



20. ALBUS' STORY

Albus didn't hate Alma Aleron despite his outward jibes and complaints. Nor did he necessarily dislike life in Ares Mansion with his fellow Werewolves. In many ways, they were comfortingly similar to his mates back in Slytherin House. There was a familiar ruthlessness to them, a mingled sense of pride and ambition that Albus wholeheartedly shared. He had friends among the Wolves and even a few outside his own society. Like Zane, Albus was a likeable fellow. People gravitated toward him and got caught in his orbit, drawn by his infectious (albeit pointed) wit and his cynical insightfulness. There were times when Albus felt perfectly at home with his new mates and even this strange new school, which was so very unlike Hogwarts.

Furthermore, there was a refreshing candor to the Werewolves—a distinctly American straightforwardness that was somewhat shocking to his English sensibilities. Where the Slytherins (at least in his day and age) were rather political and subtle with their tactics, the Werewolves were fully overt about their aims. They were militant, power-hungry, arrogant, and merciless, and they were utterly unabashed about it. Albus appreciated the sheer bloody-minded bluntness of Clay Altaire, Olivia Jones, and the rest of the upperclassmen Wolves, even if their flinty-eyed zeal sometimes left him a little cold.

The one thing that ruined it all, of course, was the Werewolves' sense of nearly absurd patriotism. Albus understood patriotism—had expressed it himself in his irritation about coming to the States to begin with—but the brand of nationalism practiced by many of the older Werewolf students was off-putting at the very least. It had begun with the nickname 'Cornelius', apparently an

American term for anyone with a British accent, derived from some famous speeches given decades earlier by some Minister of Magic. Albus could live with that, he supposed. He himself had handed out more than a few derisive nicknames in his time, and knew that the best way to manage such a thing was to embrace the nickname rather than eschew it. Consequently, he answered to the nickname as if it was a source of pride. After all, he *was* British and this Cornelius fellow *had* been Minister of Magic. These were hardly things to be ashamed of.

The Werewolves, however, seemed immune to the irony of Albus' willing acceptance of their sneering moniker. They viewed it as a weakness rather than a sort of backhanded boldness. The Werewolves, Albus learned, did not appreciate cunning or subtlety, at least outside of the battlefield. What they wished to see from their fellow Wolves was *fierceness*. They wanted Albus to bare his metaphorical teeth at them, to prove his toughness (and his adopted Americanness) by snarling at their jibes and even slashing back at them a little. By the time he realized this, however, it was too late to do anything about it. Like any wolf pack, the alpha dogs maintained their positions by stepping on the throats of the lesser animals. By playing it cool and subtle, Albus had allowed them to decide—erroneously—that he was *not* an alpha dog. The fact that he clung to his Britishness (and perhaps even more, his *Slytherinness*) only cemented their opinion that he was an interloper.

As a result, Albus' initial rabid enthusiasm for his house and his mates had cooled to a brittle, grudging tolerance. He missed Slytherin House, where he was appreciated and (he had to admit it, at least to himself) revered a little. After all, he was the son of Harry Potter and he had been sorted into the house of Harry Potter's mortal enemy. If that wasn't delicious irony, then nothing was. The Slytherins, politick as they might be, understood irony. They relished it.

Thus, as each day passed, bringing Albus one step closer to going home to his mates, he became more and more discontent and restless.

He talked to James about it a little, but James couldn't really understand. James had Ralph and that insufferable git Zane Walker to hang out with just like always. Besides, James was obviously obsessed with some project or other, as he always seemed to be. Albus didn't know anything about it—had merely noticed his brother and his small circle of mates buried in hushed conversations and lurking around the campus like a bunch of self-important little berks—but he guessed that whatever it was, it had something to do with Petra Morganstern.

Albus supposed that he was slightly jealous of them. After all, Petra was his friend too, at least a little. She and her sister had lived in the Potter home for several weeks over the summer, and Petra and Albus had developed a sort of sharp-edged camaraderie. There was something decidedly *un-Gryffindor* about Petra, despite her house of origin. She could be surprisingly dark sometimes, both in her attitudes and her humor, and Albus had, to his own great surprise, truly liked her. He didn't feel the same way about the older girl that James did, of course. Everybody knew that James was completely sodden with puppy love for Petra. Albus, on the other hand, saw her as a younger, female version of his recently married Uncle George. To him, Petra was a sort of sister-in-arms, a cynical kindred spirit, even if she did tend to hide it all under a somewhat sugary *nice girl* exterior.

Albus didn't know if Petra really was guilty of cursing old Mr. Henredon or not. In his own way, he thought he knew her even better than James did, since James' opinion of her was rather

hopelessly skewed by the rose-colored glasses of infatuation. Albus understood that Petra may well have been the one to break into the Hall of Archives. He didn't know what all the ruckus was about it, really. So what if she had cursed some old Muggle curator and diddled around with some mysterious relic at the bottom of the Archive? Even if she had done it, Albus figured she'd had a good reason for it.

He also understood—instinctively if nothing else—that if the American wizarding authorities tried to put Petra in prison, they might have a harder time holding onto her than they'd expect. Albus had some experience dealing with singularly unique, magical individuals. His father, after all, was the great Harry Potter. Albus knew that there was something unusual about Petra, something that was both quietly powerful and (perhaps even more importantly) deeply fierce. No matter what happened with her and that pipsqueak arbiter, Keynes, Albus had a feeling that Petra would manage to stay in charge of her own destiny. And Izzy's as well.

“Hey Cornelius,” Altaire called as Albus returned to Ares Mansion one evening, interrupting him just as he began to tromp up the wide staircase. “Your brother and his slab of a buddy toddled by to see you.”

Albus stopped, surprised. He peered over the banister at Altaire, who lounged in the main parlor with some older Werewolf students pretending to study, nipping Firewhisky from a bottle they kept hidden behind the couch.

“James came here? What'd he say?”

Altaire shrugged indulgently. “Who knows? He and his little Bigfoot pal shook in their capes when I met them at the door and told them you weren't here. I suggested they beat it before I taught them a little respect. Sorry if I ruined teatime or something.” He grinned maliciously and nudged the girl next to him. She smirked crookedly.

Albus rolled his eyes and turned away, trudging up the rest of the stairs.

He'd heard about James' errands around the campus that day. Lucy had corroborated the rumours at lunchtime. Apparently, James and Ralph Deedle were making the rounds to all the other societies, asking for a little help with the upcoming tournament match. He shook his head as he made his way to the second-floor landing and opened the door to the small sophomore dormitory room. It was just like James to traipse all over the campus with his hand out, begging for help, making *his* problem everyone *else's* problem. As irritating as the Werewolves could be, at least they understood the concept of self-respect. They'd either win or lose on their own two feet, and they'd do it with pride, no matter what.

Of course, in Albus' experience, the Werewolves *always* won, so he couldn't be entirely sure how they'd react if they ever lost. He assumed that they'd accept it with the same stoic bitterness that they displayed in nearly every other case.

Albus plopped his knapsack onto his bed and threw himself down next to it. He propped his chin in his hands and stared out the tall window.

The fact was that it rankled him a little bit that James hadn't tried any harder to ask *him* for help. Truthfully, Albus knew that he hadn't given James any indication that he, Albus, would be willing to *offer* any help, but still. They were brothers, weren't they?

Deep down, despite all of his bravado and his apparent society loyalty, Albus sort of wanted to see the Bigfoots win the tournament. Not just because James was part of the team and not in the least because the Foots were the celebrated underdogs. Albus was not the sort of boy to be moved by the plight of the underdog. The fact was, Albus was uneasy about the apparently unstoppable nature of Team Werewolf.

It had started a few months earlier, right before Christmas.

Albus was bundling up to follow the team out to Pepperpock Down for a match against Igor House when Altaire had stopped him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, where do you think *you're* running off to?" the bigger boy had demanded, placing a hand on the middle of Albus' chest and pushing him slightly back into the foyer.

"I'm going to the match," Albus replied, resisting—with some difficulty—the urge to produce his wand and give Altaire a *shove* of his own.

Altaire shook his head impatiently. "No you aren't," he countered. "*You've* got a job to do. Don't tell me you forgot already."

Albus frowned wearily. "You're kidding? I have to do it *now*? But the match...!"

"I expect we'll manage to play the first half just fine without you in the stands waving your little Werewolf flag," Olivia Jones smirked, passing them as she strapped on her gauntlets.

"Everybody has to do their part," Altaire added condescendingly. "Our part is to go kick Team Igor's scrawny butts. *Yours* is to polish the silver so that we have something nice to eat with when we get back. It may not seem very important to you, Cornelius, but we'll be hungry when we get back. We'll deserve some nice shiny silverware. Right? What would happen if you toddled off to the match and shirked your duties? Why, we'd get back here and find nothing but tarnished, spotty old silver! How awful would that be?"

"Answer him, cadet," the Werewolf Keeper, a brute of a senior named Dunckel, commanded as he passed, bumping Albus with his shoulder.

"That would be pretty awful," Albus muttered, trying not to sound too sarcastic.

Altaire nodded. "It sure would. Now get to it. If you double-time it you may still make it for the second half of the game. And if you get there any earlier than that, I'll know you cheated and used magic. No magic for house chores! You know the rules."

"Yeah," Albus said darkly, stripping off his scarf and throwing it over the hook by the door. "I know the rules."

Altaire had already dismissed Albus, however. He smacked himself on his padded shoulders, first his right and then his left, let out a hoarse bark of animal-like enthusiasm (which was answered

by the rest of the team as they made their way through the huge front door), and trotted down the main steps into the cold afternoon.

Unlike the rest of the houses, Team Werewolf lived close enough to Pepperpock Down that they got ready for their matches in their own house, ignoring the locker cellar beneath their platform until the end of the match. Albus watched grimly as the team ran single file down the steps and along the path, barking and yawping at the early yellow moon. As they passed the bronze statue of the crouched werewolf, they patted it on the muzzle, as if for good luck. It was a tradition that was very nearly a compulsion. Albus shook his head. He was not superstitious enough to believe in luck. He believed in making his own luck.

Or not.

Still frowning to himself, he turned back to the main hall of Ares Mansion and made his way to the dining room and the silver hutch therein.

He used magic to clean the silver, of course, despite the Werewolf House rules. It took all of three minutes. The next few minutes he spent grubbing up some old rags with silver polish and leaving them on the table just for the look of it.

There was a television in Ares Mansion. This had offended Albus a great deal at first—the idea of a telly at Hogwarts was utterly preposterous, of course—but Alma Aleron was not Hogwarts, and at times like this, he was secretly rather glad for the diversion. He used his wand to click on the set and plopped full length onto the couch.

There were dedicated wizarding television channels in the States and Albus watched one of them disconsolately, biding his time until he felt he could head out to the match without raising any suspicions. The program was a sort of chat show. The host, a wizard in orange pinstripe robes, was interviewing some bloke from the Crystal Mountain about the persistently missing Muggle senator. The working theory, apparently, was that the senator, whose name was Filmore, was still alive, and was being held by the Wizard's United Liberation Front at a secret location. The man from the Crystal Mountain was impressively slick and cool, wearing a slate grey suit and a burgundy ascot. *Former Werewolf House man*, Albus thought with a mixture of pride and annoyance.

“According to some experts, the new head of the W.U.L.F. is a woman,” the man said, his tone grave. “She replaces the former leader, Edgar Tarrantus, who preferred to be a rather public figure despite his group’s clandestine nature. This new leader, however, has maintained a remarkably low profile, and we know almost nothing about her. She simply seems to have appeared out of thin air, wresting control of the group away from its founders and taking it, some say, into dangerous new directions.”

“And what does this bode for the Muggle senator Filmore,” the host asked meaningfully, leaning slightly forward on his chair.

The man in the grey suit shrugged. “If he is still alive, then we have to assume that the plan is to Obliviate and *Imperio* him. He may then be released back into the Muggle power structure, probably with some fabricated story to explain his absence. Assuming that this succeeds, we must expect that he will then act upon the will of his former captors.”

“And what might that be?” the host asked, cocking his head.

“The aims of the W.U.L.F. are quite well-known,” the grey suited man replied easily. “Complete equality between the wizarding and Muggle worlds. The first step would probably be some disclosure of the magical world, at least in a relatively small way, just to prepare the Muggle public for the changes to come. Of course, this is just conjecture at this point.”

The host nodded dourly. “Noble goals indeed, even if their methods are a little questionable. Recent opinion polls show that nearly fifty-two percent of American witches and wizards are in favor of complete magical revelation to the Muggle world. Any ideas why the W.U.L.F. and their mysterious new leader have waited so long to act? After all, the senator has been missing for several months, now.”

“It may be that they are on the run,” the interviewee answered breezily. “International authorities are working with the Magical Integration Bureau to track them down, and there are rumours that the international agencies involved have acted imprudently, allowing the W.U.L.F. time to relocate. There are even suspicions that *some* of the international police are secretly involved with the W.U.L.F., either working with them or, more likely, attempting to take over the group for their own nefarious purposes.”

“Skrewt poop,” Albus said disgustedly, sitting up on the couch and flicking his wand at the telly. It popped off with a short squawk. “Bloody malcontents and ingrates. It’d serve you all right if Dad just gave up and went home. Leave you all in the lurch with your stupid W.U.L.F. and your bleedin’ opinion polls.”

He got up, pocketed his wand, and stalked toward the door, not caring if he got to the match early or not. For the moment, Albus figured Altaire could stuff his silver where the nargles didn’t bite. He grabbed his scarf and slammed the front door on his way out.

It was virtually dark by now and Albus could hear the whoop and roar of nearby Pepperpock Down even as he made his way along the front path. He passed the glinting bronze statue of the crouched Werewolf. The plaque embedded into the statue’s base was just readable by the light of the full moon:

VICTORY TO THE WEREWOLVES!

Gift of Mr. Stafford N. Havershift, Wolfpack Booster Troop Chairman, Class of 1992

“Sod off, Havershift,” Albus grumped. “You *and* your stupid statue.”

A moment later, he stopped in his tracks as a thrill of surprise scuttled up his back. Slowly, wide-eyed, he turned back to the snarling bronze shape.

It hadn't moved. And yet Albus was quite sure that it had just growled at him. He frowned at the crouched shape. Its bared teeth glinted in the moonlight. Its amber eyes caught the dusky light and seemed to glow faintly. Albus was about to continue on his way when the sound came again—a sort of tiny, barking growl. It was almost too quiet to notice, but it was definitely coming from the statue. With some trepidation, Albus crept closer to the statue. The noise of nearby Pepperpock Down echoed across Victory Hill. A cheer erupted suddenly from the grandstands. Albus concentrated on the bronze statue, resisting an irrational fear that the frozen shape would suddenly spring to life and pounce upon him, snapping its jaws, its amber eyes flashing.

It was making noises.

They were so quiet, so faint, that Albus had to place his ear directly in front of the bared muzzle, straining to listen, but there was no question about it. More of the faint barking growls sounded and Albus suddenly recognized them. He'd heard the same sounds less than half an hour earlier as Team Werewolf was making their way to the match. It was his own team, barking in triumph at a scored goal. He heard them through the mouth of the bronze statue, as if on some secret magical wireless frequency. And then, tiny but recognizable, he heard their voices.

Nice shot, Lantz!

Knocked her clean off her skrim!

All right team, pincer formation! Let's take it to 'em again!

Steal that Clutch from 'em! That's more like it!

Albus recognized the voices: Altaire, Jones, and all the rest. As he listened, he heard the roar of the crowd as well, coming both from the statue's snarling mouth and the air high overhead. There was no question about it: he was hearing the match as it happened—hearing everything his teammates said to each other like a magical play-by-play.

He stepped back and stared at the statue. The amber eyes glowed faintly and Albus wondered if perhaps it *wasn't* the collected light of the full moon that he saw glinting in those yellow orbs. Perhaps they were glowing on their own, powered by the same secret magic that connected the statue to the match even as it played on less than a hundred yards away.

And if it was connected to the match, was the match somehow connected to *it*? Albus knew very well that while game magic was allowed in Clutchcudgel, *outside* magic was strictly forbidden. Nothing outside the boundaries of the figure eight course was permitted to influence the match in any way.

And yet...

Albus shook his head slowly, still frowning at the bronze statue. 'VICTORY TO THE WEREWOLVES', the plaque on its base read. Albus couldn't help wondering.

Was that merely a slogan? Or, perhaps—just perhaps—was it an incantation?

He didn't know. But he meant to find out.

For now, he turned and ran the rest of the way to the nearby grandstands, his breath pluming behind him in the cold, dark air.



Once Albus determined to learn the secret of the Werewolf statue, it took him less than a week to work it out.

No doubt James would have been amazed by this (and later was, when Albus told him about it), but his cousin Rose would not have been surprised at all. While Albus was mainly known among his family as a rather sharp-tongued rogue and a bit of a malcontent, he was also, deep down, a very sharp boy with excellent instincts. Rose recognized these qualities because she had them herself. In fact, the main difference between the two of them was that Rose, like her mother, loved to read and had therefore supplemented her innate brightness with a wealth of knowledge. Albus, unfortunately, hated to read, thus his natural intelligence had been rather starved of the fuel it needed to thrive. For this reason, it was easy for those who knew him (including Albus himself) to conclude that he was a bit thicker than his brother and sister, despite his verbal wit. The truth, however, was rather the reverse.

The first thing Albus did was research a certain Mr. Stafford Havershift, whose generosity was apparently responsible for the statue that stood in front of Ares Mansion.

This proved to be rather easier than Albus could have hoped. The hall outside of the Ares Mansion dining room was dominated by a large glass trophy case packed with plaques, photos, newspaper clippings, and assorted memorabilia. One entire section of the case had been dedicated to Mr. Havershift, whose face smirked crookedly from a large framed photo in the center.

He was an almost absurdly good-looking man, with a prominent cleft chin, thick salt-and-pepper hair, a chiseled nose, and bright green eyes. A cursory glance around the nearby shelves told Albus quite a lot. The man had played Clipper for Team Werewolf throughout his school career some twenty years earlier and had lead the team to a series of championships. According to the newspaper clippings, Havershift had been both an excellent athlete and a dedicated student, excelling at Potion-Making and Precognitive Engineering.

Albus wondered for a moment if the man had gone on to play professional Clutchcudgel, but then his eyes fell upon another newspaper clipping near the top right of the case: *'Accident Sidelines Star Werewolf'*. The moving black-and-white photo that accompanied the article showed two Clutch players colliding hard in midair, spinning out of the center ring with their pads and goggles flying. Albus scanned the first few lines of the article, gleaned just enough to learn that Havershift's right wrist had been shattered in the collision, struck by the other player's skrim. Apparently, there had been conjecture that the other player, a boy named Benoit from Vampire House, had deliberately struck Havershift in an attempt to remove him from the match.

Deliberate or not, the result was the same: Havershift's wrist had been healed as well as possible, but he had sustained permanent damage to the tendons of his hand, dramatically reducing his ability to use a wand. In one fell swoop, his career as a Clutchcudgel athlete had been ruined.

Regardless, the team had apparently gone on to victory and had granted Havershift a Most Valuable Player award, despite the bandages that still wrapped his wrist.

As Albus scanned the rest of the case for more clues, a shadow fell over him. Glancing up, he saw Professor Jackson, President of Werewolf House, standing over him, his dark brow steely as always.

"It's good to see you taking an interest in house history, Mr. Potter," the tall man said stoically.

Albus nodded. "Yeah, er, I've been walking right past this case for almost a whole year and I never really stopped to look at it." He glanced back at the glass shelves and pointed at the large framed photo. "You know anything about this bloke?"

"Stafford Havershift?" Jackson said, smiling a little incredulously. He chuckled and shook his head. "Of course, being from England, you might not be quite as familiar with him as the rest of us are. Mr. Havershift is the founder of Pandora Potions, the country's largest elixir and potion-fabricating facility. His products are shipped the world over, everything from hair-coloring tonics to magical acids used by the military. I daresay you've probably got some of his products in your own toilet."

Albus shrugged. "Perhaps. So he's kind of a big deal here at Werewolf House, eh? Him being a former Werewolf and all."

"Indeed he is," Jackson nodded, turning serious. "His perseverance in the face of adversity is an example to us all. As a Clipper for Team Werewolf, he led us to our first string of tournament victories in many years. I was President of Werewolf House in that time as well and I remember it quite vividly. After his unfortunate accident, he swore that he would devote himself to the support

of the team for his entire life, regardless of his inability to play. He graduated, founded Pandora Potions with the help of his father, and became a global success. And yet, despite his wealth and his international business obligations, he still finds time to stay involved here at Alma Aleron. He was chairman of the Werewolf Booster Troop for many years. Just over a decade ago, he donated the bronze werewolf statue you've seen standing before this very house."

"Is that so?" Albus replied evenly.

"He came for the dedication of it," Jackson added, straightening his back and nodding proudly. "It was a glorious day, attended by alumni from decades past. There had to have been three hundred people on the slope of Victory Hill, which we had just regained after a very impressive tournament victory over Team Pixie. Mr. Havershift asked the current Clutchcudgel team to come forward so that he could have his picture taken with them and the statue. 'Stroke its muzzle,' he told them as they gathered around the statue, and I can still remember the pride in his smile, the twinkle in his eyes. 'Stroke it and see if it brings you victory,' he told them. That was the beginning of the tradition you yourself have surely witnessed. Am I correct, Mr. Potter?"

Albus nodded slowly, turning back to the smiling man in the photograph. It was a moving photograph, of course. In it, Havershift's grin was smug, confident, even a little mean.

Albus' instincts were clicking neatly into place. He didn't know as much stuff as Rose, but he was quick.

Here was a man, Stafford Havershift, whose chance at a senior-year tournament victory had been stolen away from him, along with much of the use of his right hand—his *wand* hand. This did not stop him, however. It barely even slowed him down. In classic Werewolf House fashion, the man apparently forewent wand magic and immersed himself into his second love: potion-making. Driven and probably ruthless, he succeeded wildly, all the while simmering in anger about what had been taken from him, about that last tournament victory that he had been unable to taste. In response, he had vowed to support Team Werewolf until his dying day—to help them achieve as many more of those victories as possible—and as a token of that support, he had donated a large bronze statue with mysterious amber eyes.

Was it possible that no one else had figured it out? Or did they know—at least a little—and just pretend not to? To Albus, it seemed very obvious: a wealthy team supporter who just happens to be an international potion-making expert gives the team a talisman for them to rub before every game and from that day on... they never lose. Coincidence?

"You've got to be kidding me," Albus mumbled under his breath, peering out the front window at the statue on the lawn, glinting in the moonlight. "I mean, seriously. *Nobody* is *that* good."

A few days later, as he was coming home from classes, Albus angled over toward the statue. He glanced furtively around and then peered closely at the amber eyes set into the statue's head just over the snarling muzzle. He saw his own reflection in them, hazy but bright, tinted golden. Tentatively, he reached out and touched the cold metal of the wolf's nose. It was skillfully cast, both soft and hard under his fingertips, worn bright by the hands that had rubbed it over the years.

Feeling a slight shudder, Albus stroked his palm along the wolf's carved muzzle. A moment later, he retreated into the house, virtually running up the steps to his dormitory.

Once inside, he slammed the door and hurried to his bed. He placed his knapsack onto the bed, unzipped it, and rummaged inside until he found a sheet of light pink parchment, nearly as thin as tissue. He had just come from Potion-Making class with Professor Baruti and had secretly nicked the flimsy bit of parchment from the stash in the Potions closet. Among the Potions students, the pink parchment sheets were known as 'Teach-cheats' because of the way Professor Baruti used them to measure the ingredients of the class projects. He'd merely dip one corner into their cauldrons, examine it critically, and then suggest more eye of newt or a pinch less powdered spider bile.

Carefully, Albus lay the thin parchment onto his right hand, which was still cool from the metal of the bronze statue. With his left hand, he pressed the Teach-cheat hard against his palm. He waited ten seconds, counting slowly under his breath, and then drew his hands apart again. He carried the sheet of pink parchment to the window so he could examine it in the sunlight.

Slowly, faintly, cursive handwriting began to curl out on the paper, as if written by an invisible hand. Albus read the words as soon as each one became clear.

Peppermint oil (trace)

Powdered slagbelly toenail (133 particles)

Essence of eel (miniscule)

Wreakramble root (degraded; 0 potency)

Albus leaned over the parchment, frowning at the words. He could trace the origins of all of these ingredients. Most of them were remnants from his recent Potions class and his lunch prior to that. The Wreakramble root was from last week, when Professor Baruti had taken the class to Shackamaxon for a special lesson with the native woman, Madam Ayasha. Albus reminded himself that he should probably wash his hands a little more often. He sighed. The Teach-cheat didn't seem to have picked up anything from the bronze statue outside.

But then, very faintly and slowly, another line began to write out on the tissue-like parchment. Albus leaned over it again, straining to make out the blurry words.

Composite: Felix Felicis (derivative hybrid; memory)

Albus very nearly gasped. His eyes widened as he stared down at the parchment and its faint words. He knew what 'memory' meant in potions terms. It meant that there wasn't any detectable remnant of the listed ingredient, but a sort of halo or aura of it remained, imprinted onto the parchment like an echo.

“Felix Felicis,” he whispered to himself, awed. A moment later, a crooked smile crept onto his face and he shook his head slowly. He was familiar with the substance, although he’d never actually encountered any of it in real life.

“It’s probably in those amber eyes,” he mused aloud. “After all, it’s a liquid, isn’t it? It might be infused in the metal as well, but there’d have to be a store of it somewhere inside, otherwise, the potion memory would be useless.”

Albus narrowed his eyes. He collected the used Teach-cheat, folded it up, and stuffed it into the inside pocket of his slate grey blazer. He wasn’t entirely sure what he’d do with what he’d learned, but he was glad of it nonetheless. Maybe he’d tell James about it. Not that it would do any good, of course, but it would feel good to be able to reveal such a juicy bit of house gossip.

Felix Felicis, he thought, smiling ruefully. *Better known as Liquid Luck.*



Albus might have told James that very night if it hadn’t been for the arrest of Petra Morganstern.

In retrospect, both James and Albus understood that that had been the event that set everything fully into motion, like a lever being pulled and starting up a sort of magical merry-go-round, one that starts slowly, but gradually spins faster and faster, becoming an unstoppable blur.

They were walking to the library after dinner in the cafeteria, Albus, James, Ralph, Zane, and Lucy, the Tuesday before the final Clutchcudgel tournament match, when the word came down. A rabble of voices wafted into the early summer air, distracting Albus from the Quaffle he and Ralph

had been tossing around. Ralph's toss struck Albus in the chest and bounced to the ground, unseen, as the gathering turned toward the increasing noise.

"It's that girl!" someone called out in a sort of hushed shout. "The one that cursed Mr. Henredon! They've finally convicted her!"

"But why are they bringing her here?" a Vampire boy asked, trotting past Albus, heading to join the gathering crowd.

"Petra?" Ralph asked, turning to look at James and Zane. "Did you hear anything about this?"

James shook his head, his face growing alarmed. "No. Not a thing! Come on!"

As one, the group broke into a run, Albus and Lucy following in the rear. By the time they reached the throng of students, a commanding voice rang out from the center, overruling the babble.

"Everyone please stand back," the voice said, its tone one of unquestioned authority. Albus saw a very severe man in a dark grey tunic and short vest, his hands raised. The left hand was held palm out, the right clutched his wand. "For your own safety and for the security of the campus, return immediately to your houses and classrooms. Anyone caught interfering with Wizarding Court affairs, even by accident, will be prosecuted. Am I clear?"

The last was not really a question and the set of the man's face made that fact very obvious. Students began to fall back, although none seemed in any hurry to return to their houses and classrooms. As the mob broke apart, Albus saw a tight assembly of men and women dressed in more of the grey tunics and vests, their faces all nearly expressionless. The arbiter, Albert Keynes, was among them, smiling faintly, his hat pulled tightly down over his bald head. The troop began to walk slowly toward a large building—the campus medical school—levitating something carefully between them. Albus realized what it was at the same moment that James and the rest did.

"Petra!" James said, nearly groaning. He began to move forward again, reaching for his own wand, but Ralph and Zane both grabbed a shoulder and held him back, their faces pale and grave.

Petra Morganstern floated upright in the center of the gathered witches and wizards, her head down, her hair hanging like a dark curtain over her face. Albus guessed by the dangle of her arms and the loose curls of her fingers that she was unconscious and felt his own pang of mingled pity and fear. Her bare feet dangled six inches over her shadow as she floated along the footpath, suspended in the center of no less than eight pointing wands.

"Petra!" James called again, as if he meant to wake her. Albus knew it was a futile effort. She wasn't merely asleep. She had been Stunned into unconsciousness. Probably it had been the only way the court officials could apprehend her. Still, it hurt his heart a little to see it. It was a bit like seeing a noble dragon declawed and defanged, or a captured warrior princess with all of her hair cut off. There was something shameful about it and something rather deeply frightening. Not just because Petra was so silent in her unconsciousness, but because Albus knew that they wouldn't be able to keep her unconscious forever. Eventually, she would wake up.

Slowly, carefully, the gathered court policemen and women maneuvered Petra's body into the wide front doors of the Medical College. Keynes held one of the doors open for them, smiling that infuriating, smug smile. Inside, Albus knew, were potions that could place someone into a deep sleep, virtually dreamless.

But they won't be able to keep her unconscious forever, Albus thought again, and shuddered faintly. Eventually, Petra would wake up. Perhaps Izzy would be gone by then, spirited off to her new home in the Muggle world, her memory of Alma Aleron, the magical world, and Petra herself completely erased. Perhaps they would have succeeded in imprisoning Petra by then, for all the good it might (or might not) do. Unlike James, Albus didn't know that Petra was a sorceress, but he sensed nonetheless that she was no typical witch. Eventually, sometime, Petra *would* surely wake up. It was inevitable.

And when she did, Albus was quite sure of one thing: when she woke up, she would be very, very angry.

Here endeth chapter twenty. Only a few chapters left!

Tomorrow's chapter will be released by noon, CST, via www.jamespotterseries.com. In the meantime, come on over to the [Grotto Keep forum](#) to discuss what's happened thus far.