers, as the ground is rocky and

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does not yield as much as where we live.” However, Lily was not convinced, “Perhaps you are right, but how much do you need for a living. I'm easily satisfied. Most people I knew are never content, always want more, larger, bigger, newer.”

“Perhaps you're right,” added Alexandra. “But what is wrong with some luxury? Things like enough food or a warm shower?”

“Traveling abroad can learn us much. That is if you are willing to open your eyes and heart to it. Many people live much simpler than we in England, and certainly much simpler than Margaret and I do.”

Lily let the boats on her left side pass and the small farms on her right side. What does one really need? And what is 'luxury'? At home, she considered electricity as something essential, but last two years at school had learned her that the omission of it did not bring any hardship at all. On the contrary.

“Lily, we're there, wake up!”

“I wasn't sleeping, just far away in my thoughts.” she answered.

After a final turn, Edward parked the car on a wide field, closed it off. Even here all could see the huge scale of the site.

“This is enormous!” Even Edward was impressed.

For a moment they were wondering which direction to take, but Lily said, “Follow me!”

“How can that be? She has never been here before!”

But Lily walked steadily without any hesitating.

“There is, or was, a small temple dedicated to Zeus, who was sheltered here on the island during his youth.”

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“To your left are the remains of Knossos' palaces. And a bit more beyond was the place where he lived.”

“There used to be my hairdresser...”

They walked like this for over an hour, and it seemed that Lily knew even far more of the place than the official guides. Some of the other tourists even tried to come along with them.

Finally, she stopped. “This is the place I was longing to find, an image that is stuck in my mind for ages.”

She turned around and pointed, “Look!”

She pointed towards the sea. From this position downwards they all could see a road, paved with thousand years old stones, about ten feet wide and several miles long. With narrow but very tall trees on either side.

“Just imagine hundreds of people walked here every day, over four thousand years ago, while the rest of Europe was inhabited by simple hunters and collectors. This is one of the most important starting points of civilization.”

“How do you know all that?”

Lily didn't answer, but pointed upwards, to a huge black-and-red pillar, where huge birds flew around. Albatrosses.

“I've been here before, recently in my dreams, but it feels so strangely familiar here. Like I remember the place, from long, long time ago. I think that I used to walk these stairs with my eyes closed.”

Finally, Margaret said to the others, “I think that it is time to go. At least to the boat. This place is so huge, even I would love to stay here for weeks.”

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They all looked at Lily, but she simply said, “I have found what I was looking for. The place in my memories really exists. It seems I have been here so many times before, impossible as it sounds, I do realize that. Perhaps I'll return. Someday. Now let's walk this road again, finally.”

Unpacking

Back on the boat, James softly said to Sirius. “She seems a nice girl, but sometimes she scares me out of my pants. Up there at the palace, I felt for a moment I was at an audience at the queen, the pope, and some presidents. She can really make you feel so small, so tiny!”

“So you too. I thought I was just imagining. Who is she, I thought she was just another all-muggle born witch?”

“So did I.”

Margaret accidentally overheard the boy's conversation and returned straight to Edward.

“Edward, when we are back home, find out who this Lily really is, her parents, grandparents, all of it. She is more than the eyes meet. Is she in disguise, or adopted or so? Even the boys felt something, but they could not put a name on it.”

“Can you?”

“It resembles the echo of an extremely powerful event or ruler. I wonder if that girl might be a reincarnation of a sorceress, princess or queen. Or else, who knows!”

During next evening and night, they sailed back home with *a touch of magic* to the port of Brighton.

From the harbor office, Lily phoned her dad the next morning, to tell him they safely returned to England.

“How do you plan to come home?” he asked.

“James' mother has phoned for a cab, she will bring us home

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again, James himself, his father and Sirius just left port and go north, probably Ford William or a small port in that area.”

An hour later, the three ladies and their luggage got out of a cab, Margaret paid the fair and rang the doorbell.

“Already here? That is indeed fast.” Henry greeted them.

“Welcome back, please come in.”

Not much later they were all telling stories about all they have seen.

“Looking on the maps and considering the distance, it is a miracle you had time to see anything at all, when did you leave Crete? Beginning last week?”

“No dad, yesterday at the end of the afternoon.”

It took some time for Lily's mother to comprehend. “You left Greece yesterday by boat and now..”

James' mother immediately used the opportunity, “I understand that our ways of traveling must be highly confusing for you. You have no other wizards or witches in the family?”

“No, not as far we know. But we heard from our daughter that she thinks my grandmother might have been a witch, we have a photo of her, but I never met her. She lived abroad. My own mother moved to England when she was a young girl.”

“And how does it feel to have such a special daughter?”

Margareth laughed, “Don't ask Henry. To all fathers their daughters are always special and precious.

But seriously, we both hope she will be able to use her gifts for helping people in general. Come to think about it, we consider it a pity that you all have to live a secluded life. If you were allowed to use magic in the open, many problems in this world

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wouldn't need to exist anymore.”

James' mother looked surprised, “Surprised to hear that, there are some people in our world that thrive to achieve that. But much more people would disagree with you. Both in your world and in ours, they consider that view as a threat. Much power comes with many responsibilities. Few people live up to that.”

Lily's father added, “Throughout the entire school year we miss her a lot, Hogwarts is so far north, and off-limits for people like us. But if she was at a private school in Glasgow or Edinburgh we wouldn't see her much either.”

Lily noticed a letter with the sign of Hogwarts on it.

“Letter from school, dad?”

“Yes, it includes new timetables and has the list of new books and other requirements. But you don't need to worry about that. Alexandra's aunt took care of that, as she didn't know when you would return. You only have to bring your clothes with you. If you put your clothes around the corner, I'll wash them. I took the liberty of buying some clothes in your absence, I do hope they are the right size, or I'll have to change them.”

“I'll try right away!” and both girls dashed off.

Margaret smiled at Henry, “You don't need to ask. They all did behave very well. Both the girls and the boys. Not even a single word was needed.”

“Thank you so much for everything, the trip, being there for her, the holiday. I hoped we could invite you and your husband, but he already left. Is there anything we can do for you?”

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“Of course not. It has been a wonderful experience for us either to have all of these youngsters along.”

They heard the girls talking and laughing upstairs.

“Ah, another week and they'll be off again. Hogwarts express next Saturday.”

“Not necessarily so.” James' mother said. “Do you have plans for next weekend, besides bringing the girls to London?”

“No, not really.”

“We live not so far away from their school. And we don't get that much visitors up there. If you all come to our place, let say at the end of Friday, the girls can skip the train once. If you stay with us the weekend, you have a weekend almost abroad, we will take care all youngsters get at school in time.”

“Henry, what are your plans for Friday? Are you needed at your doctor's practice here or hospital?”

“Neither, I was scheduled for the hospital, but Dr. Johnathan Geyer wanted an extra shift. So I was thinking to have a go at our garden. So, yes, I'm honored. But as we have never been in that area, you should give besides the exact address, also some instructions how to find your home.”

Margaret scribbled something on a piece of paper, “That is our official address there...” She thought a while and added something. “And that is our address in London. We also have an apartment on Mount-street, especially when Edward has business meetings downtown. They always ran out.” She thought again awhile. “Perhaps I have an even better idea, Edward needs to have a lot of things brought over from London to our other home. Can you be ready at about ten in the morning?”

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Then I'll have you picked up and you don't have to drive at all!"

"That sounds very luxurious!"

"Settled then. May I go upstairs to have a final word before I go?"

"Sure! But I can call them to get down, it's they who should be thanking you!"

"They already expressed their gratitude!"

Minutes later she returned, "Silly girls! By the way, from McGonagall I understood that your fireplace is connected. So may I use that? I'll be home much earlier than my husband this way."

"By all means, please do so!"

"In that case, thank you for your hospitality, and see you next Friday. Bye!"

After some Floo-powder and a green flash, Mrs. Potter was gone.

Henry, who hadn't seen Minerva leaving the previous year, and now witnessed the transportation through the fireplace-grid for the first time, just commented, "I am glad that we didn't go for that central heating, dear."

"Indeed, I think I'll have a go at the laundry, so everything is clean, dry and ironed when we leave."

"Need a helping hand?"

"No thanks.....Henry!"

"Yes, Margareth?"

"Look what I just found!"

"What is it? Underwear?"

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“It's nothing we bought for her, shall we ask about it?”

“Later. Perhaps we, or just you, should ask her something else instead.”

“About what?”

“Interest in boys!”

“Henry, Lily is just fourteen years old!”

“Better ask too early than too late...”

“Anything else on your mind, husband?”

“Just wondering. That boy might be a good match?”

“Henry, for goodness sake. Arranged marriages. You do live in the previous century!”

“Don't you think about it, don't you worry?”

“About her future? No. Perhaps for a tiny moment, when she first mentioned the trip I had some doubts about James and his parents. I feared that they might treat our daughter disrespectful. An easy victim, a try-out or an in-between, but I think we can trust him and his parents.”

“And about the other two youngsters?”

“You mean Alexandra and Sirius? Are you now starting to see ghosts everywhere or what?”

“It is just that neither of them has parents they regularly see to give them guidance, and if they become an example for Lily...”

“Henry, firstly, I don't think that they are a couple, so don't think about that. And secondly, if you worry about the well-being of either of them, I suppose you must start by gaining their trust. Both as the father of their friend and as a doctor.”

“I suppose I should trust your motherly instincts.”

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“Yes, you should! And let me remind you, one of our own daughters does not see us very much either. Do you trust Lily less than Petunia?”

“You are right, again Margareth.”

“Lily! Can you come down for a moment.”

“Yes, mum!”

“I went through your luggage, for washing your clothes. I noticed you got a new swimming-thing..”

“Yes mum, it is called a bikini. It is highly fashionable.”

“Is that why you bought it?”

“No, it was given to me, as a present.”

“By Alexandra?”

“No, by James' parents. James' mother bathing suite was worn-out, so she went shopping in Athens. When she returned she brought one for Alexandra and me also.”

“The company that made these thing certainly did save on material expenses!”

“Dad, you don't have to worry. I'll not wear that in public.”

“Anything else, mum, dad?”

“Well a tiny other thing, it is not much we see you now. And we still know little or nothing about your school and its conditions, the staff and so.”

“What can I tell you? I'll guess it is just a school like any other, just a bit further away. Anything you like to know in particular?”

“Well, don't take it wrong, but I can not help looking from my

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professional point of view, but also as a father. Health, hygiene and so on. What happens if a student or a teacher gets ill?” He tried to start the conversation in an as general possible way.

Lily thought for awhile, “Well, food is well balanced and well cooked, never a shortage of fresh fruit, meat, fish, vegetables. But I have to admit, there is no checking on what, or how much anyone eats. There is Gym on the agenda, but I always start every morning with running, to clear my head. Dangerous things we never do without supervision. And if one gets seriously ill, or meet with an accident, we have our own hospital ward. Probably because we are so far away from any other hospital. Is that what you wanted to know?”

“That is indeed a great relief, how about privacy?”

“Oh, you don't have to worry about that at all. Just like any other school, separate toilets, separate showers, separate dormitories with six girls or less. And they have mechanisms to prevent any boy entering the girl's area!”

“That was actually where I was carefully heading for, without being too nosy. You know you can trust us with everything, important or not. But Alexandra, your friend, has only her aunt, her very *old* aunt. If there is anything either of you two wants to know or want to tell us about growing up or boys, he added quickly, don't hesitate to send us a word. I mean, are at school among the staff also young women, you can confide in?”

Lily looked surprised, “Come to think about, no, all of them are over 90 years old.”

Carefully Lily's mother added, “I know your friend Alexandra is very young but also wise for her age, ahead I dare say. If there is anything, anything at all, I rather hope she asks us 'too

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soon, rather than too late'.”

Grinning she replied, “She is way too busy to think about boys.”

But her mother added, “It includes you too, daughter!”

Scotland

Thursday evening was consumed by packing. All of the clothes for both girls for the upcoming next year at school, and some clothes for Lily's parent for the next couple of days.

“Not having to drive the entire end to the north, sounds rather relaxing. Although, if Edward needs to transfer lots of things, we might be sitting in a van, so I wonder if it will be much site-seeing. He couldn't have been more wrong. When Friday morning the doorbell rang, he opened the door, Henry found a huge limousine parked before his house and a butler inviting them.

“Margareth, I think we slightly underestimated our hosts.”

The complete tour towards the north was done without any magic involved apparently, though it stroke Henry as peculiar that they didn't have any troubles with the traffic. “Either due to the odd hour we left, or a very good and informed driver.”

At the end of the voyage, they left the populated area and entered a more uninhabited region. Finally after gates with 'private property,' the road became that bad, that they had to transfer from the limo, into two jeeps.

“I am glad I didn't have to drive. Not just the distance, but we would have definitely got lost. After a very dense forest and narrow mountain roads, they descended and after a final turn, they arrived at the Potters' residence.

“Welcome, welcome Margareth, James. And I am very glad you two arrived, girls. Sirius and James were constantly asking when you would arrive. Please release me from them for a moment.”

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“You live certainly far away from the civilized world.”

“Yes, if we had to do shopping by foot, it would take awhile.”

“But living in the midst of nature, wonderful indeed.”

“And such a beautiful house, I would say: This is modern art!”

“Some wizards are stuck in the previous millennium, I don't object to modern things, with reason, of course.”

James explained, “My mother loved to have an indoor swimming pool, but doing the heating traditionally, no way!”

James' mother said, “let me show you around.”

Henry turned to get the luggage out, but he needn't doing so, a simple wand movement took care of that.

When they returned he asked, “It is a rather late for tea, how about something stronger? Wine, beer, whisky?”

“As we're in the highlands, I'll choose the last one.”

“And you, Margareth?”

“Make that two, please.”

Surprised he said approvingly, “Ladies and whisky, a combination not regularly seen, most stick to wine. If you want some water or ice...Please help yourself.” and he pointed with his finger to the table.

“Sirius, James, I trust you will practice for being a good host, and take care for whatever the young ladies want. When you are done, you might find in the shed a package. I presume you will find it to your liking.”

A little later Lily's parents were surprised by four youngsters chasing each other on broomsticks.

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When Edward noticed the looks on their faces, he said, “Oh, I forgot, you probably never have seen your daughter, or anybody else for that matter, flying on a broom-stick. Here they can, it is safe enough. We have no trespassers here.”

Some regard this valley as a protected area, a nature reserve, we even have a tiny waterfall, let me show we, it is not far away.

Little later Margaret was heading for the kitchen, only to find Lily had the same idea.

“Don't you like flying, Lily?”

“Enormously”

“Tell me about it..”

“It started a bit bumpy” and she told her about her very first flying lesson.

“So, after one-year private lessons, I even got my private broomstick!”

“But I understand you now hardly fly on that one!”

“James needed that one far more than I did.”

“And because of it, he got selected for the Quidditch team!”

“The broom is far too advanced for me.”

“Never thought of joining the Quidditch-team yourself, or for speeding, like Sirius does?”

“Nah, I don't need to show off, I don't like that kind of attention.”

“But you, what do you like?”

“I mostly like simply cruising over the fields, over the lake. It sort of clears your mind. You understand what I mean? It feels

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the same like meditation and Yoga. Did you know we got lessons for Yoga the very first year?”

“Really! Does it feel the same, do the same? Do you fly often?”

“Yes, just like running in the morning. When I grew tired, got too much on my mind or stuck with an exercise, I always fly with Alexandra in the evening, sometimes til night falls.”

“So why don't you fly right now, like the others?”

“I like helping too”

“Thanks, I really could use some company.”

“What's your plan for the menu?”

“Edward got some, or actually quite a lot, salmon, and trout. Any suggestions?”

“We could slice the salmon very thin, and serve it raw, it is perhaps too late for smoking it, but we can fry it, or make a mousse?”

“Difficult to choose, they are all tempting.”

“Or we can do all three of them, Margaret.”

“You are quite a domestic girl, do you like cooking?”

“Not really initially, but it sort of grew. My sister never liked to help mum, so I started to help with the things I liked myself, and it grew from there on. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. And people need to eat every day. That's always a good excuse for experimenting. And it is rewarding. How about you?”

“When it is just the two of us, Edward and me, it sometimes becomes a chore. Especially doing the cooking alone. You have the recipes at heart?”

“I think so, otherwise I can ask my mother.”

“Where do we start, Lily?”

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“Cleaning the trout, I want to make a mousse of it and when is a bit solid again, wrap some thin salmon around it. Some of that this salmon we can serve with butter and bread, that's easy enough. Oh, as I am not allowed to use my wand outside of school, can you freeze the half of salmon slightly, it is much easier the cut very thin slices?”

“Yes, chef. And thawing it afterward?”

“Yes, please. Perhaps a sprinkle a little bit of lemon juice over it, against coloring. Or...”

Lily thought deeply, “I've read about it, but never actually tried it before, if you can borrow some whisky from your husband, you can sprinkle that over the salmon. If we dare.”

“Intriguing thought! Let's do it.”

Lily grinned, “Funny and exciting to wait how they will respond!”

“Lily?”

“Yes, Margaret?”

“You're a nice and kind person.”

“Thank you, I like you too.”

“I am glad Lily, I would like it if you would consider me as your friend, not just the mother of one of your schoolmates.”

“I am truly honored, Margaret.”

“Thank you, in this world, you can never have too many friends whatever age, only too little.”

A little later, Edward returned with Lily's parents and noticed three flying students, when he waves James comes down.

“I just see the three of you, what did you do with Lily.”

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“She said she was going to help mother. Ah! There she is.” and he pointed to his mother and Lily coming out of the kitchen.”

“Lily has helped me very much, she deserves a break. Alexandra, can you help me with dressing up the plates? Boys, can you dress up the table and finally, when we're ready, move the plates around?”

Looking at the girl that sat down with her parents, Margaret continued, “I was very glad not to reside to magic for cooking, Lily helped a lot, she knows much about the Muggle way of cooking.”

Alexandra nodded, “Most people do what they like to do, Lily like's helping people. But that is also her flaw, her pitfall.”

“Why?”

“She likes 'helping others' perhaps a bit too much.”

“How can that be?”

“Her mother once explained it to me. At her tenths birthday, she baked with her mother her favorite pie. In the end, someone ate even her piece, probably unintentionally, but she was left with nothing.”

“Awkward, how did she react?”

“She just said, 'We'll bake another pie someday'.”

“So she wasn't bitter, angry?”

“No, but Margaret, but it does make me feel so deeply sad.”

“Why then?”

“I fear that one day, she might find herself empty-handed again.”

“She does believe in second chances...”

“Lily doesn't realize, but 'someday' never comes, and some pies in life are never baked again.”

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“I know girl, I know.” Margaret agreed softly.

“You really like her, don't you, Margaret?”

“Yes, it seems impossible not to like her.”

“I know, I felt the same, that is, by the way, Lily's other vulnerability. Unless something is utterly wrong with a person, they will like Lily. But it might attract wrong people. Even Lily needs people who can help her, who she can trust.”

“But I heard that some people feared Lily.”

“Feared! Why?”

“Because of her powers, her gifts scare them.”

“Scared? She is the person most scared of herself. Ever since the day her initial gift was detected, she learns she has more gifts, or gift reaches further and deeper. During the first year at incantation-lessons, we learned about all the dangers involved and heard from other professors about unintended fatal consequences. With every spell she cast, she is scared that she burns herself or someone to timber. Inside she is still a little scared frightened girl. Our first flying teacher saw that immediately, that is why he arranged private lessons by another student, instead of giving it himself. That paid off immediately. You can see for yourself. We all can fly on a broom, some better than others. But she sits on it like she sits as on a chair, as on solid ground.”

“You know her pretty well.”

“We have been together for about two years now. I trust her, just like she trusts me. But what I can do is limited and I won't be there all the time...”

“I feel there is something you like to say, but don't dare to say.”

“She has never said a word about it, but...”

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“Please trust me, it will stay between the two of us.”

“I hope you are not offended and I am not sure, but I think she likes your son, James, a lot, but considers him as unreachable as the stars.”

“Now did she really?”

“When James took over the personal flying lessons from Martin, she never complained. On the contrary. She loved it. But you'd better forget I even mention this. I could be completely mistaken.”

“Thank you, Alexandra, for confiding in me. I'll think about all you said, and I agree that it is not up to us to make up someone else mind. But, and please keep that also to yourself, I detected 'some interest' with my son for Lily. Last year he went for a walk with her through Hogwarts, in the dark, hand-in-hand. Even then, she made a huge impression. A first time a girl ever did that. He felt about the same but considers her also unreachable.”

“So, if they both consider each other as 'unreachable'...”

“... we might offer fate a modest helping hand, or actually a pair of helping hands...”

“So, A bridge between 'unreachable stars', but they shouldn't be aware of it, never I mean! Don't say anything to either of them or any of their friends or family.”

“You have my word, Margaret!”

Finally, Saturday came. At the end of the afternoon, Margaret and Edward drove both jeeps to the railway station where the Hogwarts Express would stop. Far away, at the other side of the lake, Lily's parents could catch a glimpse of the school.

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“Is THAT your school? Good God, impressive!”

They all remained waiting until the train arrived with all other students. Immediately the four students were greeted by the other Gryffindor students.

When the coaches arrived, some of the students were discussing what kind of charms was used to move them. But Lily saw that no magic was involved at all. Huge creatures were in front of them. Two for each coach.

A seventh-year student saw her staring. He explained, “Those animals are named Thestrals. Only people who have faced death are capable of seeing them. Don't be afraid, they look strange but they are harmless.”

As usual, the first year students were taken away by Hagrid, for the ceremonial boat trip across the lake.

Another fresh start

Quickly, all other students were directed to the main hall, where they had to endure Dibbet's speech, before the initial banquet, symbolizing the start of the year.

“Dear Students and staff, welcome.

Again we are standing on the brink of a new year full of educational, organizational and emotional challenges. The first one is that we must try to recover all we have tried to learn you the previous years. The second one is all about the fact that we not only have to deal with the traditional Quidditch championship but also try to hold championships for the European broomstick contest, not only speed, the single mile and ten miles distant but also an obstacle circuit. Last year we applied for participation and due to the facts that enough students qualified and showed they have enough skills, endurance, guts and perseverance, we were granted this year the privilege to organize it. The fact that the current holder of world records is one of our own students has been a decisive factor. We are Gryffindor's Mr. Black much grateful for this.

As since the foundation of this school, our staff has to deal with the usual amount of students in the puberty. Those before or after that difficult period in their life, in which they fight and object against common sense, know it is just a difficult phase to deal with. For those currently in that phase of their life, I have nothing to say, as you won't believe me anyway. Except that we have strict rules and if you think you out-smart us, we have dealt with mindless zombies before.

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For those participating in the single mile broom contest, long distant swimmers, and crew of rickety boats, the people of the lake has ended their time of withholding, they are no longer vegetarians and have a healthy appetite. Also for those classes that suffer from too many students, we will organize weekly at midnight a sightseeing in the forbidden forest: the participants are the main attraction, and only have to pay for a one-way ticket. For those who want to explore the third floor, we are considering investigating if our caretaker, Mr. Argus Filch is related to the people of the lake. I hope that is clear enough: FOR YOUR OWN SAKE, JUST STAY AWAY!

I'll leave the sorting procedure for professor McGonagall."

While one professor sat down, the other got up.

"Thank you for your uplifting speech, professor Dibbet. It was very encouraging! Dear new students, don't be alarmed by the sinister tone of the head of our school, he isn't half as scary as some of the other teachers and other creatures that dwell in our dungeons."

She looked at the small number of new students.

"Hagrid? Is this all? I thought there were much more applicants. Did anything happen during their initial boat trip over the lake? I hope the lake people weren't that hungry that only half of the students made it?"

The semi-giant rose, "No, professor, low yield this year."

"Alright children, attention, please! Besides the main hall where you currently are gathered, we have four sections devoted to each of one of the founding professors. The Ravenclaw tower, The Gryffindor tower, the Slytherin dungeons and

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the Hufflepuf wing. In each section one of the houses is positioned. Such house will be basically your family for the next couple of years. Most of you are now about eleven years old. When are eighteen years old you leave this school, at least most of you, some grow so fond of this school that they stay longer, while others want to impress the upcoming information so well that the need extra years here to comprehend it all. But even when you leave, you will always remain a member of one of the houses. The different houses form the basis of a sorting competitive rivalry for the game of Quidditch, but also for the Hogwarts House Cup, that is rewarded at the end of the year to one of the houses. If you perform above expectations your house gets point rewarded, but trespassing, breaking rules or indecent behavior will cost your house points that one of your housemates have earned.”

Professor McGonagall pointed to the sorting head.

“Sorting will commence in a minute. When you hear you name, you come forward, be seated on this chair. The hat will probe your capabilities and give a more-or-less binding advice which house is appropriate for you.”

“Heather Hodson” A meager girl approached the chair, sat down, got the hat on her head, and promptly responded with “Hufflepuf”

“Lyle Sanderson”, same procedure but the boy ended up in Slytherin.

“Tanya Guillo” became a new asset for Gryffindor.

“Kylee Duffy” joined her at Gryffindor.

“Joslyn Doone” started at Ravenclaw.

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“Angus MacElheran”, another student for Slytherin,
“Machara MacIvor” would populate the girl's section of Ravenclaw.
“Archibald MacLeish”, a new student for Hufflepuf
“Moireach MacInnes” was a new Gryffindor girl,
“Ercwlff Merricks” another Slytherin student.

After the short sorting ceremony was ended, half an hour later, and all students welcomed by their house, Professor Dibbet had some final announcements.

“Now all the houses are complete again, I like to inform you that two of our Slytherin staff, professor McCunningham, and professor MacIlzegowie will commence with a special Slytherin study for trying to breed almost extinct animals. Only senior Slytherin students can apply for participating. If you happen to be in your final year, it will greatly improve the possibility of gaining points for your NEWT. Other houses have similar projects. If interested consult your house head-boy or girl.”

He paused a moment for a nip water.

“From tomorrow on all teachers will test the students for their subject on their skills. Like always, some will be redoing previously final test-paper, some a practical test and some a simple interview. All first-year students will only do a simple test-paper for the elementary subjects and an interview with the head of their house. That is I think about all, so let the banquet begin. Oh. I almost forgot, to mention, I received a 'thank-you'

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from Peter and Mary, especially for those involved with the honeymoon.”

With a tick of his wand, all the dishes, bowls and cups got filled and remained filled, while the students tried their best to empty them. Meanwhile, Sirius told colorful tales about the previous months.

Next morning, was the start of the usual yearly procedure.

On a blackboard, all the names of students that were expected for an interview were on display. For most of the teachers, that was the easiest part, reviewing test-papers, or checking of position making absorbed much more time. Hence most teachers preferred interviews.

As to be expected, Alexandra started with Greek and Latin.

“Hello professor, I saw my name on the interview list.”

“Good morning, miss McGonagall. You are indeed a special case. Due to the intensified program, you managed to squeeze all material, good for six years hard work for normal students, into two years. And I dare say even above my expectations you passed the normal standard national examination with exceptionally high marks. And I learned from your aunt, that you even had your share in field work this summer holiday. I really envy you. However, the question remains, what now? Obviously, there is no regular material for you here anymore. But if you are still interested, the option I offered you previous time, still stands.”

“You mean, helping you with this course?”

“Yes, I very much understand that it is for the school itself, you, and other students in the third year and higher unwanted that you participate there. Possible conflicting interest, or the

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appearance of it. So if you are inclined, I would ask you helping out at the lower levels. First assisting at the first year students, and when you like it and think you can handle, you can take over that class altogether. I think it could be a wonderful career opportunity.”

He paused for a moment to make it sound more attractive.

“There is of course also another option. A couple of years ago one of my students graduated here, and continued her study at a well-known university, where she is doing some research. This summer she wrote that she could use some help of a graduate student, and if I knew some candidates. That would imply much learning, real working, writing essays. As you are not graduated on all subjects, you are not allowed to follow courses at any university yet, but you can already acquire some points.”

Alexandra knew very well about who the professor had been talking, but she didn't want to let it show.

“That is a tough decision to make professor! Any chance of combining the two? With the first years, I'm pretty sure I totally master the material, but the teaching itself is a nice challenge. But the continuation of my study is also tempting. Any chance of finding out more about that?”

“I was somehow already expecting this. That professor is currently visiting our school, together with another college from Oxford. I would strongly advise, to talk this first over with your aunt and professor Dumbledore. And don't make hasty decisions please.”

When she got out of the classroom, Lily was already waiting.

“And Lily, how about English, what did Undertow propose?”

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“He knows I've finished regularly Biology, so he wondered if I might speed up his subject.”

“And?”

“I said that I would think about it, but that I'm rather pleased with the previous arrangement with plenty exemptions. It was hard to tell if he was sad or pleased about it. And how about you?”

“Same propositions like last time: helping him, but this time more detailed this time, he suggested to teach the first years. I don't know yet.”

“History for you, and Bio for me. But I also noted that your aunt and Dumbledore wants to see us. Shall we save these two for last?”

“Yes, shall I ask for a 30-minute talk for the both of us with Binns, about the stones?”

“I completely forgot about them, completely slipped my mind. Yes, please do so!”

As there were quite a lot of other students waiting for a ghostly interview, Alexandra had to wait a while. Lily could enter the classroom almost immediately.

“Good morning, professor Slughorn!”

“A very good morning to you also, miss Evans. I think we can be brief this time. You graduated in biology, so I'm done. But what are your plans? Cooling down, or steaming up further? You remember our talks last time? Miranda Dibbet is this week here with one of the study mates from times-gone-bye. In case you have second thoughts about it, I'm considering stopping giving this subject, it's my last year. Next year I'll do something

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else. But we'll discuss that later on, you're scheduled for Albus. I'll be there as well, but I wanted to thank you for past two years. Those extra programs are rare and even for a prof like me refreshing. See you in half an hour at Albus?"

"Certainly professor Slughorn, and I should thank you for your cooperation."

When she returned to the corridor, Alexandra was still waiting.

"That took long!" she complained.

"He got all the time in the world!"

"But I don't!"

Finally, she was allowed in.

"Hello, professor Binns!"

"Hello miss McGonagall, I can't remember I placed you on the interview list. O, yes, I remember, the 'hasty' one. Unfortunately no exemption in the near future, we are dealing with far east: India and China."

"I fully understand. I wanted to tell you that I've been at the temple of Pallas Athens, the palace of Knossos and the submerged ancient parts of Alexandria. I was there with my friend Lily Evans, so it might be nice if we could talk about it, when you have time."

"That sounds very nice! How about next weekend, you two should be free then."

"Thank you, professor Binns!"

And to Lily, still waiting she said, "Done, Saturday or Sunday, whatever fits best with you."

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“Great! Now up to Dumbledore. I presume he wants to see both of us, regarding the continuation of the study program, so he can do both at once, agreed?”

“Fine by me, but Dumbledore might think differently...”

But when the girls came to Albus' study, he was pleased to see them both, “I'm glad you came together, I forgotten to mention it. I presume I don't have to introduce my other guests!”

And indeed, that wasn't necessary. Not only Alexandra's aunt was present, but also Margaret Potter and Miranda Dibbet. To Margaret, they both said, “It's been such a long time”, and Lily inquired Miranda about her health. “Absolutely fine, totally gone. You father still checks me every half year, just to be certain.”

Dumbledore continued, “Tea will be here shortly, but let's start ladies. Minerva and I want to know about your visit to Athens, girls. And we need to discuss the possible options for your study, the classical languages for Alexandra and Biology for Lily, both possibilities, and obstacles. And much more important how you two feel about it all. Who first? Will you take over, Miranda?”

“OK, the point is, for both girls, that they are very far ahead compared to other students of their age. They have finished and passed their exams and are ready for a next challenge, but neither of them can go to a regular university, yet. Last year I've discussed this with Lily when she visited me at Oxford, that there are lots of other students like her, that can not attend the university, for several reasons. A lot of other professors agree with me, also from totally other faculties. So we have established a new and open university, where people all over the

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world will be able to study. They get their course material by post and at some moments in time we organize examinations. Prove of laboratory exercises still has to be worked out. Its headquarter is located in Milton Keynes and we have given it the name 'Open University', as everyone should be able to join it. You can do module by module and when you have obtained enough points, you become a bachelor and when you continue, even a master. Albus sent me a note and asked me to contact Margaret, who happens to be an old study-pall of mine. That brought us together again.”

“Margaret?”

“Currently I'm doing a research program, but I can become a private teacher for Alexandra and Lily. Examinations can be done at my place, except lab exercises, but perhaps those can be done here. How about that, Slughorn?”

“Yes, Slughorn?”

“Several points. Why there and not everything here? All that traveling. Secondly, you should note that perhaps one, or perhaps both girls might have second thoughts. For once, I happen to know that our college 'Greek' made another suggestion, that should be mentioned.”

“And that is, Alexandra?”

“He asked if I would be interested in becoming a teacher, and start this year with the first-years. And I understand that professor Slughorn wants to stop with Biology also.”

“Is that so, Horace?”

“If they now start with teaching, they can become fully qualified when they graduate and leave school. Or actually, I hoped

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that they could stay at school, as members of the staff. Guaranteed job, that is quite something nowadays.”

“Girls, what do you think?”

“We could start with helping other students with difficulties...”

“Minerva, I can see from your face that you're not happy about it. Speak up your mind!”

“Neither idea sounds proper. The only sensible one came from the girls. About students helping other students, but not just these two. The mere idea of letting fourteen, fifteen-year old children work on their career: absurd. At that age you should let them play, grow or study, not work!”

“I fully agree with you, Minerva,” said Dumbledore. “Would your O.U. object against doing some exercises here? Supervised by either you or one of our own teachers?”

“Probably not!”

“And I think it is advantageous for both girls to have a change of surrounding for their other work. I'll arrange extra leave permits. And Minerva, remind me that I should remember this when making new timetables. I presume your fireplaces are all connected, Margaret, Miranda? In that case, the girls can walk to nearby village and use a fireplace there to travel to your place, Margaret.”

After the tea arrived, Dumbledore said, and now we all want to know more about this summer, ladies!”

Under-slept

Next Friday, late in the afternoon, it was again time for professor McGonagall's special study class about dreaming.

Lily helped the professor putting chairs in a circle, so that everybody could clearly all participants.

One-by-one all other students arrived. Some of them Lily knew from previous years, but some were new.

The professor invited them all to take a seat and started.

“Welcome, all of you. At the beginning of each year we do a formal introduction part, that is unfortunately compulsory. You find that during the rest of the year these sessions will not so strict. You were either invited because you excelled in one of the charming-subjects, or you applied yourself. These extra classes are only accessible for senior students who achieved good enough levels on their O.W.L.'s. Students in their seventh year, going for NEWT, can gain extra points by such classes in general, not just this one.”

Lily observed that all of the new students were probably in their sixth study-year.

“In this class, we study in depth all phenomena regarding the area we are supposed to go to when we close our eyes. Some call that dreaming, but we noticed that our conscious can travel elsewhere. In contrast with other classes you have to draw your wand, and give the rest of the group your vows. I'll explain. We are often exploring uncharted area's of mind, soul, and

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might come across very deeply buried events one would rather forget. It only works if you open up yourself to each of us. No holding back. So will I. But that is only possible if we can trust each other completely. What you might encounter should never, and I really mean never mentioned, written about or even make vague suggestions about outside these walls.”

Lily looked at her professor, in contrast to previous years she did put quite some importance about secrecy.

“If you don't think that's a big deal, or had in the past difficulties with vow's and promises, now is the proper time to leave.”

This made quite an impression, even on the students that followed these classes the previous years. But no-one left.

Subsequent followed a round of students giving the secrecy-vow, but Lily noticed a deviation.

“Professor, you used a different spell, how come?”

“Yes Lily, the normal vow will inhibit the spreading of secrets when you are at your normal conscience. I found that is not enough. Some people talk while they are dreaming, but more sinister, most -if not all- people talk when tortured. This deviated spell will prevent even that.”

She looked at all the faces in the circle, and sighed. “The circle gets smaller each year. Previous year many students left. Some, like Peter and Mary, they graduated. Silvia, well, we from our group know, she left... differently.”

A long pause followed after she named the traitor who had tried to kill the head of Hogwarts and died in the attempt.

“During these sessions we will use our first names, to make it a bit informal, including myself. If you use my first name outside

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this class, however, I'll subtract one house-cup-point. Clear? I'll start this year. My name is Minerva, currently acting head of Gryffindor, and I am an old hag." Before Lily, who was sitting next to her, could start she continued, "Here beside me, sits Lily. She is a third-year student from Gryffindor, don't let her younger age misguide you, on many fields, she surpasses even many teachers. I dare disclose that Hogwarts owes this bright young woman a big deal, but that can never be disclosed publicly. So I think the rest of the students can speak for themselves."

"Hi, I'm Nicole fifth year Gryffindor, second year here."

"I am Marissa, Ravenclaw fifth year, second one here."

"My name is Daimh, Ravenclaw, sixth year, also the second time."

"Morwen, Gryffindor sixth year, likewise."

"Robin, Ravenclaw sixth year, also a second time."

"Ginger, Gryffindor, final year, second the time."

They continued until they reached the new students.

"Camila Ebdon, Gryffindor fifth year."

"Camren Garnett, Ravenclaw fifth year."

"Eoin MacRaild, Gryffindor fifth year."

"Nimue Maddox, Ravenclaw fifth year."

Minerva looked at Lily, "Lily please put away your modesty, and refresh the old ones and inform the new students, please."

"I hope you don't mind leaving out some technical details. All of these can be found in our notepads. When we do sessions, some participate, some observe. We all make notes of our

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experiences and mostly discuss them the next session. Others outside our group can not read them, they are well protected.”

This remark earned her an approving and encouraging nod.

“During our sleep, our consciousness can travel, we can travel in space, in time we can even travel together. Normally this isn't possible, but a previous student, Martin, made a discovery, a combination of an existing deep sleeping potion and a newly discovered spell. All of the participants were able to sleep this way. I, however, can do this without potion or spell.”

After looking for encouragement, she said, “We found that while dreaming, we can diagnose and cure ill people. But detected that others can poison and even kill.”

The memory of what happened previous year still chilled her to the bone and gave her goosebumps, for all to see.

Nicole noticed and continued, “We heard from Minerva that this was quite a scare to find out. Just like in the awakening world, life and death are nearby, there we also have to be careful with spell and potions. We can not fool around when deliberately entering the dream-world. When we enter the dream-world you'll feel very strange indeed. This is how squibs normally feel. You are not able to perform lasting magic. The only thing we, like any Muggle, can do in a dream, are illusions.”

Finally, Minerva added, “and somehow we managed to visit the afterlife, the bright area at the other end of the tunnel. We witnessed that much of what's been said is true.”

Minerva stood up and returned with notepads for the new students and tea.

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“This is always hard to digest the first time, we all realize. However the rest will also get something to swallow, and no tea, I mean.” She made an inviting gesture to the new ones.

“Please, trust us. And share your past dreams with them, like you shared them with me.”

Turning to the other students, Minerva said, “Brace yourself, these are highly unpleasant stories. We've heard about these nightmares before, but always second, third, fourth hand.”

Camilla started “I have nightmares as long as I can remember. In those, I have been abused by 'uncles'. Each time it was organized by my own mother. Every morning I feel like a whore. It is all between my ears, but I'm always glad to shower my dreams away.”

Those four simple lines had a devastating effect on most of the others. “How can you ever go to sleep again?”

“With considerable effort. Much exercise, finally you are too tired to stay awake.”

Eoin followed, “In my dreams, I have to kill my twin-brother. I don't know why, just feel the urge to do it. In other dreams, he tries to kill me. He hunts for me the whole night until I wake up. That is already bad enough, but when I woke up last month, he had a real knife in his hand and was still dreaming. I took it away, but when he woke up, he didn't remember a thing. I asked my dad that when I return for the holidays, I get a room for myself and a lock on the inside of the door.”

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Nimue continued, “When I fall asleep I constantly hear a voice telling me no-one will ever like me, I am too fat, hideous, plain ugly, I should stop eating, I should stop living. I have even puked in my sleep.”

When Lily looked at the Nimue she realized that she was thin, dangerously thin.

Minerva waited a long time, “Thank you for your openness and daring to share it with us. The previous year I said there was hardly any nightmare reported. That was from the official reports from our ministry of Magic. Dumbledore found the drop strange and didn't trust those numbers. Either they simply are false, for whatever reason, or people don't report it anymore, probably because they don't trust them, or don't see the benefit in reporting anymore. Either way, the problem still exists and is growing. It certainly is not my intention to classify you as 'guinea pigs', but we do have persons, real victims that can give us reliable reports. And even much better, we can objectively verify if there is a change, for the better or for the worse. And these students know for certain that here people listen to them, share their anxiety, and perhaps share the load of fear.”

Most of the students were shocked by what they just had heard. “Any comment, ideas, suggestions?”

Nicole replied, “Sorry Minerva, I presume you already knew their stories, but either story itself is quite something to digest. And then three of them, are you expecting an immediate response from us: we are no veteran soldiers!”

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But Daimh brought up, “Either we break our group up into smaller teams, or we prioritize. This is way too much for us to handle.”

Minerva answered, 'true, you are right. I heard these stories some months ago. I'm sorry. Lily, would you like to say anything?’

“Eh, yes. Several things. Perhaps we can make teams later on, but not now yet. We need everybody view and suggestions at the moment. As Eoin and his brother pose no threat to each other while he is here, I would suggest that we focus our attention to Camilla and Nimue.”

“Sounds reasonable.”

“There is, however, something I would like to do for all of them, including Camren, even though she had reported nothing and I hope that is indeed the case, not, Camren?”

The girl just nodded to confirm.

“From what you all told us, I presume it has been quite awhile since you had a trouble free sleep, and when I look closely, the rings around your eyes tell me that you try to postpone sleeping as long as possible. Understandably. I would suggest a small session, no longer than fifteen minutes to give Eoin, Camilla and Nimue a short peace of mind. Robin, Ginger, being the most senior, can you pick a fellow traveler companion and choose either of the girls. And very important, before you start, clear your mind as good as possible. What we all heard made a deep impact, but don't let it return in your own dream. Then, I suggest one of my favorite beginnings, just flying on my broomstick over the fields on a beautiful summer evening, and

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keep your mind firmly focused on flying to avoid 'other thoughts'. How about that?"

Thirty minutes later, four groups of three students had made their own tiny circle and let their mind float away. The tense expression on the new students slowly faded away and became serene.

When Lily walked from one team to another with Minerva, she noticed that Minerva was smiling at her. Before she could ask anything, Minerva said, "You are doing absolutely fine, Lily. You took the lead and are in control. They all trust you and so do I."

"Thank you, Minerva, for trusting me, and letting them trusting me, and for the compliments at the beginning."

"You are probably not aware of it, I'm actually pretty sure about it, but you have grown immensely since the first time, Lily."

She smiled thinking about the very few dreaming classes, but then became serious again, thought about the new students for a second, then said, "Did you noticed Nimue? The girl reminded me of the Thestrals. She must be famishing without realizing it. We must try to get some high protein food in her and succeed fast with that, or else we might be losing her."

"Yes, I noticed. She must be weak and I wonder how she comes along. What about Camilla?"

"That will be even more difficult!"

"What makes you think so?"

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“She told us she had dreams about abuse. That is already really horrible. But was it really a dream, or is it an echo of what has really happened? That would worse, much worse. I would like to consult with Miranda about a possible abuse-victim. Is that OK with you, do I have your approval for that?”

“Lily, that possibility never crossed my mind! If possible, I would you grant twenty points for Gryffindor. Clever thinking. But keep your suspicion between the two of us. And yes, you may discuss this with Miranda, as a doctor she will be officially held by her professional oath of secrecy.”

Another half hour later, all students looked refreshed.

“That was the best power-nap in ages!”

“Don't get over excited, it won't last that long, but it will do for now. We will continue next week, but if you are up against the wall, warn Minerva immediately. She can help or round us up.”

Nobodies child

At Hogwarts, breakfast was normally served slightly later on Saturdays and even more later on Sundays. But this Saturday Lily and Alexandra were fetched by professor McGonagall long before breakfast. Not unfriendly, though with a sense of urgency but without further explaining she said, “Please come, to Dumbledore.”

“Did we do anything wrong professor, that you want to see us this early?”

“No Alexandra, neither of you did something wrong, but I have to warn you about bad news before Dibbet tells it all out loud for all to hear. I understand his motivations, but I rather do it this way.”

As a gesture of consolation, Dumbledore placed his old hand on her shoulder. Alexandra, we received bad news, it is about your mother. She had passed away. Our condolences. Normally this news is already devastating, but as with regards to your father, officially missing for over a year now, you are technically an orphan. The Muggle authorities found out that your aunt is the only living relative, so from now on she holds official custody, until you are either legally grown-up, or get married. You should know that Dibbet will spend some extra words on it. Somehow this news had an influence on him, he seemed to feel guilty about something, but I don't know what or why. So, you have some time to prepare yourselves.”

Without saying anything, Alexandra got up, and walked slowly back to the dormitories.

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For all students, Saturday was an important day, as mail was delivered just after lunch. This weekend was no exception. Some students received a copy of the newspaper that was read by almost all wizards and witches, the daily prophet. Normally Sirius only received his broom-stick-magazine and some mail from fellow broomstick-fliers. But this time, he received a letter from home, a nasty one. A howler.

“Young Mr. Black.

At the beginning of the first year, we were informed by several others about the ridiculous mistake made by the sorting hat. Immediately we wrote that you should correct this. For generations, all members of the nobles house of Black always joined the Slytherin house. There is absolutely no reason why you are treated differently. Not only did you not respond, but you took no steps to change houses. When you returned for your second year, we gave you an ultimatum, you MUST correct this, or face the consequences. Again you failed to comply with your parent's demands. You did not return any letter, moreover, you didn't return home at all. Everyone, everyone should know that by now YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HOME ANYMORE. Or to get it into your thick head, YOU DON'T HAVE A HOME ANYMORE. The door lock-spell has been changed. Repellant spells applied. You are a disgrace for the house of Black and a humiliation of all the family members. I even don't consider you as part of our family anymore. Everything you owned and left at home, has been thrown away or burned or both. Unfortunately, we are not able you prevent you from using our family name. If

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we could, we would certainly have done so. You former family.”

All the students and staff stared silently at Sirius. All knew that everyone from the Black's were for many generations ended up into the Slytherin house and the Sorting-Hat's decision had caused much gossip. Without showing any emotions, he sat down. Before anyone could say or ask anything, Sirius commented, “My future used to be 'Black', it just became 'bleak'. For all of the students here, Hogwarts is a temporarily home, for me it became my real home.”

Dumbledore rose and remained standing, indicating he had something important to announce.

“Dear students, the school year is only days old. Some of you received letters, mostly from friends. If you got a letter from home, it mostly is that you had forgotten something. One of us here will not receive mail from home anymore. Never again, in her life. I want you all to stand-up as a sign of respect.”

Much whispering among all the tables. As she knew what was coming, Lily took Alexandra's hand.


“You should all know that during my entire career, this is one thing I dreaded the most. I want from the house of Gryffindor Alexandra McGonagall to come forward.

Slowly they rose and walked towards the table with all the staff. Lily saw all the students looking at them. She knew how her friend felt right now. Previous year her friend had accompanied her, now it was Lily's turn to help and support her friend.

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“Staff, students. We received a letter that Alexandra's mother died. This tragedy is worse as she already misses her father since last year. Our sincere condolences, on behalf of the entire staff.”

Here he paused for a second, then he continued, “All of the previous times I had to give such announcement, I stopped here. But I feel it as my duty to spend some extra words this time. It is good practice and a sign of common decency to share condolences with the person left behind and I expect that there are in this respect no walls between the different houses.

“It is a commonplace to say that life goes on, but it really does. And time heals wounds. Even grief wears, though very slowly, but on special days, anniversaries, holidays, pain and solitude can burn as deeply as it was the first moment. Final months of this woman were extremely hard as she  to cope with the loss of her husband. So please, think twice before you say something rude, and when any of you have something to commemorate, remember there are students that only have us to share happiness and sorrow. Thank you for your patience and respect.”

Dibbet turned and walked quickly away.

Silently crying, Alexandra walked back with Lily. From the faces of all the students, she saw that the speech and the site of a crying fellow-student had made a deep impact on all of them. They realized it could be either of them next week. After they left the great hall, the other students left also.

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Lily put her arm around her, searching for the proper words, but Alexandra said, “I know, I know, dear friend. You’ll be there when I need you. Even if I don’t know it myself.”

Silently they walked towards the staircases leading to their common room, but Alexandra stopped, and said, “I would rather not see all of them right now.” But Lily replied, “I know, but you must let them give a chance to share their feelings too. Some of them might also have lost a father, mother, brother or sister. Perhaps they carry silently a burden.”

Her friend answered, “You are right. That didn’t cross my mind. You are indeed a good friend. But after that chore, can we pick up our brooms and take off?”

“I was about to suggest that.”

When they walked later that day with their brooms to the courtyard, they saw a student, who hadn’t been in the common-room; Sirius. He too had red eyes.

“I am so sorry for you Alexandra, first your dad and now your mother. It must feel horrible.”

“Yes Sirius, thank you. It does. But I feel sorry for you. Your family still alive but cast you out, that is just as horrible!”

Silently they embraced each other. And the first thought that came to Lily’s mind, was that they both lost parents but might have found each other.

“I see that you were about to take-off?”

“Yes, Lily taught me that it can clear your mind.”

“Good thinking, see you!”

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But Lily looked to her friend and said to Sirius, “If you want, you can borrow my broom for a little while. That is, if Alexandra wants it too.”

She looked at her, and silently she thanked Lily with the look in her eyes.

Lily kept looking at them when they disappeared, over the wall heading for the lake.

Behind her she professor McGonagall saying, “My compliments Lily. Very well thought off, two-of-a-kind. They both know how the other is feeling like no-one else can. They can share their grief. Even though you are fond of flying yourself, you let him take your place. Noble of you. Can I offer you tea?”

“O, eh, yes, very kind of you.”

Suddenly another thought struck her mind.

“Professor? My condolences to you to. Alexandra's mother was your sister-in-law.”

With a wave of Minerva's wand tea and biscuits were transferred from Hogwarts' kitchen outside.

“Thank you, Lily, yes, you are right. Very considerate of you. Though there wasn't much left of her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Alexandra's mother, Keyla, wasn't doing well. I'm not sure if I should share it with you. It is a sort of indecent family secret, one is not proud of going public about and some parts even your friend probably don't even know about. But on the other hand, it might help you in helping her, if you know.

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My brother, Gregor, had a friend, Nathan and both of them were wizards, but my brother wasn't much talented, while Nathan was. They both joined the Royal Air Force and were for long times and often away from home. While Keyla and Gregor were already engaged, there were talks about my brother seeing other women. I never knew if that was true or not. Keyla confided once that she looked for and found consolation with Nathan. My brother made up with her, but Keyla was already a girl with a problem. Keyla and Gregor married, and while my brother was unaware of the situation, neither Keyla nor Nathan was ever sure who was Alexandra's real father. Gregor and Nathan remained best friends, but there was always a strange, touchy atmosphere.

And very often Keyla was alone with Alexandra. She practically raised her alone. Always in need. Before the last RAF-mission the three of them had a bitter argument. I fear that the accusations that were spoken at the moment could never be made unsaid anymore. So when that aircraft went missing, she lost not only a husband but also her lover. And anyhow she lost Alexandra's father, whoever of the two it was.”

“Life is cruel.”

“When Alexandra went to Hogwarts, Keyla was admitted to a mental hospital, she was already a danger to herself. I visited her regularly, every month, but she just sat there staring, not responding to anything, she never recognized neither a photo of her daughter nor me. She already lost the lust for life many years ago, and only remained living for her daughter. When Alexandra came to Hogwarts, she had lost everything and just gave up. Initially, I was glad I never brought Alexandra along, that she never had to see that scene, But now I realize I robbed

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her of a final good-bye. In the final letter from the hospital, they wrote that Keyla woke every night up screaming calling out for Gregor and Nathan, just them, never her own daughter. One night Keyla managed to slip away and walked off the cliffs.”

After a very long silence, Minerva said, “Now you also understand why I was so very glad your friend could stay during the first summer holiday with you with a stable and decent family, and joined you on your trip to Greece.”

“Minerva, would you mind if I confide this to my parents?”

“I already spoke with them, when her father went missing, but you may tell them the rest, the whole story.”

Searching for info

Next week, Saturday, Sirius and James came begging at the girls, for borrowing the advanced broom-sticks. James wanted to show-off and proof he was still the best choice for the Gryffindor Quidditch team, while Sirius wanted to practice for the upcoming speed contest.

The girls, however, were heading for the history teacher, professor Binns. When they entered his study, they found him staring at two photographs, those they made the previous year of the memorial stones not far away from Hogwarts.

“Hello, professor!”

“He turned around, but it seemed that he had to come from far away, a long time ago.”

“Eh, what? O, that's true! Hello, miss McGonagall, miss Evans.”

“I noticed you were looking at the photos. I hope it doesn't cause any discomfort, professor?”

A small sigh. “If I were still alive, I would have said it caused me to feel hollow and empty, but as I am already a ghost, it comes with my condition. But it gets me as close as what I should be feeling. So yes and no, it reminds me more often of my girl and my friends. It is a pity I'm bound to the castle, so I can not visit the place myself, but I'm still grateful to you for erecting those marks and the photograph of them. But I understand you have visited less grim locations?”

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“Yes indeed, professor, the Mediterranean during the summer season is quite different compared to the north of Scotland. It too is beautiful here, but differently.”

“Miss Evans, you have the talent for a good politician! But that's quite a voyage for two girls, any particular place or reason?”

Both girls hesitated a moment, they wanted to find out more about the traveling stones, but knew they couldn't ask straight away, they had to plan their talk carefully.

“We didn't go there alone. My parents would never allow that. I couldn't afford traveling the Muggle way, and as we are still underaged, we are not allowed to use magic outside school.”

Alexandra continued, “We traveled along with one of your former students, perhaps you still remember her, Margaret Potter, the wife of Edward Potter. And Lily got an invitation to come to Athens, to the Parthenon, the temple of Pallas Athena.”

“Oh indeed! It's so beautiful there. We have been there, several times. For all tourists, most places are unfortunately all behind fences.”

Alexandra noticed the word “we”, but continued, “That didn't apply to us! We could go anywhere, we all got special, unrestricted permits from a man, what was its name, eh Alfredo, and he showed us even inside the Parthenon, inside some secret magical chambers!”

When she deliberately placed the accent on the name, the professor reacted remarkably. “Who you said? -no that can't be.”

“A very old man, we initially thought he was a beggar and lived there, can you believe! But when we wandered around we came across not only ancient temples but also a place that

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strongly reminded us of the sites in southern England we told you about last year. But yes, I remember for sure, his name was Alfredo, no sir-name that I can remember.”

He approached them closely, “Yes, there were rumors of travel-key-stones there. But what did you say? Did that Alfredo-person led you INSIDE the Parthenon!”

“Yes, that is correct. Don't tell me that you know that man!”

“No! That would be impossible, ridiculous. The Alfredo I knew was a member of eh, eh a group of wizards that regularly gathered there. But an invitation you said?”

Slowly Alexandra fed him piece by piece, “Yes, we got, or actually Lily got an invitation, from the Supreme International Wizardry Council. That Alfredo looked like a clerk, a janitor, but in fact, he is the head of that council!”

The ghost looked dumbstruck, “What! You mean you not only know about the council but even got an invitation from them!? Only heads of ministries know about it, and some privileged people.”

With the voice of a public announcer, Alexandra said: “*Now here this. Now hear this, Lily, we joined the assembly of privileged people!*” On purpose, she drew the focus to her friend. “So professor, you do know about the council?”

Still astonished Binns replied, “I know, and I have been there also one time. They were worried about a certain stone elsewhere, but I couldn't help them. They tried to travel from Athens to Egypt, but it was just was one-way, whoever they sent, they did never return, so another tragedy.”

Next, Lily pushed a bit further, “Professor, my friend tried to find the world famous Alexandrian Library to find further in-

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formation about... you-know-what. As you might have guessed we failed horribly. However, one of the Egyptian wizards-in-hiding directed us to very old remains of the classical city of Alexandria. Deep below the waves, we found an ancient city, undisturbed for thousands of years. We saw streets, palaces, temples, and also something else. A site identical to Stone-Henge. Hundreds of meters below the sea. No-one could have survived a dive that deep. A lethal trap indeed.”

“Now did you indeed?”

“Yes professor, but there is something else you should know, and we really hope you will help us. Something that scared us terribly, mainly because of your story of Lachlan. In Athens, we found one of the stones softly glowing and when we approached it, it felt like humming. Obviously, we stayed away from it, but other people might not be so lucky.”

Perhaps she touched a too sensitive spot, or had gone too far, as he just said, “Oh, Lachlan, my dear Lachlan...”

As no sensible word came forward anymore, they decided to leave.

Next morning, Sunday, they bumped into Dumbledore. “You are up early for a bunch of youngsters! But why so sad? It is a beautiful day!”

“We thought about paying our library a visit. We are still searching for information about traveling. Last summer we found an abandoned but active traveling-stone. It might be an imminent danger to others.”

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“Still poking around despite several warnings? I really shouldn't help you two, but what did you just say, an active stone, really? How did you found out? How sure are you?”

“Professor, the settings were much like Stone-Henge, but the central stone was glowing and humming. Normally stones don't glow and hum, irrespectively of their mood.”

Dumbledore said nothing and looked very stern, “You know they can be lethal without a clear cause or reason!”

Alexandra confessed about Binns' story, the findings, the landslide not far away from school, the memorials, and the submerged travel-stone near Alexandria. “So, yes professor we know about some of the dangers involved, just some of them, but still not enough. There is so much to find out.”

“Oh, that explains the change in Binns' behavior last couple of months! We find him staring at those hills often. Oh well, I can not promise a thing, but a friend of mine has a memory that is as long as professor Binns. Come to my study at eleven.” And with these words he left, with a puzzling look on his face.

When they knocked on the door of Dumbledore's study at eleven, they were invited in, but not by Dumbledore. Another old man was sitting in one of the chairs intended for visitors.

He greeted them, “Hello, you must be the girls Albus told be about. Please have a seat! Albus is just gone, but he tries to be back as soon as possible.”

“Excuse me, sir,” Alexandra said, “your face looks familiar, but I don't think we ever met before,” Lily said she did neither.

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“O, that means that they finally changed those horrible textbooks for the subject of modern wizardry. I almost take for granted that everybody knows me. My photo was in that book, without my permission for several hundred years.”

He picked a book from one of the zillions gathered in Dumbledore's study. He browsed through it and gave it to the girls.

There they read: “Nicolas Flamel. Famous Wizard that finally succeeded in making a reliable Philosopher's Stone. Birth date, AD 1302. Married with Annabel Flamel, birth date, AD 1305.”

The girls looked at each other, “What! You are Mr. Flamel?”

The door opened and a lady about the same age of professor McGonagall entered the room.

“Yes, absolutely. And this is my wife Annabel. Dear, these are the girls young Albus told us about.”

The woman replied, “Of course they are! You are clearly Alexandra McGonagall.” and she stroke her gently over her head. “And you are thus Leonora Evans!” But she made no effort to make the same granny-like move. Instead, it almost looked like that she made a tiny bow.

Nicolas continued, “So you want to know more about Diderick and his stones, not? Tragic and treacherous things, these stones. Yes, I know his story. I even remember his girl Lachlan, we both do actually. Sad indeed. It went so wrong suddenly, while the day before the tragic event, we played with it nothing went wrong, his friend transferred me dozens of times to Calanais, a Hebrides island in the north and back. Small cold and windy island, the location had no importance what so ever. But it was near the home of the wizard who build the network of portal-

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stones. Perhaps a nice place to start. I understood you found out what went wrong?”

“Yes, the stone nearby here was covered under a landslide.”

“That explains it all. But how did you find out which location? Binns tried, but never succeeded.”

“That's part of my gift. I feel things.”

“Ah, just like my wife.”

“Mr. Flamel, do you know more about the stones. How they work, to select destinations, to activate and to deactivated them. We think that the one in Athens is still 'ON'. It hums and glows.”

“By now you know how dangerous they are, a simple touch at the wrong stone at the wrong moment and you're gone. Not traveled away, but dead. Just by one single touch!”

“Therefore we need to know more about them. If we have to find our ourselves, that will be far more dangerous, and takes much longer, don't you agree?”

“Absolutely! Alright. I agree. When I'm back home I'll look for my notations. Just like Binns I jotted all instructions from Eideard down. I never thought I would even need them anymore so it will take some searching, one does collect quite a lot in a couple of centuries, you understand.”

“Thank you, Mr. Flamel, you are very helpful!”

“You two are welcome, is there anything else I can help you with, something from long ago?”

Lily thought a while, “There is something, but I'm pretty sure even you can not help me with this, as it dates thousands of years before this.”

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While Alexandra poured tea in the cups of Nicolas and Annabel Flamel, Lily tried, “Do you know anything about Hecate's key? Can you perhaps tell us something about that?”

Nicolas mood seemed to have changed, from helpful to reserved perhaps even annoyed. “Girls, sorry to say but that is something of a totally different magnitude. I agreed with Albus to talk about the stones, as you were investigating them anyhow, and there was some sort of urgency, even though these stones are already far ahead of your competence. These should be investigated and dealt with from seasoned wizards from the traveling department of the ministry. But even these stones are just simple childish toys compared with that. One ought to speak about it with due respect. The holy trinity Hecate had several magical object objects, among one was her key. With that she could unlock the doors to either realm: the living, the sleeping and the dead. With that key, even a Muggle could unleash hell on earth. A wizard could cause the end of times with it. Actually one once almost did, as a consequence half of Europe's population died. Two hundred million deaths worldwide because a resentful wizard unleashed the plague. Thankfully the council realized the underlying danger and ordered its destruction. However, they failed to destroy it completely, after centuries, a medieval wizard succeeded in deactivating it, by breaking the key. One part has been kept safe by the house of Ravenclaw, the other half is kept far far away by a secret supreme wizardry council. So there is absolutely no reason for fearing it. But why are you asking?”

“This summer, at the Council, we heard that the key was re-forged, and a new keeper was assigned.”

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With a loud bang both Nicolas and Annabel let their teacup fall on the floor. “That is not funny! I said that subject deserves respect and awe. Perhaps you should check the Bhagavad Gita, with the Key you can become death, destroyers of worlds. Don't you ever do that again! Mentioning it so lightly. Perhaps you two are much less sincere as Albus had told me.”

Feeling sorry that she had touched the subject, Lily bent a bit forward to put her empty teacup on the desk. At that very moment, something golden shimmered between the buttons of her Hogwarts' robe. Instinctively Lily put her hand on it. But Nicolas and Anabel had noticed it.  they got the picture.

While both of them yelled “Nooooooooooooooooooooo” it seemed their faces reflected centuries of horror and disaster. To Alexandra, it looked like they aged several hundreds of years in a split second and they ran away like hunted by a pack of wolves.

When Dumbledore returned, concerned he commented, “They left in quite a hurry, never seen him run that fast. I think something inappropriate has been said. Judging the look on his face, I shouldn't expect any help from him anymore, girls.”

“We still learned a lot, professor.”

“In such a short while? And probably through a hard lesson. And knowing Nicolas, he could have helped you much more, I think. Care to elaborate what happened?”

The girls told him that initially, Mr. Flamel was more than willing to help with the portal-stones and subsequent a bit more about what the council had said about the key.

Finally, Dumbledore said, “The Flamels are extremely old, they have witnessed many unpleasant ordeals. Living for about six

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centuries also has less pleasant aspects, like losing all of your friends and families in wars, and diseases. I have just two comments. First, Lily you are still the intended recipient of the key, confirmed by the council. But on the other hand, be extremely careful, don't use it unless you are absolutely sure how. Don't even show it. I was initially thinking about Voldemort and his cozy club of death-eaters. From what I just heard, that sounds like I was worried about a raindrop, while the ocean might flood the area. And do you realize what could happen if the wrong people find out about your key, Lily?"

With Flamel's face twisted by fear and horror still in her mind, she said, "Yes, professor. I think I start to see that the key is an extremely powerful object, in some hands and can be used like any tool for either good or bad."

Wild dreams

The next dream class started with a nice surprise for all of them. None of the new fifth year students looked so tense as they had done before.

“But I have to admit,” Minerva said, “that the next day, after our previous session both Nimue and Camilla came to see me. Not that they were having problems, but on the contrary. I decided it was worthwhile to have them come to my office at ten in the evening and let Robin and Ginger do a full hour of shielded meditative resting.”

“Very well,” said Lily, “but I hope you don't mind saying that for the time being, I would rather see them observing us and examining previous findings, instead of unrestricted participating. Both for their safety but ours as well.”

“Very wise Lily, I agree and accept,” said Minerva. ‘I’ll also stay here and awake.”

While she instructed the four students, the others prepared themselves for another session. “Any specific idea's?”

“No, shall we try to empty our minds as much as possible, and try where we end up? Might be scary, do we all dare for a couple of minutes? If not, or any other idea, please say so!”

By lack of any other idea's at the moment, some took a bit of the potion, while Lily waited and finally let her mind drift away.

She closed her eyes and imagined she flew over the hills near the school. For a moment she looked back and saw all of the others were following her. She did a round along the erected

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memorial stone, in the hills and then turned towards the small village, Hogsmeade. But even before she got near, thick clouds covered the sky. It became darker and darker and it was clear that it would start to rain any moment now. Thus she dived towards the nearby forest. Without any warning, lightning struck and the thunder was deafening. The very moment they all dismounted, it started to rain, but instead of raindrops, it rained question marks! They made an enormous noise, you couldn't even hear yourself talking. When any of those questionable marks reached your bare skin, they stung. Lily didn't see blood, but they did hurt pretty bad.

Robin approached her to ask her something, but she could not hear the question, she only heard the noise of the question marks coming down. Lily looked at her and saw she was a bit frightened, unable to communicate. She pointed towards the forest, to find some better shelter. The longer they walked, the denser the forest became. It meant that rain didn't hurt them that much anymore, but it became darker and darker and the noise slowly died away, and only an irregular thunder-strike reminded them that the storm wasn't over yet. When Robin tried again to ask something, she heard something else. An animal. But not just an animal, a wolf. And from the sound, she understood that it wasn't a single wolf, but a complete pack. Lily looked around and it became clear that it wasn't her imagination. The frightened look on their faces made clear that they all had heard the wolves. And as the sound became stronger and stronger it could only mean one thing, they were approaching rapidly. No matter how ridiculously shortcoming her idea was, running was the only one she got. Away from that horrible frightening sound. It felt like that they had been

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running for hours when one of them spotted a cave. It had a metal fence and bars on either side, strong enough to defend them against any wild animal. After they verified no-one was left behind, they closed the gate tight shut. Not a second too soon. The first wolf jumped to the fence, but thankfully the fence was strong enough. They all could see his fierce looking sprout, evil radiating from its eyes and blood dripping from his beak originating from a previous unfortunate victim. Seconds later a second came, a third ... until more that thirty pairs of red eyes were looking at them. The wolves did not try to reach them anymore, it seemed that they were very content, very satisfied.

After they rested a bit they looked at each other, “We can't stay here. We have to go back to Hogwarts, I'm getting hungry!”

One of them approached the fence, but as soon as he did, the wolfs got up and made clear that they would not anyone pass alive.

“Now what?”

“Anyone examined this place yet? How deep is this cave? Perhaps it has another entry, or rather an exit to escape from!”

As only possible in dreams, torches lay on the ground and here-and-there a burning torch was attached to the walls of the cave. At that point, they should have realized that they were driven like a herd to this place, and anything lying there, was placed with a specific intention, but all their minds were set on getting away from those fangs, claws and horrible bloody fiery eyes that only radiated hatred. With a sense of relief, they moved away from those wolfs, those hounds from hell. The longer they walked, the warmer it became. Was it because of the walking, or was the atmosphere warmer. Ginger said, “Going

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down is one thing, that is always easy in life, we have to get up also, that will be much tougher.”

With each step they took it became warmer and warmer, like a hot day in summer, worse, like working in a bakery. And it smelled worse and worse. It reminded her of matches, brimstone, and charcoal. Finally, the cave ended with a door, a metal door. They felt the heat radiating from it, so how hot it may be at their side of the door, it would be much worse at the other end.

With no alternative available she used a cloth to protect her hand from touching the handle, to opened the door. Lily thought that much warmer wasn't possible anymore. Until she stepped through the doorway.

They ended up in a huge hall with rough walls made of sharp stones. The floor was so hot it glowed reddishly. Further away was a crossroad with people stumbling from one end to the other, but when they nearly reached the other end, those people found themselves at their beginning position. “Look how that one is dressed!” and she pointed to one of the people. He, or she, was walking barefoot, what must have caused enormous pains. But horrible enough, that was not what troubled Lily. It was the robe that person was wearing, one that all of them recognized, a Hogwarts robe. Lily turned around quickly and counted. No, it wasn't one of them. But how could another student end up here? Who might that student be?

She looked closer. Then suddenly that person looked up with agony, into Lily's face. She recognized the face. They all did. It belonged to a student that was part of their group until last year. Until she betrayed them all to the death-eaters and had tried to murder professor Dibbet. It was Synthia Killbride, who died in

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the attempt. The one she had cursed to hell. And hell perfectly fitted the description of the place they were all right now. But how could that be? All the time at school she had learned over and over again, that coincidence hardly existed.

The moment Lily recognized her, it felt like the arctic ocean was poured over her. She gasped for air.

Lily turned around to look at the others, but they all were gone. She turned back again and realized she was back in the classroom.

It took a while before Lily came round. She heard others crying, most of them sat still shivering.

Minerva looked worried. “Did something go wrong? Also a bad nightmare?”

But Lily shook her head.

Robin and Ginger asked softly, “Lily, if this wasn't just a dream, then where have we been?”

“Minerva, please!” Lily asked, “I think we need something different than tea. Something stronger, much stronger. Please don't leave us here. Use your wand to collect it or ask one of the new students to fetch it. But don't leave us now.”

Minerva saw from Lily's face and from the other students that she was dead serious. And scared, scared to death.

Moments later some were silently drinking beer or brandy. Each time one looked at one of the others they shivered and looked away.

Nimue said vaguely, “Your robes stink bad, brimstone, sulfur, all of them. And some of you have burns! How can that be so? You were doing a dream-thing or am I mistaken. What did you

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do? Where have you been?”

Finally Ginger started to talk. “Minerva, do you remember one of the first circle-sessions, long time ago. We thought we were at a reception of the opening of some elderly-home, but you suspected more, it frightened you stiff.”

Suspiciously Minerva said, “But of course, 'the afterlife'! How could I ever forget! Did mean you end up there again?”

“Sort of. This time, I think we traveled through the other tunnel, where oath-breakers, murderers, rapists, child molesters end up.” and slowly she pointed with her fingers downwards.

“I think witnessing the torturing made a huge impression, that it made lasting remarks on our clothes, like we have really been there.”

Robin continued, “Be glad that neither you, nor the new students were there with us. We saw someone paying her price for a murder attempt, treason, and oath-breaking: Synthia Killbride!”

Astonished Minerva put her hand to her mouth, not knowing what to say. But the horror in her eyes said enough.

Girl talk

After dinner, Dumbledore announced in the great hall, “We need some students to help others students, preparing for upcoming test-papers. All who assist will earn points for the 'house-cup'.”

Moments later Lily heard a knock on the door of a classroom that was appointed to her.

“Hi, I'm Molly, Molly Wilson, third year Hufflepuf. I heard that there might be students around to help me. Do you? Can you help?”

“That depends on which subjects you need help for. For Potions, Bio, English, I can help. My friend, who just gone away for some tea can help with History, Latin, and Greek. Also so some spells. For transfiguration, gym, economics, maths, physics and spells, Quidditch and brooming you ask we boys in the classroom next door.”

“Aren't you Gryffindor?”

“Yeah, but next week there are also some senior students from Ravenclaw also. Why?”

“Well, eh eh eh.”

Molly hesitated.

“Yes, it is Biology or actually more Psychology, charms, or even more just life. No, it is about one of the boys from your house.”

“Boys! That is indeed a tough subject, unpredictable, highly irrational.”

Molly started to sob. “I wish there were books about boys! One never knows what they think. Boys are so irrational, unpredictable, narrow-minded.”

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“Calm down Molly. We are all in that situation, sooner or later. Tell me, I promise it remains between the two of us. Has one been mean to you?”

“No! Yes. No. I don't know! I'm so confused.”

“I'd guess I think I know what you are getting at. Biology, something to do with the heart. Yours.”

Molly nodded. “There is that boy I like, and that thought he'd like me to. But, you know, next week, the party, ball, and eh eh, he still did not ask me to come along!”

“Oh dear...”

“We have spent quite a lot of time together, but lately he keeps on talking about your friend, Alexandra this, Alexandra that, Alexandra such. So I am not sure if still likes me or not. I thought he did. He can be so nice, but also so insensitive, unthoughtful.”

Lily wanted to say, “That just typically boys,” but she noticed that Molly was silently crying, so she kept silent for a while.

“I understand it is hard. it is difficult.”

“How can you know how difficult it might be? Both of you look like you walked out of a fairytale. You are bright and can get every boy you like, I think. I heard you are dating the Quidditch seeker!”

“Dear Molly, you have been reading the wrong fairy tales. Yes, I see James a lot. But a lot of girls try to get his attention. And let me tell you this: despite everything, James has never, not even once told me that he even liked me! How about that. And I know that Alexandra is fond of Sirius, but he is just as thick as James. What do you think she feels when she sees his photograph everywhere in the girl's dormitory?”

“Oh, I didn't realize.”

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“Would you tell me about which boy we are talking about?”

“The one with the red hair, Robert. Robert Sheldrake.”

“Yes, I know who you mean. Do you have any idea what his favorite subjects are?”

“History of Magic, Muggles, Potions.”

“Well then, I will tell him that there is a specific student, who needs help with all of these subjects tomorrow after dinner. Right here.”

“Then what?”

“After some time, just tell him, you ask him!”

“What me? Asking him! Isn't he suppose to ask me?”

“Who want to know? You! And remember this is for him just as scary and new as for you.”

“But what if he turns me down?”

“That is painful, but then you know where you are at, and don't have to wonder ...what...if.... anymore.”
sigh.

“The biggest problem with boys, is that you never get them alone, they are always with two or three others. If I can lure him to come and assisting another student, you are sure you will not be interrupted and can talk for at least an hour. I'll be there and leave after five minutes.”

Next Alexandra re-appeared, “And, was Lily any good in coaching? Which subject?”

“Boys!”

“That's a tough subject indeed!”

When she noticed Mollies still slightly red eyes, she sat down, held her hands in hers and looked mesmerized at her.

“Don't worry too much. It will all work out fine for you.”

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Surprised Molly got up, and said, “Thanks, see you tomorrow!” and left.

“Daring indeed, Dr. Alexandra Freud!”

“No, I just saw children. All with red hair.”

“Sometimes I envy you, being able to see that.”

“What did you arrange with her for tomorrow?”

“Getting her and Robert Sheldrake together without anyone else interrupting them for some time, with helping each other as an excuse.”

“No excuse required, you are helping them, but with an entirely different subject, much more important. This school has no exams for it. Life itself is the perpetual test.”

“Indeed, Dr. Alexandra Freud!”

Suddenly Alexandra stood up and with a distant gaze she chanted with a strange and croaky voice:

*“The boyfriend is red,
Mollie is blue,
The both shall have children,
And not just a few!”*

After the last word had left her lips she looked bewildered around to find someone, “Where is that woman, who is she?” Slightly amazed Lily said, “Who do you mean? Molly? She just left! And what were you reciting? I wonder what Molly would have said to that!”

Not understanding Alexandra replied, “No! Not Molly, that old woman who made a parody of ‘roses are red, violets are blue’?” Worried Lily explained, “Are you feeling alright? After Molly left there was just the two of us, no-one else. And it was you

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suddenly singing about she and Robert having a bunch of children, nobody else!”

When she noticed her friend shivering, Lily suggested, “How about trying to fetch a hot cup of coco? That will do you good!”

Alexandra gladly accepted the suggestion, but while she walked towards the school's kitchen, they stumbled upon one of the teachers.

“Hello Alexandra, Lily! Third-years Gryffindor I believe.”

“Yes professor, I don't think we've ever met. What subject do you teach?”

“No, we never met before! I just arrived several hours ago. My name is MacVail. I'm the new teacher divination. All third years should have had it already, but you start after the winter break. I have some catching up with the fifth, sixth and seventh-year students. Some have chosen this subject and face their OWL or NEWT exams.”

A moment later one of the house-elves brought them their hot coco.

Lily mused, “Funny coincident, same appetite, same moment.”

MacVail answered, “Girl, there is no such thing in life as a coincident! Most things in life are predetermined, has a cause. But no class yet. Coco gives me some sort of peace, consolations when dealing with predictions, fore-tellings. And you? It's too late for coffee or tea I presume?”

Lily joked, “In that case, perhaps we were meant to meet right now!”

Unexpectedly seriously, MacVail replied, “Why do you say such a thing?”

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After that, Lily had no choice but to tell what had happened moments ago.

Alexandra was very uncomfortable with all the attention a few lines brought to her.

But MacVail tried to squeeze every tiny bit of information out of both girls.

“So, Lily, you never saw any other person around, but you did hear another person? I presume you can distinguish when your friend is trying to imitate someone else?”

“No, but It could be that she has an undiscovered talent for theater?”

“Only if she did it knowingly!”

He thought for a while, “And what happened before?”

“A girl came around, she had an issue with a boy that she has a crush on, but he doesn't notice her. So we are trying to help them.” Alexandra said.

“Perhaps you should say, that you had a vision about them?”

Lily asked.

Nothing could have triggered MacVail more suddenly, “You also have visions?” he asked intensely.

Reluctantly Alexandra admitted, “yes, sometimes, very seldom, though.”

Quickly MacVail grasped a piece of parchment out of one of his pockets. “Do you remember it? Exactly, word for word?”

While Alexandra recited it again, now with her own voice, the professor wrote it carefully down. When she was done, she commented, “What is all this fuzz about, just some stupid four lines of a verse, actually a bit childish.”

But the professor was excited. “Did you ever had something like this before?”

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“No, not that I can remember. Why?”

“In that case, I am proud to be the one to record your very first prediction!”

“My first what?????????????????”

“Aren't predictions about other things, more serious things.”

For a moment MacVail paused and thought deeply, looking for the proper words.

“I had a premonition that I had to be here at Hogwarts for a prediction. But even I have not expected this. I believe you had no other plans right now?”

Looking at Lily, “I know you rather stay with your friend right now, even though it only concerns her, not you.”

“That is so,” Lily confirmed.

MacVail sighed.

“Divination is a subject the least understood and valued. Not just here, at this school, but at any school, even at the Ministry, they consider it a waste of valuable time. There are even fierce debates about predictions. I'm the first to agree that they are vague and open to several interpretations. Even yours! It is very easy to say that Molly and that red-haired boy, Robert you said, will get married and have several children. But it could also mean that it considers some other boy, also with red hair, with 'red' in his name, an active communist party member. And even if it is about Arthur, it does not say that they are the father and mother of those mentioned children.”

Lily looked surprised, “I never thought so much behind some changed lines of a nursery rhyme!”

“That is why they are treated very carefully at the ministry. There they are collected and only the truly intended recipient can collect it.”

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He reached for his pocket and he gave Alexandra a pile of pieces of parchment.

“If it ever happens again, write down exactly as possible all the words. Just keep some empty pieces in your pocket, just in case it happens. It might very well be that this was your first and your last prediction, but I doubt that.”

“And then what?”

“Put it in a blank envelope, and put that one in another, and send it to the ministry, department of mystification, section predictions. They know what to do with it.”

“Even silly ones?”

“How do you tell silly ones from others? One of my first ones was about breaking glass. I thought it silly too, thinking about windows or drinking glasses. Much later I was told it came true, a glass factory had collapsed. And because of my prediction, no-one was hurt. We can only do our part and do it well, let others do theirs. We can only give advice. If they heed our words it is something completely different, that is their own consciousness and responsibility.”

He looked at his watch and said, “I have just one advice, and I urge you to heed my words: Go to bed and try to catch some sleep while you still can. I'll escort you at this hour. It is about three in the morning. You don't need divination to tell that dawn will be here in just some hours.”

The contest

The next week something happened that many had been longing for a long time. The broom-contest!

It all started with the arrival of the foreign guests. Some countries had large delegations others just a few or even just a single contender.

James wondered, “I never new there are so many countries with wizards or witches! And do they all have schools?”

Dumbledore, overhearing his remark, replied, “Why would you think that our country is so special? Magic can be found everywhere. All though people practicing it is highly uneven spread. We are exceptionally well off, in contrast with other dense populated area's. We were told last summer that some countries, Denmark, Holland, don't have enough wizard or witches to keep their ministry up-and-running. We became extinct. But on the other hand some countries, like us, have multiple schools. France for instance have a school in the central massive, but also in the south at their side of Pyrenees. While twenty miles at the other side, the Spanish have their school. They have a nifty competition between those two schools. Italy, Greece, Switzerland, Lithuania, Norway, they all have schools, but nothing compared to ours of course!”

The contest was spread over two days. The first day they were competing on the single mile and the ten miles. The single mile was played in the morning. That was all about power and concentration. The poles for start and finish were placed inside

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the lake nearby. The afternoon was reserved for the ten mile. That part was more about endurance and was held above the loch in the next valley.

The second day was intended for the hindrance race. That final part was more focused on broom-stick control and perseverance. James had proven previous year that the trees of the forbidden forest created an ideal environment for such test.

Most of Gryffindor students only participated on the ten miles. Except for one student who had to defend his title, Sirius.

Because of the width of the lake, all fifty contenders could start together. Directly after they started, Sirius noted that neither of the other students were a serious competition for him. But he faced a bigger challenge from Italy and France. He tried to get as small as possible, to catch less wind. That helped him against his Italian opponent. But not against the slim build French girl. But Sirius managed to win with a fifteen seconds advantage. Otilie, the french girl was furious. “Nice bud, but don't think that stick between your legs will help you much the next time!”

That afternoon, Sirius found out that not all contenders played honestly. This time, only ten broom-sticks and its owners would enter the challenge. Because of the distance, there were only spectators at the start and slightly more at the finish. Sirius flew side-by-side with an Italian student for a while. Ahead he noticed the Spanish flier and one from Greece. And much further ahead another one, but unable to distinguish. After four miles he started to feel his fatigue, cramp. But he noticed he wasn't the only one. He could read from the Italian guy face that he was fighting against his pain. He tried to remember the

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previous time he flew here. At that moment he had only one thought. One person. A girl from his class. Seconds later, Sirius noticed he had passed all others, except one. That french girl again. He was gaining but still some yards behind her. She dropped height until she was just inches above the water. Sirius did the same so he would be much harder to see, even though he perfectly well knew that she was very much aware who the persons were chasing her and about to catch-up. Suddenly she lowered her leg and let her left feet drag through the water. Sirius totally surprised, instantly hit a wall of water and dropped. Outraged by such unsporting behavior he looked for his broom and re-embarked on his chase. But he was too late, much too late. He already noticed the finishing poles and realized she had cheated him from winning. But nonetheless, he gave everything. What was the broom's name? Indeed, 'Need For Speed' That was what he needed. He gained yard by yard by yard the difference shrunk. But not enough. She won. Half a second later Sirius finished. She whispered to him, “You smell so bad, I decided that you need to freshen up a bit, did you enjoy your bath?”

When he returned to school they all regarded Sirius as the winner on both tracks. “At the single mile, you won with over thirty seconds difference. And at the ten miles, you only lost with three seconds. And she cheated!”

“Yes, I know, but she was there first, nothing can change that.” And the official result was a draw.

It meant that they both had to compete in the third part also.

Whatever the official result was, Hogwarts and particularly

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Gryffindor were celebrating, celebrating big!

Just to prove his point, Sirius was wearing both batches he earned the previous year, indicating he was still the world champion on the single mile, but also of the ten miles distance. Although the consumption of alcoholic drinks was totally forbidden for students at parties, it was clearly by the behavior of some that they had managed to bypass all detection. Some of the boys had difficulties with standing up, some had problems with talking sensible, although some were considering that as normal behavior for them. A group of girls acted in a way they would certainly not do during breakfast. Standing on the table singing, dancing, cuddling with Sirius, offering him “indecent” photos and underwear.

At one point Alexandra got so fed-up, she walked to Sirius standing on one of the tables of Gryffindor common-room.

“You are a bit late Alexandra, but you can put your photo on the pile there and leave your bra here.” Sirius hands out his broom with countless bra's and knickers.

“You are such an an an *adolescent*!! Your eyes only see what your dirty mind tells them to see! I can not believe you are so ignorant, so blind!”

“What are you saying, you're only jealous!”

“No just take a look!” She grabbed one of the photos. One girl was constantly putting her underwear on, starting from scratch.

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“They are all modified, adapted! The original photos are commercial ads from dirty magazines. Made by dirty men and intended for dirty old men. The women on it got paid for doing this, they don't like doing it.

And some girls put a photo of their own head on top of these photos. Look for yourself.” Alexandra removed tiny parts from the photo, exposing the original girls of the photo of it. Highly disappointed Sirius had to agree with Alexandra.

“But these bra's look real enough!” And he pointed to one from the photos and hanging on his broom.

“Did you really thought they got them off when you won? They just had them in they pocket, it was all planned and organized far ahead.” Alexandra said with much conviction in her voice, even though she knew it wasn't entirely true.

“And what do you intend to do with them? Wearing them? I'll bet those from Slytherin are willing to publish such photo!”

“No, of course not! No idea yet.”

“Perhaps you should also realize another thing. These are expensive piece of clothing. Any idea what this one costs?” She picked up a challenging one.

”No, not the faintest idea.”

“For the money this one costs, you can buy more chocolate frogs than you can eat in an entire week. Just this single one! You must return them.”

“How? There are no names attached.”

“I suggest you, or one of your friends if you don't dare, give them to our schools' care-taker, You know, the lost-and-found items. If he puts them all on display, the rightful owners will recognize and collect them.”

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“But why would they all do that then?”

“Are you that thick? Look at this photo, did you read the words below it?”

Sirius looked again at a photo of a hardly dressed girl. The text below read: “...*I know what I want...*”

“Did you really think any of them wanted **you**, Sirius Black? The one and only person responsible for all this only want one thing, and that is winning tomorrow, and her plan is distracting you so much that you have your mind on anything else except flying!”

Utterly disappointed, Sirius threw the photo's away, “isn't there anything real anymore around here?”

“Oh yes, there is. Take a look at this photo, even though it is just a Muggle photo, it is very real. And so is this.”

After these words, she grabbed his head with both her hands. And kissed him on his lips for quite awhile.

“And if you manage to win tomorrow, I'll give you the other half! Think about that for a change!”

And with these words, Alexandra got down, leaving an astonished boy behind, and went to the girl's dormitory.

Lily asked, “I didn't know you were that much interested in him.” Her friend responded, “I was so utterly disgusted by his behavior. I had to do something about it to stop it. And no, I wasn't.”

“Alexandra, how did it feel, kissing a boy like that? I've never done that. Kissing or being kissed that way.”

“Neither had I. But it felt good.”

She thought for a second and then continued, “Lily?”

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“Yes.”

“Sometimes I feel so strange inside. A couple of days before my period, sometimes it lasts a week. It isn't painful, just a distracted, a slightly light feeling in my head, breasts very sensitive. Yesterday I had no fitting bra, so I thought I leave it off. That even felt more horrible, I thought all the boys knew and were looking at me. Immediately after the first class I hurried back and got an older one, slightly too small.”

“I think it is about hormones rushing through your veins.”

“And just a moment ago, I was going to give him a piece of my mind, and suddenly all I could think about was to kiss him.”

“Hormones impacts your feeling and thinking.”

“But now I feel ridiculous! What would he be thinking?”

“Can't tell. What did you give him?”

“A copy of the photo your father made of us, at Stone-Henge. And to be honest, he does look cute and it did feel good, I'll hope he does win tomorrow.”

Changing the subject, “Alexandra, did you finish your essay for French? I was late, and I still have to hand mine over.”

“No, I finished it already last week.”

With a sheet of parchment, Lily left, but instead of going to her french-teacher, she headed for Dumbledore.

“Sir, do you have a minute?”

“But certainly. What is it about?”

“The contest, the final and closing. Who is giving the medals to the winner?”

“No idea! As Dibbet is away, I presume I'll do it. Why?”

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“In the Muggle world, they often ask an attractive girl to do that. Could we do that the same way?”

“Are you volunteering for the job, Lily?”

“No, but Alexandra would certainly not refuse, if you ask her.”

Dumbledore smiled, “Youth... I think about. Well, why not.”

An hour later when Lily returned to the common room all 'surplus clothing' was gone, and all photos were burning in one of the fireplaces.

“Eh, Lily?”

Sirius was standing behind here.

“Yes, I see the party is over, all is cleaned up!”

“I feel silly and ashamed. Your friend Alexandra was right. Though you should have seen Filch eyes when I said I had 'found' something. That was priceless. But I wanted to ask you something...”

“As long as you don't want any of my clothing, ask!”

“Uh? No! That photo of Alexandra and you, do you have another one?” and he looked quickly away.”

“O no! Don't tell me you burned that one also! Alexandra wouldn't be pleased when she finds out!”

“I could certainly understand that, of course! The one I've got is safe. It isn't for me. James is awkwardly jealous, he wants mine. He keeps on asking, but I won't give mine away.”

Of all possible replies, this one she had never expected. She felt surprised, flattered, but also something else, like a small butterfly taking off, from her stomach. She flew to her dormitory. A split second she returned.

“Sirius?”

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“Yes, Lily.”

“I have two things for you. The most important thing is this,” and she handed a second photograph to him. “For James. You better not tell him you got it from me. He'll probably feel ashamed if he finds out that I know about it. And the other thing is this, but only on loan, I need it back. James uses it almost always when playing Quidditch.” and with these words she handed her own broom over. “It has the name 'Cutting-Corners', you can out maneuver anyone. James can almost do straight angles. Good luck with it.”

“But that is cheating, against the rules!”

“This isn't just about winning, but about getting even.”

She thought for a while, not sure if she should say it,

“And eh Sirius, there is this particular blue-eyed Gryffindor girl, that would very much like to see you win, if you know what I mean....”

The next day, the french girl didn't stand the slightest chance, but it wasn't clear what caused it, the different broom or the motivation.

Exited Alexandra said, “Guess what? My aunt asked me to hand-out the prizes! I'd better get dressed.”

Softly smiling Lily headed outside along with all the other students.

On a podium, they saw Dumbledore, Alexandra, some photographers, Otilie, the French winner of the ten miles distance, and Sirius, winner of both the single mile and the hindrance race.

Dumbledore amplified his voice by putting the tip of his wand

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to his throat and the “Sonos”-charm.

“Dear contenders and spectators.

For the first time, we had the privilege of participating and organizing this bloodcurdling event. We were all thrilled by either of matches. The single mile was an explosion of power never seen before. It's bigger companion, the ten miles, showed that just training for power will not yield the desired results, while the final test proved that training, self-constraint, and endurance are also essential. We are glad that the lake people have caused no problems, and that the trees from the forest have left no permanent impressions on the contenders.

May I present to you all, the winner of the ten miles, a student of the Beauxbatons school of magic from France, Miss Toussaint!”

Dumbledore hinted Alexandra, who reached for one of the medals. She gave it to the winner and congratulated her. She stepped back to give other the chance to congratulate and to photograph the winner.

“Next, the winner of the single mile and the hindrance race, our own world champion: Sirius Black from the Gryffindor house!”

Alexandra got one of the medals, put the attached ribbon around his neck and kissed him. For moments long she was only thinking about her lips that seemed to be stuck to his. She didn't care that the whole school was watching. She felt his hand holding onto her forearms. Not pushing her away, but making sure she remained where she was. Finally, Dumbledore said, “Would you mind giving others also the opportunity to congratulate him?” Reluctantly Alexandra turned away. Sirius let go of her arm, but unintentionally for a split second, she felt

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his hand against her breast. Embarrassed about the clumsy move, he apologized. “Sorry, I didn't do that on purpose, I stood still, you just turned away!” Alexandra was just glad that no-one had seen it. She thought.

Next day half of the 'daily prophet' dealt with the contest, the contenders, achieved times and the winners. One photo showing Dumbledore and the french girl, the other of a Gryffindor boy being kissed by a girl, with the title “Winner takes it all!”

The same day she received discretely an unpublished photo in an envelope. It had been taken exactly during that split second and had the title: “Winner discards gold medal, but reaches for the cup!”

In both Gryffindor dormitories, a student was asking a friend to check if his/her lips weren't under some sort of spell...

The Marauders

“Sirius, I've got a weird feeling about one of your friends.”

“Only about one of them, Alexandra? Personally, I think they are all a bit 'strange', myself included,” he replied seriously.

“You are definitely daft, but I meant Lupos.”

“What is wrong with Remus?”

“He is far more often sick, compared with others students. And also very regularly, almost clockwork.”

“Some girls I know, have also very regularly all sorts of complaints.”

“Wise guy! Having your period isn't funny. I wish you would have it once, if you knew what it is like, you wouldn't joke about it anymore. Don't you agree, Lily?”

“Absolutely! And as you brought it up yourself, I find it more than just a coincident, that every time that one of the Gryffindor girls, Camilla, has her period, your friend Lupos is also ill. Each and every time. Very suspicious! Is your friend actually a boy? Every four weeks he/she is gone for a couple of days, and he returns as bleak as one is after an awkward bleeding. And finally, if someone is that often that ill, I would expect such person to be admitted to the hospital-ward. We both checked, but Lupos was never admitted.”

“Yeah, what can you tell us about Lupos. You claim you are friends, not? Or do we have to dig deeper ourselves!”

“Can you keep a secret?”

“Sure.”



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“So can I!”

“Ha ha, very funny!

“Alright. Alright. Remus is a werewolf. Every full moon he changes. After that, he needs time to recover. Now you know it!”

“WHAT!”

“You heard me. A werewolf. He was bitten as a young bloke. At first, he got very ill, and nearly died. But thankfully to many blood transfusions he survived. He recovered almost completely. Initially, he got sometimes an abnormal case of hair growing, but his  parents thought that was a boyish thing, so they gave him a  for his tenth birthday. But it deteriorated quickly. As his father is a wizard and a friend of Dumbledore, the diagnosis was found quickly.”

“But a werewolf is an extremely dangerous creature!”

“That is why he gets a strong potion to dampen it, and he is kept in isolation. For his own security but also for the security of the other inhabitants of Hogwarts.”

“How did you find out?”

“We also noticed he was missing out a lot of classes, but it never resulted in any complaints of any teacher, nor from Dumbledore or Dippet. If we are ill a couple of times, we need to handover examinations reports from the hospital-ward. He never had to do that. We thought that a bit peculiar. But James really found out.”

“You know, I told you about making a map? One evening I found a secret entrance. I saw Dumbledore coming out of it. I watched it for a couple of days, and learned how the trap-door worked. Then one evening, I tried myself and discovered a long

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tunnel. At the other end was an abandoned old house. While I was investigating the area, I suddenly found I wasn't alone anymore, but cut off and in the company of an unpleasant beast. I was hiding for an entire Saturday, when I saw Dumbledore returning. He immediately noticed me and told me all about Remus.”

“And ever since that day we tried to help him.”

“That is pretty descent of you all.”

“Well, we are also very curious about being transformed. A couple of days every four weeks he turns into a wolf. And I learned from the lessons, that the worst period is directly after full-moon. At that moment is werewolf not able to distinguish friends from prey.”

“Why the curiosity?”

“Even since last holiday. Remember swimming like a dolphin? Marvelous! However, Edward isn't willing to explain about that spell. And the books describing the 'Animagus-charm' is locked inside the restricted section of the library.”

“Eh, dear ladies?”

“Oh no! Those pleasantries warn me for something!”

“I somehow remember that because of your intensified studies, the both of you have extended access to the library, so I was just thinking...”

“Danger ahead! The boys turned their heads on and started thinking. Take cover!”

“Please, dear ladies?”

“Won't promise anything yet, something for nothing, but I still have to think about it. This is serious magic, no kid's stuff, your

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know what your father said about it. It is not without reasons in the restricted area.”

“So you want something back in return. Like what?”

“I want to know more about the art, or as you like the magic, behind traveling. You know portal-keys, what makes a broomstick flying. Remember professor Transcrashia? He said he could make anything flying, cars, motorbikes, anything.”

“Not satisfied with your broomstick? It's more than good enough for me! Any particular reason?”

Lily just answered, “Has to do with the stones, you remember?”

“When we have the books, we can tell you how difficult that is.”

“That's fair enough.”

Some hours later, when most students were in a class, following a subject, Lily and Alexandra walked to the library, and after showing their special permit, they were allowed in a section, holding books and manuscripts that were considered too dangerous for average students.

“How do we find them? We know what it is about, but we know neither author nor book-title!”

“For one book, I think I might know the way. There is a list of when a book was loaned and by whom. Check for your aunt!”

“Why?”

“She knows the Animagus spell very well! The first time she visited my parents and me, she transformed herself into a cat. That charm isn't common knowledge, so she must have learned it somewhere and probably here..”

“Clever thinking!”

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While Alexandra studied the book with all log records, Lily wandered around. Strange books and even stranger titles on reports she came across. “Advance Arachnids Aphrodisiacs”, “What werewolf’s want”, “Horrible Haunted Hymns” and “List of missing/deceased students”.

“Got it!” Alexandra yelled. “Both probably!”

“Really? Tell me!”

“Look here: Advanced transfiguration, borrowed by M. McGonagall dates then-and-then, returned six months later. Got to be it.”

“The boys will love you for this. And you said you found another record?”

“Indeed! Study report of Meredudd MacChoiter and Eideard MacKaskill”

“Who were they? I think I heard those names before.”

“Don't you remember? These are the names of Binn's friend and his girl, that also disappeared.”

“And look what I found: Timeless Traveling Techniques!”

“It seems that they should all be here. After they were returned, no-one did a check-out. Which path, which cupboard?”

“Eh, let me look, Path twenty-seven, cupboard eighteen, shelf three, cupboard two, shelf eighteen and eh eh cupboard eighty-nine no shelf reported.”

“Let's find them.”

As the library was unfortunately charm-protected, the summation spell 'Accio' didn't work. They had to walk and search. Luckily all paths and cupboards were numbered, however, the numbering was done unorganized, so cupboard eight was not between number seven and nine, but somewhere completely

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else. Finally she checked out with two books and the study report. The librarian checked the permit three times, “By Dumbledore himself, well it must be fine then.”

When they returned, Lily held the study report for herself, but gave the advanced transfigurations to James and the traveling techniques to Sirius.

“Any particular object you want to make to fly?”

Lily answered, “I would like to make a very old carpet fly. That's all. From Hogwarts to the place with the memorial stones. And I would very much appreciate if you first will have a look at this, before you change yourself accidentally permanently into a mole.”

“What?”

“Most moles are blind, so they can not read about counter-spells!”

“Ha, ha, very funny!”

“Alexandra, did you just also noticed that all pleasantries are gone since the boys got what they wanted?”

“Ah well. Boys and promises. Short term memory disorder...”

“No, no, I'll stick to my word! I'll see James does too.”

Next couple of weeks several teachers were impressed by the amount of studying and practicing of two certain Gryffindor boys, that previously lacked the motivation to concentrate on school business. The following month they were able to teach both girls to make any carpet fly, where ever they wanted to.

“It is not portal-key yet, but it should do for now.”

After they tested it themselves, and flew in a moon-lit sky over the hills, they visited professor Binns again.

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“Professor, your only limitation is that you are bound to the castle, correct? No other limitations? If we could move the entire castle, or just your room, or part of it, you could come along?”

“Ehhhh yes, that is correct.”

“Well in that case, may I invite you to take place on your own carpet?”

Alexandra spoke the lengthy and elaborate traveling charm. Three times she had to do it all over again, because she missed a single syllable. But finally, they took off! They remained almost unnoticed, as they had chosen dinner-time for this trip. The girls were way too much excited to be hungry, and professor Binns had missed quite a considerable number of dinners since he passed away. When they flew near the window of the great hall, Dumbledore was looking outside.

Moments later they arrived at the two simple graves and the memorial stones. “Professor Binns, where are you?”

“Sorry girls, on the way up to here I lost all of my dust, so you weren't able to see me. I am truly grateful for what you have done.”

“We're not done yet!”

With some effort, the girls dragged a sack from the carpet. Lily draw her wand and made a shallow ditch around the grave. When she was ready Alexandra opened the sack that held stems of many plants. When they were all planted, the ditch was closed again, and they applied water to it.

“Ah, roses! Lachlan loved them so much!”

When one of Binns tears touch the ground, Alexandra pointed her wand. Immediately one of the rosebuds blossomed. Very

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carefully she cut it and gave the flower to the professor and while offering it, she spoke words with several meanings, 'There YOU are!'

When they returned to the castle, they were welcomed by professor Dumbledore. "Girls, you probably are not aware how many house-rules you just broke, but I am so proud of you. Now that is really the spirit of Godric Gryffindor. I will give twenty-five points each for making one of your teachers so happy."

After Binns had placed his single rose in a vase, he returned with a very thick book, and gave it to Lily. "Because you didn't ask for, I give on my own account. I know you two were looking for this information."

He looked at Albus and added, "We don't have to warn them anymore dear friend. They know. They know the dangers even better than we ever did. Just one request: don't share it with the ignorant. Most people, even including wizards, are too stupid and unreliable. Especially those from the Ministry."

Study advise

Next morning the students from all the houses in their third year were summoned to gather in the main hall, which was normally used for breakfast, lunch, dinner and festivities. When they arrived, professor Dibbet was already waiting for them.

“Dear students,

You are all aware that each year is important. During the first two years, the foundation is laid for your subsequent career, whatever that may be, from a housekeeper, professor til advisory of heads of governments.

During the fifth year, the OWLs decide whether you are considered fit enough to be allowed to use a wand at all.

The sixth year, with its regular exams, will yield a diploma, essential in the Muggle world, for subsequent Muggle studies or for applying to Muggle jobs.

After the seventh year, and the NEWT exams, their results will possibly open doors for attractive jobs in the Magical world, for instance, our ministry of Magic, or even applying for diplomat status at an embassy or a ministry of Magic in another country.

In the third and fourth year, you have to choose which subjects you continue to follow and which to drop, with a possibility to correct it in the fourth year. Both for magical as regular subjects.

For some, decisions are easily made, and they regret it for the rest of their lives. Some subjects come easy, and some may be a daunting task every time. If you want to leave this school as

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soon as possible, regardless of the consequences, take the easiest subject and be gone with it. But don't come complaining afterward that you can't find a job or a job that pays well. As a rule of thumb and there are exceptions to it, you can say that most jobs in the magical world pay poorly, if anything at all. But you don't need much if you live entirely in the magical world. The cost of living is low, and many wizards families live in their houses for uncountable generations. As their communities are shielded, you are not subject to Muggle taxation.

On the other hand, jobs in the Muggle world, if you can get one, pays well. However, if you live in their world, you need lots of money. If you work, you have pay tax, if you own property like a house or the ground beneath it, you pay tax. If you spend money on buying clothes or food, you pay tax. And if you don't spend any money and put it into a saving account in a 'Muggle-bank' -guess what- you pay tax. And everything is much more expensive compared to our world. Nevertheless, a former Gryffindor student, was self-employed in the Muggle world, that means he was his own boss, and became uncountable rich, even to their standards. But that was a rare exception to the rule. Most people are just 'well-off' and to be honest, how much wealth do you need to gather after all? If your home is warm and cozy, you have enough to eat and your children can attend a descend school, what else do you need? But I am drifting away from my own subject.

This year you must decide which subject you want to keep, and which to drop.

English is compulsory. Mathematics should be, but unfortunately, it is just optional. It is my duty to say this, but for many jobs in our world, and all jobs in the Muggle world, you don't

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stand a chance without mathematics.

Charms is compulsory for anybody. But Transfiguration or defense against the dark Art are optional. Those opting for a job as auror should take both.

Muggle art, Muggle music and Muggle studies are required for those from all-magical parents, who want to work at one of the several departments of the ministry of magic dealing with Muggles in one way or another.

Arithmancy is also optional, but following it makes only sense in the combination of the regular subject arithmetic. If you are not able to add one-and-one, it makes no sense to learn why the outcome might still be three. For many jobs in the Muggle world, this is extremely handy.

Those contemplating of doing Herbology and 'Care of mystic animals' should know that it is highly advantageous to do also regularly biology.

Astrology and divination are required when working at a traveling show.

For almost everything Potions is essential. Our school is thinking of making this also mandatory. Without it, alchemy remains incomprehensible. If you take both, regular subject of chemistry, is also highly advisable.

If your heart is in abstract studies, one might consider Runes 'history of magic' and 'Ancient studies', in which case regular history is a good choice.

If you are stuck underneath your local stone, and you are content with it, plain English is enough, and compulsory by the way.

Ancient languages and Latin in particular, is beneficial with

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charms and co. Those students interested in history and related subject might consider Greek and Arabic. Those who would strive for a job abroad, might also consider, French, German, Urdu, Russian. Cymru is extremely handy for anybody. By the way, all of the languages are also given extra after graduating. That leaves me with regular subjects of Economy. That is a Muggle subject that has many resemblances with some of our magical subjects. If you graduate and continue on a Muggle university, you will learn how to influence other people's minds. Also, you learn how to produce a predefined result, regardless of the initial numbers, their equivalent of our arithmancy. Indispensable for politicians, lawyers and people working at auditing companies.

All students should have their flying-certificate, whether or not they will ever use a broomstick.

Apparition is extremely handy, but remains optional.“

Several beers later..

“So to what does it all boils down?

The first question to ask yourself, is 'do I know what kind of job I like?' If so, check out its requirements. If not, follow some extra lessons divination. Actually, that is a good suggestion anyway, because the job you're looking for might not last very long.

A second question might be, 'Am I in regular contact with Muggles?' If so and both of your parents and wizards or witches, take any or all of the Muggle subject. If you already know enough of them, and what an easy ride for the next five years, do it as well. For some nice jobs on our ministry, it is essential.

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If you think about working at St-Mungo hospital, you need at least charms, potions, biology and tending Mystic Animals. For all of those subjects, you need at least an 'acceptable' or better at NEWT-level.

If any student has the unlikely idea of becoming a teacher, for the regular subject that means a university degree for that subject, combined with a pedagogical note. For any of the magic subject, you need at least an 'Exceeding expectation for that subject. Then after five years internment and educational assistant and writing a dissertation of an acceptable level, you can re-graduate. I should say that obtained experience in the Magical world still counts as a plus.

Well, I think that is about it. Think about your future life for the next five minutes and don't forget to leave the form with your choices in the box near the exit. For those slightly doubting or absolute without any clue, you can make an appointment with me to have your head examined by the sorting hat. And as I already mentioned, consulting you teacher astrology or divination might show up what your inner person might already know.”

Immediately afterward, two queue's were formed, one for appointments with Dibbet, the other for astrology.

“And James, how about it?”

“English, Mathematics, Economy, Arithmancy, charms, eh defense-ADA ... perhaps Geography and those Muggle-specific subjects, I think. And you, Sirius?”

“No clue! I would like more sport, and what you choose, English, Mathematics, Economy, Arithmancy, charms, eh defense-ADA, no Muggle-stuff, potions perhaps.”


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“So we all go to the hat, the glass ball or both?” Alexandra inquired. “I only got as far as English, history, history of magic, Latin, Greek, Charms. Everything set for you, Lily?”

“When you want to attend a Muggle university for becoming a doctor, much is defined already, besides that, charms, potions. Astrology and divination”

“What! Why do you want to do those two subject? To know in advance if your suggested treatment works?”

“No you silly, I am just suggesting to go there. Either as past-time or to see what others might think about us.”

Late that night it was their turn. Just below the roof of the observatory tower, one by one the students sat behind the crystal ball. Their teacher, MacVail  couldn't understand.

“There must be something wrong with the ball, or I'm just too tired. With all of you, I only get charms and defense against the black art. A tiny bit of potions and history. Nothing else! Please return another time.”

When Sirius and Alexandra had disappeared, Lily commented, “Just the two of us again, alone in the castle. Do you still remember the previous time, a year ago?”

James replied, “Would you mind getting lost in the castle? We now have a valid excuse for being up this late.”

Lily didn't answer. But just held out her inviting hand.

High-expectations

After several weeks consistently studying, Lily and Alexandra made an appointment with Margaret and Miranda. As agreed upon, they were giving some extra time-off and permissions to leave the school premises.

They walked to Hogshead, and via the fireplace they traveled on a Thursday to the home of Margaret and Edward Potter. Miranda Dibbet was already there.

“Ready for the very first tests?”

“I think so.”

“Don't be nervous. Even if you fail the test, nothing is lost. On the contrary. Even by doing the tests you learn. And with every lesson you get, you gain compared with other, regular students.”

“Alright, Lily, will you come and sit here, Margaret has some tea for you, and I have a first-year anatomy test-paper.”

“And Alexandra, same for you. Tea is waiting for you, and initial vocabulary test, intended for regular first-years. You both have one hour, but I won't be very strict in case you need some more time.”

Lily sighed, took a sip of her tea, opened the sheet with the exercises and started. They were exactly like normal biology questions, perhaps using a bit different wordings, but certainly not more difficult. After fifteen minutes she looked sideways. Alexandra was already looking at her. Shrugging her shoulders.

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“Miranda, Margaret! Do you have a minute for us?”

Worried the two ladies came.

“Something unclear or too difficult?”

“No, not yet so far. But can you tell me where the rest of the questions are? Number four-hundred-five was the last question on this exercise!”

“Same with me!”

“Girls, number four-hundred-five IS the last question. Are you really done? Let's see you need at least a score of 75 percent correct answers.”

Five minutes later one professor said to the other, “I think we encountered a small problem.”

“Normally we would have to investigate such results. I know that neither of you was able to cheat, but this is really impossible.”

“Well a nice cozy study, a cup of tea and no distraction, you can work at a high rate.”

“I even forgot about that aspect. No, I was talking about your scores. A full hundred percent. Even the five control questions, that are far above the required level. I am glad we are doing these test here and not at the O.U. You would make other students look like a bunch of retards.”

“In that case, we think we are entitled to another drink. Don't you think Lily?”

“Absolutely Alexandra! But although this was a piece of cake for us, there is, however, something else that I can not comprehend. I haven't the faintest idea how to handle this problem. I

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hope that you, as a researcher, doctor, and psychologist can help me.”

“Then it must be hard indeed. Please share it with us, I hope I can help you.”

“Let me first tell you that it is about another girl at school, very sensitive matter. I asked in advance professor McGonagall if I am allowed to talk about it and she has given me permission. It is not hypothetical. It is about a case of possible abuse.”

Miranda looked appalled, “This indeed a magnitude different than I expected.”

Margaret said “Let's sit outside. I'll tell Edward to take care of dinner. Abuse. I fear I need something stronger than just tea.”

Slowly and carefully Lily started to talk about what Camilla had told her nightmares about being abused.

“There are so many issues involved here and all horrible sensitive. And I am way too young to comprehend any of them.”

“Dear girl, abuse, or a suspected case of it, is horrible, no matter what age you are, even for us.”

“Thanks, but I hoped you had dealt with it before, or know about it.”

Miranda thought long and deep.

“Lily, does she trust you? Really trust you?”

“We know each other just shortly, but for now, I think she does, but it is difficult for me to indicate how much she trust me.”

“You were very right in differentiating an ordinary nightmare, with one caused by a traumatic experience in the waking world. It is important to determine what you are dealing with. Either case is horrible.”

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“But what if she denies it? I very much expect that she will deny. Should I believe her, or might she be suppressing all memories about it! I even thought about doing it in a dedicated dream-session, but I can not do that without her knowing it, in which case I'll loose any trust for certain.”

“Indeed, it is all about trust. If you gain enough trust you can ask to let herself examined. Then you know for sure.”

“But that is certainly not something you might ask of me. Would you be willing to examine her?”

“That question was to be expected.” Miranda said and after a deep sigh, “I confess I am not eager to do this, but you are right. This is indeed not something anyone could ask of you. You are way to young. Even for me, it is hard. But if you gain enough trust, even to include me, I will help.”

Before embarking on a nice meal, Alexandra said, “Sorry for interrupting, but can we please change the subject otherwise I can not sleep anymore!”

Margaret agreed, “Yes Alexandra, very wise indeed. I presume other students don't have such problems!”

Lily continued, “No of course not! But she worries me the most. Another girl has dreams about eating disorder, a severe case of anorexia...”

But Alexandra cut her short and tried, “Did you know that Sirius won a broom-stick-contest?”

Edward and Margaret started to laugh, “Yes absolutely, It was in 'The Daily Prophet. All England knows about it and beyond! And although we could not see her face, I am pretty certain that

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the girl on the photo also listens to the name of Alexandra, not?”

Blushingly, “Eh, you are right...”

Grinning Edward added, “Now that kiss was what I call a public statement that leaves no room for misunderstanding. I heard some reporters were timing it.”

“Oh Margaret, perhaps you can help me with this. My party robe does not fit so good anymore.”

“That is easy to solve, how about your party robe, Lily?”

“My aubergine robe from 'The Proper Needle' adjust itself, but I don't know for how long it will last.”

“You mean YOU were the girl that bought that aubergine one? Mrs. Pinnacle told me countless times about it. It will last for years, but you might want to have it adjusted to the latest fashion.”

“How do you want to solve Alexandra's problem? Can you adjust her robe?”

“Perhaps I can, but I won't. I have a much, much better idea. Miranda, I presume no biology tomorrow? In that case, I would suggest going shopping with the four of us. How about that?”

“Absolutely Margaret. Splendid idea. Last week I noticed they have a whole new collection. Latest fashion. I would certainly love to dress these young ladies up.”

So next morning Lily and Alexandra found themselves on “Diagon Alley” again. She remembered the first time she walked there. Professor McGonagall was right. As always she was right. It felt so different this time, almost normal.

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The first thing they did, was heading for “The Proper Needle” where they were warmly greeted by the shopkeeper, Mrs. Pinnacle.

“Hello, Mrs. Pinnacle. Last week you were telling me about the mystic dark aubergine dress you sold some years ago, that perfectly fitted. I found the girl who owns it. It still does fit, but it needs some updating after two years.”

Without the chance of saying something, Margaret added: This young lady deserves a re-fit. I heard you have something from the same dressmaker?”

“But certainly Mrs. Potter. Same quality. Though a different color, deep emerald green. Fits perfectly with the lady's eyes!” With these words, she left, and when she returned she said, “I left it in the dressing room, with some additional articles, if you don't mind.”

When Lily left to change, Alexandra tried to come along to help her friend, but Margaret stopped her.

“Miranda will help her. Mrs. Pinnacle, you can surely help us. This young lady is addicted to bright, light colors, mostly white. Do you have anything for her of the same quality as that green dress? She needs a party dress that makes her feel like a princess, and have a certain young lad feel his eyes popping out.”

Mrs. Pinnacle grinned hearing the requirements and thought for a while, “I do have something, but eh..”

“But?”

“But it is quite daring for her age, I think.”

Margaret smiled and asked Alexandra just one thing:

“Gryffindor?”

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Alexandra replied: “Gryffindor for sure!”

“I presume you mean, 'Let's try', please follow me to the other dressing room.”

A considerable time later, two young swans re-appeared. One in deep dark emerald green, one sparkling white, necklace, bracelets, high heeled shoes, everything.

Mrs. Pinnacle was the first to comment. “I didn't realize those dresses we sell were that beautiful. What did you say, Mrs. Potter, eighteen years old? Certainly! Everywhere you go, dressed like this, any gathering will become a party people will talk about.”

Miranda replied, “I would classify those dresses, as highly dangerous. They will cause severe neck injuries: two head-turners at the same time.”

The white swan was first speechless, but finally manage to stutter, “I've seen Lily in her aubergine dress before and I knew that certain dresses are waiting for a specific woman, but never ever in my life I have felt like this before. Honestly, when I previously looked in the mirror, I have a realistic self-image, and I don't complain, I am just 'Alexandra-Average', but now, this! I can not believe my own eyes. I never knew they make dresses like this. That I could look like this. Never before in my life, I knew what it meant, to feel beautiful, to feel desirable. Oh, I wish Sirius could see me now!”

With tears in her eyes, she embraced Margaret, “Thank you so very much.”

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Lily commented, “Dear Alexandra, there is absolutely nothing average about you. You not only look beautiful and desirable, you ARE beautiful and desirable! Any boy saying differently must be an idiot, blind or both!”

Margaret confirmed, “I couldn't agree more with you Lily, but it also applies to you.” and she said to herself “I wonder how James will respond,” and softly to Miranda, “Goals and Expectations were high, but I dare say we fully achieved our objectives, not?”

Miranda commented, “Absolutely, stunning!”

A matter of trust

“Camilla?”

“Yes, Lily?”

“We have done many sessions together, much more than I did with anyone else.”

“I was glad I could share some experience with potion-making with you. It is fun doing that in dreams. Instead of cleaning all up, we just had to wake-up.”

“The main idea was comforting you, and letting you sleep.”

“I know Lily, and I am very grateful for it.”

“It 's good to hear that you don't have nightmares anymore but Minerva and I are still worried.”

“About what?”

“Do you trust me, Camilla?”

“Of course I do!”

“Honestly, on a scale from one to ten?”

“Ten, if not eleven!”

“Alright then. This has troubled my mind since the first time we heard your tale. Anyone can have nightmares, even Minerva and I. But why this particular subject? Why you? We fear there might be something else. And there is no-one but you who can help us with finding out. And for that, I need your trust, your complete trust. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I do trust you, fully. And I understand that you need my trust for something I will not like or even fear or even worse.”

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“Thank you, Camilla. Right now, I will tell you about my fear about you, and next, I will ask you questions. Are you ready? Will you please hear me out?”

“Lily, is it that horrible?”

“Yes Camilla, to me it is. What I fear is that your nightmare isn't just a dream, but a glimpse of your past. Something buried very deep inside. I don't say it is so, but I fear the possibility. That's what I really fear. What do you have to say to that?”

“Phew! You certainly have a way of preparing people for something horrible, Lily. The same thought has crossed my mind to, 'what if..' but no, I don't think so.”

“You know your mind can play tricks with you. Self-denial in order to protect yourself, to avoid losing your wits.”

“Yes, I've heard of that before. But that does not apply to me, I think. But how can I be sure, if I even cannot trust myself?”

“There is an option. You can have yourself examined to find evidence of abuse.”

“You mean as a crime victim? By who? You? School? Police? Strange doctors?”

“Calm down, no certainly no police. And none of the medical staff of Hogwarts. Perhaps I could, but I dare not do that. But I have a friend who can. She is my biology professor and a doctor, like my own father. Some years ago she was very ill, even dying. Somehow I managed to cure her. She knows and trusts me and I trust her to. Would you let her examine you?”

After long thinking, Camilla replied, “If that means that she relieves us from that nagging doubt, yes, I will.”

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“Thank you Camilla, and if my fears come true, you will need a lot of help, something she can give, she is a professional, I am just a student.”

“Thank you, Lily, for being so honest with me, I knew I could trust you. Somehow I feel your friend is near, not? So let's get it over with!”

“She is indeed here now at Hogwarts, but she came to talk with Slughorn, McGonagall and Dumbledore about my study. Shall I ask her?”

“Yes, please do. The sooner I get over it, the better.”

“Then please come along. Perhaps I'm silly, but I won't leave you alone now...”

They walked to Dumbledore's study and knocked.

“Professors, can I borrow Miranda for a while?”

“Certainly, you can use my study.” said Minerva.

Silently they walked to Minerva's study, not far away.

“Camilla, I would like you to meet Miranda. She is the professor, and the medical doctor I told you about. Miranda, this is the girl I have been talking about.”

“Hello, Camilla!”

Camilla started straight away, “Hello Miranda. Before you have to prepare yourself for all sorts of awkward questions, I have some answers. Yes, I do trust Lily and you. I want to be certain for myself and my own piece of mind. And no, I haven't had anything seriously with boyfriends.”

“You certainly surprised me. Yes, these were indeed things I was going to ask you. Do you have any questions?”

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“Some. About the examination. Does it hurt? How long does it take, and can Lily please stay with me?”

“No it doesn't hurt, I'll look as a regular doctor and I'll hover with my wand over your belly to confirm my findings. It will take just some minutes. And I'll trust Lily with my life, sure she can stay.”

Within a couple of minutes, Miranda sighed deeply.

“You are OK Camilla, nothing wrong, nothing to worry about. Nothing happened in the past.”

“I think that is a huge relief to us all. I already knew, but when you are told you can not trust your own memories, you start to wonder again. And I presume Lily and Minerva are freed from some worries as well.”

“Indeed, we can concentrate on just horrible dreams, not on horrible pasts.”

“Shall we share the good news with all involved?”

“Yes Camilla, I think you are very much entitled to doing that.”

The next dream-class, Camilla told all about the worries Lily and Minerva had, and the fact that here were unfounded.

All of the students seemed relieved, especially the new students. But Robin and Ginger were quite uneasy.

“What's wrong aren't you relieved?”

“Yes, I'm happy for Camilla, but there is something else troubling us.”

Ginger looked tight, worried, “Last time while they observed, you know we went,” and she pointed with a finger downwards. “before we entered the cave, we were chased by wolves.

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“Yes horrible real, those eyes, fangs.”

“And the howling. I'll keep on hearing it.”

“Then you must refrain from next sessions for a while, and meditate. It helped Camilla and Nimue a lot!”

“No! It isn't the dreaming, sometimes I even hear the howling when I'm awake.”

Minerva responded, “In that case, I should advise paying a visit to Hagrid, out game-keeper. The semi-giant that always welcomes our first-year students. He knows all about wild animals. Both mystic or common. If there are any around the castle he should know about it. A big fellow with an even smaller heart.”

Lily replied, “Yes, I know him, Sirius talked about him. Some students fear Hagrid, but I know Sirius regularly end up drinking tea while James is practicing Quidditch. Well, he claims to be drinking *tea*. Next time I'll join him and ask about it.”

Day-mares

At the beginning of November, the Quidditch season started again. Obviously, James remained their seeker, but he wasn't overjoyed. "Last seasons we lost some very good players, who all graduated. And this year some of the moderate players declined, they said they couldn't combine the training schedule with their other school obligations."

Lily didn't quite understand, "But that isn't your problem, I never heard anyone complaining about you?"

Her remark clearly annoyed James, "Girls, sport, you just don't dig it! Do you?"

"Even if chasers, beaters or the keeper under-perform, that is not related to you. As a seeker, it is your job to find the snitch before the other seeker does. So it is all about your flying skills, not?"

"No! It is not that easy! I'm off. Try to practice with the new ones." And surly he left.

"What's wrong with him, Sirius? I've seen James before in such mood only just after losing a match and by the time he's back at school he's normally forgotten all about it. But he remains grumpy for weeks now!"

"Just as he said Lily, all teams have to say goodbye to the graduated students, but the quality of new Gryffindor players isn't too good, in contrast with all of the other teams. I heard that Hufflepuf has a new seeker she flies as good as James, has excellent strategic insight and knows how to motivate the other players. So there's nothing you can do. Why don't you come

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along with me? I'm going to Hagrid. His stories are as good as his tea.”

“Thank you, sounds nice, I could do with some change of attitude. Are you coming, Alexandra?”

“I spilled ink over my essay, so I cannot leave.”

Even the small walk from the castle to Hagrid's hut, in the nice weather, was enough to move James and his bad temper from her mind.

“Hullo Sirius! New flame? Previous was blond not?”

“Hi, Hagrid! No, Alexandra is busy doing schoolwork. This is her friend Lily. She needed some friendly words and a nice cup of tea.”

Lily looked up, it has been a while since he has escorted Alexandra and her as first-year students to the boats on the lake.

“Hm, someone unfriendly to you? Those things happen. Let me put the cattle on.”

Lily looked around, Hagrid's hut wasn't exactly luxurious, just a single room, but it was cozy and had everything a semi-giant needed.

“Hagrid, that stove does that work?”

“It's a long time since I used it, why?”

“If Sirius is willing to help, I can make something for with the tea!”

Lily investigated the stove, it seemed that if it had ever been used, it must have been a long long time ago. But it didn't take long before his hut smelled like fresh cookies.

“The smell of a good life!”

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Not much later, the three of them enjoyed tea and cookies.

“That's very kind of you, eh eh Lily.”

“Next time, when Alexandra comes along, I'll make a pie for you, OK?”

“I won't object, do you, Sirius?”

“Certainly not, she really good with cooking.”

“Hagrid, I heard you are an expert with wild animals, both magic or common.”

“Well I'm fascinated by many of them, too bad we can not keep most of them here. They think it is too dangerous.”

“Are there many wild ones around here?”

“So near the castle? Of course not, however in the forbidden forest, an hour deep in it, you might find some, why?”

“Well, I was wondering, are there any wolves around here?”

Immediately Sirius and Hagrid looked at each other. “What?”

“Wolfs are considered as wild animals, and as you are the specialist, I thought if any of them would be here, you would be the first one to know, not?”

“If there was a pack of wolfs, I would definitely know about it, true.”

“So there are no wolves here?”

“No there are no wolve-S”

“Some of my friends claim they sometimes here a howling wolf.”

“Well eh there is this eh”

“Hagrid!” said a startled Sirius.

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“You know Hagrid, once every month or so. When the moon is round...”

“Hagrid?” said a worried Sirius.

“You must know Sirius, the Shrieking Shack is way too small for a, you know ah ah what.”

Suddenly Lily understood. “Ah. I remember something James once confessed. Any chance that those friends of mine couldn't sleep because of your friend Remus?”

“Eh eh eh that might be possible.”

“Isn't that very dangerous?”

“It's only once a month! It's outside, not near the castle, the students are in and Hagrid is strong enough. And he only goes out when he feels lonely.”

“I suspect this girl know more than you like, Sirius!”

“And I had a bad dream about wolves.”

“We try to do something about it. We want to keep him company.”

“But that is extremely dangerous! His bite is contagious!”

“Only for humans, That is the reason we want to master the Animagus spell. We will be immune then.”

“That explains a lot!”

From that moment of, Lily started to visit Hagrid more often, sometimes with Alexandra, with Sirius or both of them.

Several weeks later, after tea with raspberry pie, she asked, “It is still not going well with the Quidditch team not?”

“What do you mean?”

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“Some noticed that they see James hardly any more in our common room or library. Always practicing, practicing.”

“Indeed, he is very determined.”

“Determined you said? He is even gone 'practicing' when the rest of the Quidditch team is in the common room. That isn't determined, that is strange, not? Yesterday he was gone while Hufflepuf was training!”

“Funny indeed, today he also disappeared, while I was helping our team-captain with his essay on potions.”

“And because of maintenance on the goal poles, there was no training at all!”

“He told our captain, he was going to study Hufflepuf's maneuvers.”

“How can he do that, without being able to play, with who?”

“Perhaps with their team captain...”

A horrible scenario appeared before her eyes. James, her James with Huffelpuf's Gwili!

“Sirius, what do you think of their seeker and team captain, Gwili O'Shannachan?”

“What?”

“Would James be interested in Gwili? Not only as a Quidditch-player”

Sirius looked at Lily for a long time, trying to remember what his friend James might have said or done.

“Sorry, Lily. I have no idea. I never looked at her that way. I am not much of a help for you. Many guys talk about her, but I

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look totally different at girls since Alexandra, eh well, you know what I mean.”

A possibility pierced her like a dagger through her heart, No! Scared she asked “Please Sirius! Can you please find out....”
“Certainly!”

Next day Gryffindor played against Hufflepuf. Most of the games neither of the girls watched, but now were Lily and Alexandra on the first row. It was worse than a humiliation. It was a slaughtering. After two hours James ended the spectacle by catching the snitch and earning 150 points for Gryffindor. Their very first points, while Hufflepuf already had 300 points. The subsequent match against Ravenclaw was better, but just slightly. The final score was 150 against 250.

Next day, Friday started with a double hour History. Some students noticed a change. “I con not describe exactly what it is, but it seems that Binns has changed. He still is a ghost, and should be elsewhere, but he seems more 'present', last week he even cracked a joke about Napoleon.”

At the end of the day, it was again time for McGonagall's special class. But all dreaming companions were asked to gather in Minerva's study, instead of her classroom.

“Please be seated, I have very bad news for us, but it is horrible news for you, Lily. I just received news about Camilla. I'm not sure when she will return to school, if ever.”

“What happened? Accident? Ill?”

“In her own home, while asleep, she has been assaulted”

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“By who, burglars? What did the police say?”

“The police wasn't involved. It seems that her mother knew the abusers, and let them in.”

“What! Why did she do that? How about her father?”

“When he came home late from work and final shopping, he found his wife, not a witch, by the way, acting strange, saying that they already started upstairs. After he investigated what his wife meant, he lost his mind and used spells he shouldn't have used. Unforgivable spells. You will learn about those later. Because of his actions, the ministry rushed in and found this horrible scene. They have taken her father to Azkaban, and Camilla to St-Mungo. There they healed her body, and completely erased her mind, she doesn't even remember going home.”

Minerva paused a moment for the final part.

“When she came home again, her mother claimed there were voices in her head, and she had to obey, but she realized what she had done. She knew that every morning people came to check on her and her daughter. Early this morning she opened the gas to the stove. When the doorbell rang, a tiny spark ended it all.”

All the students needed time to deal with the news. Suddenly Nimue cried out, “Oh no! So it wasn't just a nightmare, or something from the past, she was seeing a glimpse of the future, her very own future. And it came true!”

“But why would anyone plan such horrible attack on an innocent girl?”

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“The premeditated attack wasn't against her, or her mother, it was against her father. At the ministry, he was preparing a bill to enlarge the amount of spell on the unforgivable list. It was very difficult, and had much opposition, but it won't stand a chance now, as he used one of the worst himself, and is in prison.”

Lily shivered, “I don't know what is worse, the idea a child can not trust it's own parents, or the fact that there are people who are willing to use that trust as a means of a weapon. I'm off!” And with goosebumps and uncontrollable chattering teeth she ran away.

“She's taking it hard, Minerva!”

“You would understand, if you knew how much she already had done for Camilla. The poor girl completely trusted Lily, and thought the worst was over...”

After Minerva informed her niece, Sirius and Alexandra were talking with James.

“James, lot of Gryffindors see you talking a lot with that Hufflepuf girl. Is there anything we need to know?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“The girl with the very long black hair, Gwili!”

“Oh! She!”

“Do you fancy her, admire her?”

“Yes I do admire her, but only her insight in Quidditch game tactics. She is brilliant, but I refused to see, she made a fool out of me and learned me a hard lesson!”

“How?”

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“As a seeker, I must find the snitch. If I find the snitch too late, we lose the game, but if I find it too soon we also lose the game.”

Alexandra softly commented, “So whatever you choose, you loose anyway. Awkward!”

A chill ran down her spine, “I hope I'll never end up in such situation, horrible...”

“Indeed, and there is nothing you can do about it.”

“So much power available as a wizard, but still completely powerless, it feels horrible!”

“James? Someone else feels horrible else well, and we all feel that you are the one capable of changing that.” And she explained the reason why one of the Gryffindor girls would not return to school anymore.

Moments later James found Lily near one of the fences, over-seeing the lake and hills surrounding Hogwarts. She looked at it but clearly she didn't see any of it, empty eyes wondering about the ways of the world. Questions without answers.

Silently he stood side-by-side to her for some time.

“I was sorry to hear. Who would do such a thing.”

Lily said nothing, but slowly shrug her shoulders.

“I'm sorry, lately I've been too much preoccupied with Quidditch, I think.”

With some difficulty, she managed to answer, “I understand James, the game means a lot to you. I heard you play the game that well, that you probably end up as a professional player, on the national team.”

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“I very much doubt that, my parents probably have different expectations.”

“You have sensible, responsible parents, who can imagine and do such a thing, you must have a twisted mind!”

“When they find who was responsible, I'll bet it was a former Slytherin student!”

“This hasn't anything to do with the houses or Hogwarts at all, don't be so narrow-minded, James! There is a life beyond school.”

“But it does! When children come to school, they might have some mentality, preference, but for seven long years, they completely get brain-washed with a certain way of thinking. Disrespect of others. Their way is the only way. No other option.”

Lily thought about it.”Yeah, in that respect you are right. But I knew Camilla so well. What could I have done?”

“We were just discussing it with the others. Sometimes you don't know, you run out of options.” And he told her about his own dilemmas. “Of course it is insignificant compared with Camilla. That is real life, Quidditch is just a game.”

After some contemplation, she commented, “True, but being faced with no options feels the same. How do you deal with that, how do you cope, James?”

“My parents taught me that there are many things in life you can not prepare yourself for. When the occasion arises, make a decision according to your experience and conscious, and hope for the best. Just like this, I've never done this ever before.”

While talking James already turned a bit, and after his final words he wrapped his arms around her, and kissed her.

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When the sun was finally gone, so were all unanswerable questions gone from their mind, they had to give room for a new, a much more important experience in their your lives. Neither of them realized, that besides hope and expectations, there were also despair and disillusion waiting ahead.

Yule

Long after Samhain, the moment that the Quidditch season started, the days were already short and grew shorter and shorter. A Saturday evening, shortly after dinner, while it was pouring cats and dogs, Dibbet ask for their attention of the students still remaining in the great hall. “Dear students, I heard one of the students was asking if we would have a Christmas tree in the main hall. The short answer is 'NO' and 'YES'. I think it is worthwhile to bear with me the longer answer. As I am in the mood for warm spicy wine, I will make an exception and share it with you, although those who prefer hot coco, be my guest.”

With a wave of Dibbet's wand clean glasses and mugs appeared along with a number of bottles and carafes, all filled with both warm drinks. After his first glass, he continued.

“The short answer was no and yes. The real explanation is much longer, though classes are over, you might still be able to learn something this evening. Yes, as usual, I've asked our gamekeeper Hagrid to take care to find a number of trees that will be placed at several locations in our school, the entrance, some here in the great hall, and I believe that some will be placed in each of the common rooms. They will be decorated with all sorts of shiny objects and candles. Just as many families are doing in the western world. We will make it cozy and merry.”

He paused a moment to refill and re-empty his glass again.

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“But no, it isn't a Christmas-tree. Why? Those do not exist and we celebrate something totally different. Around the 21st of December, people in the northern hemisphere are celebrating for thousands of years, long long before the Christian religion came into existence, the fact that the days were getting longer again. Many of the so-called Christian believers don't even have the faintest idea of all the symbols they gather around them. I don't mind what you believe, that is absolute something personal to you, but you should know what you are talking about. Christian-extremists have discredited and even persecuted people who don't share their belief. Let me enlighten you all. Everyone understand that the seasons are caused by the earth circling around the sun. It took some time, but even the Vatican can not deny that fact, although they tried for many centuries. On the 21st we have the longest night, winter solstice, or so you will, the shortest day. To celebrate this we get some fresh green plants inside, often a decorated conifer.

The whole idea of 'father Christmas' is the most absurd idea. His name 'Santa' or 'Santa Claus' is taken from the Dutch festivity of 'Sinterklaas' or St-Nicolas, a legendary man originating from the town of Myra, in Turkey, who gave needing children extra food and presents.

Some people are talking about the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. I have to disappoint you: until the fourth-century Christian followers, didn't celebrate that either. However, the church 'borrowed' again another existing festivity, the birth of Mithras, who was born long before the Christ entered history.

Do I have something against Christmas? No. What he lived for and died for was absolutely good. A perfect example and role-model. But people, knowingly or not, celebrate something en-

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tirely different. At the winter solstice or Yule as it is called, we celebrate the new year, with some extra food and drinks, we look forwards and commemorated all that we hope for, and make plans for the future. Nothing wrong with that!”

Dibbet made a great gesture with his arms.

“There is, however, something that worries, troubles me immensely. People follow like sheep. And all religions take advantage of that. They all have their own, what they consider as, holy scriptures. And I read most of them. People in their institutes often interpret those scriptures to find an excuse their own actions. However, everyone is self-centered, protecting what they believe to be right, and look down upon other views. For instance, in the Thora-and-Tenach, you can find the Ten-Commandments, absolute universal rules how to treat each other: thou shall not steal, not kill, not work every day without a day off. Or in the Bible, the book of the Christians. Treat others like you want to be treated by others.”

He sighed deeply, “All of those books were written ages ago, and intended for people living ages ago. Simple instructions how to live their life in peace. But the interpretation caused bloodshed and war.”

Dumbledore replied, “True, but since the Renaissance, views have changed, not?”

Dibbet looked pitying at him, “Yes, and no. When I look at the horrors inflicted onto the Maya's, the Inca's and those from 'The Great War', what happened by the Nazi's, Stalin, Pol-Pot and many others, I wonder. All gloom and doom. But the wizardry world too. The position of Giants, Goblins, Centaurs. And now this Voldemort.”

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But Dumbledore opposed, “I meant that through ages, atrocities were committed with religion as an excuse. The devil is no longer responsible for hell. Just check Dante Alighieri, Sartre, or Nietzsche for it. People are responsible for the hell they create for themselves and for others.”

Dibbet replied, “I was actually thinking about something from an entire other culture. Did you ever read the 'I Ching', the 'Book of Changes'?”

“No, I haven't. I presume I should?”

“Yes, I can certainly advise it. Life is all about change. And people, both Magic and Muggle, are afraid of change. There are exceptions of course. Just reflect what has happened through the cause of time. At one point people are afraid of all things unknown, new. Even when new places, new recipes, new cultures will enrich their entire life. They don't know, and want to stick firmly with what they have and what they know.”

Dumbledore nodded, “Yes, you are perfectly right.”

Dibbet continued, “And at the other end -both literally and figuratively-, they are afraid of the other major change, letting things go, say goodbye. Afraid to go on. They cling on to what they got, and what they know. Afraid to enlarge their own horizon. And when they are influential, people also limit other people. And like I said, creating prisons and hell for themselves and others.”

His eye fell upon a girl with blond hair, sitting very close to a boy with wild black hair. But people are also capable of creating heaven upon earth,” and nodded in the direction of Alexandra and Sirius.

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Dibbet looked, and understood, “Some changes or for the better...”

He raised his glass, “To new beginnings, hope for the future, happy Yule, happy Christmas, or a happy new year !”

Winter holiday

Every last Friday of the month, Lily and Alexandra enjoyed their extra day off, officially for doing test papers at the Potter residence in Northern Scotland. Although they really did, it mostly was an enjoyable social gathering between two very young ladies and two slightly older ladies. Immediately after their first test papers, it became clear that the influence of the spells used at Hogwarts, for slightly easier absorbing of study material, not only worked for secondary school subjects, both Muggle and magic, but still worked on university material. As the whole concept of the Open University was all very new and fresh, it was for all involved difficult to determine what was normal progress. Comparing with other students at Oxford itself was unfair, as those students remained permanently at the university without any other distraction, besides the life students live.

The two professors noticed, however, a divergence between the two girls. Lily still firmly focused on following up her father as a G.P., General Practitioner doctor, concentrated on subjects given for generations to medical students. Not only the elementary subjects like anatomy but also studying standard cases of treated patients. When Miranda was examining Lily with this, she noticed that treatment applied for centuries seem to be in Lily's top of her head, while more modern insights were as difficult for Lily as for any other students.

Alexandra on the other hand, with her bachelor study on classical languages, was developing totally differently. Languages

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like Greek and Latin posed absolutely no problem for her. She was even able to write prose, poetry, and even songs in Greek. She even seems to regret opting for classical languages instead of History. At one point, Margaret, her assisting Professor, mistook a poem Alexandra wrote for an undiscovered classical piece. “It really breathes the essence of the feel and thought!”

After another test-paper session that produced no surprises for the girls, but only for the teachers, they were able to excite both girls for a change.

“Alexandra, Lily, I'm not sure, but I think we came up with something, you might like. But if I'm mistaken, no offense.”

With wondering in their eyes, they looked up to James's mother.

“Firstly, what are the thoughts about winter in general, what do you like most?”

Alexandra replied first, “Skating! It's been ages that I've done that. When I was just a very young girl I loved to glide over the ice. By then, it almost felt like flying. I think for any Muggle it gets as close as flying as can be!”

“And you, Lily?”

“The snow! Now I marvel about the beautiful crystal structure, it's symmetry. But as a child, I liked to walk across the virgin unbroken fields of snow. The different light much more intense, the different sounds much softer, almost muted. It made me almost aware that there was much more in the world than meets the eye.”

“No problems with the temperature?”

“I rather swim in a bikini, that's true. But a nice warm jumper or sweater will do!”

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Margaret smiled assured.

“And Lily, do you have any idea what your parents think about the seasons?”

“Let me think about that, it's quite a question you ask. Eh, I think they mostly like spring, and secondly winter. Cozy fireplaces, all of the family inside, togetherness, candles. That kind of things.”

“Edward and I sort of hoped such kind of answer. We got an invitation of an old study friend. He owns a hotel abroad and wants to celebrate his day of emigrating with old friends. I happen to know that it is something your mother would like to have done at least once again, so Edward and I have invited your parents to join us going to Switzerland, this winter. And as I know the hotel, the coming of you two, James and his friend will pose no problem at all!”

“That, that would be marvelous! Thank you so very much!”

“Don't you think your sister would be much disappointed? Except for your parents, it is a complete wizard and witches company?”

“I can not tell, perhaps she will envy us, but she hates the cold.”

“Can you tell us where we are going?”

“Near Switzerland's biggest mountains. The Eiger, Matterhorn, Munch. A small town called Grindelwald. Perhaps you heard about it. You can look it up on the map. We have all sorts of leaflets and brochures about the hotel and its environment.”

Alexandra looked thoughtfully for a moment. “I remember that name! Something with professor Dumbledore?”

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“Very good, girl! Indeed, the town bears the same name of a dark wizard that Albus overcame. He defeated a wizard with the name of Gellert Grindelwald. He also originated from Switzerland, and studied many years at the school in Norway, until he got expelled. Albus and Gellert were friends for quite awhile until something happened and they became enemies. In that town still live many wizard-families.”

Specially Alexandra was over-excited, “Skiing and walking in the now, I can not wait..”

“Well, just a short while, When you return tomorrow to school, gather some warm clothes. And eh, I understand you haven't wore your new party dress, still waiting for a proper occasion? I think you should bring that also.”

Next day they transferred all luggage directly to the Swiss hotel. And subsequent they traveled to Lily's home.

“We have several options,” Edward said, “We can travel together as a group and leave now, or we can split up and meet each other there, at the railway station. In that case, you might have another chat with Petunia, and try to persuade her over and also come along.”

It didn't take Henry and Margareth long to decide,

“Please, go ahead, I presume you rather not travel cumbersome by non-magic-means. Although I'm pretty sure about my other daughter, I will certainly try. Even when pleasure is presented on a plate, like this, she is too blind or too stubborn to take a chance. And we don't mind traveling together. It will remind me of our honeymoon.” She said with a smile.

Edward replied, “If you like, we can also send most of your luggage ahead, you'll travel easier.”

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They all agreed that they would try to persuade Petunia to come along and to meet them at the railway station shortly. The others formed a line before the fireplace. Edward held up his pouch with Traveling-Floo-International. A number of times the same procedure took place: One person stepping into the (cold) fireplace, grepped of some Floo-powder, mentioning 'Hotel Post, Grindelwald, Switzerland.' And finally a green flash.

Seconds later all six persons reported at the reception of the hotel. "Four double rooms. One for the girls, one for the lads, the other couple will arrive shortly, and one for us."

In contrast to James, had Sirius and Alexandra never been abroad in the snow. So he and his mother demonstrated them some of the winter sports skills, especially the art of remaining standing while being dragged up the mountain by the ski lift. Edward drove with Lily towards the railway station, to pick-up her parents. While waiting he asked, "And Lily how do you like it so far?"

"I have been with my parents to Glasgow and Edinburgh before in the winter, but this is so totally different. Those cozy houses. It is like a scene from a fairytale. Heartwarming. It really is indescribable. I have no words for it."

But Edward responded, "No, I think you described the atmosphere pretty well."

When the train arrived, Lily looked for her sister, but only her parents got out.

"Hi, Lily! Isn't it beautiful here? I'm so glad you can experience this. Your father and I went on our honeymoon to the town of

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Interlaken, also Switzerland, not so far away from here. And this town is even much more cozier. Oh, the air, so pure, so fresh!”

From that moment on the adults and the youngsters only met at dinner-time.

After a long day having fun in the snow....

At one fireplace they found Sirius and Alexandra close to each other and asleep while he held his arm around her.

“Just look at those darlings. They were waiting for us, how sweet of them, but being busy all day in the fresh air has taken its toll.”

Henry smiled and walk towards the couches to wake them up.

Almost begging, Margaret asked, “Please Henry, don't. Perhaps this couch isn't as comfortable as a bed, but please, please let them be. Don't break up something so precious, innocent and so beautiful. Looking at them like this, brings back happy memories of a long time ago. Searching for, and finding happiness.”

While Edward reached for his wife's hand, he said, “You know, that like me, James is a Quidditch seeker. It looks like that he found what he was looking for, I hope. Actually, I hope they all found what they were looking for! Our moment in time for having children has passed. For them, it still lies in the future.”

Lily's mother said, “Compared to us, they are young, so very young, you can not tell if they stay together, they have so much to explore.”

But Margareth replied, “They can explore just as much, perhaps even much more as their hearts travel together.”

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Henry looked at his daughter, “With youngster at this age, hormones rushing through their veins, their whole world is upside down. Not only their physiology changes, everything changes, is new, strange, nothing is certain. If they find new certainties they can really depend and build on, it will give them a precious advantage. And if you found what you've been looking, you can continue, broadening your horizon a step further.”

James and Lily were sitting on another couch, side by side, her head on his shoulder, hands on her lap. James was sleeping steadily, but obviously Lily had a troubled dream.

Lily's mother knelt near to them and put James' hand into her daughter's.

“Lily told me that last year, or the year before, they walked hand-in-hand through the castle. She said that she felt like a princess and hoped she could keep on walking like that. That is a vision I treasure.”

“Well done, thank you, Margareth. A scene and gesture I will remember for a long, long time, I think.” James' mother said.

“A harmless thing to do, a pity they are not aware of it and..”

At that point, she got interrupted. Not by anyone saying something, but while asleep, Lily moved James' hand with both of her own hands and put it on her heart. Her facial expression changed with it. Had it been troublesome, it changed to happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction.

“Might that be a glimpse of the future?”

Margaret smiled at her husband, walked towards Sirius, took his hand and lay his hand on Alexandra's left breast.

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Margareth looked at her. “As a woman and as a mother, I am surprised you do that, Margaret. It is quite something to do!”

But Margaret explained it to her. “I sort of knows what goes on in her, what makes her tick. She desperately longs for warmth, intimacy, and motherly feelings, and hopes that Sirius will be the one to fulfill those longings.”

She showed her the newspaper with the article and photo's about Sirius triumph at the contest.

“I hope that I can show this in some years from now to their grandchildren. He is definitely fast, spry and a handy-man, but Alexandra manage to surprise even him.” and told them that after several minutes Dumbledore had to interrupt their public kiss. “But I wouldn't dare to do such a thing with our children!” she added with a laugh.

“Just a pity that neither of them will remember this when the wake-up!” Margareth said, while putting blankets over both couples.

But Henry replied, “I'm not so sure about that, honestly. I heard quite some startling stories about dreaming.”

Next morning Alexandra woke up with a big smile on her face. After some moments of confusion, she turned and found Lily and James also covered by a blanket on another couch.

“Lily, are you awake?”

“No, I wasn't, but since one was calling my name, I'm now...”

“Remember we were waiting for yours and James' parents? I think we fell asleep on the couch!”

“I'm, we are still there!”

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“I had such a weird dream, if I I'll tell you, will you promise not to tell anyone else. OK?”

“Sure!”

“I was dreaming that I was sleeping here on the couch...”

“Excuse me? Dreaming about sleeping, that sounds rather complicated!”

“Yes, I was seeing myself! Just like we were sitting here, close together, but nothing special, you know what I mean.”

“Yes, sort off, probably??”

“When I woke up, in the middle of the night, Sirius had his hand on my sweater, on my breast.”

“In your dream, or did he really? What did he do? How could he! While you were sleeping.”

“That is the strangest thing, it is not something that Sirius would do. A big foul mouth among boys. But a tiny heart when we are together. That kiss already swept him off his feet. He couldn't have done such a thing.”

“What did you do, slap him, kick him, wake him?”

“No, I just moved his hand.”

“So would I!”

“Eh, I meant differently, I moved it from on top my pull-over to under my pull-over, even under my....”

“Alexandra!”

“It felt heavenly, and I only dared to do that as it was just a dream, but...”

“But what?”

“This morning I discovered someone put a blanket over us. Then I noticed his hand was still there! Yes really *there*. I think Sirius never noticed, as he was still asleep. I feel a bit ashamed

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what I did while he was asleep, but he made the first move. So I feel bad about myself, what did I dream and what was real?" With big eyes, Lily looked at Alexandra."What indeed? What is bad or indecent?"

"Are you judging me?"

"No, no, no absolutely not. On the contrary. I am startled too." Lily blushed, "Ashamed. Point is, I dreamed also..... You remember that James and I walked through Hogwarts, some time ago?"

"Yes, very decent, very innocent..."

"My dream last night wasn't so innocent anymore, at one point I took the initiative. Like in your dream, we were sitting side-by-side on the couch. I too put his hands on eh, eh the same place. Like you, I mean."

"Just a strange coincidence..."

"Indeed, but – You swear you won't tell anyone either, Alexandra? I didn't stop there. I think. In my dream I mean. Something was stinging. I thought it was his wand. I tried to move it away. But it wasn't his wand. I found I put my hand on James' eh eh you know...And I kept my hand there for a while, a long while."

She couldn't get the other thing she had done, over her lips.

"You did what? That! Why?"

Deeply troubled Lily admitted,"I don't know, really. Then it felt good, curiosity, longing. Like you, And I thought no harm done in a dream. But now I feel awkward and ashamed of what I did or might have done."

Still blushing she looked away.

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“Hush now, James is waking up! And not a word, I feel embarrassed enough.”

“If they ever find out what we did, I couldn't face them again!”

When finally James woke up, he looked awful. The blanket should have kept him warm, but his head felt terrible and the rest of his body felt cold and stiff. “Strange dream of not finding toilets in time and something else...”

A moment later, he realized not every detail was a dream. His pants were still sticky and a bit wet. Reluctantly he went to the man attending the bar. “Sir, I have to confess something, I fear that I have soiled your couch while I was asleep.”

The man, however, wasn't angry or so, but very apologetic. “No need to apologize! I should have warned you and your friend. The manager ordered some Belgium beer from a town called 'Moortgat'. Last week we understand why it is called 'Duvel'. You drink it easily, too easily, but even most adults can not stand two of them, let alone more. We should translate the label into 'Devil.’”

The man's assistant did several times a 'Sanitato' spell when no-one was looking, but the bartender didn't let go of James' arm.

“There is something else I feel very bad about, you should know, however. When you ordered drinks for the girls, orange juice, my college asked you 'normal or strong', but he didn't tell you that that the strong variant was an alcoholic mix with Vodka. Is everything alright with the young ladies, nothing unintentionally happened? If so, I rather confess it immediately to my manager myself, before there are any complaints.”

“No, I don't think so. But what exactly do you mean?”

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Looking troubled, the man explained “Something strange happened to me and some of my friends. You understand that we are not allowed to drink during our work shift. Because of the snowstorm we stayed here instead of going home. We all were tired, but in a jolly good mood. But this morning, I woke up with Penelope, you know, one of the waitresses. We like each other a lot. But neither of us remember ending up there, in a bed.”

“You are grown up, an adult and probably married, so what's the big deal?”

“Indeed I'm married, So is Penelope. She is also married, but not to me. Hence I was worried about what might have happened to you all!”

“No, need to be afraid. We fell asleep on the couch, and there we also woke up. The only thing I cannot explain is about the blanket.”

Relieved the man explained. “I saw all of that. About twelve 'o clock your parents returned. You were already sound asleep. They didn't want to wake you up, so she put the blanket over you to keep you warm. Thank you, what you said is a big relieve to me.”

“By the way, do you know where Sirius, my friend is?”

“When his girlfriend stood up, he woke up. He asked me about a glass of milk, he had been dreaming about it all night he said, but we don't have it here in this fridge, so he went to the breakfast room.”

“Milk you said? Sirius drinking milk? That is new for me!”.

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Wondering about what he heard he walked back to the girls. Alexandra said, "I'm taking a very long shower. And wash my hair, perhaps it helps against the weird feeling in my head."

Lily was about to do the same, but he stopped her.

"Lily, I should tell you something about last night."

She didn't know where to look, would he know about her 'dream'? And how would he react?

"It is rather embarrassing. Sirius and I have been drinking foreign beer. Much stronger than what I am used to, but that's no excuse. I think I pee'd in my pants while sleeping. I soiled the couch and myself, but I hope not you."

After a sigh of relief, she responded, "No, not that I know."

"Eh, Lily, there is something else. I just heard from the fellow at the bar, that your drinks from yesterday, weren't just orange juice, but a combination of juice with Vodka. You have to believe me, I didn't know until right now. You are feeling fine I hope? No headache or nausea? How are you and how is Alexandra? My parents won't be very pleased with me if the find that I liquored you up..."

She just said, "That explains a lot, James. Thank you for telling me. No, I'm feeling fine, just very thirsty and I was thinking about asking some juice, but I think I rather stay with plain water for the time." But to herself, she made a promise, "I won't drink any alcohol anymore. Was I responsible for what happened? It looks like my dream and Alexandra's were related somehow. Breath-taking, Breast-taking. And what did happen to the others? Neither the bartender nor the waitress had anything to drink. What else did I dream or got started?"

But she just said, "James, I will check with Alexandra."

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Her friend just finished showering and washing her hair when Lily entered the room. After telling her what James told her, she replied, “I wonder if those drinks might have caused those dreams? They say that alcohol effects self-restraints. You do and say things you'd normally wouldn't dare to do”

In the end, all parents knew. The man attending the bar decided to take his responsibility and inform the parents. Little later, after some fresh walking and strong coffee's, Margaret called for them. “I heard from the staff, that you had a serious encounter with the spirit of alcohol. As far as I understand, all unintentionally and no harm was done, but you learned a lesson in a less favorable way. I cannot speak for Lily's parents, but I hope you won't forget about what happened last night. I won't object against some modest drinks like a beer or a glass wine, once in a while, when dining for instance, but don't over do it, never drink to impress others, stay away from strong drinks until you are much much older. And even with beer and wine you have to be careful. As soon as you think you need it to feel better, whatever the reason, warn me, warn Edward, warn Lily's parents, warn teachers at school as you as you enter a highly dangerous zone. When you think you need it, it isn't harmless anymore. And another tough lesson, distrust any drinks in glasses or opened bottles you get from others. Especially you, girls.” Edward agreed, “Many Muggle children and so-called grown-up ruin their lives, but wizards and witches carry an extra responsibility. Let me inform you that they have at St-Mungo a special wing for people sobering up. And in Azkaban, they have a special department for drunken wizards that need time for dealing with the consequences of their actions they did while under the influence.

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Lily's mother confirmed, "From teachers at others schools I heard horrible stories. Girls who don't dare to face a mirror anymore of because what they did while they were drunk, or worse."

Her husband added, "and remember human brains still develop until the age of about 23-25. When you are drunk parts of your brain die and are gone forever. I agree with you, Edward, when they are with you and your wife, or with us, I won't be hypocritical with drinks. We, your parents are there to protect you. As a doctor I see too many devastated lives by alcohol, at school, at work, while driving, people getting addicted and even when they drink for the first time at a friends party. Some even die because of it. The alcohol itself or the consequences."

Next day was new year's eve, due to the heavy snowfall and the strong wind, it wasn't advisable to stay outside for long. But all the hotel guests were entertaining themselves. Next couple of days some would be leaving for home, but the Potter & Evans group would certainly stay for at least another week. But that evening would be a smashing dinner party for all of them.

While waiting for the ladies to arrive, Edward and Henry were contemplating about things in general, while the boys listened along. Moments later Margareth and Margaret joined them.

"You didn't bring the young ladies?"

"No, they were busy putting on they new dresses. They told us to go ahead, it won't take long, at least that is what they said to us."

As time passes, more people joined them and it became a noisy party. But suddenly, like by the turn of a switch, all talking seized, no laughter no sound was heard. None of who were

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present, had heard the two young ladies coming in. But now they all saw. And watched in disbelief. Like in a trance Sirius got up. He got up that fast that his chair tumbled over. But no-one noticed that at all. Like everybody else, he stared unbelievably and incapable to digest the image his eyes produced. It looked like the summit of beauty and desire floated into the room. '*A pure and white swan*', that was the only thought Sirius was capable of thinking. And strangely enough, the ultra white swan just came closer and closer, towards him! She certainly must be mistaken, and be heading for a gathering of beauty queens and princesses in another room or so. She had something familiar, though. Her eyes! He seemed to remember them vaguely. Blue! So unbelievable deep intensely blue, like ice on fire, and radiating with expectation and pleasure.

He thought had seen them before, after he'd won the contest. But how could that be? His brain was probably playing a game with him.

"Hello, Sirius! I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long?"

But Sirius wasn't capable of answering, it felt like his mind was switched off, only capable of doing just one thing: looking at that beautiful girl, that was even speaking to him, simple Sirius Black, outcast from his own family.

"Hello! Hello! Anyone home there?" she asked Sirius again.

As he still didn't reply, Alexandra sighed and stated, "Then there is only one remedy I know of...", and she repeated her action she performed after giving his medal some months ago. She kissed him with all the passion and devotion she could think of. All the women in the room followed Alexandra breathlessly. All married women thought, this is how it used to feel, while all single women imagined, "Yes! This is how it

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should be”. One man started to laugh and applauded, just to break the tension. A second one followed and another one. Finally, not knowing what else to do, one started to sing: “...for he is a jolly good fellow...”

“Alexandra?” Sirius finally whispered.

“Yours, truly, one and only!” she softly replied.

Just like his friend, James found himself also standing and staring. For a moment at Alexandra, but shortly afterward he looked at that other lady, dressed in emerald green and with long deep dark red hair. She too was a raving beauty, but differently. When he looked at Alexandra the first thing that came to his mind was “sparkling fresh spring”. Looking at Lily he felt longing, desire just to be near to her, like the promise of a heavenly summer. When she looked at him, he felt his heart pounding, simply hoping she wouldn't look away.

When other people looked at Lily they felt something else instead. Sure, she was a beautiful girl with a magnificent dress, with some golden ornaments. But she also radiated ageless power, respect, and awe. Perhaps because of that other object hanging around her neck, that she wore for the first time in public, for all to see instead of hidden under her robes. Certainly not a regular necklaces from a boutique. The sight of that golden key made them feel humble and slightly uneasy.

When the girls sat down, the magic of that moment was broken, and normal conversations continued.

Margaret said to Margareth, “Strictly speaking are we not allowed to do magic in the presence of non-magical people. But

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as this is a select group of people, I think that you, like any of the other invitees, know about it. At first, I feared I overdone it a bit, but Alexandra lacks and misses so much, I'll think she'll treasure this moment for many years, along with Sirius.”

However, what she didn't say, was about the impression that Lily had made on everyone. That was all by herself any had nothing to do with any spell.

With an unspoken question, Margaret looked at Edward. He nodded softly, “*Yes, Mrs. Potter!*” And that affirmation could have meant several different things. Did he addressed his wife Margaret, or did he refer to Lily as a possible plausible future wife for his son...

Unexpected developments

Obviously, all the other students wanted to know all about their foreign holiday, as not all of them had the opportunity to do likewise.

“What did you like most, Sirius?”

Sirius decided that the thing he really liked best, he would keep to himself for the moment, so instead he said, “Racing downhill on skis. It is a pity the hills around here are so shallow. Otherwise, we could do it here also. And the speed you can get, man it is almost as good as racing on your broomstick. The best thing is, you can do it everywhere, Muggles or not. The bad thing, however, is that it only lasts minutes before you are down in the valley. But there is something else you should know: There they have a brand of beer, that blows your mind. When you drink it, it is nicely strong and a bit sweet, it makes our local beer taste like shallow water. And that is already worthwhile drinking it. But oh boy, moments later, the drink hits you like someone put a spell on you, and multiplied the mugs ten-fold.” Meanwhile, he looked to the other side of the common-room, where the girls were sitting. One of them looked at him, and they both knew that they had found something else, something much better than all skiing, beers, and dresses all put together.

“And you James?”

“To ski downhill takes much longer, not so fast, but more difficult. Though not as difficult as flying through our forest here,” he said with a grin. “The hills in Scotland are perhaps not as

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high as the Alps, but what matters is the difference in height between the top of the hill and the valley. I wouldn't know why we can not do things like that here in Scotland. Perhaps not here, near our school, but some valleys ahead, why not. The biggest reason for not doing is that it would attract much more people to the north, and I'm not sure if we would welcome thousands of them.”

“And what about the beer, is it true what Sirius said? And did you see any attractive girls there?”

“Yes, it is true about the beer...” and he grabbed his head with both hands. Laughter.

“But they told me afterward the name of it 'Devil', a very appropriate name for it. The dreams you get after drinking that Belgium potion, I'll not forget easily.”

“And about foreign girls?”

“They speak a different language. I didn't understand a word of it!”

“Anything happened worthwhile mentioning?”

“I wouldn't go traveling abroad, just for girls. You might as well stay here.” And without any further comment, he looked in the same direction as his friend did.

“Anything happened here, or did you all go home?”

“The usual things, due to much snowfall no Quidditch practicing possible. So Filch was complaining as some of the lads were *playing* with Mrs. Norris.”

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“And new timetables. We have a new subject, divination. It should have started the beginning of the year, but they postponed it. Did you see the books on this subject?

'42 other purposes of using tea leaves', Well, when thirsty, that might be a useful practice. But the second one: 'Workbook: tending you Crystal ball.' Would that imply that we have to do all sorts of cleaning up chores? I certainly hope not! And that other one: 'Cold and warm reading, whatever the season is.' It seems that at least someone kept his feet on solid ground!

I heard that they finally found a new teacher, a certain Mr. MacVail. Weird fellow, untraceable. I wonder if he is also a Professor, I mean how can you ever be a professor on the subject of divination?”

“Well, if you really want to know, ask him, it is our next subject. Or, if he really is that good, you don't need to ask him the question, he should *'know'* already you would like to ask.”

“Smart ass!”

“And probably decided not to give an answer! Which means you still don't know. No questions, no answers, just a vague feeling before and thereafter. Sounds like a good definition of a class divination.”

When they entered the classroom, they found test-papers waiting for them.

Sirius complained, “An entrance exam is ridiculous, this must be a mistake, we don't know anything, this is supposed to be the very first class divination.”

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But all that professor MacVail said, “Yes Mr. Black, I *knew* you would be saying that. Some, however, will never know anything, despite long studying hereafter. Please continue!”

Much to her surprise, after the final questions, Alexandra found a hand written instruction: 'When done, report at Dumbledore!'

Alexandra found that all of the other students left before her, at the corridor her friend waiting for her. “I have to report at Dumbledore!”

“Why?”

“I think something to do with divination.”

And indeed, she was very much right.

When they entered his study he smiled, and said, “I was just expecting you, Alexandra. No, you can stay Lily. Professor MacVail suspected you wouldn't come alone. He'll be here shortly.”

When he finally entered, Dumbledore just asked him, “And?”

MacVail responded with Alexandra form with her test-paper answers in his hand. “Conclusive proof. I was right.”

“Just her, MacVail?”

“Yes, just the McGonagall girl.”

Lily couldn't stand it anymore, “Excuse me professors, but could you tell us what is going on. What is wrong with my friend?”

Surprisingly, it was not the professor but Alexandra who replied. “Lily, do you still remember when we were cycling towards your tree-house, long long time ago?”

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Lily thought long and deeply, “Do you mean what you told me about when you were a small girl, you first contact with your gift?”

Alexandra silently nodded.

MacVail gave the results to Dumbledore, who looked at the reviews and the teacher conclusion.

“Lily, all of the test-papers were different, each accordingly to the expected divination-level, or actually a bit above it, to make it a bit challenging. Most of them were meaningless, yours was rather daring. However, Alexandra just did her test at NEWT-level. And as the professor predicted, she passed with 'Exceeding expectations.' However, with divination, the phrase 'exceeding expectations' is in this context a '*contradictio in terminis*'.”

Lily stared silently at her friend.

MacVail added, “If any student can predict the outcome of a divination test-paper, one might consider that unfair or cheating, but to me, it is the ultimate proof that he or she has a well-developed skill for this subject. If anything is missing, it will be solved in time by her gift itself. Alexandra is a natural talent. Fully developed, scary but true. No classes needed for her on this subject. Ever! Unless she wants herself. And I know she often will. In a couple of years, just for the sheer fun of it, she will re-do the test to see if she can get an *outstanding* for divination. Of course she will. So doing, is actually pointless.”

Alexandra proved his point, by saying, “I sort of knew you would be saying that. But I still don't have full control over that part of the gift. Yet. But you know that already. I know that you know.”

Helplessly Lily looked at Dumbledore, “This is beyond me!”

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Like in a choir, both MacVail and Alexandra said simultaneously, “Yes, we know!”, which caused Dumbledore to start laugh hilariously.

Before they walked back, Alexandra asked, “Please don't tell the others why I am excused for any divination classes and test papers. Most of them will not understand. They will either envy me or try to use me for their own means.”

Professor MacVail was probably about to say that he knew about her request, but remained silent and nodded.

Lily was expecting that her friend was glad about the results, that at least she, had not expected.

“What is it, Alexandra? Something is troubling you, I know.”

When she noticed the tears falling from her eyes and the repeatedly shrugging of her shoulders, she stopped her hold both her friend's hands and she asked again, “What is wrong dear friend?”

“Do you remember I told you that I raised my own protecting barrier, to avoid other people getting too close? I was so eager to do this test, to prove what I can do, what I can see and sense. So I lowered my defense. For a couple of minutes, I was overjoyed with the result. Objective and unchallengeable proof of my gift. Recognition at NEWT-level, but then I got almost drowned with sadness and grief. It almost swapped me of my feet. I'm so happy I can confide this with you, Lily, I wouldn't know how to go on otherwise. I do realize nothing is certain in life, so I grasp every tiny bit of certainty I may find.”

“I promise on my life, I'll be there to help you, Alexandra, as long as we both shall live!”

“I know you will, dear friend, and so will I. So will I.”

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Later that evening Lily looked for the boys at Quidditch practice. Although Sirius wasn't part of the selection, he often helped with the training.

“Sirius, can I have a word with you, alone?”

“Sure Lily, in that case, let's go and let the others clean up. What is it about?”

“It is about Alexandra!”

“O! Did I do or said something wrong? Is she angry with me?”

“No, not at all, something much more delicate. Last year, after the contest, she did something and I can not believe with all the newspapers still around, that you have a chance to forget about that.”

A very wide grin told her she was correct.

Lily continued, “Some months ago, at the hotel in Grindelwald, she did that again. How much initiative do you expect from a girl, any girl?”

His grin was gone and was replaced by a troubled look, “What should I say, what does she expect me to do? You know, you are also a girl and her best friend!”

“Oh no, Sirius! That is up to you. It is what you see and feel, what is in your heart and mind. It should not be something that was instructed you by someone else. And because I am her best friend, I am having this talk with you, without her knowing it, by the way.”

After a moment pause, Lily added, “I won't tell you what to do or say, I have only a minor suggestion *when* to do it. You know that, just like me, she is doing some additional studying, I'm

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doing biology, Alexandra is doing Greek. Almost every morning, before they others wake up, we study in the common-room.”

So, next morning Alexandra was in for a surprise.

“Would you mind if I joined you?” Sirius yawned with a bunch of books under his arm to a lonely figure.

After a surprised glance, “No of course not, as long as you keep silent and don't distract me.”

But a moment later Alexandra herself broke the silence, “I never noticed you were much into studying, Sirius? Change of heart?”

“Several changes. Regarding studying, this is actually not standard course material.” And he showed her the scripts and books about Animagus-spell, Transfigurations, and the Poly-juice-lo-tion.

“I don't think it would be wise if others saw me studying material from the restricted library section.”

“Wise decision. During daytime, you'll get noticed and in the evening lots of other students still fool around here. At night until daybreak and students get up, the silence is abundant, good for concentrating and contemplating.”

And with his nose deep in his book, Sirius added, “And I like to see you, just simply, to be with you.” And quickly he departed.

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Next couple of days Lily watched Sirius getting up, much earlier than he ever did, and giving Alexandra a daily kiss. She smiled and returned to her bed, studying there.

Normally Alexandra got dressed before she started studying, so after a breakfast, she could directly start with school lessons. As breakfast was served much later on Saturday and Sunday, she remained in her nightgown.

As she almost expected, Sirius was already sitting in one of the bay-windows, overlooking the lake nearby. When he noticed her approaching, he got up and kissed her, “Good morning Alexandra.”

She kissed him in return, but instead of taking her usual place opposite him at a small table in the oriel, she sat beside him on a small bench.

She looked at the empty table before him, no books.

“Sirius, didn't you forget something? Books for instance..”

“No Alexandra, I just wanted to ask you something, but actually I really don't dare to.”

“Try me!”

“Something is troubling me since latest winter-holiday.”

“What then?”

“I fear that I like you for the wrong reasons Alexandra. I'm not sure I can trust my own judgment.”

“Like me for the wrong reasons? What are you talking about Sirius? How can that be, explain it to me please!”

“I like, really, I like you a lot. But you are not just a nice girl, you are eh eh also a very beautiful and attractive girl.”

“And why does that trouble you, the two girls are the same!”

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“Well, you know, that other night while we were waiting for James' and Lily's parents to return, I drunk way too much.”

“So what? So did James. Lily and I were drinking vodka without knowing we did.”

“It is not about the drinking, though I still feel not completely sobered when I look at you. But the dream that night, it still lingers in my memory. In it, I held my hand upon your heart...”

Alexandra had no trouble remembering that dream.

“And Alexandra I wondered if I may... You can hit me if the question is impertinent, I wonder if I may hold it again once more. Just once, for a second.”

“WHAT!”

“I'm so sorry, I should never have said that. Can you please forget all that I have asked. No, I certainly should not have said that. I don't understand what came over me. I'm so sorry.”

Alexandra listened amazed and slowly reached for his hand.

“Sirius, this all is for me as new and confusing as it is for you. By kissing you in public, twice, I already put my heart in your hands. It can easily get broken, please be careful about it. If it doesn't work out, please bring it gently, don't humiliate me in public.”

She saw that Sirius was going to say something.

“No! Don't make any promises or vows now, we both are much too young, I think. Only time will tell, but be gentle in the meantime.”

Sirius answered in the only possible way, he gently kissed her.

“And Sirius, I think at that time, I had the same sort of dream, I also had been drinking too much. So, I too am curious how it

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feels, how I will feel when I am sober. Never ever do this in public, but will you touch my... heart with your hand, for a second?”

Alexandra shivered when he complied for a couple of seconds, but then he quickly moved his hand back.

“And how did it feel? The same?”

And again, the only reply Sirius knew was to kiss her, but much longer.

“I like the feeling too, Sirius.”

When she put his hand back again, she thought she never realized how thin her nightgown was.

When Lily peeked around the corner, she quickly put a blanket around the two. This was so private, no-one else business.

An hour later, but long before the others would get up, she woke up the two.

When Sirius headed for the showers, Lily asked, “And how does it feel?”

Alexandra sighed, “Good but, I am still confused. When we kiss, it feels so good, like a clear sunrise on a summer morning. And when he touched me, when he held me, it felt a thousand times stronger. I fear the hormones are drowning me. How can you be sure?”

“Sorry Alexandra, I can not answer that. I'm on the same train. And you are many 'stops' ahead of me. We could ask Margaret or Miranda when we meet. They are older, but not too old to have forgotten about it, got married, they should know!”

Alexandra just sighed, because of all the emotions.

Second thoughts

On one Friday afternoon, Lily finished her history test-paper rather quickly. Thoughtlessly she walked to the classroom professor McGonagall had designated for her dream-studies.

Only after she had entered the classroom, to only find the professor and one of the students, she realized she had made a mistake by coming far too early.

“Oh, sorry. I didn't want to disturb you.”

“No problem, Lily. Please stay. Robin wanted to talk to me before the others, particularly before Nimue arrive.”

Minerva looked at Robin, “I would like Lily to stay, and know what her opinion is.”

“Problems?” asked Lily, looking at both of them.

Robin hesitated, “No, eh... perhaps. I don't know.”

“Is it about the eating disorder of Nimue? I haven't seen her for quite a while!”

Slightly relieved Robin continued, “That is the main reason I wanted to talk with Minerva before the others arrive. I think we finally found a way to do something. The horrible dreams we managed to block for quite a while, but that wasn't enough as they influenced her subconscious for months. She didn't like much food, as she thought no-one would ever like her as she was. And to be honestly, she looks as meager as some of the ghosts around. Rumors had it that Hufflepuff's house-ghost wanted to date her. All of the boys look through her, both literally and figuratively speaking. An endless circle, so to say.”

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Lily tried, “I presume you meant a vicious circle. Anything madam Pomfrey could do for her?”

Robin continued, “Yes we thought about that too, but I would try another approach. With potions or spells, she would know we were working on it, and I thought about working on her subconscious.”

“Wow! That sounds complicated. How would you do that? Making her want to eat, by herself, but not knowing that her appetite increases? Advanced spells?”

“No, we were thinking about a different kind of magic, much much older.”

Minerva indicated Robin to continue.

“OK, it seems to work, so you find out anyway. I asked a guy from Hufflepuff, Timothy Mascal to help me. Not anything special, but to pay some extra attention to Nimue. Be extra kind to her, if you know what I mean.”

“You did what? That never works! Any girls would see through that! What happened?”

“It started very difficult. We didn't want her to get suspicious, so all the fast and glamorous boys were out of the question. And to avoid absolute rejection, brainless dogs like Goyle or Crabbe also fell out of the equation. Which girl in her right mind would like to be seen with someone like those! So we were looking for just an average guy, but to avoid gossip going round, we had to be successful with the first candidate. Initially, Timothy was not interested, even a bit scared. He didn't know what to do, had never a girlfriend before, not even ever kissed a girl before, can you imagine. We informed him that Nimue had neither any experience, so it was actually a plus.

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When we finally promised help like 'accidental meetings' and 'joined classical projects', other help, and the promise that he could very well save a life besides earning lots of points for the 'house-cup', he finally agreed to help.”

“And?”

“He plays his part magnificently! She is totally unaware of the setup. And it worked. It really did! Since the beginning of the year, we asked several girls to monitor Nimue during breakfast and dinner. And slowly, bit-by-bit she stays longer while eating continues, and the amount she eats increases also. But the most important sign was that she starts to tend her clothing, her hair, her looks much more.”

Minerva congratulated Robin, “Well done. It is something I would have never thought about. Just like Lily said, I was thinking about advanced/complicated spells and potions. Well thought off. Well done, and I have to agree, she starts to live up, truly!”

Both looked at Lily and waited for her comment.

“It worked they way you planned, but..”

Robin looked annoyed, “But what? You don't like it because it wasn't you who came up with it?”

Surprised and rather defensively Lily replied, “No! On the contrary. I am always with any alternative view! No! I was thinking about something entirely different. How long will Timothy 'play' along? What if he gets bored, or got interested in another girl? If that artificial romance breaks up?”

“Anyone knows that school romances never last forever! As long as we get her back to normally eating again, our mission is a success!”

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Minerva already started to look a bit worried.

Thinking about Sirius and James, it was a remark that Lily didn't appreciate. But Lily continued, "And did you ever thought what will happen, if Timothy ever lets it slip, that this romance was all artificial, all making up, make belief, no real true feeling from his part!"

Robin didn't answer, which said enough, but Minerva evaluated it carefully, "Sharp thinking Lily. If that would ever happen, Nimue would lose any trust in us and even work out reversed, break a final straw. Therefore I did something even Robin didn't know, I let Timothy make an unbreakable vow to keep silent about this arrangement. As far as I know, besides Timothy, only the three of us know all about it, and it should stay that way. Some teachers only know that I asked them to get them 'accidentally' together, but certainly not our intentions. I presume no vows are needed here?"

Immediately Lily replied, "I will keep it to myself, and I really hope it will last long enough!"

Robin followed, "I never thought about that, thank you, Minerva, I'll keep silent."

Minerva looked again at Robin, "There is something else bothering you, no?"

Now Robin looked apologetically at Lily, "Please don't take it personally, but with each session, I'm getting more scared every time. Those earliest sessions, the sharing of dreams, the healing that was wonderful. But traveling to uncharted places, going to the afterlife party, being chased by hellhounds, ending up in hell and witnessing a former student is much more that I bar-

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gained for. And I think that I am not the only one with such feelings.”

Lily was speechless, but Minerva just said, “I see. Can you spare us a moment, Robin?”

Lily just sat staring at the desk, trying to comprehend what the other student had said. Only when Minerva put two cups of tea before them, she realized she had sunk deep in her thoughts.

She gladly accepted the cup but looked without understanding to her professor. “Why, what, how?”

Minerva sighed. “I am sorry for about that, Lily. In our magical world, many consider Muggles and dumb and narrow-minded. We both know that it's not true. Among researchers being stout and having an open mind are essentials characteristics. Perhaps I have misjudged some of the students in our group, it is hard to find capable ones. We just witnessed what kind of old-school techniques Robin thinks about when trying to help Nimue. I am really sorry.”

She smiled at Lily, “But you and I have to confirm that this is indeed much more than either of us dare to expect. Do you still remember one of the first sessions, flying together with Martin Steward? To be honest, even that was much more than a dare to hope for. The detection or discovering of the 'simul-somnia' spell, the healing of people like Transgressia's son and Miranda, that all by itself could be an entire lifetime achievement, Lily. That is something you should comprehend and treasure.”

After a small sip of her cup, Minerva continued, “You have gave us so much more. I, our houses and the entire staff of Hogwarts are grateful of what you have achieved so far Lily!”

“And now?” Lily simply asked.

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“I will talk with the others. Did you know that Robin and Synthia grew up together since they were toddlers, so finding her there,” and she pointed downwards, “was quite shocking, don't you think so. Just imagine you finding your friend there!”

The idea of finding Alexandra unexpectedly in hell, chilled her to the bone. “Don't apologize, Minerva, I understand it.”

“You stride through life. Most other students walk through life much smaller steps. And not all have their focus ahead.”

Minerva thought for a moment, then scribbled something on a piece of parchment and gave it to Lily.

I think you've had enough to digest for today. If you want, find my niece and take this note to your potion teacher, Peatery. I know for sure he can brighten you up.”

Thankfully she accepted her hint, “and next session?”

“I will first talk with the group, and then we will try to add Occlumency, a technique you learn later on, to a sleeping potion. That might also work against nightmares.”

“But that treats only the consequence, not the cause!”

“Very much true, but that might be the only thing that some people just want. They don't want to know anything else. We also have narrow-minded wizards and witches. Some even work at the ministry!”

The rest of the afternoon, Lily, Alexandra and professor Peatery were working on comfort food as requested in Minerva's note.

Little moves

Lily noticed that since a couple of weeks, her friend Alexandra joined for breakfast in the main hall with a vague smile. Finally, curiosity won over discretion, so she asked, “And, do you dare to tell me about Sirius?”

Alexandra's vague smile became broader.

“You know that much of the boys stay up late, while I turn in early, in order to have a clear head next morning. Can you imagine, Sirius gets up early too, just for me? For the last couple of months, I get a soft and tender 'good morning' kiss of him, after that we sit opposite of each other near one of the windows. I do the Greek exercises as Margaret suggested, Sirius tries to study about Animagus transformation, but rather often he falls asleep again. Until a couple of weeks ago.

“What happened then?”

On weekdays I dress up before studying, on Saturday and Sunday I relax and do it the other way round.”

“So do I.”

“Did I tell you that he very politely asked me if he may touch 'my heart' again? Yes, I think I did tell you! A couple of Saturdays ago we were sitting side-by-side, in the sun, and I dozed away. It felt so cozy, secure, with my head on his shoulder, his arm around me. I was between sleeping and awake, but I definitely noticed his fingers slowly moving inch by inch. Just minutes before the others awoke his fingers reached their goal.”

“But why did you let him?”

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“I knew he shouldn't be doing it, but I was glad that he did.”

“What were you thinking and feeling?”

“It was so exciting! I really hoped he reached his goal in time!”

“What did you do all the time?”

“To be honest with you, I kept my eyes closed pretended to sleep and enjoyed every moment. I dreaded the moment the others woke up and he moved his hand away.”

“Did he ever find out that you were half-awake and aware of what he did?”

“Sort off. Next week I admitted that I was aware of what he had done, how I enjoyed it too!”

“Alexandra, don't you think you are slightly rushing ahead?”

First, an angry look appeared on her face, but then she sighed.

“For a second I was about to say to mind your own business, to talk to you again when you are in the same position, but then I realized we made a deal, to be honest, open and fair. Yes, Lily, you are absolutely correct. But right now I feel exciting, challenging, daring. There is only one thing I fear right now. That I cannot cope with the summer holiday. Not just missing his early morning kiss, but simply not having him around.” And with these words she held her own hand on her heart and wiped a tear from her eye.

Surprised, Lily asked her, “is it *that* bad?”

“Yes Lily, it is that bad...”

I know a perfect way to clear your head!

“What?”

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“Pick up our broomsticks and fly!”

“Great idea! It is so long ago.”

“Any particular direction or destination?”

“Absolutely! I feel it is Binns-time!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Remember the book you got from Binns?”

“Yeah!”

“I've tried to read it before, but I always fall asleep. Probably it was always too late or too early. Can you organize a bag to put the book into? I have to fetch some other things like something to eat, drink and other things like a blanket to sit on.

Half an hour later, two cheerful girls arrived at the memorial.

“What did you bring along, did the house-elves think we would stay away for a week or so?”

“Nah, they probably expecting some hungry male visitors!”

“But why do you need that tiny vase for?”

“To pay my respects. I was thinking about cutting another flower for Binns. He will surely appreciate that.”

“Don't tell me you got feelings for the professor!” Lily joked.

“What a ghastly remark, miss Evans!”

But a moment later, they had cut two roses and put them in the vase, use a protecting spell to keep it undamaged in the bag.

Next the returned to the portal stone, using it as a table putting the food and the book on it.

With a sandwich in one hand, she used the other to open Binn's book and looked for a bookmark. When she found it, she raised

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her other hand to take another bite, but she didn't. Instead of that, she said. "I am so daft, so stupid, so blind!"

"These are new examination-evaluations for miss Evans," Alexandra imitated one of the professors.

"Hah. No I mean, countless times I read the phrase 'Going to Calanaïs', but I presumed it was another student or professor. Do you remember Nicolas and Anabel Flamel?"

"After you scared the hell out of them with your key, they weren't much of a help."

"Sorry for that, but he said that he remembered Eideard very well and that he traveled the day before the accident TO CALANAIS. I think it is another site of portal-stones! I interpreted it all wrong!"

"You mean a place, not a person!"

"So, knowing this, shall we try to have another shot at the book? Fresh mind, no homework waiting, a fresh breeze, a stone at hand, should be an ideal setting!"

"It is difficult to read, Eideard made notes for himself, not for someone else. Thankfully Binns kept a letter Eideard wrote to him. It explains some parts, but it makes it even more unbelievable. Let me have a look.."

For a moment Lily skimmed through several letters.

"Yes, this. Not what I was looking for, but still amazing, listen:

'Dear fellow researcher,

I did find another spot! Another one in the North. An abandoned solitary Island with another ring of stones and a central stone. But much more important, there was a small house, actu-

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ally no more a shed, protected by muggle-repellant spells! You remember that we came across the name of 'Goleuddydd' before? It seems that this was his hideout! He devoted his whole life on traveling and collected a treasure of information. My impulse was to pack it all, and take it to home, but I have second thoughts about it. Here in the North, it remains safe from other prying eyes. And it is too much, too heavy. He has stone and clay tablets from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and other undecipherable but brittle documents. So instead I'll try to copy them. Among his findings is something I like to share with you. This Goleuddydd person seems to believe that the 'travel-stones' are even much much older than we first thought. Our first findings were about the turn of the new Millennium, over 500 years old!”

Alexandra interrupted, “Wait a minute! He wrote around the year 1600 about 500-year-old things?”

Lily replied, “It's getting worse! Hear what Eideard thought, ' But this wizard claims they date back to the time of the Greeks and Egyptians. He has visited the greatest library and found proof! But even he had difficulties with its origin, either from Babylon or from a vanished civilization from the far east, around Java, or that it developed when wizards from both cultures met.”

“Nice from a historical perspective, but not much of use for us, we are still stuck with piles of questions!”

“I understand, but so was Eideard and even Goleuddydd before him. Listen, -first an undecipherable part- but here he continues. ... most of the sites are all interconnected, though not all.

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There seems to be some sort of hierarchy. All maps and descriptions are lost.”

Alexandra also started to read some of the letters.

“Look, what he wrote here to Binns:

'Dear fellow aspirant traveler,

It is much more complicated than I thought.

The original maintainers decided that building and maintaining a circle and central stone is too cumbersome, too difficult or too costly, so newer sites consist of only one single stone!

So no separate control and directional stones anymore...

And thank you for the advice, to use fresh eggs as test material to send and to receive. Some eggs were gone and some eggs got squashed. Just imagine what would have happened if I would have tried to go there myself...

About the 'control-stone', I found this so far:

Last month I wrote that the stones were initially used to gather gifts from sacrificial altars. When activated, everything moved in a single action from one place to another. Later on, they were able to send simple objects. Much later they were able to prolong the sending or receiving, like transferring a heap of bread.

Before the Darkness settled in, they dared and managed to project the activation place, so they could move animals near the stone and didn't have to put anything on the stones anymore. When you read the notes about those experiments, you need a steady stomach. Much went initially wrong with living animals. They were finally able to transfer people, but always

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one at the time, and they had to re-settle each time. At their peak of glory, they were still working on continuously moving living object, but it had undesirable side-effects.', and next he continue to wonder about the reason for transferring from the oldest altar stones.”

“Funny that we might know more about that, not?”

“What do you mean by that!”

“Remember the unbreakable vow in Athens, at the council, and Alfredo's explanation..”

“I see! Simple people making all sorts of sacrifices to their 'gods' and when the gifts disappear, they think their prayer has been answered, while some wizard had an easy meal.”

“Exactly!”

“Hold on!” Alexandra jumped up in excitement.

“I think I might have found something. Eideard wrote here something about the 'central-stone' or 'control-stone' as he named them. Some have different capabilities, 'On the eldest and simplest you can turn the ring right or left one position, each one for receiving or sending one single session.' Then he continues about those with two and three positions. As far as he could investigate, the only one with 'four' is either lost or unreachable. He wrote that it was a pity that they placed that one on the remote island of ice and fire.”

“Well, if the island of ice-and-fire is what we now know as Iceland, there is a fair chance it got lost in volcanic activities. But you mentioned 'A Ring', what did he mean by that? If you need a special ring, it is probably the end of this adventure, we'll never find something we don't even know how it looks like!”

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“I hope you are wrong, Lily. Can you help me with clearing the stone? I would like to investigate it a bit more closely.”

And with these words they removed not only Binn's book but also much of the food and drinks they had brought along.

Lily asked, “When you touch the stone, can you also remember about previous visits and uses?”

“I'll try that”

The girl closed her eyes and put the palm of her hands on the top of the stone.

“Remember to be careful! Binn's story still gives me the shivers.”

Instead of confirming and acknowledging her friend's concerns, she grinned. “The last time someone used this stone, it had nothing to do with traveling...”

Later she said disappointed, “Nothing, it is rock-solid!”

Lily fetch two apples from one of the bags. Putting one on the stone, giving the other to her friend.

“Here you are! Sorry for the work. I presume examining the side of the stones is also a waste of time?”

Alexandra picked up her apple, and before taking a bite, she used her right hand to examine the side of the stone.

“I don't think we will ever.....”

And there she stopped, looking bewildered. “Yes” was all she said.

“People, wizards did touch the stone there. But I don't see anything.”

Silently she put her apple down again. “I wonder if..”

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Now with two stretched arms she held the sides of the stone. From the look on her face, Lily could see that her friend detected something. Slowly she moved her fingers down. When her fingers were about four, five inches below the edge she exclaimed, “Found it!”

Slowly but surely Alexandra turned an invisible ring to the left until she felt something humming.

“Please! Can you turn it back again?”

With some effort Alexandra, turned the ring back again.

Gloriously the girls looked at each other.

“We found it! We did it. We cracked it! We solved it! What a feeling!”

Alexandra turned, to pick up her apple again. But not only the humming sound was gone, so was her apple!

“Where has my apple gone to?”

“That is a good question! A very good one indeed. I wager you send it somewhere. You turned it to the left, how about the reversed, turning to the right? May I try?”

This time Lily got to exact the same position where her friend had been standing. “I'm not sure if it matters. Was there anything in your mind when you did it?”

“Not exactly. Just thought if we now how to activate and deactivate a stone, we can turn the one in Athens off.”

A vague smile appeared on Lily's face. “I wonder if that's enough.”

She embraced the stone with her arms, and let her fingers try to detect an invisible ring. As expected she could turn it a bit to the right, causing the same humming again. Quickly she turned

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it off again. On the stone, her apple re-appeared again, most of it. Someone else had taken a good bite out of it. But something else came along with it. Bread, shop-receipts, cheese and a bottle of wine.

Astonished Lily said, “I have a vague guess where THAT all came from!”

Lily picked up the bottle, but she had quite some difficulties with reading the signs. Not Alexandra, she could read Greek like a native one.

“I think we better we gone. It's getting dark and we have quite something to digest.”

When they returned to school, they were stopped by Filch.

“Well, well! Wine! Having a girl's party? Caught red-handed. Report to your head immediately!”

Slightly scared they knocked on his door.

Dumbledore looked troubled.

“Girls, you have disappointed us very much. You are all aware that the possession or drinking of alcohol, is strictly forbidden. The two of you were caught while being in possession of a bottle of wine, and you have not even tried to hide it! Why did you do that and how did you get hold of it? This is not something they sell everywhere! Did you brought it along from you previous holiday?”

“No Sir, absolutely not! We never drank a drop of it. You have to believe us.”

“Have to believe you? But it is half empty!”

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With a wave of his wand, it became clear that the girls had indeed not drunk any of the wine.

“But how did you get hold of that bottle? Is it from any other student?”

Silently Lily put the shop receipts on his desk.

“What is this? Just a receipt for buying things. It just proves..”

“Did you see WHERE it was bought and WHEN?” Lily interrupted Dumbledore.

He stared again at the note. “It was bought less than two hours ago, in a shop over two thousand miles away from here. He examined the note and the bottle with his wand. It is genuine, no illusion, the wine is cheap but real. No owl could have covered that distance so fast. And the only fireplace connected to the grid is in my study, and I'm pretty sure neither of you have no international portal-keys.”

He didn't look angry anymore, just very curious. “So?”

Alexandra explained, “We don't have a 'portal-key', however, there is here a ,portal-*stone*, around...”

And Lily added, “We were careful, I think. We didn't travel, but those items did. Somehow.”

“Merlin's beard! You did what? You mean there really is a such a stone nearby? And you know how to operate it! I'm rather busy right no, but tell me all about your findings later. Well then, you are excused for the wine, but still some friendly words of advice. Be even more careful with what you are investigating. Perhaps it is best that you keep this quest and your findings to yourself. If any other students even only suspect what you are doing, their parents will know and seconds later

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we have an investigating delegation from the ministry. If there is anything I dread, it is their poking around. You two should know that Alexandra's mother is fiercely against the consumption of anything containing alcohol by students, hence she has given Filch the order to be very strict in upholding regulation about it. Although I am perhaps slightly more lenient, I understand her motivations, so if such transfer happens again, just throw the contents away and keep the bottle as proof.”

“Before you forget, we have to see Binns!”

“Telling him what we have discovered?”

“We can, but we were going to give him a fresh flower from the grave!”

“I have totally forgotten all about it!”

Moments later they walked through Hogwarts' corridors with the two roses in a tiny vase, cause all sorts of remarks by other students. Lily softly knocked on the door of his study. This actually was just a formality, as Binns had said before that his door was always open for them, and as ghosts don't sleep, they could either find him in one of the classrooms, or in his study. A simple look on Binns' face told them enough, they didn't have to explain where the flowers came from.

“Professor, I didn't realize that you know Nicolas and Annabel Flamel!”

“Knowing is a word too big, we met only once or twice. From your words, I deduce that he is still alive and you met the Flamels?”

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“Yes we did, some months ago, professor Dumbledore suggested that he might help us with our investigating.”

“Ah, still can not get those stones out of your heads? What did I hear recently? A student was singing Carol Channings' song 'Stones are a girl's best friend', but she referred to other stones if I am not mistaken. Diamonds. Students like you are the gems, the castle, the staff they are just the settings. This school should be careful with treasures like you!”

“Thank you for the compliment, you flatter us.”

Binns moved his look from the two fresh flowers to the girls again. “And was he able to help you?”

“Sort of. He told us that he too knew your friend Eideard, and that he let him travel a couple of times to-and-fro to another place, an island in the North, we just found out. He claimed he had been taking notes for Eideard and was going to share it with us, but...”

“Ah, but he never did, I presume. Nicolas has always kept everything to himself, collecting, gathering: yes! Letting others do the dirty or dangerous work, a lazy coward, that is how I remember him. Even while dating Annabel, he had an interest in my girl.”

“No, we did scare him away....”

“Oh, did you now? Please tell me! You can not scare a ghost anymore by horror stories!”

But that assessment was not quite accurate.

Initially Lily was slightly reluctant, but Binns already knew that they had visited Athens, and about the secret council. So piece by piece Alexandra told him the whole story.

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Binns remained silently for a while, “So you are the new keeper?” he asked Lily.

Without any words Lily got the key, she always kept under her robe and put it on the desk.

“Hecate's key, it is back in our world again!”

Astonished Lily exclaimed, “You know about the key?”

Disappointed Binns looked now at her, “Remember I was born a very long time ago and I was, and still am a history teacher, my favorite subject.”

Alexandra noticed something. “Professor, when people see this key, or even only hearing mentioning it, they got scared, but not you. It does not seem to affect you.”

“A keen observant witch you are! Perhaps that is one of the advantages of not-living, you can not be scared to death.”

This reply triggered a completely different question in Lily's mind. “Professor, can you tell me, what is it to be a ghost?”

“You mean to be dead, to die? Honestly, I have forgotten most of it. One evening I fell asleep behind a desk in the teacher's common-room, and the next morning I was dead when I woke up. Why are you so interested? You are so young.”

“No, I participate with some secret study here. Via the dreaming-world, we visited the after-life. Both heaven and hell, or at least parts of it. I mean can you communicate with others that lived before? You are a ghost, but totally different to Sir Nicolas or the red Baron!”

Binns asked, “Lily Evans, are you really just a third-year student? You know things and have been to places that would envy any old Hogwarts professor. Now I understand why the

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council has chosen you as the new keeper. By now you remember why I lost my will to live...” and he looked at the flowers again. “But I just started my new job as a teacher, here at Hogwarts. Teaching fresh students, about promises and stupidities from the past gave me a new goal in life, and that is still true up to this day. But when I died, I was afraid that there would be on-one to look for me, so I decided to stay half-way, and continue to make myself useful.”

For a moment he looked at the key, and next to Lily.

“I do know some of the stories, legends or myths. It is an object beyond any comparison. The first thing that comes to my mind is Neptunes' trident or Zeus' lightning-rod. But even they fall short compared with this. You know what it can do?”

“No! It was given to me without much explanation. 'In due time' they said, probably because I'm still a witch in training.”

“I presume the first thing you did, was trying to find out about Hecate?”

“I found few references towards her. Books describe her as the goddess of magic and witchcraft. Some mention her as 'Trinity', past, present and future. Holding several objects, among one her key.”

Alexandra added, “She is also referenced with making difficult choices. I read that ignorant Muggles placed alters to honor her at crossroads, but I presumed that idea was about crossroads in your path of life, not physical road-crossings. And that the legendary Medea worshiped her!”

“That is correct, sometimes she holds a burning torch. To enlighten blind and ignorant people, to shed some light over dark

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and mysterious questions. I would rather say, to burn some prejudice away, but that's just my opinion.”

Binns continued, “One of the other objects is a dagger. It is not to kill or cut meat or bread, but to cut through any illusions or spells. The slightest touch of it will even render the most strong potion powerless. So it can end any magical invocation. But It is endlessly sharp, indicating that the truth might hurt.”

“That is hardly ever mentioned!”

“Much stories come from the Muggle world, where anything related to magic is either discarded, or removed, but you understand it's importance? The other object is a simple piece of rope. Very often a circular one, as an indication the endless cycle of life and rebirth. Even Muggles grasped the potential importance.”

“And this one, the key?”

“With this very key, you have access to the different realms of beings, the waking world when you are alive, the dreaming world when you are asleep, and the realm of the dead. With this key, you can open, or close, the doors in between them. Extremely powerful and dangerous. You can go where others can not. You can do what others can not”

“We heard a story about unleashing the pestilence!”

“That was because something from the dead was let to roam free in the awakening world.”

“How is that possible?”

“Between each realm, there are gates, fences, doors. Mostly they are closed, but sometimes a powerful wizard or witch manages to open it for a moment. With this key, you should be

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able to open and close any of these doors, for always. The most harmless example is that you will be able to act and manifest in dreams like you were awake. Less harmless is the other way round, you can unleash things from your dreams into the real world. And the doors to and from the dead, well I don't think I have to spell that out for you. One of the unforgivable curses, the curse-of-death, came into existence because of this key. Many, many, many years ago, the stone-of-recurrence was made with the aid of this key. But that was never a success. Summoning people back from the death, well, all the stories I remember are about regret and disappointment.”

“Someone said, I could become death, destroyers of worlds.”

“Technically spoken, one could. If that key would fall into the hands of a revengeful unscrupulous wizard. But you couldn't or wouldn't, but others might, so be careful. Keep it hidden and don't use it unless you have to.”

“But I haven't the faintest idea HOW I can, should or shouldn't use it.”

“That is indeed a problem, girl. My first inclination would have been to compare the key with your own wand. You had to learn to use that too, practice it a lot. But with the key you are playing with mortal fire and there are neither teachers nor textbooks.”

“So no wise words?”

“No, not yet, but I'll think about it. The only thing that comes to mind, is to look for the other two object. Rope and dagger and trust for wisdom and luck.”

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Obviously Lily was disappointed, but her friend said, “If we can solve more of the portal-stone riddle, we might travel to places where Hecate lived? Ancient Greece!”

Lily turned to leave, “Perhaps, perhaps. Through the dream-world might be a safer option.”

But suddenly Binns said, “Stop!”

Both girls stopped and turned amazed “What is the matter professor, did you remembered something?”

But Binns shook his head and pointed to Lily,

“That thing in your hair, for your braid. How did you get it, where did it came from?”

“That? I don't know. My mother gave it when I was young. She said it was in the family for generations. I like it, as it never seems to wear out. It seems to stay new. Come to think about it, it is probably a magical object.”

“Indeed girl! I think luck travels along with you, and my advice to find to objects is indeed wise. That simple thing you wear for ages in your hair is actually Hecate's piece of rope, the symbol of infinity and rebirth!”

Spring

Along with the new, third and final trimester, students were replacing existing Quidditch players, much to James' relief. Some seasoned players passed most of their test papers, so now they had enough spare time for playing and practicing. Winning the cup was out of the question, but he could try avoiding the fourth and final place.

Much to their surprise, some of the carefully planned and hidden activities did not remain submerged. One day, at the transfiguration class, a desperate Sirius asked, “Professor, can you explain us something. Here in this class, we learn to 'change' the appearance of objects. At the potions class, we noticed, although not part of the material to study, the description of the poly-transformation-juice. And some time ago we witnessed a wizard applying the Animagus spell. They all are used to change..”

Professor McGonagall looked sharp at Sirius. “I was wondering if, when and by whom this question was going to be raised. Yes, they are all somehow related. Be aware that you have transformation and transfiguration. Related, but different. The second one makes an object appear differently, but its essence remains the same. The change last as long as the spell last. Sometimes it the change has a built-in safeguard, so it changes back automatically. It is far more difficult, in either case, to make the change last. But even then, the spell can be broken by either a counter-spell by himself or if the person responsible for the spell is no longer there, by someone else. Although even

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those aspects can be dealt with, with spell alterations. With the potion it is more-or-less the same, the stronger it is, the longer it lasts. Although as you probably know from your teacher, there are limits how strong you can make a potion, and the stronger it becomes, the more side-effects it can cause, more unstable so more dangerous.”

Slightly encouraged by the technical aspects of the subject, Lily asked, “Very well understood professor, but how about the Animagus-spell? I, we all, have seen you doing the transformation into a cat several times. Still, my own cat knew perfectly well that you were, appearing to be a cat, but no real cat! Are you going to teach us that, one of the coming years?”

At that point, McGonagall looked from Sirius, towards Lily, James, and her niece.

“The Animagus spell is quite something different. With that one, you can do a real and complete transformation. You really change the essence of a person. There also lies the danger. If you do it too often, or too long, the changeling begins to forget its original form. Your cat knew the difference only because I did my transformation in front of his eyes. Don't underestimate the intelligence of your cat! But had I changed before he entered the room, even he would not be able to tell the difference. Very few wizards know how to perform this spell correctly, so everyone capable of doing so must be registered at the ministry.”

“Why do they have to do that?” asked James.

“Why? Isn't that obvious Mr. Potter? Through history, wizards and witches were curious how certain animals behaved and were thinking. That is how the transfiguration spell was changed into the Animagus spell. But after succeeding, some

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found out that it became very addictive to change into a bird or a fish like Dolphins...” With these words, McGonagall looked very intense to certain students.

“If you care to study more carefully 'The History of Magic’, you will learn about several cases where it went horribly wrong. Heartbroken witches, who transformed themselves into one-day butterflies. The she-bear that slaughtered her own son. The transformed witch was finally hunted down by her own villagers and killed. At that point, the spell was broken and she got her human-form back. And albatrosses and seagulls that forgot they used to be wizards. That is why the ministry has a list of all people capable of doing such transformation. They are checked if they still exist in their human form and you can be contacted if a changed animal has to be changed back to a human. Because of the dangers we do not, not *refrain* from teaching about this spell, but the background of the Animagus spell and its invocation, remains in the restricted area of the library.”

For a moment she looked directly at Lily.

“And those still tempted and brave and resourceful enough, even that information is not enough.”

She asked Sirius, “Does that answer your question, Mr. Black?”

“Yes, professor, I'm afraid it does.”

Obviously satisfied, she continued, “Well then, we progress to the next chapter...”

Halfway during April, they noticed that the lessons 'Defense Against the Dark Art' was shifted from the morning towards the

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afternoon. Some of the students, mostly the boys, welcomed this, as it implied some extra hours sleep in the morning. But others were a bit disappointed. “Did you noticed the beautiful weather, clear blue sky. Excellent flying conditions!”

“Well now, “ Dumbledore said, we had approached them without getting noticed and overheard it all, “The flying thing is beyond me. Too high for my bones, but I agree that we should take advantage of the lovely weather. We can do our lesson outside the classroom for a change.”

Surprised they started to pack, class outside, they never had done that before.

When they walked through the main gate, they noticed Albus wasn't heading for the Quidditch field, but walked into the opposite direction. They found a freshly cut lawn, with a nice view over the lake. They noticed just one minor disappointment, on one of the seats, professor Dibbet was sitting. What would he have to say about a professor and all of his students circumventing a class?

When he saw the class approaching, the headmaster welcomed them. “Ah, Albus! Good to see that some of your brain cells are still working. Ridiculous that some of the teachers are still in the dungeons. A waste of good weather, not?”

Relieved, Dumbledore replied, “Absolutely, headmaster.”

“By the way, Albus, are the students informed about the day off next week, and no homework for the subsequent day?”

“No, I don't think so. Having a good mood, for celebrating Beltane again?”

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“Indeed, A couple of weeks ago, the foul weather made me postpone the celebrating of Ostara, but look at this! I wonder if we can do a school-wide pick-nick here?”

“The elfin kitchen-aids won't object, I think”

“Some of the Muggle-born children were talking about Easter.”

“So, what is wrong with that?”

“Nothing, but just like Christmas, most of the people, Muggle or magic, don't have the faintest idea what it is they are celebrating, commemorating, the rituals they perform and the symbols they are using.”

Looking at the asking eyes of the students, made it clear to Dibbet that like many grown-ups, they also needed some education about this subject.

“Do you mind if I take over your lesson, Albus? I think defense against superstition and ignorance is as important as 'Defense Against the Dark Arts'.”

“Absolutely not! I'll try to arrange some tea as I am aware of the length of next sermon.”

Dibbet looked a bit quizzically but continued nonetheless.

“Now then, do you remember what so-called Christians commemorate the Friday before Easter?”

Most of the students looked at Lily, as she was raised by Muggles, hence they expected her to know all about other rituals.

“Eh, the death of Jesus?”

“Yes, but do you know why did he die? And spare me the hollow phrase of 'The sins of the world', that was invented much, much later.”

No-one said a word.

“About twenty centuries ago, a man lived under difficult circumstances. His country was invaded and occupied by the Ro-

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mans, a brute people and in many views much less developed compared to the people they enslaved. They robbed and took much more than that they ever brought. It was nearly impossible to become a Roman-citizen. And on the other hand, the people from Palestine faced a very rigorous religion. Strict rules. And what happen often, much too often, that ordinary people get between those two centers of power. If you didn't live exactly to their rulings, liked their friends, did like them you were cast out of their community. Most of the people then had nothing at all, women had no rights, no-one would defend ill people, or strangers. And then, just one man stood up for the powerless and the defenseless and said everybody should be nice to each other, regardless what you believed, your background or gender. He became a threat to the powers-that-be at that time. They tried to seduce him with wealth, esteem, but he refused. That is why he had to die. He showed many the way to live a more meaningful life, he believed in what he said, and was willing to die for what he believed in. A truly great man and example for us all. Some thought his dead was the end, but some of his followers came up with a revolutionary idea that if they remembered what he said and did like he taught them to do, he would never really die. Really magnificent, it is true and it works. A shame though that a group of power and wealth-obsessed people turned it into something else.”

“Amen! Said Dumbledore, bringing lots of tea, biscuits, and chocolate.”

For a moment Dibbet looked disturbed, “So you see, that rabbits, eggs, either boiled or chocolate, have absolutely nothing to do with Easter. All of them have more to do with the ancient fertility celebrations. Ostara is the other word for spring

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equinox. On that moment of the year, the length of the day is exactly as long as the length of the night, and the days grow longer. At Beltane, The world looks much more a pleasant place to live in, and there is more food, so any offspring born at that time has much more chance to survive than siblings born during winter.”

After swallowing another chocolate egg, he said, “some teach you that in their holy scriptures, you can read: “Thou shall not steal” or want what no belongs to you. They have borrowed a lot, with no inclination of returning anything at all, not even admitting it is not theirs anyway.

People have died for their belief before, and according to other legends, much, much more older legends, they also rose from the death after three days. And it saddens me to say that also since then, people have suffered and even died for their belief.” Dumbledore remarked “Fighting against windmills again, Don-Quichotte?”

“Absolutely! Trying to teach youngsters not to accept blindly what so-called 'authorities' might say and even question facts on which some decisions, views or traditions are based.

Some of you know, that around this time of year, people commemorate the departure of an entire people from the land of Egypt. You can read about it in the Thora or the book of Exodus. The first time you read it as a kid, it is an exciting story of slavery and the struggle for freedom, believe and disbelieve, temptations, perseverance, and mostly trust. Much later in life, when you question everything, one start wondering why there are no other references about those happenings. In that time, the Pharaoh ruled the known world, so the slaying of him and his army, would have caused quite some upheaval in the entire

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world. When you are wiser, then you see the true story behind the written words. A self-inflicted enslavement, the awakening of awareness and the long and hard struggle to get free again at a harsh price.

Struggles like that still exist, not just for groups of people, but also for individuals in their personal life. Just substitute the word 'pharaoh' by 'Nazi', 'Soviet', 'Alcohol', 'drugs', 'power', 'money' That makes it such a powerful story.”

“Some would call that blasphemy, sacrilege!”

“It is not intended as such. On the contrary! The real story behind the words is much powerful, more personal, more actual. Not just an old historical story!”

“If they would only open their eyes, and understand that religion is something completely different than the subject of History, the world would be a better place to live in.”

Many happy returns

After the successful transportation of an unknown persons' lunch from Athens to Scotland, Lily was anxious to continue but was looking for a proper next step.

“And, when does the brooding gives any results, mother Goose?” Alexandra asked Lily.

“It is so difficult and also some dangerous. I'm truly grateful for the help we got from Binns, but since he stopped warning us, I remember his first story, about what happened to his girlfriend Lachlan much more vividly. Crushed!”

“And so, anything you want to do, to try?”

“Actually there is constantly one thing on my mind, but that I don't know how to do that.”

“And that is?”

“Just like Eideard, I want to visit Calanais. To find out what kind of information still lies there. In the end, he dared to travel by stone from Stone-Henge and back, I don't.”

Alexandra was silent for a while, but then continued, “There might be another way, though...”

“How? We cannot travel by flying on our broomsticks! We don't know where it is, and it is probably in Muggle territory!”

Now it seemed that Alexandra had made up her mind. “No, but I think I know someone that might know more about that region. And so do you!”

Lily looked imploringly, “Ah, Alexandra's oracle has spoken!”

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“No, you silly! Did you forget that James father has built his own yacht and sails a lot? He'd probably explored that whole region! From Binns' letters, we learned that it is, or was a deserted island. Yes, there are a lot of them up here, but how many have those touristic stones on them?”

Lily looked doubtfully. “Do you think so?”

“You'll never know unless you try and ask! When are we going to M&M for our studies? At least you can ask Edward!”

But before Lily could reply, James had entered the common-room.

“What did I just caught up, are you two going again to my mother and Mrs. Dibbet?”

“Eh, yes, perhaps. Why?”

“Next weekend it is her birthday. She seldom celebrates it, but you might like to know that.”

“Thanks for telling me. From a certain age on, women don't like to be reminded of their age. For them, it is a sensitive subject. Is there anything we can do to surprise her?”

James thought deeply, “Actually not...”

But Alexandra had a bright idea, “We can ask her if we can come for our studies, at least if Miranda can come. But we should ask her in advance. And from a reliable source I heard there is a person around here that knows her way around the kitchen, so perhaps with a little bit of help, we can make a nice surprise-cake? And to make the surprise complete, we can ask Dumbledore if he might be willing to enlarge the leave-permits for another one-or-two persons. That is, if you think it is a nice idea, James.

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James looked slightly overwhelmed. “You just made that up?” Alexandra put up a challenging face, noticing that Sirius came along. “You thought that HE is a fast fly-er? I think much faster! What do you think, James?”

James thought for a while, but before speaking, his face told everything. “I think she will love it.”

“So what is the planning, then?”

“First I'll ask Miranda, if she is available too, if so we'll ask your mother. If that's all OK, you can ask Dumbledore. Normally it is not done, but if you say you'll come along with us, he'll be more lenient, I hope. And the pie will be a piece of cake.”

“Just a simple thought got up. Don't you have to do some learning to do? Preparing for test-papers?”

Both girls looked with a contemptuous look to each other, but then started to laugh. “do some learning? Boys!”

Miranda's owl was sent right away, and returned much earlier than normally was the case. “Obviously she isn't in Oxford!”

Lily got the parchment of the owl's paw, and read it.

“Great, really! Even she was not aware of her birthday. She really loves the idea! She asked if Edward can be informed about your plan?”

Alexandra looked at James, “What do you think, involve him?”

“That is a sensible thing to do. He'll love that too, and by telling him, it decreases the odds that he is taking her out or so accidentally.”

“OK, I'll write that we have almost finished another chunk of work, and would like her and Miranda to evaluate it. It is not

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entirely true, as we have to start with baking completely. As we were scheduled to go anyway, I don't think she'll object.”

“In that case, come along James, pick up your feet. Let's ask Dumbledore!”

At first, Dumbledore looked surprised, doubtfully, but after checking James' and Sirius' timetables, and seeing that they would not miss too much, he gave them permits for him and Sirius, on the condition that they would also bake something for the staff.

With his spirit as high as a flying snitch up in the sky, he grabbed Lily's hand. “I love school, but such a sneaky privileged excursion away, I love even more!”

At that point, Lily secretly hoped that he would continue the last sentence and include her, but when he remained silently, she understood that she had to be contend with the fact that he was holding her hand.

With leave-permits in one hand, and Lily in his other hand, he caused a scene that many other students whispered about for quite a while. When they were almost downstairs, they bumped into one of the professors. “Invitations for a Quidditch match of the national team, Potter?”

“Uh, no Professor. An unscheduled permit to leave for home tomorrow. A surprise party for my parents.”

Lily looked at professor Peatery. “Sir, may we use the potions-laboratory, I would like to make an anniversary cake for his mother...”

Peatery looked deep, long and stern at Lily, who wasn't aware that James still held her hand. And that fact, combined with the request for baking something for the boy's mother obviously

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triggered some thoughts at the professor. “No way! My college Slughorn is still busy lab-exercises with Ravenclaw.”

Lily felt disappointment, but a moment later they were gone.

“Never use the lab when others are busy! I *could* let you use Hogwarts's kitchen, but normally students are not allowed in there. Unless..”

“Unless?”

“Unless they are there for helping the staff! Would that be acceptable to you, will you let me help you?”

“Splendid. Absolutely! We are grateful! Dumbledore had only one condition, that we would make another cake for the staff!”

“That is how I know Albus! No problem, there are enough elves to help us.”

But next morning those elves were not needed, as Alexandra and also Sirius were there to help, although most of the time the boys were only doing simple tasks and were more trying not to stand in the way of Peatery and the girls.

When they were almost ready, another member of Hogwarts' staff visited the kitchen, Dumbledore. Looking at all the pies and cakes they had made, he commented, “Well, well! I didn't realize that James grew up in an orphanage!”

Peatery apologized. “The boy didn't remember what his mother's favorite pie was, so I decided to do some experimenting. And I also heard that you asked for something for the staff.”

Albus smiled as the teacher, “Yes I did indeed. But just one or two, not a dozen!”

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Then Dumbledore turned to the students, “James, I received a message from your father. Miranda, eh professor Mrs. Dibbet is already there, and Edward is taking your mother out, with the excuse for doing some shopping. They will be back at twelve.”

Alexandra looked at the clock and alarmed, “It is already eleven! How do we get there with all of these?”

Dumbledore hushed her, “Calm down girl. That was something I expected to happen right away. Because of your exceptional luggage, you are allowed to use my fireplace.”

He looked at all of the pies, then asked, “May we have this one?” and pointed to a pineapple-pie.

“But of course!” the girls replied.

With a wave of his wand, the pie disappeared to the room where the teachers gathered. Another wave moved the rest to Dumbledore's study.

“I hope the pineapple-addict Slughorn leaves a piece for me. Now, tidy a bit up and come to my place!”

After the students left, Peatery asked Dumbledore, “Everybody knows about Sirius and Alexandra. But the other two, are they also an 'item'?”

“There have been some speculations, but as far as we know, that isn't the case. She pays all of her attention to her study and he has only eyes for Quidditch.”

You could have said the same about the other two, Alexandra seems to be a Greek legend and Sirius is hooked to speed-brooming.”

“So that proves that even we, the staff don't know everything.”

“Indeed, even we...”

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Moments later, all of the four students had redressed and packed some things, the girls besides clothing also study materials.

“Ready to go?” Asked Dumbledore.

When they all nodded eagerly in anticipation, Albus suggested, “Perhaps the girls go first, then all of the 'luggage' and finally you, Sirius and James. Will you give your parents my warmest regards and will you congratulate Margaret on the occasion?”

One-by-one, the students and their luggage and all of the pies traveled through the fireplace-grid, to be welcomed by Dippet's granddaughter.

“Your arrival was a good excuse for Edward to go shopping. They will be back shortly I presume.”

Miranda looked at them, “Did you by chance take your festivity robes along? I think this would be a proper occasion for them.”

While Miranda moved all the cakes and pie's away, the girls hurried away.

“And you, Sirius, don't you have anything else, better than that?”

“Uh, not really.”

“In that case, come along, I think that with my wand I can take care that the content of Edwards wardrobe will fit you.”

Moments later Sirius was wearing a suit for the first time in his life. James had done that before as he even has his own suit, but his friend felt very dressed-up. That feeling vanished into

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thin air as soon as he saw his girlfriend again in her snow-white robe.

When Margaret and Edward returned, Edward stayed a bit behind. Margaret asked Miranda, “Have the girls arrived? I was glad Edward reminded me to go shopping, I was forgotten all about their coming this weekend! Unfortunately, the bakery was closed!”

“I don't think you have to worry about food, my friend. Why didn't you inform me before that it is your birthday? Yes, the girls are here, and they didn't come empty-handed.”

This was the agreed sign for the James and Lily to come forward, hand-in-hand, just like Sirius with Alexandra, while singing 'happy birthday to you..!’

As to be expected, Margaret was completely surprised and even winked a small tear away. She was deeply touched, just like Edward was, even though he knew all about it. But unlike everybody else, he knew what it meant for his wife to see her son and Lily hand-in-hand.

“Sorry but we had no time for presents. James only told about it yesterday. We only had enough time for making some pies....”

“You have absolutely no idea of the magnitude of the gift you just gave me.”

Edward asked, “Who had that bright idea?”

Next, the all pointed towards Alexandra.

When they all congratulated Margaret, Alexandra got a very firm hug. “Thank you, girl, it's the most precious gift in years!”

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Looking at Edward she said, “So that was the reason you invited me for shopping. You knew about it!”

And to James, “Edward and I were just thinking about just another quiet day. I hoped to be down south, but your father remained working here all week. I'm so glad to see the two of you, your friend and his girl.”

When James noticed the happy expression on his mothers' face, he thought it was because of their surprise visit. It didn't dawn on him, that his mother had something completely different on her mind.

As soon as Lily saw Miranda, she asked “I do hope that all about our study can wait until tomorrow? Before the test paper, I do have some specific questions.”

“Sure, but you can ask them now anyway..”

“No, they can wait til tomorrow.”

Normally Lily was rather direct in mentioning difficult subjects, but this time, she kept herself at the distance.

Rest of the day was spent in a way a birthday should be celebrated, with unconcernedly eating, drinking laughing and merrymaking.

However, next day the girls were back in business.

In one of Edwards study-room, Miranda said, “There was something bothering you yesterday, but delayed it till now. Why and what?”

Lily blushed, but confessed,”I thought you knew that I like James a lot, although most of the times he looks right through me. I already felt exquisite that he held my hand for so long. So excuse me for feeling embarrassed not talking about human reproduction, as that is our current chapter. I dare a lot, but that I

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could not get that subject over my lips at that moment.”

Miranda looked surprised for awhile, then, when remembering all embarrassing moments while she was much younger, she understood and laughed. “He's gone away with Edward now...” “OK then, do you know and can tell me why women ovulate? I know what it is and what happens, but almost all other mammals don't! Besides all the discomfort, from a biological point, of view it is such a waste of tissue and blood! There must be an evolutionary reason why humans do, and others don't.”

Miranda was dumbstruck. “Why indeed! It is such a part of my normal life, that the thought never struck my mind!”

Looking at Lily, she said, “Now I start to understand some of the remarks Dumbledore and your teacher made while discussing you. While teachers and other students focus on some simple details of any subject, you are already miles ahead. I know for sure that this is something not in any regular textbooks, or you would have found about it yourself. When I am back at Oxford, I'll put your question to some of my learned colleges. But don't expect an answer soon. My only comfort to you, that the test does not concern about that aspect.”

While Lily started her test-paper, Miranda stared at her. “Unbelievable. This fourteen-year-old professor in-a-nutshell pops up questions that no other professors have ever thought about. But on the other hand still, she is such a shy and uncertain little girl!”

And that was exactly what Alexandra said to her Greek professor, Margaret Potter. “She is such a shy and uncertain little girl!”

“What do you mean by that?”

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Alexandra thought awhile how to phrase the question.

“Do you remember that Lily and were investigating traveling-stones? They are some predecessor or portal-keys, but differently. I think we told you some about it when we were in Athens last summer, lovely time by the way.”

Margaret remembered it vividly, “That ghastly story about professor Binns?”

“We found out, that on an inhabited small island in the north there might be much that we could learn about it. But neither of us have the means or the possibility to go there and we are not even sure about it's location. Remembering you and your husband live most of the time here in the north, both adept sailors, you might know more about the place or even be willing to take us there. I think the site resembles much of the photo of Lily and me that James keeps above his bed.”

Meanwhile, she observed Margaret's face. A vast range of emotions passed over it.

With a faint smile, she said, “You are indeed a nice little wheeling-dealing intriguant, but also her best friend. You know more about the place?”

Grinning Alexandra said, “In Welch, it is called Calanais or Callanish. It one of the outer Hebrides islands. Hundreds of years ago a wizard with the name of Goleuddydd used to live there. Eideard made a copy of some of his findings. We heard that Nicolas Flamel has been there.”

Still smiling James' mother replied, “I never heard of the place, but Edward knows much more about that. He was born in this region and has sailed much more with some of his friends. I'll ask him when he's back. And Alexandra? You know you don't have to lure or persuade me. It was rather obvious.”

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Apologetically Alexandra replied, “So I need to practice much more negotiation tactics! Did James ever tell you about his feelings?”

“No, never! Coming to that, he is as deep and as silent as a Norwegian fjord.”

“Sirius told me he really wanted that photo, so she does mean something to him. But I never detected anything else. When I suggested yesterday to hold her hand, Lily was eagerly enough, and James didn't refuse or make any objection to 'doing silly'. I thought it was a nice try, modest encouragement.”

Margaret smiled happily at the memory. “For a tiny moment, I was daydreaming about more to come. Alas.”

“James' focus is now on something else, mostly Quidditch and his friends. He told me your husband didn't want to teach him the Animagus spell! That is what dreaming is about, I heard.”

With sadness in her eyes, Margaret said, “last night I had such a wonderful dream. So many children were playing around here. Grandchildren of you, Sirius, Lily and James...”

Immediately Alexandra looked outside, and tried to imagine the scene Margaret just had described, but failed to do so. All she saw was barren, deserted hills. Nonetheless, she replied, “That must have been a wonderful dream.” And with a naughty look in her eyes, she added, “I'm working on it! I mean finding a way to his heart.”

As a thankful gesture, Margaret put her hand on Alexandra's arm. “Thank you dear, but don't rush, you are all much too young. Seeing you all happy is more than enough for now.”

She followed Alexandra's look, and noticed Sirius walking about. “Hold your ears, dear!”

And with a thrill whistle and a waiving she got his attention.

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“Please come, we need to talk for a while, Sirius”

Alexandra asked, “You want me to leave?”

“Of course not, you silly”

When Sirius entered and took a seat, he looked surprised, not knowing what to expect.

“Sirius, you know that, like all parents, we hear a lot of what goes on on Hogwarts, some directly and official, but most of it unofficially. One news item struck us, Edward and I, rather hard and we immediately felt the need to do something. My husband and I wanted to offer you something, but you don't have to accept it if you feel obliged.

While she was talking, Sirius still looked totally bedazzled. He didn't have the faintest idea what Margaret was talking about.

Noticing that, Margaret explained, “I was talking about the howler you received at the beginning of the year. I presume nothing has changed in that respect?”

When Sirius entered the room, and seeing Alexandra, had given Sirius a comfortable, relaxed feeling. The reminder that he was kicked out of his home, and had no place to go abruptly ended that.

“No, at school they said I was welcome to stay there, and I could help Hagrid with tending the animals and helping to look after the Hufflepuff-garden during the summer...”

“If that is what you want, please do, but Edward and I would like you to know that we more than enough spare rooms around here. You know you are welcome here, but you should know that it is not just now, for just a weekend, but also the holidays, actually as long as you like. We all like your company, and if we can offer you a bit of 'substitute-home', it is yours.”

Never in his life had Sirius experienced so many mood-changes

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in such a short amount of time. A moment ago he was reminded of ugly bitterness, but right now he felt a had won unexpectedly the lottery.

He simply stood there, speechless but filled with gratefulness. Alexandra said it all, “That is wonderful, Sirius! Thank you, so much Margaret. It means I can visit you!”

At that very moment, Sirius realized that during the summer months, the entrance of the school was closed, and although he could stay there, it would have become a sort of prison, not being able to visit others, or receive friends.

“That is a marvelous generous offer, Margaret. Are you sure it is not inconvenient? What does James think about it?”

“Absolutely not. And James welcomes it for several reasons. There are not many chores to do here, during the summer, but Edward insists that James learns and practice to do some tasks without resorting to magic. When you are surrounded by Muggles for weeks, you still have to do shopping, cleaning, tending fireplaces. He would welcome some help. And he complained that is father is getting slower each year when playing on his own Quidditch field nearby. You can keep James sharp. So think about it, at least you an alternative now. You don't have to decide right now, but it might be handy for us to know before the summer holiday.”

But Sirius didn't need months to think it over, not even a day or a single second. He hugged Margaret, “Thank you, that means a lot to me.”

Looking at Alexandra, Margaret replied, “Your well-being and happiness is important to several people. I'll notify Hogwarts. As you will be staying longer, you better find a larger room, where you can leave things.”

Larger steps

That evening, while roasting pieces of meat on a small stove outside, the traveling became the general subject of discussion. “Why are you so interested in it? Nowadays even Muggles can travel everywhere they like with modern ships and airplanes?” “For several reasons. It is part of our magical heritage. Secondly, you travel free of charge, though that might not be relevant for some people. Thirdly you travel almost instantly: no checking in or out, no delays.”

Sirius asked, “But from your story, I remember there are quite some dangers involved?”

“Eideard was trying to decipher the working of one site. Accidents can happen. And he was still experimenting, got the wrong destination. And you thought no accidents happen when Muggles travel? The newspapers don't even bother mentioning it anymore. Ever heard of the Titanic, the Hindenburg?”

“I guess you are right.”

James wanted to know, “So what are you looking for? You managed to send and receive from Hogwarts' stone to Athens?” Lily looked at Alexandra and thought for awhile. “Alexandra found a tiny bit about controlling the Hogwarts' stone, but we are still clueless about destinations. Perhaps with multiple stones, in a ring, it is easier. But much more important how can we be sure if it is safe? We discovered that the Hogwarts' stone was buried under a land slight, and we think that Alexandria's stone is submerged. Others might be used for buildings or cracked. The city of Cartage is completely gone, no single simple stone left, so the traveling stone will be gone too.”

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Alexandra asked, “Any bright idea's then, James?”

“Just something vague, let me sleep on it!”

But then next morning he said nothing more than “I have some idea's for some experiments.”

Which triggered his mother to say, “be careful son!”, but his father said, “be resourceful, James. Lots to win, irreplaceable things, like lives, to loose. Start small!”

James started to smile wide, “Thanks for the hint dad!”

Because of boys presence, they returned a bit earlier than on regular study-weekend. Unfortunately, they were not allowed to travel back the way they came. Via the fireplace, they went to 'The Hogs Head Inn', and had to walk back to Hogwarts castle. After knocking on the door, they had to wait quite a while before Finch finally opened it. As usual, he looked mean and distrusting and wanted to call the heads straight away, but after examining all the permits he had no excuse anymore for doing so.

“Please James, can you give away any of your thoughts?” the girls begged.

“No, not yet. I first have to see if I can get all necessary parts to make it safe. Meanwhile, can you do something? How many possible destinations are there? Can you organize a piece of parchment for each of them, and write its name or description onto it! And some empty sheets as well. Shall we meet at the stone after lunch? I'll try to prepare something, so if you can bring some sandwiches for me, it would be very much appreciated.”

Around one o'clock Lily, Alexandra and Sirius grabbed their broomstick and flew the Binns' memorial-site. There they

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found James waiting for them. Near the travel stone, they saw a rather large basket.

“What in Merlin's beard did you bring with you?” they asked.

“A couple of things, to probe.” he replied without really answering the question.

“You brought some food?”

“Sure, help yourself before Sirius takes care of it,” Alexandra replied.

Doing so, James started to explain,

“I thought, correct me if I'm mistaken, there are several things to do. One of the major things is finding out how to select the other point, either going to, or coming from. Although from what you said, with people you can only send, while for objects on altars you can send but also gather?”

“No, not exactly. There isn't much difference between an apple, a dog or a human. The main mistake I constantly make while reading, is distinguishing the one who is operating the stone, and the one traveling. As ordinary object can not think for themselves, the sending or gathering of objects seems different and easier, but they remain the same.”

“If you say so, that's beyond me. The think I spent some thoughts on, was security. One aspect is finding out if the object or person can travel safely, whatever the destination. But there is something else. These travel-stones were placed and operated a long, long, time ago, before the decision was made that everything related to magic should be kept hidden. Stone-Henge and that place we saw in Athens, were in the wide open, or in the center of the city. Whatever you do, I think our ministry will not be pleased if lots of people start to pop-out from nowhere at the Henge among Muggle tourists.”

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Lily looked saddened, “That idea never reached my thoughts, you are absolutely right about that. What do you propose?”

“Like my dad said, keep it simple, small steps. Did you draw up a list of possible destinations?”

“Yes, but most of them have no names, it is just vague.”

“I think that doesn't matter. The names that people give to places changes, but the place itself not.”

He reached behind his back, and showed a rock and a large sheet of paper.

“What is that?”

James explained, “It was difficult to find paper, as they still use parchment for almost everything here. What I would like you to do, is trying to send this sheet with the stone on it away, and gather it back again, for all your destinations. Can you do that? Did you bring something to write with? I want to make notes for every destination, whatever that may be.”

“What does that prove? Remember the accident!”

“Yes I do. Sending the stone only proves that the destination still exists and works. And even when there are Muggles around, that should not draw much attention.”

“True, but the paper, why do you need that?”

“I was thinking about the Icelandic volcano's If it got near to one of them, it will burn. If it becomes wet, the stone is probably under water.”

“And next?”

“A bowl of water, and some eggs.”

“To detect buried or toppled stones?”

“Exactly! Only if that works, I would suggest the next step.”

With these words, he picked up a cage with some mice in it.

“I borrowed that from one of the classes.”

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“Clever thinking!”

“Thank you, how about trying out. Anything else we can do?” Sirius inquired.

“No, Alexandra is the only one with the memories of the destinations. The only one, we all have seen, are the rings in Athens and the submerged one. Besides that, you can make notes”

Then James got another bright idea, “Next time we should bring with us one of those photo cameras. Did you know that you can configure those to make a photo after several seconds? That is normally used so that the photographer can be in the picture, but in this case, we can make a photo without going there. First that proves it traveled somewhere else, and secondly, we can perhaps use that picture so other people can control the portal-stone.”

“Well thought off!”

The next time they were eagerly experimenting.

Some destinations didn't work at all. With one of them, they thought to be Cartage, it was an expected result. Exactly like James thought it would happen, the sheet of paper from Alexandria returned wet. Unfortunately, the same happened when it was sent to the cold and lonely island, she had hoped to be Calanais.

“How can that be? Flamel told us he had been there!”

After a moment of thinking, Sirius held the sheet to his tongue.

“The sheet is wet, but not salt. So it must be raining out there.”

But they had several surprises. When they gathered the stone on the sheet of paper back, somebodies wallet came along.

“Nice souvenir, but we better return it. The poor bloke is probably now looking for it.” and so they did.

And they also gathered some unknown leaves and lots of flow-

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ers from one site, and from another a strange colorful bird came along, however, the very moment it arrived at Hogwarts' stone, as they know named it, the bird flew away before they could catch it.

Lily said “Poor bird! It lost its habitat. I hope it can find something to eat here.”

But James was excited. “Do you realize what that means, what it proves. No? It means that you can safely transfer something living through it!”

Sirius said nothing. While making notes he kept a steady eye in Alexandra. After the bird flown away, he said, “I think we should show that leave to madam Sprout. She might know what kind of plant that leaves belongs to, and where it grows. And call it a day.”

Silently he nodded towards Alexandra, she looked exhausted.

Unaware of the effort it had taken, she said, “But we could..”

Immediately Lily interrupted, “Indeed, we could do with a nice cup of tea. Let's get back!”

“You go ahead, Sirius and I will clean up” James offered.

While enjoying some of the sunlight, the two girls flew slowly back to the castle.

Before going to the common-room, they made a detour to the greenhouses, where they found the herbology professor and madam Pomfrey, collecting some medicinal herbs.

When they showed the leaves and flowers to professor Sprout, she looked sharp at them.

“Where did you get those from?”

“They are not from your greenhouse, professor. But do you recognize them?”

The professor looked again, longer and closer.

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“Yes, I do. They don't grow here in Scotland, nor somewhere in Europe, not even in greenhouses. I've tried that often enough. They are used in traditional sacrifices far, far away from here. They only grow well on a tropical island. Five years ago I went to Java to visit the Borobudur. There I've seen many of them. But these are freshly cut! How did...”

But before she could finish her question Alexandra collapsed.

“I don't know what you have been doing, but look how pale she is, how weak! Either she feasts too much, or she works too hard. Does she get enough sleep? Let me get her to my ward,” madam Pomfrey said.

“Can't you do something with your wand, some spell or so?”

“No! Spells will only harm her now she is so weak. At the ward, I have some specially brewed potions for cases like this.” With her wand, she let Alexandra's body hover, and walked resolutely towards her hospital ward.

Later that evening, they visited Alexandra, still asleep.

Pomfrey explained, “Mostly a lack of sleep, perhaps she missed a meal and a slight touch of the flu. Don't wake her up or stay too long!”

But at ten, Sirius refused stubbornly to leave.

“If not for her, but think about yourself, if you are not careful, you be in the next bed!”

And that was exactly the unwisest thing she could have said.

The next second Sirius moved a nightstand to the other side of the bed. And a second later Sirius got in the next bed, next to Alexandra's, holding her hand.

“Serious heart-trouble!” he explained.

Pomfrey had already summoned professor McGonagall, but when it was all explained to her, she tried hard to suppress a

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smile. “Just this night, if you promises us to let her sleep.”

Tasty Detention

With the scholastic year progressing rapidly, the students were confronted with more thorough testing. One of the was the making of potions. A many heard complaint was that with normal potion-tests, the results were delivered to the teacher, who examined the results. Now, if the results appeared right, they were allowed to taste it themselves.

“Students, for the next test you are asked the produce what we have studied for the last couple of weeks, LHP1 till LHP12 (Liquified Happiness Potion Number one...twelve). Today I will not accept any mocking around. Anyone, and I mean ANY-one who fools around got detention for the rest of the day, here with me. It is still early and you have all morning available, though if well prepared, you can manage in much less time. Rest of the day you can use for studying. Those who are able to produce something at least 'Acceptable', are allowed to taste it, and experience the expected 'Happy' feeling for exact five seconds, as that is how long this potion works. Now, off you go, and no fooling around, you all got warned twice!”

Like all other students, Lily and Alexandra went with their own notes to the supply desk. They offered their list of, what they thought, the list of required ingredients, and got exactly the amount they required.

Just like they had learned previously, they followed the elaborated instruction from notes. It wasn't just the sheer list of strange ingredients, but they had to make three basic potions,

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and finally add them together. Each of them required a strict order of adding, use of their wand, stirring in the right direction, and an exact amount of seconds waiting interval between them. After 90 minutes preparation, the girls added the three parts together, but nothing happened. The mud-like troubled liquid remained murky and stinking.

“I thought we made no mistakes. Last week we practice on all the different parts, they went as expected. Over again!”

One hour later they were about to do the same final part.

On the desk behind them, they witnessed they expected result with two other Slytherin students: Sylvia and Severus. The liquid in one test-tube became opaque green, the other transparent but pinkish. Their own test-tubes remain muddy and stinking.

Severus hailed professor Peatery, after a quick glance he said to Sylvia and Severus, “OK, seems acceptable, you can taste it, but just a little bit, the amount makes no difference on the working and I need the rest for the final examination.”

Both took a small sip and for a moment they looked trouble-free. Sylvia sneered to them, “When I compared our results to yours, I don't need a sip, I'm already happy!”

When the professor looked at Lily's and Alexandra's test tubes, he concluded, “Disgusting! I absolutely expected something else from you two, definitely TROL! Detention, I warned you all in advance!”

Lily didn't know what was worse, the failing of an important test, the humiliation before the other students or the detention.

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When all the others had left, Peatery said not unfriendly, “With some of the students I knew they were not up to this test, but you two really disappoint me. Let me see your notes.”

He examined them, and after some minutes he concluded, “yes, they are correct, you even added some of the points of attention that I gave last week. This should work, let me see how you did it. Give it another try.”

But after another hour, they got the same results.

“Impossible!” He said, “I saw no mistake! Let me show how to do it..”

Much to his own surprise and that of the girls, even the professor came to the same bubbling, stinking dark cloudy substance.

“This can't be true. I know my own recipes by heart! This has to be analyzed, I'll have to take up my old profession.”

He looked at the girls, “If you are fed up, you can leave, but if you are curious you may stay, but it may take a while..”

Lily exclaimed “Whatever! I want to know what I did wrong!”

But Alexandra asked, “What was your old profession, professor?”

“Long, long ago I use to be an Auror, analyzing and examining strange phenomena and potions.”

First, he compared the previous results. “Your first attempt was a bit thinner, but except for that, they are identical to the one I made! I have to take a closer look.”

Some time later he remarked, “That shouldn't be in here!”

“How about a new set of ingredients?”

“Let me see the lists you have been using!”

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Alexandra handed it over, and Peatery looked through it.

“You have LHP3: A bit too much of everything, but they are all there, no nothing else. Nothing wrong with that”

After they fetched fresh ingredients both the professor and the girls tried again. Exactly one hour later both had a transparent, slightly colored liquid in front of them.

“In our earlier attempts, I found fermented rat-tail, instead of dried, pulverized butterfly wings. But that wasn't on your ingredient lists, and let me check, hm hm, No, it wasn't dispatched to you either. It looks like someone has been trolling the two of you! Let me check.”

After searching through his own notes, he said, “fermented rat-tail is required in only one potion, LHP-11! Let me see which students had that recipe!”

A bit later he stated, “Snape and McCunningham.”

Lily confirmed, “they were sitting behind us!”

Peatery admitted, “Sorry girls, I have accused you wrongly. By now, I've witnessed that you master the theory and practice, so I'll give you both an 'outstanding'.”

“I'm glad it is sorted out. And informative to see you analyzing our previous results.”

Peatrey looked at Lily, “Something has been bothering me. The very first time I gave the subject of 'potions' to you, at the first year, you were so enthusiastic, but since then both with potions but also with chemistry you seems to be holding back. How come? Anything wrong with the lessons? Something we can improve?”

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Lily thought for a while, “Ah the first lesson with Slytherin! But then we were cooking! We made an apple-pie.”

“Yes, that's correct, it is more or less the same: strictly following recipes!”

“No, not exactly, when cooking or baking, you can try and taste constantly. I wouldn't dare to do it here!”

And Alexandra added, “You told us, you use to be an Auror. That's quite an admirable job, so why did you give up?”

“It certainly is a good job, but you spent all of your time in our world, the magical one. Mostly it is fun and the living is easy. Then one day I remembered the world was much broader, so looked further teaching and I remembered my parent's passion for cooking.”

Lily understood, “Ah, hence the cooking session!”

Peatery grinned, “Yes, indeed. And I'm thinking moving more in that direction. By the way, how about tea and pie? A good excuse for combining cooking and magic.”

“Oh, yes please, very nice, what are you going to bake?”

“I was thinking about a cream-cheese cake, either strawberries or pineapple, depending on what is available.”

“Isn't that very fattening?”

“You two can have it, but you don't have to worry, there is one part the magic comes handy.”

“That will be rather technical, how is your theoretical knowledge of chemistry?”

“You can try us...”

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“Did you already got to the subject of stereo-isomerism?”

“No, not officially, but I did some reading ahead some chapters about isomers. It is about different materials, but both having identical molecular structure, but with different behavior. Or so!”

“Yes, you got the essence of it. For instance milk and butter contain lactic-acid. If you shine polarized light through it, its angle changes a bit. Now this component has a counterpart that changes the light the other direction. Substances made of it look the same, smell the same, taste the same, but your body does not recognize it, so it won't absorb it, so you won't gain weight, no worries or extra exercises. What I do with my wand, is changing all ingredients to their inactive mirroring part. Ingenious, not?”

With a wave of his wand, he pulverized biscuits, melted modified butter, mixed them and made a pie-foundation of it. With another wave, he mixed the cream, cheese and sugar (all modified), put it on the foundation, and cooled it stiff with his wand.

“Now comes the fun part I like most!”

On one workbench a pineapple was sliced, and on several places, dozens of knives started to cut the pineapple into tiny parts, that ended all on top of the waiting pie.

“Almost done..”

In a bowl, a syrup was heated up, and when it started to thicken, the bowl magically went to the pie, making a nice jelly-like topping. Finally, Peatery cooled it down with a cooling spell.

“Ah! Tea is ready!”

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While enjoying another piece, Peatery continued,

“I got this recipe from my new girlfriend. I'm thinking about leaving here and moving to mainland Europe, perhaps end of next season.”

“That is quite something to do, but why there?”

“My new friend is Dutch, but their kitchen is horrible, and for being able to speak their language you have to pass NEWT-exams at an outstanding level, that difficult. The french kitchen has a well-known reputation, but their nouveau-cuisine is nouveau-horrible. The Belgium's kept their feet on the ground. Belgium is the Valhalla for cooking, rich tradition and respect for all ingredient. And in between France, Netherlands, England, and Germany.”

Both girls got the same thought, “I know some boys that have some experience with Belgium beer...”

When finishing her piece of cake, Lily concluded, “This feels better than swallowing a barrel full of LHP3.”

Alexandra added, “It has no side-effects, and the good feeling lasts much longer!”

Even further

On a warm June morning, they were glad to go to the dungeons for potions, after two hours of transfiguration. But as not all students had paid enough time for studying and preparation, some of the potions that a couple of students produced were stinking beyond any possible descent description. The foul air was so deep in their noses and memories, that most had serious trouble having their lunch.

Lily looked enviously at Alexandra.

“Lucky you! Beautiful weather and next couple of hours off!”

“Sorry, but true! No Classical languages or divination for me anymore. I've had more than my share.”

“What will you be doing?”

“James wanted my help exercising some history and potions I believe. You don't mind?”

“I'm taking Sirius to divination, would you mind that?”

“Of course not!”

“See you later.”

“Yeah, test-papers, so much later.”

Just a bit later, James returned from lunch to the common-room.

“Are you ready, James?” Alexandra asked.

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“For wasting a good afternoon, I fear so, yes! You said we would go, testing some stones afterward. When will the others return? I mean, will Lily and Sirius join us at the stones?”

“No, I don't think so. Probably too late, they have to write test-papers instead of normal lessons.”

Alexandra thought for a while. “Do you think the others would object if we did some testing? The previous time, you had some good suggestions... You have to balance, history against fresh air. Though you will have to take and make notes.”

Instead of answering, James closed his books straight away, and with a broad smile he said: “I'll fetch the basket again.”

When they flew to the stone, they felt slightly guilty, then in the open, while others in a dull classroom. But when they arrived they only concentrated on the possible adventures that lay ahead of them. With a “Ta-da!”, James showed a photo camera.

“You know how these things work?” Alexandra asked.

“Sort off, most of them are likewise. The only thing important for us, is to find out how to let them work by themselves after a delay. But I have to return it, so we have to be certain you can get it back after sending it away. Shall we do a tour of all destinations with the bowl of eggs?”

“Very well. How much time would you need for making a photo? We can use the same delay for the eggs.”

“I think some, like five minutes, should be long enough.”

The previous time they noted down which destinations didn't work at all, which were submerged or returned squashed eggs. So, this time, they concentrated on the others.

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First, they did a tour with the bowl of fresh eggs, sending them away, waited several minutes and trying to get them back. Nothing spectacular happened, though James observed that in some cases they eggs returned slightly warmer than in other cases.

Secondly, they did exactly the same with the camera.

“When can we see the result?”

“I'll ask Gwendolyn, who owns this camera, if she will help me developing them. So I'll guess, tomorrow or so, if she has enough paper to print them on.” James said.

“I'm so excited to see them!” Alexandra wondered.

“So am I, but it could very well be that we only see a neighboring stone and nothing more!”

“That is so, but in those cases, we should try again, and turn the camera in several positions! We could that right now.”

“Let's wait with that, if you are not tired, I would like to do something else, the cage with the mice.”

“No I'm fine, I'll let you know when it is a good time to pause or halt altogether. Experimenting with live animals makes be a bit nervous though.”

Alexandra performed an identical exercise, for each considered safe destination, she sent the mice away, and retrieved them some time later. This time, James carefully examined the small animals each time.

When they were done, Alexandra repeated, “Are you sure they are well? I wouldn't want to harm these poor little creatures!”

James wanted to say something, but stopped before even starting and thought for a while.

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“Alexandra, doing this blindfolded, is that possible, would that be easier, not seeing the cage?”

“I don't know, perhaps that might be less discomforting.”

“OK, let's try. You name the destination out loud, when I place the cage I'll say 'READY', if everything works as it did previously I'll say 'GONE', you do your thing again, and I'll respond with 'BACK', I'll examine, make my notes, and then the next destination.”

“Sounds flawless to me!”

After Alexandra put a simple shawl before her eyes, they started, and a minute later one could have heard a strange duet:

“Stone-Henge”, “Ready...Gone...Back”

“Athens”, “Ready...Gone...Back”

“Crete”, “Ready...Gone...Back”

“Java”, “Ready...Gone...Back”

“Calanais”, “Ready...”

Alexandra waited patiently for James to say “Gone”, but it remained silently.

“James?” But she could only hear the air.

When she removed her shawl, James was nowhere to be seen. Instead of him, she found a small note, attached to the cage in front of her.

“Dear Alexandra,

I knew you dislike using animals for testing, and so do I, but sometimes it is needed before you can proceed to the next step. I knew you would be afraid to do this, so without telling you, I

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swapped places with the mice. You have done this countless times before with the mice, so you have my full confidence. If however something goes, and you cannot get me back, it is my fault only.
James.”

For a moment she exploded with panic.

“What if I can not get him back? Lily will never forgive me, never. I shouldn't have been doing this. He tricked me!”

She returned to the stone, and tried to get James back, but nothing appeared. James was gone!

“Lily will never forgive me, never. I shouldn't have been doing this.”

Her heart was beating like a steam-engine and she had tears in her eyes. Again, she had to try it again! No matter how many times. In her memory, she heard Binns telling his sad story over and over again, “Lachlan, oh my dearest Lachlan...”

She turned the ring again and when she looked up again, James stood there, with a huge bunch of poppies.

“You stupid fool! Don't you ever do that to me again. Do you know what could have happened! “

She pounded with her fists on James' chest and started to cry.

“I really thought I had lost you! The idea of having to tell *that* to Lily and your parents. You reckless idiot! Dis you ever think of someone else's feelings?”

Slightly surprised about Alexandra's emotions, and relieved to be back, he kept quiet for a moment.

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“Like I wrote in my note, we had to make this step once, if I would have told you, you would have objected, or hesitated, feeling the pressure. Now you know for sure that you can do it.”

Offering her the bunch of poppies, “I saw them growing nearby, hence I dared to walk away from the other stone for a moment, in order to pick them. I have been thinking about this for a long time, but I admit, when I noticed to tried to return me while I was picking those flowers, I lost a heartbeat or two, simply hoping you would try again a couple of times. Can you forgive me?”

Alexandra looked at James, and she knew he was right. A person traveling by a portal-stone was a next step, and something she had feared most about.

“Perhaps, if you confess your reckless stupidity immediately to Lily, and give these flowers to her. You Idiot! I'm still trembling! Let's pack and get back.”

When they returned to the castle, James first returned the camera, telling it contained important schoolwork pictures, next they headed for the Gryffindor's common-room, where they waited for Lily and Sirius.

Seeing that Alexandra had been crying and the bunch of flowers, they had absolutely no idea what to think about it. Horrible thoughts crept up.

“What did he do. Did he... hurt you?”

But Alexandra replied “He certainly did hurt my feelings, that reckless idiot of yours. He scared me absolutely stiff my wandering off picking some wild flowers for you.”

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Looking at the poppies, she asked, “These grow everywhere around the Quidditch practice field, that's not so nerve-wracking?”

With a sheepish laugh, knowing he shouldn't have done it, but got away with it, he confessed, “I picked them a bit further away, while I was at Calanais. Nice island, though, a bit windy though.”

“What! Do you mean... You did what?”

Lily's eyes nearly popped out of her head.

“Well, we had to do it once, and we did test previously countless time if it was safe to do, so, eh, yes! I did travel through the stones.”

Lily's first reaction was one of anger,

“Did you ever thought what could have happened? Did you forget about Binn's girl? “

But James calmed her down, “Don't blame her, she didn't know what I was doing, I tricked her.” and showed the piece of parchment he had left for Alexandra.

“I am sorry Lily. Can you imagine how I felt when I initially failed to get James back, just because he wandered off for picking flowers? I thought I died on the spot. The thought of having to tell you and James parents...” Here she stopped and started to cry again.

After Sirius comforted her, he asked James, “And can you tell us something about it. How does it feel.”

James sighed, “now it is done and successfully, I dare admit that, even though I trust Alexandra completely, it was one of the scariest things I've ever done. I had absolutely no idea what

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to expect. But the transferred mice were OK, so I took the plunge. I swapped places with the caged mice and waited. How does it feel? Let me say that I wouldn't advise anyone of heaving a rich meal before doing this. The feeling is in between the gate at platform 9¾, when traveling with the Hogwarts Express to London, and on the other side traveling by portal-key.

At the platform, you step in and step out, but this takes much longer. Like a slow elevator, made of glass, but nothing to look at, it was just dark.

But it is not as bad as traveling with a portal-key. Did anyone of ever do that? I did once, with my father.” He massaged his naval, by the memory of that unpleasant voyage. “I think if the object you use to travel with, remains at its place, there is no need to hurry or so. It feels easier.”

A softly “a-hum” made them turn around.

“I hope I am not intruding something?”

It was Gwendolyn, who owned the camera.

“You said it was important, so I looked straight away. Some are very dark, but I thought you would like to see them anyway. I didn't know if the sequence is important, so I numbered them, in the way I found them.”

The first photo the girls recognized immediately, it was the same spot Lily and Alexandra had visited some time ago with Lily's father. Stone-Henge.

All of them remembered the scene the second photo showed, it was the humming stone they saw in Athens.

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It seemed that the third one came from the same place, but they assured that of each place they made just a single photo.

Alexandra looked at her notes, “Crete” she said.

The next photo showed just a grim other stone. “Next time we have to turn the camera around, and make more photo's.”

When they looked at the fifth one, they only saw many trees and in the distant an unfamiliar building.

“Nice photo, but it could be anywhere!”

But Gwendolyn disagreed, I'm not sure, although I think I've seen a picture like this before. That long straight lane between those dark trees. It gave me a creepy feeling, that's what I mostly remembered.”

They now all looked at it.

It was Sirius who broke the silence. “I know where that is. My parents threatened to send me there if I misbehaved. It is one of the other schools for wizards and witches, The Durmstrang Institute.”

The next couple of photos were so dark, that they were discarded “Failed”. The next ones were blurred, because of raindrops on the camera's lens. “Perhaps re-doing the next time with some sort of shelter, a tiny roof or so. We just see a green blur.”

“Wait a minute!” Gwendolyn said, looking at previous photos. “These ones did not fail! There is some other reason why the are so dark. You see that tiny bright spot? That is the moon, this photo has been taken at night!”

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With a strange look, Gwendolyn observed the others.

“Now wait a minute! That is not possible! These photos were taken all this afternoon. There can be no night-shot in between them...”

“I am sorry, but it is school-business, and we are not allowed to talk about it before it is finished. If others find out about it, it will cost us house-cup-points. So please keep it to yourself.”

“What? You mean you did some sort of time-traveling? Wow!”

“Well not exactly, but likewise. Not as stunning as you might think.”

“OK then, fine by me. I've heard there are several so-called 'secret-studies' done on Hogwarts, I presume this is just another one. You know where to find me if you want to borrow it again. It might be handy if you let me know a little bit longer in advance, because others might borrow it too.”

With these words Gwendolyn left, leaving the other students with lots to think about.

Years end

“Alexandra, we should prepare us for packing again!”

“I know. And also that I should be getting more organized, less sloppy.”

“Why, how come?”

“For some time I was missing my favorite bra, the one that fits best and now I found it among my socks. Strange! But I'm glad I got it back.”

“Eh, Alexandra, that one was was fitting best?”

“Yes, why?”

“In that case, I have a present for you. To get you through the summer. But I hope you are not offended...” And with these words Lily gave a small package to her friend. All wrapped up in nice colored paper.

“But what is the occasion? It's not my birthday or so! And I don't have anything for you!”

“As I said, it is for getting you through the next holiday. And don't worry about a return gift, I am absolutely sure that the look on your face will be priceless. That will be more than enough reward for me, I'll promise you.”

Curious but silently, she removed the gift wrap. Inside she found a small cardboard box, about the size of her hands.

“What is it?”

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“I'm not giving away anything. I was just my idea, but James' mother helped me realizing it. I only hope that it fits, as you said, that is important with clothes.”

When Alexandra opened the box she first looked puzzled, next blushed and finally started to laugh.

In the box, she found a new bra. But not just dull-coloured white, black or red. The cups had a printing on them, each of them the print of a hand, Sirius' hands! And the straps just looked like a pair of arms.

Grinning Lily advised, “If either one of the girls here at Hogwarts see you wearing this, jealousy might cause you some serious trouble... And if the original owner of those hands see this, either like this or while you wear it, don't hold me responsible for his reaction!”

“You devious, twisted mind friend! How did you ever came up with this idea?”

“Some months ago you were telling about your early-morning activities, and that you would probably miss Sirius while on holiday. It kept me awake all night. I had a vague idea, so I talked it over with Margaret. I can tell you, they were really cracking up. All day not a single word about studying, test-papers or lab-exercises. They asked me to make a photo of each Sirius' hand and arms, which was rather difficult, as he remained asking me why I needed them, so I made up that I needed it for my study. Next, I gave the photo-hands with one of your bra's to Miranda and Margaret, and they transformed it all together.”

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“I am not even sure whether I dare wearing it. Just imagine that I meet Sirius, while wearing this. Even though no-one can see it under my Hogwarts-robe, the idea of his hands...”

“That is why it is intended for your holiday. Here it would hinder you trying to concentrate on the class. And I'll write Margaret that your expression was priceless.”

“We now better start packing, they hate it when you are late for Dibbet's speech and dinner-time. Oh, and Lily? Thank you. If you swear you don't say a word, I'll try it on right now!”

Later that evening, all staff and students were gathered in the main hall. Dishes, bowl, cups and glasses on the tables, but still empty. Throughout the year, both girls were sitting next to each other, but this evening Alexandra asked Sirius to sit next to her and Lily at the opposite side of the table.

Although Lily had promised not to say a word about her new bra, she constantly made vague remarks about hands and that Sirius was so supporting, which caused Alexandra constantly to laugh and to blush.

Finally, Dibbet started to speak.

“Dear students and staff.

Another year over and done. Slightly older and accordingly to the results of the test-papers also slightly wiser. I am glad to announce that all the students in the first four years graduated to the next year. All but one fifth-year student have made it through their OWL examination. The single exception, Hufflepuf's Bennowitz was that ill, that he could not even remember his own name, let alone whatever we tried to examine him here for. He is allowed to do his examination at the start of next

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year. Everybody in the sixth year has successfully completed their Muggle exams, although for some it really was a close shave, regardless of the fact that the student involved is a girl. As they all decided to attend our seventh year, much to our delight I might say, the students will receive their Muggle diploma at the end of next year. Regrettably, for us, we have to say goodbye to the students in their seventh and final year. All have faced the NEWT-exams at various levels. Yesterday we had a nice party with all of those who are leaving, along with their parents.

All here gathered here are always considering the most boring and dreaded part, so let me spice it a bit up. Among all the students here, there is one, and I'm not disclosing who it is, nor the involved house, nor the students' year, that manages to achieve a NEWT 'outstanding' without even having followed one single lesson for that subject. The student involved don't want to be named, and the only thing I'm going to disclose, is that Hufflepuff was probably not involved. So happy guessing, and I won't confirm or deny any suggestions about the identity.”

Immediately many whisperings started at all tables...

“That got to be someone from Ravenclaw, those smart-asses, doing Muggle-ology by some mud-blood.” a Slytherin student said.

Dibbet continued, “Let it be clear, that this is no invitation to skip lessons. It was the first time in the recorded history of Hogwarts, and I don't expect it to happen ever again. While on the subject of achieved results I have to say this.

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Besides that, The Quidditch cup is won this year by Slytherin, although that became unavoidable clear during this year season. Let this be an encouragement for the other houses.

I don't want to raise hope and expectations too much, but last month I received several owls from the other schools. They also have their own Quidditch championship. It seems that they are thinking about inviting the school champions. More about that will be clear after the holiday, I presume.

On the other hand, we all still remember that none other than our own young Mr. Sirius Black, Gryffindor won the broomstick contest at the beginning of the year. I think it is fair enough to say that he made a devastating impact on most of us, and a lasting impression for one student in particular.”

Again Alexandra suspected that someone was trying to transfigure her into a lighthouse.

“Then it is time to award and subtract the final points.

Blacks' results earn Gryffindor an extra fifty points, well done, well done indeed.

Some combined effort of some Slytherin students, tending mythical animals, sometimes during the small hours, ten points.

Ravenclaw and Gryffindor produced again startling results in their off-time classes, both of them hundred points. This high number is based on the fact that their effort seems to have a huge impact of the view on our ministry on our school. I hope I can tell you more about this after the summer.

Again one of our Gryffindor students has proven she is invaluable to our staff and our school, Binns nominated her twenty points.

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So according to our highly esteemed professors Arithmancy and Divination, this means that the house-cup this year is won by Ravenclaw. Hip, hip, Hurray!

This means that I have only a few words left: let the feast begin and I hope to see you all in good health next September!”

With the usual wave of his wand, the results of the hard working house-elves became available.

As heavy rain battered the windows, Lily decided that this year she would remain with the banquet and not take their brooms for a spin. Many discussions involved upcoming holiday. Petty-grew asked: “Does anyone have any plans yet?” Alexandra looked at Lily. “No, each year it has been a complete surprise for me.”

The feasting took all evening, but even that came to an end.

Sirius yawned “Does anybody have any clue at what time the Hogwarts Express leaves? I feel I could sleep for at least an entire week. But the idea to miss it and to be stuck entire summer can keep me awake all night!”

James scratched his head, “Ten o'clock, so you have plenty time for an extended breakfast!”

From the look on Sirius' face, it became clear that he was very much intended to skip breakfast.

Next morning all students gathered in the main hall, while waiting for their luggage to be transported to the train. After some minutes they got permission to leave. One-by-one the coaches, pulled by Thestrals, arrived. As the coaches were open, all of them were glad the rain showers of yesterday were

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replaced by a clear blue sky. Beside her handbag, Lily carried the travelling basket with Duncan. Like all previous years, Alexandra's bird remained at school, in the care of Hagrid. During the short trip, they looked over their shoulders until the view of the magnificent castle was blocked by the dense forest. “Gone!” Lily said. “Do you still remember, us arriving here for the first time?”

“Yes. Just three years ago, but what a difference...”

They sat silently, lost in thoughts, until the coach stopped.

“Let's try to find the GRYF3-spot, I hope all my luggage is there.” But her worries were unfounded, it proved a bit more difficult to find an empty cabin. The four Marauder-boys, the two girls, and all their luggage made it rather crowded, but when two of the boys left at the first stop, those who remained on the train were not happy with the extra space. The next stop Peter and Remus also left, so the girls remained alone. The only one welcomed the extra space was Lily's cat Duncan.

“Don't worry, Alexandra, you'll see him soon enough. And you still have him near enough, whenever you want.”

Alexandra smiled thankfully, but her voice trembled a bit.

“Thank you, Lily, I never realized that parting, even for just a couple of weeks, could be so difficult.”

=== END year three ===

Sneak preview part of chapter: Revived memories

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Now both girls were totally convinced about Mikey's painting qualifications, they were elaboration on what to do next.

“Do you still want to go ahead with the original idea?” Alexandra asked.

Lily thought for a while.

“Yes, It seems that the stones operate on the image in your head, or with the older central-stones a combination of thought and position of directional-stones. You have captured some of those images by picking up stored memories. I think it is important to store and share those images.”

“You are right, let's do so. Shall we ask Mikey?”

“Straight away!”

After a long stroll up to the Ravenclaw tower, where Mikey's studio was located, they knocked at his door.

“It's us Mikey, Alexandra and Lily.”

When he let them in, they noticed that one of the paintings was gone. Lachlan had moved to the corridor on the second floor.

For a moment Lily found herself between two Alexandra's, one in flesh-and-blood, and another one, almost alive.

“Please Mikey, can you do me a favor?”

“Certainly!”

“Can you cover the other painting? It is so much alive, I almost started talking at it.”

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With a grin and a wave of his wand, one Alexandra was gone.

“Well ladies, what can I do for you? Portrait of someone else?”

Lily shook her head, “No. No persons. Landscapes. We need to transfer as good as possible the memories of some landscapes. I know that eyes are you specialty, but what can you do for us in this respect. Any magic you can apply to them?”

At first Mikey looked slightly disappointed, as he rather painted persons, but when she mentioned 'magic' he started to think.

“Those places, have you been there your selves?”

“One place we have been both, but all of the others, no. It is much more like the impressions of our professor history. She has memories if stored impressions.”

“How can you verify whether I painted them correctly?” he asked.

“If so, I will also be able to go there. Although we think that some of these places no longer exists anymore.”

“I might add something, but I have to dig up a book about it. Can you tell me something about some of the places?”

Alexandra nodded, “Some at least. One is located in Athens near the Parthenon, another we think is on Crete, at Knossos. We have seen three others. One is on a small island at the Hebrides, and the fourth is submerged in the Mediterranean. The fifth one, you might have visited yourself, Stone-Henge.

The sixth one is in Norway, near the Durmstrang institute, at least, that is what we think. And most of the other places, we have absolutely no idea whatsoever where they might be located.

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“So, in that case, it seems to me as a good starting point to use one of the locations you've been before, not? But be careful that you do not mix the original impression with your own memory.”

Lily commented, “Very good point, Mikey! So what destination are we going to do?”

Alexandra looked at her. “You'll have to be the judge, so just wait and see.”

Turning to Mikey, “Ready for another experiment?”

“Ready when you are, fair lady!”

Alexandra walked to the back of the chair, Mikey sat down on, placed her fingers on his eyes and head, and concentrated deeply.

Finally Alexandra said, “That's about it. Perhaps I should visit the original place, for refreshing my own memories. Can you start one the first one?”

Mikey sat still for some time.

“That is a weird feeling indeed. But yes, I think I can do something with it. No promises though. I'll try next week.”

But it wasn't the next week Lily got invited to see the results, and neither the week after, nor the month after.

At the same moment Lily got slightly disappointed, even annoyed, the two McGonagalls came to fetch Lily.

“Miss Evans, may we invite you to a very special exhibition? It took some time, but believe me, it was worthwhile waiting!”

This time they were not heading for Mikey's studio, but one of the larger classrooms. At the door they also found Mikey and

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Dumbledore waiting. The first one glowing with excitement, the other full with expectation, just the way like Lily felt.

“Ladies and gentlemen. My I present you my first full private presentation. I've named it 'revived memories'.” And with a wide gesture, he opened the door. Lily expected the paintings to be hanging on the wall, but she saw none, the room was pitch dark.

Suddenly a light appeared and shone on one painting. A site Lily knew very well. Greece, Athens, near the Parthenon. The site she had visited along with Alexandra, Sirius, James and his parents. But the scene was different, not how she remembered it. Somebody must have read or sensed her mind, because a second light showed a second painting, directly next to it. This was exactly how Lily remembered the place.

“I don't understand, they are different but what, how?”

Mikey explained at a low voice, “These two paintings are about exactly the same object, even the same location. However there is a time lapse. The left one is 1500 years older, from the original memory. Your friend and I traveled to Athens some weeks ago. What we saw, is on the right picture.”

Now, when she looked closely to the first picture, she noticed the difference. People wearing ancient clothing, and the temple was still whole and decorated.

“I presume we don't have to tell you where this is located?” and with these words a third painting lighted up.

Lily heart started to glow. Yes, this was Knossos. Even before their holiday, she had this picture in her mind. Strangely she seemed to remember it, how it used to be.

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The third one, everybody recognized. Stone-Henge. Again two paintings.

“Did you also traveled to that place?”

“No that came from the fresh memories when you and Alexandra visited the place.”

At the fourth one, Dumbledore said: “Desolated spot. Where is that?”

Now Lily responded, “That is on the Hebrides, Calanais or Calanish. We visited the place this summer.” This time there was hardly any difference between the left and the right paintings.

“From here on, only old impressions.”

Alexandra pointed to the next one, “This is how Alexandria must have looked liked, in the old days. And this, this is Cartage before the Romans decided to destroy it.”

The next painting showed a forest, a long wide lane, and a building at some distance. “Norway. Some say it is the main building of Durmstrang.”

While walking to the next one, Lily was thinking, “Nice paintings, and the transfer obviously worked well, but what kind of magic had Mikey put into it?”

Before she could ask her question, it got answered by the next painting. She saw a large valley with mountains that were covered with snow or ice. Except one. It looked like another mountain, but it radiated heat through the picture. She had to step backwards, being afraid that she got burned.

“We think that is, or better was, Iceland. It became unreachable, just like this one.”

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And she pointed to another one.

Here they saw spread over the desert hills, lot of tiny stone houses, colored by the sun setting. And at one side a huge sea, unbelievable blue tinted.

“We think that this was Cartage, before it was demolished. It must have made a huge impact on the one who traveled to that place. The image was extremely strong.”

When Lily looked at the painting, she could feel the longing of going to that place, realizing that it was totally impossible, as that entire city was ruined by the Romans.

“This one is the cause of most of the time you had to wait,” Mikey said, pointing at the next one.

“Exceptionally well done!” Dumbledore said. “I like mountains. Those hills, those flowers, that view... But where is it located, do you know?”

“No, not exactly, we assume somewhere in the Alps.”

Albus took another step closer to the painting, “If you painted those mountains accurately enough, and I have no doubt whatsoever that you did, you can perhaps find out comparing it with other pictures or photographs.” With another step he was inches away from the painting.

“Normally when you get this close, the image of the painting get's lost, and you only see the paint on the cloth. But not here! I could almost smell the fresh air. And I long to walk their, climbing up to the next hill, knowing that there probably will be another hill blocking my view.”

When he turned away, Lily noticed a small tear in his eye, and she knew that professor Dumbledore would probably never

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find the time to go there anymore, and certainly not be able to make such adventures hikes.”

The final one didn't need any introduction either. The huge building near, had such a characteristic shape, that every one recognized it, The Borobudur, Java.

“As you remember Lily, there were many more places, but those were too vague, I had to refresh my own memory before I could pass them to Mikey. Last week I did, and he will work on the other ones, but we wanted to show you these already.”

Finally it started to dawn at Dumbledore and professor McGonagall. “Hold on. Just a minute. Alexandra, you told us that you captured memories on images. That is already extraordinary. Are you now trying to tell us, that these were or even are destinations of those traveling-stones?”

“Yes I do and even did. And with these images, I think I can pass that information to others. Don't you think you can use these, Lily?”

But Alexandra didn't get answer straight away. Lily had walked back to one of the previous paintings. She stared at it. Like Mikey had said, these were from memories, old memories, some of them perhaps over 500, 1000, 1500 years old. Perhaps even older.

But still she felt like she recognized one of the minute figures on that painting. Although this was totally impossible she started to become dizzy. It looked like someone she saw not so long ago. It felt here brains started to melt. Someone she saw very recently.

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When her knees gave way and it appeared that someone turned the light off, she realized and remembered. The one in the painting was she same one she had seen this morning. In the mirror!

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