**Chapter 119**

**Sixth Task**

**6 April 1995, Scuola Regina, Magical Republic of Venice**

"You should really stop going on these midnight adventures, you know."

"I blame Fred and George."

And her inner animal too, for forcing her to yawn in front of her girlfriend.

"Uh, uh...somehow, I doubt the Twins told you to go pick a fight with the Centaurs of the Forbidden Forest."

Ah. Alexandra should have known the Minister of Magic was going to inform her niece of that little escapade.

"I had to grab some mushrooms in the Forbidden Forest, it amounts to the same thing." Alexandra grumbled. "You would think that with my reputation, a tribe of upstart ponies would take the hint and stay away for a night."

"They might not have believed all the rumours, and I doubt they are watching the magical or non-magical media," the redhead Badger argued.

"They came at me with bows and arrows, Susan." Was she allowed to sigh? She was allowed to sigh. "I know the Centaurs have some magical resistance to curses and other offensive spells, but it's just stupidity. As long as a wizard is able to blast away the projectiles and keep his calm, those quadrupeds were going to be on the receiving end of a very bloody humiliation."

"Yes, I admit, what they attempted there wasn't exactly a proof of deep intelligence." The future Lady of House Bones grimaced. "How many did you have to slay before they understood the lesson and released all their hostages?"

"Surprisingly," or perhaps not, "only twenty-eight, and most of them were in the first group that tried to ambush me at the edge of the Forbidden Forest when I was doing some sightseeing."

The Basilisk Slayer snorted.

"Once I had dealt with those and I found the Centaurs' camp, I think they understood the message I was sending them perfectly."

Walking straight into it and throwing the head of the so-called 'Bane' in front of some young Centaurs had made an impression.

"Sometimes, I think you should do some theatre, Alex. You have a gift for it."

"Without being too philosophical, I sometimes think life is a theatrical performance, or sometimes it feels that way."

Her girlfriend hummed something melodious, and let her hands wander in Alexandra's black hair.

The Hydra Animagus let her, the contact was...pleasant. It let her feel more comfortable, more...relaxed.

"If anything," Susan spoke, "I am angry that our ex-Headmaster thought it was a good idea to keep the Centaurs in the Forbidden Forest. Yes, they'd never dared to go outside of the woods and raid Hogwarts or Hogsmeade, but they are *Centaurs*."

Alexandra shrugged.

"I am far from a supporter of his methods, Susan, but in this case, he wasn't the one who authorised the Centaurs to settle. According to Hermione, it was Phineas Nigellus Black who was responsible for this monumental lack of judgement."

"Aka the most unpopular Headmaster in history," her girlfriend sniffed. "Wait a minute. Wasn't he also the Headmaster who eventually had to resign because he slept with several female students and in exchange handed them the final exams' papers in advance?"

"Yes, it was that one. I also think he tried to ban Quidditch because his eldest son was revealed to suck at it. He handed the House Cup to Slytherin as many times as he could, to the point our current Professor of Potions appears rigorously impartial compared to him. And that's just what I remember off of the top of my head."

Seriously, one wondered why it had taken so long for the Board of Governors to fire him from his position.

Phineas Nigellus Black didn't seem to like children or even tolerate being in their presence, which seemed kind of problematic for a school.

And unlike Albus Dumbledore, he didn't even seem to have been a charismatic or powerful wizard.

"Figures," Susan continued. "But going back to Dumbledore...the Acromantulas were on his head. They spread while he was a teacher, and it was him who let Hagrid become the sort-of warden of the Forbidden Forest."

"Yes."

Her girlfriend smirked.

"Any chance I can hire you to organise a nice court of justice for Dumbledore and all his accomplices? Just to teach them they shouldn't neglect the security of hundreds of students, you know."

Alexandra rolled her eyes.

"Susan, Dumbledore is hiding behind the wards of the castle, and I am not in the habit of abusing my title of Lady Protector. If Dumbledore is to be judged in front of a court of justice, it will be after his arrest. I am not going to do something as ridiculous as to try him *in absentia*."

"You could do it," the red-haired Badger countered. "Just name Fred and George as Judges, and take the mantle of Champion of Judgement."

For once, Alexandra gaped for a couple of seconds.

"I'm going to pretend to not have heard that," the current Champion of Death breathed out. "It doesn't work like that, and I'm very sure that Judgement is best left idle rather than to 'infect' it with pranks and whatever other tricks."

"Too bad, it would be something worth remembering." Susan joked.

"And to say certain Hufflepuffs were worried *I* was going to be a bad influence over *you*."

The future Lady of House Bones giggled.

Alexandra sighed, one more time.

The black-haired Ravenclaw changed the subject, trying to banish the thought of the Weasley Twins becoming the Champions of Judgement. Alexandra didn't know if it was possible, but honestly, it was something to avoid at all costs.

Britain wasn't ready for that.

By all the heroics of Middle Earth, the *world* wasn't ready for that.

"Anyway, I suppose you weren't searching for me just to question if I did something unlawful lately."

"You're right about that." Susan nodded. "The Judges have stuck an enchanted board next to the breakfast hall. You know what it means."

"*This* week-end. Really?" She had expected the Tournament to return soon, but not *that* soon!

"The Sixth Task will take place on the eighth of April, yes," the Badger confirmed.

In other words, it was two days away.

"What a bunch of sadists...I swear vengeance will be mine, in the end."

"Oh? And how do you intend to achieve that, Lady Protector Potter?"

"I don't know, Lady Bones," the Hydra Animagus hissed. "But don't worry. I will find a way."

**7 April 1995, Cedric's Villa, Coliseum Valley, lands of the Scuola Regina**

The meeting was now in its second hour, and if Cedric had to be honest with himself, they were making little headway.

They didn't know anything serious about the Sixth Task save what they had seen in the arena.

It was ignorance at its finest, and the same could be said about what they had been able to collect when it came to the other Champions.

Still, they had to try.

Unfortunately, there was this sinking feeling now that for the Sixth Task, their best might not be *enough*.

And that he felt really guilty the more time went on.

"Krum?" Angelina Johnson asked.

"The Judges have clearly told us we aren't allowed to take anything but our wands with us," Montague said. "So unless he's able to transfigure a massive mushroom into something able to fly-"

"Don't even joke about that," Alexandra Potter interrupted him as she wrote something on the pile of papers before her. "Krum may take it as a challenge."

"A first-class broom is not something you get in a few seconds." Cedric felt he had to point this out.

"For my peace of mind if nothing else, please don't tempt Fate."

Cedric wished he could have rolled his eyes, but when the Champion uttered these words was at the top of the rankings, it was best to humour her.

"Okay, let's stay prudent about Krum, even if he got his favourite Task the last time. Next?"

"Lucrezia Sforza," Angelina answered. "She's been in the library every morning, taking Herbology books right and left."

Graham Montague of course had to chuckle after that.

"We all know the Lions, bar a few exceptions, are allergic to books, but-"

"Montague," the female Chaser growled. "If you don't want to end up as a eunuch by the end of the Sixth Task, you will not continue that sentence."

The Slytherin Champion closed his mouth and didn't reopen his mouth for the next minute.

"While Montague was rude, he had sort of a point," the Lady Protector of Britain who also happened to the Ravenclaw Champion pointed out. "We're kind of supposed do our research about the Sixth Task, and train hard for the challenge ahead. Sure, Bayard and Krum have been seen running, swimming, and doing all sorts of sports to be in top form, but everyone is trying to play to their strengths."

"And Sforza's strength is to learn as many mushrooms as possible so that she can poison us all?"

It said quite something that the youngest Champion of the room didn't defend the Venetian Succubus.

"Well," the top scorer of Hogwarts drawled ironically, "her first name is *Lucrezia*, so...err...I don't advise eating or drinking anything she proposes to you on the day of the Sixth Task. And maybe the day before that, just to be sure."

"Formidable," Cedric was already feeling a headache coming, and it wasn't going to be a small one. "Please tell us you have a plan to neutralise her before we end up poisoned."

The powerful green eyes stared at him.

"I told you the plan I had for my tricks with the mushrooms, Cedric Diggory. I also found a way to make all of you immune to it. And I did tell you in confidence I have high hopes it can at least give us a significant advantage over Lyudmila Romanov. But if you think I have some kind of perfect plan to deal with the twelve other Champions one after another, then let me apologise, because, no, I haven't."

"Why don't you replicate what you did before?" Montague wondered out loud. "I mean, we have dangerous mushrooms provoking hallucinations, and we can always collect more tonight, right? So let's take a page from your book and install more trebuchets! Mushroom bombardments! BOOM!"

The gesture the Slytherin made was rather funny, Cedric had to concede.

Angelina Johnson was looking at Montague, trying hard not to laugh.

And Potter...Potter was looking like someone doing her best not to facepalm.

"*In theory*, it isn't against the rules. But I lost the effect of surprise when I used the trebuchets during the Third Task. Now the Judges will be on the lookout for them. We will have handlers doing their best to stop it before the first shot is fired. And I'm sorry, but I can't make something as big as a trebuchet *invisible*."

"Your dragon?"

"We're speaking about dangerous mushrooms, Johnson. I have not the time to test which mushrooms would be able to hurt seriously Fingolfin, and testing it in live conditions would be madness and particularly stupid."

"Throwing lightning around and eliminating the opposition?"

"There are twelve of them, and we aren't at the First Task anymore. Some of the Champions can be dealt with easily, but the majority are sufficiently powerful enough to challenge me if it is a two-against-one duel."

"This doesn't leave a lot of options," Cedric remarked.

"The same applies for the three other schools," Alexandra Potter pointed out, "and we're not the most disunited quartet, that honour certainly goes to Durmstrang these days."

Yeah, Fuchs and Wolffhart had certainly not won any points with Romanov and Krum during the Fifth Task. In fact, they may have lost whatever few they could boast of.

"So all we can tell is that it's going to be a Herbology Task, and that mushrooms are somehow going to be involved. This is not promising."

The Champion of Ravenclaw's lips barely twitched.

"The risks of dying have considerably decreased with the fall of the Statute, and honestly, before the Fourth Task we didn't know much either as long as we didn't find the Tournament Clues."

"I won't disagree with you on that. The crowd booing you is always preferable to tens of thousands of voices gasping in horror because someone has failed to survive a vicious trap."

"Let's go to sleep before we begin to pursue that dark path, we need to stay optimistic-"

"And we will need all the energy we can possibly muster to cast our spells tomorrow."

Cedric nodded in relief.

But why did the guilt inside his chest refuse to go away?

**8 April 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

"They really took the 'Trial of Mushrooms' too seriously..."

"Who even thought it was a good idea?"

"The Honourable Judges, evidently," Alexandra replied sarcastically. "You have to give them credit, Johnson, I didn't think it was *possible* to grow a forest of mushrooms in so little time."

Yes, a forest of mushrooms.

Imagine a forest except instead of trees, bushes, or some form of European vegetation, everything had been replaced by mushrooms.

There were mushrooms the size of century-old oaks. The grass that was now covering the arena was covered in mushrooms everywhere. Other landscapes had rocks, this one had boulder-sized mushrooms. And did you fail to notice that as far as height went, there were some groups of mushrooms who were just tall enough to serve as umbrellas should it rain today?

And yes, the sky was incredibly cloudy, it was likely going to rain in the next minutes.

Alexandra was willing to bet a few hundred Galleons that it wasn't a coincidence.

"I can only pray to the Morrigan I am not going to have nightmares about mushrooms by the end of today...now that would be ridiculous."

Nonetheless, the mushrooms had been expected.

Yeah, the particular disposition of the Sixth Task was not the single floor that she had thought the most likely, but there were mushrooms.

The Judges had just ordered the arena handlers to expand the inside of the Coliseum so that the forest was spread on three different levels. The 'ground floor' was where the arena should have been, and then there were two others above it. And on what should be the 'second floor', attracting all gazes, there was a flamboyant...would you guess it? Yes, it was a massive, giant mushroom. Its cap was bulbous and coloured a light red with white dots.

If you thought it was a good idea to eat it, then likely you deserved to win the reward for the most moronic wizard alive.

Yes, it was a fair warning.

But intelligence or lack of it aside...

The mushrooms, at least, had been anticipated.

Alexandra had let Hermione do a lot of the brainstorming, and asked for a list of the most dangerous magical mushrooms in the world.

It was a list that had been shared with the other Hogwarts Champions.

And it was a good thing, because of this seventy-plus list, it seemed most of the mushroom species, if not all, had been 'cultivated' here.

That so many had been grown to reach colossal sizes unfortunately promised nothing good, but the fact remained they were on familiar terrain.

This time they didn't have to deal with dangerous beasts, just potentially lethal mushrooms.

They had to fight smart, cast Bubble-Head Charms among other things, and stay out of range of the nastiest threats – easier to say than do, alas, when the mushrooms were *everywhere*.

But it was not a novelty.

Assume you were in hostile territory, an environment where everything was out to get you, and it was going to be fine.

Nobody, however, had expected the *railroads*.

Before their stunned eyes, the gates of the Coliseum opened again.

And yes, there was a massive train taking position on the only part of the arena which had been enchanted to not be covered in mushrooms.

"It is not the Hogwarts Express." Graham Montague pointed out.

"And thank the Powers for that," Alexandra replied.

The 'Tournament Train' seemed to have been built from a non-magical model, and certainly it had much in common with some high-speed trains of the non-magical variety that Alexandra had seen before in France.

"And what is wrong with the Hogwarts Express, pray tell?"

"It is red and gold, and it hurts my eyes," the Basilisk Slayer said honestly. "What is wrong with it? I think a Gryffindor painted it, and then decided that obsolete or not, we would have to be traumatised by that outrageous decoration for the next couple of centuries."

For some reason, Cedric Diggory began to laugh hysterically.

And he was not the only one. In the public, plenty of Slytherins, Ravenclaws, and Badgers were laughing, with the Twins making a killing with their completely unofficial gambling.

"Err..." Montague cleared his throat. "Potter. You realise that the Task hasn't yet begun, and as we're here just next to the Judges, everyone in the world who watches this challenge has just heard you, right? And that it includes, in all likelihood, our ex-Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore?"

"Oh, yes," Alexandra shrugged. "To be honest, that's half of the reason I'm saying it in the first place."

**8 April 1995, Hogwarts, Scotland**

"*Oh, yes. To be honest, that's half of the reason I'm saying it in the first plac*e."

Praise Merlin for small mercies, Albus Dumbledore had a lot of experience listening to petty arguments.

That's why his eyes barely twinkled when he heard this.

He could see at least that in some ways, the child of James Potter was still exactly that: a child.

No matter how much maturity one could expect of a Black Witch, there were aspects that wouldn't exist within her until and unless she grew into adulthood.

"Headmaster? Surely you must agree this is intolerable!"

And suddenly he was reminded that for all the detachment he was able to think about the whole affair with, there were a lot of wizards who were far more sanguine about the issue being raised.

"I'm not exactly happy to hear these words, no," the Defeater of Grindelwald smoothly replied. "But I am not totally surprised either."

"This is outrageous!"

"No, it is not." Moody grunted in approval, but the other Lords present in the Great Hall of Hogwarts were showing expressions going from 'wrathful' to 'close to vomiting'. "As I am saying often to students and teachers alike, if you expect to get universal approval on certain subjects, you are going to die of old age before it happens."

"But it's the Hogwarts Express! Its colours and theme are a noble tradition of our school!"

The de facto Headmaster of Hogwarts had a feeling some people were far too quick to anger about things that were irrelevant.

"*You're bluffing*," he heard the voice of the young Angelina Johnson.

"*No, I'm not. Let's make a bet, shall we? If I win this Task, I will rush to King's Cross and I will paint the Hogwarts Express in green and blue. Oh, and I may add some black and silver too on the wagons*."

"This can't be borne any longer! Alexandra Potter is trampling all our traditions and insulting the memories of our school!"

It was always his hope to be the wise and reasonable voice in a debate, but these days, it was developing some significantly unhappy outcomes.

"Calm yourself, my Lord."

"Calm ourselves? Surely you are joking! She intends to-"

"Yes, she may paint *one* Hogwarts Express," Mad Eye interrupted the argument. "The two others are here at Hogsmeade Station, protected by wards that are centuries old. So she can only spray paint on one."

"Yes, this is into-"

"Really?" the retired Auror, much like Albus, seemed to have enough of the foolishness. "Let me remind you, Lords, that it is *only paint*. The train isn't damaged. We can paint it all over the moment we gain access to it again. I'm far more worried to be honest that they are going to open a substitution school at Oxford or Cambridge. The train? The train can wait."

Did the commanding voice of the Auror officer deliver the truth of the matter? Yes.

Did the Lords and the august purebloods in the room enjoy the message? Absolutely not.

There was some grumbling.

No, correction: there was a lot of grumbling.

"By all the oaths of the Wizengamot, I really hope the Black Witch is going to die during this Task!"

Albus felt very, very old suddenly. Yes, he opposed the Dark and all it stood for, from Dark Arts to earth-shaking policies that destroyed the monopolies of the Guild of Alchemists.

But could his supporters please think before they opened their mouth?

The spawn of James Potter had survived the Archmage and countless horribly dangerous situations.

The chances of some dangerous *mushrooms* achieving what an army worth of Dementors and the most powerful Light wizard in existence had failed at were too ludicrous to be seriously entertained.

"And when she will be judged, this cursed Lady Protector will be sentenced for one more crime, and it will be 'heresy against our most noble and sacred traditions!'"

This Task really couldn't begin soon enough...

**8 April 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

In appearance, as they had been told facing the Judges seconds ago, the main goal of the Task was incredibly simple: they had to reach the top of the giant mushroom that was waiting for them on the 'summit' of the second floor of the arena.

Never mind that no one among the Champions knew which type of mushrooms this curious specimen belonged to.

Alexandra had a bad feeling about it, and she doubted she was the only one.

Then there was the little bomb that detonated under their feet, metaphorically speaking.

"The Tournament Clues were in the library books?" Fleur Delacour shouted aghast. "But why didn't I find a single one?"

The Greek Judge shrugged.

"We placed the Clues every morning in a different book. What happened after that point is not our problem."

"Never mind," Alexandra hissed, while beginning to glare at Lucrezia Sforza. "I have a feeling I know exactly what happened. It is only a guess, but is it possible a certain Succubus woke up early and that under the guise of borrowing more books, stole all the Clues from under our noses?"

The daughter of the Scuola Regina Headmistress looked incredibly smug...but only for a second or two.

The fourteen other Champions began to glare at her, and the Champion of Lust discovered the joys of being surrounded by hostile wizards and witches.

For some reason, the three other Champions of the Scuola Regina didn't look exactly pleased she had kept them in the dark. Funny, no?

At least this time they couldn't accuse the Judges of being sadists.

Lucrezia, however, would not escape the accusation.

"And how are we going to get between floors?" Ulrich Fuchs asked. "I'm all for the idea of using this train, but there is no railroad that goes up!"

"Maybe the rails have been charmed to be temporarily invisible?" Eleonora da Riva suggested.

"Or maybe they're busy placing them in position."

Some secret compartments under the Coliseum chose this moment to open and levitate out more massive railway that began to be suspended over their heads with no sign of support whatsoever.

"Why do I have a bad feeling about this?" Angelina Johnson groaned as excited cheers mounted from the tens of thousands of spectators.

"Because you're smart?" Alexandra cleared her throat. "I'm seeing some sort of massive railway switches on this 'ground floor'. We will likely have to do something with them if we want to go 'up'."

"The problem is that there is a railway line that plunges into this tunnel on the right there," Cedric pointed out. "There are two switches, but only one correct choice, I fear."

"Could we focus on the most important thing?" Graham Montague barked. "In case you've missed it, there are no doors on this train! We are supposed to ride on the roof of this infernal engine!"

"What?"

**8 April 1995, Rome, Italy**

"Oh, now that's just plain *evil*," Lilian had great difficulties not chuckling.

And honestly, given the grim and angry faces of the sixteen Champions, the young vampire had a feeling none of the Tournament participants would disagree with her.

It was almost enough to make her regret not being inside the Coliseum, cheering for her daughter.

Alas, there was a lot of work on her already busy schedule, and so little time to do it outside of school. As such, the 'free day' of the Sixth Task could alas not be enjoyed as a free holiday.

"I'm so glad you enjoy it."

The former Gryffindor witch instantly curtsied.

"Lord Knight," she had not known he would be inside the Exchequer base today and-

"At ease," the Knight Explorer smiled, eminently recognisable in his azure robes and the splendid rapier tied to his belt. "I am merely an interested spectator for the next minutes."

Lilian almost snorted. Yes, she didn't doubt his interest. But this was more than simple curiosity.

It was...*professional*.

The mushrooms had not grown magically just like that with a click of the fingers and a few amazing incantations.

You needed special greenhouses for that, but above all, if you didn't want the mushrooms to die in a minute or two, you needed strong ambient magic to support them.

You needed a Master of Ley Lines and Fel Magic – for the counterparts of the Army of Light, assuming they were not all dead, would have refused to use their talents for something so *entertaining*.

Herbalists and other specialists of the mushroom flora undoubtedly had played their part, but it was Knight Explorer or several of his Apprentices who had laid down the groundwork.

"Was it your idea, my Lord?"

The duellist and adventurer laughed.

"I wish I could take credit for it, but the Sixth Task has been imagined from the beginning to the end by the Judges, and most of those who pushed the strongest for it were not influenced by the Exchequer."

"It seems...difficult to believe," Lilian said delicately.

"I think plenty of Judges were more annoyed by Dumbledore's attitude than they were comfortable expressing in public. Of course, given how much your daughter just lambasted him in public, I think they have just realised that they're hardly alone in that."

"Yes. It is only my opinion, but I think Dumbledore's habit of not acknowledging anyone as a true peer or worthy advisor bit him hard here."

"To be fair to him, Karkaroff and Maxime are not his equals," the Knight Explorer argued. "And as for your own Mistress...well, Grindelwald introduced an Incubus to him when they visited the Italian Peninsula. It was a bloody disaster, and there are some of us who think it led him to develop his anti-non-human politics, despite the event being absolutely apolitical."

"Sometimes Fate really loves to destroy relationships and the bonds we strive to create."

"Exactly," the powerful wizard approved. "Well, the Champions are climbing the train, and I have a feeling that while a lovely Succubus was able to steal the Clues, she was not made aware of how small the platform on top of the train was going to be. This promises to be *interesting*."

**8 April 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

Alexandra could truthfully say she had done plenty of things most wizards and non-wizards didn't do in their lives.

This involved insulting Ra, preparing a successful ambush against Dumbledore, killing two Basilisks, and permanently eliminating certain threats that could have caused plenty of trouble for this world.

But when she used the train as a transport method – and most of the time, it was the Hogwarts Express – the Lady Protector of the Isles was doing the normal thing. She found a seat inside the train in question.

Yes, she was a Hydra Animagus. No, this didn't mean she wanted to ride on the roof of the train.

Of all the adrenaline-filled activities that could be done, this one had never crossed her mind.

"I think your bad feeling was not strong enough, Cedric," the Ravenclaw Champion commented darkly.

The 'platform' that had been revealed above the train was ridiculously tiny. To say they were packed like sardines was not that much of an exaggeration, in her humble opinion.

The locomotive they had been supposed to 'ride' was long, yes, but try to place sixteen wizards and witches next to each other.

Suddenly, there wasn't any empty space at all.

"The railroads look like they're going to lead us on a full circle at the periphery of the arena," Angelina Johnson spoke. "I suggest that-"

The comment of the Gryffindor Champion was abruptly interrupted, because the train *moved*.

It was a brutal beginning.

Alexandra instinctively transformed her fingers to draw Hydra's claws, in order to improve her stability options.

It was a very good thing she did, for in the next seconds, the train began to accelerate.

"How in the name of Merlin-"

"MUSHROOM BOMBARDMENT!"

"You are kidding-"

"SEGMENTA PROTEGO!"

The mushrooms were attacking.

Spores and sort of...tiny flowers?

It smelled powerfully, and not in a pleasant way.

And the train was still accelerating!

"We have to jump!"

"Are you crazy?" Alexandra shouted at Montague. "Unless you've suddenly become a bird Animagus last time I checked, you're going to break your legs, no matter how resistant your magic makes you!"

The Slytherin was too distracted by his crazy proposal, and was touched by one of the mushroom spores, right on his left arm. Immediately, the contact with the unknown substance caused Montague's limb to turn blue.

A vivid blue with white dots.

"Not good," the Slytherin mumbled.

"That's some kind of Polish mushroom," Alexandra winced. "Apply the Krakow Counter-Curse and-"

She didn't manage to voice her next order, though. That certainly had to do with her surprise watching Lucrezia Sforza get blasted out of the train's platform by over seven spells.

"EXPELLIARMUS!"

Alexandra treated the attack with all the respect it deserved; she deflected it right on the mushrooms nearby, not bothering uttering an incantation.

Instead her eyes focused on the source of this attack. Because as packed as they were, it wasn't possible it had come from a student of Durmstrang or Beauxbatons.

"Et tu, Johnson?"

"Sorry, Potter, but you have way too many points for us to catch up. Much like Sforza, it's time for you to get no points for a Task."

"So much for Hogwarts unity," the Champion of Death sarcastically declared. And yes, Montague and Diggory were pointing their wands in her direction.

"You can't deflect all our spells for long, Potter."

Alexandra chuckled.

"Ah, but I don't need to. Tell me, oh Champions of my school: is there a rule that suggests this train has to remain intact for long during the Sixth Task?"

"STOP HER!" Fleur Delacour screamed. Ah, this bitch was behind this pathetic treason, then. "SHE IS GOING TO-"

Alexandra smiled.

"**FULMEN. IMPERATOR**."

**8 April 1995, the stands of the Coliseum, lands of the Scuola Regina**

Last month, the Fifth Task had proven beyond doubt that Alexandra Potter was capable of thinking far outside the box to win politically and strategically.

Not that Daphne and the rest of Hogwarts had needed much to be convinced of that, obviously. The Ravenclaw Champion had used *trebuchets* during the Third Task.

But for a good part of the Tournament, one had to admit the new Lady Protector had used her cunning and the loopholes available to her.

It was not bad, no.

But the Heiress of House Greengrass felt that some Champions had forgotten the obvious.

Alexandra Potter was a Lady of Magic, and a monster of overwhelming power.

"**FULMEN. IMPERATOR**."

Many Champions had already jumped from the train by the time the lightning coalesced, the Dark Queen leading the pack.

This was the sane thing to do, for a second later, the train and everything around it disappeared in a torrent of emerald lightning.

"And the first train is destroyed!" the Judge who was playing the role of sport commentator today said more cheerfully than any normal person should be able to. "Don't worry, friends, there are seven of them available for today, and the second train will come within ten minutes!"

"Ten minutes?" Hannah Abbot gasped not far from the Slytherin third-years' seats. "But what are they going to do in this horrible mushroom forest?"

"At a guess," Tracey replied loudly, "I think they are going to settle old feuds once and for all."

The lightning burned before vanishing as it had been swallowed by a giant beast...or something even more dangerous.

And Alexandra Potter stormed out of the destruction she had herself caused.

The mushrooms nearby – some sort of things provoking hallucinations and covering your skin with boils, if she wasn't mistaken – literally *burned*, unable to withstand her power.

Of course, more small mushrooms were already growing back behind her, the saturation of the arena making sure all victories against the flora would be a temporary one.

"**All right**," and this time, it was the Champion speaking, not the school girl, "**you wanted to remove the competition? I am here, and we have ten minutes. Let's not waste any time**. **DEPULSO**!"

Johann Wolffhart had barely the time to raise a shield before the terrifying attack arrived.

It was like three explosions in one.

The shield of the Durmstrang Champion shattered, and Wolffhart himself was blasted away, so hard he went through six enormous mushrooms and over a dozen smaller ones before stopping.

It went without saying that after being on the receiving end of something like that, Wolffhart didn't rise to counterattack.

"And here I had forgotten how terrifying she can be when she feels it is punishment time," Blaise Zabini moaned. "Great! Now these idiots have annoyed her. This is not a Task anymore. It is a full-scale battle between Champions."

It was unfortunately a very good sum-up of the situation.

In a decor that seemed completely surreal, the fifteen Champions left went to war against each other.

They all had their wands, and plenty of frustration from the two previous Tasks had not been forgotten.

And evidently, since everyone knew the scores of all the other Champions, plenty could do the maths. Alexandra Potter, Lucrezia Sforza, and Lyudmila Romanov had earned way too many points to be beaten the normal way.

This had to stop today, or victory would soon be out of the thirteen other Champion's reach.

All of this was easy to say, Daphne figured, but Sforza, while initially taken by surprise, had recovered and was now fighting Martin Bayard, Ambre de Courtois, and Eugenie Millet. *At the same time*.

The Dark Queen herself was facing Viktor Krum, Cedric Diggory, Ulrich Fuchs, Graham Montague, Angelina Johnson, Eleonora da Riva, and Giovanni Ruspoli. *All at once*.

There was serious magic hurled everywhere, to the point some mushrooms were twisted beyond recognition by the spells missing their targets.

But most of Daphne's attention, as well as most of the Hogwarts' students' she was sure, remained on the centre of the arena.

One might say because it was the core of the devastation, and it was true. There had been no more Imperial Thunder cast, but this didn't mean the lighting spells were absent.

Now Alexandra superbly ignored Wolffhart – that the Healers were evacuating towards the exit of the arena as fast as they could – and was watching her next opponent.

"I wish I could say I am surprised, but I am not." Susan Bones sighed theatrically. "They really hate each other, those two."

"Life versus Death, and Fire versus Lightning," Daphne grimaced. "Let's hope that when this Tournament will end, the two of them will fail to meet each other again."

"You think we will be that *lucky*, Daphne?" Tracey asked.

"No," she admitted. "But it's nice to dream, right?"

"THIS IS A CONFRONTATION AND A RIVALRY YOU'VE BEEN AWAITING FOR A MONTH! ONCE AGAIN ALEXANDRA POTTER AND FLEUR DELACOUR WILL DUEL EACH OTHER!"

**8 April 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

The ancient Chinese curse 'may you live in interesting times' had never been more appropriate.

"Delacour."

"Potter."

"You know that we're not anywhere near a volcano, right? This time, the environment won't save you."

The hair of the Champion of Fire transformed into a river of fire.

"I don't need it to beat you."

"So you say. Are you trying hard to convince yourself?"

For any normal witch, it would have been near impossible to have that sort of conversation.

The mushrooms' spores all around them turned the air into an extremely unpleasant fog, and though it wouldn't kill the average student, it would at least send you off to the Healing Wing of the Coliseum for a few hours.

But simply flickering their respective auras pushed these inconveniences away. For now.

"Your series of victories end there," the Phoenix of Fire told her. "ELEUSIS!"

Alexandra had never been more thankful for Flitwick's 'dodge exercises' than she was now. The attack was incredibly potent, and the poor mushrooms on her left were literally transformed into sort of toad-like creatures.

"WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA ULTIMA!"

She had levitated a Dreadnought several times. By comparison, over fifty gigantic mushrooms were not worth mentioning.

"REDUCTO FULGUR!"

It may have been a bit overkill to deal with a single Champion, but Delacour was way too powerful to take any risk. The French Veela tried to conjure several shields, but a rain of lightning and mushrooms fell upon her.

That was her problem, Alexandra knew. The Champion of Prometheus just wasn't quick enough on her feet; while Alexandra deflected or avoided as her first reaction. Delacour was powerful, and the Army of Light in her youth had encouraged her arrogant tendencies. As such, while she wasn't just a juggernaut by the standards of most witches, she behaved like one.

"Time to finish this, I suppose. Accio Mushrooms!"

The good thing about the basics, you had to admit, was really that you could do them all day.

"FINITE INCANTATEM!"

And just like that, the combo the Champion of the Morrigan had prepared fell apart.

Alexandra breathed out and tried to not look annoyed.

"Malatesti. Your presence isn't desired in this duel. Leave."

"I must respectfully decline," the former Champion of War cheekily answered, wand pointed towards her head.

And of course Delacour used the seconds well to banish plenty of mushrooms and crawl out of the bombarded zone, weakened, but still in the fight.

This was going to be one of those days, wasn't it?

"Why are you helping her in the first place? According to what we hear every time when you're in the presence of each other, she constantly refuses to be your girlfriend."

Though why one would want to be close to Fleur Delacour was something she couldn't fathom.

Her personality was more toxic than the spores of the mushrooms that were spreading all over the 'ground floor' of the Sixth Task.

"She is my Juliet; she will accept we are made for each other."

They had a large audience, so Alexandra wasn't going to facepalm.

The Hydra Animagus couldn't pretend she wasn't tempted, however.

"You chose this moment out of all times to get out the Shakespearian references."

"I visited Verona plenty of times, I assure you."

This day was getting worse and worse.

And unfortunately, a glance at the other battles told Alexandra that no, there would be no reinforcements. Lucrezia and Lyudmila had their hands full dealing with all the other Champions.

"I don't need your help, Romeo!"

Oh, already using the first names? Maybe there was more to this proclamation of love than met the eye.

"Quiet, fire chicken," Alexandra commanded, snickering when the Veela turned a murderous glare at her. "It seems you want to fight me. I'm fine with that. I just happen to have an open slot in my very busy schedule. Just try to not fall too quickly! ANIMA FUNGI! FULGUR LORICA!"

**8 April 1995, a bar somewhere in London**

Gilderoy Lockhart, if pressed, would concede the plan of the thirteen Champions hadn't been too bad.

As a spy, he could recognise when someone was faced with a complicated problem, and you necessarily had to do some unpleasant things to resolve it.

Yes, eliminating the three most dangerous Champions, the ones at the top of the rankings, was a must-be if they still wanted to have a chance of victory.

The plan was sound.

There had been contingencies, otherwise it would have all fallen apart the moment the train was disintegrated and its mangled carcass fell into a sea of mushrooms which instantly covered it.

Unfortunately for them, even taken by surprise, the three redoubtable witches were hardly defenceless.

Worse in a way, Gilderoy knew for sure Lyudmila Romanov, Lucrezia Sforza, and Alexandra Potter could not use their full might in this arena.

The three Ladies as always had the raw power and the dark lore to kill their opponents, but they couldn't pay the political cost of killing many students in front of millions of non-magical spectators.

The Blood Sport that had been acceptable before in certain circumstances no longer was.

And in turn, that meant two out of the three were slowly overwhelmed.

If his eyes didn't trick him, Gilderoy was willing to gamble Lucrezia Sforza was in the most perilous situation.

It wasn't exactly surprising. If the rumours were true, Water was both the kingdom and the source of all massively overpowered magic for the Succubus.

And sadly for her, there was precious little of it here. On the top floor of the arena, there was a lake of sorts, but as it was, it could have been in America for all the good it did.

All the different 'mushroom levels' were sealed away from each other, the enchantments flaring with every second as the Champions hurled extremely powerful incantations at their foes.

Still, most of the Champions, exhausted or not, were actively participating in the Sixth Task.

The exceptions were Johann Wolffhart and Graham Montague.

The former had been knocked out in a devastating sucker punch by Alexandra Potter.

The second was going to likely need to get new teeth and some impressive skin surgery to recover.

For no, it was not a good idea to say unflattering words to the Dark Queen of Durmstrang.

For goodness sake, you had to delay the bragging until your target was unconscious and vanquished at your feet!

Especially when the witch in question was a monster of Chaos!

Graham Montague, one hoped, would learn the lesson. It was that or the second time there was such a situation, it was likely it wouldn't be in an inter-school Tournament, and the outcome was going to be death for him.

Anyway.

Three Champions against eleven of their peers.

Something had to give.

Ultimately, it was the arrival of the second train that decided how the ferocious duels would end.

**8 April 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

The train was green and red, ironically.

Maybe it would count as the imperfect union of House Gryffindor and Slytherin?

It also counted as a superb distraction.

Why?

Because one second later, Alexandra felt the *Light*.

It appeared she wasn't the only one to have the intention to cheat, this time.

"FRED! GEORGE! NOW!"

It began to rain mushrooms. Well, mushrooms and powders, but who was interested in the finest details?

Alexandra cursed under her breath and threw as many shields and defensive measures as she could.

She added four Runic evocations to it, two of Hieroglyphs, two of Futhark.

The terrifying impact sent her flying nonetheless, and by the Morrigan, it hurt.

By the-

This time, for a couple of seconds, the Hydra Animagus had really seen the stars.

"What the hell was that?"

Order. Yet, it was not-

The Light.

Eleonora da Riva was the *last* Champion of the Light.

Assuming De Condé gave her a nice artefact that could be only used by a Light Champion, in order to trigger a trap of Order, Eleonora could activate it at the best moment possible – from her perspective, of course.

Damn it.

"That is the price we pay, I suppose, for underestimating Innocence..."

Alexandra removed the mushrooms trying to cover her black clothes, and stood.

It was not pleasant to admit it, but she was out of breath.

And she had not even been the main target of this attack.

How did she know this?

Well, when one small part of the arena was literally sealed into a cage of Light, assumptions could be made.

And by everything belonging to the Lord of the Rings-

"Okay, I admit I didn't think you could do the impossible, Eleonora."

Lyudmila Romanov was unconscious inside that Light-illuminated land, which felt strangely like some weird realm out of this world, as the mushrooms had been twisted in strange shapes of gold, blue, red, and green. Yet there was a certain orderly impression. Everything tried to be symmetrical, no matter how impossible it sounded to her own ears.

Obviously, the Dark Queen had not been the only one to be brought low.

Viktor Krum and Ulrich Fuchs were unconscious not far from her. Thus one could say the Durmstrang Institute team had been completely knocked out.

They weren't the only ones.

Angelina Johnson had been paralysed by a mushroom effect that had grown her tongue to reach several metres of size, in addition to giving her blue skin with white dots.

Lucrezia Sforza was like Sleeping Beauty on a field of black mushrooms. She had managed to take Martin Bayard and Emilie Millet with her, though.

And Giovanni Ruspoli was running while laughing like a madman. It looked like the Venetian bespectacled student was high on drugs, or something mushroom-created accomplishing the same effects.

Alexandra coughed, and damn it was painful.

It also felt more difficult to flare her aura.

What had Eleonora used? It was powerful, and by its effects, both instantaneous and otherwise, it felt like a field-covering geas of old, but it couldn't be that, the Champion of Innocence had never shown any talent in Celtic magic.

It didn't mean there couldn't be variants of it in other cultures, however.

The Roman had the sacred pomerium, during the days of their Republic. Was it something derived from it?

Well, one had to be honest: it worked.

Alexandra began to spit blood.

"Look at that, we managed to knock two out of three out. Not a bad result, I will say."

"Malatesti," Alexandra acknowledged, not bothering turning her eyes towards him.

Instead, the Ravenclaw Champion had eyes focusing on Eleonora, who appeared to be pouring mushrooms by the buckets into a large receptacle right next to the railroad switch.

A specific species of purple-red mushrooms.

And it worked.

"I see Lucrezia was not as cunning as she believed."

"Some of her investigations may have raised an alert or two," the former Champion of War acknowledged.

And since the Succubus had been pretty much the only one to know the basics of this Task, there had not been anyone to spy upon for the rest of the period of time that came before today.

Sometimes, the Champions of the Dark, former or actual, were truly their own worst enemies.

"You don't run to catch up to them?"

"Do you believe I am stupid?"

Yeah, Cedric Diggory and Ambre de Courtois were climbing up to take place on top of the red-green train, and soon Eleonora would join them.

Yes, the train was currently immobile, and Alexandra could, in theory, catch up to it along the way.

Already her Hydra abilities were healing her, refurbishing her strength, though far slower than they should be.

But it would mean turning her back to Malatesti and Delacour.

Alexandra couldn't perceive the Champion of Fire, but if anything, it doubled her suspicion levels.

Fleur Delacour had been a Champion of Light, and Fire could create Light. There was no way she would have been blasted by this attack, not with the magical symbiotic link between the two Powers.

Romeo Malatesti chuckled.

"It was worth a shot."

"Laugh while you still can," Alexandra hissed as the train accelerated in a thunderous sound. "Because unless I have suddenly failed to learn how to count...you happen to be trapped with me on this arena level. And there are only two of you left."

The tall Champion stopped laughing and paled.

Yeah, it was suddenly not very amusing when the others left you to win the Task, and you had to deal with a powerful foe on your own, was it?

"I am certainly not going to win this Task," Alexandra acknowledged. It was a pity, she would have loved to repaint the Hogwarts Express. "But I certainly can ensure no one of the Romeo and Juliet duo can."

**8 April 1995, the stands of the Coliseum, lands of the Scuola Regina**

If minutes ago the duel between Malatesti and Alexandra had been fairly balanced thanks to Delacour supporting the former, this time it was a one-sided humiliation.

It had to be said that Alex's motivation was a big factor too.

Morag could recognise the signs, they were clear as day. The jaw was tightened, the green eyes were burning, and her body moved with inhuman lethality.

Her friend had realised that if nothing was done, she was going to lose this Task, and as a result, the time to play around was lost.

The 'duel' therefore was a combination of never-ending Runic attacks along with elemental spells ranging from ice to lightning, and vicious hexes that while not Dark or lethal, were particularly nasty.

Malatesti lost his wand in one minute.

Delacour ran to save her only ally.

She didn't get there in time.

"BOMBARDA!"

Morag grimaced in sympathy.

The good news was that Malatesti had been thrown into the forest of mushrooms. The bad news was that the mushrooms in question had hallucinogenic properties – Giovanni Ruspoli still believed he was an animated fruit after slamming his head against them.

"ETERNA-"

"SPATHA!"

A whip of fire was unfurled and struck in a dead angle, but in an impossible display of skill, Alexandra had already moved, and the flames withdrew as a giant sword of lightning struck the mushrooms and the moss.

The two Champions faced each other, and not for the first time, the Heiress of House MacDougal thought the two Champions couldn't be more different.

And no, it had nothing to do with the legendary enmities the people of the Isles and their rivals on the other side of the Channel had borne against each other in the last centuries.

Fleur Delacour and Alexandra were really complete opposites, and the former suddenly having hair of fire changed nothing.

"Death," the Champion of Beauxbatons called her out.

"Juliet," yeah, in hindsight, it was predictable Alex was going to be sarcastic. "Out of the way, or I send you to the Healers, where you will be able to listen to the songs of your Romeo."

As was completely predictable, the French Veela really didn't like the repartee.

"He is not my boyfriend or my lover!"

"Did I imply anything of the sort?" When she really wanted, Alexandra could really fake a virtuous and innocent expression. It was a pity that a second later her friend cackled, totally ruining the attempt to present a serious face.

"YES!"

"Oh," Alexandra smiled carnivorously. "Never mind then. Where were we? Ah, yes! Step aside, Delacour. I have a Task to win, a Champion of Innocence to catch, and a Badger to punish. It might not be necessarily in that order, though."

"Over my dead body," the Champion of Fire growled, and Morag like plenty of other students swallowed, because right at this second, it looked like the Veela was bathing in a cascade of magma.

Only for what seemed to be ten thousand lightning bolts to slam into her the next second.

"You really should not tempt a girl like that!"

The two Champions went to war against each other, completely ignoring the next train that had taken position at the start of the railroad tracks.

**8 April 1995, second level of the Mushroom Arena, the Coliseum**

All in all, Eleonora da Riva was quite satisfied by how things had turned out.

To be completely truthful, she had not expected her plan to work so close to perfection.

And yes, it was her plan.

Despite years of exploiting that weakness to her advantage, the young Champion was pleasantly surprised that so many of her peers mistook Innocence for Naivety or Inoffensive.

Well, she wasn't going to complain.

Thanks to the Contract of Luminous Order acquired by particularly underhanded manners, it had been possible to deal with the Dark Queen of Chaos and Lucrezia.

Okay, it was more for the former than the latter. The Succubus of Water had been so smug collecting the Clues that she had probably thought the victory was in her handbag, while nothing could be more wrong.

And yes, it was a reminder that for all your past victories, it was best to not rest on your laurels.

"I see three switches this time." Ambre De Courtois told her. "And this time, I presume the Judges weren't obliging enough to give us the Clues to know what types of mushrooms will unlock them?"

"You presume correctly." Eleonora nodded approvingly, congratulating herself to have chosen the French girl as her accomplice. "And unfortunately, we have to hurry. We eliminated two out of the three Dark Ladies, but the third is very much in the game, and I think she won't waste any time pursuing us once she has finished dealing with Delacour."

"Assuming she wins," the other girl replied. "Delacour is Fire now, and not so easy to beat. Your explosion of Light weakened her at the worst moment possible from her point of view. And-"

This was when the stadium shook and power was unleashed in an infernal wave.

It came from under their feet.

It was like cold thunder that uncoiled itself out of the abyss.

It was Death, and it was Endless.

It raged, and with it, the mushrooms' absurd growing-rate faltered.

"You were saying?" Eleonora asked charmingly as another explosion shook the stadium and another power, burning for the sake of burning, clashed with it.

"I stand corrected," Ambre de Courtois conceded with a smile. "What do we do with our last little problem?"

The third member of their much-diminished party blushed heavily.

Some of it may have to do with the fact he had been trying to point his wand at their backs.

It could have worked.

But the poor boy was fidgeting, and came back on his decision every minute before trying to go ahead with it.

"I don't-"

"You are particularly horrible at playing the role of traitor, Cedric Diggory."

Eleonora had been incredibly amused at the beginning of the year to learn the boy was sleeping with a girl of the Dark.

Assuredly, the 'Hufflepuff Champion' was not one hundred-percent attuned to Light magic, no one who wasn't a Light Champion would be. But as ironic as it was, save on some carnal aspects, Cedric Diggory was truly *innocent*.

"I can still win a victory for my school and be forgiven."

"You can," the Champion of Vesta acknowledged. "Besides, I don't think that Alexandra Potter will curse you too much. She won't trust you for the Seventh Task, but if one is realistic, I don't think she would have trusted you anyway at the last hurdle before the final game."

It was amusing that her words reassured the poor boy. Yes, she was speaking honestly, but the Champion fighting under the banner of the Badger was genuinely conflicted.

"In that case-"

"That said, I'm afraid we have lost enough time, and we can't afford to leave you in position to give Potter a detailed sum-up on how to bypass these obstacles. Ambre, you can go ahead."

"Hey! It's not-"

A mushroom imbued with freezing-stasis powers fell upon him, temporarily bringing an end to the fast progression of the Hogwarts Champion.

The British boy was now trapped in a magical block of ice, and he would stay that way until someone came to unfreeze him.

"I apologise for the sneaky move," Ambre smiled, "but we are in a bit of a hurry."

"Absolutely right. Where do you think are the Clues to decipher which types of mushrooms are the correct ones for the railroad switches?"

"I think we are going to have to show our mastery of Herbology."

Eleonora grimaced.

"I suppose that sooner or later, the sadism of the Judges was going to come back to haunt us."

**8 April 1995, first level of the Mushroom Arena, the Coliseum**

Alexandra removed the blood with a wandless spell.

It was strange.

Not because she was reminded that a Champion of Death bled. The Hydra Animagus didn't believe herself to be that arrogant.

Everyone could bleed, beginning with Ra and Osiris.

Alexandra was not an exemption to this rule that applied to all humans.

But for the first time, the Lady Protector was having fun while doing so.

Her strength was increasing and waning.

She received some nasty injuries that were only slowly fading away.

Plenty of her evocations and spells had slammed into her opponent but had failed to put the Phoenix Animagus down.

But it was a true challenge this time, one that Neville Longbottom and all the other morons of the Light couldn't provide.

"Accio Mushroom! Glacius-"

Once again, a whip of flames almost decapitated her.

The problem for her enemy was this time, it had been a feint.

"Mucus!" The Ravenclaw witch didn't waste her time uttering the full incantation. It was way better for the effect of surprise anyway.

There was an enormous splurging sound, and the ground began to transform into a swamp.

Alas, Delacour reacted in time, and managed to jump away, shrouded in her aura of flames.

"I have to admit," the British Champion said conversationally while hurling two more ice spells at the Champion of Fire, "you're far better than the last time. I really thought I would take less than ten minutes to remove you from the arena."

"Do you really think you're the only one who can train hard?" the daughter of the French Minister retorted before spitting blood. "You almost killed me during the First Task. Never again."

"'Never' is a very dangerous word," and no, Alexandra hadn't needed the teachings of Professor Flitwick to teach her that.

"Admit it, you're just angry I am your equal in this duel."

This time it brought a laugh out of her.

"No, you're not, *Juliet*."

Unlike Delacour, this Task was not really playing to her strengths. To begin with, there was nothing to empower Death here. They couldn't slaughter their fellow Champions, and the mushrooms didn't have souls.

Then there had been the actions of Eleonora da Riva, which were significantly weakening her.

Add to that the first period of duel when Delacour had been able to not lose thanks to Malatesti, and you obtained a worst-case scenario.

Alexandra remained confident she was going to win.

Delacour, for all her Phoenix regeneration, was getting out of breath.

She, not the Champion of Fire, was able to dictate the pace of the duel.

But the more time passed, the more her chances of getting an acceptable score during this Sixth Task crumbled.

"You are fast becoming another Dark Queen, and you're just too blind to see it."

If it was supposed to rile her up, it failed.

That said, it would not be a bad thing if she could convince her opponent she had succeeded...

"You know what?" she said aloud. "I withdraw my previous judgement. You are not proving as interesting as I thought. Time to finish this."

"And how do you think you're going to achieve this?" the Veela mocked her. "I have learned how to counter your common elemental attacks."

"I'm so glad you asked the question."

And then Alexandra transformed.

**8 April 1995, Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, Scotland**

Albus Dumbledore was very glad he had withdrawn minutes ago to the privacy of his personal office.

Many excuses had been spoken, many of them mentioning other pressing duties. In reality, the bickering of some Lords of the Wizengamot tired him, and he wanted to watch this Tournament Task in relative peace.

It was not a bad thing right now, for the Defeater of Grindelwald was alone with Fawkes.

As a consequence, there was no one to observe him as a cloud of poison spread across the Venetian Coliseum.

Albus was pretty sure he winced at that very moment.

Naturally, throwing around poison like this had the predictable effect of creating explosions. It was like throwing Alchemical reagents into a volatile cauldron: you couldn't be sure exactly what would do the deed, but you knew it was going to spell disaster for the classroom that was the 'battlefield'.

"Powerful attack, but not enough, I think..."

He was proven right, a second later, as the young Fleur Delacour emerged from the purple-black clouds.

The French Champion clearly looked worse than half a minute ago, but she did seem in a state to continue-

"Ah."

The wind blasted away the result of the unholy combination of mushroom spores and poison, and the Champion of Life's opponent revealed herself.

Or rather, the monster that had taken her place.

"This is bad."

Albus had never tried to complete his Animagus transformation. Yes, he was a Transfiguration Master, but he was not a Champion. Therefore the possibility of a magical beasts' transformation was forever denied to him.

But in his childhood, the Headmaster of Hogwarts had admitted fairly truthfully to several people that if he was given the opportunity, he would seize it with both hands.

It had never come for him.

But others had been given the choice and refused to miss that chance.

Nine heads.

A gigantic serpentine body of dominant black scales with streaks of gold.

Fangs easily bigger than the one the Basilisks could boast about.

Suddenly, some poison and lightning spells took all their meaning here and now.

*Lernaean Hydra*.

Fleur Delacour tried to transform into a Phoenix, the pyre of flames announcing her intentions clear as the day.

The emerald lightning that came out of three maws made sure the effort was doomed to fail.

Albus had thought the destruction of the first locomotive represented the maximum effort the Black Witch was willing to unleash today.

He had been utterly wrong.

In seven seconds, Alexandra Potter explained to the entire stadium and everyone watching the European Magical Tournament why she was one of the most dangerous monsters in this world.

**8 April 1995, first level of the Mushroom Arena, the Coliseum**

This time, Fleur Delacour went down for good.

Alexandra threw more lightning attacks around, and began to transform back.

It took several seconds – her Hydra inner animal had been excited, and wanted to 'play' for longer, but it was accomplished.

She had beaten Fleur Delacour, one-on-one, and in conditions disadvantageous for her.

Arguably, the last point wasn't exactly something to take pride **in**, given that fair fights were for Gryffindors and idiots, but still.

Disregarding the factor of intelligence, there was no denying the immense amount of satisfaction Alexandra felt at seeing her foes unconscious at her feet.

A pity that-

No. There were too many witnesses, and besides, if she did that, Fire would not have a Champion anymore, something that could make all the difference between victory and defeat at Ragnarok.

"You will owe me one, Malatesti..."

Of course, while killing Delacour was not possible, that didn't mean there weren't other options to signify her displeasure. And the former Champion of War had given her some amusing ideas.

"If we're leaving a Shakespearian story, the least I can do is to provide the accessories, I think."

Yes, it was going to make her sure she lost more time against Eleonora and her accomplices, but honestly, by now, it was not very much a concern anymore.

The Champion of Innocence and Ambre de Courtois had been given over fifteen minutes of advance, maybe more.

"If they really can't win with these odds, one might easily argue they don't deserve a victory at all." The Ravenclaw tried to calculate what it would mean in terms of scores, but she had not checked very much the rankings below the Champions of Chaos and Water.

Assuredly, after today, it could be acknowledged as a huge failure of her.

"Now, Delacour, what am I going to do with you? I think a big bright pink ribbon in your hair with-"

The Morrigan whispered a warning in her ears.

Alexandra reacted instantly.

"FULGUR AEGIS! TEMPESTAS ELEMENTAS! PROTEGO AUXILIA!"

Darkness surged onto the arena, but the attack never came.

And deep inside, Alexandra felt uneasy.

This wasn't from a Judge or one of the Headmasters of the four schools. This wasn't coming from the handlers or the Healers. And it wasn't part of the Task itself, given the agitation it provoked on the outskirts of the mushroom arena.

The attack still didn't come.

It felt like something *wrong*. It was not like the presence of Apophis, the Powers be praised for that.

But it was-

It raised all her senses in alert and gave her the urge to flee.

Which should be impossible, for she was a Lernaean hydra.

Yes, this didn't mean the Lady Protector was invincible, but she was very close to the top of the food chain.

And the darkness was spreading, darkening the skies above their heads. Its chief weapon was fear, and since the public in its great majority was neither Animagi nor Occlumens practitioners, panic was the reward.

"**I know you are here. Stop this game, and reveal yourself**."

**8 April 1995, Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, Scotland**

Albus knew the moment the attack came this had not been part of the Task.

Of course, as the Headmaster of one of the four schools, he had been informed of the sort of protections the Scuola Regina had poured into their first-class arena.

As a result, the Defeater of Grindelwald knew how tough the wards and all the enchantments were, and how much strength would be required to go through them.

It was, at the risk of saying a typical British understatement, a lot.

Far more power Albus possessed.

Far more power than any wizard or witch of this world save maybe Ra and Osiris had at their fingertips.

But power was never the only solution.

There always were flaws in ward schemes, a weakness its architects had overlooked or been unable to shield their creation from.

And here, it had evidently happened.

"**I know you are here. Stop this game, and reveal yourself**."

Albus acknowledged the challenge, but this bravery was completely misplaced here.

Whatever power a Black Witch was given by the Dark, it was not-

The darkness seemed to retreat before the lightning.

And then in fewer than three breaths, the magic attack changed.

It was no longer pure darkness; it was shrieking faces of the departed hurling a cacophony for the world to hear.

Where the ghostly magic touched, the mushrooms changed, taking the shape of animated corpses.

They were crude, but you could recognise them for what they were: the illusions of Inferi.

And that meant-

"**Necromancer**," he like millions of people heard the spawn of James Potter utter a title every wizard and witch had learned to dread. "**Your presence is unwanted here. Begone**."

The threat was ignored.

From the ashes of the battle that had raged for the last minutes, the party responsible came.

It looked like the Necromancer was crawling out of a tunnel filled with the moaning of the damned.

There was not much to see.

This was a figure hiding behind a hooded cloak. It could have been used during a carnival, or to keep your anonymity in ten thousand other events.

There was an integral mask protecting the identity of its wearer, and with everything else, you could not even know if whoever was under the disguise was male or female.

The only thing Albus knew for certain, however, was that the Necromancer was not here in person.

This was some sort of astral projection, one that the enemy of the Scuola Regina had somehow been able to project through the wards.

And as it stabilised, the Wizarding robes protecting so much of the identity of the Necromancer changed colour, going from orange to green in the blink of an eye, before shifting to blue, purple and black in rapid succession.

Any other time, it could have been described as an amusing artistic display of Charms.

Right now? It felt like an incredible statement that you didn't understand the true meaning of.

"*I am the true Queen, and Necromancy is my birthright*." The voice which resonated in the stadium definitely sounded female. "*And on this day, I come to tell you to prepare*."

Albus definitely didn't like the sound of that.

"*Whereas you proposed peace and games to those unable to understand the glory of magic, I have moved closer to my ultimate goal. I am now a claimant. By the time of the Summer Solstice, my will be supreme. I will be the new Champion of Fate*!"

The former Chief Warlock didn't often feel sheer terror strike him like a thunderbolt, but today this really was one of those cases.

"May the Light save us all..."

**Author's note**: The end of the Sixth Task will come with the next update, as will be the climax of the very rebellious Knight Necromancer, obviously gone completely rogue.

Nature has horror of emptiness, and with the empty thrones of the Champions of Magic, it was somewhat unavoidable some would try to claw their way to the throne...

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