



## 22. WOVEN DESTINIES

As the gathering neared Pepperpock Down, it accumulated a following of students from other houses, forming something like an escort. By the time they passed by Administration Hall, there were over a hundred people walking along with the Bigfoot Clutch team, shouting happily, cheering, waving banners, and tossing old Clutches overhead. James was nearly bursting with mingled excitement and apprehension. The encouragement of the other houses (all but Werewolf House, of course) was both exhilarating and a bit frightening since James knew that it would probably taper off quickly if Team Bigfoot did not immediately hold their own against the Werewolf juggernaut.

As they passed by the Medical College, James was surprised to see Uncle Percy standing near the doors, his face tense and distracted. Lucy stood by his side as well as a small knot of nurses, doctors, and (James noticed with some dismay) Wizarding Court officials. He recognized the latter by their slate gray tunics and severe expressions.

“What’s going on over there?” he asked, nudging Ralph and pointing.

Ralph looked and shook his head. “I don’t know. Maybe they’re here for the match?”

“Uncle Percy, perhaps,” James said doubtfully, raising his voice over the accompanying crowd, “but not those blokes from the American Wizarding Court.”

Zane peered over the crowd toward the doors of the Medical College. “I don’t see Keynes, at least.”

James nodded, frowning. “No. But still...” He paused, craning to look as the crowd pushed him onward, past the medical complex. A blonde-haired girl moved next to Lucy in the center of the gaggle of court agents. It was Izzy, her face pale and worried, looking up at the severe expressions of those all around her. James felt a sudden sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

“Izzy’s with them,” Ralph said, noticing the same thing. “You don’t think...”

“They wouldn’t,” Zane said, not very convincingly. “Not while the match is going on. Keynes and his goons may have plans to Oblivate Iz and send her off to be adopted into the Muggle world, but they wouldn’t do it already. Er... I think.”

James wasn’t so sure. As the crowd forced the team onward toward Pepperpock Down, he lost sight of the gathering on the Medical College steps. Just because Keynes wasn’t visible, that didn’t mean he wasn’t there. He could very well be inside, making arrangements. The arbiter didn’t strike James as the sort of man who would allow a sporting event to interrupt his plans. Still, there was nothing James could do about it at the moment. He felt a deep sense of misgiving, nonetheless. At least Uncle Percy was there, and Lucy. They wouldn’t let anything bad happen to Izzy.

If they could help it, at least.

James shook his head, clearing his thoughts. He had other difficulties at the moment.

Pepperpock Down hove into view as the team angled around Administration Hall. It was already nearly full, thrumming with the roar of the crowd, alive with waving flags and popping bursts of Firework Spells. James’ heart skipped a beat and then galloped to catch up. He grinned as the crowd escorted the team into the shadow of the rampart grandstands. A cheer went up in support of the approaching Bigfoots. It throbbed in the air, blotting out every other noise, and James couldn’t help turning to look back at his fellow players, exultant with nervous excitement.

“Go Foots!” Jazmine Jade suddenly cried, raising her voice, barely, over the roar of the cheers.

“*Go Foots!*” the rest of the team echoed back, pumping their fists in the air. Mukthatch let out a surprisingly loud roar, and then grinned a little sheepishly as everyone boggled at him.

A moment later, the team crossed the field and disappeared into the cellar locker room, where their skrimms and Professor Wood awaited them.

“This is it, team!” he called out, clapping his hands together eagerly. “Get geared up and let’s meet on the platform for practice laps in ten minutes!”

Wood met James’ eye as he turned to climb the steps. He winked and smiled crookedly, almost mischievously. James grinned at the professor and then began to strap on his new wrist gauntlets.

By the time the last of the team clumped up onto the platform, the sun had lowered to a huge bronze ball on the horizon, casting its last beams onto the waving flags and banners of the grandstands. The crowd was in extremely high spirits, producing a nearly constant roar of happy exhilaration. James blinked in the late afternoon glare and fingered his skim.

Only minutes earlier, while the team had still been congregated in the locker cellar, James had called them together in a quick huddle. There, he had announced one change to the evening’s Clutch magic game.

“No curses,” he’d said firmly, producing a chorus of objections from the gathered team members.

“Why not?” Norrick had asked stridently. “We’ll need to use everything we’ve got against those Wolves!”

“Not curses,” James had repeated. “Leave the potion pouches down here in your lockers. They may be legal and they may not be, but that’s not really the point, is it? The Foots play a clean game. Nothing dirty, right? We’ll win this match, but we’ll do it with our heads held high just like always! Understood?”

“James is right,” Jazmine had added resolutely, removing the potion pouch from around her neck. “We’ll win this match straight up! We don’t need to resort to Vampire curses. That sort of thing is for teams that don’t play as well as the Bigfoots! Am I right?”

To James’ surprise and delight, the team had responded with a hearty cheer. All around, the Bigfoots players had removed the potion pouches from around their necks and piled them on the shelf next to their skrim.

Now, standing in the sunset light and looking across the rings toward the Werewolves’ platform, James felt a pang of doubt. The powdered curses might have been sneaky and a bit devilish, but all of a sudden James agreed with Norrick: they were going to need everything in their arsenal to beat the Wolves.

With their backs to the sunset, Team Werewolf appeared to be fringed with molten gold. Clayton Altaire stood in the front, grinning malevolently, his skim standing next to him, decorated with a snarling wolf’s visage. Flanking him were Olivia Jones and Jeremiah Dunckel. All of them stared across the lofty open space of the field, smirking with seamless confidence.

“Don’t let them spook you,” Wood called, summoning the team into a huddle. “Team Werewolf is a good team, an excellent team, but you lot are every bit as skilled as they are and then some. Their overconfidence will be their downfall! They expect to win this match easily with hardly any effort. They think that Victory Hill is their birthright. Are they right?”

“No!” Team Bigfoot cried out in rowdy unison.

“Will you lie down and let them win just because they’re the Werewolves?”

“*No!*” the team barked again, louder.

Wood shouted over the crowd, “*Will* you take the match to them and show them that their arrogance is their greatest weakness!?”

This time, the team exploded in a shout so loud that the crowd all around could hear them. “YES!”

“Who are we?” Wood demanded.

“The Bigfoots!”

Wood asked again, “WHO are we?”

“THE BIGFOOTS!” This time, the shout dissolved into a deafening cheer as the gathered crowd took up the cry, turning it into a chant: “*BIG-FOOTS! BIG-FOOTS! BIG-FOOTS!*”

Fireworks popped from the grandstands all around and banners waved frantically against the purple sky.

“Line up!” Wood shouted, smiling grimly. “Practice laps! Team captain?”

“Viper formation,” Jazmine barked, dropping her skim and jumping onto it. “*Go Foots!*”

The rest of the team returned the cry and followed Jazmine out into the rings, slipping easily into formation. James was among the last to take off. For one instant, he felt a pang of mortal worry. *This isn't going to work*, he thought, panic washing over him like a tidal wave. *We can't do this! They'll slaughter us!* For a split second, he was convinced that he had forgotten everything--all the game magic they had practiced, all the formations and maneuvers, everything the other House teams had taught them, even how to fly a skim. He stared down at the odd broom as it floated next to him, one of his feet planted on its middle, holding it steady. He felt frozen in place.

A hand clapped him gently on the shoulder. When James looked up, it was Professor Wood.

“Don't worry about it, James,” Wood suggested, nodding encouragingly. “Just have fun, eh? This is what you were made for.”

James looked at the professor, hoping he was right. He nodded, gulped, and then swung his other foot onto the beam of his skim. A moment later, the platform was gone, replaced by open space.

James remembered everything.

Less than a minute later, Professor Sanuye blew his official's whistle. From that point on, there was no looking back.

The match was a blur of wild motion, punctuated only by the whoosh of the rings, the buffet of passing players, and the occasional thump and cry as Bullies collided with Clippers. Spells sizzled through the air all around and James thought he had never experienced such intense, instantaneous ferocity. It was as if the Wolves were pulling out all the stops from the very moment the whistle blew, meaning to crush Team Bigfoot's spirit even before it had a chance to take root. As James passed through the center ring in pursuit of a Werewolf Clipper, he was walloped from overhead by what felt like a passing freight train. He spun off his skim, grabbed onto it as he fell away, and then swung back up on the other side--a maneuver he had practiced so many times in the Gauntlet that it was nearly second nature. As he re-oriented himself, he glanced aside. Pentz, the boy who had tried to knock him off his skim the very first time he, James, had attempted to fly one, was rocketing away, grinning back over his shoulder.

James shook his head, fuming, and darted back into the rings, rejoining the flow of the match.

It was difficult to keep track of the match as it was underway. James tried to be aware of what the rest of his team was doing, but the viciousness and speed of the Werewolves' tactics made it a challenge simply to stay on his skim. James was sure that he had never flown so fast for so long, and yet he was barely keeping up. At one point during the first quarter, he saw Jazmine and Gobbins performing one of the two-man offensive spells that the Pixies had taught them with some

apparent success. Later, he followed Wentworth in Clipper formation and saw the smaller boy activate one of the Igors' ingenious gizmos from the rear of his skrim. A small box popped open and a Boggart deployed from it, immediately taking the shape of a ghastly flying clown. Clayton Altaire, who had been gaining on Wentworth in Bully position, nearly fell off his skrim as the clown loomed over him. James flashed past and used the *Riddikulus* spell his father had taught him to turn the clown into a cloud of ping pong balls, which fell away into the darkness below.

In general, the team seemed to be putting everything they knew to good use, and yet as the match neared halftime, James noticed with dismay that Team Werewolf was leading by a score of fifty-two to forty-four.

And then, fifteen seconds before the end of the second quarter, James heard a sickening thud and a shout of pain. The crowd roared deafeningly, either in anger or encouragement, and James glanced around, seeking the source of the cry. His heart rammed up into his throat as he saw Norrick falling into the darkness of the field, his arms and legs thrashing at the empty air. Far over him, his skrim spun lazily, weaving a looping trail out over one of the grandstands. Professor Sanuye's wand was out in a flash.

"*Wingardium Leviosa!*" he shouted, his voice thin with distance.

Norrick bobbed upwards, missing the grassy field below by less than ten feet. He hovered over his shadow, his right arm dangling limply.

The crowd, which had fallen silent for a few seconds, erupted with mingled cheers and jeers. From the announcer's booth, Cheshire Chatterly's voice rang out.

"Bigfoot number six, Willem Norrick, appears to be injured after a *devastating* sideswipe by Werewolf number nine, Parker Pentz," she cried, obviously angry. "Match Official Sanuye is escorting Norrick to the Bigfoot platform. Unless we hear otherwise, it would appear that Mr. Norrick will be out for the rest of this match, leaving Team Bigfoot one player short!"

James shouted to Norrick as Sanuye levitated him to the platform, "Norrick! How bad is it?"

"Bad enough!" Norrick called back through gritted teeth. "But I'll keep playing! That punk can't get rid of me that easily!"

James glanced back at the 'punk' in question. Pentz flew in a lazy arc around the Werewolf platform, grinning crookedly.

"Do we have any reserve players?" Gobbins asked, floating up to join James near the center ring.

"Rrrarpgh!" Mukthatch answered dolefully from his place by the goal ring.

"We only had Kleinschmidt," James said. "And he came down with the yipsplits from eating too many of Yeats' dragon fingers."

"He'd have been no help anyway," Gobbins observed mournfully. "Kid flies a skrim like a fish flies a kite."

"So what'll we do?" James asked.

Gobbins shrugged. “We play one man short unless we can find a replacement. Can you think of anyone else who can suit up in Norrick’s place?”

James shook his head dourly.

From the Bigfoot platform, Professor Sanuye turned away from Norrick and blew his whistle.

“Penalty, Team Werewolf,” he called out, using his wand to amplify his voice. “Malicious sideswiping. Three minutes in the dock.”

James glanced back to the Werewolf platform in time to see Pentz dropping easily onto it. The Werewolf coach, a college-level student with a blocky head and a crew cut, collected Pentz’s skrim and grinned tightly.

“They planned it,” Gobbins commented wonderingly. “Pentz did it on purpose! See how easy they’re taking the penalty?”

James sighed angrily. “Well, at least our numbers will be even for the next three minutes.”

“Three minutes nothing!” Gobbins said, glancing back at him. “It’s only thirteen seconds ’til halftime! All penalties are canceled at that point! Why do you think they waited to do this now? Come next half, they’ll have a full crew and we’ll be down by one! Unless Norrick can keep playing.”

As if on cue, Cheshire Chatterly spoke again, her voice echoing from the announcer’s box.

“*And* Willem Norrick is escorted down to the field by the medical crew, apparently suffering a dislocated shoulder at the hands of Team Werewolf. Thus, with no reserves, Team Bigfoot finds themselves one player short of a full squad. Daunting odds indeed for the perennial underdogs.”

James’ face was hot with anger and frustration. When Sanuye blew his whistle again, announcing the resumption of play, he felt clumsy on his skrim. Werewolf players thundered past, quickly collecting all three Clutches. By the time the halftime horn sounded, two of those Clutches had been turned into scores. Team Werewolf circled like wasps, barking gleefully and collapsing onto their platform in triumph.

“How’s Norrick?” Jazmine asked dispiritedly as she landed on the Bigfoot platform.

“He’ll be all right,” Wood replied, sighing, “by tomorrow afternoon. For now, I’m afraid he’s out of the match.”

“Do we have to forfeit?” Wentworth asked, his eyes huge and angry behind his glasses.

“Not legally, no,” Wood answered immediately. “But we are at a distinct disadvantage. Let’s give it a vote. Do you lot want to go on with the match? Or shall we pack it in and head down to the Kite and Key to celebrate a season well spent?”

“No way,” Gobbins announced loudly. “I’ll take them all on myself even if the rest of you go home. Lousy cheats! I’ll teach them to play dirty like that!”

“I’m in too,” Jazmine said, firming her jaw.

“Wraak Rubffthuth!” Mukthatch agreed, nodding vigorously.

“We can still take them,” James added, sounding much more confident than he felt. “This is our match to win!”

“Hear hear,” Wood concurred as the rest of the team cheered in agreement. “Then we stay and play on. You’re doing incredibly well, all of you. I have nothing else to tell you than just to keep it up. Now that we’re down one player, though, we’ll all have to be even more alert. Concentrate on offense, sink as many scores as you can. You’ll have to get used to playing Clipper and Bully at the same time whenever necessary. We can do that because you all know all the parts, right?”

“Right!” Team Bigfoot responded with slightly less than their original fervor.

“Right,” Wood agreed. “Now get something to drink and limber up. We’re back in the air in three minutes.”

It was nearly full dark by now with only a pink rim spreading along the western horizon. James took a moment to look around the grandstands, hoping to see some sign of his family. Sure enough, he spotted his mum in the grandstand directly behind the Bigfoot platform. She saw him looking and waved at him, her face pale and strained, as if she were desperately wishing the match were over rather than merely at halftime. Next to her was Lily, Aunt Audrey, Cousin Molly, and Viktor Krum, who sat ramrod straight, his face etched with restrained anger.

*Join the club, James thought sourly. And then: where’s everyone else?*

He scanned the seats all around his mum. There was no sign of Albus. Neither in sight were Uncle Percy, Lucy, or Izzy. James was again visited by that sense of sinking dread. *I can’t think about that now, he reminded himself. Win the Clutch match first. Then deal with everything else.*

Wood called the team over to the edge of the platform. Halftime was nearly over. James turned away from his family and Viktor Krum, returning to the matter at hand.

*But where are they, he thought naggingly, worriedly. What in the world could be so important that Lucy, Izzy, and Albus wouldn’t be here to watch the match?*

Shortly enough, though, the teams launched from their platforms and merged into the figure eight course. Professor Sanuye blew his whistle once more and the match launched again into motion, wild and ferocious.

In the midst of it, James forgot about his brother, friend, and cousin completely.



Lucy *was* watching the match, in fact, in a manner of speaking.

“What’s the score?” Izzy asked, her voice small.

“I don’t know,” Lucy replied quietly. “The scoreboard’s too little to make out from here.”

The two girls sat in a small waiting area on the fourth floor of the Medical College. Nearby, a round desk was dominated by a ghostly miniature representation of the ongoing Clutchcudgel tournament match. The tiny spectral players swooped and zoomed silently through rings no larger than dinner plates. The witch working the desk was plump and pale, her red hair cut so short and curly that it looked like a helmet. She was watching the match whenever she wasn’t glancing furtively at the Wizarding Court officials gathered near the hall.

“Which one is James?” Izzy asked for the third time. She leaned her head against Lucy’s shoulder.

“One of the ones wearing blue and orange,” Lucy answered patiently. “With dark hair. It’s hard to keep track of him with things moving so fast.”

Izzy nodded against Lucy’s shoulder.

From the hallway nearby, voices approached. Lucy looked up, feeling a gulf of nervousness in her stomach. She’d volunteered at the Medical College for the past two months, mostly for extra credit, but also because she liked being around the recuperating patients, liked helping people who were so grateful for even the slightest thing. Tonight, however, she wasn’t working. She wouldn’t have been allowed to be here at all if her father hadn’t been who he was. As a senior vice director in the Ministry of Magic, he was the closest thing to an official representative of Izzy’s home government as was likely to be found. There wasn’t much he could do other than observe, but he was committed to doing that, if nothing else, and Lucy loved him for it. She herself was only there to keep Izzy company until the moment came when the men would call the blonde girl back into the room beyond the hall’s double doors. When Izzy came out of those doors again, she wouldn’t know who Lucy was, or anyone else for that matter. At that point, Izzy would be as alone as anyone on earth could be. Until that happened, Lucy meant to stay by her side.

“What are they going to do to me?” Izzy asked without raising her head.

Lucy pressed her lips together tightly and then said, “They’re going to make you forget.”

Izzy nodded again. “There are some things it’ll be nice to forget.”

Lucy considered this as she stared at the large round desk and the tiny ghostly Clutch players that swirled over it.

“Will I forget my mother?” Izzy asked.

Lucy began to answer and then paused. “Actually,” she answered quietly, “you may not. She wasn’t a witch.”



There was another pause. The voices in the hallway were still talking, quietly and intensely. Lucy heard her father among them. She couldn't tell what they were saying, but she could see their shadows on the hallway wall, gesturing animatedly.

"Will I forget the lake?" Izzy asked softly. She lifted her head and looked directly at Lucy, her eyes intent. "Will I forget the gazebo and the Wishing Tree?"

Lucy didn't know what that meant. "Probably," she ventured. "I expect so."

Izzy nodded. "Good. That's good. I don't want to remember that."

Lucy sighed deeply. The men in the hall had stopped walking as they talked, but now they approached again. Lucy sensed that they were finally coming for Izzy. For her own part, Izzy wasn't paying them any attention.

"When it's all over," she asked, leaning her head on Lucy's shoulder again, "will Petra and I be able to go home again? Back to our little rowhouse here at the school?"

Lucy held her breath, her eyes widening slowly. She supposed she could lie to Izzy. After all, in a few minutes, none of it would matter. Izzy wouldn't remember that she ever had a big stepsister, much less the details of this conversation. And yet, Lucy couldn't bring herself to tell Izzy anything other than the truth.

"No, Iz," she said very softly. "I'm sorry. No."

"Where will we go then?" Izzy asked, and as she raised her head once more, Lucy saw the first cloud of doubt pass over the girl's face.

"You'll go... somewhere else," Lucy answered, not taking her gaze from Izzy's eyes.

Izzy whispered, "But what about Petra?"

Lucy shook her head and tried to smile encouragingly. It was very difficult. "It'll be all right, Iz," she said. "You won't remember her."

Izzy's face began to darken. Her lips pulled down in a slow frown and her brow clouded. Her eyes thickened with sudden tears. "I'll remember Petra," she said, certainty and doubt mingling in her words. "I could *never* forget Petra."

"I'm sorry, Iz," Lucy said, cursing herself for ruining the poor girl's last moments of awareness.

"I won't forget Petra," Izzy said again stubbornly. A tear spilled over onto her right cheek and she glanced toward the door. The men came into sight even as she looked. The one in the lead was the arbiter, Albert Keynes. Behind him, looking perfectly miserable, his face pinched into a helpless frown, was Lucy's father.

"Izabella," Keynes said, cocking his head slightly and smiling, "come on over here now, darling. We're all ready for you."

"No," Izzy replied immediately, pressing back into her chair. Her lower lip stuck out in defiance.

Keynes stopped in front of Izzy. Still smiling, he hunkered down on one knee before her.

“I’m afraid I can’t take no for an answer, darling,” the man said, tilting his head toward her, as if he meant to play. “Come along with me, and when it’s all over, I’ll give you a lollipop.”

“I won’t remember lollipops when it’s all over,” Izzy replied immediately. “And I won’t remember you. Or Lucy. Or any of the rest of you. And I won’t... remember... *Petra*.”

Lucy realized that Izzy was crying. Tears ran down her pink cheeks in shining rivulets. They weren’t tears of sadness, however, at least not entirely. Mostly, Lucy realized, they were tears of anger.

“You won’t forget lollipops though,” Keynes smiled, reaching to take Izzy’s hand. “Those you’ll remember just fine.”

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Izzy turned her head and let out a yell. It wasn’t a scream; it was a name.

“Petra!” Izzy called, so loudly that her voice cracked.

“Now listen here,” Keynes said, and grabbed for Izzy’s hand. Izzy wrung it away from him and hugged her knees to her chest.

“Give the girl a moment,” Percy snapped angrily, stepping to get between Izzy and Keynes. Keynes was too close to her, however. He reached for her again, his already pale face growing even paler with annoyance.

“PETRA!” Izzy called again. Her voice rang in the waiting area. The nurse behind the round desk was standing now, one hand covering her mouth and the other flat against her throat.

“Come along now,” Keynes demanded, grabbing at Izzy. Lucy could bear it no longer. She jumped up, not even aware of what she was doing. She was holding Izzy’s hand in her own and Izzy began to clamber after her.

“Oh no you don’t--” Keynes cried, but was cut off as Izzy extended both of her feet at once, connecting with the man’s thin chest. He sprawled backwards, knocking Percy aside. Both men fell to the floor.

“Stop her!” Keynes called, his knees poking up into the air as the court guards scrambled to help him up. “Forget about me! Get the girl!”

“Lucy, no!” Percy called out.

Lucy heard his voice but didn’t so much as glance back as she ran, Izzy at her side. Hands grabbed at them as they sped through the archway into the main corridor, but the girls were young and quick. They ducked between the two guards flanking the entry and darted into the door-lined corridor, making for the stairs beyond.

It was completely hopeless, of course. They’d never make it out of the building and even if they did, where would they go? And yet, Lucy couldn’t stop herself. She ran on, Izzy at her side, even as a red bolt struck the marble floor at her feet, sending up a burst of sparks.

“Petra,” Izzy said, almost to herself, still running. “We have to find Petra...”



Not very far away, Albus followed along with the Clutchcudgel tournament, somewhat indirectly.

He'd stayed back at Ares Mansion as Team Werewolf geared up for the match and left, pausing only for their ceremonial rubbing of the bronze werewolf statue in the front garden. No one asked him why he was still there, not even his mates, Greunway and Shrum, since they had left an hour earlier to get good seats up in the grandstands. Albus watched through the tiny window in the center of the third-floor hall until the team was completely out of sight, their barking grunts lost in the increasing roar of the crowd. Then, as patiently as he could, Albus had waited.

He'd overheard Altaire and Jones talking in the parlor earlier that afternoon. Altaire had heard all about James' overtures to the other houses, seeking help in the Bigfoots' attempt to defeat the Werewolves. Both of them had laughed maliciously at this.

"Isn't it just like the Foots to ask the *losers* for help in beating the *winners*," Olivia Jones had observed, shaking her head. "They should have just come to us. We'd have given them the best advice of all: go home and hide under your beds, little Foots."

Altaire had chuckled. "We should teach them a lesson," he'd said, his voice hardening, "just for having the gall to try to rally the whole school against us. We should beat them into the ground like tent pegs even for trying. Make an example out of 'em."

"I have an idea," Jones had agreed and then lowered her voice. Half a minute later, Altaire had yodeled a laugh of pure spite. Albus hadn't liked the sound of that laugh although he hadn't heard the details of Jones' plan. It didn't matter, really. Team Werewolf's tactics were never particularly subtle. Probably, they meant to sacrifice a few penalties in favor of taking out a Bigfoot player or two. Albus only hoped that one of the players they eliminated wouldn't be James.

Albus hadn't known for sure what he intended to do, but at that moment, he had decided on a plan. It might not work, but then again, it just might.

Besides, it wasn't as if he would be sabotaging his own team. He would merely be evening the odds.

From his dormitory room, he'd listened to the ebb and roar of the crowd at nearby Pepperpock Down. He'd watched the clock impatiently. Finally, when it had gotten dark enough

outside to hide his movements, he had crept out the front door of Ares Mansion and approached the statue of the snarling werewolf.

As before, he could hear the shouts and commands of Team Werewolf echoing from the statue's muzzle as if on a distant wireless frequency. Albus hunkered in the darkness, waiting for his moment to act. People were still moving along the nearby footpaths--latecomers to the match, hurrying toward Pepperpock Down. None of them noticed the boy hiding in the shadow of the werewolf statue, but Albus didn't mean to take any chances. He waited and listened, watching for the moment when no one would observe his actions.

Faintly, via the mysterious statue, he heard Altaire's instructions, shouted to his teammates as the match approached halftime. He could even hear the dull thumps and exclamations as the players collided in air or the buzzing whooshes of the game magic spells. Albus could tell that Team Bigfoot was holding their own against the Wolves, although not well enough to take the lead.

*Of course not*, Albus thought sourly, *they don't have Liquid Luck on their side*. He glanced up at the werewolf statue as he listened. Its eyes glowed faintly, coppery in the last light of the sunset.

Finally, just as Albus was preparing to act, he heard Altaire call out a command, directed at that block-headed prat, Parker Pentz.

*Number nine! Do it now! Phase one, Operation Achilles!*

A moment later, a heavy thump and yelp of pain emanated from the statue's mouth. Albus heard Altaire's wicked laugh as the unfortunate Bigfoot player screamed, falling away from his assailant.

Nearby, drowning out the thin broadcast of the statue, the crowd roared in Pepperpock Down's grandstands.

Albus didn't know what happened next, but he assumed that the Bigfoot player was all right, more or less, since the match continued shortly thereafter.

It was nearly halftime. Albus thought that that was probably the best time to act. He waited for the halftime horn to sound and then climbed carefully to his feet, producing his wand from the sheath in his sleeve. He stood in front of the statue's glowing eyes, hearing the distant whoops and barks of his team as they congregated for halftime, and then raised his wand.

He opened his mouth to speak the incantation--*Convulsis* was the spell he had chosen after some consideration--but the words stopped in his throat as the werewolf statue *blinked*. It moved, shaking its shaggy bronze neck and turning very slightly, as if to face Albus directly. The amber eyes narrowed and a low growl, almost like the purr of a very large cat, emanated from deep within the thing's metal throat.

Albus froze. This, he had not at all expected. His mouth moved, framing the words of the spell, but he couldn't speak. Fear had closed off his breath. The statue's eyes flared brighter and Albus sensed it preparing to pounce on him, to crush him under its weight. He had time to think, *Did Havershift enchant it to recognize when it was being threatened, and to defend itself? Is that even*

*possible?* Obviously, it was. The truth wrinkled its bronze lips back from its bronze teeth and the growl grew louder, announcing its intention to strike.

And then, suddenly, a hand closed on Albus' wrist, pushing his arm upright.

"Halt right there, Cornelius," a voice commanded stridently. "Drop the wand. Now!"

Albus didn't obey. He barely heard the words. He continued to stare wildly at the crouching werewolf shape before him, but most of the light suddenly seemed to have gone from its eyes. It was no longer moving *or* growling.

"I said *drop* it!" the voice commanded again. The hand holding Albus' wrist tightened painfully and Albus' hand spasmed, releasing his wand. It fell silently into the grass in front of the statue. Albus finally looked aside and found himself staring into the face of Dayton Englewood, a senior Werewolf student and member in good standing of Professor Jackson's Salem Dirigus Free Militia. Englewood's crew cut bristled and his wide pockmarked face was set with a sweaty gleam of triumph.

"Looks like I caught me a spy," he said with grim glee. "A spy and a saboteur."

Despite his fear and frustration, Albus rolled his eyes. "Great," he said wearily. "Just what you've always wanted."



"Gobbins!" James shouted hoarsely. "Overhead! Brick wall! Now!"

Gobbins acted immediately, stopping his skim in midair as if he had struck a solid wall and dropping flat onto its surface with the Clutch held beneath him, protected. The Werewolf Bullies swooped over him, barely missing his head as he hunkered down. Instantly, Gobbins sprang up again, rocketing forward, now following the Bullies, drafting behind them. They boggled back at him and then jerked upwards out of the course under the influence of Wentworth's gravity well.

There was no time to celebrate even as Gobbins swept on toward the goal. The other two Clutches were in the Werewolves' possession. James leaned over his skim, driving it forward so quickly that the rings flashed past like fence posts. He caught up to one of the Werewolf Clippers, Olivia Jones, and fired a Zombie hex at her. Somehow, uncannily, Jones jiggled to the left at just the right moment, causing the spell to deflect from the center ring as she passed through it. James cursed loudly to himself and ducked through the melee of the center ring, still chasing Jones.

They were only five minutes into the second half when James swooped past Clayton Altaire, who let out a guttural bark of triumph.

“Number four!” he shouted, apparently to one of his teammates. “Phase two! Now!”

James didn’t know what the call meant. A few seconds later, however, a piercing howl rang out over the course. James was so surprised that he nearly fell off his skrim. He swooped out of the course and spun around in a tight corkscrew. There was only one person in the rings who could make a sound like that. Sure enough, Mukthatch had fallen onto his skrim, holding his right knee in pain. His Keeper’s Cudgel was spinning lazily as it fell toward the field far below.

“On no!” Jazmine cried helplessly, dismay and rage evident in her voice. “Not Muk! What’d they do!”

“They buzzed him,” Troy Covington called from the opposite end of the course. “On purpose!”

James flew over to the platform and jumped off his skrim, landing next to Professor Wood, whose face was set in a hard frown.

“They shot Muk!” James declared angrily, pointing. “And that was no accident! What spell was it?”

“Inertia Charm,” Wood answered tersely. “Great for thrown Clutches, terrible for human bones. Or Sasquatch bones for that matter.”

Professor Sanuye was towing Mukthatch toward the platform using a Lanyard Charm. His whistle poked from between his teeth. On his skrim, Mukthatch groaned, still clutching his right knee.

“Medical College, immediately,” Sanuye announced as Wood helped Mukthatch off his skrim.

“They did that deliberately,” Wood said to the match official. “You know that, right?”

“Miss Brazil says it was an accident,” Sanuye replied evenly.

“Linton Brazil is a cheat and a liar!” James exclaimed, but Wood raised a hand, silencing him.

“Your word against hers,” Sanuye said, shaking his head slowly. “Either way, you’re down by two players, Professor. You don’t intend to finish the match, do you?”

“Absolutely!” Gobbins cried, landing on the other side of the platform. Jazmine and the rest of the diminished team were close behind. As they landed, two medical students in green tunics appeared on the platform to examine Mukthatch’s knee. They shook their heads gravely and began to splint the knee in preparation for the trip back to the Medical College.

“I’d strongly advise you to forfeit,” Sanuye said, still speaking to Wood. “You may choose to contest the results at a later time. Frankly, I’d testify to the board that you deserve a tie. Team Werewolf would still receive a technical victory, but you’d save your team the embarrassment of losing rather miserably. A squad two players short is a lost cause, I’m afraid.”

Wood considered this stoically. He looked out over the remainder of the team.

“No way,” James declared, shaking his head. “We can’t give up! They’re trying to force us out, one by one, because they know they can’t beat us in a clean match!”

“Right you may be, James,” Wood nodded, “but Professor Sanuye is right. We’re two players down. I don’t see that we have much of a choice.”

“But we *can’t* give up!” James insisted, looking around at the team. “That’s what they *want* us to do!”

“Maybe we should, though,” Jazmine suggested sadly. “I mean, if we can at least get a technical tie game like Professor Sanuye says...”

Troy Covington nodded. “It’s better than getting completely destroyed in the rings at least. I sure don’t want to risk any more ‘accidents’ at the hands of those maniacs.” He shot a dark look at the platform across the way.

“Face it,” Wentworth added, stripping off his gauntlets and throwing them down onto the platform floor. “Playing a clean game is just no match for ‘all’s fair in love and war’.”

The rest of the team muttered agreement.

“Shall we take a vote?” Wood asked, raising his voice.

“What’s the point?” Gobbins declared angrily, glancing around at his teammates. “Let’s just get out of here.”

He made his way toward the stairs that descended through the center of the platform and the rest of the team followed, discouraged into silence.

Gobbins stopped on the second step, however, as the sound of clumping footsteps rang up from below. James watched as Gobbins backed up off the stairs again, making way for the newcomer. A head with very short dark hair appeared from below followed by a stocky body with arms like tree trunks. The figure was carrying Mukthatch’s skrim and wearing an ill-fitting Bigfoot jersey.

“You need a reserve player?” the figure asked seriously, glancing around at the wide-eyed members of Team Bigfoot.

“You’re Viktor Krum!” Wentworth exclaimed suddenly, pointing a finger at the big man. “I’ve got your Chocolate Frog card back in my room!”

Krum smiled gravely.

“Viktor,” Wood said, stepping forward and shaking the man’s hand. “Good to see you. Especially under these circumstances.”

“Is it legal?” James asked impatiently, glancing around at Professor Sanuye. “Can he actually play for us?”

Sanuye nodded consideringly. “Every house has their own rules for who can play on their team,” he said. “The official Alma Aleron rulebook only states that a simple majority of any team

must be students from that team's house of origin. Mr. Krum may indeed play if he wishes and if you'll have him."

"But *can* he play?" Covington asked. "I mean, no offense, Mr. Krum, but do you even know how to fly a skim?"

"Are you *skrewt poop*?" Wentworth exclaimed, nearly beside himself. "He's Viktor zarking Krum! He can do *anything*!"

Without a word, Viktor tossed Mukthatch's skim into the air. As it came down next to him, the big man hopped easily onto it. It bobbed with him on it and he directed it in a quick corkscrew swoop, ending in a ready crouch, his hands held out flat on either side.

"I once played for Bulgarian Clutchcudgel Minor League," he admitted with a grin. "It's not Quidditch, but sport is sport, yes?"

"Sport is definitely sport," Wood agreed, matching the big man's grin. "Professor Sanuye? It would appear that the Bigfoots are not quite prepared to give up just yet." All around him, Team Bigfoot cheered fervently.

Sanuye nodded. A moment later, he turned his broom away from the platform and swept out over the center ring. He blew his whistle and the babbling crowd fell quiet.

"Penalty, Team Werewolf. Careless use of magic. Five minutes in the dock."

The crowd roared approval as the members of Team Werewolf cried out angrily, denouncing the call. James grinned as he jumped back onto his skim. Careless use of magic carried a much harsher penalty than mere accidental buzzing, which enforced only two minutes in the dock. Linton Brazil would be out of the match for the rest of the third quarter, making the teams even once again, at least for the moment.

"And in a *shocking* turn of events," Cheshire Chatterly called from the announcer's booth, "Team Bigfoot gains a surprise reserve player in the form of Mr. Viktor Krum, world-renowned Harrier, athlete and participant in the famed Triwizard Tournament! Team Werewolf faces a stiff but fair penalty at the hands of match official Sanuye, and the match resumes with the Wolves leading by a score of seventy-six to sixty-five!"

James heard the whistle as the match plowed once again into motion. He watched as Viktor Krum immediately snagged one of the loose Clutches and tucked it under his huge arm.

*This match isn't over yet*, he thought, and plunged eagerly into the fracas.





Lucy and Izzy clambered down into the dark stairwell. Voices rang out behind them, but they echoed so that Lucy couldn't tell how close their pursuers were.

"We can't just keep running, Iz!" Lucy panted, but Izzy paid no attention. The two girls darted around a corner and pushed through a heavy door. There were no windows here and a sign overhead was lit with red light: *'Experimental Medicine and Elixirs--No Admittance!'*

Izzy ran on, her blonde curls flying. Lucy followed, glancing back the way they had come.

"Petra," Izzy moaned again, looking around wildly. "She's here! I feel her. She's dreaming!"

"Izzy, Petra's in an enchanted sleep!" Lucy insisted. "They gave her the poison apple! Nothing will wake her up until they *want* her to wake!"

Izzy didn't seem to hear Lucy. She turned and pushed through a set of swinging double doors.

"There!" a voice echoed behind Lucy. She glanced back and saw two of the court agents bursting through the stairwell doors. Their faces glowed crimson in the light of the overhead sign. One of the men pointed his wand and shouted. A Stunning Spell burst against the pale green brick wall next to Lucy, showering her with red sparks.

"*Lubricus!*" Lucy cried, flinging her own wand out.

Both men suddenly flailed wildly, as if the marble floor beneath them was coated with ice. They slid into the walls, one on each side, overcorrected, and then bounced off of each other, collapsing messily to the corridor floor.

Lucy spun and ran again, following Izzy through the swinging double doors.

The walls here were black tile, shiny in the overhead lights. The room itself was low and wide, packed with aisles of shelves. Lucy had been to the Ministry of Magic many times and was reminded of the Department of Mysteries. Here, however, the shelves were crammed with stoppered jars of colored liquid, each labeled in glowing green ink. Izzy was looking around at the shelves, helplessly.

"She's nearby," she moaned. She looked up at Lucy, her eyes pleading. "I can feel her. She's close. She's dreaming. She's dreaming of us!"

"Stop, Izzy, please," Lucy plead. "It's useless. You can't wake her even if you do find her. Do you understand? Maybe we can talk to the people, try once more to convince them not to take away your memory. My father can hel--"

A burst of red shattered one of the vials on a nearby shelf, startling both girls. They ducked and clambered away as more spells lit the air. Izzy spun at the end of one of the aisles and grabbed a large jar. Her face was etched with fear and rage as she flung it. The jar arced over Lucy's head and shattered loudly on the marble floor, directly in front of the approaching court agents. Fire leapt up

from the jar's liquid contents and engulfed the men. They shrieked in unison as they scrambled forward, beating at their clothes to extinguish the red flames. Lucy had only a moment to realize that the flames weren't fire, however; they were leaves. Red vines and bright red flowers grew with lightning speed from the released liquid, entwining the men's arms and legs, attaching to their gray tunics.

"Stop!" one of the men shouted, tugging at the vines. "Stop in the name of the wizarding law of the United States!"

"Sod off!" Lucy shouted back. A moment later, she and Izzy doubled back to the main doors, banging through them even as the court agents fired Repelling Spells at the red vines, releasing themselves.

"If you see her," Lucy asked as they ran on, "if you see Petra, Iz, will you stop running?"

"Yes!" Izzy cried out eagerly.

Lucy nodded. "I know where she is," she said. "Follow me."

Izzy had been right, after all. Petra had been very close. She had been exactly one floor below them, in the lowest basement of the Medical College.

Glancing back only once, the two girls found the rear stairwell and began to clamber down into the darkness below.



"What were you planning to do?" Dayton Englewood demanded, pushing his face so close to Albus' that he completely blocked the view of the tiny Ares Mansion dungeon.

"I *told* you," Albus replied in irritation, "I was giving old Wolfy a little haircut. That's all. Shaggy fur is *so* last year."

"Laugh all you want, Cornelius," Englewood growled, narrowing his eyes. "You won't be laughing when Professor Jackson gets here. He'll nail you to the wall. I've seen it happen, you know. He doesn't take kindly to saboteurs."

"I'm sure he doesn't," Albus agreed. "What'd you do with my wand?"

Englewood smiled thinly. "I confiscated it. You'll probably never see it again. They don't allow wands where *you're* going."

"Really?" Albus said, shifting on the hard bench in the corner of the dungeon. "So you Americans are in the habit of sending blokes to Fort Bedlam just for pointing wands at statues? Sounds pretty touchy if you ask me. Maybe you should consider growing a bit thicker hide."

"Shut up, Cornelius," Englewood suggested, lowering his own wand a little, but not completely. "It's just a good thing I was coming back late from my last exam. Who knows what you might have done?"

"That's pretty late for an exam, isn't it?" Albus replied, unable to stop himself. "The pointy end of the quill goes *down*, you know. The fluffy end points *up*. Tough one to remember, that."

"Shut *up*, I said!" Englewood commanded, raising his wand again. "You think I want to be here guarding your sorry English butt? I'm missing the tournament match!"

Albus rolled his eyes and slumped on the wooden bench. "Ah, you're not missing anything," he muttered. "Same old song and dance."

At that point, a dull thump and a series of heavy footsteps sounded overhead. Englewood glanced up and then showed Albus a toothy grin.

"That's Professor Jackson," he said smugly. "I sent for him by pigeon, interrupted him right in the middle of the match. *Boy*, will he be mad at you."

"Yeah," Albus nodded. "Dangerous prisoner like me definitely couldn't have waited until after the tournament was over. I bet he'll give you a medal even."

Englewood's grin faltered for a moment. Footsteps knocked loudly on the stone stairs of the dungeon as Professor Jackson descended, his black waistcoat buttoned all the way to his chin. Englewood spun around to face him. He saluted with fierce efficiency.

"I've captured a spy, General!" he shouted, snapping to attention. "He was engaged in the act of sabotage when I discovered him and apprehended him. I have been guarding him ever since, awaiting instructions."

Jackson glanced at Englewood and then shifted his gaze to Albus, his expression unchanging. Slowly, he looked back at Englewood again.

"This is Albus Potter, Englewood," Jackson said, apparently struggling to keep his voice even. "He is a member of this house."

"Sir! He is a spy, sir!" Englewood barked, saluting again. "I caught him attempting to sabotage the werewolf statue out front!"

Jackson closed his eyes and pressed his lips together. When he opened them again, he was looking at Albus.

"Is this true, Mr. Potter?" he asked tiredly.

“Yes sir,” Albus answered honestly. There didn’t seem to be any point in lying about it. “I was planning to blast it a hard one right between the eyes. It was on the edge of attacking me.”

“Attacking you,” Jackson repeated. “The statue, you say, was attacking you.”

“Sir, yes sir.” Albus nodded easily.

Jackson drew a long, deep breath. When he let it out, he returned his attention to Englewood. “Could this not, perhaps, have waited for the end of the match, Private?”

“The spy presented a clear and present danger, sir!” Englewood declared, his face going red. He glanced back over his shoulder at Albus. “He, er, was engaged in covert activities!”

“He was pulling a prank, Private,” Jackson sighed. “At best. I cannot imagine why he was doing it, but I admit that I have never quite understood the thought processes of the Potter family. Frustrating as they may be, they are relatively harmless, I assure you.”

Englewood snapped his heels together and stood so straight that he looked like he meant to rocket up through the low dungeon ceiling. “Sir! What are your orders, sir?”

Jackson closed his eyes again and rubbed them with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. “I order you both,” he said patiently, “to accompany me back to Pepperpock Down for the remainder of the tournament match. It was, you may be interested to know, just getting good.”

“Sir, yes sir!” Englewood barked again, snapping off yet another salute.

“At ease, Private,” Jackson growled. A moment later, he beckoned for Albus to follow him. In single file, Albus in the middle, the three made their way back up the dungeon stairs and through the mansion’s main hall.

“I hesitate to ask this, Mr. Potter,” Jackson said as the front door slammed behind them, “but why, pray tell, were you pointing your wand at the werewolf statue?”

“Like I said,” Albus answered, still seeing no need to lie, “I planned to destroy it. At least a little.”

Jackson shook his head slowly. “I doubt you’d have succeeded in any case,” he said wryly. “But *why*, young man?”

Albus paused and stopped. Englewood nearly ran into him from behind. His wand was still out, pointing at his prisoner, and Albus felt it poke him harmlessly in the back. Englewood dropped it and cursed urgently to himself, scrambling to pick it up again.

Three paces away, Jackson stopped as well. He turned and looked back, his eyes impatient but curious.

Albus tilted his head toward the bronze statue. It stood unmoving next to him, its muzzle frozen in its characteristic snarl.

“Do you really,” he said, turning back to the professor, “want to know?”



By the end of the third quarter of the tournament match, Team Werewolf had succeeded in taking out yet one more Bigfoot player. This time, Troy Covington had received a blindside hit with a skim, right in the middle of the back. Covington had fallen from his skim, completely unconscious, while the Werewolf Bully, Pentz, had collected the dropped Clutch and flown on without a backward glance.

Sanuye had succeeded in levitating Covington just as he had Norrick. The penalty had been called--ten more minutes in the dock for dangerous maneuvering--and Pentz had landed on the Werewolves' platform, no longer grinning but grimacing smugly.

"Professor Jackson's not even in the stands," Gobbins panted, swooping in next to James and pointing. "The Wolves always play dirty, but even *he* wouldn't have allowed a brazen hit like that. They're taking advantage of the fact that he's not here!"

James swore loudly and glanced back at his own platform. What he saw there gladdened his heart even if the match seemed increasingly hopeless. Several members of the other House Clutch teams stood on the platform, surrounding Professor Wood. Every one of them wore a Bigfoot jersey and held their skims at their sides. Warrington was first in line. As Covington was lowered gently onto a waiting stretcher, Warrington hopped onto his skim and swooped out into the rings.

"It's his grand poobahness!" James announced gamely.

"Welcome to the jungle, Warrington," Jazmine Jade called. "Thanks for coming!"

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," Warrington said. "Zane says howdy by the way. And if you *ever* remind me that I once wore a Bigfoot jersey, I'll paint your house with Plimpy puke. See if I don't."

James nodded. "Point taken."

"Is it break time?" Viktor Krum called as he swept past. "Or is a match going on?"

Warrington frowned. "Into the breach!" he called, and leaned over his skim, following Krum. A moment later, James and Gobbins followed. The Bigfoots were still behind--no matter how many goals they scored, the Werewolves always, infuriatingly, managed to keep a slim but stubborn lead. James refused to think about it. As he had thought several minutes earlier, the match wasn't over yet. The Foots still had a chance, no matter how slim.

James flashed through the center ring and snatched a floating Clutch. He pointed his wand, called out one of the Pixies' proprietary speed charms, and rocketed forward in a blur.



Lucy and Izzy made it to the bottom of the narrow stairwell and pushed through the heavy door. It was very dark in the corridor and a pair of guards stood at the end, flanking the last doorway. They looked up as the two girls approached.

"This is a restricted area, sweetheart," one of the guards called to Lucy. He was young with a Southern accent.

"Don't call me sweetheart," Lucy instructed, raising her wand. Her Stunning Spell struck the young guard in the shoulder and he collapsed like a bag of cauldrons. The other guard watched this in disbelief, not even thinking to reach for his own wand.

"Oh no you didn't," he said, looking up at Lucy and frowning. He was finally reaching for his wand, but it was too late.

"Oh yes I did," Lucy replied. "Sorry."

She winced as her Stunning Spell struck the second guard. He crumpled on top of his mate, dropping his wand. Sometimes, Lucy thought, it helped to be a young girl.

"They're coming," Izzy said urgently. "I sense them. Petra's dreaming of them."

"She's just beyond that door," Lucy shrugged, pointing. "Go ahead, Iz. Go see her. Do what you have to do."

Izzy trotted forward, clambering easily over the fallen guards. Lucy thought the heavy metal door would be locked, but when Izzy turned the handle it opened easily, swinging silently on its hinges. Izzy disappeared quickly inside.

Lucy stepped gingerly over the guards and stood just outside the open door. It was dark inside the cell. The walls were blank stone with no windows. A narrow metal bed stood in the exact center of the room beneath a dim lamp. Petra lay on the bed, uncovered, clothed in the same drab dress she had been wearing on the day that they had arrested her. Izzy stood beside the bed and clasped one of Petra's hands.

“Petra!” she said fervently. “Wake up! They’re coming to get me! They’re going to make me forget you and everybody else! They’re going to send us away from each other! You have to wake up and help me!”

Lucy watched, frustrated anger and fear settling over her like a wet blanket. Petra lay on the bed still as stone, her eyes closed peacefully. Lucy could make out the shape of Petra’s eyes beneath her lids. They didn’t so much as flinch.

“Petra!” Izzy insisted in an urgent whisper. “Wake up! Please! Don’t let them take me! They’re coming! You’re dreaming of them! I can see it in your thoughts even now!”

“Izzy,” Lucy whispered, shaking her head. “She can’t. She would if she could, but she can’t. Do you understand? It isn’t Petra’s fault.”

“No!” Izzy wailed, raising her voice, not taking her eyes from the sleeping shape of her sister. “She *will* wake up! She *has* to!”

A door banged open at the end of the dark corridor. Lucy looked back the way they had come and saw figures emerging into the dim light. Keynes was in the lead, his face hard. Lucy’s father was close behind him.

“Lucy!” he called, his voice echoing in the low corridor. “Put your wand down, love! Please stop!” Then, to the others, he said, “If any of you raise a wand to my daughter, I will have your badges before the International Wizarding Court, I swear it.”

“Come out, Izabella,” Keynes demanded. All the sweetness had gone out of his voice. “You are only making this hard on yourself.”

Lucy turned back to the small room. Izzy had not looked up from her sister. Petra, of course, had not moved in the slightest.

“Petra,” Izzy cried, still clinging to the young woman’s hand with both of her own, “don’t leave me alone with them! Don’t let them make me forget you!”

“Stand back, young lady,” Keynes demanded, pushing Lucy aside. Her father stopped next to her and put his hand on her shoulder. He shook his head down at her, both sadly and warningly.

“Izabella Morganstern,” Keynes said, striding into the room, “come this moment. I don’t wish to Stun you.”

He grabbed her, one hand on each shoulder. Izzy screamed and wriggled beneath his grip, but Keynes was no longer wasting any effort. His grip on her was like a vice. He turned her around even as Izzy still clung to her sister’s hand.

“Petra!” Izzy gasped, tears running down her face again. “Don’t let them! Petra, please!”

Lucy watched helplessly as Keynes pushed her toward the door. He stopped only to grasp Izzy’s small fingers and pry them away from Petra’s hand. The hand fell away limply and hung next to the narrow bed, the fingers curled loosely in sleep.

Izzy screamed, loudly this time, making no words. Keynes' face was hard as stone as he maneuvered Izzy through the door, which she clung to uselessly. Lucy reached to comfort the girl, but Keynes pushed her hand away, giving her a black look. A moment later, he dragged Izzy down the corridor toward the basement stairwell. The court agents followed along, cutting off Lucy's view of the blond girl. One of them remained by the door, his wand in his hand, standing over the Stunned guards.

"I'm so sorry, Lu," her father said, his hand still on her shoulder. "There's nothing I can do."

"PETRA!" Izzy screamed once more through her tears. The sound of it rang in the hall like a gong and Lucy realized that she herself was crying. She turned to look back through the open doorway of Petra's cell. The girl lay on the bed like a corpse, her eyes closed peacefully, her hand hanging limply to the side, pale in the lamplight.

"PETRA!" Izzy's voice shrieked, cracking, and then, frantically, echoing as the girl was pushed into the stairwell: "MORGAN! Help me! *HELP ME!*"

And on the bed, Petra's eyes flickered. They fluttered, opened, and then turned aside as Petra rolled her head toward the door, meeting Lucy's astonished gaze.

Coldness rushed out of the room like a gust of wind, streaming through Lucy's hair and clothes. Lucy gasped at the frigid blast and raised an arm to shield her eyes from its force.

When she looked again, the narrow bed in the dark room was empty.



"Are you quite certain of this?" Professor Jackson asked flatly, studying Albus' face.

"Teach-cheat don't lie," Albus said, nodding toward the pink paper in Professor Jackson's hands. Albus had realized that he'd been carrying the tiny paper in his blazer pocket ever since the day he'd used it to test the statue. It looked very small in Jackson's big knuckly fingers.

"Indeed it does not," Jackson stated gravely.

"He could've gotten that from anywhere!" Englewood cried. "There's no way of knowing if that stuff came from the statue! It's a trick! Got to be!"

Jackson narrowed his eyes at Albus. Slowly, he lowered the teach-cheat and pushed it into the pocket of his waistcoat. When the professor's hand reappeared, it was holding his wand.



“You may be right, Mr. Englewood,” Jackson replied in a low, smooth voice. “This is, after all, an extremely serious allegation.”

“Damn straight,” Englewood agreed, giving Albus a beady-eyed glare.

Jackson raised his wand. Albus felt a moment of raw panic as the wand seemed to level at him. He glanced around, remembering that his own wand had been confiscated by Englewood. He was defenseless. And then, with a monumental sense of relief, he saw what the professor was really pointing at.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Jackson said, obviously reluctant to do what he was about to do. He stared down the length of his wand and trained it on the werewolf’s bronze head, just past Albus’ shoulder.

The wolf growled, loudly this time.

Albus spun around, his eyes going wide, and ducked aside. If the statue meant to tackle its opponent, Albus did *not* wish to be between them.

Professor Jackson called his spell at exactly the same moment that the bronze werewolf pounced.

“*Expulso!*” Jackson thundered, raising his arm instinctively to match the metal beast’s motion. The spell struck the statue in midair, producing a blinding purple flash which was, strangely, perfectly silent.

Albus dropped to the ground and covered his head with his hands. Bits of statue rained down like hail, peppering him, none larger than his pinky finger. When the rain of bronze bits was over, Albus raised his head, his eyes wild.

The rear half of the statue was mostly intact. It lay sideways on the grass, six feet from its base. The rest of the statue was spread around the lawn like a corona, thousands of tiny bits glinting in the yellow moonlight.

“Well then,” Jackson said, his own eyes wide as he pocketed his wand, “let us proceed to the tournament match, then. We shall see what effect, if any, this turn of events has on the outcome.”

“Er, what about him?” Albus asked, climbing to his feet and glancing back toward Englewood.

Jackson peered over his shoulder at the boy. He lay on his back in the grass, his arms and legs splayed in a dead faint.

“Leave him,” Jackson sighed. “If he’d have saluted once more, I’d have Stunned him myself.”



James sensed the change immediately. He couldn't put his finger on what it was, but it was evident nonetheless.

For one thing, Pentz dropped the Clutch. James had been chasing him, trying to aim a Lanyard Charm, when the leather ball had simply popped out from beneath the boy's arm. James could scarcely believe it and almost forgot to grab for the Clutch as he sped past. An instant later, he hugged it against his chest and leaned over his skrim, hardly believing his luck. He rocketed past Pentz, who was glancing around confusedly, comically.

"What happened?" Warrington demanded, swooping in next to James to escort him through his laps.

"He fumbled!" James called, swooping through the center ring and ducking beneath a Werewolf Bully. "Straight up dropped it! It nearly hit me in the face!"

"Well, don't waste it!" Warrington advised, aiming a Bonefuse Hex at a Werewolf Clipper. "We're only down by four! We can still take this match!"

James nodded as he completed his second lap. He expected to be fallen upon by Werewolf Bullies, but as he glanced around, he was amazed to see that his course was almost completely clear. In fact, most of the Werewolves seemed to have fallen into a sort of confused fugue. They had slowed in their path through the rings. One of them, Olivia Jones, had completely missed one of the far rings and had been forced to relinquish her Clutch. She stared dumbly down at her own hands and then back at the ring she had flown past. There were no Bigfoot Bullies around her at all. She had simply missed the ring.

"What's happened to them?" Warrington called wonderingly, glancing around. "They act like somebody pulled the plug on 'em!"

"It won't last, whatever it is," James replied, raising his voice into the rushing wind of the course. "Stay on top of it! If they take out one more Bigfoot, we'll have to forfeit the match!"

Warrington nodded grimly as James spun around on his skrim, lobbing the Clutch toward the goal ring. Dunkel, the Werewolf Keeper, wasn't even watching. The Clutch sailed through the goal and James glanced toward the scoreboard as he flew on, watching the numbers change.

"*With* only ninety seconds left in tonight's incredible match-up," Cheshire Chatterly cried exuberantly, "Team Bigfoot closes within three points of the reigning champions! *What a match, folks!*"

James sped on. He sensed the Werewolves recovering from the mysterious confusion that had overtaken them. Altaire swooped in next to him as they passed through the center ring. They both grabbed for the single remaining Clutch, but Altaire body-checked James, knocking him violently out of the course. The Werewolf captain glanced back angrily as he sped on, holding the Clutch under his arm. Even as he looked back, however, Jazmine Jade fell in next to him. James hurled himself forward, attempting to catch up.

“Hey Altaire,” Jazmine called out, giving her voice a very uncharacteristic lilt. James was shocked to see the big girl place one hand behind her head and the other on her waist. She cocked her hip toward the Werewolf captain and smiled at him, all while rocketing along next to him, skrim for skrim. “You’re such a big bad wolf,” she trilled, fluttering her eyes at Altaire. “How’d you like to huff and puff and blow *my* house down?”

Altaire did a complete double take at Jazmine, apparently forgetting for the moment where he was. A split second later, he spanged headlong into one of the passing rings, dropping the Clutch as his skrim squirted away into the night. Jazmine caught the Clutch easily, tucked it beneath her arm, and hunkered over her skrim.

“Wow!” James called to her, his eyes wide with disbelief. “That Veela thing is pretty amazing when you turn it on!” He glanced back and saw Altaire dangling gamely from the ring he’d crashed into.

“If you’ve got it,” Jazmine called, grinning sheepishly, “flaunt it.”

As Jazmine scored, James saw that the Werewolves were only ahead by two points. Ten seconds later, Viktor Krum socked home another goal, hurling the Clutch so hard that it knocked the Cudgel clean out of Dunkel’s hand. The crowd exploded into deafening cheers, stomping their feet and waving banners wildly against the night.

“Two more and we win!” Gobbins shouted, grinning with disbelief. “We’re gonna do it!”

James nodded. The Werewolves had been merciless in their attack on Team Bigfoot and had apparently been infuriated by the line of players from other houses gathering to play reserve for the underdog team. Only minutes earlier, Wentworth had gotten forced into a collision with a Werewolf Bully, jamming most of the fingers on his right hand. He had sworn loudly and even bared his teeth at the Werewolf Bully before being pulled away by Jazmine and Gobbins. By the time Pixie captain Ophelia Wright subbed in for Wentworth, nearly half of the team had become comprised of players from other houses. If only one more native player got removed from the match, Team Bigfoot would have to forfeit.

James tried not to worry about it. The last thing the team could afford right now was to be careful.

Thinking this, James rammed through the center ring, collecting the Clutch that Krum had just scored with. He tossed it aside to Gobbins and fell in behind him, meaning to escort him through his laps. Two Werewolf Bullies dropped instantly alongside, moving to flank Gobbins.

*Now's as good a time as ever*, James thought, pressing his lips together tightly. He leaned severely into the wind, driving his skrim wildly forward, and reached toward the button the Igors had installed on the end of his skrim. He pounded it with the flat of his hand.

Beneath his skrim, a small box popped open. James knew what was in the box: a tiny photograph of a babelthrush spore and a curled length of Bamboozle vine that James had asked Professor Longbottom to send to him. As the box opened, the Bamboozle transformed into a cloud of fat pink babelthrush spores. The Werewolf Bullies flew through the spores, which peppered their goggles and chests. Immediately, the Bullies corkscrewed off course, swiping at their goggles and dissolving into fits of sneezes.

*That's the last of our tricks*, James thought as Gobbins lobbed the Clutch through the goal ring, tying the match. *From here on out, it's just us!*

The crowd roared constantly now as the final seconds of the match ticked away. James heard Cheshire Chatterly's voice echoing wildly from the announcer's booth, but he couldn't make out any of her actual words. He leaned completely sideways on his skrim as he powered through the figure eight course, passing Werewolves and Bigfoots on both sides. As he ripped through the center ring, he managed to grab two Clutches, one in each hand. Amazingly, there were no Werewolves challenging him for them. He tucked one under each arm, leaned over his skrim, and grimaced into the oncoming wind. He completed the first lap easily, almost effortlessly, and was halfway through his second when a voice cried out.

"James!" Krum called distantly. James barely stopped to look. When he did, he saw Krum waving wildly at him, pointing. "Behind you!"

James peered back over his shoulder. The entirety of Team Werewolf was stacked up behind him, gaining on him, their faces set into grim lines of resolve. Most of them had their wands out, aiming at him.

*They're going to take me out!* James thought, and panic ripped through him. *They don't care if their whole team gets penalized! If they knock me out of the match, there won't be enough native Bigfoots left on the team and we'll have to forfeit! Team Werewolf will get a technical victory!*

Even as this realization formed in James' mind, a blast of red sparks sizzled over his shoulder, barely missing him. It hadn't been a Lanyard Charm or a gravity well. The Werewolves were using dueling spells.

"James, look out!" Jazmine cried from somewhere far behind, but it was no use. James ducked and swooped back and forth, struggling to stay inside the rings while simultaneously avoiding being struck. More magical bolts lit the air all around. Sanuye was blowing his whistle repeatedly, but the Wolves weren't stopping. They were desperate, and in their desperation, they were willing to do anything. James felt a sudden wriggle of real fright. It spread through him like ice, freezing him. He scrambled for his wand, fumbling one of the Clutches. He stripped the thin wooden shaft out of his gauntlet and then dropped *it* as well. It spun away into the darkness and he stared after it, petrified.

Something thumped against his chest as he leaned over. He scrambled at it, worried that it was a Lanyard Charm, or worse. With some amazement, he realized that it was a small cloth pouch, both soft and dense to the touch. It hung around his neck on a length of rawhide string: the Vampires' game curse! He had been so intent on getting the rest of the team to take the Vampires' potion powders off before the match that he had completely forgotten to remove his own!

Without thinking, he grabbed at the short fluttering ripcord. He pulled it, and felt the pouch pop open. Black powder exploded from it, streaming backwards instantly into his wake. It engulfed the trailing Werewolves, covering them in writhing black tendrils. James glanced back, struggling to stay on his own skim while holding onto the last Clutch.

The tendrils of black powder solidified around the Werewolves, forming a sort of loose net. Then, violently, it contracted. The black net pulled tight, sucking the entirety of Team Werewolf into a monstrous collision. If the game curse had been deployed on a single player, it would surely have forced them to momentarily lose control of their skim, sending them off course. Deployed on the entire team, however, the effect was both sickly amusing and utterly devastating. The team crashed instantly in midair, pulled together by the force of the magical black net. A second later, the net vanished into smoke and the Werewolves fell out of it, scrambling to stay on their skims, grabbing at one another, spiraling away in every direction.

Breathlessly, James turned back to the course. Somehow, he had managed not to miss a single ring. He raised the final Clutch, held it over his shoulder, and tossed it easily through the goal ring. No one was guarding it. The Clutch sailed through so cleanly that James caught it himself, coming through on the other side.

The crowd erupted into a single riotous cheer. The scoreboard flickered, reflecting the change in the score: ninety-seven to ninety-eight. Team Bigfoot, including the several reserve players, collapsed around James, laughing wildly and hoisting him up over them.

The horn sounded, echoing deafeningly over the grandstands. The match was over.

Team Bigfoot had won.

*Thus concludes chapter twenty-two! Only a few more chapters to go!*

*See you here tomorrow at noon, CST!*