

As Valentines Day nears and January fades into February love or lust at the least, is most definitely in the air at Hogwarts. Even sleepwalking through most days due to Battle Training, it is impossible to miss the increased number of couples walking side by side through the halls or snogging in the more abandoned corridors. You are hardly immune yourself, working your schedule as much as possible to be able to walk with Arty at least part way to her classes and then frantically rushing to your own. It is a reasonable trade off to snag a quick kiss, in your mind, and she seems to appreciate the effort. Your dad had told you that falling in love was the easy part and it was what came after that took work.

Since the minor fight you and Arty had a couple of weeks previously, you had been trying to put in that work. You weren't terribly worried, you and her both apologized to one another and talked about it, but still, trying to be a bit more attentive and planning out a fantastic Valentine's for her seemed appropriate. It was going to be the first one you shared, after all.

Thankfully, the tiny Hufflepuff was looking just a bit less exhausted than before, so it seemed she was getting more rest somehow and getting a bit more used to balancing all her responsibilities. You may have helped just a bit, coming to a compromise with Arty, providing her with some severely diluted Griding potions and a small pack of energy shots, courtesy of your parents, with the promise she would only use them as a last resort and not over consume. Students in University used far stronger stuff to make it through after all and if she really wanted to, she had become a good enough potioneer to make her own brews. You are still worried but for now it seemed to work. Besides, you had had to rely on the same potions a few times recently; trying to forbid your girlfriend from doing the same was just hypocritical.

Regarding Valentine's itself, you fully intended to repay Arty for her Christmas gift which was still in your pouch, though you also felt the need for something more. Something classic and timeless. To you that meant a ridiculously large box of chocolates and a certain plushie, at the least. You unfortunately discovered that while wizardkind could produce any number of interesting candies and confections, they had never got the message about huge heart-shaped boxes of chocolate, forcing you to think outside the box. To that end, on the Saturday before the holiday you had followed up dropping Arty off at the Three Broomsticks by making your way to a far less popular tavern on the edge of Hogsmead for a clandestine meeting.

Entering the bar and getting a couple of nasty looks from the patrons before they returned to nursing their cups, ones you were positive did not contain butterbeer, you made your way up to the counter where the owner was replacing a couple of empty bottles of Firewhisky with fresh ones. Clearing your throat slightly, to get her attention, and begin speaking.

"Ah- excuse me, Ms. Snyder-", before being cut off.

“It’s Merula. Or just Snyder if you are like one of these other rude louts. No “miss” about it, boy.”, she says turning to look down at you.

While you had seen the middle-aged witch when you and Arty had visited previously, this was your first up close look at her; several things struck you at once looking up at her.

First was how ridiculously similar she looked to her daughters. Falere was a bit taller and Riley just a bit thicker but if it wasn’t for a couple of decades of age, you could easily imagine Merula being a third sister rather than their mom. It was positively uncanny that all three had the exact same blonde tuft of hair in their bangs; how do you even inherit that? Did they all just bleach the same bit of hair?

Secondly, she had the most peculiar eyes you had ever seen, a purple shade half way between violet and mauve which bored into you. You couldn’t be sure but you strongly suspected they were not entirely natural, even if they suited her.

Lastly, she was a very good-looking woman. Age had given her a couple of small lines around her eyes and what you might call “frown lines” but her face was still sharp and well proportioned with the small amount of eyeliner and make up accenting her natural features. You had noticed a couple of pictures of her, younger, in trophy cases from when she attended Hogwarts; you couldn’t help but say she was quite pretty, both then and now, although just a bit too intense. You suddenly felt slightly uncomfortable, like prey being sized up.

Thankfully, her expression softens just a bit before she continues speaking,

“Once again, no, I do not sell Firewhisky to students no matter what rumors say... already got in enough trouble the one time... but feel free to take a table and one of the girls will be by in a second. Wait- I recognize you. You were the little Slytherin who won in Potter’s battle class! Haha! Seeing Riley lose sucked but I can’t not be happy my old house showing the school we are still the most powerful! Good work! Ha!”, she says with a bit of loud, ruckus laughter, slapping the counter.

“Ah, thank you ma- Merula. I actually came to talk to Falere. She should be expecting me, if that’s alright.”

“Ah, really? Didn’t I see you here a while back with some second or third year Hufflepuff? Tiny girl? About this big?” she says, her palm down low to the counter.

“Robing the cradle and double dipping, are we? Well house of the ambitious and all. Hey! Falere! You have a suiter looking very uncomfortable out front! Slytherin boy, short! Come out here!”, Merula shouts towards the door behind her causing you to blush and panic a bit.

“I-its not like that! I was asking her for a favor and-“, you stutter out, very aware a few of the patrons are now looking your way.

“Sure, sure. Just hang out for a minute, she’ll be out soon.”, Merula says with a smirk that shows her perfectly white and very sharp looking teeth just a touch.

Thankfully, you only have to stand around awkwardly for maybe 30 seconds before the door behind the bar opens and the tall 7th year Ravenclaw emerges.

“Mom, what are you talking about? Finally going senile? Oh, its just Elliot... I’m taking a break for a bit, alright?”, Falere says after spotting you before she removes her blue trimmed work apron, tossing at her mom who deftly snatches it from the air.

“Yeah, sure, sure. Lunch rush is over. Have fun, just be back soon. And use protection! Hahaha!”

“Mom! Ugh, lets go, before she has too much fun. Lunch rush... we have the same 5 people come in here every day...”, she mutters, leading you outside and around the side of the old building.

“Sorry, about Mom. She really needs to get out more if the best part of her day is giving you crap. So, you have the money? And the alley next to the Leaky Cauldron, right?”, Falere says asks, as the two of you stand out of sight in the shade next to the building. You nod in affirmation, still a bit flustered from her mom’s comments, handing the Head Girl a galleon and a few sickles.

You had really wanted to give Arty a couple of things that couldn’t be found in the small village of Hogsmead and though Apparition classes were going better, all that meant for now was that you managed to squinch your entire arm vs just a hand.

Granted that might be better than Apollo who had managed, somehow, to transport all of his clothes into the destination hoop, aside from his boxers and socks last class. Amid the chuckles at that accident, you swear you could literally hear a handful of girls swooning before Riley Snyder had collapsed on the floor with a bleeding nose. Apollo himself seemed nonplussed, collecting his robes while the wispy instructor had rushed over to enervate the girl. You don't know if anyone would believe you if you told them you were positive you saw actual hearts in her eyes when she came too.

Unable to Apparate on your own, you naturally you applied Slytherin cunning to the problem; in this case, that meant paying the only 7th year you even vaguely knew to transport you to and from London.

Quickly pocketing the coins, Falere smiles.

"You know, I almost feel bad taking your money. Almost. Been making a pretty penny since you mentioned needing a "ride" to the city and I ran with it. Plenty of students need something from muggle-town it turns out!" she says, laughing.

"Alright take my hand, hold on tight, and when we get there, don't puke on my boots; they're new."

You grab on to the older girl's hand, and breath in as the world twists, a dry pop echoing in your ears and brain. You reappear after a few moments of disorientating, swirling colors in a small street just beside the iconic entrance to Diagon Alley and about 6 inches above the ground. Coming down to the pavement, you stay on your knees for a few seconds to control the queasy feeling in your gut and dizziness in your head. Falere remains standing, letting go of your hand.

"Ahem, thank you for choosing Snyder Transit and Transport for your trip. We apologize for the slight turbulence. Thank you for not throwing up on my shoes. You okay, Elliot?" she says in a mock formal tone that softens at the end. It takes you a second to respond, but then you manage to rise fully to your feet with a bit of help from grinning Ravenclaw.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm good. Thanks, Falere. Still not quite used to Apparition yet. I'll be okay."

"As you say. It does get better once you can do it yourself. You'll get your "Apparition legs" as it were. So just to reiterate, I'll be back, same spot in two hours to pick you up. More than 10 minutes late and you are going to have to find your own way back. No refunds."

“Yeah. Got it. Appreciate the ride. I’ll be here.”, you tell her as the dizziness fades, which she giggles at. Once you begin to head towards the street, you hear the Head Girl unexpectedly call out; turning back towards her, she looks far shyer and more anxious than before, more like she seemed when you met her at Slughorn’s party.

“Hey, Elliot. Wh-what kind of stuff does your girlfriend’s brother like? Riley, she told me don’t worry about it, but she did want to know. For Valentines. Does he like certain sweets, or colors, or you know... stuff? You two are friends, right?”

You turn and take a couple of steps back towards the taller girl who seems quite interested in her heavy looking black boots all of a sudden.

“I, mean yeah, as much as he will let me be. Apollo is pretty... normal? Basic? He doesn’t really care about fashion... I don’t think he has a favorite color, really. He does share his sister’s sweet tooth I suppose. He and her just about cleaned my parents out of sweets when they were there for Christmas. Why... doesn’t she just ask him?”, you say somewhat slowly, your eye brow raised. Looking up, Falere meets your eyes and says,

“Well, you know. He isn’t the easiest person in the world to talk to. And all Riley could get without being super obvious is that, and I quote, “Just anything is okay.”. She though you might be able to help, give her something to work with but was too embarrassed to ask. So, I am trying to be a good big sister.”

“Ah, I guess she really is into him... she could probably get anything at Honeyduke’s and Apollo would enjoy it. And he like building stuff or puzzles, I suppose. I get it though. If Arty hadn’t told me what to get for Christmas it might have been a struggle to shop for him. Did that help?”

“Yeah, it does a bit. Riley, she is really kind of silly. She wanted to get something great, something he might not be able to find otherwise. Can I ask for a favor, Elliot? Do you think, you could pick something up for her to give him, while you are out today? Some Muggle chocolates or something? I’ll give you back my fee plus some extra if that’s okay?” she says, taking out the coins you had passed her, plus some extra from a different pocket. Walking up to her, you merely skim a few sickles off and indicate for Falere to keep the rest. For a small box of chocolates and maybe a card, that was more than enough.

“I can grab an extra box of something, sure. Nothing to crazy though. Apollo, he is better about getting stuff from people than his sister but he... doesn’t get it sometimes. He kinda got odd when Riley’s Christmas gift came. He is getting better about having friends, I suppose having people interested in him.

We spoke so I think he understands she is in to him, in that way, but... maybe let Riley know not to expect too much from him right away?" you say, trying to give her a reassuring smile.

"Yeah, I can let her know... he is weird. He is powerful, smart, nice... "well built". I would have imagined he was used to girls giving him googly eyes. But maybe not. Thanks again. I'll make sure my little brat of a sister thanks you as well."

"He *is* weird. *I'm* weird. So is my best friend and so is my girlfriend. Hell, you seem weird, Falere. But that's fine. It's what makes it fun. And just, when she gives him her gift, maybe do it somewhere private? Just in case."

"Sure. Alright, with that embarrassing conversation done with, I should probably get back before mom can find new and fun ways to tease me about disappearing with a younger Slytherin boy. 2 hours!", Falere says before walking away and vanishing with a soft pop.

You sigh. What did you just sign up to enable? You suppose you will need to try and talk to Apollo in the next week and suggest he maybe have a return gift of some sort prepared. Brother-in-Laws, ugh. Still it makes you grin; Apollo had made friends this year. Hell, he got more gifts from his Army and Riley's than you and Arty combined. And he had an admirer. The Hufflepuff part of you couldn't help but be happy for the tall blond boy, even if the Slytherin part of you questioned how wise it was to help hook two of the generals who would be fighting against the Raiders, given that Linda would be facing them soon. Oh well.

Whistling a familiar tune, you enter the tavern leading to Diagon Alley and slipped once more into the world of magic impossibility. The shop you were looking for was quite far back and you had to check the return address on the confirmation mail you had received via owl a couple days more than once, though once you arrived, you realized there was no way you could have missed the shop, what with the life sized, magically animated young dragon on its roof breathing paper streamers of fire which disappeared upon hitting the cobblestone road.

Entering the shop, you were immediately glad you had given yourself a little bit extra time; the place was standing room only. People milled about, looking at the cages filled with small animatronic stuffed Kneazels or Cerberus pups that acted quite convincingly like living creatures rather than toys. You almost got brained by a fluffy barn owl toy swooping towards your head which was being chased by a couple of small girls. Thankfully, despite the chaos, the store smelled only of slight perfume and warm wool instead of like a normal pet shop. Waiting in line and admiring the tiny Puffskiens that tumbled about an "enclosure" near the counter, you finally made it up and pulled out the letter in your pocket before handing it to a smiling witch who had called you up.

“Let me see... oh, Mr. Hallaster. Excellent. We have your special order just in back. So happy one of our branches still had one of these in stock; never was sure why they weren’t more popular, they are so adorable! Just a moment!”, the blonde girl cheerfully says as she retreats through a small door behind her.

It only takes a couple of minutes before she returns, a relatively large box in her hands, setting it on the counter then removing its lid.

“Please, have a look and try him out to make sure everything is in order! As you requested, a self-cleaning charm, a small warming charm, and a basic movement charm. To activate the last, you must simply scratch behind the mane. And we threw in a voice charm for free, for such a nice boy. Would be a shame if he couldn’t talk.”, the girl said before handing the soft, black and grey stuffed Magical Beast to you. Immediately you confirm it is nicely warm, just a hair more than a person would be, and once you activate it with a soft scratch, it gently climbs up to your neck. Nuzzling you slightly, the toy lets out a quite “meow” and begins purring. You are positive this is not at all accurate to how a real one would sound but it is very cute and oddly soothing. Switching him back off, you hand the plush back so it can be returned to the box.

“Thanks, it is perfect. I know she will love him. Thanks for the deal and the voice charm. How much...” you say.

The woman lists off the price and you fish out a couple of gold, silver, and copper coins from your pouch which she takes and places in a very, very old cash register before handing you a small hand written receipt you had asked to not include the price.

“Thank you for doing business with Forrest and Greene Toys. If any of the Charms go out or it is damaged, please come back and we will repair him or fix the spells back up... I hope whoever you are giving the little guy to enjoys him! Next!”

You exit, a bit less rich but smiling all the same to make your way back down the street, a large brown bag held in your gloved left hand. You are making decent time, even with the slight wait in the over crowded toy store so you do a bit of casual window shopping. One hatter has a very nice-looking leather piece you stare at for just a bit too long, one which would match the jacket your parents had given you for Christmas fantastically, but is unfortunately a bit out of your price range if you intended to have any spending cash for the next couple of months. Instead, you simply head for a small coffee shop near the exit back to London and order the type of overly sweet fancy drink that would send a real coffee

aficionado into an apoplectic rage, and sit at one of the outside tables to enjoy the sugar and caffeine while you people watch.

Finishing your insult to coffee drinkers in general, you made your way out, back into the world of muggles and began heading down the road towards a close by shop decorated with pink and red streamers and an excessive number of hearts to pick up the second part of Arty's Valentine's gift as well as something for Riley to give Apollo and a small box of friendship sweets for Linda. Crowded as it was, it doesn't take you terribly long to pick out a pair of good-sized boxes which are not overly cutesy, a much larger heart-shaped one, almost as wide as your chest, and one small simple one then add them to your bag. You swear the cashier gives you a wink at buying 3 separate boxes of chocolate which you try and ignore.

With still a decent amount of time before needing to meet back with your "ride" back and the coffee not really doing much for your growling stomach, you pop in quickly to a McDonalds near the Cauldron; you stop briefly in your order to add on an extra double cheese burger and order of fries. Once again, your inner Hufflepuff winning out as you realize Falere, between working and her side gig, probably hadn't eaten. And it never got old seeing people who had lived their entire lives in the Magical World get a taste of Muggle cuisine, of course. After paying with the last bit of non-wizard currency you had left from Christmas you sit down outside and begin digging in. Encouraging Helga to share your senses in between bites, you enjoy both the last Muggle meal you might have for a while and the ancient Hufflepuff's soft sighs of enjoyment from the burger and especially the hot, crisp fries. You are still early but you go ahead and toss away your trash and head into the side road where you were to meet Falere.

Bags in both hands you turn into the shadowed unused alley spotting a familiar figure squatting down out of sight with her back turned and a small stream of smoke rising up from close to their face. Tentatively, you call out.

"Hey. That you Falere?"

The hunched form bolts up right and turns to you, confirming their identity, holding a half smoked cigarette in her left hand which she quickly tosses to the ground and stomps out with a heavy black boot. Coughing slightly, the older girl says in a startled tone,

"Elliot! You-you are early! I-uh wasn't expecting that!"

"You're early too, you know. I didn't want to have to figure out a different way to get back to Hogsmead, so, ah, yeah I brought you some lunch, though?"

“Yeah, makes sense. And you didn’t have to bring food. So you didn’t see me burning down a fag. You saw nothing, got it?”, Falere says, exasperated while coming close, pointing a finger at your chest.

“My mom would give me shit for weeks and the most powerful Head Girl in Hogwarts can’t be caught sneaking a smoke during a part time job she really shouldn’t have. Understand?”, she says with a soft poke to your chest.

“Hey, I’m a Slytherin. I am plenty used to keeping secrets but... “the most powerful Head Girl”? You are the only Head Girl. That is weird. You are weird.”, you say looking up at her before she spins around and pressed one hand against the side of her head in frustration.

“Ahhhh, damn it! It slipped out again. You should try to live with my mom for 17 years and not end up saying stuff like that! She still calls herself the “most powerful tavern owner”, the “most powerful bartender”, the “most powerful single mom in Britain”! And now me and Riley have to try and not say the same kind of stuff. Is she 15 or 50?!”

It comes out automatically, a soft chuckle which escalates into full laughter for several seconds while Falere stares holes into you with her oddly colored eyes and a bright pink blush on her cheeks. Once you are back in control of your voice, you attempt to smooth over the situation by raising the small bag of greasy, warm food as an offering.

“She sounds fun, honestly. But seriously, my best friend was calling herself a “real snake” for years and claimed she would be the most evil witch Europe had ever seen. I am going to find Avalon and Atlantis. Arty and I are going on vacation to find an extinct species of Dragon this July. You are fine. Now would the “most powerful Head Girl” like to have a bite to eat before we leave?”

“Uhhhg. I guess. That does smell pretty good. Its muggle food, right? What is it?”

“Why, this is the very height of their cuisine, McDonalds; hot and fresh, a burger fries in less than 3 minutes. Sorry, I wasn’t sure what you liked so the burger only has cheese on it.”

The flustered Ravenclaw accepts the paper baggie from you and unwraps the still warm sandwich, sniffing it before taking a first tentative bite. She quickly follows up with a couple more, looking like she might choke as she begins inhaling her lunch. Pausing after demolishing almost half the burger, say says.

“Holy crap. Fuck, this is... *good!* Maybe I’m just famished but... you said 3 minutes. And for how much muggle money?”

You quickly confirm, doing a bit of money conversion in your head and encouraging her to try the fries while they were still warm, which she does eating them 4 or 5 at a time until both they and the hamburger are nearly gone before wrapping up the last portions.

“I think mom needs to try these. I think I have an idea... Thanks Elliot. Between work, studying, Head Girl stuff, and keeping an eye on my sister, sometimes I kind of forget to eat. Do you mind if I finish having a smoke before we leave, since you already saw? We still have a few minutes before its time to go.”

You tell her it is fine, setting down your gift bags as she uses her wand to quickly light up another cigarette, inhaling deeply and sighing in contentment as she leans back against the brick wall.

“Ah, crap, did you want to steal a couple of drags? Forgot to offer, this isn’t the most popular hobby in Hogwarts.”, she says glancing over and offering the heater to you. The last time you had tried any tobacco had been a couple of years ago, with Taylor when he had snagged an old pipe from his dad. You recall it being somewhat enjoyable up until the two of you had a bit too much and took turns puking out one of the windows in the Astronomy tower. Still, couldn’t hurt to try just a drag and might help convince Falere you were not in fact going to rat her out or try and blackmail her. Taking it from her hand you bring it up and take an experiment drag, only coughing slightly.

“No, no. Hold it between your index and middle finger. Do it the way you are and people will think you are French!” she says, correcting your form with a laugh. Adjusting your fingers, you take another pull before handing the cigarette back to her and exhaling. You can’t say it is a habit you would probably pick up soon unless it was perhaps an occasional cigar, like your father indulged in a few times a year, but the rush of nicotine had calmed some nerves you didn’t even know you had been suffering from.

“What’s wrong with the French? Paris was nice when I went a few years ago.”

“Oh, France is fine. But the French? We are British. We are contractually obliged to look down on them! Ha!” she barks out, tossing the rest of the dart away. You can’t help but roll your eyes a bit as she reaches out her hand while you rearrange your bags a bit.

“Let’s head back, Elliot. Just hold on to your stuff well. I am not responsible for lost baggage, mostly because I have no clue where stuff lost during Apparition ends up.”

Grabbing a hold, you feel the world twist before vision returns and the two of you land back next to her mother’s pub. After a moment to regain your bearing, you reach into the smaller of your two bags, handing Falere the box of assorted chocolates you picked up for her sister to gift to Apollo. They were of good quality and the box was only decorated with a red embossed ribbon and a small heart in the corner with a “to” and “from” printed on it; simple but something you thought would work considering it was going to Apollo and how he was.

“Ah. Thanks, again... I’ll give it to Riley in a bit.”, she says, taking the box from your hands.

“Hey, do you think I could see what you got for Arty? Just a bit curious.”

Falere bites her lip slightly as she asks, once again looking shy. Looking up at her, you don’t see the harm in showing off some. First you pop out the comically large heart shaped box of sweets which cause her to grin, before moving on to the second present, opening the box and lifting the large stuffed animal up and offering it to her. She takes it gently into her hand, looking it over briefly before giving a barely concealed snicker.

“Is this what I think it is? Haha. You know most girls would probably prefer a teddy bear or like, a bunny rabbit. Not something known for eating the faces of entire villages!”

Taking the toy back from her and putting it back in its box, you chuckle as well.

“Artemis Pertinger isn’t ‘most girls’.”

“I could tell. Still, you are way too nice to be a Slytherin. Unless this is some cunning plan to undermine Hufflepuff. And Gryffindor. And... maybe Ravenclaw.” She says, with a smile.

“I... don’t suppose you have a slightly older secret brother, do you? Younger would be fine too.”

“Sorry, no dice. My parents did want another kid but... well, I don’t think Britain could handle the *Lords Hallaster*.”

“Ha. Well, I hope you and Arty have a good Valentines, even if she is the competition. And be sure to come back to Snyder Transit and Transport in the future!” she says trying and failing to push back the blonde tuft of hair threatening to fall over her eyes, then turning the corner and heading back into the dingy tavern.

You vaguely hear her calling out for her mom to get a taste of “this” and for her younger sister to come out and grab something as you begin to head back up the road to the castle.

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You manage to get caught up with a bit of homework in the common room before going out to meet Apollo at the front of the castle; it was still anxiety inducing to make your way to and from Hogsmead at night. Potter had been pretty confident that no more rogue Aurors were going to go after you or your friends. Still, every shadow, every snapping branch set you on edge. It was almost a relief when Arty and Apollo parted ways with you, once the three of you had returned to the Castle. Your sleep was thankfully uninterrupted by dreams or “dreams”. A small blessing, considering the task you would be facing the next day.

It had turned out that you were utter crap at taking photos. Despite having a cell phone with a camera before you even knew you were a wizard; you had never mastered the skill. And with the obtuse magic camera you had bought, it was even worse. You had wasted at least a half of the developing solution you had brewed on blurred or awkward pictures of you unclothed from the waist up. You had many talents but this was not one of them it seems. Therefore, you once more applied natural Sytherin cunning and asked a comrade for help.

The issue was, the one person you would trust with helping you in this, the one who just so happened to have a bit of experience in photography, was Linda. Or Raven. She had tried to bring back a bit of her old personality after you ceded command of the Raiders to her. For better or worse; you smiled seeing a bit of her old snark return; though when it was directed at you? It hurt. Not the comments but knowing Taylor, the third man of your band wasn’t there any longer. Still, the dark-haired girl agreed to help you, and met with you in the corridor leading to the Room of Requirement, a place that had turned into the de facto headquarters for your plots and plans.

Setting down the bag containing the camera, a few different changes of clothes, and some props your friend had insisted on, you waited until she arrived.

Without really looking at you, Linda paced back and forth three times and softly spoke,

"I need a place to take photos."

"I need a place Elliot doesn't look like a dork."

"I need a place where we can have fun, again."

With a sigh, the pale Slytherin turned to look at you, stroking the thick braid falling across her shoulder with one hand and pulling the handle of the door which had suddenly manifested on the wall. Following her in you were treated to the sight of a very large room, just a hair smaller than one of the training rooms you had made to help the Hufflepuffs in your second set of memories. Rifling through your bag she retrieves the cheap camera and a set of cloths, a tee shirt and pair of jeans, Linda quickly instructs you to change out of your school clothes behind one of the small curtained areas in the room.

Coming back out, you notice Linda has mounted the magical camera on a transfigures tripod, adjusting it slightly towards you.

"Hey, Elliot. You look good. I like it. I know we need get some shirtless fap bait for Arty, but... Let me get a couple just like this. To practice. Don't want to waste the rest of your developing solution on crappy photos for her." She says, giving you a small, warm smile.

"Yeah... no problem, Linda. Or is it Raven right now?"

"Raven... she is okay. I, was afraid of her for a while. After what happened at the Last Light. But she is me. A part of me. And Raven Everdark is a much better photographer than Linda Colbris.", she says before a bright flash blinds you and you hear a haughty laugh which you had not realized you missed for almost 3 months.

“Merlin, fuck! War-warn... me...”, you manage before the slightly taller girl wraps her arm around you while you clear your eyes. When you finally banish the brightness from your eyes, Raven is tightly hugging you by the waist and pointing her wand at the mounted camera which once more produces a blinding burst of light before your friend dances towards it.

“I’m going to keep one of these. We... We don’t have many pictures of Taylor. If something happens, to either of us I just want the other to have a picture or two. Elliot, Taylor was my first love. He won’t be my last, I hope. But I love you too. You and Taylor were my first friends, aside from Baubau and mom.”, she says, adjusting some mechanism of the camera and grinning as she taps it with her wand.

“Now take your shirt off and start running corner to corner. Then do some push-ups. And a few crunches. Squats too. Need to get some sweat on you.” Raven says.

“The hell?!”, you manage to get out before Raven conjures up a long riding crop that she slapped against the floor before advancing toward you. Non transfigured items had to be summoned from somewhere. Somewhere you knew about. Which is scary.

A few minutes afterward, Raven stops her chase to simply laugh, though she does instruct you keep moving between various exercises till a thin sheen of sweat in falling over your slightly swollen muscles. Smirking, the blushing girl walks up to you, while you pant. Placing her hand against your chest and then moving it down, Raven grins and removes a small bottle from her pouch labeled “Baby Oil” and places it in your hand.

“Oh, what the fuck? Why did I just do that then? Whyyyyy?”

“Because it amused me. It was fun. You are... nice looking. So yeah, don’t complain. Arty... well I hope she brings an extra pair of underwear when you give her these pictures.”, Raven says with a snicker.

“Gross. Gross and weird!”

“Suck it up and put the oil on.”

After a very awkward few minutes and slightly less awkward hour which followed them, you put on your normal Hogwarts vests after a quick Scourgify, with Raven assuring you that she had got some good

pictures. Your friend, despite being an utter terror in general, was a pretty good photographer. You almost feared for the school when her younger sister joined next year. Just like the magical world could not handle two Lord Hallasters, you doubt it could manage two “Everdarks.””

Cleaned up and back in your normal attire, you came up to your friend as she finished packing up, gently hugging her around the shoulders. It took her flinching for just a second to return the hug; it took a moment but the embrace was returned, softly then much more strongly. Pressing her head against your shoulder, she didn’t cry. Perhaps a snuffle but that was it. Once again you are reminded of how her tears had seemed to run out; seeing Taylor die, killing Lily, healing your body again and again as the monster inside you tried to rip its prison apart. She is soft and warm. It is hardly the first time the two of you had embraced through the years, this time she does feel just a bit smaller. Stronger, though, than she had seemed for the last couple of months.

“I got something for you. You know, like every Valentine’s.”

“Thanks, Elliot. I got you something too. Something for Taylor as well. If you can meet me up at the Astronomy tower, its fine if you ca-“, she says gripping you tightly.

“I’ll be there. Ha, it’s not just some of your mom’s booze, is it?”

“You- its not *just* that! But yes. That first time up there, it... it’s special to me. You and him. Us. Together. So, just don’t give me crap, okay?”

“I wouldn’t. That night... That memory, it’s important to me too.”, you say recalling the fall air, the first time you had gotten drunk. Looking over the edge of the Astronomy tower, looking up as Taylor called out the stars making up the Big Dipper, Orion’s belt, Altair, Denube and Vega. Raven saying she needed to pee, Taylor’s hand reaching up towards the bright crescent in the sky. The memory which had been your refuge when your body had begun to be torn apart by the Beast. The one where Taylor and her had saved you, forced you to return to reality. Where Raven had asked, in her own way, to please not give up and die.

“I think I need a quick nap. Then I have to catch up on Charms. Those last few inches just aren’t coming. Want me to head out to Hogsmead with you and Apollo, to walk Arty back?” she says, her voice shifting from Raven back to Linda.

"I would appreciate it. Thanks. Me and Arty took off from our training on Thursday, so we could enjoy the holiday on Friday without being exhausted and bruised. Not sure how long we will be together, but I will be back before midnight. And we can go see the stars." You say.

"Yeah... yeah.", Linda says, unconsciously touching the scar on her left arm from Last Light and making your own right hand lightly touch the leather glove covering your left hand.

The two of you met a few more times, over the rest of the week. You helping Linda with a bit of bullshit Slughorn had assigned regarding the origins of Focus Potions and why they were banned in competitions and her helping you with some extra credit assigned by Professor Groski regarding wizard involvement in the Korean War; you also shared a quiet moment of mutual hatred for McGonagall and Irakey when they had assigned a dozen inches regarding the least applicable of Gamp's Laws, an assignment which required you to ambush Apollo outside the Hufflepuff dorm when he left for supper on Wednesday night. As he ate his dinner, he had managed to explain the concept to you well and in a way that made you almost slam your head against the table and caused Linda to drain her Pumpkin Juice and head off to the Slytherin common room silently.

Setting aside his cleared plate, and pulling one with a small slice of Chess Pie in front of him, Apollo looks up at you as he scratches the top of the dessert with his fork. You had meant to talk to the tall blond boy before now, but hadn't managed. The transfiguration homework may have been a blessing in disguise.

"Hey. Elliot. I think Riley is going to get me something. A present. For Valentine's Day. What do you think I should do? She already gave me something for Christmas, I told her thank you, but... I want to give her something back this time. She likes me. Like how you and Arty like each other."

Working your own fork over the last bit of food on your plate, you try to think of how to word it. Apollo was a bit different but he was still another just 16 year old boy at the end of the day. And if he was asking you about her, he was worried, right?

Riley wasn't an unattractive girl and you had noticed her chatting or just walking with Apollo more than a few times in the past month. She was clearly putting in effort to try and get to know him.

"You don't have to like her back, if you don't want to. But affection... Its weird. I had never spoken to Arty before going to get a new cauldron in fall. Now I'm crazy about her. I had never spoken to you before we fought in the first battle, but you are a good friend now. Linda and... Taylor had come up to me on our first day at Hogwarts and then we were friends from then on. Do you like her?" you say, just a bit unsurely.

"I think so? She is funny and pretty and clever. She does the same kind of work Arty does, so I know she works hard. And she shot Hugo in the back, which made the last couple of battles more fun."

"Haha, that will never not be funny. Fuck Hugo. I heard what he said about his Hufflepuff soldiers. Second biggest prat in the school." You say, handing off your plate to a nearby house elf while Apollo scowls a bit and plunges his fork slightly too hard into the pie.

"What... exactly did he say?"

"That they were only good for "cannon fodder."

"If he ever decides to show up to battle class again, I am going to send him into a wall. My sister is not cannon fodder. My soldiers are not. I am not. I am even more glad Riley deposed that dickhead."

"Yeah. I agree. She seems alright, and her sister helped me out a bit a few days ago. If you want to give Riley something, well it is to late to pick something up from Hogsmead, since the Holiday is Friday. But... how about making something?" you offer, and the tall boy's scowl disappears.

"I think I can convince Slughorn to let us use the Potions Classroom for a while and we could make some cookies for her. Sugar or chocolate chip are simple enough and there are a couple of ovens in there."

"Ah, thanks Elliot. I am better than my sister at cooking, a bit, but I don't think I have ever made cookies.", Apollo says, finishing his desert.

You give a small laugh. Arty had really tried when they were staying with your family but you don't doubt, she could burn a cold sandwich, somehow.

"Sure, sure just meet me by the dungeons tomorrow evening. Have to be a good brother-in-law..." you say before you can stop yourself.

Apollo raises an eyebrow while you quickly rise up.

“Brother... what did you mean by that? Elliot...”

“Its, nothing really! Anyway, I’ll see you tomorrow! Bye!”

You make your way back down to the dungeons, avoiding any glaring Hufflepuffs, thankfully.

-

Following a strangely tiresome day you meet up with Apollo right outside of the dungeons, watching as a gaggle of younger girls exit, most holding small bags or boxes, into the halls, followed by Slughorn, his mustache still impeccable but with a thin sheen of sweat on his forehead.

“To be young again... a curse and a blessing. Oh, Elliot! How are you, my boy! And Mr. Pertinger. Always a pleasure, even if you are more of a Transfiguration man opposed to Potions.”, the centurian instructor belts out, patting you on the shoulder maybe just a bit too vigorously before adjusting his tweed jacket and shifting his cane to his off hand.

You try not to make too much of the fact he has at least 3 Valentine’s Day cards stuffed in his pocket.

“Professor. You know, just enjoying the spirit. Its fine if Apollo and I use the classroom now, right? I know we are a touch early.”

“Of course, of course. Hell, I would have kicked those young ladies out early if you had asked. All very nice but most just milled about for a half hour at the end. Maybe I should emphasize efficiency a bit more in my lessons? Or not. Our next potions-master is standing right here. He can figure out how to sort them out.”, the almost ancient wizard says with a laugh.

“I appreciate it, sir but not sure I want to go straight to teaching after I graduate. Need a couple of decades to figure out Immortality and find Atlantis first, I think.” You say with a smile. Slughorn was by very many measures a crap teacher even if he himself was brilliant.

“As you say, Mr. Hallaster. Just don’t take too long. I have no plans to pass away soon but you never know. And maybe save a sip of that Potion of Immortality for your favorite Professor? Haha! Another 100 years or so wouldn’t be too bad, as long as Atlantis has something to sort out my sciatica too. Now then, I believe it is time to treat myself to a glass of brandy, grade some of the first year’s homework. Maybe

more than a single glass, in fact. Have fun, young men”, he says, ambling away, just a hair slower than you recall him doing back when you had first come to Hogwarts.

What follows is an interesting hour of mixing and baking. Apollo, while no genius at either cooking or potions is still incredibly precise in his measurement and prep, which you can respect even if it takes him twice as long as you would need. At the end, the two of you had tried a couple of the less pretty cookies, ones that got just a hair too dark on the bottom, while waiting for the rest to cool enough to be bagged up. They received your seal of approval; despite being relatively simple they were *good*. Sitting next to the blond boy and enjoying the satisfaction of a job well done, he polishes off the last of the rejected snacks, and looking a bit glum.

“Do you think she will like them?”

“Yep. I think she will. Hell, I am pretty sure even if we forgot the sugar or had mixed it up with salt, Riley would enjoy them. Because they are from you.”

“I-thanks. I, never really had someone to talk about girls before, aside from Arty. I didn’t even know I wanted to talk like this. To do this kind of stuff.” He says, turning to look at you. Apollo’s eyes are still a striking green but now, maybe less intense. Brighter.

“You’re welcome. You know, you kinda lucked out. Didn’t even need to approach her and she still likes you.”, finishing off the last of the sweets.

“I did. I got lucky a lot I think. And it bothers me sometimes. When I give her these... So, yeah, I will see. About her. I still have a couple of days. But...”, Apollo says and putting his hand on your shoulder, lightly, awkwardly.

“You are going to keep her safe, right? Protect her. Arty. You told us what was going on. The danger you are in. That we all are in. I can’t always be around. And even I was, I’m just me. I lost to you and your army. I can’t fly a broom all that well. I can’t talk like you can. I... chose to not be with you and my sister for your battle tutoring. And I see her come back to the common room with bruises or cuts that are still healing. But she will be okay right? She’ll be fine, yeah?”, Apollo asks, his arm resting against your shoulder. There are slight trembles. And that hurts more than if the tall boy had slugged you in the face.

“I don’t think I can promise that, Apollo. I can do what I can. I’ll do everything possible. But you know what happened to Taylor. What happened to Lily. What happened to me and Linda. But you know what happens if we don’t fight. And I can’t stop Arty from being there. It wouldn’t be right. It’s her life too. And yours, for that matter. You know how she is. Hufflepuff to a fault. When we go to St. Mungos, to Avalon... I can’t guarantee anything. But you’ll be there too. And as much as I am improving at fighting, I am pretty sure my best *Lagann* would still just reflect off your *Prismatis*.”

The boy removes his arm from your shoulder, holding the bag of cookies the two of you had baked a bit more tightly.

“Yeah, it would. Still, you are strong. You helped Arty with Brighton and those girls months ago. You went straight into danger with Potter and the other Professors and were clever enough to put the rest of out of danger. You fought that monster, Salazar, before. And...” he says before you interrupt.

“I will. I will protect her. Everything I can do. I really love her, Apollo. So, whatever it costs to keep her happy. Alive. To give her a future...” you spit out, stumbling a bit from the fact he didn’t know how the exact circumstances around their birth.

The fact that just being born he had cut his sister’s life in a quarter. Had ruined her magical potential.

But she still loved him despite it. If what Arty had said followed through, Apollo could live well over two centuries. Other than “Flammel”, the oldest wizard you could recall was close to 400 years old before they passed...

Parents shouldn’t bury their children. And brothers shouldn’t have to bury their sisters. Lovers shouldn’t have to see one another dead in old forgotten places. Father’s shouldn’t have their children ripped away, so completely they couldn’t even recall them.

And you would fix it. Not your problem no one had had cared enough to do it before.

“I... good. Please do, if I lost her... I don’t know what would happen. Thank you...” he says, looking up, his eyes now just a bit brighter, a closer mirror of Arty’s, in deep green as opposed to her own vivid blue. Apollo stands, beginning to make his way out of the repurposed classroom, mentioning he would let you know how it goes with Riley when he met you to walk Arty to work on Saturday.

Once the door had shut behind him, you stopped suppressing the tremor in your left arm. You breathed in and out to control the fear, of losing. Of everything ending. Of Arty dying. Of Linda, Apollo, all the friends you made in the Raiders dying again and again and again forever. Of not being able to meet Taylor once more.

After another session of being tossed around by “Professor” Crouch and wandering back to your dorm, your dreams that night were not ones of a green skied forest and a kind girl.

What you recalled of them the next day were of a small, smiling girl and of how the two of you would find all the lost places, the forgotten creatures. One which ended with her swooping in on a particular vicious breed of dragon believed to have gone extinct long ago, holding an oddly familiar sword in one hand and a peculiar wand in the other, a pair of giant spiders riding on her shoulders.

—

It took you till Friday, the Holiday itself, till you had shaken off the terror of Arty having learning to speak dragon, befriending all the Acromantula in the Forbidden Forest, and somehow stolen the Sword of Godric Gryffindor and the Elder Wand. The world was in no way ready for a tiny insane Hufflepuff with that much power. Granted, it made you feel something a bit different, in a lower portion of your body.

According to your dream, Arty did look quite stunning on a giant flying beast.

Once the final part of the lecture from Binns had ended, you made it to dungeons, cleaned up, took a small swig of Girding Potion, and went to meet your small Hufflepuff Fury near the Room of Requirement. Not exactly the most romantic spot, but it would suffice. You had promised her an early brunch the next day, before Occlumency, at Remus’s to make up for it. And you had, though a few tries, found a particular configuration for the Room which seemed good; this one happened to have a small table with a white and silver trimmed table cloth, a few scented muggle candles, and a small bed that was hidden tastefully behind a divider. Just in case.

Because the pair of you might need to lay down for a bit. You were both still exhausted, after all. That was why. Only reason why you had literally screamed at the room to produce one.

No impure thoughts here.

Heading to the arranged spot in a polo shirt, green naturally, and a nice pair of jeans, your hands shifted the bags between themselves. It was probably too much. The massive heart shaped box of chocolate was probably fine alone. The pictures alone were fine. The plush? Fine. But you wanted to spoil Arty.

Gifts were hardly the only way to show affection. Hell, they were probably one of the worst ways. But you had the money. The luck to be born to parents like Kendrick and Helen.

You understood why she had her hang-up about being given things. That she didn't want too much. That she felt bad when she couldn't reciprocate. How little she grew up with. How hard she had worked for everything she had.

At the same time, you knew she deserved every gift. She deserved more. If you couldn't find a means of immortality, if you ended up dead in some Ancient place fighting Salazar, you would make this Valentines count. Your first with your beautiful girlfriend. Hopefully not the last; but you knew wishes couldn't stop the killing curse nor time nor an army of Aurors.

Chuckling slightly, you recall an old saying your dad had used a few times, that the worth of a man could be measured by his enemies.

One of the most powerful wizards in history. The Ministry of Magic, or at least parts of it. An eldritch being from Nothingness itself. Time. Prophecy. Fate. *Death*.

You suppose on that front you were performing admirably.

Taking a bit of satisfaction from the fact that if you did die, it would at least be interesting if nothing more, you turn towards where a distinct sound of small Hufflepuff footsteps had begun to echo from.

Seeing Arty turning the corner to meet you it filled you with joy to see her with a bit of pep in her step and an easy smile on her face as she came in for a hug which quickly turned into a deep kiss. Arty was beautiful. She was *always* beautiful but she outdid her self today.

A delicate white dress which fell just above her knees. A small bow in her styled hair, Hufflepuff yellow and black. The earrings her housemates had given her for Christmas. Light makeup; a touch of eye

shadow, mascara, light pink lip gloss. And a pair of small heels that let her lock her lips to yours without needing to conjure a box or stool.

Breaking the embrace and retrieving the pair of bags she had momentarily set down, Arty looks up at you with a brilliant smile.

“Shall we go, Mr. Hallaster?”

“Shall we, Ms. Pertinger?”

“I think we shall. But if we are going to continue to speak in a refined manner, perhaps I should have brought my monocle and mustache?”, she says with a giggle.

“I... do think you look fetching with your fine facial hair, Arty, but I don't think that is needed.”

“Flatterer. Lets head in, before someone sees us like this and even more rumors start.”, Arty says before hooking her free arm around your own and leading the two of you towards the door to the Room.

Entering, the two of you make your way to the small table to sit while you feel a bit embarrassed when you ask,

“What rumors.. exactly?”

“Oh, you know. The normal. That the evil Slytherin boy had seduced me, was blackmailing me to get in my pants. He Imperio'd my brother to get him to do his bidding. He is doping all the Hufflepuff girls' food with a Love Poison, since he is a genius with potions and now makes most of them blush. Something involving a “cuck chair” and Hugo sitting in it, which I don't get. That you have a girl in every house and that's why you look so tired lately. That the reason we both end up with still healing injuries some days is... well, it's not appropriate for a Lady to say. My friends have asked some very interesting questions though. Girls and *boys*.”, Arty says with a growing grin.

“Apparently kicking the asses of all the other armies last year and you supposedly dueling Potter to a standstill made you a pretty popular topic in some people's little circles of gossip.

“Arty!” you say, not quite a shout but a hair louder than normal, feeling the flush on your cheeks and a hint of panic.

Touching your gloved hand quickly and biting her lip, she continues, her deep blue eyes locking with your own green.

“Now, naturally, I told them while he could have someone in all the houses, he had settled on the best one in the best one. That my brother was just fine. That Elliot would have been hexed and transfigured by now if anything untoward was happening. And though I still don’t quite know what a “cuck chair” is, that ass would be in one regardless. And... that if anyone made a move on you, well, I have gotten quite a bit better with battle magic.”

“Mine. All mine. You are all mine, Elliot Hallaster. Till the end. Because I-“ Arty says gently before your hand clasps her wrist and brings her in closer.

You hadn’t meant to jerk her like that, her arm. You had softened it before it could turn into more than a soft pull which brought her hand closer towards your side of the small table.

“I love you, Artemis Pertinger. I love you, Arty. And if Death himself decides to pay a visit, I will kick him in the dick, toss his cloak over his head, and run off with you where he will never find us. I... I’m sorry about grabbing you like that I should haven’t-.”, you say, head full of regret, letting go of her wrist. Hating yourself for it, hating yourself every moment after your hand left her small wrist more by more. And then the small girl looks back to your eyes and simply laces her fingers between yours.

“We get worse 4 nights a week. And, I told you, I am okay if you hurt me. It makes it real. Makes me believe it’s true. That I have you. We might hurt each other a bit, but that is because we are this close. Hedgehogs can poke one another when they nest in the Winter. Their quills are hard, sharp. Claws can get too long and hit their bed mate. But they still do it. Curl up with each other. And they thrive when Winter ends and Spring begins. I... know you would never harm me, want to truly hurt me. You could put your wand to my head and shout out the Killing Curse and I wouldn’t feel a touch of fear. Stick it to my neck and whisper *Diffindo* and *nothing* would happen.”, she says with a sad smile.

“Arty, I would never-“

“No. You wouldn’t. But even if the most powerful wizard in the world was trying to make you do so, you would find a way to stop yourself. Because you are far, far too kind. You tried to save Lily, at the end, right? Once you knew what had happened to her? That is why Salazar showed you those horrible memories. Why he used them against you. You have the spirit of Helga fucking Hufflepuff in your head, your soul. And I know she found you for a reason. So, if you hurt me a little, I know it’s nothing, or maybe even something I need. When we fought a while back, when I was so tired, pissed, and desperate I could collapse, I didn’t want to think about what I was doing to myself. You told me though. Then I threw the fact I am going to die in your face. *I hurt you*, Elliot. And yet here we are.” She says, steel in her voice, in the hand gripping your own. You silently curse Hogwarts for being this dusty, for plants having the audacity to bloom so early in the year and their allergens making your eyes water this much.

“Yeah. Yeah Arty. We are here. And I think it’s about time to exchange presents.”

“Yep. It is. Because if the worst hap- ah fuck it.”, she says before standing, leaning over the table and planting a messy kiss on your lips.

“Standing in these shoes is really annoying, I’ll have you know. Bad Elliot.”

You look towards Arty and her slightly frowning face, and spring up, planting a small kiss back on her lips, nearly knocking over your chair in the act.

“Mine too, Arty. So let’s just sit for a while.”

You sit back down and pull the huge box of chocolates out from your bags, gently pressing it forward, across the table. The soft smile of the girl sitting across from you turns into a beautiful scowl as she reaches down and produces her own box, one that is clear and seems to hold a single chocolate cupcake, trimmed with gentle Slytherin greens and a touch of silver sprinkles.

Accepting the challenge, you reach down one more time towards the box containing a very specific stuffed animal before a small box comes across the table and lightly impacts your chest. Naturally you return fire after sending over your own package.

“It seems we are at a standstill, ‘Lord Hallaster’” Arty says with a defiant look in her eyes.

“Seems *you* have forgotten Slythering cunning. Always have another trick in your hat. My ultimate weapon.” You say, reaching to the bottom of your bag to retrieve a small simple box. A mirror of the one Arty had gifted you for Christmas. Handing it toward her, you smile.

With a bit of blush coloring her cheeks after taking a peek inside, Arty looks up while bringing the last gift just a bit closer with her hand then stands once more.

“You truly wish for war, Hallaster?”

“I believe you are the one who said we were *always* at war, Pertinger.”

“So be it, then. You brought this on yourself you know. I dreaded using this weapon. To bring it into the light of day. To wield it against someone I love so dearly.”

Taking her left hand to them hem of her dress you become aware of two things rapidly. One that Arty is not wearing any underwear. The second is that she has a very good throwing arm, as a minute box bops you in the head while your eyes are still locked on the brief glimpse of her smooth and soft pussy.

Bringing the edge of her dress back down, and sitting Arty commands you to open the small box now sitting on your lap first. Her menacing glare is more than enough to stifle any arguments you might have had.

“Right hand, Elliot. I don’t know if I am quite ready for the other. At least until I graduate... It’s a promise ring. One that says you will not die. You will comeback, from whatever happens. That even if I grow to hate you, I won’t have to hate a ghost. And that you belong to me. Now I am going to open this huge heart shaped box then you can open the cupcake, as I want a bite.”

You obey. Inside the small box is a ring. One which you find fits perfectly on the fourth finger of your right hand. And then soon after you learn that when you buy more cupcakes for Arty, you should ask if the baker can put a bit more icing on them, as the one she gifted you was so sweet it almost made you cry.

Regardless, you look up meeting her eyes, as she wipes a small amount of chocolate from her lip.

“You might have won the war, Arty but I can at least squeeze a Phyrriic victory from it. So, open yours.”

“Fine, Elliot. I will allow you this small concession in your defeat, so... wait is this- wait where on Earth did you find a-“, Arty says before beginning to stutter, pulling the plush Nundu from the last box.

“That would be a state secret, miss. But I would advise you to scratch him behind the mane.” You say, eyes going a touch wide at seeing the beautiful young girl hugging the plush toy.

Looking up, one hand sneaking up the back of the toy and then jumping back just a bit as a soft paw reached up to touch her face, and the black mane expanding. By the time the stuffed Nundu gave out a small cry, Arty had already squeezed him so tight you thought you would need to cash in the offer of free repairs very soon.

“That should not be how a Nundu sounds. I also think he should be trying to rip my face off, not curling up in my arms, but... he is perfect. Will you open your other gift now? He isn’t as good as this little guy, though...”

Opening the small box, inside is a scarf. Hand made by the look. Knitted in Slytherin colors, with one end resembling a snake’s head.

“Arty, it’s great, let me try it on- ah!”,

You begin to say as you wrap the knitted strip of cloth around your neck before the snake headed end jumps up to lightly hit you in the cheek and it wraps a bit tighter around your neck. Arty has to stifle a quick laugh as she hugs her black and grey toy in her arms.

“A friend of mine helped me enchanting it. I knitted and sewed it.”

Stroking the head end of the scarf, you look at your girlfriend. The scarf had thankfully not tried to nip you past the first bite.

“Didn’t know you could sew, Arty.” She smiles sweetly, after picking another piece of chocolate from the box.

“Yep. Learned to do it before Apollo and I found out we were wizards. Had to fix our things sometimes. And been patching our stuff up since. And now, well, using a wand for everything makes you lazy. I am sure our kids are going to need at least a couple of tears repaired or maybe I’ll need to patch your pants when we find Agatha, and- Eep!”

You leaned back over and planted a quick kiss on her lips.

“Our kids, eh?”

“I said that out loud? I guess... yeah.”

“How many?” you ask with a smile, watching her blush and look down.

“A lot. A Quidditch team. Or what is that Muggle sport? The one with a black and white ball? Sock-something? I want that many. Enough to make Potter pull his hair out in 20 years. Enough smart and kind boys and girl that we overrun Hogwarts with them. Just... maybe less adventure in their lives?”, the beautiful young girl says with her eyes locked on yours.

“Want to start on that now?”

“Ha! I think we should probably save the world first. Graduate first. And... I just took one of the potions in Pomfree’s office. To be safe. Because you make me want to do very unsafe things, Elliot. I would be okay if we... practiced a bit though.”

“There may be a place for a bit of “practice” behind one of the corners. If you want. I... don’t want to make you, I know what happened last time and I don’t want to see you like that again. And we had a fight, a couple of weeks ago, so we-“, you say with a bit of sadness taking the place of your smile.

“Shut up, Elliot. I am nuts for you. What happened before? Our fight? I was trying to be dumb. The thing with Potter? A stay in the infirmary? Don’t really care when the most handsome boy in the world is right

in front of me. I still have some hang ups, I probably still have some problems, but I will *not* let that control my life. If we all might die, if you might die, if I might die, I am going to live while I can.”, she says steel in her eyes. Fire in her voice. And plushie of a creature known for wiping out entire villages in her arms.

You are both incurably attracted and terrified of Artemis Pertinger at that moment. When you come around the table, ask her to stand a bit, then scoop her up, the fire is still there, in her impossibly blue eyes. The Nundu is still in her arms. Voice soft when she says she loves you and that she will make the toy turn around, that he is too young to see what the two of you are about to do.

Setting her down on the simple bed the Room had produced with her placing the Nundu on the nightstand with its head facing towards the corner, Arty indicates for you to come down with her, which you do after slipping off your shoes.

What ensues is a soft embrace. Gentle cuddling. A touch here and there. Holding one another tight, you finding out how sensitive the area of your collar bone is, right where it meets your left arm when Arty goes in for a couple of kisses. Reminding her of the weakness behind her right ear.

Her saying to not to disregard the weakness of your lower left arm to simple kisses. Soft and warm. Pure and innocent. Then Arty doing something very not pure.

Laying against your side, her small arm lifts her side of the cover up and over her corner of the bed, raises her skirt up once more, and places her hand between her thighs. Your upper leg makes for a quite good point of leverage. Your arms, and a quite nice point of balance. You would like to think that your face pressed into the auburn hair helped as well, but your mind and your little friend had other concerns.

The fact Arty was very soft. Very much wanted you to do something not wise. And that she had kicked a Death Eater in the metaphorical dick, then told off what was likely the most powerful wizard in the world in your name.

She was moaning softly, hand beneath her dress as she rocked back and forth against your leg.

It wasn't your fault your cock had turned hard, pressed against the small girl, maybe a half foot away from her private parts. Not your fault that the girl with ridiculously blue eyes was starting to come from

rubbing herself against the person the last prophesy made had declared, in a thousand screams, would end the world. Not your fault when as she shivered and finished her orgasm that you brought her chin up, asked if you could get another few kisses and then took one from her lips then brought her wet hand up. Not your fault when you kissed the fingers of the most beautiful girl in the world on her fingers, then licked them clean tasting salty, sweet, a bit acerbic.

It was very, *very* much your fault when you shifted downward and put your face between her thighs and began licking, kissing it softly.

That blame was easy to take when Arty began to cry out softly, pressing her legs against the sides of your head. You probably are not the best at eating pussy. Probably not even in the top ten. But your girlfriend might disagree, given how she is reacting. Might just say you could put in a bit more work, that she would help you practice, given her soft screams of pleasure. How she is pressing your head inward to that specific area between her legs. That she is begging you to give her more. Which you obliged. Very happy. You would give her the world if she asked. Rip every star in Heaven down if she thought they were pretty. So giving her a few more licks, sucking a bit harder? Easy. And more fun.

Coming up for a breath of air once Arty simply came, you were to surprised when her arms pulled you up, forcing her lips to yours, her body still shaking a bit. You were less concerned about her extreme grip strength versus the fact she was doing her best impression of a Nundu, eating your face off at the moment. Your lips, cheeks, at one point your eyebrow, she went for every part she could reach and kissed them. Laughing a bit as her last fell on your neck, you simply hugged her, despite your little friend pressing quite tightly against the inside of your jeans.

Once she began to speak between breaths and quite sighs, Arty just asks you to hold her for a while. You are pretty sure you had cleaned up well down there, your parents had always insisted you clean your plate after all, and you were careful with her dress all the same. You didn't want to ruin it and while the Scourgify charm was quite good at its job, still better to be careful.

To keep the front hem of her dress from falling down. It had nothing to do with wanting to hold your hand up against the warm, slightly swollen lower lips. Arty herself didn't seem to mind, her legs shifting back and forth over the digits pressed against her. It was starting to feel a cleaning charm might end up being required no matter what.

"Elliot... I gotta pay you back." Arty says with a sigh.

“They were gifts, Arty and you gave me better ones-“; you begin to say before she interrupts you with a kiss. When she breaks it off, tilts her chin down, and bumps her head lightly against your chin, she tells you,

“Not those. The ones you just gave me, down there.”

“You don’t have to, just being like this is enough. We can wait longer-“ you begin before Arty plants a soft slap on to your cheek and shifts her face down low. Quite low, planting a few soft kisses as her head migrates south for the “coming” season. Your desire to think of more clever jokes immediately ends when you feel her unzip your jeans, nuzzles briefly against you then swallows your cock whole.

Linda apparently does not need to breath, might have gills. But Arty is very, very eager. And has absolutely no gag reflex. If Taylor... if he was still there, you might have compared brags. Makes you want to very bad things, like forcing her head down which you can’t help but indulge in doing. Feeling her tongue going back and forth some, mouth sucking again and again, you let her back up for air a few times and feel her spit leaking out to cover your balls. Her lips are all the way to the base of your shaft when her mouth made you come after a few minutes.

She struggles just a bit before you begin to jerk your hips and cum starts to flow and then shoot from your cock into the back of her throat. Arty then relaxes, beginning to suck. Slurping greedily. Somehow making it feel like she had found an extra inch or to swallow.

It is the most intense orgasm of your life. You didn’t know how you could ejaculate so much. But the tiny girl might be some undocumented form of vampire, one designed solely to suck you almost dry.

When the convulsions in your hips stopped and your hand had stopped forcing Arty’s head down, she came back up, her lips sliding up your cock, lingering just a second or two at the head to lick and suck. Make sure she hadn’t missed even a drop. Slurping. And then drool against her chin, her face is pressing to yours before you know it. You just lay back and accept her gentle embrace, having a quite difficult time feeling your legs.

“You taste good, Elliot. Better than pumpkin juice. Butterbeer.”

T-thanks. Thank you, Arty., I might have been eating a little bit more pineapple recently. You know just incase-“ you stutter out.

“Incase you forced your beautiful, innocent princess’ head all the way down your shaft and made her suck? Give her a good reason to swallow up all of your cum? To make her want even more? A most cunning and handsome Slytherin, indeed. One who I love and want to do horrible, terrible things to me.”, Arty says before locking her lips with yours. You can taste a bit of *you* but it mostly tasted like love.

“What kind of things? I mean I have some ideas...” you manage to get out after a few seconds, when your limbs work well enough to wrap your arms around her delicate back.

“Well, I’ve been a bad girl. A very bad girl. Had so many impure thoughts. Done a lot of dirty things. Going to do even more when I get a chance to be alone with those pictures. I think I might need a bit of punishment. A brat needs correction, even if you still love her being a brat. Think that would be alright? I know I am needy... wanting all this, after getting so much already.” Arty says, her whisper sultry.

“I don’t think I I can do that, I don’t want to-“

“Hurt me, yeah. Elliot would never. But what about Dark Lord Hallaster? Think an evil man like him could do the job?”, she asks, looking up with a blush on her cheeks.

“I need to go pee. So maybe when I get back, an evil clone of my boyfriend will have abducted you, a boy who will do terrible, awful things to me?”

“If, if you want, I think that might just happen, Arty. But if we are going to do this, we should probably have a safe word.”

“I don’t know what that is. And I am always safe with you. Always.”, she says getting up from the bed, flashing you the bottom of her ass at you when she adjusts her dress and glancing back with a soft grin.

“If we do this, you will be learning your lesson very, very thoroughly Arty. I might take a while for Elliot to take a Dark Lord down.”

“If he is like you, I am sure he is an excellent teacher. And I am very much in need of some lessons. I love you. And I love Dark Lord Hallaster. I hope he does his worst.”, Arty says as she walks around the divider to the restroom the Room had thankfully provided.

You elect to remain shirtless, waiting with a throbbing erection. Raven might have claimed to, at one time be the most evil witch this side of the Atlantic but the anticipation you felt now was making you think Arty could give her a run for her money.

A few minutes later Arty returned with a small bottle in one hand and a tiny box in the other, some towels beneath it.

“You should be proud of me, Lord Hallaster; I brewed the Slipping Solution myself and I promise from experience it is *quite* good.” Arty says with a smirk, putting it down on the nightstand.

“This other one... well your mom slipped it in my bag before we left. Just incase all the Anti-Pregnancy Potion were gone. Went bad. For if we wanted to try something... different. I looked at one with Raven and we both agreed they should fit well. You *will* explain how she knows how big your amazing cock is though. Got it?”

“Uh- yeah its really nothing, we-“, you begin to stutter out before a pair of small pale fingers press your lips shut.

“Not right now, my Dark Lord. We have better things to do. You helping me out of my lovely dress, me taking those jeans off... I should be clean down there. Raven helped me make sure but, well scourgify isn’t exactly sexy. And-and I shouldn’t be too tight down there, in my other hole. Raven, she helped me with that too.”, she says, blushing towards the end and making your hair raise.

“How did Raven help you? How the fuck-and are we going do what I think? You want *that*?”

“Shhh. And yes I do. Very badly. I am sensitive, sir. I... used that one more than a few times in the past.”

“It might hurt Arty. Are you-“

“Yes. I have said it is okay to hurt me some. And it feels good too, with the pain. Good enough we are going to be glad we don’t have to clean these sheets. Though I feel sorry for the poor house elves who are going to wash out the stain my pussy juice is going to make after I come from getting my Dark Lord to fuck my ass so hard I won’t be walking right for a few days.”

“A week.” You say, rising to kiss Arty who drops the condoms on the bed, your hands reaching behind her to pull down her dress’ zipper while her hands begin undoing your pants. While you fully embrace the darkness, becoming an evil Slytherin about to violate a tiny Hufflepuff ass so hard she comes all over your bed from the act then begs for more. While Helga screams that this is *extremely* inappropriate while still keeping her eyes over your metaphorical shoulder. Once you shuffle your pants off and Arty’s dress is on the floor, she moves her hands to your shoulders and pushes you with surprising strength backwards, on to the bed she grabs the box of condoms next to your waist then kneels. Taking one out and ripping it open with her sharp, white incisors, the beautiful young girl sets it over just the tip of your cock.

“Let me show you, one of the tricks Raven taught me. If that is, okay Lord Hallaster?”, she asks with a toothy grin and her fingers placed gently on the head of your penis, rubbing altogether too softly.

“I am really going to have a talk with Raven after this...”, you say as you fight the urge to squirm from her rhythmic massage on your most sensitive part.

“Is that a no, sir?”

“No, no, fuck no. Show me!”

“Since you asked nicely... call me princess when I am fixing it up. I want you to tell me I am your princess. Please, Dark Lord?”, the short pale girl says now on her knees with lips nearly pressed to the apex of your latex covered head.

“Yes, Arty. Mine. My princess. Forever. My dark Lady. A fierce, wild princess, you-“. The accolades end in a sputter, soft full lips going over your cock to the base and rolling the rubber along with them. Even after it is on, Arty comes back up, brushing her aside as she pushes it back down, tightening the thin film, and then again, until your penis is tightly wrapped with veins even being able to show through the tight material. Arty finishes by running her long pink tongue up and down a few more time until you give her a soft sigh of happiness, before kissing both of your tightened up balls once.

“Take the bottle and let me get on the bed first,” Arty says blushing then mounting the mattress. Her tiny chest and taught belly are pressed down and gives you an exquisite view of her ass like a firm, shapely, and juicy peach. Hugging one of the pillows and whispering into it, she asks,

“Do-do you mind lubing us up, Lord Hallaster? Lots. I want to be able to keep going for a while...”

“It should be clean down there, Raven and me made sure, but we don’t-“, the cute naked girl on her belly whispers into a pillow, embarrassed.

“Arty, hips up. Face down. And keep your thighs spread for now. Move your cheeks apart.”, you instruct her firmly.

“Yes-yes sir! Here, I hope you like it- Eeeep! What are you doing Elliot! You don’t- uhg ah have to... that feels goood.... Oh Merlin, your tongue! I’m sorry but, more, pleeease more!”, Arty squeaks out as you bend down between her pillowy cheeks and plant a kiss against her spasming pink hole, delicate, and for some reason tasting slightly of wild strawberries. You bury your face tight and tongue her, forcing it in while the small Hufflepuff cries out when it flicks around, snake like. Against your chin, her warm slit moistens to the point it is almost dripping after a few minutes of your innocent little Hufflepuff having her eager asshole eaten. With a few final licks, you pull up and grab a wash towel she had snuck on the edge of the bed, your beautiful perverted princess still shaking her ass back and forth slightly, wanting more, while you wipe your chin and mouth clean.

Retrieving the bottle of Slipping Solution, you wet your cock with some. Your hand rubbing it around, up and down feels odd. Almost like when Helga shares your senses but still amazing. As horny as you are right now, as kinky as it is that your love is begging in an innocent voice for you to please lick it again, to use her ass... well your throbbing penis still sends trills of pleasure up your spine when you finish with tip and move on to Arty. Her pink little button is still plenty wet from your spit but she did say she wanted to go for awhile.

“Hold still. My little slut. Going to use my fingers, lube your filthy little hole so I can take you. Understand?”

“Yes, thank you. I want it Elliot. Sir. Dark Lord Hallaster. Please.”, Arty says in a submissive voice and turns her head to look a bit back, towards your face and arm as the latter shifts and she feels a pair of sopping wet fingers go inside, plumbing, twisting so they lubricate every crevice of her rectum. Going in and out while your free hand slaps against her thigh and buttock to make her clench and clean the slipping solution off your fingers as they pull out and circle around her asshole. There is a tiny amount left in the bottle, but you don’t want to waste it. A few drops on the end of your wrapped cock then,

“Arty, down further. Ass up higher. And relax.”, you say, touching the bottle to her ass and tipping it up. The last few mls drain into her; just to make sure she is lubed enough on the inside. When the very dregs

disappear, you toss the bottle away and wipe your hand on the towel, Arty arching her back a bit less when you scoot in and place your cock in between her cheeks, the head just an inch or two from her slightly gaping asshole.

“Just stay relaxed, I’ll go in easy. I-!” you start and are then interrupted by a determined voice from one edge of the pillow as her little rosebud clenches tight.

“No. Like this. Force it in, all the way on the 1st thrust. Every inch. Please, Lord Hallaster. Elliot. Please, boyfriend?”, the small girl says hair covering part of her face, bottom moving just a bit against the tip of your slick cock.

“It’s going to hurt. And if you want it all... I won’t stop.”

“Perfect..”

Shifting her ass down just a hair, you line up the covered tip of your dick with her till it catches some. One hand on her waist to stabilize you, the other on the back of her neck to keep her body in place and cause hot soft moans to escape when your fingers press around the small shape, you thrust down and forward.

Arty screams as you force your way in and struggles a bit, until you about halfway in and snag, running up against resistance you don’t just want to force your way past, so you keep her ass there, shifting your hips to find a way forward until her hips drop slightly and your dick pushes deeper in as she screams, until your thighs are all the way against her soft butt and quivering. And because she wanted it, you squeeze her closer with your left hand against her pubic bone, until you can feel the rim of her hole almost to your balls. She seems to actually struggle at this point but your right hand keeps her head pressed against the pillow, her arms too short and out of place to do anything but flail on the covers. But her voice? In between the indignant yells and cries, you hear her begging for more, again, deeper, harder. So you pull back, bringing her face out of the fabric, and thrust in and out again, and again, and again. Softer but picking up speed, your cock shifting around her warm insides.

For Arty’s part, with every thrust she is speaking a pidgin of pained screams, deep pleasure; begging for more in two word phrases, and soft sobs.

“Fuck me, fuck me, screw me, I’m bad, love it, more more! Ahahaha.... Ahhhh! Ahhh! Ohhh. Eeeeeee!”

“Arty, my slutty little princess... soften up. I can go deeper. When I go in, relax. When I pull out, tighten. Or are those instructions too hard for you now? Did I break your brain too much?”, you ask softly with something very hard shoved 6 inches deep in the girl’s ass; who’s styled hair was now wild and streaked with sweat. You still brushed your fingers through it, stroking her scalp, as you allowed her to catch her breath. Drool spilled from the corner of her mouth as she gasped.

“Ye...s, yes, sir. Dark Lord Hallaster. My Dark Lord. Are you close? Please say you are... am I still your Princess? Now? I-I’m naughty. Came a minute ago. Didn’t ask if I could. I’m so, so sorry, you dick is too good. I’ll do better. I love you... so much.”, Arty says softly, blushing and looking embarrassed before she pushes her head into a pillow and mounts her hips higher on your shaft, sobbing a bit in a combination of feelings.

Lust. Love. Humiliation. Pride. Pain. Pleasure. Longing. Happiness, mostly. She had cried hot tears of sorrow on your shoulder before, but now all the emotions blended, like a complex potion. An amazing one, unique.

Pressing in, cock squeezing deep enough Arty’s body tensed, you bend over her, touching her face with both hands, her tears had stopped. She had stopped. And you tell her,

“Always. Always my princess. One who gets saved. One who saves me. Beautiful as destruction. Terrible as creation. In everyway you are a princess. Even if right now you are your husband’s whore princess. Next weekend you are going to be his. And the month after, the year, decade, century, millennium. Forever.”, whispering into her amazing smelling auburn hair, and shifting your hips softly and slowly, cock pressing inside her back and forth.

“Wait? Husband?! Wait- ah, ah... Merlin right there, keep going!”

“Fuck Merlin.”, you counter, very close to the dam breaking.

“No, fuck me, *fuck meeee!*”, the small girl corrects, her hips lifting you up slightly as a hot small stream of juice and pee squirts out twice from her pussy, and she collapses down while you plant a few more rhythmic thrusts in her ass, shuddering with each as your balls empty into the plastic around your piece. Long. Long, almost painful. You keep shuddering so long you wonder if the cum will blow out the end of the condom. The clear dam holds, you think at least and as you pull out, you hear a soft *squelch*. It seems as good as Arty’s mouth was, the hold onto your cock that the condom held had finally failed and

now your slightly wet and shiny cock was free of its latex prison; looking down, maybe a third of it was still sticking out of Arty's ass while she enjoyed post orgasm bliss. Post anal orgasm, one so hard there was a wet spot between yours and her legs.

"Hold very still, Arty. Don't move. Whatever you do, do not clench up. Relax as much as you can.", you say softly to the panting and petite Hufflepuff who sighs in bliss. Grabbing the rim of the rubber and twisting it around your finger, you tense back and pull, like it was a dangerous snake. The cum filled end pops out with a wet slorp which is when you allow Arty to tighten up, as much as she could, once more. The end is filled with what has to be 30mls of milky-white 'venom'. More dangerous than that of even the Blue Krait, to Hufflepuffs, at least. With a relieved sigh, you tie the end and toss it to a small bin, nailing the shot almost as hard as you just nailed your girlfriend.

You knew badgers could walk off some snake poison but you considered yourself a polite serpent. A Monocled Cobra. Hahaha.

A brief session of cleaning, scourgify, Mentos charms, and more kisses than strictly needed, you mentally yelled at the Room until it produced a small dresser that was not there 5 minutes ago containing 2 sets of clothes.

A small, thin sleep gown that looked 60 years out of date and a set of light blue striped sleep pants and short sleeve top, which you are pretty sure belonged to Donald Duck, you and Arty done the garments. Your original cloths are folded, in her case, and piled in yours, on a small wooden bench at one corner of the divider.

It was weird. Despite what you had done to her, what she wanted, what she had done to you, getting changed was still a private ritual. One you do it back-to-back, not even daring a peak. One done in silence. Reverent. You and the girl with gorgeous auburn hair, more gorgeous for it being out of place so much, turned at almost the same time to face each other.

You had never loved your green eyes all that much. Not light jade, nor bright malachite, nor deep emerald. Just Elliot green. But Arty's own, a pair which could shift between sapphire, alexandrite, tanzanite, the palest blue diamond and a thousand more gem shades seemed to drink them in. Like they were the first sprigs of grass in spring or the last bits of summer in fall. So the two of you closed in with the practiced grace of people who had fought as a pair against a madman till you could move as one, and embraced.

Your kisses were deep and passionate but not sexual. Just the love of one soul and their mate. Soft and strong, flirty and passionate. Long and perfect, her arms around your shoulders to bring you in, yours around her waist to lift her to her tip toes.

Hand in hand, you made your way the short distance to the bed, now clean, and you lifted her up in your arms to place her on the right side, before joining her on its left and pulling the sheets over your bodies. Arty Came in first, snuggling against your chest, and you followed, one hand holding her tight against you and the other under her face as she snuggled against it and you.

“Sleep?”, she says, more than asks.

“Sleep.”

“I know you need to meet Raven, Linda around midnight. She told me what you we going to do. Together.”, Arty states innocently.

“I owe it to us. Did... you want to come?”

“Already did a lot today. Haha!” the adorable but fierce girl says, kissing your neck.

“That’s not what I meant!”, you say with a smile at the sweet gift fate had sent you.

“I know... but nah. This is for you and her. For Taylor. But if we can get a few hours before then? And will you come back. I think Riley is keeping Apollo busy and the other girls will cover. We don’t have to head to Occulamency till late. So... come back and I will keep the bed warm till then.”, Arty says. So close you can smell the linen, perfume, sex... all of it. Smelling like Arty. Like love.

Sleep takes you soon, her soft snores. Your grasp a bit to tight. All of it in a quite dark room only a few people could ever find you or hurt the tiny freckled girl in your arms.

You try and fail to not wake her but as sneaky as 6 years in Slytherin could make you, it was not enough. But, perfect as she was all she did was say she loved you, demand a kiss, then open up your side of the covers for when you returned before falling asleep again.

Now back in Slytherin greens with wand in pocket and chocolates in hand you began to make the precarious ascent to the top of the Astronomy tower, dodging prefects with practiced ease; considering what you had been through they might as well have been blind.

Was this how Potter felt all the time? Intoxicating, and boring.

At the top, February breezes cool even with the warming enchantments in your robes, you look around seeing little. Just as you are about to cast a silent disillusionment charm, a shadow sitting on the ledge calls your name.

"Elliot. Here. One the edge.", the shadow says, long twin braids lightly dancing in the near dark. Coming to her left side she adds,

"Come on up. Best seat in the house."

"Hey, Lin-", you try as you climb up.

"Raven. Raven tonight. She is the one he fell in love with."

"He loved the both. Real ladies man, that Cycad.", you say, correcting her as you plant your butt down on the wide old stone, legs dangling off; nothing but a couple hundred feet between them and the ground. And yet... no fear. Because of who is next to you.

"You know, if you jump, im coming next. Carpe Retractum to catch up and bleed your momentum."

"Decendo, pull us both down faster."

"Arresto Momentum. Stop you till I close the distance."

“Acendio when you pass me.”

“Accio Raven’s panties”

“Not wearing any.”

“I know.”

And so you continue. Which would have to see the other die, if you shifted forward maybe 2 feet. Then you bring out your ultimate weapon, cunning and preparation.

“I already drugged our hot coco tonight with my own version of the slow fall; longer lasting but weaker. Not perfect, you and I are probably going to need to regrow the bones in our hands and knees but... I love you, Raven. I love you, Linda.”

Stroking one braid, the pale girl, once more in her dark make-up looks out, towards the vast sea of stars with longing and then down.

“I love you, Elliot. And... I got something. I think Taylor will like it.”, she says, her slight frown coming up a bit as she grabs a small device from the cranny next to her on the right.

It was a cylinder thin as her wrist with a bulb at the top and a tab that just screamed “pull me” with a small box of chocolates and a tiny bottle of the same dreadful alcohol the 3 of you had drunken up here years ago and green ribbons to tie one more small thing on to. After she explained how it was a modification of a traditional paper lanterns sold at Wizbang’s, her soft pale hands help your own to attach your small glowing box of star shaped chocolates, then held the device up.

“Do the honors, Elliot?”

“Shouldn’t you, since, you know?”, you say saddened. She shakes her head and replies,

“No. You are the one who is going to bring him back. If you send it up, its just a care package. If I do... it means I am saying goodbye. So light the fuse, pull the tab, and lets send Taylor a Valentine’s gift.”, Raven says, grey colored eyes just a bit puffy and dark eyeliner not completely hiding the redness, eyeshadow not completely blending into the rings of purple beneath her kind, sharp orbs.

Glad that it is just dark enough to hide the mist in your eyes, you grasp hold of the activator, then yank it to the side and out. Instantly the contraption flares to life like a small sun, blinging you and your quirky best friend before the top bulb puffs open and it takes flight, quickly soaring to the stars. *Too* quickly as Raven isn’t able to let go fast enough and it yanks her arms up, threatening to take her with it. She lets go at the last minute but wobbling forward, you do the only thing you could and wrap an arm behind and around her waist, then fall backwards like divers on a ship. The two of you hit loudly against the stone floor of the tower and get the perfect view, a tiny chocolate and booze bearing star heads towards heaven on its way to meet a certain dark-haired boy.

It is amazing. As it rises far up, its course never shifts from wind and the light twinkles to match the other countless lights in the night sky. You and Raven just lay there for a while, in the quite and cold darkness, until its light becomes indistinguishable from the others that your friend loved so dearly. You squeeze down, expecting her hand but instead get softness with a cool metallic center,

“Eep! Elliot! Boob. Squeezing my tit you twat!”, Raven cries out in a surprised scream. When you look over, her shirt and vest are raised up on the right with your hand pressed tightly against her breast from where you had grabbed onto her to pull her back. It takes a second for your hand to stop instinctively caressing the soft warm mound.

“Umpf! Keeping me from falling to my death does not mean you get to cop a feel! Well, maybe just the one, but not that many! I’ll hex you!”

Your brain finally catches up and you release your grasp of your best friend’s ample pale mound, dropping your hand to the side. It wasn’t the first time you had seen her tits, just the first since she had apparently swapped out the small black bars going through her rosey pink nipples for thicker metallic rings that kept them seemingly hard and erect. Or maybe that was the February air.

“Ah shit, Raven. I didn’t mean to... I’m sorry. Sit up some and let me get my arm back.”, you say quickly.

Retrieving your arm and sitting you stifle a laugh. Her skirt had flipped up and over, exposing herself to the sky; you also notice a piece of jewelry you had not seen before going vertically through the hood of her clit and the fact she wasn’t lying about not wearing underwear. After a brief struggle, Raven

untangles her legs from the wall and begins fixing her self back up while you turn around and giggle some. When she finally gives permission for you to turn around, Raven is more or less made back up and giving you a stare which you are pretty sure will be making you vomit snails any second.

“Cad. Beast. Lecher. *Rude*. How about I tell Arty about what you do to gorgeous Slytherin maidens up here at night. Huh? Think she would like that, Hallaster.”, she says fire in her voice, grey eyes on yours.

“Ohhh really. First how about you tell me what you do to pure Hufflepuff ladies to make them that corrupted, Everdark. What dark magic did you use on her down in that suitcase, eh?”

“Pretending you didn’t like it? Hypocrite. And she was impure before asking the evil witch for help, I assure you of that.”, Raven snaps back, the pair of you closing the distance between each other.

“Oh *of course I liked it*, I’m as Slytherin as you are. But she is mine. You know it is not wise to touch another Slytherins property. You will regret doing so when I turn her against her teacher, Everdark.”, you tell the Darkest Witch in Britain.

You are all but nose to nose now, warm breaths coming quick, caressing the other’s cheeks. Bodies touching just enough for you to feel her nipple rings while you are sure she can feel your half erect cock brush against her thighs every once in a while.

“You be the one begging for mercy when I set her against you, Dark Lord Hallaster. She seemed quite eager to learn from Lady Everdark, after all. And she is a very good kisser.”, Raven says, eyes going wide at what she admitted.

“What?”

“What?”, she responds, cheeks rapidly turning a shade of crimson that would match Gryffindor’s crest.

You are the first. The first to burst into a ruckus laughter, but Raven quickly follows. You step in and embrace her in a tight, familiar hug. You and her had shared many times over the years; one needed too many times since Taylor had died. The pretty dark-haired girl is laughing over your should, squeezing you tight, chest pressed into you.

No sexual tension. No nervousness. Nothing but an old, though incomplete, joy. There should be another boy here, his large glasses jostling around as he was hugged and adding his kind laughter to yours and Raven's.

While you are still chuckling, Raven quiets down and hugs you closer. Places her face against the top of your shoulder. And sobs. Softly, barely a sound but you can feel hot tears on your neck, unsteady breaths. And you, damn half-Hufflepuff you are, start crying too, face on her shirt.

It had been months since you had seen Linda Colbris cry. Had even though her tears had run dry. That was cruel of you. The wound was still there, if not bleeding fresh.

"I want him here, Elliot. I want to see him again. To hear him talk about precession, orbits, convergences. Even if I had no clue what he meant half the time. I-I want Taylor! Even one last time, one last kiss, 10 more points taken from Slytherin for getting caught sneaking out at night. Elliot it hurts... it hurts.", Linda says, her tone changed, voice desperate and pained.

"I do to. So, so much. To talk about Atlantean star plotting with, to sneak food from the kitchen and hide with me so we could gossip about girls. So we could sit out of Flying class together and play Gobstones again. To tell me I am not crazy. I want to call him Moonman again. I am so sorry Linda its my fault."

"No!", she says as sharply as she can with a cracking voice and running nose.

"No, Elliot it isn't. Taylor and you were inseparable. If you didn't take him with you to Last Light, he would never forgive your ghost. We won because he was there, after I got hurt, he fixed my arm, when I was useless, he fought on with you."

"But-", you try to begin.

"I said no. No buts. I wanted to be down there with you too, right? Because if you had gone alone, we would all be dead. Salazar would have grabbed the repository, tried to take the Merlin-Beast, failed and it would all be over.", Linda says with fire in her voice.

"He died saving the world with his lover and best friend. And the world is still here, right.", she asks.

“It is. There is a world to mourn for him in. And his stars still shine.”, you say looking up to her pained face, still pretty but with wet lines of mascara across her face now.

“Yeah. Lets sit down, yeah? Got something to warm us up.”, Raven says, putting her back against the wall where the two of you were sitting on the ledge, taking down a couple of items from the nook she had placed them in. You come to join her, grabbing your own gift. The pair of you scoot together. Both Linda’s and your robes have heating enchantments but there is a certain kind of warmth they could never provide, one only another human being near you fills your heart with. Linda then hands you something. Something to fill the stomach with warmth too; a larger bottle of the same crappy liquor you had sent up to Taylor. Three years ago, this size had been enough to get all of you pleasantly drunk. Now, with what you had been through and your growth, should suffice for Linda and yourself.

Cracking it open, you take the first swig and pass it back to your left; yep, still awful, in a comforting, nostalgic kinda way. The two of you continue in that way, silently taking alternating pulls with your bodies pressed close until maybe a third of the amber liquid is left, placing the bottle down between yourselves.

Reaching over, you make the first move, handing the dark haired lass a small box of 6 different filled chocolates, dark chocolate, naturally. She reciprocates with a box filled with specialty truffles, each with a different cordial filling.

“Happy Valentines Day, Linda. Happy Valentine’s Day, Raven.”

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Elliot. I love you.”, she says softly.

“I love you too. Whether its Linda or Raven.”, you assure, turning to match her tight hug, the pale girl giving you a light kiss on the cheek, before releasing the embrace and grabbing another deep swig from the mostly drained bottle.

“Playing my first war game with dad. Baubau being born. Finding out I was a witch. Mom telling me she loved me, no matter what I was or wanted to be. Meeting you and Taylor on the Hogwarts Express. The first time I correctly cast a spell. Hissing at a stuck-up Gryffindor when I split my tongue and her peeing her pants. Learning my sister was a witch too. Hexing a Hufflepuff boy who reached under my skirt so hard Madame Pomfree had to fix his face. Taylor and you accidentally kissing. Taylor and I kissing for the first time...”, Linda says, slurring some.

“Yeah? Those sound-like great memories... oh no.”

“Things I used to fuel it. But after he died, I can’t cast a patronus charm any more. Those memories are still there. Those things *still* happened. I still cherish all of them and more. But I can’t make a sword out of my *happiness* any longer, just a knife from my *hate*.”, Linda says passing the bottle to you which you take a deep swig of.

You knew all too well how it was to not be able to manifest a Patronus, to be told you just weren’t happy enough. You had no idea what it must be like to lose that. To have that happy part of your soul lost and to have it replaced with what could let you use the Killing Curse.

“Hey... it doesn’t have to be one or another. Potter can use them both. Hell, Salazar of all people could use them both. You can cast your Patronus again, I’m sure. People gain it and lose it. Logically people who have lost it can get the ability back.”, you tell Linda as she looks towards the sky; you take one more drink from the bottle before placing it in front of her and grabbing ahold of her chilly right hand with your scarred left.

“Potter never used it to end someone’s life. And Salazar is insane. Anyone who can still be happy while being able to hate this much... you were the one who told me what he made Lilly do. Do to herself. And when I remember, some of those small scars and burn marks? Too straight or clean for accidents. Too many in places that I know from experience *hurt*. I don’t think I will be able to cast it again. And... am I a monster, Elliot?” she says, draining the bottle and tossing it over the wall behind her. Linda looks sad, alone, and quite drunk.

You release the soft grip on her hand, then twine your arm around hers and re-engage the embrace, this time closer than before.

“You are not a monster. You are the person who saved my life three times this year alone. Raven kept me from bleeding out when Salazar took my arm. Healed me for what Helga said was *hours* when the Beast tried to rip its way out of me. Linda kept me from using the Resurrection stone and killing myself afterwards.”

“I also killed Lily. Used the Curse. And then, before I thought to help you, I ripped her body to shreds. Turned everything from the neck up into gore... and I don’t feel bad. I liked it, ripping her throat out. Behind the rage and sorrow, I enjoyed destroying her corpse like that.”, Linda admits to you, shuddering from the memory. Your hand just squeezes tighter.

“Even if you were a “monster”, you would still be my friend. Linda, Raven, Dark Lady or not. But please don’t think of yourself as bad. And... what did you mean, about knowing? The other things Salazar did?”, you say, before your best friend lets out a couple of tears.

“*Lumos Fillia Minima*. Here. Look. I stopped but for a while I would hurt myself sometimes. Cuts. Burns. When I was stressed. When I was hurting on the inside. Afraid. The nights I hated myself.”, Linda tells you, lifting up her sleeve, her skirt and directing the tiny floating ball of light close. With the end of her wand, she traces over small, small healed wounds, their scarring barely visible but for the close light and her pointing them out. A few on her arm including the underside of her wrist. Several smaller straight lines inside her thigh. Dismissing the spell and pulling her clothes back down, your friend wraps an arm around your shoulder and hugs tightly.

“You are only the second person I’ve ever told. Mom figured it out on her own, of course, but..”

“Linda. Why didn’t you tell Taylor or me? If you were going through things, that you were hurting like that?”, you say to her.

“Because I was ashamed. Of feeling that way. Embarrassed that I was doing this. Though my only two friends might hate me or run away. But its fine. And neither you or Taylor showed anything but concern for me, when I told you. I haven’t tried to it in a few years, even if I had the razor blade pressed against my wrist after he died, I didn’t go through with it. Because I still had you, Elliot. Because Taylor would have been sad if he was around to find out and you would feel bad, try and blame what I did on yourself. There is a lot wrong with me, Elliot. But I am okay because of you and him. I-I was rambling. I’m drunk. Sorry. But, thank you for being there. For being my friend.”, she sighs and looks down, sad.

“Lily didn’t have a Taylor or an Elliot. All she had was a monster she could never run from. So, when I realized that, I understood.”

“I understood why Salazar has to die.”, Linda says, looking up Raven again in her voice and movements.

“He will. We will stop him. Fix it. Fix it all.”, you say before squeezing your arm tight over her shoulders again.

“Yeah. But, I think its about time for you to head back to Arty. I am going to eat the wonderful chocolates you got me and head back down in a bit. Look for Taylor’s lantern. Think. Thank you for the wonderful Valentine’s, Elliot.” she says, both Linda and Raven at once. You really were not sure what tossing Rowena in the mix might do, aside from traumatize the founder of House Ravenclaw.

Standing with your feet unsteady you realized that even with warming charms in her robes like your own, it was cold up here; you brought out your wand and after a respectable three tries, conjured up a blanket you draped over the dark haired girl. It took a couple more failed casts but you did manage a weak, temporary heating charm as well.

“Elliot. Thanks. I hope being up here didn’t ruin the rest of your night. I’d say you should have ended up in Hufflepuff, but that would mean we might not have ever become friends so, just thanks. Can I get one more hug?”, she says with a giggle.

As you bend down to give her a quick squeeze, she supprises you and grabs your face on both sides so she can bring her lips against yours; you start to panic but she releases the kiss in just a few moments.

“Friendship kiss. Because it is Valentine’s and I would be alone if you weren’t up here. Because I love you... like a friend. Though if Arty wasn’t so nice, and if you didn’t love her, I might think of stealing you from her. But... I’m sorry. Shouldn’t have-”

You bend back down and plant a soft, quick kiss back. Nothing erotic about it. Nothing sexual. Just an acknowledgement of the bond you and her share.

“It’s fine. Just... be okay? If you stay out to long you’ll catch a cold. I suck at charms so that Warming Enchantment will probably only last another couple of hours. And If you don’t show up in the common room tomorrow, if you do something dumb, I will tell everyone what is in your suitcases.”, you say sternly and look her in the eyes.

“Don’t worry. I’m not going to do something silly because I am a bit sad. Who would host Rowena then? Help you kick Salazar’s shit in? But that is mean. And Arty is a better kisser than you, just so you know.”, Raven says and pops another chocolate in her mouth.

This girl.

“You are going to tell me how you know that, and soon, *Dame* Everdark.”

“I could do better and show you, *Lord* Hallaster.”, she says with a smirk and a bit of chocolate on the corner of her mouth.

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Dodging the prefects is a bit more challenging with this much brandy in you but you had become fairly good at sneaking around and are sure at least a few are “off duty” with another student in one of the old classrooms or larger broom closets, so you manage to make it back to the Room and set it into the correct configuration.

When you enter and walk around the divider, Arty is halfway sitting, propped up on a few extra pillows with a small novel spread open face down in her lap, a dim enchanted light now manifested on the night stand next to her. She snores so softly it might as well just be breathing and you try not to wake her as you strip down to just your boxers and the tee beneath your robes. Sliding into the bed, you almost think you had succeeded, until she places her book on the small wooden table quickly, and rolls over so she can wrap her arms around you.

“Hey... hey Elliot. Did you have fun with Linda? I took a nap then read some and I guess fell back asleep. Sorry, I was going to stay up till you were back.”, she says with her face pressed against your chest. Being under the covers like this, Arty is warm. Very warm to someone who just spent the last few hours in the chill of a February night, so you grab ahold and greedily suck in her heat. Slytherins are cold blooded after all.

“Cold! You’re cold, Elliot!”, she squeaks out. And you just hold her tighter. After a bit of squirming, she stops, just resting her head on your chest while you bring the blanket up almost to her chin.

“Yeah. Yeah, I did Arty. Linda, Raven- she has been my friend since my first day. We talked about Taylor, sent something up to the stars for him. Talked about how we were doing. Drank the same crappy booze we did together 3 years ago. Sat and just, talked, I guess. Got some candy we can try together. I’m sorry, I probably shouldn’t have gone off with another girl on Valentines...”

“Shush you. Linda, she is a good person. She is your oldest friend. You do this every year with her... and him, apparently. She helped me. A lot. She lost her love, but is still fighting. She is going to host one of

them, because I...I can't do it. I am okay. You are mine, but if it is her, I can share a bit. Worst Slytherin ever I swear, this future husband of mine. I expected to be held captive, ravished, made to serve him, turned into a Slytherin in all but name.", your tiny auburn badger sighs, scooting up to kiss you deeply. She fixed her hair to the point it no longer looks like bed head, just a bit wild; you might just prefer it this way.

"Wait. Why do you taste like her lip gloss? And why is there a bit of that color on your lips!", Arty says with a huff.

"A... friendship kiss. But why do you know what it tastes like? And why did she imply some things about how she helped you prepare for Valentine's?", you respond, seeing her sharp look dull and a flush rise to her cheeks.

"A friendship... kiss. And, I wanted to make this good for you, and she is really pretty, and-", Arty says hiding her face a bit in the covers.

"The three of us are really going to have to have a talk, after we keep the world from ending. But... I wasn't anything Arty. You are still the only girl in the world I want to be with. Okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. Okay. Sleep?", she says half her face poking out of the sheets.

"Sleep. Goodnight my love."

"Good night love."

And so she curls in while you turn more towards her and with in 15 minutes, both of your eyes are shut and your breathing soft and slow.

Thus ends the first Valentine's with the girl you knew you would spend a thousand more together with.

