

The night before the 14th, you paced around the Room of Requirement. What a crock. If it really could provide anything you required, you wouldn't have asked Linda for help you think, kicking around tiny stones while waiting for her to arrive.

If it could, the cupcake you had bought would have turned into a *whole* cake, no cup about it. The scarf you had made would have resembled the fancy ones Elliot's old comrade Elland wore. And the plain steel ring you found would be gold and go on his other hand. You had trouble getting gifts. And you had trouble giving them. The idea it wasn't enough. You knew you could probably give your handsome and charming boyfriend a half empty salt shaker stolen from the great hall and he would treasure it, but... you wanted more. If the Room could give you just a hair more confidence, that would have been lovely.

You had found the man you wanted to spend your whole life with, however short it would be. Despite what he told you... you knew you were going to die far, far sooner than most. Quicker than you should. You had made peace with that, you thought. You would need to tell Apollo about that fact, after he graduated. Make him promise to not do something dumb when you got to see what was after the last train stop. If him and Riley worked out, you hoped that having the same love you and Elliot shared would help him.

Maybe some potion, seeing a muggle doctor could push it back for a few years. Maybe. Long enough to see a kid or two graduate even.

Artemis Pertinger was no coward and you would kick anyone who said so in the dick harder than you had done to Crouch before, but... She was also a 15 year old girl. One still terrified that... she didn't deserve him. Of him having to weep over her body. And of you being happy like this.

You didn't have money. Status. Power. Things to give him which he couldn't just get himself. Hell, greatest living wizard had said that even after being tortured by a barely contained Death Eater you would still be weaker than one of your junior house-mates in a year. You thought about it now and before; your only real skills were not being mauled by magical beasts and not knowing when to quit. It hurt, the idea you couldn't help the kind Slytherin you loved as much as you wished to do. That you were a weak spot. A liability. A target his enemies could use.

Taking a drink of the diluted Griding potion, mixed with one of the muggle energy drinks Elliot had given you from a small flask, you sigh. And you knew why you were like this. Couldn't aid him like you wanted to. Why he would have to cry at your funeral. You were a twin, a magical twin whose brother had stolen most of her power. Her time, before he knew what was happening. Before he was even born.

There was a reason why magical twins were rare in the past. Not a good reason, you believed. But a real one, why one was usually killed in the womb.

There were days... days you wanted to hate him. To loath him because he could get any job he wanted with how strong he was, could breeze through classes, because he would likely out live most of the people going to school by a hundred years.

But you couldn't. Apollo was your brother. Only one you had. He had the courage to save you from the hell that you and him were in as children. The love to support you, even if at times you don't think he got exactly why he was doing it. The occasional soft smile he gave you. Grabbing an extra plate and bringing it to you when you skipped dinner to study. Late nights where you and Apollo just chatted until he inevitably zonked out. The fact he had broken at *least* three people's noses in the last 5 years because they were mean to you.

You were very glad some days you didn't wear eyeliner and mascara. Today was one of them. You finished the flask of what Elliot had called "Redbull on crack" and dabbed your eyes just a bit by the time another Slytherin, this one with long dark hair made it to you with a large trunk hanging off her right hand.

"Hey Arty. Sorry got a bit delayed. Some second year Ravenclaw is apparently fond of me. Got a card as an early gift.", she says, a touch winded.

"It's fine Lind-"

"Raven is okay for today. And... when I get Rowena to come out? Ha! Who knows. Might need a new alias?", Raven says bringing the case to the spot on the wall you both knew would soon reveal a certain Room.

"I got it, Raven. I always liked that name you know. Its cool."

"Glad you think so. I sound like a nerd. Raven Everdark... But she is a part of me and... I don't want her to go away. To die. She- Linda Colbris wasn't the one who made friends with Taylor and Elliot.", Raven says with a slightly sad smile which perks up a tad when she begins to speak again.

“Hey if we are talking about nick names? How about Apocalypse Machine: Hallaster for Elliot? Or like, Tyrant Snake? Monocled Cobra? What do you want, if we ever get to use them?”, she asks with a dumb smile on her face.

“Hahaha. You are a nerd, I think. And I love it. Something with a badger, I believe. I do like them. There is this magical sub-species you can find in the forest which are really nice! I want one as a pet some day!”

“Those... are the ones who can chew through solid steel right?”, Raven says with a gulp.

“Yeah! And they are really friendly mostly. I’ve only had to toss one into the branches of a tree when it bit a finger tip off a couple years ago! Taught that naughty boy. Now they know not to mess with me!”, you exclaim, some extra cheer in your voice.

“Fucking crazy... he is dating an insane woman. What the fuck Elliot. What the fuck?”, you hear Raven mutter her, eyes a bit wide.

“I am not crazy! So many of these creatures are just misunderstood. They aren’t bad they just... they just... need a hand sometimes... and when I was alone they were there... and thestrals are really pretty, and the two-headed snakes are cool even if their venom can melt stone... and...”, you say, once more glad you don’t wear anything around your eyes.

You look down for a moment before a soft, warm hand is on your face, making you look up some. Raven’s face no longer looks sad or confused, just concerned.

You hate it.

“Hey. Are you okay Arty? I’m sorry. Crazy in a cool way, okay? You look like you... had cried some before I got here. I’m sorry if I fucked the mood, but... if anything is going on? If you need help? Or to talk? I’m here, alright. That time of the month? We can always talk if you need and I have some Muggle pills that really help. And if you have some issues, with what you want to do with Elliot... he won’t mind. He is way nicer than he should be. Even if he is going to end the world.”

“Thanks, Raven. Linda. I don’t have that one problem most months- but, I... thank you I-“

“Lucky. You’re tiny.” She says hugging you close.

“Reminds me of Baubau. My sister... part of why I have to keep fighting. She is so excited she will get to come here, this fall. Think you can be her friend? Next year? I hope she ends up in my house but... there is a good chance she will be in yours. But she is also smart so-“

“Of course. No matter what house. I’ll show her the ropes when you can’t. She sounds nice, so I hope she joins Hufflepuff!”, you say with a smile. You had... always wanted a sister. Raven was acting very sisterly. Apollo is great but, is this how it would feel for there to be a third Pertinger you ask while you embrace the older, much taller girl softly, then tightly.

“Thanks, Arty. Elliot... I’m glad he picked you. Even if you are nuts. And quite sad Taylor never got a chance to know you better.”, Raven tells you, breaking the hug before you renew it, hugging tight again for a few moments.

“Yeah me too. On both counts. Want to head in? I don’t need more rumors regarding me and boyfriend starting if someone sees me out here, clamped on to his “Lackey”, you say walking in front of the wall, back and forth 3 times to create a simple configuration of the Room so useful you were halfway convinced it could only be the creation of a hack writer of children’s novels.

“Sure, but what... rumors? Slytherin’s are pretty well informed most of the time but... also not a ‘Lackey’.”

You walk in, with a slight grin. You had no clue where these started, though you suspected a certain sore loser might have had a hand in them. It was always fun to address a few of them.

Shutting the door after checking the hall, you giggled a bit, and began informing your friend.

“You know the usual. He is actually Grindlewald reborn plotting reclaim the Elder Wand, he is holding my brother hostage to force me to be with him. Love Poison in the secret Hufflepuff pumpkin juice stocks. That he and I ride giant Acromantulas out into the Forbidden Forest under the moon light to be together. He is a vampire from some muggle show called “Twilight” or some such. A nice but very dumb 7th year boy offered to duel him for my freedom, before I let him know Elliot would kick his shit in so hard he wouldn’t be able to leave St. Mungo’s for a week if he tried. And that I would get a few liver shots in when he was on the floor. Haha!”

“You know... those rumors make Elliot sound far cooler than he is. Quite dashing. But he sparkles nowhere near enough for the vampire theory to work. And he *is* planning to steal the wand.”, Raven says with a light chuckle.

“Heh. Oh yes, I know. He is a dork. I have said as much to him. But... A dork that is trying to save the world. And who has the founder of my house in his head, a monster who will destroy everything trapped in his soul, and figured out who the 5th founder was after 1000 years of speculation... One planning the greatest act of theft in centuries. Who I am going to fight along side in a place most of wizardkind believes isn't real. A guy being taught by, well, a very *infamous* man, along with his wonderful girlfriend.”, you say smiling, turning as Raven sets down the hefty suitcase.

“You know, you are making a very poor case for Elliot not being the next chosen one. Like the protagonist of some story.”

“Yeah. And...It-it worries the frick out of me. Normally the second act of a story is where it gets bad... real bad. You... were there with him. Got hurt already. But I am staying. I told that asshole Potter just as much. Did you know he offered to ship me off to America just to get me away? Said he would be sure to put roses on my grave if I stayed? Cunt. Prat. Bastard. Fuckface.”

“Potter is an asshole. A barely sane asshole, given what you and Elliot have told me.”

“Yeah. He is. Days when I think he is less sane than the guy he got to teach us. Why... why the fuck won't he just believe Elliot. So much could be avoided if he just had faith in him. Faith like we do.”

“Years of having his metaphorical dick sucked by the entire Wizard population of Britain and North-West Europe is probably part of it.”, your tall dark-haired friend says with a small smirk, a touch of anger hiding in its corner.

“Bastard. I swear the spiders will pull their weight before I collect them and put them back in the forest in a couple of years. Even if Potter is right. If it was any one but Elliot? I would be having a very hard time believing what he said.”

“Just because you two are fucking?”

“What! No! And we only did that the one time at his house. And we are going to slow back down... some. Enjoy the journey as much as the destination. Because he is nice. Kind. Smart. Helpful. Strong. Brave. And, yes he is handsome but... When I went alone, when no one else was around, before he even knew who I was, he got my cauldron back for me. Beated one of Brighton’s floozies in the head. Kept me from being a victim. Again. Taught me to not suck with Potions. Has been there by my side when we are training so hard it feels like we might die. When I was barely conscious one of the first nights, he instantly threw a barrier of fire around me so our professor couldn’t hurt me anymore. Rushed 100 Inferni when I let them use me as bait for the DADA challenge.”, you say defiantly. You aren’t angry with her. Just angry the world keeps giving a certain brown-haired boy the short end of the stick. You look Raven straight in her pretty grey eyes.

“The two of you are absolutely going to have to tell me some of the secrets you have now. When all this is done. About why both of you have a few new small scars. About the spiders. How Elliot is going to learn the Dark Mark. Is some of it related to why I didn’t see my best friend at breakfast or you in the halls for a day? Also, me and Taylor were there too when he brained a girl with no brain. As body guards apparently.”, she says with a bit of Linda creeping past the confidence of Raven.

“Oh yes. I will be happy to let you know every detail. Like the exact circumstances behind them. Me fighting so hard against our “teacher” that I thought I would die, to protect Elliot until he could shake of those stupefies. That Pomfrey said I did almost die. About the small number of vents in Potter’s office and how they are full of my small buddies. About... hey? Are you okay?”, you ask, confidence shifting to concern when the older girl looks down and rubs a specific area of her left arm you had seen her touch a few times in the past couple of months.

“I want it.”, she says in a whisper.

You reach down, more on instinct than anything to wrap Raven in your arms. She struggles for a moment but after a month of training with a mostly insane Death Eater, you have become good at holding on. After years of being with Magical Beasts, you are very good at holding on. After helping to calm Apollo down if it got too much for him for a decade? You are *very fucking good* at holding on.

She stops pushing back after a few seconds, and instead accepts her fate, wrapping her own arms around you, placing her head against your shoulder. And there are no tears. Elliot had confided in you that he worried some times. That her tears had run out. So, you chose to shed a few for her.

"I'm sorry. Sorry Arty. Just this time of the year... Taylor not being here... losing him. Hearing about you and Elliot being like this? I want it again. Badly. It hurts, some. In a place I wish I could just... get rid of it."

"Don't. Don't you ever fucking dare." You say to her, lifting her relaxing your hug some so you can meet her eyes with your one, ones full of fire and steel.

"That... place is why you could become friends with Elliot. With me. Could fall in love with Taylor. Don't you ever fucking let go of it, because that place is going to let you do what you did before, to save someone. To fight on. And... I know it hurts. There is a place in me... some days I want to get rid of. The place he hurt. The one still aching for what happened, what was done to me. The one... that knows what Apollo went through. But it makes me who I am too. Why I stay up till midnight and then get up at the crack of dawn. Why I love to work hard. Why I love kind brown haired Slytherins. And kind black haired ones. That lets me help my brother, when I can. Makes me appreciate kindness. And lets me have my pride." You say, pulling up a small stool that wasn't there a few minutes ago.

"Yeah. Yeah, you are right. I know. I need that part. I need it to keep my sister safe. Save the world with yall. To make sure there is a place for here to come in the fall. So she can smile at how awesome it is to be witch. But... you know I killed "Lily". I told you on the train. I didn't say how. Or what I did after. Can I tell you? Would you hate me?"

"No. I very much think I would not. Elliot said... how bad it was down there. And... you didn't kill her. At that point, she had been gone for a long time, I think. And what he did to her? Made her do? Keeping her away from even a shred of light, to control her? I-I was abused as a kid you know. In a lot of ways. Apollo, he got the worst of it, tried to take the brunt of it for me. But there were things he couldn't take for me... things I had to have done to me. It probably fucked me in the head some. But it... is okay. You can't fix the past, just keep it from repeating. So, we are going to kill the monster who made a scared girl endure that. We can always talk, Raven. Linda. Always."

"Oh god. I- I am sorry. I didn't mean to... I am so sorry. I didn't know. She says, looking ashamed for making you mention it.

"Don't. Please don't look down. You are strong. So am I. Its okay, I am mostly over what happened. So, please talk. It's fine." You say, small hand rubbing her back.

"Avada Kedavra. I used the Killing Curse. Something that will get you a life sentence at Nurmengard. After "Lily" lopped Elliot's arm off. Used the same thing Taylor was killed by. And when the body of that girl fell to the ground, I tore into it. As many diffindos as I could manage. And when my magic ached so bad I

couldn't keep going, I just used my body, my hands, till all my nails had broken. I tore in. Her throat, face, chest. It is very hard to heal or repair a body once they pass. I didn't want her to get an open casket funeral. And through the pain I was feeling, I felt joy. At doing that to her. Denying her family a last chance to see her face. I... thought being a Dark witch was going to be cool. But now? I am sick. Sick with what I did. How I feel. The fact I can do it again. That I can no longer cast a Patronus, as weak as mine was.", she says. Linda, not Raven.

There is a far off look in her eyes, a 1000 yard stare focused on a quirky boy and a girl you had never known. You wrap your hand over her own and look forward, trying to see what she was looking at. A vain attempt. That horror was beyond you. For now, at least.

You stay like that for several long moments before you can find the words to speak.

"I won't lie. What you did... it sounds terrible. But... all of the Founders could cast it you know. They all killed in their lives. Maybe for good reasons. Maybe for dumb ones. Or bad ones. And only 2 of them could use that other spell. It's fine. It's okay. You being sick at what you did? I think as bad as it must feel, it is a good thing. I think... I think Elliot can use it too if it gets bad enough. If we die. So... let's not make that happen. What you went through sound like Hell, so let's not make him go through it too, alright? I can't use the Patronus Charm either. Elliot even brewed with me, gave me something to cheat with. And after four tries I got nothing. But I am proud; I kept trying. And even though I was pissed at him for getting hurt, I am proud Elliot tried again. You can try again too. If Raven can't do it anymore, maybe the other part of her can. To be good, happy, to not hate enough for that curse. And I think you are. Good. One of the reasons you are my friend. And I don't think any of us know when to give up.", Raven, Linda whom ever, is holding your hand tight... she squeezes a bit more, gives a dry sob or two.

"Why... why the fuck... why the fuck are all my friends too nice? I am a bitch, a monster, why the fuck." Linda says, between shudders, between trying and failing to turn and hug you. Seeing her fail at something she wants to do activates a very Hufflepuff instinct in you so you apply a lesson Crouch had shown you about moving your body and shifted your stool closer with one foot while still holding her hand and then wrapped your free arm around her chest. Used something he didn't teach to kiss her gently on the shoulder. Not in the same way you did to Elliot. In a way that seemed very old to you, like how someone had done to you in the distant past.

Raven, Linda. Your friend she just pressed in. No tears. A shudder at best. Then a soft full pair of lips meeting yours for a moment.

"Just a friendship kiss. The French do it all the time." She says, eyes just a bit more full. More like they were when you had first met her.

You smile after a second. Plant your own lips on hers for just a moment before backing off. You... didn't feel the same when you and Elliot snogged. It just felt warm. Connected.

Her lip gloss tasted nice. Cherries were always a favorite of yours. You would need to borrow some... when you do things with Elliot. To him.

You were never going to cheat on him. Give it to anyone but that kind boy your loved. Feel the way he made you felt when you cuddled and touched one another some with anyone but him. House of the Loyal. You knew that by the time he had tracked you down after you had failed to cast a patronus. Even before then when he showed you how to dance to a Waltz in the Three Broomsticks.. When all you could do because your brother was there was to hold hands in the dark? You think you knew even then. That he would be the one; be "it".

That didn't mean you couldn't enjoy a peck on the lips from a very pretty girl who was also so dear to your beloved boy. Or learn a thing or two from her. So after a couple of minutes to collect yourselves, you headed down into a trunk full of very interesting items. Where she showed you very interesting items. Let you borrow a couple for later use. And then you sat on your very sore butt while she showed you to do your hair and make up like you want then slipped a couple of the products she had used to make you think you looked good enough to be with the Boy-Who-Will-Save-The-World into the small bag you had brought down. Climbed back up alone as your friend said she needed some time to herself. Wondered if in a year or two you could find someone who could put a couple of tiny bars of metal in places which we already extremely sensitive despite it being likely you would still look too young for that to be acceptable. So Elliot something to play with when he held you at night. Boys do like toys after all.

And while you were already his princess, his Dark Lady, his Hufflepuff Fury, you didn't think being his toy sometimes sounded bad at all.

Quite a few hats to wear but you weren't afraid of hard work. You were going to add another few as it stood. His Wife. Mother of y'all's kids. And, you hoped with all your heart, Girl-Who-Didn't-Die.

“Which is?”

“Stole my heart. Most important one. One that is not just a rumor. So, I want him to have a good Valentine’s. I believe we are going to win, but... in case we don’t... that this is the only one I get to be with him, I want it to count.

“Yeah. He is. And Elliot has one more medal on his chest. Most important one.”

“Which is?”

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