A Connection He Never Expected

By steffenyp

Summary: Remus Lupin has spent most of his life believing that his lycanthropy means he will always be alone. Although he has close friends and a place at Hogwarts, he has never found someone who could fill the empty space in his heart. That changes when Shevonne Alexander arrives as the new Muggle Studies professor. From the moment they meet, Remus feels an inexplicable magical connection to her—one so powerful that even his wolf instinctively recognizes her as his. As their relationship grows, Remus must overcome his fears of rejection and finally allow himself to believe that he can have the love, companionship, and future he never thought possible.

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CHAPTER 1

\Shevonne Alexander had always believed that the most interesting stories were the ones people never expected to hear. That was probably why she loved history and her job at Edinburgh Castle in Scotland.

History wasn't simply a collection of dates, battles, kings and treaties. It was made up of people – people who had loved, fought, lost, survived and sometimes changed the course of the world without ever realizing what they were doing. Shevonne liked those stories and loved sharing them with others.

Today, however, she was telling a much more familiar one.

"All right everyone, stay together," she called as she led her group through the courtyard of Edinburgh Castle. "And please remember that the castle is very old. If you see a stone wall, don't lean against it just because you're tired."

A chorus of laughter came from her group of American schoolchildren following her and Shevonne smiled.

The students had been surprisingly well behaved for a group of preteens who had been away from their parents for several days. There had been the expected questions, the occasional complaint about walking, and one minor argument over who had gotten to stand closest to the castle's cannon. All in all, she had considered the tour a success.

"Does anyone have a question?" she asked, stopping near the entrance to St. Margaret's Chapel.

A girl with brown hair and gray eyes immediately raised her hand and Shevonne pointed toward her.

“Yes?”

“What is the oldest part of the castle?”

“The oldest surviving building is St. Margaret’s Chapel,” Shevonne explained. “It was built during the reign of King David I, sometime in the twelfth century.”

“How old is that?”

“Very.”

The children laughed and Shevonne grinned.

“More specifically it dates to the early 1100s.” she continued and the girl nodded thoughtfully.

“Is the Chapel still used?” the same girl asked.

“It is. Weddings and other ceremonies are sometimes held there.”

Another hand shot into the air. This time it belonged to a dark-haired boy standing near the back of the group.

“What’s the MAH above the Royal Palace door mean?” he asked.

“Excellent question,” Shevonne smiled and led the group toward the Royal Palace. “MAH stands for Mary Queen of Scots and her second husband Henry Stewart.”

The boy nodded as if filing the information away and Shevonne glanced at her watch.

“We have time for one more question.”

A tiny girl with hair so blonde it was almost white and the brightest blue eyes Shevonne had ever seen raised her hand near the front, and practically bounced with excitement.

“Go ahead,” Shevonne laughed

“Is it true that the castle used to be a prison?”

“Yes.” Shevonne responded and the girl’s eyes widened.

Shevonne launched into an explanation of the castle’s military history, watching the children’s expressions change as they realized that the beautiful building surrounding them had once held prisoners. She had always loved that part. Places had memories. People left pieces of themselves behind wherever they went and sometimes those pieces remained long after the people themselves were gone.

Shevonne didn’t know why that thought suddenly made the hairs on the back of her neck rise. She rubbed her arms and dismissed the feeling. Probably just the Scottish weather.

“All right everyone,” one of the teachers called from behind her. “I think that’s enough history for today.”

The children thanked her as the adults began herding them toward the buses waiting outside the castle. Shevonne stood back for a moment watching them leave. She loved her job, but lately, something had been bothering her. It wasn’t unhappiness exactly. Her life was good.

She had a comfortable apartment, a job she enjoyed, friends she could count on, and her parents-her adoptive parents-were loving and supportive. She had no reason to complain. And yet…something was missing.

She couldn’t explain what. She simply felt as though she were standing at the edge of something, something waiting for her.

“You’re getting sentimental again,” she muttered to herself.

Shevonne smiled and turned toward the castle entrance. She had barely taken three steps when she heard it. A soft fluttering sound. She stopped. An owl was sitting on a nearby stone wall staring directly at her.

“Hello,” she said, and the owl blinked. “Are you lost?”

The owl continued staring for several more moments and then it flew directly at her and she instinctively ducked. The owl swooped over her head, circled once, and landed on the stone railing beside her.

“What are you doing?” she asked and the bird gave a soft hoot. “Well, aren’t you friendly,” she said and the owl tilted its head.

Then something strange happened. A tingling sensation moved through Shevonne’s body. It started at her fingertips and traveled up her arms. She frowned. The sensation wasn’t painful. It was almost warm and strangely familiar. She had felt it before. Several times, actually. Usually when she was around certain animals or when something happened that she couldn’t quite explain. She had always assumed it was nerves

She reached toward the owl and the bird leaned forward and touched its beak to her finger. The tingling intensified. For one brief moment, Shevonne had the unmistakable sensation that something inside her had awakened. Then it vanished.

“Okay,” she whispered. “That was weird.”

The owl suddenly took flight and she watched it disappear over the rooftops. Then she shook her head. “Definitely spending too much time alone,” she thought, and turned toward the parking area.

She had no idea that the owl was carrying a message. She had no idea that someone far away had already written her name, had no idea that the life she knew was about to end. Because

somewhere in Scottland, a letter waited for her. A letter that would introduce her to a world she had never known existed. A world where her past had been hidden from her.

But Shevonne knew none of that yet. For now, she simply walked toward the waiting buses, completely unaware that her life had already begun to change. And that the first chapter of her real story had just begun.

Her apartment occupied the left side of a quaint little duplex, where she had lived ever since accepting a position at the castle five years earlier, at the tender age of twenty-five. It had taken Shevonne a while to figure out what she wanted to do with her life. After more than a few false starts and unexpected turns, she had finally found a career she truly loved—teaching history to anyone willing to listen.

Her fascination with history had begun when she was very young, and over the years, that passion had taken her far from her home in the southern United States and all the way to Scottland, the homeland of some of her adopted family's ancestors. She had never imagined that her love of the past would eventually lead her to a place where history seemed to linger around every ancient stone.

As she reached her apartment, Shevonne began rummaging through her bag for her keys. Before she could find them, the sudden flutter of wings was followed by the unmistakable hoot of an owl.

She paused and looked around, trying to locate the source of the sound. A moment later, she was startled when a beautiful golden-brown barn owl swooped down from the nearby streetlamp and landed neatly on the postbox beside her. Had she suddenly become very attractive to owls. This was the second one today to seek out her company.

Taking a cautious step backward, Shevonne stared at her visitor. The owl gave another soft hoot and extended one leg toward her. Shevonne blinked. Clutched tightly in the bird's talons was an envelope.

"Well, aren't you full of surprises," she murmured.

Carefully, she reached out and took the envelope from the owl. The moment she looked at it, her surprise deepened. Her own name and address were written across the front in elegant script, the letters formed in shimmering green ink against the cream-colored paper. She turned the envelope over.

A purple wax seal held it closed. Embossed into the wax was a strange coat of arms: a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H. Shevonne frowned. The unfamiliar crest was her only clue as to who might have sent the letter, but she couldn't think of a single person who would have sent her something like this—especially by owl.

"Okay," she muttered, staring at the envelope. "That's definitely unusual."

Deciding that standing on her doorstep wasn't the best place to solve the mystery, Shevonne slipped the letter carefully into one hand and began searching her bag for her keys again.

Before she could find them, another flutter of wings caught her attention. She looked up. The owl was still watching her. This time, however, its hoot sounded distinctly impatient.

Once again, a faint tingling sensation spread across Shevonne's skin. The sensation grew stronger as she met the owl's bright yellow eyes. For a fleeting moment, Shevonne had the unsettling feeling that the bird was looking directly into her thoughts. She quickly dismissed the idea.

“I'm sorry, beautiful, but I have absolutely no idea what else you want from me,” she told the owl.

Finally finding her keys, she slipped the correct one into the lock. The owl responded with an irritated screech. With a powerful beat of its wings, it lifted from the postbox and flew back toward the streetlamp where it had first appeared. It settled onto the metal arm and continued to watch her. Shevonne shook her head.

“Strange bird.”

She unlocked the door, stepped inside, and tossed her keys and bag onto the small table just beyond the entrance. Then, with the mysterious envelope still clutched tightly in her hand, she headed into the living room.

Whatever was inside that letter, she had a feeling it was about to change her life.

CHAPTER 2

Shevonne sat on the sofa in her living room, turning the mysterious letter over and over in her hands as she tried to make sense of where it could possibly have come from. For several minutes, she simply stared at it, studying every detail as though the answers might somehow reveal themselves.

“Staring at it isn't going to give you any answers,” she chided herself with a small laugh.

She turned the envelope over once more, her eyes settling on the strange coat of arms impressed into the purple wax seal. Curiosity finally overcoming caution, she carefully broke the seal and lifted the flap. She nudged the letter free from its elegant envelope.

The paper was thick and unusually smooth beneath her fingers. It had been folded neatly in half to fit inside the envelope. As Shevonne unfolded it, her eyes immediately fell upon the same elegant handwriting and shimmering green ink she had seen on the front.

And then the strange sensation returned. That same faint tingling she had experienced outside washed over her again, raising gooseflesh along her arms. Shevonne paused, rubbing her forearm.

“What is that?” She forced herself to ignore the feeling and looked back at the letter.

At the very top was the same coat of arms that had appeared on the wax seal. Beneath it was the most astonishing letterhead Shevonne had ever seen.

HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY
Headmistress: Minerva McGonagall

Shevonne stared at the words. Surely she wasn't actually reading what she thought she was reading.

“Am I being pranked?” she asked her calico cat.

Patches, apparently unconcerned by the crisis unfolding in her human's living room, rubbed against Shevonne's legs and purred contentedly. Shevonne shook her head.

“Well, you're no help.”

Her curiosity now thoroughly outweighing her disbelief, she unfolded the letter completely and began to read.

Dear Ms. Alexander,

My name is Minerva McGonagall, and I am the Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At this point, you are probably asking yourself whether this letter is some sort of prank. I assure you that it is not.

Magic is very much real, and those of us who possess the ability to use it are known as witches and wizards. We generally keep the existence of magic hidden from non-magical people, whom we refer to as Muggles, with a few exceptions. Those exceptions are usually individuals with magical ancestry or Muggle-born children who display magical abilities.

I am writing to you because Hogwarts would like to offer you a position as our Professor of Muggle Studies. Our former professor has recently decided to retire, and we have been searching for a suitable replacement for some time. Unfortunately, we have had considerable difficulty finding someone with the particular qualifications we require.

Recently, while reorganizing my office, I came across a very unusual book. After studying it, I discovered that it had apparently been created for precisely this sort of circumstance. When consulted, the book revealed your name and address and identified you as the most qualified individual in the Muggle world to fill the position.

If you are interested in learning more about our offer, I would like to meet with you tomorrow at noon at the Curbside Café on Prince Street. Please send your reply with Berty, the owl who delivered this letter, so that I will know whether or not to expect you.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall
Headmistress

Shevonne reached the end of the letter and simply stared at the page.

For several long seconds, she didn't move. Then she slowly fell back against the sofa and covered her eyes with one arm. Her mind was a whirlwind. Magic was real. Hogwarts was real. And, apparently, a woman named Minerva McGonagall wanted to offer her a teaching position at a school for witches and wizards. None of it made sense.

Patches jumped onto the sofa beside her and began kneading Shevonne's leg with her paws before rubbing her head against Shevonne's elbow. Still lost in thought, Shevonne absently reached over and scratched the cat behind the ears.

“Magic is real?” she whispered. Patches purred.

“Am I completely losing my mind?” More purring.

“Did I fall somewhere and hit my head? Is this some kind of concussion-induced hallucination?” Patches apparently decided that Shevonne's attention had wandered far enough. She sank her claws into Shevonne's leg.

“Mrrreowww!” Shevonne yelped and looked down.

“All right! All right!” Patches stared at her expectantly.

“Sorry, Patches.” She gave the cat an affectionate rub beneath the chin before getting to her feet. “Dinner. I know.” Apparently, even revelations about magic had to take second place to a cat's dinner.

Shevonne headed into the kitchen, filled Patches' food and water bowls, and watched as the cat immediately settled down to eat.

Afterward, Shevonne retreated to the bathroom, where she took a long, hot shower and changed into something more comfortable for the evening. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop thinking about the letter.

Was she really going to meet this woman who claimed to be a witch? Or should she simply dismiss the whole thing as someone's elaborate—and rather bizarre—attempt at a joke?

The questions followed her beneath the warm spray of the shower.

Who was Minerva McGonagall?

How had she found Shevonne?

How had she known where Shevonne lived?

And, perhaps most importantly, how in the world had she gotten an owl to deliver a letter?

By the time the water began turning cold, Shevonne had finally made up her mind. Her curiosity was simply too strong to ignore. Even if this turned out to be nothing more than an elaborate prank, she couldn't bring herself to dismiss it without at least finding out what was going on. She would meet this mysterious Headmistress McGonagall. If the poor woman truly believed she was a witch, Shevonne would at least try to determine whether she needed help.

With her decision made and her cat fed, Shevonne settled down with a good book for the rest of the evening. Tomorrow was her day off, and she had several errands to take care of before her meeting at the café. Hopefully, the trip wouldn't turn out to be a complete waste of time. At the very least, she told herself, she could say she had tried to help someone who seemed to be in need. And perhaps she could finally put her own curiosity to rest.

One question, however, continued to bother her. The owl.

How had it known where to find her?

And how had McGonagall managed to train an owl to deliver mail?

Suddenly, Shevonne remembered something else. The letter had specifically instructed her to send a reply with the owl. Shevonne sighed.

“Of course it did.” She tore a small piece from the edge of the letter and quickly wrote her response.

Dear Professor McGonagall,

I will meet you tomorrow at noon at the Curbside Café.

She folded the scrap of paper and headed for the front door.

When she stepped outside, the evening air had begun to cool. Shevonne looked toward the streetlamp, wondering if Berty had already flown away. She didn't have to wonder for long. The moment she opened the door, a familiar flutter of wings filled the air. Berty swooped down from the darkness and landed gracefully on the postbox.

The owl extended one leg toward her. Shevonne stared.

“You were waiting for me, weren't you?”

Berty gave her a look that seemed almost offended by the question.

“All right. No need to get insulted.”

Tentatively, Shevonne held out the small piece of paper. Berty delicately plucked it from her fingers with his beak. For a moment, the owl simply stared at her. Then, with one final, impatient hoot, Berty spread his wings and took flight.

Shevonne watched as the owl disappeared into the deepening twilight, the small scrap of paper securely clutched in his beak. She remained on the doorstep for several moments after he vanished. What had she gotten herself into?

Tomorrow, she would meet Minerva McGonagall. Tomorrow, she would find out whether magic was truly real. And one thing was certain.

Whatever happened next, she had a feeling this was going to be a very interesting conversation.

CHAPTER 3

The next day, Shevonne stood outside the Curbside Café at a quarter to twelve, once again questioning her own sanity.

She had reread the strange letter several times that morning before leaving home to run her errands. Each time she read it, however, the words seemed no less absurd than they had the night before.

Magic was real.

Witches and wizards existed.

And the Headmistress of something called Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry wanted to offer her a teaching position.

Shevonne shook her head. “This is insane,” she muttered under her breath.

Standing outside the café looking like a woman who had lost her mind wasn't going to accomplish anything, so she took a deep breath, pushed open the door, and stepped inside.

The café was warm and pleasantly busy. The quiet murmur of conversations mingled with the clinking of dishes and the occasional hiss of the coffee machine. Shevonne glanced around before choosing a small table tucked away in a far corner. Privacy seemed like a good idea. She had barely settled into her chair when a waitress approached.

“What can I get for you, miss?”

“I'll have a cup of tea and a strawberry scone, please.”

The waitress smiled and nodded. “Coming right up.”

Shevonne watched her walk away before glancing at the clock on the wall. Five minutes. Only five minutes until her scheduled meeting with Minerva McGonagall.

Her stomach gave an uncomfortable little flip. Was she really doing this?

She was about to meet a woman who might very well be completely delusional. Then again, what did that make Shevonne? Perhaps she was a little crazy herself for actually showing up.

The waitress soon returned with her tea and scone. Shevonne thanked her and wrapped both hands around the warm cup, hoping the heat would somehow settle her nerves. She took a small bite of the scone. Then another glance at the clock. Three minutes. She sighed.

“What am I doing?”

Before she could answer herself, that familiar sensation suddenly returned. The tingling.

It began along her arms and spread across her skin, almost like a gentle vibration beneath the surface. Shevonne had felt it when she had seen that strange owl at the castle, she had felt it when the owl delivered the letter. She had felt it when she first touched the envelope. And now she felt it again. Stronger than before. Shevonne slowly lifted her head. Someone was standing beside her table.

The woman appeared to be in her sixties. She was elegantly dressed, with an air of quiet authority that made her seem instantly formidable. Her brown hair, lightly streaked with silver, was pulled into a neat, severe bun. Gold-rimmed spectacles rested low on the bridge of her nose, and her sharp eyes regarded Shevonne with an almost unnerving level of confidence.

The tingling intensified and Shevonne knew immediately who she was.

“Hello, my dear,” the woman said, her voice carrying a faint Scottish burr. “My name is Minerva McGonagall. May I sit down?”

Shevonne swallowed. “Yes. Of course.” She gestured toward the chair opposite her.

“Thank you.”

McGonagall settled gracefully into the chair. Almost immediately, the waitress appeared beside the table.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

“I'll have a cup of tea, please.”

The waitress nodded and hurried away. McGonagall watched her go before turning her attention back to Shevonne.

“I imagine you are wondering whether I am some barmy old woman who has completely lost touch with reality.” There was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. “I assure you, Miss Alexander, I am perfectly sane.”

Shevonne opened her mouth to respond, but nothing came out. McGonagall's smile widened slightly.

“I can hardly blame you for being skeptical.”

The waitress returned with her tea, and McGonagall thanked her before taking a small sip. Then she reached into the sleeve of her robes. Shevonne's eyebrows rose.

McGonagall withdrew what appeared to be a slender, polished wooden stick. Shevonne stared at it. McGonagall murmured several words beneath her breath and made a small, precise movement with the object.

“There,” she said calmly. “Now no one will pay us the slightest bit of attention, and no one will hear anything we say.”

Shevonne blinked. “I'm sorry?”

McGonagall held up the wooden object.

“This is my wand. It helps me focus and direct my magic. I have cast a Notice-Me-Not charm and a silencing spell around us so that we can speak freely without anyone overhearing our conversation.”

Shevonne looked around the café. Nothing appeared different. People were still talking. The waitress was moving between tables. Someone at the counter laughed. Yet somehow, no one seemed to notice them. Shevonne looked back at McGonagall.

“Okay.” It was the only response her stunned brain could produce.

McGonagall gave her an encouraging smile.

“Well, Miss Alexander, shall we get down to business?”

Shevonne nodded.

“I am not one to dance around a subject or play games, so I shall be quite direct. I am a witch, and I am the Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” She paused. “Hogwarts is a school where young witches and wizards are taught how to understand, control, and properly use their magical abilities.”

Shevonne stared at her. McGonagall calmly raised her wand.

“However, I do not expect you to take my word for it.”

She pointed the wand at her teacup and whispered a few words. The air seemed to shimmer. Before Shevonne's eyes, the porcelain teacup twisted and changed. In the space of a heartbeat, it became a plump brown rat.

Shevonne screamed. Her chair scraped backward as she instinctively recoiled.

The rat sat calmly on the table, whiskers twitching as though transforming from a teacup were the most ordinary thing in the world. McGonagall looked completely unperturbed. She gave the rat another small tap with her wand. There was another shimmer. The rat disappeared. The teacup sat exactly where it had been before.

Shevonne stared at it. Her mouth opened. Closed. Then opened again. Finally, she managed to speak.

“So...magic is real?”

“Yes.”

Shevonne looked around the café. No one had reacted to her scream. Apparently, McGonagall's spell was working. She turned back to the older woman.

“Why doesn't anyone know about this?”

McGonagall's expression became more serious.

“There was a time when magical and non-magical people lived alongside one another. Unfortunately, fear and mistrust eventually grew between the two communities. Some non-magical people became frightened of magic, and that fear led to conflict.”

She folded her hands neatly on the table.

“Eventually, the magical community decided that separating ourselves from the non-magical world was the safest course of action. Our own government was established, and the International Statute of Secrecy was enacted.”

“Muggles,” Shevonne said.

“That is what we call non-magical people.”

“So, there are millions of people who have no idea that witches and wizards exist?”

“Billions, actually.”

Shevonne's eyes widened. “Billions?”

“Yes.”

Shevonne shook her head slowly. “That is...a lot of people to keep a secret from.”

“Indeed it is.”

“And you only reveal magic to certain people?”

“Very rarely. Usually when a magical child is born to non-magical parents, or when knowledge of magical ancestry has been passed down through a family.”

Shevonne stared at her. “Then why reveal magic to me?”

McGonagall leaned back slightly. “As I explained in my letter, I recently discovered a very unusual book while reorganizing my office.”

“What kind of book?”

“One created by the founders of Hogwarts.”

Shevonne frowned. “The founders?”

“Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin.” Shevonne's eyebrows rose.

“All four of them created it?”

“Yes.” McGonagall took another sip of tea. “The book was designed to assist future Headmasters and Headmistresses when they found themselves struggling to fill an important teaching position.”

“And you needed a Muggle Studies professor.”

“Precisely.”

“What happened?”

“I placed the book on the corner of my desk and intended to examine it later. As I sat there contemplating how I was going to fill the vacant position, the book began to glow.”

Shevonne leaned forward. “It glowed?”

“Quite brilliantly.”

“And then?”

“My curiosity got the better of me. I opened it.” McGonagall paused.

“Inside, I found your name, address, academic history, and professional qualifications.”

Shevonne stared at her. “Wow.”

“That was more or less my reaction.”

“I wonder why the book chose me.”

“As I said in my letter, I suspect you may have magical ancestry somewhere in your family line.”

Shevonne's expression changed. “I grew up in the United States, but I'm adopted.”

McGonagall's eyes narrowed slightly with interest. “Do you know anything about your biological family?”

“Not much. I don't know who my biological parents are, but I do know that my biological family came from Ireland and Scotland.”

McGonagall's expression became thoughtful. “Ah.”

Shevonne waited.

“That makes the possibility of magical ancestry rather more intriguing.”

“I wonder if that's why...” She stopped herself.

McGonagall raised an eyebrow. “Why what?”

Shevonne hesitated. “This is going to sound strange.”

A faint smile crossed McGonagall's face. “Miss Alexander, I have just turned a teacup into a rat in the middle of a crowded café. I assure you, very little you could say would surprise me at this point.”

Despite herself, Shevonne laughed softly. “Throughout my life, there have been certain people and objects that have caused me to experience a strange sensation.”

“What sort of sensation?”

“It's difficult to describe. A tingling. Almost like a vibration beneath my skin.”

McGonagall listened carefully.

“Sometimes it's pleasant. Other times it's...disturbing.”

“And you experienced it today?”

“Yes.”

“When I approached?”

Shevonne nodded. “I felt it when your owl delivered the letter, too. And when I first touched the envelope.”

McGonagall was quiet for a moment. “Well,” she finally said, “that makes me even more inclined to believe my suspicions about your ancestry may be correct.”

“Is there a way to find out?”

“Possibly. I shall have to investigate the matter. Magical genealogical records can be remarkably thorough, though adoption may complicate matters.”

Shevonne nodded. “I'd really like to know.”

“I shall see what I can discover.” McGonagall set her teacup down. “But for now, perhaps we should discuss the position I have offered you.”

Shevonne blinked. “Right. Of course. Sorry.”

“There is no need to apologize. I imagine this is rather a lot to take in.”

“That might be an understatement.”

McGonagall smiled. “As Professor of Muggle Studies, you would teach our students about the differences between magical and non-magical cultures and societies.”

Shevonne's professional curiosity began to awaken. “For example?”

“Magical households still make extensive use of candles, oil lamps, and other traditional forms of lighting rather than electricity. We have entirely different methods of transportation and communication. Our social customs and traditions also differ considerably from those of the Muggle world.”

Shevonne nodded slowly. “And you want me to teach Muggle history as well?”

“Indeed. We believe it is important for our students to understand the history and development of the non-magical world.”

Shevonne couldn't help smiling. “That actually sounds fascinating.”

“I thought you might find it so.”

“If I accept the position, would there be materials I could study beforehand? Books, perhaps?”

“Certainly. Hogwarts would provide you with everything you require as part of your employment.”

Shevonne hesitated. There was one practical matter she couldn't avoid asking about.

“I really hate to ask this, but...what kind of salary are we talking about?”

McGonagall's lips curved into the faintest smile.

“A perfectly reasonable question. The wizarding world has its own currency, although it can be exchanged for Muggle currency. As for your salary, I have been authorized to offer you six hundred and fifty pounds per week.”

Shevonne nearly dropped her teacup. “Six hundred and fifty?”

“Per week.”

Shevonne stared at her. That was nearly twice what she currently earned. She sat back, trying to process that information along with everything else.

“Would I have to move?”

“Yes.”

Shevonne sighed. “I thought so.”

McGonagall's expression softened. “Hogwarts is located here in Scotland. To a Muggle, however, it appears to be nothing more than a ruined old castle. Our protective enchantments ensure that they see nothing more.”

“So, Hogwarts is actually here?”

“Yes.”

“And if I accept the job, where would I live?”

“You would live at the school during the academic term. Hogwarts is a boarding school, and members of staff are expected to assist with maintaining order and discipline outside of classroom hours.”

Shevonne nodded. “When would I need to arrive?”

“The students generally arrive on September first. We would ask that you arrive approximately one week beforehand so that you have sufficient time to settle in, prepare your classroom, and familiarize yourself with the school.”

“And classes begin on September second?”

“Correct. Unless September second falls on a Saturday or Sunday, in which case classes would begin the following Monday.”

“What about holidays?”

“There are two principal holiday breaks during the school year: Christmas and Easter. The summer holiday begins on July first.”

Shevonne leaned back and rubbed her forehead. Her head was spinning. There was simply too much information to process.

“Do you need an answer today?”

“No.”

Shevonne looked relieved.

“I can give you a few days,” McGonagall continued, “but I would appreciate an answer as soon as possible. It is already the second of August, and if you accept the position, you will need adequate time to prepare.”

Shevonne nodded. “Could you give me a couple of days to absorb all of this and make my decision?”

“Of course.” McGonagall rose from her chair and straightened her robes.

“I shall send Berty to collect your answer in two days.”

Shevonne looked up at her. “Berty?”

“The owl who delivered your letter.”

“Right. Of course.”

McGonagall smiled. “I shall leave you to your thoughts, Miss Alexander. I hope very much to hear a positive response.”

Shevonne managed a small smile. “I have to admit, Professor McGonagall, this is probably the strangest job interview I've ever had.”

For the first time, McGonagall's expression broke into a genuine smile. “I should certainly hope so.” With that, she turned and walked away.

Shevonne watched her disappear into the crowd. She sat motionless for several seconds, staring at the teacup McGonagall had transformed into a rat only moments before.

Magic was real. Hogwarts was real. And somehow, a mysterious book had chosen her. Shevonne wasn't sure whether she was frightened, excited, or simply overwhelmed.

But beneath all of those emotions was something else. Curiosity.

For the first time in her life, she had the strange feeling that perhaps she had stumbled upon a missing piece of herself—one she had never even realized was missing.

CHAPTER 4

By the time Shevonne reached her apartment, she needed a very strong cup of tea, maybe with a little something added.

She unlocked the door, stepped inside, and barely had time to close it behind her before a small furry body wound its way around her ankles.

“Hello to you too, Patchy.”

Patches answered with an insistent meow and Shevonne bent down and scooped her cat into her arms, burying her face against the soft fur of her head. The familiar warmth and steady purring were exactly what she needed after the bizarre afternoon she'd had.

She carried Patches into the living room and settled onto the sofa with Patches curled against her side. For several minutes, Shevonne simply stared at the wall.

Magic, actual magic, witches and wizards, a hidden society existing alongside the ordinary world. Muggles, as Headmistress McGonagall had called people who couldn't do magic. And, she, Shevonne Alexander, history nut, had been invited to become part of it.

“This is insane,” she said aloud, but even as she said it, she knew it wasn't entirely true.

Insane would have been dismissing what she had witnessed. She had seen McGonagall perform magic with her own eyes. She had watched a teacup become a rat and then become a teacup again. She had felt that strange tingling sensation whenever McGonagall used her magic.

The same sensation she had felt from that owl at work. The same sensation she had felt when Berty. The same sensation she had felt from the letter Berty had delivered. The same sensation she had felt many times during her life.

Over the years, there had been moments when she had walked into a room and immediately known that something was different. Sometimes it had been a person. Sometimes an object and sometimes she couldn't even pinpoint what the difference was. She had always assumed it was intuition or a strange quirk of her senses or perhaps even an overactive imagination.

Was there magic in her biological family? She didn't know if she would ever find that out for sure. There was one question that bothered her more than the others though. Why her?

McGonagall had explained that an unusual book connected with the founders of Hogwarts had somehow identified Shevonne as the most qualified person to fill the Muggle Studies position. That was extraordinary enough.

There had to be more to it though. Why would a magical book choose someone who didn't even know magic existed? Why would she have those strange reactions to magical people and objects? And why had McGonagall seemed so certain that Shevonne had magical ancestry?

She had been adopted as a baby. Her adoptive parents loved her dearly, but there had always been a blank space in her history. She knew very little about her biological family. The adoption agency had only told her parents that her biological family was a mix of Irish and Scottish.

For most of her life, that had just been an interesting bit of information. Now it felt like a piece of a puzzle.

Shevonne glanced toward the kitchen. "Tea!" She exclaimed, and Patches opened one eye.

"Yes, tea. Then I'll figure out whether I've completely lost my mind." She said and headed toward the kitchen.

Two hours later, she was sitting at the kitchen table surrounded by paper, a notebook, and several pages of hastily scribbled questions.

She had started with a simple list.

Things I know:

1. Magic is real.
2. Witches and wizards exist.
3. There is an entire hidden magical society.
4. Hogwarts is a real school.
5. Minerva McGonagall is a witch.
6. I have apparently been offered a teaching position there.
7. I may have magical ancestry.
8. I can apparently sense magic somehow.

Shevonne stared at the list and then added another item.

9. I have apparently agreed to consider moving into a castle full of witches and wizards.

She stared at that one for several seconds before laughing. "I'm either incredibly brave or completely nuts."

She leaned back in her chair.

The truth was, though, that the idea of Hogwarts didn't frighten her as much as it probably should. In fact, there was something strangely comforting about it.

For years she had felt as though she were waiting for something. She couldn't have explained what. Her career was good. She had a comfortable apartment, good friends, a loving family and Patches. Her life was stable.

Yet sometimes, especially late at night when the apartment was quiet, she had the persistent feeling that there was supposed to be more. Something beyond the predictable rhythm of work, home, dinner, reading, and sleep.

She had never known what that something was.

Shevonne picked up her cup of tea. “Maybe this is it.” she thought, and the words sounded ridiculous somehow. And yet, as ridiculous as it sounded, it felt right.

She thought about the position itself. Muggle Studies. Teaching young witches and wizards about the world she knew.

That part fascinated her. She could already see the possibilities. However, if the only textbook they had was the one McGonagall had mentioned, she suspected the students were going to have a rather distorted view of Muggle life.

Shevonne had spent years studying history. She knew how easily information became distorted when people relied on assumptions rather than firsthand knowledge.

She could teach them what it was actually like. Not just facts and dates, but people, families, traditions, technology, entertainment. The little things that made up everyday life.

She smiled. That part she could do. The magical part? That was another matter entirely. She had no idea how she was going to walk into a school full of witches and wizards without looking like an idiot. But perhaps that was the point, perhaps she was supposed to learn right along with her students.

Shevonne looked toward the clock. She had several days to decide, several days to choose between the life she knew and something she couldn't even begin to understand.

She already knew which way she was leaning and that realization startled her. She hadn't even seriously considered saying no.

The next morning, Shevonne woke earlier than usual and spent the first several hours trying to convince herself that she needed to make a practical decision.

She made lists, she calculated expenses, she considered her job, she considered her apartment, she considered what would happen if Hogwarts turned out to be everything McGonagall claimed it was. And then she considered what would happen if she said no.

That thought bothered her more than anything else. If she refused the position, she would return to her ordinary life. She would continue giving tours. She would continue studying history. She would continue living in the same apartment. Nothing would change. And perhaps that was exactly why the thought felt so wrong.

Shevonne had spent years waiting for something to change. Now change had knocked on her door. Literally. With an owl. She laughed at the absurdity of the thought.

“All right,” she said aloud., and Patches looked up from the windowsill. “I'll do it.”

The cat blinked and Shevonne smiled. “I'm going to Hogwarts.”

She felt strangely lighter after saying it. The decision was made. She would accept the position, she would learn everything she could, and she would figure out why the magical world seemed to recognize something in her that she had never recognized in herself.

There was only one problem. Patches. Shevonne looked at her cat.

“I can't leave you behind.”

Patches stared back as though the suggestion was insulting.

“Don't give me that look. You know perfectly well you're coming with me if they'll let you.”

Patches gave a satisfied little purr.

Two days later, Berty appeared exactly as McGonagall had promised. Shevonne had been watching for the owl all morning. When she heard the familiar hoot, she hurried outside.

“There you are.” she said, and Berty landed on the post box and extended his leg. “I suppose you want my answer.”

The owl hooted and Shevonne laughed.

“Very well.”

She carefully attached her letter. It was short, but she had rewritten it three times before finally deciding that simple was better.

Headmistress McGonagall,

I have thought long and hard about what you told me about your world and the position of Muggle Studies Professor.

I love my current work, but I have felt for a long time that something was missing from my life. Perhaps this is the change I have been waiting for.

Therefore, I have decided to accept your generous offer.

I do have one question, well, at least one question for now. I have a pet cat named Patches. Would I be able to bring her with me to Hogwarts, or will I need to make other arrangements for her care?

Sincerely,

Shevonne Alexander

Berty took the letter delicately from her fingers.

“Thank you.”

The owl gave an irritated hoot, flapped his wings, and disappeared over the rooftops. Shevonne watched him go.

“I think he's getting tired of me.”

A soft meow came from behind her and she turned to see Patches was sitting in the doorway.

“What?”

The cat meowed again.

“You're the one who wanted to come outside.”

Another meow.

“Fine. Let's go inside.”

Shevonne closed the door behind them.

She didn't know it yet, but that simple decision would change the course of her life.

Shevonne had just finished preparing dinner when the response arrived a few hours later when there was a sharp pecking sound against the front door. Patches immediately bolted toward it.

“Wait!” Shevonne cried, but it was too late.

The cat skidded to a stop as Shevonne opened the door. Berty was sitting on the post box once more.

“Well, hello again.” she said, and the owl extended his leg.

Shevonne carefully removed the letter and opened it.

Miss Alexander,

I am delighted to hear that you have decided to join us here at Hogwarts. I look forward to getting to know you better.

In a few days, please expect to receive a parcel delivered through Muggle post. It will contain several books to introduce you to the magical world, along with an outline for Muggle Studies and a list of textbooks currently used for the class.

As to your question, you are more than welcome to bring your cat with you. Our students are permitted to bring certain animals to school, and there are already many cats at Hogwarts during the school term.

I will come to your residence on August 24th to bring you to Hogwarts and help you settle into your quarters. If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them at that time.

Until then, enjoy your own learning.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

Shevonne lowered the letter and Patches immediately rubbed against her ankles.

“You heard that?” The cat purred. “You're going to Hogwarts.” she told the feline and Patches meowed. Then she looked back toward the sky where Berty had disappeared.

August 24th. That was less than three weeks away.

For the first time, the reality of what she had done truly settled over her. She was leaving everything familiar behind. She was going to Hogwarts and she was going to live among witches and wizards. She was going to teach children who could perform magic.

And somewhere in that strange world was the answer to a question she had carried all her life although she had never admitted it to herself Who was she?

Three days later, the promised parcel arrived. It was an ordinary-looking package. That was almost disappointing. Shevonne had half expected it to arrive floating through the window or for

it to materialize in the middle of her living room. Instead, the postman handed it to her like any other parcel.

“Package for you, Miss Alexander.”

“Thank you.”

She carried it inside, and Patches immediately began sniffing it.

“Oh, don't look at me like that.”

The cat sniffed harder.

“I have no idea what's inside either.”

Shevonne set the parcel on the table and carefully opened it. Inside were two enormous books. She lifted the first one.

Hogwarts — A History

She smiled. The second was titled:

A Guide to Wizarding Life and Tradition

Beneath the books was a neatly folded document. She opened it.

Muggle Studies Outline

Shevonne settled into her chair. “All right,” she murmured. “Let's see what I've gotten myself into.” The outline was straightforward.

1. What is a Muggle?

2. Muggle Culture and Tradition

3. Differences between Muggle and Wizarding Transportation

4. Differences between Muggle and Wizarding Communication

5. Animals Kept by Muggles as Pets

6. Muggle Tools

7. Muggle Sports

8. Muggle Entertainment

9. Muggle History

Shevonne read the list twice. Then she frowned. The topics themselves made perfect sense. The textbook situation, however, did not. There was only one recommended textbook.

Home Life and Habits of British Muggles

Shevonne stared at the title.

“You have got to be kidding me.”

Patches jumped onto the sofa and Shevonne held the book up.

“This is supposed to teach children about the Muggle world?”

Patches sniffed the cover.

“I don't trust it either.”

Shevonne flipped through the pages. Within minutes, she was making notes. Within twenty minutes, she had filled half a page. Within an hour, she had started another list.

Things Hogwarts students should know about Muggles.

Electricity.

Telephones.

Television.

Cars.

Airplanes.

Computers.

The internet.

Grocery stores.

Public schools.

Hospitals.

Banking.

Music.

Movies.

Sports.

She opened **A Guide to Wizarding Life and Tradition** and began reading.

The first chapter immediately captured her attention. She learned about wizarding families, magical customs, communication methods, transportation, magical creatures, government, education, and traditions she had never imagined existed.

The more she read, the more questions she had. And strangely, the more she read, the more familiar the world began to feel. As if some part of her had been waiting for this information. As if she were remembering something she had never actually learned.

Shevonne frowned at that thought. “That doesn't make any sense.”

Patches purred from her feet.

“No, I'm not going crazy.” She turned another page.

Outside, the afternoon sun slowly faded toward evening. Shevonne barely noticed. For the first time in years, she was completely absorbed in learning something new, something impossible, something magical.

And as she continued reading late into the evening, one thought kept returning. She had thought she had finally found the place where she belonged with her current job. Now she wasn't so sure.

Somewhere beyond the ordinary world she had always known, Hogwarts was waiting for her and she felt something inside herself settle.

Shevonne smiled softly. August 24th suddenly seemed very far away. She couldn't wait to begin her new adventure.

CHAPTER 5

On the morning of August 24th, Shevonne was awake before the sun. She had been awake for most of the night, actually. Sleep had proven impossible.

Every time she closed her eyes, her mind returned to the same thought. Today I'm going to Hogwarts.

Shevonne rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. Hogwarts. A real castle. A school filled with witches and wizards. And she was going to be one of its professors.

She covered her face with both hands. “What am I doing?”

From the foot of the bed came a soft, questioning meow. Shevonne lowered her hands. Patches was sitting there staring at her.

“I know, I know, I'm the one who is supposed to have all the answers.” She told the cat and finally climbed out of bed.

By eight o'clock, she had checked her luggage three times, checked the clock at least a dozen times, and changed her outfit twice.

She had eventually settled on something comfortable but professional. She was going to be meeting the faculty of Hogwarts, after all, and she wasn't entirely certain what a Muggle Studies professor was expected to wear.

The thought made her laugh. She had spent the previous weeks learning about an entire magical civilization, and somehow she was worried about her clothes.

Her gaze moved toward the stack of books McGonagall had sent her. She had read Hogwarts—A History almost from cover to cover. She had learned about the school's four houses, its founders, its traditions, its ghosts, and more moving staircases than she could possibly remember.

She had also discovered that Hogwarts seemed to have a remarkable ability to change the rules whenever it suited the castle. Which, according to the book, was perfectly normal.

Shevonne was beginning to suspect that the word normal meant something very different to witches and wizards. A sharp knock sounded at the door, Shevonne jumped and Patches hissed.

“Oh!” She hurried toward the living room. The book she had been reading slipped from her lap and landed heavily on the floor. Patches leapt sideways.

“I'm sorry!” Shevonne apologized to the cat as she opened the door. Standing on the other side was Minerva McGonagall.

The Headmistress was dressed impeccably, wearing emerald-green robes and carrying her wand in one hand. A small smile played at the corners of her mouth.

“Good morning, Miss Alexander.”

“Good morning.”

McGonagall's eyes moved toward the floor, then toward Patches.

“Did I hear the distinct sound of feline displeasure?”

Shevonne felt her cheeks warm. “Yes.”

McGonagall raised an eyebrow.

“Your knock startled me out of the fascinating world of Hogwarts history,” Shevonne explained. “I dropped the book, and Patches was apparently offended by the entire experience.”

Patches gave another indignant hiss and McGonagall chuckled.

“I see.” She stepped inside.

Patches immediately walked over to her and began rubbing herself against McGonagall's legs. Shevonne stared.

“Well, that's interesting.”

“What is?”

“She usually hides whenever someone comes over.”

McGonagall looked down at the cat.

“Perhaps she knows I'm not a stranger after all.” She reached down and scratched Patches behind the ears. The cat immediately began purring. Shevonne shook her head.

“Traitor.” she muttered and McGonagall smiled.

“Animals often know more than we give them credit for.”

There was something about the way she said it that made Shevonne pause. Before she could ask what she meant, McGonagall raised her wand. Shevonne's eyes widened.

“Wait.”

McGonagall looked at her. “What?”

“You're not about to do something that is going to cause me to have another existential crisis, are you?”

A sparkle appeared in McGonagall's eyes.

“I make no promises.”

She raised her wand. There was a brief flash of light, and where Minerva McGonagall had stood a moment before was a beautiful tabby cat.

Shevonne froze. Patches froze. For several seconds, neither cat moved. Then Patches slowly approached.

The tabby lowered her head and their noses touched. Patches gave a soft chirp and the tabby answered.

Within seconds, the two cats were circling one another, rubbing against each other and communicating in a series of meows and chirps that Shevonne couldn't begin to interpret.

Shevonne's mouth fell open. “Oh, my God.”

The tabby looked at her and Shevonne pointed.

“You.”

The cat blinked.

“You're Minerva.”

The tabby sat down while Shevonne stared. Then the tabby transformed back into McGonagall.

Shevonne promptly dropped into the nearest chair.

“I think I need a drink.”

McGonagall laughed. “Are you quite all right?”

“I don't know.” Shevonne looked at the woman standing before her. “Can every witch and wizard do that?”

“Certainly not.”

“Because if they can, I have a great deal more reading to do.”

“Indeed you do.”

McGonagall sat across from her.

“That particular branch of magic is known as Animagus transformation. It requires considerable study, discipline, and concentration. Very few witches or wizards master it.”

Shevonne glanced toward Patches. “She knew.”

“I believe she did.” McGonagall smiled.

“She sensed my inner cat.”

Shevonne looked at Patches. “So you're saying my cat recognized you because you're secretly a cat?”

McGonagall's smile widened. “In a manner of speaking.”

Shevonne laughed.

Patches climbed into McGonagall's lap as though the two had known each other for years.

“Well,” Shevonne said, “I suppose that answers that.”

McGonagall glanced at the clock. “Are you ready to leave?”

Shevonne looked toward the four suitcases beside the door. “I think so.”

“Are you certain?”

“No.”

McGonagall smiled. “Good. That would be rather unnatural.” She said and Shevonne laughed.

“What about my luggage?”

“Not a problem.”

McGonagall drew her wand and Shevonne watched carefully as with a few graceful movements, McGonagall cast a shrinking charm.

The four suitcases rapidly became small enough to fit into the palm of her hand. Shevonne stared.

“That's going to save me a fortune in luggage fees.”

McGonagall blinked.

“Luggage fees?”

“Never mind.”

Shevonne took the miniature suitcases and slipped them into her coat pocket.

“Now,” McGonagall said, “we need only take Patches.”

Shevonne scooped up her cat. Patches immediately curled against her chest.

“How are we getting there?”

“Apparition.”

Shevonne nodded. She had read about it. She also remembered that the book had described Apparition as a sensation similar to being squeezed through a very small opening. That description had not exactly reassured her. McGonagall held out her arm.

“Take my elbow.” Shevonne did so. “Keep hold of me.” Shevonne tightened her grip. “And close your eyes.” Shevonne looked at Patches.

“Here we go.” She closed her eyes.

For one brief second, nothing happened. Then—Pressure. Everywhere. It felt as though the world had suddenly collapsed inward. She couldn't breathe. Her stomach lurched. Her body seemed to twist through a space far too small to contain it. And then—It stopped.

Her feet hit solid ground. Shevonne's knees buckled. McGonagall caught her arm.

“Easy.”

Shevonne kept her eyes closed. “That was not fun!.”

McGonagall chuckled softly.

“You'll become accustomed to it.”

“I don't think I want to.”

“Most people say that after their first attempt.”

Shevonne took several deep breaths. Eventually the dizziness began to fade. She opened her eyes, and forgot how to breathe for an entirely different reason.

She was standing before a pair of enormous iron gates. Beyond them—Hogwarts. Shevonne stared.

The castle rose above the landscape like something from a dream. Towers reached toward the sky. Turrets seemed to grow out of the stone at impossible angles. Battlements lined the upper walls. Windows glittered in the morning sunlight.

The castle was enormous, beautiful, ancient, and seemed to be alive.

Shevonne didn't move for several minutes and McGonagall watched her carefully.

“Well?”

Shevonne swallowed. “I've seen pictures.”

“And?”

“Pictures don't do it justice.”

McGonagall smiled. “No. They don't.”

Shevonne slowly looked around. There were sprawling lawns, flower gardens, and greenhouses. A large lake that glittered in the distance. And beyond it stood a dark forest.

“The Forbidden Forest?”

McGonagall nodded.

“I can't believe I'm actually here.”

“You haven't even entered the castle yet.” Shevonne laughed softly.

“That's probably a good thing. I might faint.”

McGonagall raised her wand and the gates opened.

Shevonne took one step forward, then stopped.

“Wait.” she said turning toward McGonagall

“Yes?”

“You told me Muggles couldn't see Hogwarts.”

McGonagall's expression changed. She had been so caught up in the younger woman's reaction that she had completely forgotten that Shevonne should not have been able to see the true Hogwarts.

“You should not be able to.” McGonagall answered, her brow furrowed.

“I can see it.”

“Yes.”

Shevonne's heart began beating faster.

“You said I should see ruins.”

McGonagall's face became thoughtful. “You should.”

Shevonne looked toward Hogwarts again. The castle shimmered in the sunlight. There were no ruins. No abandoned buildings. No crumbling stones. Only Hogwarts. Beautiful and magnificent.

“I don't understand.”

“Neither do I.” McGonagall said and looked genuinely unsettled.

Shevonne looked back at the castle. A strange tingling began spreading through her body. The same sensation she had experienced before, only stronger, much stronger.

It wasn't frightening. It felt like recognition. As though something inside her was responding to the castle. Shevonne placed a hand against her chest.

“Do you feel that?”

McGonagall studied her. “Feel what?”

“That...” She searched for the right word. “Buzzing.”

McGonagall's expression became more serious. “No.”

Shevonne looked at her. “You don't?”

McGonagall shook her head. “No.”

Shevonne looked back toward Hogwarts. The sensation grew stronger. For one fleeting second, she thought she heard something. A whisper. Not a voice exactly. More like a thought that wasn't hers. Welcome home.

Shevonne's eyes widened.

“What?”

“What is it?” McGonagall asked.

“I thought I heard something.”

McGonagall's expression sharpened. “What did you hear?”

Shevonne hesitated. “Nothing.” She wasn't ready to explain it, not yet.

McGonagall studied her for another moment before nodding. “Come.”

Shevonne followed. Neither woman noticed the faint shimmer that passed across the castle's highest tower. Nor did either notice the way the old stone beneath their feet seemed to hum very softly as Shevonne crossed the boundary of the Hogwarts grounds.

The enormous oak doors opened before them and Shevonne stepped inside. Her mouth fell open.

The entrance hall was enormous. Stone walls rose several stories above her. Torches burned in iron brackets. A grand staircase dominated the center of the room. Corridors stretched away in several directions. Shevonne slowly turned in a circle.

“I think I may have died.”

McGonagall smiled. “Not quite.”

“Because this is heaven.”

“I'm afraid Hogwarts is considerably less peaceful.”

Shevonne laughed. The castle was even more impressive inside than outside. Everywhere she looked there were details she wanted to study. Portraits, armor, statues, ancient stonework.

She suddenly understood why she had spent so much time reading Hogwarts—A History. The book was fascinating. But this was different. This was alive. This place had stories. Thousands of them and she desperately wanted to know every one.

“Come along, my dear.”

Shevonne followed McGonagall up the staircase until they stopped in front of a door.

“This is your classroom.” McGonagall said.

Shevonne looked at the brass plaque.

MUGGLE STUDIES

Her heart gave a little leap.

“My classroom.”

“Yes.”

McGonagall opened the door and Shevonne stepped inside.

The room was larger than she expected. There were rows of desks, a teacher's desk, shelves, a large blackboard, and several empty display cases. She walked slowly around the room.

“Can I change things?”

“Within reason.”

“Excellent.”

McGonagall raised an eyebrow. “I recognize that expression.”

“What expression?”

“The one that tells me I should be concerned.”

Shevonne smiled innocently. “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

McGonagall shook her head. “Your quarters are through that door.”

Shevonne looked to where McGonagall was gesturing to the area behind the teacher's desk.

She stepped around the desk and opened the door situated directly behind it. The door opened into a comfortable little sitting room. Beyond the sitting room was a bedroom with a bed, nightstand, wardrobe and dresser. A small writing desk sat near the window. Shevonne stared.

“This is mine?”

“Yes.”

She walked to the window. Outside, the grounds stretched toward the lake. She could see the mountains beyond it. Shevonne's eyes misted unexpectedly. McGonagall noticed.

“You all right?”

Shevonne nodded. “I'm just...” She laughed softly. “I've never seen anything like this.”

“Welcome to Hogwarts.” McGonagall said smiling.

The older woman waved her wand and the miniature suitcases flew from Shevonne's pocket and expanded to their normal size.

“Take some time to settle in.” She said and Shevonne nodded.

“Thank you.”

“You are very welcome. I'll return at eleven-thirty.”

“For lunch?”

“Yes. We're holding a welcome luncheon for the staff.”

Shevonne's stomach tightened. “I'm meeting everyone today?”

“I'm afraid so.”

“Oh, dear.”

McGonagall laughed. “Don't worry. Hogwarts professors are a friendly lot.” she said and closed the door behind her.

Shevonne stood completely still. Then she looked around her new home, her new classroom, her new life.

Patches jumped onto the bed and Shevonne laughed.

“Well, Patchy.” The cat curled into a ball. “I suppose we're officially professors now.”

Patches purred.

Shevonne walked to the window. She looked out across the grounds. The strange tingling returned, stronger than before. She placed her hand against the glass. For just a moment, she thought she felt something answer from somewhere deep inside the castle.

Shevonne frowned. Then the feeling disappeared. She stepped back from the window.

“Probably nothing.”

But deep beneath Hogwarts, something ancient shifted in the darkness. And for the first time in centuries, it seemed to know that someone had come home.

CHAPTER 6

Remus Lupin had never particularly enjoyed staff luncheons. It wasn't that he disliked his colleagues. Quite the opposite.

Over the years, Hogwarts had become something he had never expected it could be. Home.

There had been a time when Remus had believed he would spend the remainder of his life moving from place to place, taking whatever work he could find, never staying long enough for anyone to become too attached to him. It had seemed safer that way.

His condition had made long-term relationships difficult. Friendships were difficult, employment was difficult and love had always seemed entirely out of the question.

Then war changed everything and somehow, despite everything that had happened, Remus Lupin had found himself back at Hogwarts. Teaching. Something he had always loved.

Three years ago, when Hogwarts had reopened under Minerva McGonagall's leadership, she had approached him about teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts. He had initially refused. Not because he didn't want to teach, but because he was afraid. Afraid of losing control. Afraid of

hurting someone. Afraid of allowing himself to become comfortable in a place where people might eventually discover the truth about him and decide they no longer wanted him there.

Sirius Black had refused to let him hide. Harry Potter had been even more persistent. Between the two of them, Remus had eventually agreed. And he hadn't regretted it. Not once.

He and Sirius shared the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. Remus taught the first through fourth years, while Sirius taught the older students and covered Remus's classes when the full moon required him to be elsewhere.

It worked surprisingly well. Sirius was instinctive, enthusiastic, and occasionally reckless. Remus was methodical, patient, and considerably more cautious. Together, they balanced each other.

More importantly, Remus had discovered that he loved teaching just as much as he remembered. There was something deeply satisfying about watching a nervous first-year successfully perform a defensive spell for the first time. Something rewarding about seeing a seventh-year who had once been terrified of magic finally realize they could defend themselves.

After everything the wizarding world had endured, helping prepare the next generation felt like a worthwhile purpose. For the first time in years, Remus felt useful, perhaps even happy.

Which was why he had no reason whatsoever to be dreading the welcome luncheon. Except that Sirius was beside him and Sirius had been talking nonstop for the last ten minutes.

“So,” Sirius said, strolling beside him with his hands tucked casually into his pockets, “how much do you want to bet that Filius has already rearranged the seating?”

Remus smiled. “Given that Filius rearranges the seating every year, I'd say that's a safe bet.”

“And how much do you want to bet Poppy has already threatened to force everyone to eat something healthy?”

“She does that every year too.”

“Sprout will bring some sort of herb-infused drink.”

“Probably.”

“And Minerva will pretend she isn't watching all of us.”

Remus laughed. “She always watches all of us.”

Sirius grinned. “See? You missed me while I was away.”

“You were gone for three weeks.”

“Exactly.”

Remus shook his head.

“You're impossible.”

“And yet you love me.”

“Unfortunately.”

They reached the entrance to the Great Hall and Remus paused for a moment. The familiar doors opened. Warm conversation spilled into the corridor.

He could already hear the voices of their colleagues. The Hogwarts staff had changed considerably over the years, but the Great Hall still felt familiar. Remus stepped inside.

The enchanted ceiling reflected a bright summer sky overhead. For a moment, everything felt completely ordinary.

“We're supposed to have a new Muggle Studies professor this year.”

Sirius nodded. “That's right.”

“Do you know anything about her?”

“Only that she's new to the magical world.”

Remus raised an eyebrow.

“A Muggle?”

“Apparently.”

Remus considered that. It wasn't unheard of for Hogwarts to employ someone from outside the magical community, but it was unusual and usually a squib. Especially for a teaching position.

“I wonder why Minerva chose her.”

Sirius shrugged. “I'm sure Minerva has her reasons.”

Remus nodded. He trusted McGonagall implicitly. Whatever her reasoning was, there was undoubtedly more to the appointment than anyone currently knew.

They approached the staff table. Filius Flitwick greeted them almost immediately.

“Good day, gentlemen!”

“Filius,” Sirius said cheerfully. “How was your summer?”

“Quite pleasant, thank you.”

Remus smiled as he took his seat. Around them, conversations began overlapping. Poppy Pomfrey was speaking with Pomona Sprout. Someone was discussing the renovations to one of the classrooms.

Sirius was already talking about a new product line he had been helping George and Ron Weasley develop for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes.

Remus listened with half an ear. His attention drifted toward the entrance.

Minerva still hadn't arrived. She was probably escorting the new professor. He wondered what she was like. Young? Old? Nervous? Experienced?

Muggle Studies was not a subject Remus had ever paid much attention to, despite knowing how important it was. The magical world had a habit of misunderstanding Muggles. Sometimes humorously. Sometimes dangerously.

A professor who actually understood both worlds could be invaluable. Sirius nudged him.

“Thinking?”

“Always.”

“That's your problem.”

Remus smiled. Then the doors opened. He glanced toward them. And everything stopped.

At first, Remus didn't understand what had happened. A petite woman entered beside Minerva McGonagall. Strawberry-blonde hair fell in loose waves down her back. She wasn't particularly tall, perhaps five-foot-five.

She had a curvy figure and an easy, graceful way of moving that drew his attention without seeming to demand it.

Remus barely noticed any of that, because then she looked up.

Her sapphire-blue eyes moved across the Great Hall and found his and the world disappeared.

Remus stopped breathing. Something struck him. Not physically. It was magic. A surge of it. Powerful enough to race through every nerve in his body.

His hands tightened against the edge of the table. His wolf exploded awake. *Mine.*

Remus's heart slammed against his ribs.

Mate.

“No.”

The word escaped his mind before he realized he had thought it. His wolf surged forward.

Ours.

Remus fought it. Hard.

He had spent decades learning how to control the beast inside him. He had learned to distinguish instinct from reason. He had learned how to live with Moony without allowing Moony to control him. But this—This was different.

The moment his eyes met hers, something inside him recognized her. Not her face. Not her scent. Her. Something deeper, something that made absolutely no sense.

Remus felt magic pouring from her. That was impossible. She was supposed to be a Muggle. But the woman standing across the Great Hall was surrounded by something he could feel as clearly as the magic in his own veins.

And then she reacted. Her eyes widened, her lips parted and she inhaled sharply.

She felt it too. Remus knew it instantly. The realization nearly frightened him more than the connection itself, because whatever was happening wasn't happening only to him. It was happening to her as well. The wolf inside him howled.

Mate.

Remus gripped the edge of the table harder. "Calm down."

Ours.

"She's a stranger."

Mate.

"She doesn't know us."

Ours.

Remus closed his eyes for half a second. When he opened them, she was still looking at him. Her sapphire eyes seemed to deepen.

For the briefest instant, Remus thought he saw a faint shimmer of magic around her. Not ordinary magic, something older, something he couldn't identify.

Then McGonagall touched the woman's arm and the connection broke. The woman looked away and Remus could breathe again. Barely. His wolf continued pacing inside his mind.

Claim her

Remus swallowed. He had never experienced anything like this. Not with any woman he'd ever know. Not even during the darkest moments of his life.

This wasn't attraction, attraction he understood, this was recognition. His magic had recognized her. His wolf had recognized her. And somehow, some impossible part of his soul seemed to recognize her too.

“This cannot be happening.”

“What?” Sirius's voice broke through his thoughts.

Remus looked at him. His oldest friend was staring at him with concern.

“You look like you've seen a ghost.”

Remus opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

“Everyone, this is our new Muggle Studies Professor, Shevonne Alexander.” McGonagall said as the two women reached the table.

Shevonne.

The name settled into Remus's mind.

Shevonne.

His wolf practically purred. Remus shut his eyes.

“Not now.”

Sirius frowned. “What?”

“Nothing.”

Minerva motioned for Shevonne to take the empty seat near Poppy Pomfrey and she began walking toward the table, toward him.

Every step she took made his wolf more restless. Remus could feel his pulse pounding. As Shevonne approached, her eyes flickered toward him again. The same strange electricity passed between them and she visibly shivered.

Remus nearly stood. He forced himself to remain seated.

She was confused. He could see it and he had no right to make her confusion worse. She was new here, she didn't know him, didn't know what he was, didn't know what his condition meant and she certainly didn't need the Headmaster's Defense professor staring at her like some lovesick idiot.

Remus looked away as Shevonne sat down. Minerva continued making introductions. Remus heard almost none of them, his entire awareness was focused on the woman several seats away. Her scent, her heartbeat, the faint magical hum he could feel beneath her skin. It was driving him mad.

Finally, he pushed his chair back and several heads turned.

“Excuse me.”

Minerva looked at him, but Remus kept his expression neutral.

“I am not feeling very well.”

Sirius stared at him, but Remus ignored him. He needed to leave. Now. Before the wolf took control. Before he did something unforgivable. Before Shevonne saw what he really was. He turned and walked quickly toward the doors.

Behind him, he heard someone ask if he was all right. He didn't stop. The moment he reached the corridor, he released a breath. His hands were shaking. His wolf was still howling.

Mate.

Remus leaned against the stone wall and closed his eyes.

“What in Merlin's name is happening to me?” He had no answer and that frightened him, because for the first time in his life, Remus Lupin wasn't afraid of the wolf. He was afraid of what the wolf might be right about.

Sirius watched his friend disappear through the doors of the Great Hall, then he looked toward Shevonne.

She was staring after Remus, confusion written plainly across her face.

Sirius's expression softened. Whatever had happened between them, she had felt it too. That much was obvious. He turned back toward the staff table.

“Well,” he murmured.

Poppy glanced at him.

“What?”

Sirius shook his head. “Nothing.” But he knew Remus. Better than almost anyone and Remus Lupin didn't run from people, he ran from himself. Sirius had a feeling this was going to be interesting, very interesting.

And somewhere beneath his concern for his oldest friend was another feeling. Hope.

Because maybe, just maybe, the universe had finally decided that Remus Lupin had suffered enough. Maybe it had finally given him someone who could see past the wolf, someone who could see the man.

Sirius glanced toward the woman sitting quietly beside Poppy. Shevonne Alexander was still watching the doorway and for the first time in a very long time, Sirius wondered if perhaps Remus's future wasn't going to be lonely after all.

CHAPTER 7

Shevonne had been at Hogwarts for only a short time, and already she had discovered that there was no such thing as a normal day at the castle.

Her morning had been spent unpacking, organizing her classroom, and attempting to convince Patches that the enormous stone castle they now lived in was, in fact, a perfectly acceptable place for a cat. Patches remained unconvinced.

The cat had spent most of the morning exploring every corner of their new quarters, pausing frequently to stare suspiciously at portraits that moved when she wasn't looking directly at them.

Shevonne couldn't blame her. She had done much the same thing. Every few minutes, she found herself looking at something she had read about in a book and thinking: *That's real.* A moving portrait. A staircase that seemed to have a mind of its own. A suit of armor that had apparently sneezed when she walked past it. And now, apparently, she was going to have lunch with the people who lived and worked in this impossible place.

Shevonne sat at her desk, staring down at the notes she had made for her first classes. She wasn't ready. Not remotely. She had spent the last several weeks reading everything McGonagall had sent her.

Wizarding history.

Magical customs.

Wizarding government.

Magical creatures.

Muggle misconceptions.

The history of Hogwarts.

She had learned enough to understand that the magical world had just as many problems as the nonmagical world, perhaps more. But knowing about those problems in a book was very different from meeting the people who lived with them.

A knock sounded at her door making Shevonne jump.

“Come in.”

The door opened and Minerva McGonagall stepped inside.

“Hello, my dear.”

“Hello.”

McGonagall looked around the room. “You've made yourself comfortable.”

“I'm trying.”

“I think you're doing remarkably well.” she said and Shevonne smiled.

“How are you finding Hogwarts?”

Shevonne considered the question. “Wonderful.” she grimaced. “Overwhelming.”

McGonagall smiled. “That's perfectly understandable.”

“I keep expecting someone to tell me that this is all an elaborate joke.”

“I assure you, it isn't.”

Shevonne glanced toward the window. “That's the part that's so strange. Everything I've ever believed about the world has changed in the last few weeks.”

“That can be difficult.”

“It is.” Shevonne looked back at her. “But I'm glad I came.”

McGonagall smiled. “I am very glad to hear that.”

Shevonne closed her notebook. “I'm ready for lunch.” she said

McGonagall's expression changed slightly. “Before we go, there is something I think you should know.”

Shevonne immediately became wary. “That sentence hasn't led to anything particularly reassuring so far.”

McGonagall almost smiled. “This is important.”

Shevonne straightened. “All right.”

McGonagall took a breath. “One of your colleagues has asked me to speak with you before you meet him.”

“Who?”

“Remus Lupin.”

The name immediately caught Shevonne's attention. She didn't know why. There had been something unusual about the way McGonagall had spoken his name.

“Is there a problem with Professor Lupin?”

“No.” McGonagall's voice was gentle. “Quite the opposite. Remus is one of the kindest men I have ever known.”

Shevonne waited.

“There is simply something about him that you need to understand before you meet him.”

Shevonne nodded. “Okay.”

“Remus is a werewolf.”

Shevonne stared at her. “A what?”

“A werewolf.”

Shevonne blinked. “I thought you said this was something I needed to understand before meeting him.”

“You mean the kind that—” She stopped, she couldn't even finish the sentence.

McGonagall nodded.

“The condition is real.” she asked as she sat down slowly. Her mind raced through everything she thought she knew about werewolves. Full moons. Transformation. Violence. Loss of control.

She had read stories about them as a child, and watched films. She had never once considered that they might actually exist.

“Does he...” She swallowed. “Does he turn into a wolf?”

“Every full moon.”

Shevonne's stomach tightened. “And he can't control it?”

“He can control himself to a degree.” McGonagall moved toward the window. “Remus was bitten when he was only four years old. There is no cure for lycanthropy.”

Shevonne listened quietly.

“However, there is a potion called Wolfsbane. When taken correctly before the transformation, it allows Remus to retain his human mind while in wolf form.”

“So he knows who he is?”

“Yes.”

“He can think?”

“Yes.”

“But he's still physically a wolf.”

“Yes.”

Shevonne exhaled slowly. “That sounds horrible.”

“It is not an easy condition.” McGonagall's expression softened. “Unfortunately, the condition has historically been accompanied by considerable prejudice. Many werewolves have been denied employment, housing, education, and even basic human dignity.”

Shevonne frowned. “That isn't right.”

“No.” McGonagall looked at her. “Remus has spent most of his life expecting people to reject him when they discover the truth.”

Shevonne was quiet. Something about that bothered her. She couldn't explain why. Perhaps because she knew what it was like to be judged by something that wasn't necessarily a person's fault. Not personally. But she had spent enough years studying history to understand how easily fear could turn into hatred.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because Remus asked me to.”

Shevonne looked surprised. “He did?”

“Yes. He does not want you to learn of his condition accidentally.” McGonagall's voice softened.

“He would rather you know before you meet him so that you have time to decide how you wish to respond.”

Shevonne stared at her. “He's worried I'll be afraid.”

“I believe he is.”

Shevonne looked down at her hands. She wasn't sure what she felt. Fear? Perhaps a little. Curiosity? Definitely. But disgust? No. Not yet. She couldn't possibly feel disgust toward a man she hadn't even met and fear shouldn't be enough to make her judge someone. She looked up.

“Does he hurt people?”

“Not when he has taken the Wolfsbane Potion.”

“And when he hasn't?”

McGonagall hesitated. “Like any transformed werewolf, he becomes dangerous. That is why he takes precautions.”

Shevonne nodded slowly. “So he knows what he is and takes responsibility for it.”

“Yes.”

“Then I don't see why I should judge him.”

McGonagall's expression softened. “That is exactly what I hoped you would say.”

Shevonne stood. “I'll admit I'm nervous.”

“That's understandable.”

“But I'm not going to decide what kind of person he is based on something that happened to him when he was four.”

McGonagall smiled. “I think Remus will appreciate that.”

“I'm still not entirely sure I'm ready for a school full of magic.”

McGonagall laughed softly. “And yet here you are.”

“Apparently I have terrible judgment.”

“Or excellent instincts.”

That made Shevonne pause. For just a second, she remembered the strange feeling she'd experienced when she'd first seen Hogwarts. That sensation of recognition, of belonging.

“Come on.” McGonagall opened the door. “Lunch awaits.”

The walk to the Great Hall was quiet. Shevonne tried to keep her thoughts under control.

Werewolf.

She kept repeating the word in her mind. It sounded absurd, like something from a fairy tale, but this was Hogwarts. She had already learned that fairy tales were often simply magical history told badly.

As they approached the Great Hall, Shevonne could hear voices on the other side of the doors. She stopped and McGonagall looked at her.

“Nervous?”

“A little.”

“You'll be fine.”

Shevonne took a breath.

“Okay.”

McGonagall opened the doors and Shevonne stepped inside. The first thing she noticed was the ceiling. She knew from her reading that it was enchanted to reflect the sky above Hogwarts.

Today it was bright and blue, with soft white clouds drifting across it. A few enchanted birds fluttered through the illusion. It was beautiful.

Shevonne took another step and the room went quiet. Everyone was looking at her. She swallowed.

Don't trip.

Don't say anything stupid.

Don't stare.

Shevonne looked toward the staff table and saw him. Sandy-brown hair, blue-green eyes, tall, lean, a little tired-looking. There were faint lines around his eyes and scars she could just make out on his face.

He looked...Kind. That was the first word that came to her. Not handsome. Not intimidating. Kind. Then his eyes met hers and everything changed.

The sensation hit her with enough force to make her gasp. It was like electricity rushing through every nerve in her body. Her heart stumbled. Her palms became damp. Her breath caught and suddenly she couldn't hear the room anymore.

There was only him. His eyes, his expression, the impossible sensation of recognition.

She didn't know this man, she had never met him, so why did looking at him feel like coming home?

Shevonne's heart pounded. The man's eyes widened. He felt it too. She knew it. She could see it in his face.

For one impossible moment, she thought his blue-green eyes changed color. A ring of amber appeared around his pupils, then it vanished. Shevonne stared.

Werewolf.

She knew immediately, she didn't know how, she simply knew. Something inside her whispered the word.

Remus.

The realization sent another jolt through her. Her body reacted before her mind could catch up. She wanted to step toward him, wanted to know him, wanted to touch him.

The instinct frightened her. She didn't know this man and yet something inside her seemed to insist that she did.

“Come along, dear.” McGonagall's voice broke through the haze.

Shevonne blinked and looked toward McGonagall. The strange pressure in her chest eased slightly. McGonagall guided her toward an empty seat beside Poppy Pomfrey.

Shevonne sat, her hands trembling. She placed them in her lap so no one would notice. What had just happened? She glanced toward Remus. He was staring at the table. His shoulders were tense. Suddenly his chair scraped against the stone floor and he stood abruptly.

“Excuse me, everyone.” His voice was strained. “I am not feeling very well.”

Before anyone could respond, he walked quickly out of the Great Hall. Shevonne stared after him. Her stomach twisted.

She picked up the goblet in front of her and took a small sip. The wine tasted rich and unfamiliar. She barely noticed. Her thoughts were still with the man who had just walked away.

Why had she reacted that way? Why had he? And why, despite everything McGonagall had told her, was the only emotion she could clearly identify when she thought of Remus Lupin was not fear? It was longing.

Introductions began.

Poppy Pomfrey was warm and welcoming.

Pomona Sprout immediately asked Shevonne questions about Muggle gardening.

Filius Flitwick was charming.

Several other professors welcomed her and Shevonne smiled, answered questions, and tried to participate in conversations, but part of her attention remained fixed on the doors.

He didn't return. Eventually, Sirius Black stood.

“Miss Alexander, it was very nice to meet you.”

Shevonne looked up. “Thank you.”

“I apologize for leaving so soon, but I want to check on Remus.”

Shevonne hesitated. “Is he really all right?”

Sirius's expression softened. “He will be.” He gave her a small smile. “Don't worry too much.”

Shevonne nodded. “I'll try.”

Sirius left the Great Hall. Shevonne watched him disappear. Something told her this wasn't over. Not remotely. She looked down at her plate. She had come to Hogwarts expecting to

learn about magic. She hadn't expected magic to make her heart race. She hadn't expected a werewolf to make her feel safe and she certainly hadn't expected to meet a man she'd known for less than five minutes and somehow feel as though a piece of herself had recognized him.

Shevonne took another sip of wine. "Merlin," she whispered.

She didn't know why she'd used the wizarding expression, but somehow, it felt appropriate, because whatever was happening between her and Remus Lupin...It was anything but ordinary.

CHAPTER 8

Remus Lupin walked until he could no longer hear the voices coming from the Great Hall.

He didn't know exactly where he was going, he only knew that he needed distance. Distance from the Great Hall, distance from the other professors, snd, most importantly, distance from the woman who had somehow managed to turn his entire world upside down with a single glance.

His feet carried him toward the lake, they always did. Whenever life became too loud, the lake gave him somewhere quiet to think. The path curved around the grounds, the afternoon sun reflecting off the water in brilliant flashes.

Normally, Remus found the sight calming. Today, it did nothing. He stopped beneath one of the large trees overlooking the water and rested his hands against the rough bark. He closed his eyes.

What in Merlin's name is happening to me?

The answer came immediately.

Mate.

Remus grimaced. "No."

Mate.

"Stop saying that."

The wolf paced restlessly in the back of his mind.

Ours.

"She is a stranger."

Mate.

"I don't know her."

You know enough.

Remus pushed the wolf down. Hard. For years, he had learned how to live with Moony, not defeat him, not destroy him, live with him.

There was a difference. The wolf was part of him. A part he had never asked for, never wanted, but had eventually learned to understand.

Most of the time, Moony remained quiet. Restless around the full moon, certainly. Occasionally difficult, but manageable.

Remus had spent decades mastering the boundaries between himself and the creature. Until today.

The instant his eyes had met Shevonne Alexander's, those boundaries had shattered. Moony had surged forward with a force Remus had never experienced. Not anger, not hunger, recognition, certainty.

Mate.

Remus opened his eyes.

“She's a Muggle.”

The wolf was silent.

“That matters.”

Still nothing.

“She doesn't know what we are.”

A low growl sounded inside his mind.

Remus sighed.

“And I don't know what she is.”

That was the part that frightened him most, because she wasn't simply a Muggle, she couldn't be, not after what he had felt.

He had spent his entire life surrounded by magic. He knew what magical energy felt like. He knew the subtle hum of a wand, he knew the sensation of spells being cast nearby, he knew the difference between dark magic and ordinary magic, and he knew what it felt like when another wizard's magic brushed against his own. What he had felt from Shevonne was different, stronger, almost instinctive.

When their eyes had met, it had felt as though some missing part of himself had suddenly clicked into place. As though he had been walking around his entire life with an empty space inside him and had only just realized it was there.

Remus swallowed. He had no business feeling this way, not about anyone, certainly not about her. She was new to the magical world. She had been kind to him for all of five seconds. She didn't know the truth about him. She didn't know what his life was like. She didn't know what it meant to love a werewolf, and even if she did...Why would she choose him? The question was almost laughable.

Remus had spent his entire adult life learning not to expect too much from others. Friendship had been difficult, employment had been difficult, love had been nearly impossible.

His condition had always been there, hanging over every relationship like a storm cloud. He had learned to keep people at a distance. It was safer, for them, for him, especially for him. Because if he never allowed someone close, they couldn't be hurt when they discovered what he really was.

A sound behind him interrupted his thoughts. Remus didn't turn around. He already knew who it was.

“Remmy?”

Sirius. Of course. Remus sighed.

“I'm fine, Siri.”

“You're sitting beside the lake staring at the water like it's personally offended you.”

“I like the lake.”

“You've been coming here for years.”

“Yes.”

“You only sit like that when something is wrong.”

Remus finally looked over his shoulder. Sirius Black stood several feet away, hands in his pockets, his expression concerned.

Remus sighed and Sirius walked over and sat beside him beneath the tree. For several moments, neither man spoke.

The silence wasn't uncomfortable, it never was between them. They had known each other too long, fought too many battles, lost too many people. There were some things that didn't require words. Eventually Sirius spoke.

“What happened?”

Remus looked at the lake. “I don't know.”

“Try again.”

Remus smiled faintly. “You've always been annoyingly persistent.”

“And you've always been annoyingly secretive.”

“Fair enough.”

Sirius waited.

Remus took a long breath. “When she walked into the Great Hall...” He stopped, his voice suddenly seemed inadequate.

Sirius turned toward him. “Miss Alexander?”

Remus nodded. “Our eyes met.”

Sirius's eyebrows lifted. “And?”

“I felt something.”

“What kind of something?”

“I don't know.”

“That's helpful.”

Remus gave him a look.

Sirius held up his hands. “All right. I'm listening.”

Remus looked toward the lake again. “It felt like being hit with an extraordinarily powerful spell.”

Sirius frowned. “Enervate?”

“Something like that.”

“But there was no spell.”

“No.”

“Did she cast something?”

“Not that I could tell.”

“Then what?”

Remus shook his head. “I don't know.”

He ran a hand through his hair. “She is supposed to be a Muggle.”

“She is.”

“Then explain what I felt.”

Sirius was silent.

Remus continued. “There was magic around her.”

Sirius looked at him carefully. “What do you mean?”

“I mean exactly that.” Remus's voice lowered. “I could feel her magic reaching for mine.”

Sirius's expression changed. “You're certain?”

“Absolutely.”

Sirius stared out over the lake. “That doesn't make sense.”

“I know.”

“And what happened to Moony?”

Remus closed his eyes. That was the question he had been dreading. “He came forward.”

Sirius looked at him. “Before the full moon?”

“Immediately.”

“How strongly?”

Remus swallowed. “Strong enough that I almost lost control.”

Sirius went still. “Remus.”

“I didn't.”

“I know.”

“But it frightened me.”

Sirius's voice softened. “What did Moony do?”

Remus hesitated, then whispered the words. “He called her our mate.”

Silence.

Sirius stared at him.

Remus stared at the lake.

Finally—

“Reeeaaally?”

Remus shot him an irritated look. “This isn't funny.”

“I know.”

“Then stop looking like you're about to burst out laughing.”

“I'm not laughing.”

“You're smiling.”

“I am absolutely not smiling.”

“You are.”

Sirius cleared his throat. “Fine.”

Remus shook his head. “I don't know what to do.”

That wiped the amusement from Sirius's face.

“I've never felt anything like it.” He looked down at his hands. “I don't even know this woman, and yet...” His voice cracked slightly. “It felt like she was something I'd been missing.”

Sirius studied him. “You mean like a soul bond?”

“Perhaps, maybe,” Remus shook his head. “I've read about soul bonds. This doesn't sound like any of them.”

“Especially because she's Muggle.”

“Exactly.”

Sirius leaned back against the tree. “Could she be magical?”

“She doesn't know magic exists.”

“That doesn't necessarily answer the question.”

Remus looked at him.

Sirius shrugged. “Think about it. You told me you could feel magic coming from her.”

“Yes.”

“Could she be a Squib?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because Squibs don't usually produce magical energy.”

Sirius frowned. “Then what is she?”

Remus looked toward the castle. “I don't know.”

The admission hung between them. Neither man liked it. Remus had spent his life studying magic. He was a professor, a researcher, a man who trusted logic. The fact that he couldn't explain what was happening was driving him mad.

“I need to research it.”

Sirius laughed softly. “Of course you do.”

“What?”

“You've always done that.”

“Done what?”

“Whenever something scares you, you turn it into a research project.”

Remus frowned. “That isn't true.”

“It absolutely is.”

Sirius counted on his fingers.

“When we were children, you researched every possible way to avoid detention.”

“I did not.”

“You researched werewolves.”

“That was necessary.”

“You researched curses.”

“Necessary.”

“You researched dark magic.”

“Also necessary.”

“And now you're going to research why a beautiful woman makes your wolf want to marry her.”

Remus glared.

Sirius grinned. “See?”

Remus couldn't help laughing. It lasted only a second. Then his expression became serious again.

“I can't do this to her.”

Sirius's smile faded. “Do what?”

“Expect her to understand.”

“She doesn't have to understand everything today.”

“She is a Muggle.”

“And?”

“She doesn't know what it means to be involved with someone like me.”

Sirius stared at him. “Someone like you?”

Remus looked away.

“You know what I mean.”

“I don't think I do.”

“You do.”

“No, Remus. I really don't.” Sirius shifted closer. “You're talking about yourself as though you're some kind of monster.”

Remus laughed bitterly. “Aren't I?”

“No.”

“I'm a werewolf.”

“You were bitten when you were four years old.”

“That doesn't change what I became.”

“No.” Sirius's voice softened. “But it doesn't change who you are either.”

Remus said nothing.

Sirius continued.

“I spend every full moon with you, remember?”

Remus nodded.

“You take the Wolfsbane. You become restless. Irritable. You pace.” Sirius smiled. “Honestly, you're more annoying than dangerous.”

Remus snorted. “Very comforting.”

“I'm serious.” Sirius placed a hand on his friend's shoulder.

“You've spent your entire life believing the worst thing about you is the only thing people will ever see.”

Remus's jaw tightened. “Because it usually is.”

“Not with me.”

Remus looked at him.

“Not with Harry.”

Sirius continued.

“Not with Minerva.”

He paused.

“And perhaps not with Shevonne.”

Remus looked away. “You don't know that.”

“No.” Sirius squeezed his shoulder. “And neither do you.”

Remus was silent. The wind moved through the trees and the lake rippled gently. For a long time, neither man spoke.

Finally, Remus whispered, “My soul was destroyed a long time ago.”

Sirius's expression hardened.

“No.”

“The night I was bitten—”

“No.”

“You weren't there.”

“I didn't need to be.”

Sirius's voice was firm. “You think being bitten made you less human.”

Remus looked down. “It changed everything.”

“Yes.”

“It took my future.”

“It changed your future.”

Remus looked at him.

“There's a difference.”

Sirius nodded. “It didn't destroy your soul.”

Remus didn't answer.

Sirius continued. “You fought beside us.”

Remus's eyes flickered.

“You helped defeat Voldemort. You saved lives. You protected children. You became a teacher. You've spent your entire life trying to make sure no one else suffers because of what happened to you.”

Sirius leaned closer. “Does that sound like a man with a destroyed soul?”

Remus looked away.

“You're my brother, Remus.” Sirius's voice softened. “And I'm telling you that you are one of the gentlest people I've ever known.”

Remus's eyes burned. He blinked rapidly. “I don't deserve—”

“Stop.” Sirius's voice was sharper now. “Stop deciding what other people are allowed to see in you.”

Remus stared at him.

“If Shevonne wants nothing to do with you, then so be it.” Sirius shrugged.

“It'll hurt.”

“Yes, but you'll survive.”

Remus nodded and looked toward the castle. Somewhere inside those ancient walls was Shevonne. He could feel her. Like a thread tied between them. The sensation made his chest ache and his wolf stirred.

Mate.

Remus closed his eyes. “I don't understand it.”

“You don't have to.”

“I need to know why.”

“That sounds more like you.”

Remus smiled faintly. “I'll research it.”

“Of course you will.”

“I'll start with magical bonds.”

“And perhaps,” Sirius added, “you could start with simply talking to her.”

Remus hesitated. “I should apologize.”

“Yes.”

“For leaving.”

“Yes.”

“And introduce myself properly.”

“That would probably be a good idea.”

Remus sighed.

“I don't know what to say.”

Sirius grinned. “Try 'Hello, I'm Remus.'”

Remus rolled his eyes. “Very helpful.”

“I do my best.”

They stood and Remus looked back at the lake one last time. He could still feel the strange warmth in his chest, the connection, the pull, the impossible certainty that Shevonne Alexander was somehow important to him.

He didn't understand it, he wasn't ready to accept it, but for the first time, he wasn't going to run from it either.

“I'll talk to her.”

Sirius smiled. “Good.”

They began walking back toward the castle. After several steps, Sirius glanced sideways at him.

“You know, Remmy...”

“What?”

“You might want to warn your wolf not to scare the poor woman.”

Remus groaned. “Moony isn't the problem.”

Sirius laughed.

“That's the first time I've ever heard you say that.”

Remus shook his head. “I think I'm the problem.”

Sirius's smile faded. “No.”

Remus looked at him.

“You're not.”

For a moment, Remus believed him, just a little, and perhaps that was enough. As they approached the castle, Remus's thoughts returned to Shevonne.

He remembered her eyes, her expression, the warmth he had felt when their magic touched and beneath all his fear, beneath all his doubt, beneath every reason he told himself he should stay away from her, one impossible thought remained.

Maybe I don't have to be alone.

Remus glanced toward the windows of Hogwarts. Somewhere behind one of them was a woman who had no idea what she had awakened in him. He didn't know what the future held, he didn't know what their strange connection meant, he didn't even know whether she would want to know him once she understood the truth, but he knew one thing, he wanted to find out.

And for Remus Lupin, that was already a remarkable beginning.

CHAPTER 9

Shevonne left the Great Hall shortly after lunch. She smiled and nodded when people spoke to her, answered questions about her new position, and made polite conversation with the professors seated nearby.

But her mind wasn't really in the Great Hall anymore. It was somewhere outside, with Remus.

She didn't understand it. That was becoming a problem. She had known the man for perhaps thirty seconds. Yet when their eyes had met, something inside her had reacted so strongly that she had almost forgotten how to breathe.

Then he abruptly left. Shevonne had spent the remainder of lunch trying not to wonder if she had somehow frightened him. It was ridiculous for her to think that. She had done nothing, she hadn't even spoken to him.

Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that whatever had happened between them had affected him just as strongly as it had affected her. She needed to stop thinking about it. Fortunately, she had work. Lots of it.

She made her way back toward the Muggle Studies classroom. If she was going to teach at Hogwarts, she needed to know exactly what materials she had available.

She opened the classroom door and stepped inside. The room was quiet. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows, illuminating the rows of desks arranged in a semicircle. Shevonne walked toward the teacher's desk.

A book sat there. She recognized it immediately. The textbook she had been sent. She picked it up.

“All right,” she muttered. “Let's see how bad you really are.”

She opened the book and five minutes later, she was frowning. Ten minutes later, she was irritated. Twenty minutes later, she was furious.

“What the hell have they been teaching these children?” She flipped another page. The illustrations were bad enough. The descriptions were worse.

Muggles were portrayed as primitive, strange creatures who apparently spent most of their time being baffled by their own technology. One passage suggested that Muggles believed electricity was some form of primitive magic. Another implied that most Muggles lived in small cottages without proper sanitation. Shevonne stared at the page.

“You've got to be kidding me.”

She flipped another page and it became worse. The book wasn't merely outdated, it was insulting. It reduced an entire population of people to stereotypes. Shevonne slammed the book shut.

“No wonder these children don't understand Muggles.”

She opened it again.

“Who wrote this?”

A paragraph on the next page claimed that Muggles rarely traveled more than a few miles from their homes. Shevonne stared at it.

“I've flown across the Atlantic.”

She turned another page.

“Cars are apparently 'metal boxes propelled by complicated internal machinery that most Muggles do not understand.'”

Shevonne snorted.

“Most Muggles don't understand how a combustion engine works, but most of them don't need to.”

She tossed the book onto the desk.

“This is absurd.”

She began pacing. She knew what she wanted to teach. Not propaganda, not stereotypes, not a sanitized version of Muggle life designed to make wizarding children feel superior.

She wanted them to understand that Muggles were people. People who had created extraordinary things without magic. People who had built civilizations, fought wars, explored the world, created art, music, literature, medicine, technology, and countless other things.

There were differences between magical and nonmagical people. Of course there were. But differences didn't make one group better than another.

Shevonne returned to the desk and picked up the textbook again. She was so absorbed in her growing outrage that she didn't hear the classroom door open.

A throat cleared behind her and Shevonne jumped and spun around.

Remus Lupin stood in the doorway. Her heart immediately skipped.

Oh.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Shevonne became suddenly aware that she was still holding the offending textbook.

Remus looked at it. Then at her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

His voice was soft. Deeper than she remembered. Shevonne lowered the book.

"It's all right." She took a breath. "I was absorbed in the nonsense presented as Muggle knowledge."

Remus smiled. "I gathered that."

She glanced at the book. "How long has this been used?"

Remus stepped into the room. "I'm not entirely sure." He gave a small laugh. "I do know it is the same textbook used when I was a student."

Shevonne stared at him. "How long ago was that?"

Remus raised an eyebrow. "Are you asking my age?"

"I'm asking how long this book has been torturing students."

He laughed.

The sound surprised her. It made him look younger, more relaxed. Shevonne smiled.

"I suppose that answers my question."

Remus walked toward the desk. "Minerva may be able to help you find more appropriate materials."

"I intend to ask her." Shevonne held up the book. "We cannot keep teaching this to children."

“I agree.”

“It's complete rubbish.”

Remus's eyebrows lifted and Shevonne flushed.

“Sorry.”

“Don't apologize.” He smiled. “I think your assessment is accurate.”

Shevonne laughed. “I've only been here a day and I'm already criticizing the curriculum.”

“I suspect Minerva knew exactly what she was getting when she hired you.”

That made Shevonne smile. Then she noticed something. Remus was standing closer than he had been in the Great Hall and the strange sensation was back. Not as powerful as before, but there. A warm, almost electrical hum beneath her skin.

Shevonne's fingers tightened around the book. Remus seemed to feel it too. His eyes flickered toward her. Neither of them spoke. The sensation faded and Shevonne exhaled.

What is happening?

Remus seemed equally confused. He took another step toward her, then stopped.

“I actually came to apologize.”

Shevonne looked at him. “For what?”

“My abrupt departure from the Great Hall.”

“Oh.”

Shevonne set the book down. “You don't need to apologize.”

“I do.”

“You weren't feeling well.”

Remus snorted, “I suppose that is one way of describing it.”

Shevonne studied him. He looked nervous, almost painfully so.

“I am Remus Lupin,” he said.

Shevonne smiled.

“I know.”

He blinked.

“Minerva introduced you.”

“Right.”

Shevonne held out her hand.

“I'm Shevonne Alexander.”

Remus looked at her hand for a moment before taking it. The instant their hands touched, the sensation returned. Stronger. A pulse of warmth traveled through both of them. Shevonne's breath caught and Remus's fingers tightened around hers.

They stared at one another for a beat and then both released the handshake almost simultaneously. Neither spoke. Finally, Remus cleared his throat.

“I teach Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

“Years one through four?”

His eyebrows rose.

“You've been doing your homework.”

“I've been doing a lot of homework.” Shevonne smiled. “I don't want to walk into my first class knowing less than the students.”

“I don't think that's possible.”

“Why?”

“They know considerably less about Muggles than you do.”

She laughed. “Good point.”

Remus smiled. And there it was again. That feeling. Not the jolt this time, but something softer, warmer.

Shevonne suddenly realized she wanted to know him. Not because of the strange connection. Not because he was a werewolf. Not because he was a professor. Because she liked talking to him.

That was dangerous. Or at least, it felt dangerous. Shevonne glanced at the textbook.

“I suppose I should ask you something.”

“Of course.”

“Minerva told me about your... condition.”

Remus's expression changed. His shoulders tightened. She immediately regretted bringing it up.

“I hope that isn't something I shouldn't have mentioned.”

“No.” His voice was quiet.

“She was supposed to tell you.”

Shevonne nodded.

“She said you were bitten when you were very young.”

“Yes.”

“And that you transform during every full moon.”

“Yes.”

“She also told me about Wolfsbane.”

Remus studied her face carefully. Shevonne could see the uncertainty in his eyes. Almost fear, not fear of her, fear of what she might think of him.

“I hope I didn't say something wrong,” Shevonne said.

“You didn't.” He hesitated. “I simply...” He looked away. “I'm not accustomed to people reacting the way you did.”

“How did I react?”

“You didn't.”

Shevonne frowned. “I don't understand.”

“Most people become afraid.”

Shevonne considered that. “I'm sure some people do.”

“Others are disgusted.”

Her expression softened. “That must be difficult.”

Remus looked at her. “You're not afraid?”

Shevonne thought about it honestly. “I don't know you well enough to be afraid of you.”

That surprised him.

She continued.

“I know you're a werewolf. I know you were bitten as a child. I know there's a potion that allows you to retain control of your mind during the transformation.” She shrugged. “But those are facts about you.”

Shevonne smiled.

“They aren't your entire personality.”

Remus stared at her.

She could almost see the words hitting him.

“You've known me for less than an hour.”

“Exactly.” Shevonne's smile became teasing.

“You might turn out to be absolutely insufferable.”

A laugh escaped him. “That's possible.”

“Or you might be wonderful.”

“That's considerably less likely.”

“See?” She pointed at him. “That's exactly what I mean.”

Remus shook his head.

Shevonne continued.

“I don't judge people based on illnesses or disabilities. I judge them based on who they are.”

She paused.

“If you're kind, honest, and decent, then I'll like you.”

“And if I'm not?”

“Then I won't.”

Remus smiled. “That seems fair.”

“It is.” Shevonne folded her arms. “Besides, I grew up learning that history is full of people being afraid of things they don't understand.”

Remus's expression became thoughtful. “That's very true.”

“I've been reading wizarding history.” She sighed. “I'm beginning to think wizarding history is just as complicated as muggle history.”

“Unfortunately,” he said as he walked toward one of the desks and leaned against it.

“May I ask what you did before coming here?”

“I worked as a docent at Edinburgh Castle.”

Remus's expression brightened. “Edinburgh Castle?”

“Yes.”

“So you're a history enthusiast.”

“Guilty.”

“What area of history?”

“Most of it.”

Remus laughed. “That doesn't narrow it down.”

“I've always been fascinated by castles.” She looked around the classroom. “Which means Hogwarts may be the most dangerous possible place for me.”

“Why?”

“Because I have an enormous castle full of history right outside my door.”

Remus smiled. “You're going to be impossible to keep out of the restricted section of the library, “ he chuckled.

“You say that like it's a bad thing.” She laughed.

“Speaking as a professor, I believe I'm obligated to say yes.”

Their eyes met, the connection returned and neither moved. For several seconds, the room seemed to disappear.

Shevonne could see something in his expression. Loneliness, sadness, a lifetime of being careful. There were scars across his face, fine lines around his eyes, a slight slump to his shoulders that she suspected had nothing to do with age.

He looked like a man who had spent years carrying something heavy. Shevonne wanted to reach out, wanted to touch his arm, wanted to tell him he didn't have to carry it alone. The impulse startled her. She stopped herself. She barely knew him, but she wanted to. That was the problem.

“I should probably let you get back to work.” Remus said, straightening from the desk.

Shevonne smiled. “You're not bothering me.”

“I've already interrupted your battle with the textbook.”

She looked down at it. “I think the textbook lost.”

“Good.” Remus pushed away from the desk.

“It was nice meeting you properly, Shevonne.”

She smiled. “You too, Remus.”

He stopped at the door. For a moment, he looked back. Their eyes met and that strange warmth passed between them again. but this time, neither of them looked away.

Then Remus smiled. A genuine smile and left.

Shevonne stood alone in the classroom. She looked toward the doorway long after he disappeared.

“What in the world is happening?” she whispered, but she had no answer.

Remus walked down the corridor slowly. His heart was still racing. He had expected fear. He had expected discomfort. He had even expected disgust. He had not expected Shevonne Alexander to look at him as though his lycanthropy were merely one fact among many.

She had listened, she had asked questions, she had not recoiled. More importantly, she had made him laugh. That hadn't happened often enough in recent years.

He reached his quarters and closed the door behind him. He leaned against it and for several moments, he simply stood there. Then he laughed quietly.

“What are you doing, Remus?” The wolf stirred.

Mate.

Remus sighed.

“You're not helping.”

Mate.

“Yes, I know.”

He crossed the room and poured himself a small glass of firewhisky. He took a sip, then stared at the glass. He had never felt this before. Not even once. and the strangest part was that he didn't want it to stop.

He wanted to know everything about Shevonne. Where she'd grown up. What she loved. What made her laugh. What frightened her. What she dreamed about. He wanted to hear stories about Edinburgh Castle. He wanted to know why history mattered so much to her. He wanted to know why she had looked at his scars without pity. He wanted to know why she had made him feel, for the first time in years, as though there might be something waiting for him beyond loneliness.

Remus looked toward the window. He could almost feel her presence somewhere within the castle. The connection was faint, but it was there and for once, he didn't try to push it away. He took another sip of firewhisky.

“I definitely need to research this.”

From somewhere inside his mind came a satisfied growl. Remus smiled despite himself.

“Fine.” He set the glass down. “But we're going slowly.”

The wolf seemed to consider that. Then settled. For now.

Back in the Muggle Studies classroom, Shevonne returned to her desk. She opened the terrible textbook again. She stared at the page for several seconds and then closed it.

“No.”

She reached for a fresh sheet of parchment. If she was going to teach Muggle Studies at Hogwarts, she was going to do it properly, and if she happened to learn a little more about Remus Lupin along the way...Well. She wasn't going to complain about that.

CHAPTER 10

Shevonne had barely written three lines when there was a quiet knock on the classroom door. She looked up in surprise and another knock sounded.

She put down her quill and crossed the room. When she opened the door, Remus stood in the corridor. He looked slightly uncertain and she smiled at him.

“Remus?”

“I know I'm disturbing your work, but I realized that I left rather abruptly earlier and I didn't want to cause offense.”

“You didn't,” she told him and she saw hesitation cross his face before it settled into determination.

“I found myself wondering if maybe I could have stayed a little longer.”

“I wouldn't mind you staying longer.” She told him softly.

They exchanged a look and that connection between them made itself known once more.

“Would you like to come in for a bit?” She asked, gesturing toward the door that led to her private rooms.

“I would like that.” He said and she opened the door to let him inside.

The room was warm and comfortable. Books were scattered across the desk, several parchment notes lay beside an unfinished lesson plan, and Patches was curled up in her usual chair. The cat opened one eye, then promptly went back to sleep.

"She's very welcoming," Remus observed.

"She's selective."

"Apparently."

They crossed to the small sitting area and settled into the chairs facing one another. For a while, they talked about ordinary things. Books, food, music, places they'd visited, things they missed about their families. Shevonne had expected silences to feel awkward, but they didn't.

She discovered that Remus was perfectly comfortable sitting quietly, just looking into the fire. She discovered that he preferred winter to summer. He discovered that she couldn't cook to save her life.

"So, you've never learned to cook?"

"I've tried."

"And?"

"The smoke alarm won."

Remus laughed. "What happened?"

"I burned toast."

"Toast?"

"Yep."

He shook his head. "How?"

"I don't know." She grinned

They shared a laugh and then Remus asked, "What's your favorite book?"

Shevonne thought for a moment. "The Time Machine."

His eyebrows rose. "Really?"

"Really."

"I prefer The War of the Worlds."

She smiled, "That's one of my favorites too."

"Then we have something in common."

"We have several things in common."

He looked at her. "Indeed."

A comfortable silence settled over the room and after a bit Remus glanced toward the window.

"It's getting late."

Shevonne followed his gaze. She hadn't realized how much time had passed.

"I suppose it is."

He stood and she rose with him. They walked toward the door. For a moment, neither spoke, then Remus reached for her hand. His fingers closed gently around hers.

Shevonne looked down, then back at him. The familiar warmth moved through her. But neither of them pulled away. Instead, Remus lifted her hand, slowly, carefully. Giving her every opportunity to stop him. She didn't.

His lips touched the inside of her wrist. A soft, lingering kiss directly over her pulse.

Shevonne inhaled sharply. The sensation that followed was immediate. The warmth she'd come to recognize suddenly intensified, racing through her with an almost dizzying force. But this time there was something else.

Something unmistakably different, heat, desire, longing. Remus looked up and their eyes met. For several seconds, neither moved. Shevonne could see the conflict in his expression. Want, restraint, uncertainty, and something deeper, something that made her heart pound.

Remus released her hand.

"Goodnight, Shevonne."

Her voice came out softer than she intended.

"Goodnight, Remus."

He turned toward the door, then stopped and looked back at her. She was still standing where he'd left her. Their eyes met once more, and that strange connection sparked between them once more.

Remus smiled and stepped into the corridor and the door closed behind him.

Shevonne leaned against it and touched her wrist. The place where his lips had been still tingled. She smiled despite herself. Then her expression changed slightly as she glanced toward the window.

The moon was visible through the glass. Nearly full. Shevonne's smile faded. Tomorrow, she knew what tomorrow meant, the full moon.

Remus would have to leave. He would have to face the part of himself he had spent his entire life trying to protect others from. She didn't know what that would mean for them. She didn't know whether their strange connection would feel the same when he was transformed. But she knew she would be thinking about him. She knew she would worry. And, much to her surprise, she realized she was already looking forward to seeing him again.

She touched her wrist one last time and smiled.

"Goodnight, Remus."

—----------

Shevonne woke the following morning with one thought firmly lodged in her mind.

Remus Lupin.

She stared at the ceiling for several moments before covering her face with both hands.

"Oh, this is ridiculous."

Patches, curled at the foot of the bed, opened one eye. Shevonne peeked through her fingers.

"I know."

The cat blinked.

"Don't look at me like that."

Patches closed her eyes again. Shevonne sighed and lowered her hands.

Last night had been unlike anything she had experienced before. Not simply because Remus had kissed her wrist, although that certainly had been something she had never experienced before, she could still feel the ghost of his lips against her skin.

What sat heavily in her mind was everything that had happened before that. The conversation, the questions, the laughter, the moments when the two of them had looked at each other and neither had felt the need to look away.

She had learned his favorite color, favorite food, favorite book, favorite subject in school, that he had no siblings and that his parents had chosen not to have more children after he was bitten. She had learned that he loved *The War of the Worlds* and that, apparently, he preferred his steak rare.

There was something almost absurdly ordinary about knowing those things, and yet she knew there was something she hadn't asked, something important. She had learned about the things Remus liked, but she hadn't learned about the things that had made him who he was other than being bitten by a werewolf as a child.

That thought followed her while she dressed, while she ate breakfast, while she organized the stack of books sitting on her desk, and finally shortly after lunch, she found herself standing outside Remus' office.

She raised her hand to knock, then hesitated. She had no idea what she was doing. Last night they had crossed some invisible line between friendship and something neither of them had yet named.

Maybe it was too soon, maybe she should give him space, maybe—the door opened and Shevonne jumped.

Remus stood there, one hand still on the handle.

"Hello."

"Hello."

For a moment, neither moved and then Remus smiled.

"You're thinking very loudly."

She blinked. "I am?"

"Your expression suggests you've been arguing with yourself for at least five minutes."

She laughed. "That obvious?"

"To me."

Something warm moved through her at his words. "Can I come in?"

"Of course."

He stepped aside and she entered. His office was exactly as she remembered it. Books filled the shelves. Parchment was stacked neatly on one side of the desk and the room smelled faintly of old paper, tea, and something distinctly Remus.

He closed the door. "Is everything all right?"

She turned toward him. “Yes, I just wanted to ask you something."

"That sounds ominous."

"It's not." Shevonne took a breath. "Last night, we talked about ourselves."

"We did."

"And I realized afterward that I asked you a lot of questions."

"You did."

"But most of them were..." She smiled. "Safe."

Remus's eyebrows lifted. "Safe?"

"Favorite books. Favorite food. Family."

"Those are perfectly reasonable questions."

"They are, but they're not the important ones."

Something changed in his expression. "What do you mean?"

She hesitated. "I know what your favorite book is."

A smile touched his mouth. "Which apparently makes us terribly compatible."

She laughed. "Apparently."

The smile faded from his face when she continued. "But I don't know what your life was like before Hogwarts. I don't mean your childhood," she said quickly. "I mean..." She searched for the right words. "Everything that happened afterward."

His gaze dropped. "The war."

She nodded. "The war."

Silence settled between them and Shevonne immediately regretted bringing it up.

"You don't have to tell me."

"I know." He said and moved toward the small table near the window. After a moment, he poured two cups of tea and handed one to her. "Sit."

Shevonne took the chair and Remus sat opposite her.

For several moments, neither spoke. Finally, Remus said, "What have you read?"

"About the war?"

"Yes."

"Bits and pieces. Mostly historical accounts."

"Those aren't particularly useful."

"That's what I thought."

"They make it sound like something that happened to other people." She said.

Remus's fingers tightened around his cup.

"I don't want the historian's version, Remus." His eyes met hers. "I want yours."

Something vulnerable appeared in his expression and he looked down at his tea.

"I don't talk about it much. Most people don't want to hear about it."

"I do."

He studied her. "Why?"

"Because I want to know you."

The words hung between them and Remus swallowed hard.

"All right." He said and set his cup down.

"The first war didn't feel like a war at first, it felt like fear." Remus stared toward the window. "People disappeared, families moved away, shops closed. People stopped saying certain names in public."

"Voldemort."

He nodded. "His name became something people were afraid to even speak."

"What was it like for you?"

"I was young."

"How young?"

"Too young."

Shevonne smiled sadly. "That's not an age."

"It should be." He leaned back. "I was barely out of school when things became serious."

Shevonne listened as he told her about the Order of the Phoenix, about Dumbledore, about the people who had decided that doing nothing was no longer an option.

"And Sirius?" she asked.

Remus smiled faintly. "Sirius was impossible."

Shevonne laughed. "I believe that."

"He was reckless, angry, brilliant and completely convinced he was indestructible."

"That also sounds like Sirius."

"It does." The smile remained for another moment before fading. "We were all like that, really."

"Even you?"

"Especially me."

Shevonne's eyebrows rose. "You?"

"I wasn't particularly sensible."

"I find that difficult to imagine."

"You shouldn't." He looked toward the fire. "We were young. We thought bravery meant not being afraid."

"What did you learn?"

"That bravery has very little to do with fear."

He looked at her. "Sometimes bravery is being terrified and doing what needs to be done anyway."

Shevonne nodded. "And James and Lily Potter?"

Remus smiled sadly. "They were extraordinary." His voice softened. "James could be arrogant. He knew he was talented, and he wasn't always humble about it."

Shevonne smiled. "And Lily?"

"Lily was..." He paused. "She was kind, fierce and she could be frightening when she was angry."

"I would have liked her."

"You would have." The certainty in his voice made Shevonne's chest ache.

"What were they like together?"

Remus smiled. "They loved each other completely. During the war, that mattered."

"How?"

"Because there were very few things that still felt normal." He looked down at his hands. "They had Harry, they had each other and for a while, that was enough."

Shevonne's expression softened. "And Sirius?"

"Sirius loved them both." There was no hesitation in his answer. "He loved James like a brother."

"And Harry?"

Remus smiled. "Harry was practically his whole world."

Shevonne absorbed that. "Was everyone in the Order close?"

"Not everyone." He paused. "But the people we trusted..." His expression tightened. "We trusted them completely."

Shevonne noticed the change. "Until Peter."

Remus went silent and Shevonne immediately wished she hadn't said the man’s namet.

"Sorry."

"No." He shook his head. "He is part of the story." Remus took a slow breath. "Peter Pettigrew was our friend." The words seemed difficult for him to say. "We grew up together, went to school together, fought together."

"And he betrayed you."

"Yes."

Shevonne felt cold. "He was the Secret Keeper for James and Lily."

Remus nodded. "The plan was supposed to protect James and Lily."

"And instead..."

His eyes closed briefly. "They died."

The room seemed to grow quieter. After a while, Remus continued.

"Harry survived."

"Because Lily protected him."

"Yes."

Shevonne looked down. "And Sirius?"

Remus's jaw tightened. "Everyone believed Sirius had betrayed them."

"You believed it too." It wasn't a question.

"No." The word came quietly. "But yes."

Shevonne's heart hurt for him. "You thought he had betrayed James and Lily."

"I did."

"And then he was sent to Azkaban."

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Twelve years."

Shevonne stared at him. "Twelve."

Remus nodded. "I spent twelve years believing my best friend had murdered the people I loved most." He looked at her. "And Sirius spent twelve years in Azkaban for something he hadn't done."

Shevonne reached across the table covering his hand with hers. Remus looked down at their joined hands.

"I don't know how you lived with that."

"Poorly."

Shevonne's eyes filled. "Remus..."

He squeezed her hand. "The hardest part wasn't the war."

"What was?" she asked.

"After." He looked toward the window. "People thought it was over."

"But it wasn't."

"Not for us."

Shevonne understood. "You lost people."

"Yes."

"Friends."

"Yes."

"Your youth."

A faint smile touched his lips. "That too."

Shevonne's fingers tightened around his. "I've spent most of my life studying wars. I thought I understood them."

Remus looked at her.

"I don't think I did."

"Most people don't."

"Wars are easier to understand when they're written in books."

He looked down. "They become dates, names, battles, numbers."

Shevonne nodded. "And not people."

"Exactly."

She was quiet for a moment. "Do you ever think about them?"

"Every day. Some days more than others."

"Do you miss James?"

Remus smiled sadly. "Every day."

"Lily?"

"Yes."

"Sirius?"

His expression changed. "That was different."

"You lost him twice." she whispered.

Remus looked at her sharply, but she continued softly.

"Once when you believed he betrayed you. And again when you learned how badly everything had gone wrong."

He looked away. "Yes."

Shevonne felt tears slip down her cheeks and she quickly wiped them away.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

Remus's expression softened. "Don't be."

"I wish I could change it for you."

"So do I."

They sat in silence for several moments and then Shevonne asked the question that had been sitting quietly in her mind.

"Do you blame yourself?"

Remus didn't answer immediately.

"Yes."

"For what?"

"For surviving."

Her heart broke. "Remus."

He looked at her. "There were times when I wondered why I was still here when so many better people weren't."

Shevonne stood and walked around the table. Remus looked up as she stopped beside him. She gently touched his cheek.

"Because you weren't supposed to die."

His eyes closed. "That's not how it felt."

"I know." She brushed her thumb beneath his eye. "But you survived."

He opened his eyes. "And now?"

"Now you have a chance to live."

Something in his expression broke and he leaned into her hand.

"I don't know if I'm very good at that."

She smiled through her tears. "Then we'll practice."

A quiet laugh escaped him. "We?"

"Yes, we."

"You're volunteering?"

"I suppose I am."

He caught her hand before she could pull it away. "You're very stubborn."

"I've been told."

"And nosy."

"Frequently."

"And reckless."

She grinned. "You barely know me."

"I've been paying attention."

That silenced her. His thumb moved gently across the back of her hand.

"I don't know where this is going, Shevonne."

"Neither do I."

"But I don't want to run from it."

She smiled. "Neither do I."

He lifted her hand, and, this time, instead of kissing her wrist, he simply held it against his chest. She could feel his heartbeat beneath her fingers. Steady, warm, alive.

"Thank you," he whispered.

"For what?"

"For listening."

She shook her head. "Thank you for trusting me."

They remained that way for a long time, but eventually Shevonne returned to her chair and the conversation shifted.

They talked about James's ridiculous sense of humor, Sirius's inability to follow instructions, and the Marauders' legendary capacity for getting into trouble.

Remus even told her about one particularly disastrous prank involving a staircase, three buckets of enchanted paint, and Professor McGonagall's patience.

By the time Shevonne left, she was laughing. But as she walked down the corridor toward her quarters, she understood something she hadn't understood before. She hadn't simply learned about a war, she had learned about the boy Remus had once been, the boy who had been afraid, the young man who had fought anyway. the friend who had lost people he loved and the man

who had spent years carrying grief quietly because he didn't want anyone else to have to carry it with him.

Shevonne stopped outside her door and thought about the way he'd looked at her when he'd said *I don't know if I'm very good at living.*

Her heart ached. "Then we'll practice," she whispered.

And for the first time, she realized that maybe the strange connection between them wasn't simply about magic, maybe it was about recognition. Two people who had spent their lives feeling slightly apart from everyone else had somehow found one another.

And perhaps, without either of them realizing it, they were beginning to teach each other how to belong.

CHAPTER 11

The following days passed quickly. The remainder of August disappeared in a whirlwind of preparation. For Shevonne, the days were filled with reading, organizing, lesson planning, and attempting to understand exactly how one taught Muggle Studies to a room full of young witches and wizards who had grown up believing that the non-magical world was something to be feared, pitied, or laughed at.

The more she learned about the existing curriculum, the more determined she became to change it. She had already replaced most of the outdated material with her own notes.

Families.

Education.

Music.

Literature.

Art.

Religion.

Government.

Technology.

Medicine.

Transportation.

Everyday life.

And, most importantly, the similarities between magical and non-magical people.

She wanted her students to understand that Muggles weren't strange creatures who happened to live without wands. They were people. People who loved, lost, built things, made mistakes, dreamed, and sometimes did extraordinary things without ever casting a spell.

Shevonne had been staring at the same paragraph for nearly five minutes when a knock sounded on her classroom door.

She looked up. "Come in."

The door opened and Sirius Black appeared. He held a tray in one hand.

She blinked. "Hello."

"Hello."

For a moment, neither of them said anything. Shevonne gestured toward the tray.

"Is that for me?"

Sirius looked down "Uhmmm, yes, Remus suggested I bring you something to eat."

She smiled. "Of course he did."

Sirius stepped into the room and placed the tray on the corner of her desk.

"I wasn't entirely certain what you liked, so I brought a few things."

She glanced at the assortment of tea, biscuits, sandwiches, and chocolate.

"You brought enough food for several people."

"I wasn't sure how hungry you might be."

She smiled. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Sirius remained standing for a moment, seemingly unsure whether he should leave.

Shevonne noticed. "You can sit, you know."

He looked surprised. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

He pulled out one of the chairs and sat. For several seconds they were quiet. Shevonne found herself studying him.

It was still a little awkward talking to Sirius. She had only known him for a few days, and most of what she knew about him had come from Remus.

Sirius seemed to realize she was watching him. "What?"

"Nothing."

"You were staring."

"I was trying to decide whether you're always this confident."

His mouth curved into a grin. "Usually."

"Remus wasn't exaggerating, then."

"He's been talking about me?"

"Not much."

Sirius looked mildly offended. "Not much?"

"He has other things to talk about."

"Such as?"

Shevonne hesitated. "His past."

The humor disappeared from Sirius's expression. "Ah."

"He told me about the war."

Sirius nodded slowly. "He doesn't usually do that."

There was a brief silence, then Shevonne looked at him.

"I hope I didn't overstep."

"You didn't." He leaned back slightly.

"If Remus chose to tell you, then he wanted you to know."

Shevonne nodded. "I care about him, you know."

Sirius looked at her for a moment. "I can see that."

She smiled faintly. "I don't know what this is between us yet."

Sirius raised an eyebrow. "Between you and Remus?"

"Yes."

He considered that. "Neither does he."

That made her laugh. "That's reassuring."

"I didn't say it was a bad thing."

"No. I suppose not."

Sirius glanced toward the books scattered across her desk. "How are you finding Hogwarts?"

"Overwhelming."

"That seems fair."

"I still haven't gotten used to the staircases."

"You probably shouldn't trust them."

She laughed. "That's helpful."

"I try."

Another comfortable silence settled between them. It wasn't the silence of old friends, they didn't know each other well enough yet. They were still figuring out how to talk to one another.

"I should let you get back to work." Sirius said standing.

"Probably." Shevonne said with a groan.

He gestured toward the tray.

"Eat."

She smiled. "I will."

He reached the door, then glanced back. "Shevonne?"

"Yes?"

"If you ever need anything while you're here, ask Remus."

She laughed. "Why Remus?"

"Because he knows Hogwarts better than I do."

She raised an eyebrow.

"You're not exactly making yourself sound dependable."

"Oh, I'm dependable."

"That sounded convincing."

He grinned. "Give it time."

Then he disappeared through the doorway. Shevonne looked at the tray and smiled. It wasn't friendship yet, not really, but perhaps it could become one, and for now, that was enough.

September first arrived before she was ready. She stood in front of her bedroom mirror that morning, smoothing the front of her blouse for perhaps the hundredth time. She had taught history to Muggle children, led tours through ancient castles, and spoken in front of hundreds of tourists without becoming nervous, but this was different. These were witches and wizards. They could perform magic, brew potions, and, if the books were to be believed, some could even transform into animals. And she was supposed to teach them about the world she had grown up in. Shevonne smiled faintly at her reflection. "Well, when you put it that way, this should be easy."

Patches, sitting on the bed behind her, gave a disapproving meow.

"I'm nervous." She told the opinionated cat.

Patches flicked her tail.

"Thank you for the vote of confidence."

She grabbed her bag and headed for the door, but before she reached it, there was a knock. She opened it and Remus stood outside. He smiled when he saw her.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

His eyes moved over her briefly. "Ready?"

"No."

"Good." He said and she laughed. "McGonagall said the same thing when I asked her the same question." He said with a smirk.

"Then she knows what she's talking about."

"I suppose she does."

He offered his arm, and Shevonne slipped her hand through it. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For coming."

Remus looked at her. "Always."

Something warm settled in her chest. They walked together toward the Great Hall. For once, they didn't talk about the strange connection between them. They simply walked.

By the time they reached the Great Hall, the room was already beginning to fill with teachers. Shevonne paused just inside the doors. The familiar grandeur still overwhelmed her.

She had been at Hogwarts for more than a week, but she still wasn't entirely accustomed to the enchanted ceiling, floating candles, moving staircases, talking portraits, or the fact that the castle itself sometimes seemed to have a personality.

Today, however, something was different. The hall felt alive. Excitement filled the air and it seemed that for the first time in several years, Hogwarts was beginning to feel like a school again rather than a place recovering from war.

Remus led her toward the staff table. The only empty seat was between him and Sirius and Sirius immediately pulled out the chair.

"Your seat, my lady."

Shevonne smiled. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet. You haven't seen what they're serving."

She laughed and sat down. Sirius leaned toward her.

"You look nervous."

"I am."

"Excellent."

She looked at him. "Why is that excellent?"

"Because it means you care."

Remus nodded. "He's right."

Shevonne looked between them. "You two are annoyingly supportive."

"Years of practice," Sirius said.

She smiled. There it was again. That sense of familiarity. But this time, she didn't mistake it for something it wasn't. She was beginning to know Sirius, not well, not yet, but enough to recognize the teasing glint in his eyes and the way he watched Remus when he thought no one noticed.

Enough to know that beneath the arrogance and humor was someone fiercely loyal to the people he loved.

The three of them fell into conversation. Only a few weeks ago, Shevonne had been a complete stranger in their world. Now she was sitting between two men who had survived things she could barely imagine, discussing breakfast and school schedules.

But she didn't feel as though she had known them forever., instead, she felt as though she was finally beginning to know them. And perhaps that was better, because friendships weren't supposed to appear fully formed. They were built. One conversation., one shared laugh, one cup of tea at a time.

Shevonne glanced toward Sirius. He caught her looking.

"What?"

She smiled. "Nothing."

He narrowed his eyes. "That wasn't a nothing smile."

She laughed. "Maybe I'm learning from you."

Sirius grinned. "Careful. That's dangerous."

Remus shook his head. "I've been trying to warn her."

Shevonne smiled. "I think I'm willing to take the risk."

Sirius raised his cup. "To dangerous decisions."

Shevonne lifted hers. "To new friends."

Remus looked between them, a quiet smile appearing on his face. "To new friends."

Their cups touched and Shevonne realized that, for the first time since arriving at Hogwarts, she no longer felt quite so much like an outsider.

The breakfast gradually began to wind down as the other members of staff finished eating and started making their way out of the Great Hall. Shevonne remained seated for another few minutes, enjoying the easy conversation that had developed between the three of them.

Eventually, Sirius glanced toward Remus. "Don't you have somewhere you're supposed to be?"

Remus looked at him. "Do I?"

Sirius nodded solemnly. "I'm fairly certain you do."

Shevonne narrowed her eyes. "You're trying to get rid of him."

"Of course not." Sirius placed a hand over his heart in mock offense. "I'm merely concerned about his responsibilities."

Remus gave him a knowing look. "You don't have any idea what my responsibilities are."

"Not particularly."

Shevonne laughed.

Sirius grinned at her. "See? I've already improved your morning."

"You certainly make breakfast more entertaining."

"I do my best."

Remus shook his head, but there was a smile on his face.

Sirius pushed his chair back. "Well, since apparently I'm no longer needed here, I think I'll go find something important to do."

"Something important?" Remus asked.

"Extremely."

"Such as?"

Sirius considered that for a moment. "Annoying someone."

Remus sighed. "That narrows it down considerably."

Sirius laughed and stood. He looked at Shevonne before leaving, and for a moment his expression became a little more serious.

"Enjoy the rest of your morning."

Shevonne smiled. "You too."

Sirius nodded toward Remus. "And try to keep him from worrying about everything."

Remus frowned. "I don't worry about everything."

Sirius raised an eyebrow.

Shevonne looked between them. "Do you?"

"Yes," Sirius said immediately.

"No," Remus said at the same time.

Shevonne laughed.

Sirius pointed at Remus. "See?" Then he looked at Shevonne. "He worries too much."

Remus sighed. "Thank you, Sirius."

"And he forgets to take care of himself."

"I do not."

"You do."

Shevonne smiled. "I'll keep that in mind."

Remus gave her a betrayed look. "You aren't taking his side, are you?"

"I'm not taking anyone's side."

Sirius grinned. "Good answer."

He started toward the doors, then stopped and looked back. "And Remus?"

"Yes?"

"Try not to make her late for whatever she's supposed to be doing."

Remus rolled his eyes. "Go away, Sirius."

"Gladly."

Sirius disappeared through the doors, leaving Shevonne and Remus alone at the table.

For several seconds, neither spoke. Then Shevonne smiled.

"He's quite a character."

Remus chuckled. "That's one way of putting it."

"I like him."

"I'm glad."

"He makes me laugh."

"That is one of his more dangerous qualities."

Shevonne laughed again and pushed her chair back.

"I suppose I should get going."

Remus stood as well. "Where are you headed?"

"Back to my classroom."

"I'll walk with you."

Shevonne hesitated for only a moment before smiling.

"I'd like that."

They left the Great Hall together. The corridor outside was considerably quieter than the busy room they had just left. Shevonne slipped her hand into the crook of Remus's arm as they walked, and he glanced down at her with a small smile.

Neither of them seemed in any particular hurry. For a few moments they simply walked. Then Shevonne looked up at him.

"You really do worry too much, don't you?"

Remus laughed softly. "I suppose Sirius has been talking to you."

"Only a little, he mentioned it when he brought me tea."

"That concerns me."

"It shouldn't."

"Why?"

"Because I think he's right."

Remus gave her a mock look of disbelief.

"You haven't known me long enough to make that determination."

Shevonne smiled. "Maybe." She squeezed his arm lightly. "But I'm beginning to get to know you."

Something in her words made his expression soften. "I'm glad."

Shevonne looked at him. "So am I."

They continued down the corridor, their conversation becoming easier with every step. When they reached the next turn, Remus's hand slipped from the crook of her arm and found hers instead.

She looked down at their joined hands, then back at him. Neither of them commented on it and neither seemed to want to let go, and walking beside Remus hand in hand felt completely natural.

CHAPTER 12

The corridor was quiet after the Great Hall. Shevonne walked beside Remus, their hands still loosely joined between them. Neither seemed particularly eager to let go.

“I think Sirius is pleased with himself.” Shevonne said, glancing back at the Great Hall.

“What makes you say that?”

“He deliberately left us alone together.”

“He did.” He replied with a small smile.

“I like him. He makes me laugh.”

“That is one of Sirius’ more effective weapons in his arsenal of things to get people to like him.” Remus replied, making her laugh.

They walked on down the corridor and Shevonne looked down at their joined hands again. A few days ago she would have thought it impossible that she could walk hand in hand with a man she had only recently met and feel completely comfortable doing so. Yet, here she was doing just that.

She noticed that Remus had a pensive look on his face, so she lightly bumped his shoulder. “Are you alright, you seem distracted?”

“Just thinking about everything that's happened in the last few days.”

“It has been a lot.” She said as they reached the staircase.

“Careful.” Remus said.

“Why?”

“The seventh step.”

“What's wrong with the seventh step?” She asked, her eyes narrowing in suspicion.

“Nothing.”

“Yeah, and I'm Mary Poppins.” She said back.

“Nothing dangerous.” He replied with a mischievous smile on his face.

Eyeing him dubious, she stepped onto the staircase and deliberately avoided the seventh step, smiling at him triumphantly.

“Spoil sport.” He chuckled and she laughed.

“I learn quickly.”

“Too quickly.” He replied and they continued upward.

“I'm terrified about Monday.” Shevonne told him after they had walked in silence for several moments.

“About your first class?” He asked and she nodded.

“I know my subject, I know how to teach, I've done it for years.”

“Then what's bothering you?”

“The students.”

“They’re children,” he said. giving her a reassuring smile.

“Children who can do magic.”

“That doesn’t make them that much different from Muggle children.”

“I hope you’re right,” she paused and thought for a minute. “What if they don’t listen?”

“Some won’t, but is that any different than Muggle children?”

“What if they think I’m rediculous?”

“Some probably will, but again is that any different from Muggle children?”

“You’re supposed to reassure me.” she said giving him a mock glare.

“I am.”

“You’re terrible at it.”

He laughed. “You’re going to be fine Shevonne.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I do.”

“Why?”

“Because you care and because you are stubborn.”

She laughed. “I’ll take that as a compliment.

“It was meant as one.” he told her and they continued on down the corridor.

They reached her classroom and they parted ways.

Shevonne spent the next several hours working. She arranged the desks, organized her notes and created a list of subjects she wanted to cover during the first term.

There was something almost amusing about the situation. She was supposed to teach witches and wizards about muggles, yet she was still learning about witches and wizards herself. Maybe that wasn’t a weakness, though, maybe that was what made her qualified. She picked up a piece of parchment and began writing

Things I want my students to understand

1. **Muggles are people**

She paused after writing that statement. It seemed almost absurdly simple. However, after everything she had read, she knew it needed to be said. After a moment she added another statement to her list.

2. **Different does not mean inferior**

She stared at that one for several seconds and smiled just as a knock sounded at her door.

“Come in” she called and Remus cam in holding two cups of tea.

“Thank you, I lost track of time.”

Remus glanced around the room. “You’ve been busy.”

“I have. Would you like to see what I have planned?”

“Very much so,” he replied and she led him toward her desk.

“I want to begin with their assumptions. I want them to tell me what they believe they know. Then we’ll separate what is actually true from what they’ve simply been told.

“That sounds like a great starting point.” Remus told her then looked at the parchment in front of her.

Muggles are people

“That’s a good place to start.” he said tapping the words with his finger. Then he tapped the second point.

Different doesn’t mean inferior

“That one is important too.”

“Yes,” she replied and their gazes locked, the familiar warmth moving between them.

“Have you eaten?” he asked.

“I ate breakfast.”

“Taht was hours ago.”

“Really, what time is it?”

“Lunch time.” he told her and held out his arm. “Come on, let's go eat. All of this will still be here after lunch.”

Shevonne took his arm and took one more look around the classroom before they exited and headed for the Great Hall.

They had barely reached the end of the corridor when Sirius appeared around the corner.

He stopped when he saw them. His gaze moved from Remus to Shevonne and then down to her hand resting on Remus's arm. A slow grin spread across his face.

"No."

Remus sighed. "Don't."

"I haven't said anything."

"You were about to."

Sirius looked at Shevonne. "Am I interrupting?"

"Probably." Shevonne smiled.

Sirius nodded solemnly. "Excellent."

Remus groaned. "Sirius."

"What?"

"You promised."

"I promised nothing."

Shevonne laughed. Sirius looked pleased with himself. "See? She understands me."

"I've known you for a few days," Shevonne reminded him. "I'm still deciding whether that's a good thing."

Sirius placed a hand over his heart. "Give it time."

Remus shook his head. "I've heard that before."

Sirius grinned. "And yet you still keep me around."

"Unfortunately."

Shevonne laughed.

The three of them continued toward the Great Hall together. A week ago, Hogwarts had been a strange and impossible place. Now she was walking its corridors with people who were slowly becoming friends and this made her very happy.

CHAPTER 13

The next morning was Sunday. It was also the full moon. Shevonne woke earlier than usual, despite having gone to bed later than she intended. For several minutes, she remained beneath the blankets, staring at the ceiling and thinking about the previous day. Her conversations with Remus and Sirius, getting her classroom and lesson plans ready. She was still nervous, but she was starting to feel better about things.

Classes would begin on Monday, and although she had prepared extensively, she had decided to spend the day reviewing her lesson plans and learning more about the wizarding world. The more she learned, the more she realized how much she didn't know. There were entire portions of history she had never encountered, cultural traditions and political conflicts she had never heard of, and, apparently, an almost endless supply of wildly inaccurate beliefs about Muggles.

At breakfast, Remus was nowhere to be seen. Shevonne knew why. The full moon. She had learned enough about lycanthropy to understand that the day before the transformation was particularly difficult for him. His body would already be reacting to what was coming, and by tonight he would be transformed.

She didn't know exactly where he would go. She knew there was a secure location at Hogwarts where he could transform safely, but she had decided not to ask too many questions. Not yet.

Instead, she settled at the staff table and tried not to think about him. That lasted approximately three minutes. She wondered whether he was all right. Whether he had eaten. Whether he was uncomfortable. Whether he was thinking about her. That last thought made her blush.

"This is ridiculous," she muttered.

Sirius, sitting nearby, glanced at her. "What is?"

"Nothing."

He looked suspicious. "It sounded like something to me."

Shevonne smiled innocently. "It's nothing."

Sirius studied her for another moment before shrugging. "All right."

Shevonne breathed a sigh of relief. She had a feeling Sirius noticed far more than he let on. She spent most of Sunday in her classroom. By late afternoon, she had covered her desk with books and parchment. She had revised her introductory lessons several times. She had created lists of questions she wanted to ask her students. She had even started designing a practical lesson that would compare Muggle technology with magical alternatives.

A telephone versus a magical communication device. A car versus a broomstick. A refrigerator versus magical food-preservation charms.

The more she worked, the more excited she became. Teaching was something she understood. It was familiar. It was something she could control. Unfortunately, her excitement didn't last long.

Monday morning arrived. Then Tuesday. Then Wednesday. By Thursday, Shevonne had learned something very important. Wizarding children knew almost nothing about Muggles.

By Friday, she was convinced they knew less than nothing. They knew Muggles couldn't perform magic. That was about the extent of the useful information. Everything else seemed to have come from stories passed down through families.

Some of those stories were harmless. Others were ridiculous. And a few were downright insulting.

By the end of the week, Shevonne had developed a headache that had begun behind her eyes and slowly worked its way toward the base of her skull. She sat behind her desk after her last class, pressing her fingertips against her temples. She closed her eyes.

"Please go away." The headache ignored her. She sighed. The classroom was finally quiet.

For the first time all week, no student was asking whether Muggles could see in the dark, whether Muggle babies were born with tails, or whether Muggles had some strange muggle substitute for soap.

She had answered questions patiently all week. She had tried to educate without insulting anyone. But there was only so much absurdity a person could take.

She rubbed her temples again as the classroom door creaked open. Shevonne didn't bother looking up.

"If you're here to ask me another question, please come back Monday."

There was a pause. Then a familiar voice answered.

"I'll try to remember that."

Shevonne immediately looked up. Remus stood in the doorway. For a moment, she simply stared at him. He looked tired, very tired. But he was smiling. Her irritation immediately vanished.

"Remus."

"Hello." He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. "I came to see how your first week went."

He looked at her expression. "Judging by the way you're sitting there, I suspect I already know the answer."

Shevonne groaned. "This has been the most stressful week I've had in a very long time."

Remus smiled sympathetically. "I suspected it might be."

"I knew there would be misconceptions about Muggles." She leaned back in her chair. "But the complete lack of understanding is unbelievable."

Remus crossed his arms and leaned against one of the student desks.

"I've heard some rather interesting theories myself."

"Interesting?" Shevonne gave him a look. "That's one word for them."

He chuckled. That was all the encouragement she needed. She sat forward.

"Just because Muggles can't use magic doesn't mean they're stupid."

"I agree."

"They have simply developed different ways of doing things."

"I know."

"But some of these children honestly believe Muggles are barely more intelligent than animals."

Remus grimaced. "Unfortunately, yes."

"One girl asked me if Muggle babies hatch from eggs."

Remus stared at her. Shevonne nodded emphatically.

"Eggs." He pressed his lips together.

"And another student asked if Muggles eat their children when they get tired of having them around."

Remus lost the battle. He laughed. Shevonne glared at him.

"It isn't funny."

"I'm sorry." He tried to stop laughing. "I really am."

Shevonne folded her arms. "I don't see what's so funny."

"The idea of Muggles eating their children is..." He couldn't finish.

Shevonne's eyes narrowed. Then something strange happened. The tips of her ears began to spark. Her hair lifted slightly around her shoulders as though a breeze had suddenly swept through the room. Remus's laughter stopped. He stared.

"Shey."

"What?"

"Your hair."

Shevonne looked confused. "What about it?"

"It's..." He struggled to find the right words. "Moving."

She looked toward the nearest window. It was closed. "There isn't any wind."

"I know."

She stared at him. Then down at her hands.

"What is happening?"

Remus stepped closer. Her hair settled. The faint sparks disappeared.

"You were angry."

"Very."

"I think your magic reacted."

Shevonne stared at him. "I don't have magic."

Remus smiled gently. "Perhaps not in the way witches and wizards do." He stepped closer and placed a hand gently on her shoulder. "Easy, Shey."

Neither of them seemed to notice the nickname. Shevonne closed her eyes and took a slow breath. His touch immediately calmed her. More than it should have. More than she understood.

She sighed. "I'm tired of them being taught lies."

Remus's hand remained on her shoulder. "I understand." He gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze. "Unfortunately, those lies have been passed from one generation to another for centuries."

Shevonne opened her eyes. "And nobody has thought to correct them?"

"Some have." His expression became thoughtful. "But prejudice is difficult to remove once people have been taught it from childhood."

Shevonne nodded reluctantly. "I suppose that's true."

Remus moved behind her. Without thinking, he placed both hands gently on her shoulders. Shevonne stiffened for only a second, then relaxed. His fingers worked slowly along the muscles at the base of her neck.

She hadn't realized how tense she was until he began easing the knots. "Oh."

Remus smiled. "Better?"

"Much." She closed her eyes.

His hands were warm, steady, comforting, and there was something else. That familiar sensation. Only this time, it wasn't a jolt. It was a gentle hum beneath her skin. A quiet awareness of him.

"Your magic likes this," she murmured.

Remus's hands paused. "What?"

She smiled without opening her eyes. "What you're doing." He resumed the massage.

"Apparently."

Shevonne leaned back slightly into his hands. The headache that had been pounding behind her eyes began to fade and she sighed.

"Sorry for ranting."

"You don't have to apologize."

"I've been doing it for nearly an hour."

"I don't mind." His voice was quiet. "I'm happy to listen whenever you need someone to listen."

She opened her eyes. He was looking down at her. Something passed between them. Something neither could quite name. Then Remus smiled.

"Would you like to take a walk around the lake?"

Shevonne considered it. "Fresh air?"

"Fresh air."

"That actually sounds wonderful."

He stepped back and she rose from her chair.

"Give me a minute."

"Take your time."

She grabbed her coat and together, they left the classroom. The moment they stepped outside, Shevonne felt the cool autumn air against her face. She breathed deeply. The air smelled of leaves and damp earth.

The grounds were beautiful. The lake reflected the gray afternoon sky, its surface broken occasionally by a gentle ripple. They walked side by side. For a while, neither spoke. They didn't need to.

Shevonne found herself enjoying the simple comfort of having him beside her. Eventually, Remus glanced toward her.

"Feeling any better?"

"Yes." She smiled. "The headache is still there, but it's much better."

"Madam Pomfrey can give you something."

She shook her head. "I try not to take medication unless I absolutely have to."

Remus looked concerned. "Why?"

Shevonne hesitated. "When I was younger, I had terrible headaches. What Muggles call migraines." He listened carefully. "I was on medication for a long time. Eventually, it stopped working."

"I'm sorry."

"My doctor eventually discovered I had a hormonal imbalance." She shrugged. "Once we corrected that, the headaches became much less frequent."

"And now?"

"Now I keep medication with me in case one becomes severe." She glanced at him. "But I try not to take anything unless I really need it."

Remus nodded. "If it gets worse, Madam Pomfrey can help."

"I'll remember that."

They continued walking. After several minutes, Shevonne smiled over at him a little shyly.

"You helped."

Remus glanced at her. "What?"

"When you rubbed my neck." He stopped walking. She stopped too. "It really helped."

She looked down, suddenly shy. "Actually, quite a lot."

Remus stepped closer. "Are you sure you're feeling all right?"

"Yes."

He reached out and gently touched her chin. She looked up. Their eyes met. The familiar sensation returned. A soft, comforting glow that seemed to settle around them.

Remus's thumb brushed lightly against her cheek. Neither spoke. He leaned toward her. Slowly. Giving her every opportunity to step away. She didn't.

His lips brushed hers. Barely a kiss. More a question than an answer.

Shevonne closed her eyes. A soft sigh escaped her. The moment was over almost before it began. Remus pulled back slightly. His eyes searched hers.

"Was that all right?"

Shevonne smiled. "Yes."

He smiled back. "Good."

For a few moments they simply stood there. Then Remus took her hand and tucked it gently into the crook of his arm.

They continued walking. Neither mentioned the kiss. They didn't need to. It was there between them. Something new, something fragile, something neither wanted to frighten away by moving too quickly.

By the time they returned to the castle, Shevonne realized her headache was almost completely gone. They stopped outside her classroom.

"Thank you for the walk."

"I enjoyed it."

"I did too." She hesitated, then smiled. "I think I needed that."

"So did I."

There was a brief silence, then Remus cleared his throat.

"Goodnight, Shevonne."

"Goodnight, Remus."

She entered her classroom and the door closed behind her. Remus stood in the corridor for several seconds. Then he smiled. He had no idea where this was going. He didn't know what their connection meant. He didn't know how powerful it might become. But for the first time in a very long time, he was looking forward to the future. And that, more than anything, felt like a miracle.

CHAPTER 14

The headaches kept returning. Shevonne had hoped it was an isolated occurrence. She had blamed exhaustion, stress, and perhaps the sheer amount of information she had been trying to absorb since arriving at Hogwarts, however, they had continued to occur. The one she was currently experiencing felt different. It seemed more intense. It began shortly after lunch as a dull pressure behind her eyes and by the time her afternoon class ended, it had settled firmly at the base of her skull.

Shevonne stood behind her desk, waiting for the last of her students to leave.

"Professor?"

She looked up. One of the younger students was still standing beside the door.

"Yes?"

"Are you alright?"

Shevonne forced a smile. "I'm fine, I just have a bad headache."

The boy looked concerned. "My mum gets those, she says they're awful."

Shevonne smiled despite herself. "Your mother is absolutely right."

The boy nodded solemnly. "She usually is." The boy answered and then hurried out.

Shevonne waited until the door closed before letting her smile disappear and pressing her fingertips against her temples. She had medication in her desk, but she didn't want to take it.

The headaches had been much less frequent since her hormonal imbalance had been corrected years ago and she had become accustomed to dealing with the occasional one having learned what usually triggered them. Stress, lack of sleep, too much work, too much noise. Nothing mysterious, at least, that's what she had always believed.

A knock sounded at the door and Shevonne closed her eyes. "If you're another student, I'm hiding."

The door opened. "It isn't."

Shevonne looked up and Remus stood in the doorway.

She smiled despite the pounding in her head. "Hello."

He studied her for a moment. "Headache?"

She sighed. "Am I really that obvious?"

"Only to someone who's been paying attention."

He crossed the room. "How bad?"

"Manageable."

"That's not an answer."

She smiled faintly. "Seven."

His expression immediately changed. Remus was well aware of the Muggle pain scale. "Seven?"

"It's not unbearable."

"That's still a seven."

She shrugged. "I've had worse."

"That does not make the fact that it is a seven any less worrying." He looked at the desk. "Have you taken anything?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"Because I don't like taking medication unless I have to."

Remus was quiet for a moment, then he said, "I think you should see Harry."

She frowned. "Harry?"

"Harry Potter."

She stared at him. "The Harry Potter?"

Remus's mouth twitched. "Yes, there is only one that I know of."

She gave him a skeptical look. "Why should I see Harry Potter about my headaches?"

"Because he is a healer, one of the best in fact."

"Why does that sentence sound like something I should have known?"

"You've only been in the magical world a short time, you're not expected to know everything."

She laughed softly, then winced and pressed her fingers against her temple.

Remus's expression became serious again. "He has his own practice and I'm sure he could help you."

Shevonne looked at him. "Harry Potter has a medical practice?"

"He is the equivalent of a Muggle Doctor, and even uses some Muggle techniques in his practice, but in the magical world it is called a healing practice instead of a medical practice. His practice is in Hogsmeade."

That caught her attention. "He's close?"

"Very."

She hesitated. "Does he see people who aren't magical?"

"He's treated Muggles before."

Shevonne looked down at her desk. "I don't want to make a fuss."

"You're not making a fuss."

"I'm having a headache."

"Headaches that are becoming more frequent."

She looked up. He was watching her with that quiet concern she was rapidly becoming accustomed to. "You've noticed?"

"Of course I've noticed."

Shevonne sighed. "You worry too much."

"I've been told."

She smiled. "By Sirius?"

"Frequently."

That earned a small laugh. Remus reached across the desk and squeezed her hand. "Let Harry look at you."

She looked down at their joined hands. "All right."

His expression softened. "Good."

Harry Potter's practice was nothing like Shevonne had imagined. She had expected something grand. An imposing stone building with elaborate magical symbols carved above the door, or maybe a waiting room filled with nervous witches and wizards.

Instead, the building looked almost disappointingly ordinary. It stood on a quiet street in Hogsmeade, tucked between a bookshop and a small tea shop. A modest brass plaque beside the door read:

H. J. Potter
Healer

Shevonne stared at it. "That's it?"

Remus smiled. "That's it."

She looked at him. "I was expecting something more..."

"Grand?"

"Yes."

Remus laughed. "Most people do."

Before she could respond, the door opened and a dark-haired man stood there. He was older than the photographs Shevonne had seen in books, though, somehow, he looked younger than she had expected. His hair was still untidy, his glasses were slightly crooked and his expression was warm.

"Remus."

"Harry."

The two men shook hands before Harry pulled Remus into a quick hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too." Harry's eyes shifted to Shevonne. "Hello." He smiled. "You must be Shevonne."

She nodded. "Yes."

"Harry Potter."

"I know."

He laughed. "Right. Sorry."

She smiled. "I suppose you get that a lot."

"More than you'd think." He stepped aside. "Come in."

Shevonne followed him inside.

The practice was surprisingly comfortable. There were several chairs along one wall, shelves filled with books and potion bottles, and a reception desk that looked almost entirely ordinary except for the quill writing on its own. Shevonne stared at it.

Harry glanced toward the reception desk. “That was Hermione's idea.”

“Of course it was,” Remus said, grinning at the younger man.

“She says I'm terrible at paperwork.”

“Is she wrong?”

Harry considered the question. “No.”

Shevonne glanced around the room again. Everything was remarkably organized. The books were arranged neatly, the potion bottles were labeled, and even the quill at the reception desk seemed to know exactly what it was doing.

“You know,” she said, “for someone who just admitted he's terrible at paperwork, this place is surprisingly organized.”

Harry laughed.

“That's because Hermione refuses to let me run it by myself.”

Shevonne looked at him. “Hermione?”

“My wife.”

Shevonne's eyebrows rose. “Oh.”

Harry smiled. “I probably should have mentioned that when I said it was her idea.”

“I suppose you should.”

Remus chuckled from his chair.

“Harry and Hermione have been married for several years.”

Shevonne looked between them. “I didn't realize.”

“There's a lot about us you haven't had time to learn yet,” Harry said.

“Apparently.”

Harry glanced toward the enchanted quill. “Hermione keeps the practice functioning. I heal people. She makes sure I remember that healing people requires paperwork.”

Shevonne laughed. “So, she's the sensible one.”

Harry didn't hesitate. “Absolutely.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “At least you learned that early.”

Harry grinned. “I value my continued existence.”

Shevonne laughed, and some of the lingering tension she'd felt since entering the practice finally eased. Something about him was immediately easy to be around. He didn't seem like the legendary Harry Potter. He seemed like a man who had accidentally become famous and still hadn't entirely figured out how to be comfortable with it.

Harry glanced at Remus. "How long have the headaches been becoming more frequent?" Harry asked, shifting into healer mode.

"Several weeks," Remus said.

"Years, technically." Shevonne corrected.

Harry looked at her. "Years?"

"I've had them since I was young. When I was eighteen, it was discovered that I had a hormonal imbalance and that was corrected with medication. After that the headaches were better. I still had them occasionally, but nothing like before the hormonal imbalance was fixed."

Harry nodded in understanding. "Estrogen imbalance?” He asked.

“Estrogen and progesterone.” She answered.

“Damn. So are you on supplements to correct the imbalances?”

“I was for several years, but my doctor felt that it would be ok for me to go off of them once my levels had remained stable for a couple of years.”

“So, now the headaches are back and have become more frequent recently?"

"Yes."

Harry's expression became thoughtful. "All right. Let's have a look. We'll check your levels first, start there. Sound good?"

Shevonne nodded her agreement and Harry gestured toward an examination room. "Don't worry. It's painless." He quipped.

Shevonne raised an eyebrow. "That's exactly what doctors say before doing something unpleasant."

Harry laughed. "I solemnly swear, I’m telling the truth." He said and Remus broke out in laughter.

“Do I even want to know?” she asked, but the only answer she got was the two men sharing a mischievous grin.

Sighing, she followed Healer Potter into the exam room while Remus remained outside.

Shevonne glanced toward the door. "He's not coming?"

Harry shook his head. "I thought you might prefer a little privacy."

She smiled. "Thank you."

Harry gestured toward the chair. "Sit."

She sat and he drew his wand. "This is going to feel slightly strange."

"Everything in this world feels slightly strange."

"Fair point."

He began the diagnostic spell and a set of numbers appeared in the air. “Well, your hormone levels seem to be okay, so now I’m going to move on to a more in-depth scan.” Harry told her and began waving his wand once again.

Harry lowered his wand slightly, his expression thoughtful. "That's unusual."

Shevonne frowned. "That's healer-speak for something is wrong, isn't it?"

"Not necessarily." He glanced at the faint readings still hovering in the air. "Your hormone levels are normal, and I can't find anything physically wrong that would explain the headaches."

"Then what is it?"

Harry hesitated. "There's something interfering with the diagnostic."

Shevonne blinked. "Interfering?"

"Yes. The spell should give me a much clearer picture of what's happening inside you. Instead, there's something preventing it from reading certain areas properly."

"Is that bad?"

"I don't know yet."

She stared at him. "You really like those three words, don't you?"

Harry smiled faintly. "Unfortunately, they're the honest ones."

He raised his wand again and repeated the diagnostic, this time moving much more slowly. The blue light passed over her head, shoulders, and arms before fading almost completely. When he reached the center of her chest, however, the spell changed.

A faint silver shimmer appeared beneath her skin making Harry stop.

Shevonne instinctively placed a hand over the spot. "What was that?"

"I don't know."

"Harry."

He lowered his wand and studied her carefully. "I've seen magical interference before. I've seen shielding charms, concealment spells, protective enchantments, even cursed objects affecting a person's readings. This isn't behaving like any of those."

"Then what is it doing?"

"I think something is blocking the diagnostic from reaching whatever is causing that shimmer."

He performed the spell again. The same thing happened. The diagnostic passed normally over most of her body, then weakened dramatically around her chest and head before producing that strange silver shimmer.

Harry's expression grew more serious.

"How long did you say you have experienced the headaches?"

"Since I was young. They became much better after my hormone problems were treated, but they've never completely disappeared."

"How young?”

“As far back as I can remember.”

“And the strange sensations you've described?"

"The tingling?"

"Yes."

She nodded. "Again, for as long as I can remember."

Harry’s expression became thoughtful. "Can you remember when it happens?"

She frowned, trying to think. "Not really. Sometimes it just happens."

"What are you usually doing when you notice it?"

"I don't know. Nothing unusual."

"Are you usually alone?"

She hesitated. "Not always."

"Do you remember anyone being with you?"

She thought for a moment. "Professor McGonagall."

Harry's eyebrows rose slightly. "Professor McGonagall?"

"Yes. I've noticed it around her a few times."

"Anyone else?"

She shook her head, then stopped. "Remus."

Harry looked at her carefully. "When you're around Remus?"

"Sometimes."

She frowned. "But I don't understand why. I didn't even know magic existed until Professor McGonagall sent me that letter."

Harry was quiet for a moment.

"That's important."

"Why?"

"Because it means you aren't consciously associating these sensations with magic. You couldn't have been."

She looked confused and Harry glanced down at the fading diagnostic readings.

"If you've been experiencing them for years, long before you knew anything about our world, then whatever is causing them isn't something you've learned to recognize. It's a physical response to something."

"Something magical?"

Harry hesitated. "Possibly."

Shevonne swallowed. "But how could I have reacted to magic before I even knew it was real?"

Harry's expression tightened slightly. "That's exactly what I want to find out. Because if the headaches and the sensations are connected, then whatever is interfering with my diagnostic may have been there much longer than any of us realized."

"Could whatever this interference is be causing the headaches?" Shevonne asked.

"It could be contributing to them."

"Is it dangerous?"

Harry considered the question carefully.

"I don't see any immediate evidence that you're in danger. But I don't want to pretend I understand something that I can't properly examine."

Shevonne appreciated his honesty. "So, what do we do?"

"For now, I want you to keep track of the headaches. When they happen, how severe they are, what you were doing beforehand, and whether you experience that tingling sensation at the same time."

"And then?"

"I want to run another diagnostic if they continue."

Shevonne nodded slowly.

"You're not going to tell me I'm imagining all of this?"

Harry smiled. "No. You're definitely not imagining it."

That answer somehow made her feel better. He lowered his wand and gave her a reassuring look.

"Whatever is interfering with the diagnostic, we'll figure it out. But I don't want to make assumptions before I have enough information."

Shevonne nodded. "All right."

Harry opened the door and motioned for her to exit before him. "And Shevonne?"

She looked back.

"If the headaches become more severe, or if that sensation changes in any way, come back and see me."

"I will." She gave him a small smile. "Thank you, Harry."

"You're welcome."

As Shevonne stepped back into the waiting room, Harry remained where he was for several seconds, staring at the diagnostic readings still fading from the air. There was something inside

her that his magic could not properly see. and whatever it was, it had been there for a very long time.

Remus was on his feet the instant the examination-room door opened.

His eyes went immediately to Shevonne, searching her face before Harry had even stepped fully into the waiting room behind her.

“How is she?”

Harry closed the door quietly behind them.

“She’s all right,” he said.

Remus’s shoulders relaxed slightly, but the concern in his expression remained.

Shevonne gave him a small smile. “I survived.”

“That’s reassuring.”

Harry glanced between them. “Her basic physical readings are normal. Her hormone levels are normal, and I didn't find anything that would explain the headaches from a conventional medical standpoint.”

Remus frowned. “But?”

Harry hesitated, looking at Shevonne, not sure if she wanted him to share his findings with Remus. She nodded her agreement and he continued. “But there’s something interfering with the diagnostic.”

Shevonne folded her arms. “You said that in the examination room.”

“I know.” Harry pulled out his wand and turned it thoughtfully between his fingers. “I’m trying to explain it without making assumptions.”

Remus gave him a knowing look. “That's usually when you start worrying.”

“I’m not worried.”

“You're doing the face.”

Harry frowned. “What face?”

“The one where you're trying to figure out something you don't understand.”

Shevonne glanced between them. “He does have a face.”

Harry sighed. “Wonderful. Apparently, my reputation as a reassuring healer is completely ruined.”

That earned a small laugh from Shevonne, but Harry's expression became serious again.

“The diagnostic should have given me a much clearer picture,” he continued. “Instead, there are portions of the examination I simply can't read properly. It's almost as though something is obscuring them.”

“Something magical?” Remus asked.

“Possibly.”

Shevonne looked at him. “And that's connected to my headaches?”

“I don't know.” Harry paused. “It could be. It could also be completely separate. I don't want to tell you there's a connection when I don't have enough evidence yet.”

Shevonne nodded slowly.

“There is something else,” Harry said.

Shevonne looked at him.

“The tingling you described.”

Her expression changed immediately.

“What about it?”

“You told me it happens around certain people or objects. Sometimes when magic is being used.”

Shevonne nodded. “Sometimes.”

Harry glanced at Remus before looking back at her.

“But you also told me that you've experienced it since you were young.”

“Yes.”

“Before you came to Hogwarts?”

“Yes.”

“Before you knew magic existed?”

Shevonne gave him a puzzled look. “Of course. I didn't know magic was real until Professor McGonagall sent me that letter.”

Harry nodded slowly. “Okay, that rules out something I initially considered.”

Shevonne waited.

“If you had only started experiencing the sensation after you learned about magic, I might have wondered whether your mind had simply begun associating a particular physical response with magical activity. But that's not what happened.”

Shevonne frowned. “No. I've had it for years.”

“Exactly.” Harry lowered his wand. “You couldn't have learned to associate the sensation with magic when you didn't know magic existed.”

Remus's expression had become thoughtful. “So, what does that mean?” he asked.

Harry considered his answer carefully.

“It means the sensation appears to be a genuine response to something. I just don't know what.”

“Something magical?” Shevonne asked.

“That's one possibility.”

“But if I didn't know magic existed, how could I have been reacting to it?”

Harry looked at her for a long moment. “That,” he said quietly, “is the question I don't have an answer for yet.”

Shevonne sighed. “I was afraid you were going to say that.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t want to give you answers that just aren’t true.”

She looked toward Remus and then back to Harry. “I know, I was just hoping for an easy explanation.”

Remus reached for her hand. “We're learning things about you that no one expected to find.”

Harry nodded. “And that's why I don't want to jump to conclusions.”

Shevonne's fingers tightened around Remus's.

“Remus told me when he set up this appointment that you have muggle medication to take when you have a severe headache. Is that correct?”

Shevonne nodded.

“What medication is it?”

“Sumatriptan.” Shevonne answered.

“All right, that is a pretty good one, however, there is a potion that is more effective. It hasn’t been on the market long so I doubt Poppy knows about it yet. I will get a few doses for you and send them up to the castle. If the headaches become significantly worse, if you experience dizziness, confusion, changes in your vision, or if that tingling becomes stronger or changes in character, come back to me immediately.”

“I will.”

Harry looked at Remus. “And don't let her brush it off if something changes.”

Remus gave him a dry look. “I wasn't planning to.”

“I know. I'm just making sure.”

Shevonne smiled slightly. “You two are very protective.”

Remus squeezed her hand.

Harry smiled, “Hermione calls it my saving people thing.” He said with a chuckle, but then his expression once more became thoughtful.

“There is one other thing I'd like to do.”

Shevonne looked at him.

“Once I've had time to review today's readings, I'd like to run another diagnostic. Not today. I don't want to keep probing at something I can't properly see without first figuring out why the first diagnostic was blocked.”

“That makes sense. You are very careful with your answers.” Shevonne commented.

“I've learned the hard way that guessing isn't particularly helpful when someone's health is involved.”

Shevonne smiled. “I appreciate that.”

Harry returned the smile. “And Shevonne?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t be stubborn, take your medication.”

“Yes, Healer Potter.” She said and then glaring at Remus muttered. “Tattle Tale!”

Harry burst into laughter at the not so innocent face Remus tried to pull off but didn’t quite manage.

As they left Harry’s office, Shevonne slipped her hand into Remus's. Harry watched them leave, then looked back toward the examination room. The diagnostic readings had already faded, but the question remained. There was something about Shevonne that his healing magic could not see and whatever it was, it had not appeared recently, it had been there for years.

CHAPTER 15

Shevonne had spent much of Saturday evening thinking about what Harry had told her.

She had gone to bed with the uncomfortable knowledge that there was something inside her that even a highly skilled magical healer couldn't properly see. Yet, despite that unsettling revelation, she had slept better than she had in weeks.

When she woke Sunday morning, the headache was almost completely gone. The relief was welcome, but it didn't erase the questions Harry had left her with.

Whatever was interfering with his diagnostic had been there for years. And now Shevonne couldn't stop wondering what else about herself she had never known.

Shevonne had barely finished getting dressed when the castle bells began announcing breakfast. She considered ignoring them for approximately thirty seconds. Then her stomach growled.

"Fine," she muttered. "You win."

Patches gave her a disapproving look from the foot of the bed. Shevonne laughed and headed toward the Great Hall.

The castle felt different on Sundays. There was less urgency in the corridors. Students wandered about in groups, talking loudly and laughing, apparently grateful for a day without lessons. The

older students looked particularly relaxed, and Shevonne suspected that several of them had been awake far later than they should have been.

When she entered the Great Hall, she spotted Remus immediately. He was already seated at the staff table. Their eyes met and that familiar warmth moved through her.

She smiled. Remus returned the smile, and for a moment the noise of the Great Hall seemed to fade. Then Sirius leaned across Remus.

"Are you two going to stare at each other all morning, or are you actually going to eat?"

Shevonne's cheeks warmed and Remus looked thoroughly embarrassed. Sirius grinned.

"Good morning to you too, Sirius," Shevonne said, taking her customary seat between the two men.

"Good morning."

She reached for the tea.

"How are you feeling?" Remus asked quietly.

"Much better."

"Headache?"

"Almost completely gone."

His expression relaxed. "I'm glad."

Shevonne smiled. "Thank you."

Sirius glanced between them. "For what?"

Shevonne and Remus exchanged a quick look. "Nothing," they said together.

Sirius's grin widened. "Of course."

Shevonne shook her head. "You're insufferable."

"I've been told that before."

"Frequently, I imagine."

"Usually by Minnie."

Remus chuckled. That led naturally into a discussion of Sirius's school days. It wasn't long, until the two men were reminiscing about their time at Hogwarts. Shevonne listened with growing amusement.

They talked about teachers they had annoyed, rules they had broken, and places they had explored that students were definitely not supposed to explore. Shevonne eventually looked at Sirius.

"Did your group always play pranks together?"

Sirius's expression immediately became mischievous. "Oh, no."

Remus groaned. "Don't."

"What?"

"I know that look."

"What look?"

"The look that usually precedes a story I wish I hadn't heard."

Shevonne laughed. "Now I definitely want to hear it."

Sirius leaned back, clearly delighted that he had an audience. "All right. Fifth year, I think."

"That narrows it down," Remus muttered.

Sirius ignored him. "I convinced the house-elves to help me with a little breakfast entertainment."

"A little?" Remus repeated.

Sirius smiled innocently.

"We charmed everyone's drinks."

Shevonne raised an eyebrow. "Everyone's?"

"Students. Professors. Anyone who happened to drink something that morning."

"What did the charm do?"

Sirius's grin became enormous. "When the clock tower struck the half hour, anyone who had drunk something suddenly developed a bright red clown nose."

Shevonne stared at him. "A clown nose?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"They honked whenever you touched them."

Shevonne burst out laughing and Remus covered his face with one hand.

"Please tell me you didn't..."

"Oh, I did." Sirius looked delighted.

"Even James and Remus fell victim to it."

Shevonne looked at Remus. "You?"

Remus sighed. "I was sixteen."

"That's not an excuse."

"I was a victim."

"Apparently."

Sirius continued. "The best part was that no one knew where the spell had come from."

Shevonne looked suspiciously at him. "Because you weren't there?"

"Exactly."

"You planned the prank and then conveniently didn't show up?"

"I was suddenly feeling ill that morning."

Remus snorted. "You were hiding in an alcove outside the Great Hall."

Sirius pointed at him. "Which you only knew because you followed me."

"I was trying to figure out what you were doing."

"Exactly."

Shevonne shook her head. "You two were trouble."

"We were charming," Sirius corrected.

"You were trouble."

"Charming trouble."

Remus nodded. "That is probably the most accurate description."

Sirius was about to launch into another story when a voice came from directly behind him.

“Sirius Black.”

The entire table went quiet.

Sirius froze.

Shevonne slowly turned.

Minerva McGonagall stood behind him, one eyebrow raised, her expression caught somewhere between disapproval and amusement.

Sirius swallowed. “Good morning, Minnie.”

McGonagall's eyebrow rose higher. “Do not Minnie me.”

Shevonne pressed her lips together. Sirius looked remarkably like a sixteen-year-old boy who had just been caught doing something he knew he shouldn't have been doing.

“We were discussing an old prank,” he explained.

“I gathered that.”

Her gaze moved from Sirius to Remus. “How unfortunate for you that Remus remembers things.”

Remus smiled into his tea. “I remember quite a lot.”

Sirius gave him an injured look. “Traitor.”

“You were the one hiding outside the Great Hall.”

“I was conducting surveillance.”

McGonagall folded her arms. “You were hiding.”

Sirius sighed. “Yes, Professor.”

“And you expect me to believe you were not responsible for the incident with the drinks?”

“Technically—”

“Do not say technically.”

Sirius closed his mouth. Shevonne couldn't help smiling.

McGonagall noticed. “You find this amusing, Miss Alexander?”

Shevonne immediately straightened. “No Ma’am, I'm sorry.”

McGonagall's expression softened.

“Don't apologize. I suppose it is rather amusing now.”

She looked back at Sirius. “It wasn't particularly amusing when half the Great Hall suddenly developed red noses.”

Sirius winced. “They were very impressive noses.”

Remus groaned. “Sirius.”

“What? They were.”

McGonagall gave him a long look. “I spent the better part of the day trying to determine who had enchanted the drinks and I had that blasted nose the rest of the day.”

Sirius's smile slowly returned. “Then perhaps you should have asked me.”

McGonagall stared at him. “Sirius, I knew it was you.”

His smile disappeared. “You knew?”

“Of course I knew.”

“Then why didn't you say anything?”

A faint smile touched the corner of McGonagall's mouth. “Because you were sixteen, Black. And I thought watching you spend an entire day trying not to laugh every time someone honked was punishment enough.”

Remus and Shevonne burst out laughing.

Sirius stared at her in disbelief. “You knew the entire time?”

“I knew enough.” She turned as though she intended to leave, then paused. “Although I will admit one thing.”

Sirius looked suspicious. “What?”

McGonagall's expression softened. “You were always very good at making people laugh.”

Sirius blinked. For once, he had no immediate answer.

McGonagall gave him a small, almost imperceptible smile. “It is a quality you should not underestimate.”

Sirius looked down at his plate, suddenly quieter. “Thank you, Professor.”

She nodded. “You're welcome.”

She took several steps away before stopping. Without turning around, she added, “And Sirius?”

“Yes?”

“Well done.” She gave him a quick wink and continued toward the doors.

Sirius stared after her and for several seconds, nobody spoke. Then he looked at Shevonne.

“Did she just compliment me?”

Shevonne smiled. “She did.”

Remus nodded. “Definitely.”

Sirius shook his head slowly. “That's the nicest thing she's said to me in twenty-five years.”

Shevonne laughed again, and Remus joined her. Sirius looked between them, pretending to be offended.

“I'm beginning to think I've made a terrible mistake letting you two spend time together.”

“Too late,” Shevonne said.

Sirius grinned. “That's what I was afraid of.”

For the first time since arriving at Hogwarts, Shevonne realized she was beginning to belong. Not just as a professor, but as part of this strange little family of people. And she liked it.

Eventually, breakfast ended and the three of them left the Great Hall together, but Sirius headed toward the courtyard while Shevonne and Remus continued down the corridor.

"Would you like to have tea with me this afternoon, around three o'clock?" Remus asked.

Shevonne smiled. "I would love to and three o'clock sounds good."

"I'll come find you."

"I'll be ready."

Their eyes met. Remus smiled, then they went their separate ways.

Shevonne intended to spend the morning relaxing. Instead, she reorganized her classroom. It started innocently enough. She moved two desks, then three, then she decided the entire room needed to be rearranged. By the time she stepped back to examine her work, she had created a completely different classroom.

The space felt warmer, more inviting. Less like a traditional classroom and more like somewhere students might actually want to spend time.

She smiled. "Much better."

After lunch, she sat down to work on the following week's lessons. Her plan was to prepare one lesson. One. Instead, she began reading a chapter about wizarding social customs. Then another, then she found a reference to an old wizarding tradition and became curious about its origins. An hour later, she had completely forgotten about the lesson plan.

She was several pages into the book when the classroom door opened and she looked up to see Remus stood there. "Ready for tea?"

She glanced at the clock. "Oh, my goodness."

He smiled. "I take it you lost track of time."

"I completely did."

"What were you working on?"

She gestured toward the mountain of books. "I started preparing lessons on the differences between Muggle and magical culture."

"And?"

"Then I started reading about magical culture."

"And?"

She sighed. "The lesson plans went out the window."

Remus laughed. "I think that happens to everyone occasionally."

He stepped farther into the room. "Perhaps tea and something to eat will help get you back on track."

Shevonne smiled. "You may have a point. Shall we?"

Remus held out his arm. "We shall."

She took his arm and as they toward his rooms, and Shevonne realized she was becoming comfortable with his presence. She no longer felt nervous every time he touched her. Instead, she found herself wanting him closer. That realization made her smile.

"What?" Remus asked.

"Nothing."

"That smile says otherwise."

"I was just thinking that I'm getting better at finding my way around this castle."

"Good." He smiled. "Because we're almost there."

A few moments later, they stopped outside his quarters. Shevonne looked surprised.

"That's it?"

Remus laughed. "That's it."

She looked down the corridor. "It's much closer than I expected."

"Most of the staff quarters are pretty close together."

She followed him inside. His quarters were larger than hers and surprisingly comfortable. There was nothing ostentatious about them. Bookshelves lined one wall. A comfortable sofa sat near the fireplace. Several armchairs were arranged around a small table.

There were photographs scattered around the room, and Shevonne noticed several that appeared to be of Remus with Sirius and James She glanced at one photograph. The four Marauders were much younger. James was laughing, Sirius was making some sort of ridiculous face, Peter stood beside them, and Remus...Remus looked happy.

Shevonne looked at him. "You were very young."

"We were."

She returned her attention to the photograph. "You look happy."

Remus was quiet for a moment. "We were."

Something in his voice told her there was much more to the story. She didn't push.

He gestured toward the sofa. "Sit."

Shevonne sat and he settled beside her. Then he called, "Bitsy."

A small creature suddenly appeared beside the table startling Shevonne. The little being had enormous eyes and batlike ears.

"Professor Wolfie called Bitsy."

Shevonne immediately covered her mouth. Remus closed his eyes.

"Bitsy."

"Yes, Professor Wolfie?"

"We're ready for tea."

"Of course, Professor Wolfie."

Bitsy snapped her fingers and a beautiful floral tea set appeared on the table along with a tray of small sandwiches and pastries.

Shevonne stared. "This is amazing." Bitsy beamed.

"Bitsy is pleased."

"Thank you, Bitsy."

The house-elf smiled. "Professor Wolfie and pretty lady are welcome."

Shevonne's eyes widened. Remus's ears turned red.

"Thank you, Bitsy."

The elf disappeared, and then she looked at him.

"Professor Wolfie?"

Remus sighed. "All the elves call me that."

Shevonne laughed. "I think it's adorable."

"I've tried to convince them to call me Remus."

"Apparently without success."

"Apparently."

She poured herself some tea. "I've read about house-elves."

Remus nodded.

"Bitsy is the first one I've met."

"They're fascinating creatures."

"Do they really draw their strength from being bonded to magical people?"

"Not exactly." He settled back.

"They have powerful magic of their own. They can apparate without restrictions that apply to witches and wizards, for example."

Shevonne looked fascinated.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"But they need a magical bond?"

"They need a connection to magic to thrive. The elves here are bonded to Hogwarts herself."

Shevonne looked around. "So, Hogwarts takes care of them?"

"In a way." He smiled. "They take care of her too."

Shevonne liked that answer. "Are all house-elves treated well?"

Remus's expression became more serious. "Unfortunately, no."

He explained that some house-elves were mistreated by wizarding families.

"Those elves often don't live nearly as long as they should."

Shevonne frowned. "That's awful."

"It is."

"If they're capable of choosing their own lives, why don't more people let them?"

"Tradition."

Shevonne shook her head. "That word seems to excuse a lot of terrible things."

Remus looked at her. "You're going to fit in very well here."

She smiled. "I'll take that as a compliment."

"It was."

They returned to lighter conversation then.

"How old is Bitsy?"

"I'm not certain." Remus thought. "Some of the Hogwarts elves have been here for generations."

"That's incredible."

"Harry and Hermione have an elf who's nearly two hundred years old."

Shevonne's eyes widened.

"Two hundred?"

"Almost."

She laughed. "I can't imagine living that long."

"Neither can I, but witches and wizards do tend to live longer than Muggles"

She looked at him. "How old are you?"

He smiled. "Forty-one."

She nearly choked on her tea. "You're forty-one?"

"Yes."

She stared at him. "I thought you were in your mid-to-late thirties."

He laughed. "I'll take that as a compliment."

"Oh, it was." She smiled sheepishly. "When's your birthday?"

"March tenth."

"Mine is June thirtieth."

"And how old did you turn?"

She groaned. "Thirty."

"That's not old."

"It felt old."

"Wait until forty."

She pointed at him. "Don't you dare."

He laughed and Shevonne settled more comfortably into the sofa.

"Two of my friends convinced me to go out for my birthday."

"Did you have fun?"

"I had a little too much fun."

His eyebrows rose.

"I rarely drink."

"But?"

"But apparently turning thirty caused me to temporarily lose all common sense."

Remus smiled. "What happened?"

"I got drunk."

He laughed.

"Very drunk."

"How drunk?"

Shevonne considered. "Drunk enough that the next morning I spent several hours convinced I was dying."

"That sounds unpleasant."

"It was."

She smiled. "But I survived."

"Obviously."

"Fortunately."

Their conversation wandered from birthdays to childhood memories, then from childhood memories to favorite books. They both loved history and disagreed about some wizarding historical events. They discovered they both enjoyed classic American rock.

"Seriously?"

Shevonne looked delighted.

"Seriously."

"Who is your favorite band?"

"Journey."

Shevonne laughed. "Journey?"

"Absolutely."

"My favorite is Lynyrd Skynyrd."

Remus smiled. "I suppose we're going to have to agree to disagree."

"On this matter, yes."

He leaned back. "I think Journey wins."

"Absolutely not."

"Definitely."

"Never."

They both laughed. The argument was completely ridiculous. Neither cared. What mattered was that they were comfortable enough to argue about something so meaningless.

They talked for nearly four hours and Shevonne realized that somewhere along the way, she had stopped thinking about the strange connection between them. She was simply enjoying Remus' company.

His humor, his intelligence, his kindness, his stories and the way his eyes crinkled when he laughed. The way he listened when she spoke. The way he never made her feel foolish for asking questions about the wizarding world.

When they finally stood, Shevonne was surprised to realize how late it had become.

"I can't believe we've been talking for hours."

"Neither can I." Remus offered his arm and she took it.

He walked her back through to her rooms, neither of them spoke much. They didn't need to. At her classroom door, Shevonne turned toward him.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For this afternoon."

His expression softened. "I enjoyed it."

"So did I." She hesitated. "Very much."

Their eyes met and that now familiar warmth passed between them. But neither rushed to kiss the other. They simply stood there, allowing whatever was happening between them to develop at its own pace.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Remus said.

Shevonne smiled. "See you tomorrow."

He walked away and she watched him disappear around the corner. Then she stepped inside her classroom and closed the door.

She smiled to herself. Whatever this connection was becoming, she liked where it was taking them and she had a feeling Remus did too.

CHAPTER 16

The weeks that followed passed almost without Shevonne noticing. Somehow, without either of them ever formally deciding it, tea with Remus had become part of her routine.

At first, they had met once or twice a week, then somehow it became three times. Then there were evenings when one of them would simply appear at the other's door with a book under one arm and ask if they had time for tea. Neither of them seemed particularly interested in explaining when the arrangement had changed, it simply had.

Shevonne discovered that Remus preferred quiet evenings when he was tired. She learned that he took honey in his tea when he had been grading papers for too long, and that he hummed under his breath when he was reading something he particularly enjoyed.

Remus, in turn, learned that Shevonne became almost aggressively cheerful when she was nervous, that she talked to herself when she was concentrating, and that she had a tendency to forget her tea completely whenever she became absorbed in a book. He also learned that she could argue about history for hours and that was how they spent one particular afternoon.

Shevonne sat across from him in his quarters, her legs tucked beneath her as she held a book open in her lap.

"You cannot possibly believe that," she said.

Remus looked up from his own book.

"I absolutely can."

"You're defending a wizarding historical account written nearly a century after the event."

"It's a respected historical source."

"It's biased."

"Most historical sources are."

"Exactly."

He smiled. Shevonne narrowed her eyes.

"Don't smile at me."

"I'm not."

"You are."

"I'm merely enjoying the discussion."

"You're enjoying annoying me."

"That too."

Shevonne threw a folded piece of parchment at him. Remus caught it easily.

"Violence," he said solemnly. "And after I thought you were such a peaceful Muggle."

"History has taught me that occasionally violence is justified."

"Remind me never to get on your bad side."

She smiled. "Too late."

He laughed.

Shevonne paused. She still wasn't accustomed to the sound of his real laughter. Not the polite chuckle he used in the staff room or the quiet amusement he offered Sirius when his friend was being ridiculous. This was different, warm, unrestrained and it changed his entire face.

Shevonne realized she was staring.

"What?" Remus asked sounding puzzled.

"Nothing."

His eyebrow lifted. "That was convincing."

She smiled and looked back down at her book. "I was just thinking."

"About?"

She hesitated. "How different you look when you laugh."

His expression softened. "Different how?"

"Happier."

For a moment, neither of them spoke, then Remus looked down at his book.

"I suppose I am."

Something about the quiet way he said it made her chest tighten. Shevonne reached for her tea. It was cold and she grimaced.

Remus noticed. "You've done it again."

"Done what?"

"Forgotten your tea."

"I was busy."

"You've been busy for twenty minutes."

"History is demanding."

He picked up her cup. "Allow me."

She watched as he stood and walked toward the small fireplace where a kettle sat warming. A strange sense of comfort settled over her. It wasn't dramatic, there was no sudden rush of magic or inexplicable sensation, just Remus Lupin making her another cup of tea because he had noticed hers had gone cold. And somehow that meant more.

The following week, Shevonne found herself in the library after dinner, surrounded by books and parchment. She had promised herself she would spend only an hour researching material for her next Muggle Studies lesson. Two hours later, she was still there. She rubbed her eyes.

"You're going to give yourself a headache." Remus said from behind her making her jump.

She looked up at him. "Do you always sneak up on people?"

"Only historians who become so absorbed in their work that they forget the world exists."

"I wasn't aware I was that predictable."

"You are."

She smiled. "What are you doing here?"

"I was looking for a book."

"Which one?"

He glanced at the stack beside her. "Apparently, the same one you have."

She looked down. "You could have just asked."

"I considered it."

"And?"

"I rather like watching you work."

She stared at him. He seemed to realize how that sounded.

"I mean—"

"I know what you meant."

"Good."

She closed the book in front of her. "I think I've done enough for tonight."

Remus smiled. "Good."

She gathered her things, and they walked out of the library together. They moved slowly through the corridors, not because either of them had somewhere else to be, but simply because neither seemed in a hurry to reach the end.

The next few days brought more of the same.

Tea.

Books.

Arguments.

Laughter.

Quiet.

Some evenings they talked for hours, other evenings they barely spoke at all. Those were beginning to become Shevonne's favorites. That was something she had never expected to find in another person—the ability to sit beside someone without feeling the need to fill every silence.

With Remus, silence wasn't uncomfortable. It was companionship.

One evening, Shevonne sat curled into the corner of his sofa reading while Remus graded essays across from her. Neither had spoken for nearly half an hour. She turned a page and Remus scratched something onto a parchment.

The fire crackled and Shevonne looked up. He was concentrating so intently that a small crease had appeared between his eyebrows.

Sensing her eyes on him, he looked up. "What?"

"Nothing."

"You've been saying that a lot lately."

"Maybe you ask too many questions."

"Perhaps."

She returned to her book, but a few minutes later, when Remus reached for his tea and it was empty, Shevonne immediately picked up the pot and poured him another cup.

He looked at her. "Thank you."

"You were out."

"I noticed."

She handed him the cup and their fingers touched. The familiar warmth moved between them. Neither pulled away immediately. Remus looked at her hand, then at her.

"Does our connection bother you?" he asked.

"No."

His expression softened. "Good."

She withdrew her hand slowly and looked back at her book, but she wasn't reading anymore. She was thinking about how easily they had fallen into this. How natural it felt. How she had begun to know the little things about him without even realizing she was learning them. That was when she understood that something had changed, not suddenly, not dramatically, but quietly, one cup of tea at a time.

Sirius noticed before either of them admitted it. He arrived at Shevonne's classroom one afternoon without knocking and found her sorting papers at her desk.

"You're doing it again."

Shevonne looked up. "Doing what?"

"Smiling."

"I smile."

"Not like that."

She raised an eyebrow. "Like what?"

"Like someone who has a secret."

"I don't have a secret."

Sirius leaned against the doorframe. "Remus."

Shevonne sighed. "You're impossible."

"So, I've been told." He grinned and then his expression softened. "You're happy." The teasing had disappeared from his voice.

Shevonne nodded. "Yes."

Sirius studied her for a moment. "Good."

Shevonne smiled. "Thank you."

He shrugged. "Remus deserves it and so do you."

Her smile faded slightly. "Sometimes I worry that he doesn't believe he does."

Sirius's expression became thoughtful. "He hasn't spent much of his life believing he deserves good things."

"He does."

"You might have to remind him."

Shevonne looked down at the papers on her desk. "I'm willing to, every day if necessary."

Sirius smiled. "Then you're probably exactly what he needs."

He pushed away from the door. "I'll leave you to your work."

"Thank you."

He stopped. "And Shey?"

"Yes?"

"If he does something stupid, tell me."

She laughed. "Why?"

"So, I can tell him he's an idiot and kick his arse back on track."

Shevonne shook her head. "You two really are impossible."

"That's what makes us charming."

He disappeared down the corridor and Shevonne smiled after him, then she looked down at the papers again. For some reason, her heart felt lighter.

By the final week of October, Shevonne had stopped pretending that what she felt for Remus was merely friendship. She wasn't sure when it had happened, maybe it had been during one of their long conversations, maybe it had been the first time he had touched her face when she was struggling with one of her headaches, maybe it had been one of the countless quiet evenings when they had simply sat together without needing to speak, or maybe there was no single moment, maybe love had simply been growing in all the spaces between them.

Whatever the reason, she knew the truth now. She was falling in love with him. She wasn't afraid, not of the age difference, not of his lycanthropy, not of the connection between them, not even of what might happen if she allowed herself to want this. For the first time in her life, Shevonne was willing to take the risk.

One evening, Shevonne sat curled into one corner of Remus's sofa, grading essays. A small fire crackled in the fireplace and rain tapped softly against the windows. Remus sat beside her with a stack of papers balanced on one knee. Neither had spoken for several minutes.

Shevonne reached for her tea. "How many more?"

Remus glanced at his stack. "Seven."

Shevonne groaned. "I have eleven."

He looked at her papers. "Would you like help?"

She gave him a suspicious look. "Are you offering to grade my students' papers?"

"I could."

"Would you give them good marks in order to get done quicker?"

He smiled. "Never."

"Right." She said and returned to her work.

Several minutes passed and then Remus put his quill down.

Shevonne noticed immediately. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

She looked at him. "That sounded suspiciously like something."

He smiled faintly. "I have something I'd like to talk to you about."

She set her quill down. "Okay."

Remus ran his fingers through his hair. She had learned that gesture, it meant he was nervous. Whatever this was, it mattered to him.

"Remus?"

He took a breath. "Saturday is Sirius's birthday."

"I know."

"Harry and I have organized a party for him at the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade."

She smiled. "That's wonderful."

"I'm hoping he'll be pleased."

"I'm sure he will."

Remus nodded, then he looked down at his hands.

"I would very much like you to come with me."

Shevonne smiled. "Of course."

He looked up meeting her gaze. "As my date."

Her smile widened. "I'd be happy to."

For a moment, he simply looked at her, then he took her hand and continued. "I don't want to continue pretending that we're simply friends." He said and her heart began beating faster.

"Remus..."

"I know we haven't known each other very long." He paused. "But somehow, in the time we've had, you've become a very important part of my life."

His thumb moved slowly across the back of her hand.

"I find myself looking forward to seeing you every morning. I look for you when I walk into a room. I think about whether you've eaten or if you have one of your headaches. I notice when you're tired."

She smiled softly. "I notice those things about you too."

His eyes searched hers. "I've spent most of my life believing there were certain things I simply wasn't meant to have."

Her expression softened.

"A normal life. A family. Someone who would choose me."

"You deserve those things."

He gave her a sad smile. "Perhaps." He looked down at their joined hands. "But I'm terrified of wanting them."

"Why?"

"Because wanting something gives you something to lose."

She moved closer. "Then maybe you should stop thinking about what you might lose."

He looked at her. "And think about what I might gain?"

She nodded. "Exactly."

His eyes glistened slightly. "You make that sound very simple."

"It is." She squeezed his hand.

"I want us to be a couple, Shey." There it was, the chance was taken, the question neither of them had quite been brave enough to ask.

Shevonne felt warmth spread through her chest. "I want that to Remus."

Remus blinked. "You do?"

She smiled. "I think…I think I've wanted that since our first walk by the lake." She told him.

For several seconds, he simply stared at her. Then his shoulders relaxed, and a smile slowly spread across his face. "That felt like I was sixteen again."

She laughed. "Why?"

"Because I felt like a teenager asking a girl to go with him to his first Hogsmeade weekend."

She grinned. "You did look a little like a teenager there for a moment."

Remus raised an eyebrow. "Did I?"

"Absolutely."

He reached for her. His arms slipped around her waist, pulling her gently against him, then his lips found hers. The kiss began softly, almost cautiously, the that familiar electric connection surged between them and everything changed.

Shevonne felt it race through her entire body, she wrapped her arms around his neck, and Remus deepened the kiss. There was nothing tentative about it now. All the restraint they had practiced for weeks seemed to disappear. His hand slid into her hair, gently angling her face as his lips moved against hers.

Shevonne shivered. This wasn't their first kiss, they had shared several brief kisses over the preceding weeks, sweet kisses, careful kisses, kisses that ended before either of them had the courage to ask for more. This was different, this was hunger, heat, want, choice.

Eventually, Remus pulled back and rested his forehead against hers, breathing heavily.

"I'm sorry."

Shevonne opened her eyes. "For what?"

"I got carried away."

She gently touched his cheek. "Remus."

He looked at her. "I've been wanting you to let go and do that for weeks."

His eyes widened. "You have?"

She smiled. "Do you remember that argument we had during our third tea?"

He groaned. "We argued about wizarding attitudes toward Muggles for nearly two hours."

"Yes."

"I remember."

"You were so passionate."

She smiled mischievously. "I remember thinking that I wished you'd channel some of that passion into kissing me."

For a moment, Remus simply stared at her, and then his eyes flashed gold.

The wolf.

She had seen that look before, but she wasn't afraid. If anything, she found herself smiling.

Remus's expression changed. "You aren't frightened."

"No."

"Most people would be."

"I'm not most people."

His lips curved upward. "No." He pulled her close again. "You're not."

He kissed her again and this time there was laughter mixed with the passion.

Shevonne laughed against his lips. "You realize you're proving my point."

"What point?"

"That you're very passionate."

He gave a low chuckle. "I believe you."

Eventually, they settled back onto the sofa, wrapped comfortably in each other's arms. The fire had burned lower and their abandoned essays remained scattered across the coffee table. Neither cared. Shevonne rested her head against his chest while Remus stroked her hair.

"Are you happy?" he asked.

She smiled. "Very."

He kissed the top of her head. "So am I."

They remained there for a long time, until the clock chimed eleven.

Shevonne sighed. "I should probably go."

"I know."

Neither moved and she laughed.

"We're going to have to move eventually."

"Unfortunately."

She reluctantly stood and Remus walked her to the door. Before she left, she turned toward him.

"So, Saturday..."

"Saturday?"

"I'm your date."

His smile grew. "You are."

She grinned. "Then I suppose you'd better make sure you're on your best behavior."

Remus laughed. "I'll do my best."

She stepped closer and kissed him softly. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Shey."

She walked down the corridor toward her quarters and after several steps, she looked back. Remus was still standing in his doorway watching her.

She smiled. He smiled back. Then she disappeared around the corner.

Remus closed his door and leaned against it. For forty-one years, he had believed that love was something other people were allowed to have, something beautiful, but distant, something that belonged to people who weren't cursed. Tonight, for the first time, he allowed himself to believe otherwise.

Shevonne had chosen him and that was enough.

Chapter 17

That Saturday evening, the Three Broomsticks was louder and livelier than usual.

Harry had rented the entire pub for the night so Sirius could celebrate his forty-second birthday surrounded by the people who mattered to him without curious patrons interrupting. The familiar pub had been transformed for the occasion. Tables had been pushed together, candles floated beneath the ceiling, and strings of enchanted lights shimmered overhead.

Laughter filled the room.

For once, there were no students waiting for lessons, no papers demanding to be graded, no emergencies requiring someone's attention. There was simply music, food, drinks, old friends, and a birthday worth celebrating.

Shevonne smiled as she entered beside Remus, their fingers intertwined. She was still getting used to how natural that had become, holding his hand, sitting beside him, having him reach for her without thinking about it whenever they entered a room.

Only a few weeks ago, they had barely known one another. Now, somehow, she couldn't imagine walking into a room and not looking for him. Remus glanced down at her.

"You alright?"

She smiled. "I'm fine."

"You've been quiet."

"I was just thinking."

"About?"

She looked around the room. "How different my life is now."

Remus's expression softened. "Different in a good way?"

She squeezed his hand. "Very."

Before he could answer, Sirius spotted them. "There you are!" He lifted his glass and grinned. "I was beginning to think Remus had decided to keep you all to himself."

Remus sighed. "Sirius."

"What? It's my birthday," Sirius said innocently. "I'm allowed to complain."

Shevonne laughed. "Happy birthday, Sirius."

Sirius crossed the room and pulled her into a hug. "Thank you, Shey. I'm glad you came."

"Wouldn't have missed it."

He released her and looked between her and Remus. "You two are becoming disgustingly adorable."

Remus rolled his eyes. "Ignore him."

"I am," Shevonne assured him.

"Traitor," Sirius said making her laugh again.

Before Sirius could say anything else, Harry approached from the other side of the room.

"Happy birthday, Sirius."

"Thank you, Harry."

Harry glanced toward Remus and Shevonne, and his expression immediately softened. "Good to see you both."

"Good to see you too," Remus replied.

Harry's gaze settled briefly on Shevonne. "How are you feeling?"

Shevonne smiled. "I'm fine."

Harry gave her a look she immediately knew meant that he wasn't entirely convinced. "Fine as in actually fine? Or fine as in I’m putting everyone else first?"

She laughed softly. "Fine as in actually fine."

"Good." His eyes remained on her for another moment. "How's the head?"

Shevonne touched her temple almost unconsciously. "No headache today."

Harry nodded, apparently satisfied. "Good. I'd like to keep it that way."

Remus gave him an amused look. "You're not working tonight."

"I'm not working." Harry glanced at Shevonne. "I'm checking on a patient who happens to be a friend."

Shevonne smiled. "I appreciate it."

"Just remember what I told you."

"I remember."

"If anything changes—"

"I'll come see you."

Harry smiled. “Excellent.”

Remus watched the exchange with a mixture of amusement and affection.

"You two have become quite the team."

Harry laughed. "She is an excellent patient and I like to keep close tabs on my extra special ones." Harry said, giving her a wink.

In the weeks since she had gone to him about her headaches, he had checked on her several times, even coming to the castle to run a new diagnostic to see if anything had changed. The readings were still the same and he assured her that he was continuing his research into the anomaly.

Shevonne gave him a skeptical look. "You didn’t think I was such a good patient when I questioned your diagnostic equipment."

"You questioned my diagnostic charms."

"Because they weren't working."

Harry pointed at her.

"Exactly. Which is why I maintain that you are an unusually difficult patient."

Shevonne laughed. "I'll try to be more cooperative next time."

"I'd appreciate that." Harry smiled before turning toward Hermione, who was calling his name from across the room.

"Enjoy yourself," he told Shevonne.

"I intend to."

"And don't let Remus convince you to drink more than you want."

Remus looked offended. "I would never."

Harry gave him a pointed look. "Oh, go away."

Shevonne laughed as Harry walked away. "He's very different from what I expected."

Remus smiled. "Most people say that."

"I suppose I expected someone more..." She paused, searching for the right word. "Imposing, perhaps."

"The war changed him," Remus said quietly. "But not in the way most people expected."

Shevonne looked at him curiously.

"After the war, Harry had no idea what he wanted to do with his life. Everyone expected him to become an Auror, but Harry wasn't interested. He'd spent enough of his life fighting."

"So, he became a healer?"

"Eventually. He discovered that healing was something he genuinely loved. He said that after spending so many years trying to save people with a wand, he wanted to learn how to save them properly."

Shevonne glanced toward Harry again. "That's actually rather beautiful."

"It suits him."

"How did he become so good at it?" Remus chuckled softly.

"Harry has always been an exceptional student when something matters to him. Once he decided healing was what he wanted, he devoted himself to it completely."

Shevonne smiled. "And Hermione?"

"She helped keep him grounded."

"I can imagine."

Remus looked toward his old friend's table.

"Harry spent years being treated as though his value came from what he could do for everyone else. Becoming a healer was one of the first things he chose simply because it was something he wanted to become."

Shevonne considered that for a moment. "So, the boy who was expected to save the wizarding world finally got to decide who he wanted to be." Shevonne said, getting a little more insight into the man who was fast becoming not just her healer, but a friend.

Remus looked at her with quiet approval. "Exactly."

They joined the others at the table, then, and Sirius immediately raised his glass.

"Now, everyone, settle down. I have a story to tell."

Remus groaned. "Oh, Merlin."

Sirius grinned. "You can correct me when I exaggerate."

"You mean when you lie."

"I prefer the term 'improve.'"

The entire table erupted in laughter.

Sirius launched into his story, and before long, the Marauders' memories had everyone laughing. Peter Pettigrew was mentioned only briefly, and Shevonne noticed the subtle change in Remus's expression whenever that name came up. The sadness was there, but so was acceptance. His past would always be part of him, but it no longer seemed to control him.

Shevonne found herself watching him more than she intended. The way his eyes softened when Sirius teased him. The way he laughed when Harry challenged one of Sirius's exaggerated claims. The warmth in his expression whenever he looked at her. It made something inside her ache pleasantly.

She had never expected to find this, not here, not in a hidden magical world he hadn't even known existed a few months ago, and certainly not with a man who had spent most of his life believing he was destined to be alone.

She looked around the table. Harry and Hermione sat close together, occasionally exchanging quiet smiles. Ron and Ginny Weasley were arguing good-naturedly about something that apparently only the two of them understood. George and Fred Weasley were plotting something that Neville Longbottom wisely refused to ask about and Luna Lovegood sat beside Neville, listening to Sirius's story with an expression of complete fascination.

There was something special about this group. They were different ages, had different careers, different personalities, and yet they belonged together. They were family.

Shevonne's smile faded slightly. Her own family was scattered across the world now. Her adoptive parents had their own lives, and although she knew they loved her, she couldn't help feeling the distance. For the first time since arriving at Hogwarts, she understood what she had been missing. Belonging. However, as she looked down at Remus's hand resting beside hers, she thought maybe she had finally found that belonging.

"Shey?"

She looked up. Remus was watching her.

"Are you alright?"

She smiled. "I'm fine."

He didn't look convinced. "You sure?"

She nodded. "Just thinking."

"About?"

She glanced around the table. "How lucky everyone here is."

Remus followed her gaze. "Yes," he said softly. "We are."

His fingers found hers beneath the table and she squeezed them. Then music began playing, and Sirius immediately stood.

"Come on!"

"Absolutely not," Remus said.

Sirius grabbed him by the arm.

"You're dancing."

"I most certainly am not."

"Remus."

Sirius's grin widened.

"Birthday."

Remus sighed.

"Fine."

Shevonne laughed as Sirius pulled Remus onto the floor and a few moments later, she found herself being dragged into the dancing as well. Before long, she was laughing so hard her cheeks hurt. She danced between Sirius and Remus while Harry and Hermione joined in nearby.

The music grew louder and the enchanted lights spun overhead. Someone produced another round of drinks, and for a little while, Shevonne forgot about everything else. There was no mysterious connection, no unknown ancestory, no unanswered question, everything disappeared. There was only music, laughter, and Remus.

Eventually, however, the heat inside the pub became almost overwhelming and Shevonne sat down to catch her breath, took a sip of her drink, and leaned back. That was when the pain began, a dull pressure formed behind her eyes, then within seconds, it intensified into a throbbing headache. She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples.

“Not now.” She thought. She had been doing so well. She pushed herself to her feet. "I need some air." She announced and slipped through the door and stepped outside.

The cool night air immediately touched her face, and she breathed deeply, once, twice, three times. The pressure behind her eyes didn't disappear, but it eased slightly. She rolled her shoulders, trying to release the tension gathering in her neck.

Then suddenly, strong arms wrapped around her waist. She startled for only a second before recognizing the familiar warmth behind her. Remus.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you," he murmured near her ear. "Are you alright?"

She leaned backward against him. "One of my headaches."

"Bad?"

"Not unbearable."

"Do you want to go back to the castle?"

She shook her head. "Not yet." She placed her hands over his. "Can we just stay here for a little while?"

"Of course."

She closed her eyes, and his arms tightened gently and protectively around her. Almost immediately, something inside her relaxed and the pain seemed to retreat another step.

It was always like this with Remus. His touch calmed her, his presence steadied her. Even when she couldn't explain what was happening inside her own body, being near him seemed to make everything better.

After several quiet moments, Shevonne spoke. "Remus?"

"Hmm?"

"What is this connection between us?"

His arms tightened slightly. "I don't know."

She turned her head enough to look at him. "You really don't?"

He shook his head. "I've thought about it."

"Me too."

"I've wondered whether there's some magical explanation."

"So have I."

"But I don't know what it is."

Shevonne turned completely in his arms. They stood facing each other beneath the cool night sky. Remus looked down at her, his expression unusually vulnerable.

"I've never felt this way about anyone before." He said and Shevonne's heart skipped.

"Neither have I." she replied

"Sometimes it scares me."

Her brow furrowed. "Why?"

He hesitated. "Because I've spent most of my life believing that this wasn't something I was going to have."

"What?"

"A person."

His voice was barely above a whisper. "Someone who would look at me and see me. Not the wolf, not the scars, not the illness, just me."

Shevonne reached up and touched his cheek. "I see you."

His eyes closed briefly beneath her touch. "Yes, you do."

"Does it bother you?"

He opened his eyes. "What?"

"Our connection."

"No." His answer came immediately. "Not even a little."

A small smile touched her lips. "Good."

"I just don't understand it."

"Neither do I." Shevonne rested her forehead against his chest. "But I don't think we need to understand everything immediately."

Remus wrapped his arms around her again. "No," he agreed. "I suppose we don't."

After a moment, Remus whispered, "How do you feel when you're with me?"

Shevonne smiled against his chest. "Happy." He waited. "Content." She looked up at him. "Safe."

His expression softened. "And?" he whispered.

"Complete." She whispered back.

Remus's breath caught. "Complete?"

She nodded. "Like I've found something I didn't even know I was missing."

For several seconds, he couldn't speak, then he lowered his forehead against hers.

"Merlin, Shey." His voice was rough with emotion. "I feel exactly the same way."

She smiled, and his lips brushed her temple.

"How's your head?"

"Still hurts."

"I'm sorry."

"But not as badly."

"Because we're outside?"

She shook her head. "No."

She reached up and touched his chest. "Because you're here."

Remus looked at her thoughtfully. "Your headaches seem to ease whenever I touch you."

"They do."

“I’m glad, “ He said and kissed her forehead. "Let's go back inside, say goodnight, and get you back to the castle."

"You don't have to leave because of me."

"Yes, I do."

She laughed softly. "Why?"

"Because you're my priority."

The words settled somewhere deep inside her and Shevonne looked up at him. "You really mean that, don't you?"

"Every word."

For a moment, neither spoke, then Shevonne rose onto her toes and kissed him. It was gentle, brief, but filled with everything neither of them quite knew how to say. When they finally separated, Remus smiled.

"Come on, love." He took her hand. "Let's go home."

Inside the pub, the conversation had quieted somewhat, and most of their friends were seated around the table again. Sirius looked up.

"Everything alright?"

"Shevonne isn't feeling well," Remus explained. "We're going to call it a night."

Harry immediately stood. "What’s going on?" he asked, his healer instincts taking over.

“One of my headaches.” Shevonne told him.

Harry studied her for a moment. "Is it like the ones you've been having?"

Shevonne nodded. "Yes."

"Any dizziness?"

"No."

"Changes in your vision?"

"No."

"And the tingling?"

Shevonne thought for a moment. "No. Nothing different."

Harry nodded. "All right. Then get some rest and take the potion I sent you and you know the rules."

Shevonne smiled. “If it gets worse, come see you."

"Exactly."

Harry gave Remus a pointed look. "And make sure she actually does."

Remus gave him a dry smile. "I wasn't planning on letting her ignore it."

Harry nodded. "Good."

Shevonne looked between them. "You two are worse than my parents."

"That's because we care about you," Harry said simply.

The words caught her slightly off guard, but made her smile. Harry returned her smile before sitting back down beside Hermione.

Shevonne looked around the table. "It was really nice seeing everyone."

Sirius pulled her into another hug. "Glad you came, Shey, and I’m sorry you’re not feeling well."

"Happy Birthday again Sirius."

"Ready?" Remus asked, taking her hand and she nodded.

They stepped outside together and the cool night air greeted them as they began walking toward Hogwarts.

For a while, neither spoke, their hands intertwined. Halfway to the castle, Shevonne looked up at Remus.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For tonight, for making it better."

"I think we make things better for each other." Remus said, looking down at her.

"I think you're right."

When they reached the castle, Remus walked her to her quarters. He waited while she retrieved the potion Harry had prescribed her and made certain she took it.

"Happy now?" she teased.

"Much."

She smiled. "You worry too much."

"So, I've been told." He leaned down and kissed her softly. "Goodnight, Shey."

"Goodnight, Remus."

He started toward the door. "Remus?" He turned.

"I'm glad you found me."

His expression softened. "So am I." He left her room and closed the door behind him.

Shevonne stood there for several seconds, listening to his footsteps fade down the corridor. Then she touched her lips. The headache was still there, the questions were still there, the connection between them still remained unexplained, but she was no longer frightened by any of it..

CHAPTER 18

The weeks passed far too quickly. Before Shevonne quite realized it, November had slipped into December, and Hogwarts had begun its transformation for Yule.

The castle seemed to take on an entirely different personality during the Christmas season. Garlands of evergreen appeared along the corridors. Floating candles burned with a warm golden glow, and enchanted snowflakes drifted lazily from the ceiling in the Great Hall without ever touching the tables or floor. Even the portraits seemed more cheerful, with several of them wearing ridiculous Yule hats and singing badly whenever someone walked past.

Shevonne loved it. There was something comforting about the season. Perhaps it was because she had always associated Christmas with family. Even though the Alexanders were scattered across the world now, she could still remember Christmas mornings from her childhood.

Her mother insisted that everyone eat breakfast before opening presents. Her father pretended he hadn't bought half the things she had asked for. The laughter. The sense of belonging.

This year was different. This year, she was spending Yule at Hogwarts. And, unexpectedly, she wasn't lonely. She had Remus. That thought alone was enough to make her smile.

Their relationship had continued to deepen during the weeks since Sirius's birthday and there was no denying that they were together.

They spent most evenings together when their schedules allowed. Sometimes they talked for hours. Sometimes they read in comfortable silence. Sometimes they simply sat together with no need for conversation at all.

Shevonne had discovered that she particularly enjoyed those quiet moments. There was something about sitting beside Remus with his hand resting over hers that made the world feel calmer. Safer.

She had also noticed that her headaches had become less frequent. When they did occur, Remus's touch still seemed to ease them, but neither of them understood why.

For now, Shevonne was content to let Harry continue investigating them and to enjoy the fact that, for the first time in a long while, her life seemed to be settling into something she hadn't known she wanted.

That Saturday afternoon, Remus and Sirius had been recruited by Harry to help with a surprise he was planning for Hermione. Shevonne hadn't been told what the surprise was. She had learned very quickly that when Harry Potter said something was a secret, his friends respected that secret.

Even if Fred and George apparently knew enough to make increasingly ridiculous guesses. Rather than interfere, Shevonne had decided to spend the afternoon in the library.

The Hogwarts library was one of her favorite places in the castle. There was something awe inspiring about being surrounded by thousands of books, each one containing another piece of knowledge waiting to be discovered.

"You look happy."

Shevonne looked up from the book in front of her. Harry Potter was standing on the other side of the library table, carrying several books beneath one arm.

"I am."

"I'm glad," he said, and there was genuine warmth in his voice.

“I thought you were working on a surprise for Hermione?” Shevonne said, closing her book.

“I am. I was looking for some information for the surprise.”

“Ah.” Shevonne nodded solemnly. “Classified information.”

“Exactly.” Harry grinned and pulled a chair out across from her and sat down.

For a while, neither spoke. They opened their books and settled into the comfortable silence of the library.

Harry had become someone Shevonne found surprisingly easy to talk to. There was something about him that didn't quite match the stories she had heard. The famous Harry Potter wasn't what she had expected, he was quieter, more thoughtful. He had accomplished many things, yet, he was remarkably uncomfortable when people treated him like a hero.

Shevonne closed her book. "Can I ask you something?"

Harry looked up. "Of course."

"Why healing?" His expression changed slightly.

"What do you mean?"

"You fought in a war and you defeated an evil man determined to take over the world. You could probably have done almost anything afterward." She paused. "Why become a healer?"

Harry was quiet for a moment. "Because too many people died."

The simplicity of the answer caught her off guard. Harry looked down at his hands.

"I spent most of my childhood wishing I could protect people. Then the war came, and I learned that protecting someone doesn't always mean winning."

Shevonne listened.

"Sometimes," he continued, "it means keeping them alive."

There was no pride in his voice, only understanding. Shevonne studied him for a moment.

"And you thought healing was the best way to do that?"

"I think it was the way I could do it."

He glanced toward the tall windows lining the far wall. "After everything that happened, I didn't want my life to be about fighting anymore. I wanted to learn how to put things back together."

Shevonne's expression softened. "That's a very different kind of courage."

Harry gave a small, almost embarrassed smile. "I don't know about that."

"I do." That earned a quiet laugh from him.

For a moment, they simply smiled at one another. Then Harry's expression became more thoughtful.

"What about you?"

Shevonne blinked. "What about me?"

"Why history?"

She laughed softly. "That's hardly as dramatic."

"I didn't ask if it was dramatic."

Shevonne considered the question. "I suppose I've always been curious about people."

"People?"

"History is people. Their choices. Their mistakes. What they believed. What they were afraid of. What they were willing to fight for."

She looked down at the book lying between them.

"I think we learn the most about ourselves by understanding the people who came before us."

Harry nodded slowly. "That sounds familiar."

"Does it?"

His eyes dropped briefly to the book she had been reading. "Maybe healing and history aren't so different after all."

Shevonne smiled. "How do you figure that?"

"Both are about understanding what happened."

He looked back at her.

"One tries to understand how someone was hurt. The other tries to understand why."

Shevonne was quiet for a moment.

"That's actually rather profound."

"Don't tell Ron."

She laughed. "I wouldn't dream of it."

Harry smiled, and for a few moments they returned to their books. The silence between them felt different now, not awkward, not forced, simply the quiet understanding of two people who had discovered that, despite their very different lives, they shared more in common than either had expected.

By the time Shevonne left the library, the castle had grown quieter.

She gathered her books against her chest and headed toward the corridor leading back toward her classroom. She was already thinking about tomorrow's lesson.

One of her students had asked an unexpectedly good question earlier that week, and she'd spent half the evening considering how she wanted to approach the subject.

She was still thinking about it when she heard footsteps behind her and she glanced over her shoulder.

Three boys were coming down the corridor. She recognized them as slytherin students she had seen around the castle, though she didn't know their names. She turned back and continued walking.

"Professor Alexander."

She stopped and looked over her shoulder again.

"Yes?"

The tallest of the three smiled. "We need to talk to you."

Something about his tone made her uncomfortable.

"I'm afraid I'm rather busy."

She started walking again, but one of the boys stepped in front of her making her have to stop.

"I don't think you understood."

"I understood perfectly."

The boy's smile disappeared. "You don't belong here."

Shevonne's fingers tightened around her books. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"You're a Muggle."

There was something ugly in the way he said the word and Shevonne's back stiffened.

"That doesn't make me incapable of teaching."

"You shouldn't be teaching anything to witches and wizards." He snarled.

Shevonne looked between the three of them. "I'm going to suggest that you return to whatever you were supposed to be doing."

The tallest boy stepped closer. "You think because McGonagall lets you stay here, you're one of us?"

Shevonne's heart began beating faster. "I have never claimed that."

"You don't belong at Hogwarts."

The words struck harder than they should have, because somewhere beneath the anger, there was a small part of her that had once wondered the same thing, but she had fought too hard to find her place here.

"I think," she said quietly, "that's for the Headmistress to decide."

She tried to step around him, but he grabbed her arm. "Let go." She snapped.

"Or what?"

Shevonne pulled against his grip. "Let go of me."

The boy shoved her backward and her shoulder struck the stone wall. Pain shot through her arm.

"Get off me!"

"Maybe someone needs to remind you what you are."

The first blow came without warning. Her head snapped sideways and pain exploded through her face.

She stumbled and another blow made her head strike the stone wall. Everything blurred as she tried to breathe.

"Please..."

The boy grabbed the front of her robes, which she had taken to wearing over her muggle clothing.

"Muggle whores don't get to talk."

Fear flooded through her, not for herself, but fIor Remus. She thought of his face, his voice, the way he called her Shey. She thought of the warmth of his hand around hers and then she heard it.

A growl.

Deep.

Low.

Dangerous.

"Get your hands off my mate."

The three boys froze.

Shevonne's vision was blurred, but she knew that voice. Remus. She lifted her head and he stood at the end of the corridor.

Sirius was beside him with Harry only a few steps behind. But this wasn't the Remus she knew. His eyes were golden, his expression was almost feral and the wolf was very close to the surface. This was Moony and he was furious.

The leader raised his wand. "You don't scare me, Lupin."

Remus moved.

His fist struck the boy across the jaw and the boy collapsed. The other two reached for their wands, but were too slow.

"Stupefy!" Two voices bellowed simultaneously and both boys dropped.

Silence filled the corridor and Shevonne suddenly realized the hands holding her were gone. She tried to stand, but her knees buckled.

Remus caught her before she could fall. "I've got you, Shey."

She sagged against him and his arms wrapped around her carefully. She could hear his heartbeat, fast, furious, but steady.

"Remus?"

"I'm here."

"I'm scared."

His expression softened immediately. "I know. I've got you sweetheart." He said and kissed the top of her head.

Harry was already kneeling beside her. "Don't move."

Shevonne tried to focus on him, but her vision was still slightly blurry. Harry's demeanor had changed completely.

The mild mannered and friendly man she had spoken to in the library was gone. In his place was a focused, calm, but furious healer.

He drew his wand and began to examine her. Harry moved the wand over her body, his expression tightened.

"She has a concussion."

Remus's arms tightened around her.

"How bad?"

"I'm not sure yet."

Harry continued scanning.

"Two cracked ribs. Significant bruising."

His wand moved toward the back of her head and he frowned.

"And possibly a fracture."

Remus went very still, making Harry look up at him.

"Moony."

The single word carried a warning. Remus took a slow breath and Harry turned back to Shevonne.

"We need to get you to the hospital wing."

"I can walk."

"No." Remus answered before Harry could.

Shevonne looked at him. "I'm serious."

"So am I."

She tried to argue, but the corridor tilted beneath her. Remus tightened his hold.

Harry gave her a gentle smile. "He's right."

Shevonne sighed. "Fine."

Remus carefully lifted her into his arms and she rested her head against his chest.

Behind them, Sirius stood over the three unconscious students. His expression was no less furious than Remus'.

"I've sent a Patronus to Minerva," he said. "I'll deal with these three."

Harry nodded. "Good." Then Harry looked toward Remus. "Go. I'll meet you there."

Remus didn't need to be told twice. He carried Shevonne toward the hospital wing.

Shevonne closed her eyes. "Remus?"

"I'm here."

She swallowed. "They were right."

He stopped walking. "What?"

Her voice was barely audible. "They said I don't belong here."

Remus looked down at her. "Shey." She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"You belong exactly where you choose to belong."

"But—"

"No." His voice was gentle but firm. “You belong with the people who love you."

She stared up at him.

"Do I?"

Remus's expression broke. "Yes." He kissed her forehead. "Without question."

She closed her eyes again and Remus continued on to the hospital wing.

Behind them, Harry glanced once toward the unconscious students and his expression hardened. Anyone looking at him at that moment would not have seen the healer, but the man who had put down a rabid dog and his followers.

He allowed himself a single moment to think about what he would like to do to those three, then he turned toward the hospital wing. He had a patient to treat, and something about the readings he had seen while examining Shevonne bothered him. Yet another reading he couldn't identify, but definitely something that shouldn't have been there.

CHAPTER 19

Harry caught up with Remus just outside the hospital wing. He pushed the doors open with a quick flick of his wand, his healer's instincts already taking over. There was no time to waste. Shevonne was injured, frightened, and still conscious, but Harry knew that could change quickly.

“Lay her over there,” he instructed, pointing toward the nearest bed.

Remus gently lowered Shevonne onto the mattress, but the moment he started to step away, her fingers closed around his hand.

“Don't leave.”

The words were barely more than a whisper. Her voice was slurred slightly from the concussion, but the fear behind them was unmistakable.

Remus looked down at her. “I won't.”

Harry glanced between them. “It's fine, Remus. Stay at the head of the bed. Just give Poppy and me enough room to work.”

Remus nodded and moved to the head of the bed where Harry had asked him to stand. Shevonne relaxed immediately Harry noticed.

He also noticed the slight tremor in Remus's hands. The man was trying very hard not to show how frightened and angry he was.

“Poppy,” Harry called as Madam Pomfrey hurried toward them. “I need a pain potion and a calming draught.”

“Already on their way.”

Harry nodded and turned his attention to Shevonne.

“I'm going to examine you first. Try not to move.”

Shevonne nodded weakly and Harry raised his wand. A soft golden light moved over her body, revealing the injuries beneath the surface. He frowned as the diagnostic spell mapped the damage.

“Two cracked ribs,” he murmured. “Significant bruising. The concussion I found earlier, but it doesn't appear to be worsening.”

Shevonne closed her eyes. “That's good, right?”

“It's good.” Harry answered and moved his wand higher.

The diagnostic light flickered, making Harry pause his movements. Remus noticed immediately.

“What?”

Harry didn't answer, instead he repeated the diagnostic and the result was the same. Something was interfering with the spell. Harry's expression hardened.

“Harry?” Shevonne asked, her voice trembling.

“Whatever it is that was interfering with my diagnostic spells the first time I examined you is there again.”

Her hand instinctively moved toward her chest. “The thing you couldn't see?”

Harry nodded. “Yes. It is still obscuring something.”

For several long minutes Harry simply stood there deep in thought and then Shevonne saw his face change. He looked toward Madam Pomfrey.

“Poppy, can you run a diagnostic independently, while I do the same? Focus on where a magical core would be in a witch.”

“Of course.” She said and moved to the other side of the bed and raised her wand.

Two magical lights passed over Shevonne, together, but distinctly two separate scans. Harry watched the results and Poppy's expression changed. He had been discussing Shevonne's case with her, with permission from Shevonne of course, and he could see that the older woman had come to the same conclusion he had.

“Harry?”

“I know.” he answered and the two healers exchanged a look.

Shevonne's stomach tightened. “What?”

Harry looked at her.

“Apparently, what has been hiding from us, is your magical core.”

Shevonne stared at him. “My what?”

“Your magical core. Someone put a binding on your core that also obscures it from magical diagnostcs.”

The words seemed to hang in the air.

“A binding?” Shevonne repeated.

“Yes.”

“What does that mean?”

Harry glanced briefly at Remus before returning his attention to her.

“It means someone placed a magical restriction on you.”

Shevonne went very still. “Who?”

“There is no way to tell.”

“Why?”

“The magical signature on the binding spell has degraded to the point of being unrecognizable.” Harry answered.

“Can you tell how long it has been there?” She asked.

“I would estimate it was placed on you when you were only a few weeks old.”

Shevonne's eyes dropped to her hands. For most of her life, she'd wondered why she had always felt slightly different. Why certain areas, people and objects had seemed to make her more aware, had made her skin tingle.

Now she was being told that someone had deliberately placed something inside her before she was old enough to know it was there. Had hidden who she truly was.

“The binding is deteriorating.” Harry said and Shevonne frowned.

“What happens when it deteriorates?”

“Your headaches could become more severe. You could experience increasing magical instability.”

“Could it hurt me?”

“Yes.”

She absorbed that. “Can you remove it?”

“Yes and then you should have access to your magic.”

She almost laughed. “Which I don't know how to control.”

Harry gave her a small smile. “That's what Hogwarts is for.”

Sirius, who had come into the hospital wing and had been standing near the end of the bed, spoke up. “And us,” he said. “ Don't think for one minute any of us are going to let you deal with this alone.”

Shevonne looked at him. “That's assuming I actually want to stay.”

“You're going to want to stay.”

“You sound very sure.”

“I've been around Hogwarts long enough to know it has a way of getting under your skin.”

Remus smiled faintly. “He's not wrong.”

Shevonne looked between the two men. “You're both incredibly biased.”

“Absolutely,” Sirius said and Harry laughed, breaking the tension in the air. Then his expression became serious again.

“But the decision is yours.”

The room became quiet as Shevonne looked down at her hands.

She had a choice. Leave the binding where it was and continue living with the headaches and whatever deterioration might come, or remove it and find out what had been hidden her entire life.

She thought about the woman she'd been before Hogwarts. The historian, the woman who had lived her entire life believing she understood who she was.

She'd spent years accepting the blank spaces in her history, her adoption, the mystery surrounding her biological family, the strange sensations she'd never been able to explain.

Now she knew those things weren't random. There had been something inside her all along, something someone had deliberately hidden.

“What if I don't like what I find?”

Harry's expression softened. “You may not have all the answers immediately.”

“That wasn't what I asked.”

“You might discover things about yourself that change the way you see your life.”

Shevonne looked toward Remus. He didn't tell her what to do, he didn't try to reassure her that everything would be fine, he simply held her hand while his thumb moved gently across her knuckles.

Whatever she decided, he was there. The realization brought a strange ache to her chest. She took a slow breath.

“I've spent my whole life wondering who I am.” She looked at Harry. “I think I deserve the chance to find out.”

Harry nodded.

“Remove the binding.” she told him with conviction.

“All right.”

Harry turned toward the mediwitch. “Poppy?”

Madam Pomfrey nodded and moved into position and Harry looked at Shevonne one more time.

“I'm going to perform another diagnostic before we begin. If anything looks unstable, we stop.”

“Okay.”

“And if you want me to stop at any point—”

“I'll tell you.”

Harry nodded and began the diagnostic. This time, the magic surrounding Shevonne was different.

Harry's expression changed almost immediately. “It's weaker.”

Shevonne frowned.

“It's deteriorating faster than I expected.” Harry told her.

“Is that bad?”

“Not necessarily.” He hesitated. “But it means we shouldn't wait.”

Shevonne felt a knot form in her stomach. “Then let's do it.”

Harry raised his wand. “Are you certain?”

Shevonne looked at Remus. He squeezed her hand. “I've got you.”

She nodded. “Do it.”

Harry began the spell.

At first, nothing happened, then Shevonne felt a tingling. It started in the center of her chest and slowly spread outward. Her fingers trembled and she sucked in a breath.

“Harry?”

“It's alright, you're safe, the binding is beginning to release.”

The tingling became stronger. It moved down her arms and through her legs, spreading into every part of her body. Shevonne clenched her teeth. It wasn't exactly pain, it was pressure, a terrible, unbearable pressure. And underneath it was something else. Something she had never felt before. Movement.

For her entire life, something inside her had been held back. Now it was pushing against a barrier, trying to get free. Shevonne gasped.

“Breathe.” Remus said and squeezed her shoulder.

She took a shaky breath and then the pressure increased. Harry's voice remained calm.

“That's it. Keep breathing.”

The world seemed to narrow around her and the sensation of something inside her beginning to awaken grew stronger.

A faint golden light appeared beneath her skin.

Sirius straightened. “What the hell?”

“Stay back,” Harry ordered and the golden light intensified.

Remus did not move, he remained right where he was, his hand firmly and comfortingly on Shevonne's shoulder.

“I'm here,” he told her

The binding twisted violently against the magical force pressing against it, then Shevonne felt something change. The pressure stopped and for one impossible second, everything became completely still.

Then—**Snap.**

The binding broke. Magic surged through her. The hospital wing erupted with light. Every magical instrument in the room activated at once. Candles flared, protective wards flashed along the walls and the air itself seemed to vibrate.

Shevonne felt something rush through her that was so vast she couldn't understand it. For the first time in her life, there was nothing pressing against her from the inside. She hadn't even realized she felt that way until it was gone. Nothing holding her back.

The sensation became too much and she cried out. “Remus.”

Remus slipped behind her on the bed and his arms tightened around her.

“I've got you.”

The world blurred and Harry's voice seemed to come from very far away.

“She's losing consciousness.”

Shevonne felt herself falling, but Remus caught her. The last thing she heard was his voice.

“I'm here.”

Then everything went dark.

For one brief moment, Remus felt something that had nothing to do with holding her. A warmth moved through his hands and spread up his arms, settling somewhere deep in his chest. He drew a sharp breath.

Shevonne.

He could feel her, not simply her body beneath his arms or the faint rhythm of her breathing, but something deeper, something that seemed to exist beneath thought, beneath magic itself. His heart seemed to beat in time with hers and then, just as suddenly, the sensation vanished.

Remus stared down at her, bewildered. He had no idea what had just happened, but somewhere deep inside him, Moony was suddenly still.

Not restless.

Not demanding.

Certain.

Ours.

“She's unconscious.”

Remus's voice sounded distant. Harry immediately moved closer.

“She's all right, just overwhelmed. Her body needs to adjust.”

He ran another diagnostic, the readings appearing in the air around them. Harry went still.

“What?” Remus stared at him.

Harry didn't answer immediately. He completed the examination and looked toward Poppy.

She performed her own diagnostic and they exchanged another look.

Sirius frowned. “What?”

Harry finally looked up. “Her magical core has fully opened. It should have taken at least a few hours for that.”

Remus's face tightened. “Is she hurt?”

“No.” Harry looked back at the readings. “She isn't injured from the release itself. As I said she's just overwhelmed.”

“What does that mean?”

“Her body has spent her entire life compensating for a sealed magical core.”

Harry shook his head.

“Now that the binding is gone, her magic is moving freely for the first time.”

“And that's why she collapsed?” Sirius asked.

“Partly.” Harry looked down at Shevonne.

“But there's more to it than that.”

Remus's expression hardened. “What?”

“I've never seen a magical core behave quite like hers.”

“What does that mean?”

Harry hesitated. “I don't know yet.” He looked at Shevonne again.

“But there is considerably more magical energy here than I expected.”

Remus looked down at her.

“Is she going to be all right?”

“Yes.” Harry's voice was reassuring. “She needs sleep. Her body needs time to adjust. I don't see anything other than the injuries from her attack, and her magic is now helping those heal.”

“How long will she sleep?” Remus asked.

“Probably until tomorrow morning, but she could wake before that.”

Remus nodded but didn't release her. Harry placed a hand briefly on his shoulder.

“She'll be fine, Remus. I'm going to go finish Hermione's surprise and go home. Poppy will keep an eye on her and if anything changes, she will send for me.”

He reached the door, then stopped and looked back at Shevonne. Something about the readings still bothered him, not just the amount, but the way it behaved. As though it hadn't simply been released, but as if it had been waiting.

Harry shook off the thought and left the hospital wing.

Sirius sat down on a chair beside the bed. For several minutes, neither man spoke.

Remus’ entire attention remained fixed on Shevonne. Her breathing was steady. She was safe and that was all that mattered.

He brushed a strand of hair away from her face. “You frightened me,” he whispered.

Sirius looked at him. Remus didn't seem to realize he'd spoken aloud.

“She asked me not to leave.”

Sirius smiled faintly. “Then I don't suppose you're going anywhere.”

“No.” Remus looked down at her. “I'm not.”

A few minutes passed and then there was a tapping at one of the windows. Sirius looked up. An owl hovered outside.

He crossed the room and opened the window and the bird flew inside and landed on the edge of his chair, a letter clutched in its talons.

Sirius frowned. “That for me?”

The owl bobbed its head and Sirius took the letter and noticed the seal.

Gringotts.

His expression changed. He broke the seal and unfolded the parchment. His eyes moved across the page, once, then again. The color slowly drained from his face.

Remus looked up. “Sirius?”

Sirius didn't answer. His fingers tightened around the parchment.

“What is it?”

Sirius read the first lines again and something cold settled in his stomach.

“My father.”

Remus stood. “What about him?”

Sirius folded the parchment sharply. “Something he arranged before he died.”

His voice was different now. Anger had replaced the shock.

“What did he arrange?”

Sirius looked toward Shevonne. For a moment, his expression softened. Then it hardened again.

“I need to deal with this.” he said and started toward the doors.

“Sirius.”

Sirius stopped. “I don't know what this is yet. I need to verify and then I will let you know.” he said and then left.

Remus watched him disappear through the doors. He knew Sirius well enough not to follow.

Whatever was written in that letter had shaken his oldest friend badly. And Sirius Black rarely walked away from something unless he was trying to keep someone else from being caught in the middle.

Remus returned to the bed. Shevonne shifted slightly in her sleep. He lay down beside her and pulled her against his chest..

“I'm here,” he whispered and her breathing steadied.

Remus closed his own eyes to try and relax.. He didn't notice the faint golden light that briefly flickered beneath her closed eyelids. He didn't hear the almost imperceptible change in the air around her.And he didn't hear the sound that came from somewhere deep beneath Hogwarts.

It wasn't quite a voice, it wasn't quite a whisper, it was something older, something that had been sleeping beneath the castle for a very long time.

CHAPTER 20

Sirius did not go far. He made it only as far as the corridor outside the hospital wing before stopping. The parchment in his hand felt heavier than it should have. The handwriting was unmistakably his father's.

Orion Black had been dead for years, yet somehow he had managed to leave behind one final piece of trouble for his son.

Sirius read the opening lines again. The document had been prepared through Gringotts and placed into magical custody years ago, to be delivered only when certain conditions had been met.

One of those conditions had just occurred, the binding had been discovered. Sirius's stomach twisted. He looked back toward the hospital wing.

Shevonne.

He had known her for only a short time, yet somehow the thought of anything happening to her already felt personal, more than personal. Family. He folded the parchment and went back inside.

Remus looked up immediately. "You're back." Sirius nodded but didn't answer.

His eyes went to Shevonne, still sleeping against Remus's chest. She looked peaceful now, the strain of the previous hours temporarily gone from her face.

Remus studied him. "What did it say?"

Sirius hesitated. "I need Harry."

Remus frowned. "Why?"

"Because I don't want to tell you this without him here."

Remus's expression hardened. "Sirius—"

I mean it." There was something in Sirius's voice that stopped him. He glanced toward the door. "He said he was going home."

"He did."

Sirius looked down at the parchment. "Then I'll send him a patronus."

He raised his wand and sent his Patronus toward the corridor. Five minutes later, hurried footsteps approached and the hospital wing doors opened and Harry stepped inside.

"I thought you were going home," Remus said.

"I was," Harry replied, looking between the two men. "I was just finishing up with Hermione's surprise when Sirius sent for me. He said it couldn't wait."

Sirius nodded. "It couldn't."

Harry's expression became serious. He looked at the parchment in Sirius's hand and so did Remus "What is it?" the two men asked in unison causing a brief smile cross Sirius' face before disappearing.

Sirius lowered his voice. "It concerns Shevonne."

Remus went very still, but before he could ask another question, the hospital wing doors opened and Harry stepped inside.

He looked from Remus to Sirius and immediately recognized that something was wrong. "What's happened?"

Sirius held out the parchment. "Come here."

Harry crossed the room. He took the parchment and glanced at the seal before opening it. His eyes moved across the first few lines and his expression changed.

"Where did you get this?"

"It was delivered by Gringotts."

Harry looked at the seal again. "Is this genuine?"

"Yes." Sirius gave him a look. "I know my father's handwriting, Harry."

Harry nodded slowly and looked down at the document again. "When was this written?"

"Before Orion died."

"And it was placed in the custody of Gringotts?"

"Yes."

Harry read a little farther. "What were the conditions for releasing it?"

Sirius took the parchment back. "The first was that it remained sealed until I became Lord Black."

Remus frowned. "And the second?"

Sirius looked toward Shevonne and his throat tightened. "It could only be opened if the binding on a particular child was ever discovered."

Silence filled the room and Remus's arm tightened around Shevonne. "A child?"

Sirius nodded. "The document refers to a child born to Orion Black."

Harry's expression changed. "Your father?"

Sirius looked at him. "Yes."

The connection between them suddenly felt much more important than it had a moment before. Harry wasn't simply standing there as a healer or as someone Sirius trusted, he was Sirius's godson, family.

Sirius had been there for Harry when almost no one else had been. Harry had grown up knowing Sirius as more than his godfather in name. Sirius was one of the people he trusted most in the world. And now they were about to uncover something about Sirius's family that could change everything.

Harry stepped closer. "Read it."

Sirius unfolded the parchment. "The child was born outside Britain."

Harry's brow furrowed. "Where?"

"Ireland."

Remus looked toward Shevonne. Sirius followed his gaze.

Harry's voice was quieter. "When?"

Sirius's fingers tightened around the parchment. "1972."

Remus stared at him and Sirius continued.

"The child was female."

Harry looked at Shevonne. "No."

Sirius gave a slow nod. "There was an affair. My father was traveling in Ireland. He became involved with a woman there."

"What happened to her?" Harry asked.

Sirius's expression hardened. "She died."

Remus's voice was barely above a whisper. "How?"

"Giving birth." Sirius looked at Shevonne. "The child survived."

No one spoke, then Sirius continued. "The document says the child was given to a Muggle family."

Remus closed his eyes briefly, Harry's face had gone pale. "Her adoption," he said.

Sirius nodded. "The document contains both the name her mother gave her and the name given to her by her adoptive parents."

His voice faltered and he looked down at the parchment one more time, then he read the words aloud. "Shevonne Erin Alexander, born Selena Celestia Black."

The room went silent, for several seconds, no one moved, then Shevonne stirred.

Remus looked down and her eyes slowly opened. She blinked several times before focusing on the three men surrounding her.

"Why is everyone looking at me like that? What happened?"

Sirius sat down beside the bed. Shevonne looked at him. "Sirius?"

He took a breath. "There is something you need to know."

She looked between him, Remus, and Harry.

"Something bad?"

Sirius shook his head. "Not about you."

He hesitated. "About what was done to you."

Shevonne's hand moved instinctively toward her chest. "The binding."

"Yes."

She looked at him carefully. "You found out who did it."

Sirius nodded. "Yes."

She waited. "Who?"

Sirius's eyes filled with emotion. "My father."

Shevonne's brow furrowed. "Your father?"

"Yes."

She stared at him. "What does your father have to do with me?"

Sirius swallowed. "Everything."

Shevonne looked at Harry and then Remus. Neither man looked away.

Sirius held out the parchment. "According to this document, my father had a daughter in Ireland in 1972."

Shevonne went very still and Sirius continued.

"Your mother died giving birth to you."

Shevonne's breath caught. "My mother?"

"Your biological mother."

She stared at him. "How do you know?"

"The Gringotts records. Your birth records. Your adoption. Everything is documented."

Shevonne's eyes moved to the parchment. "And my father?"

Sirius looked down. "My father." He corrected himself. "Our father.

The words seemed to strike her harder than anything else. "Our father?"

Sirius nodded. "Orion Black, my father, was your biological father."

Shevonne stared at him. For a moment she seemed incapable of speaking. Then, quietly: "I'm your sister."

Sirius's eyes filled with tears. "Yes."

Shevonne shook her head slightly. "But if he was my father, why didn't he raise me?"

Sirius's jaw tightened. "Because he knew my mother would never accept you."

Shevonne's voice trembled. "So what did he do?"

Sirius looked at her. "He had your magic bound and then he arranged for you to be placed with a Muggle family."

Shevonne stared at him, the pieces falling into place, the strange tingling, the headaches, Harry's inability to properly diagnose her, the binding, all of it.

"But why?" she whispered.

Sirius looked down at his hands. "Because he was afraid. Afraid of the consequences of admitting you existed."

His voice grew bitter. "He chose his reputation and his marriage over you."

Shevonne looked away and for a long moment, nobody spoke. Then she whispered: "So he knew I existed."

"Yes."

"And he knew where I was."

"Yes."

"He could have come for me."

Sirius closed his eyes briefly. "Yes."

Shevonne's eyes filled with tears. "But he didn't."

"No."

Her voice broke. "He just...gave me away."

Sirius shook his head. "He didn't give you away because there was something wrong with you."

She looked at him. "He was trying to hide what he'd done."

Harry spoke quietly from beside the bed. "Your father tried to erase the evidence of his choices."

Sirius nodded. "But he didn't erase you." He looked directly at Shevonne. "He failed."

A tear slipped down her cheek.

"I am so sorry." Sirius said softly.

Shevonne looked at him. "You didn't do it."

"I know."

"Then why are you apologizing?"

Sirius gave a sad smile. "Because I should have known."

Shevonne frowned. "How could you?"

"I couldn't." His voice cracked. "I was twelve years old, Shey. I didn't know you existed. But I keep thinking that somehow I should have protected you."

Shevonne stared at him. "You were a child."

"I was your big brother."

"You didn't know you had a little sister."

"I know." He looked down at their joined hands. "But I know now." He squeezed her fingers. "And as long as I draw breath, you will be protected, wanted, and loved."

Shevonne's lips trembled. "You can start now."

Sirius laughed once, though tears stood in his eyes. "Yeah." He squeezed her hand again. "I can."

Harry stepped forward. "There is something else."

Shevonne looked at him. "What?"

Harry glanced toward Sirius. "The document doesn't simply establish your identity."

Shevonne frowned. "What else does it say?"

Harry looked at Sirius. "It says the holder of the Black Lordship was expected to determine what would happen to your status within the family."

Shevonne looked confused. "What does that mean?"

Sirius answered before Harry could. "It means they expected me to decide whether you would be recognized as a Black."

Shevonne stared at him. "And can you?"

Sirius shook his head. "Not in the way they intended."

He folded the parchment. "The Black family doesn't get to decide who you are."

Shevonne looked down at her hands. "I've spent my entire life as Shevonne Erin Alexander."

Sirius nodded. "And you still are."

"My adoptive parents gave me that name."

"They're your parents. They raised you. They loved you. They gave you a home when my father refused to give you one."

Shevonne swallowed. "So you don't think I should change my name?"

"Only if you want to." Sirius smiled faintly. "You're my sister whether your name is Alexander, Black, or something completely different."

Shevonne looked at him through her tears. "You really mean that?"

"Absolutely."

“Did my birth mother give me a name?

“Yes.”

“What did she name me?”

“Selena Celestia.” Sirius said.

“I…I need a few days to process all of this.” She said

“You take all the time you need. Like I said, no matter what you decide, you are still my sister, nothing can change that now. If you want to know more about the Black family, then I will tell

you, if you don't that's fine too. Harry and I have spent the last several years trying to change the reputation of the Black family, now we just have more help."

There was silence for a long moment and then Sirius stood. He hesitated and the uncertainty on his face made Shevonne smile through her tears.

She slowly pushed herself upright, with Remus immediately steadying her on her shaky legs and Sirius opened his arms.

She crossed the small distance between them and Sirius wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm glad I found you," Sirius whispered against her hair.

Shevonne smiled against his shoulder. "I think I'm glad I found you too."

He pulled back just enough to look at her. "Will you have me?"

Shevonne laughed softly. "I think I'd like a big brother."

Sirius grinned through his tears. "You're going to regret that."

"I probably will."

"I'm annoying."

"I've noticed."

"I'm protective."

"Very."

"I'm nosy."

"Extremely."

He grinned. "And I'm going to be absolutely unbearable about this."

Shevonne laughed. "I would expect nothing less."

Across the room, Harry and Remus smiled. Harry looked at Sirius for a moment, and Sirius caught his eye.

There was something unspoken between them. Harry had been Sirius's godson for years. Sirius had spent much of Harry's life trying to give him the family he had been denied. Now, somehow, Sirius had discovered another piece of that family.

Harry stepped closer and placed a hand briefly on Sirius's shoulder.

"Congratulations, Padfoot."

Sirius looked at him. "Thanks, Prongslet."

Harry smiled. Then he looked toward Shevonne.

"Welcome to the family."

Shevonne laughed softly. "I seem to be collecting family members rather quickly."

Remus slipped an arm around her. "You're stuck with us."

She looked up at him. "I think I can live with that."

For the first time since arriving at Hogwarts, Shevonne no longer felt as though she were standing at the edge of someone else's world. She had found her place, and, unexpectedly, she had found another brother and a nephew.

Outside the hospital wing, the castle remained quiet, but somewhere deep beneath Hogwarts, something old had stirred, and it had heard the name Selena Black.

CHAPTER 21

The hospital wing remained quiet after Sirius left. Shevonne sat on the edge of the bed, one hand resting against her chest while she stared at the closed doors through which Sirius had disappeared.

Her brother.

The word still felt strange, not wrong, just unfamiliar.

She had spent thirty years believing she knew who she was. She had been Shevonne Erin Alexander for as long as she could remember. Her parents had raised her, loved her, and given her a life she had never had reason to question. And now she knew there had been another name waiting beneath that one.

Selena Celestia Black.

She looked down at her hands. "I don't know what I'm supposed to feel."

Remus sat beside her. "You don't have to feel anything yet."

She looked at him. "That's what Sirius said."

"Then for once, Sirius has given you good advice."

A small smile touched her lips. "He is going to be unbearable, isn't he?"

"Completely."

"You're not helping."

"I'm being honest."

Harry laughed quietly from the other side of the room and Shevonne looked toward him. "How long have you known him?"

Harry smiled. "Long enough to know that if Sirius decides you're family, there isn't much you can do about it."

Shevonne smiled. "I think I might like having a big brother."

Remus slipped an arm around her shoulders. "I think he likes having a little sister."

Shevonne leaned against Remus and for a moment, the room felt peaceful. Then Harry's expression changed and he looked at Shevonne.

"How are you feeling?" Harry asked Shevonne.

She considered the question. "Strange."

Harry smiled faintly. "That isn't very specific."

"I know." She placed a hand against her chest. "It's like everything is... louder."

"That is your magic?"

She shook her head. "No, everything."

Harry frowned. "What do you mean?"

Shevonne looked toward the window. "I can feel things."

"Things? Where?"

"Everywhere."

She looked around the hospital wing. "The wards, the castle, the candles, what I think is the magic in the room."

Harry nodded slowly, giving her a caring smile. "That is your magic. Your magical core was sealed for your entire life. Now that it's open, you're to experience life in a way you've never been able to before."

Shevonne looked at him. "But there's something else."

Harry waited.

"When Remus isn't touching me..." She stopped.

Remus looked at her. "What?"

She frowned, searching for the right words. "It feels like something is missing."

Harry went very still and Remus stared at her.

"What do you mean?" Remus asked.

Shevonne reached for his hand and the moment their fingers touched, the strange warmth returned.

She drew in a quiet breath. "That." she said and let go of his hand.

Harry was already reaching for his wand. "Don't move."

Remus frowned. "Harry?"

"Just let me check something."

Harry raised his wand and began a diagnostic spell. Soft golden light formed above Shevonne, moving across her body, to map her newly opened magical core.

Harry's expression remained concentrated, then the light changed. It stretched toward Remus and Harry froze. "That's interesting."

Remus looked at him. "Interesting isn't usually a word I want to hear from a healer."

Harry ignored him. "Remus, take Shevonne's hand."

Remus frowned but did as he was told. The moment his hand touched Shevonne's, the magical light brightened.

Harry stepped backward. "What the hell?"

Shevonne looked between them. "What?"

Harry repeated the diagnostic and the same thing happened. A thread of golden magic appeared between them. It was barely visible, almost transparent, but it was unmistakably there. It moved from Shevonne's magical core toward Remus', then back again.

Neither man spoke. Shevonne stared at the connection. "What is that?"

Harry lowered his wand. "I don't know."

Remus's expression hardened. "You have said that too often lately Harry."

Harry gave him a look.

"I'm sorry, but I've never seen anything quite like this before."

Shevonne's fingers tightened around Remus'. "Is it dangerous?"

"No." Harry's answer was immediate. "I don't think so."

Remus looked at him. "You don't think so?"

Harry sighed. "Let me explain what I do know."

He looked at Shevonne. "Your magical core was bound from infancy. That binding didn't simply suppress your magic. It interfered with how your magic interacted with the world around you."

Shevonne nodded. "All right."

"When the binding broke, your magical core opened completely." Harry glanced at Remus. "And something else opened with it."

Shevonne's eyes narrowed. "What?"

Harry looked at the golden thread connecting them. "Your magic has formed a permanent connection with Remus."

Silence filled the room. Remus looked at Shevonne. "Permanent?"

Harry nodded slowly. "I think so."

Shevonne swallowed. "What kind of connection?"

Harry hesitated. "I'm not completely certain."

Remus sighed. "Harry."

"I know, I know." Harry grumbled, lowering his wand. "You have to remember Remus, I haven't been a healer for that many years. There are still things I haven't come across in my practice yet. But there is something I remember reading about."

Shevonne waited.

"Very old magical texts refer to something called a soul bond."

Remus went completely still and Shevonne stared at him. "A soul bond?"

Harry nodded. "They're extraordinarily rare. Most of the accounts are ancient, and many of them are probably exaggerated."

"Then how do you know this is one?"

"I don't."

Harry looked at the connection again. "Not yet."

Remus studied him. "But you think it is."

Harry didn't answer immediately. Instead, he looked at Shevonne. "When did you first feel this?"

Shevonne frowned. "The connection with Remus?"

"Yes."

She looked down. "I'm not sure." she answered, but Harry could tell that she wasn't telling the truth.

"Think carefully." he encouraged.

She was silent for several seconds. "The first time I met him."

Remus's eyes widened slightly in comprehension.

Harry looked at him. "That makes sense."

"What does?" Remus asked.

Harry turned back to Shevonne. "You said you've experienced that tingling sensation since before you came to Hogwarts."

She nodded. "Yes."

"Since you were a child?"

“Yes.”

Harry's expression changed. "And you experienced it when you first met Remus?"

Shevonne nodded. "It was stronger."

Remus remembered the first time he'd looked at her, the way Moony had surged forward inside him, the certainty.

Mate.

His jaw tightened.

"What?" Harry asked.

Remus shook his head. "Nothing."

"Remus."

He looked toward Shevonne. "The wolf."

Harry frowned. "Moony?"

Remus nodded. "When I first saw her, he recognized her."

Shevonne looked at him. "Recognized me?"

Remus hesitated. "I didn't understand it at the time."

Harry waited.

Remus sighed. "He called you his mate."

Shevonne stared at him. "What?"

Remus's ears reddened. "I didn't exactly know how to explain that."

Harry's eyebrows rose. "You probably should have mentioned that."

"I wasn't entirely certain I wanted to discuss my wolf's opinions about my love life."

Despite everything, Shevonne laughed and Harry grinned. Then his expression became thoughtful. "That may actually be important."

Remus looked at him. "Why?"

"Because if the soul bond is real, the wolf may have sensed it before either of you could."

Shevonne looked at Remus. "So when you first met me..."

"I knew something was different."

"But you didn't know what."

"No."

Shevonne looked down at their joined hands. "Neither did I."

For several seconds, neither spoke, then Shevonne felt it again. That tingle, the warmth. It began where her hand touched Remus's and spread slowly through her chest.

Remus felt it too, he could feel her emotions now, not clearly, not as words, but as impressions, warmth, confusion, a little fear, but beneath it all, something that felt unmistakably like trust.

He looked at her. "Shey?"

She opened her eyes. "I can feel you."

Remus's breath caught and Harry stepped closer.

"What do you mean?"

Shevonne looked confused. "Not thoughts, but feelings."

"I can feel yours too." Remus replied.

Harry's eyes widened. "Don't fight it."

Remus frowned. "What?"

"If it is a soul bond, then you're both going to have to learn what that means for the two of you, so don't fight it."

Shevonne looked at him. "Can we hear each other's thoughts?"

Harry shook his head. "Probably not. A soul bond isn't mind reading."

"Then what is it?"

Harry considered his answer. "Connection."

He looked between them. "Your magic recognizes his and his recognizes yours. You may be able to sense each other's emotions. Possibly pain, fear and strong magical disturbances."

Shevonne's expression softened. "That explains the headaches."

Harry nodded. "Possibly."

She looked at Remus. "Your touch always helped."

"I noticed."

"I thought it was because you were a werewolf."

Remus smiled faintly. "So did I."

Harry shook his head. "No."

Both of them looked at him. "I think it was because your magic was already reaching for his, seeking comfort from your other half."

Shevonne's eyes filled with tears. "All those years..."

She touched her chest. "I thought something was wrong with me."

Remus took her hand. "There was never anything wrong with you."

She looked at him. "I know that now."

The golden thread between them brightened and Harry watched it carefully.

Then his expression changed. "Wait."

Remus sighed. "That word again."

Harry didn't smile. "Something is happening."

The magical thread pulsed, once, twice, then a wave of magic moved through the hospital wing. Candles flickered, windows rattled, and Hogwarts seemed to shudder.

Shevonne gasped and Remus immediately pulled her against him. "What was that?"

Harry turned toward the door. "I don't know."

The castle groaned again and this time, the sound seemed to come from somewhere far below them.

Shevonne pressed a hand against her chest and her eyes widened. "Someone is calling me."

Harry turned sharply. "What?"

Shevonne's breathing quickened and she looked toward the floor. "Something is awake and someone is calling me."

Remus felt a chill move through him.

Harry slowly raised his wand. "Don't answer it."

Shevonne looked at him. "I wasn't going to."

But somewhere beneath Hogwarts, something ancient had already heard her. And now that her magic was free, it could finally hear her clearly.

The golden connection between Shevonne and Remus pulsed once more and neither of them noticed the faint symbol that briefly appeared beneath the hospital floor.

But Harry did.

His face went pale. "That's impossible."

CHAPTER 22

For several seconds, nobody moved. Harry remained staring at the faint symbol imposed on the hospital wing floor. Shevonne could still feel the strange pull beneath her skin, as though something far below the castle had reached out and brushed against her magic.

Remus's arm remained firmly around her. "What is it?" he asked.

Harry slowly lowered his wand. "I've seen that symbol before."

"Where?" Shevonne asked.

"In a restricted-section text. It was a very old book. Older than most of the magical records we have today."

Harry looked at the floor again. "It was a book about ancient magical beings. Not creatures in the ordinary sense. These were beings whose magic was powerful enough to shape places, influence magical bloodlines, and, in some cases, survive long after their physical bodies were gone."

Shevonne felt the warmth in her chest change. "Which one?"

Harry looked at her. "Morgana."

The name seemed to echo through the room and Shevonne's breath caught, even though she didn't know why. She had heard the name before, in history texts, but this time, hearing the name, something inside her responded to it in a way that she never had before. Not recognition, not exactly, something closer to warning.

Remus felt the change in her immediately. "Shey?"

"I'm all right."

Harry studied her carefully. "Are you sure?"

She nodded, although she wasn't entirely certain. "What does this mean?"

"I don't know." Harry answered and Remus gave him a pointed look. Harry sighed. "I know, I know, I've said that too many times tonight."

"You're a healer," Remus said. "You're supposed to know things."

Harry gave him an unimpressed look. "I'm a healer. Unlike what some people think, I am not an all seeing mage." Harry grumbled with irritation.

“I'm sorry Harry.” Remus said with a chargrined look on his face.

“It's alright, I wish I had more answers for you.” Harry sighed.

Shevonne wasn't paying attention to the two men, her attention was on the symbol of Morgana. The name had stirred something inside her, but it wasn't the name itself that unsettled her.

It was the way Harry had described the magic. Shaping places and influencing magical bloodlines even after physical bodies were gone.

Alexander was the only name she had ever known herself as, but now, that wasn't the only name associated with her. There was another, one that had existed before she even knew magic was real. A name that had belonged to her even before she was born.

"There's something else I need to do." She finally spoke and Remus turned toward her.

"What?"

She hesitated. "Choose."

Harry frowned. "Choose what?"

"My name."

Neither man spoke and Shevonne looked toward the closed hospital wing doors.

"For thirty years, I have been Shevonne Erin Alexander. That name belongs to the people who raised me. They loved me. They gave me a home. They were there for every birthday, every scraped knee, every nightmare, every accomplishment." Her voice softened. "I will never stop being their daughter."

Remus squeezed her hand.

"But now I know there was another name."

She looked at Sirius's empty chair. "Selena."

Harry nodded slowly. "Selena Celestia Black."

Shevonne closed her eyes. Her biological mother had chosen that name for her before she had ever taken her first breath. A woman she had never known, a woman who had died giving birth to her, a woman whose only tangible gift to her had been a name.

"My birth mother gave me that name," Shevonne whispered.

"Yes," Harry said.

"And Sirius told me I could choose whether I wanted to use it."

"He did."

Shevonne opened her eyes. "For most of my life, I thought my missing history was something I simply had to accept. I thought being adopted meant there would always be questions I couldn't answer and that didn't bother me much because I knew I was loved."

She looked down at her hands. "Now I have answers. Some of them are painful. Some of them are things I wish I had never learned." Remus moved closer. "But they're mine."

Remus nodded. "They are."

Shevonne took a slow breath. "I don't want to pretend Selena never existed." Remus's expression softened. "But I don't want to stop being Shevonne either."

Harry smiled faintly. "You don't have to."

Shevonne looked at him. "No. I don't." She sat quietly for several moments, then she smiled. "I think I know what I want."

Remus and Harry waited and then Remus asked. "What?"

She looked at him. "Shevonne Selena Black."

The words sounded strange, and yet, somehow, they also sounded right. She repeated them silently.

Shevonne Selena Black.

Not Selena Black pretending to be someone else, not Shevonne Alexander pretending that her past didn't exist, but both. The woman her adoptive parents had raised and the daughter of a woman who had given her another name before she died.

"I'll still be Shevonne," she said softly. "I'll still be the woman my parents raised." She looked toward Remus. "But I want Selena to be part of me too."

Remus smiled. "I think your birth mother would be proud of you."

Shevonne's eyes filled with tears. "You never knew her."

"No." He lifted her hand and kissed her knuckles. "But I know you."

That simple answer nearly broke her. She moved closer and rested her forehead against his. "I think I like it."

"What?"

"My name."

His smile widened. "Shevonne Selena Black."

She nodded. "Yes."

Harry noticed immediately that the golden thread between Shevonne and Remus brightened.

"Interesting." He said and Remus and Shevonne looked up at him in question. "The connection reacted when you said your name."

Shevonne looked down. The golden light had appeared again, faint but unmistakable. "Why?"

"I don't know."

Remus sighed. "Harry."

"I know, but I think there's something important here."

"What?"

"Names carry magical significance."

Shevonne frowned. "How?"

"In some forms of ancient magic, a name isn't merely what someone is called. It can represent identity, bloodline, inheritance, even magical recognition."

Shevonne looked toward the floor. "Morgana."

Harry nodded and the room fell silent again. Then Shevonne felt it. A whisper, not in the room, but inside her.

Selena.

Her eyes widened. "Did you hear that?"

Remus immediately looked at Harry. "Hear what?"

Shevonne pressed a hand against her chest. "My name."

Harry stood. "What did you hear?"

"Someone said Selena."

Harry's face tightened. "Was it a voice?"

"I don't know." She closed her eyes. "It felt like it came from everywhere."

Remus moved closer. "You're not answering it."

"I wasn't planning to, but it already knows my name." Shevonne said, opening her eyes.

Harry looked toward the floor. "We need to find out why."

The hospital wing doors suddenly opened and Sirius stepped inside. He stopped when he saw the expressions on the three faces.

"What happened?"

Harry glanced toward Shevonne. "She chose her name."

Sirius looked confused. "What?"

Shevonne smiled faintly. "I've decided to use Shevonne Selena Black."

For several seconds Sirius simply stared at her. "Selena?"

She nodded. "My mother gave me that name. I don't want to lose it."

“Black?”

“I want to honor your name and the fact that you are my brother.” She told him.

Sirius’ eyes filled with tears and he crossed the room and pulled her carefully into his arms. "Welcome home, little sister."

Shevonne closed her eyes and lay her head against his shoulder. For the first time, the word *home* didn't feel like something belonging only to the past. She had one family who had raised her and another family who had found her and Remus, whose soul was now magically intertwined with hers.

She belonged to all of it.

She pulled away from Sirius.

"There's something else.” She said and his expression immediately became concerned.

"What?"

Shevonne pointed to the symbol and the floor.

“What is that?” He asked.

Shevonne glanced at Harry. "I was told that the symbol is connected to Morgana."

Sirius's expression changed. "Who told you that?"

"Harry."

Sirius looked at Harry who nodded. Sirius went silent for a moment and then he looked back at Shevonne who continued.

“Apparently Morgana or someone or something is calling to me.” She said.

“What do you mean?” He asked and the three told him about what had happened while he was out of the room. "Do you know what Morgana wants?"

"No."

"Do you know why she is calling you?"

"No."

Sirius's jaw tightened. "Then we're going to find out before you answer her."

Remus nodded. "Agreed."

Harry looked between them. "We should tell Minerva."

Sirius shook his head. "Not yet."

Harry frowned. "Why?"

"Because if something beneath this castle has been waiting for Selena Black to wake up, I don't think we should assume it wants us to know it exists."

Shevonne felt a chill move down her spine. "Then what do we do?"

Sirius looked at her. "We learn everything we can."

Harry nodded. "I'll go back through the restricted section."

"I'll talk to Minerva," Sirius said.

Remus looked at Shevonne. "And I'll stay with her."

Sirius gave him a knowing look. "I assumed you would."

Remus ignored him and Shevonne smiled despite herself. For the first time since waking up, the fear began to loosen its grip. She wasn't alone, she had never been more certain of that, then the floor beneath them trembled.

Not violently. Just enough to make the instruments rattle.

Everyone froze and the golden thread between Shevonne and Remus flared brightly and somewhere beneath Hogwarts, something whispered her name again. This time, all four of them heard it.

"Selena."

Sirius drew his wand, Harry's expression hardened, Remus pulled Shevonne closer and Shevonne stared toward the floor.

She wasn't frightened, not anymore, whatever waited beneath Hogwarts had called her by name. Now she intended to find out why.

CHAPTER 23

Harry returned to the hospital wing less than an hour later, carrying three books and a roll of parchment beneath one arm.

Remus looked up. “That was quick.”

Harry placed the books on the table. “The problem is that the symbol I remember isn't quite the same as the one that appeared here.”

Sirius frowned. “How is it different?”

“I'm still trying to determine that.”

Shevonne looked toward the faint symbol still visible on the floor. “So, what does that mean?”

Harry studied it for several moments. “It means I've been asking the wrong question.”

Remus frowned. “What's the right one?”

Harry looked at Shevonne. “Not *what is the symbol?* We already know it's connected somehow to ancient magic.” His expression hardened. “The question is why did it appear now?”

The faint mark was already beginning to fade, so Shevonne leaned closer to it to get a better look.

Harry crouched beside it. “Don't touch it.”

“I wasn't going to.” Shevonne said.

Harry glanced at her, then back at the symbol. He no longer looked at it as simply another magical anomaly. Shevonne recognized the expression immediately. It was the same concentration she'd seen when he examined her after the attack. Focused. Analytical. The healer was still there, but something else had surfaced within him.

“What are you looking for?” Remus asked.

“I'm not sure yet.” Harry reached into his robes and withdrew a small piece of parchment. “I need an exact copy of this. The records describe several variations of ancient symbols associated with Morgana. I don't want to rely on memory.”

He raised his wand, and a thin line of light traced itself around the symbol. Slowly and precisely, the image lifted from the stone and settled onto the parchment. Harry examined the copy, then the original, then the copy again. “An exact copy.” He said.

Sirius moved closer. “And that helps us how?”

“Now I can compare it with the historical records.”

Shevonne watched him carefully. “You think the books will tell you what it means?”

“I hope so.”

“You sound more confident than you did five minutes ago.”

Harry gave her a brief smile. “Confidence isn't the same thing as having all the answers.” He tucked the parchment into his robes. “At first, I thought the unusual behavior of your magic was the result of the binding.”

Shevonne nodded. “You told me you couldn't see everything while it was in place.”

“I couldn't.” Harry glanced at her, then at Remus. His eyes lingered for a moment on the place where the golden thread between them had appeared. “Then the binding was removed, your magical core opened, and everything changed.”

“I thought that was because I could finally feel my magic.”

“So did I.” Harry looked back at the symbol. “But I'm not certain anymore.”

Remus's expression tightened. “What are you thinking?”

Harry was silent for a moment. “I've spent most of my career looking at magic from one perspective.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “As a healer?”

“Yes.” Harry looked at Shevonne. “When someone comes to me injured, my first question is what's wrong with them. Then I determine what caused it. Then I figure out how to stop it from happening again.”

Remus nodded. “That sounds like a healer.”

“It is.” Harry's gaze moved to the fading symbol. “But that's where I've been looking at this incorrectly.”

Shevonne frowned. “How?”

“I've been asking what is wrong with your magic.” He looked directly at her. “Maybe nothing is wrong with it.” The words settled over the room.

Shevonne stared at him. “Then what is happening?”

“I don't know.”

Remus sighed. “Harry.”

“I know, I know,” A brief smile crossed Harry's face. “But this time, I mean something different.”

He crouched again, studying the place where the symbol had appeared.

“Your magic isn't behaving like damaged magic.” He looked up at Shevonne. “It's behaving like magic that recognizes something.”

Sirius went still. “Recognizes what?”

“I'm not sure.” Harry glanced at the parchment. “But I'm beginning to think your name, your bloodline, your magic, and whatever is beneath Hogwarts may all be connected.”

Sirius's expression darkened. “And Morgana?”

Harry folded the parchment carefully. “That's what I intend to find out.”

He started toward the door. “Restricted Section?” Sirius called out.

Harry stopped. “Yes.”

Shevonne watched him. “Harry?” He turned. “You seem different.”

Harry was quiet for a moment. “Maybe I am.”

Remus studied him and Harry leaned against the doorframe.

“For years, everyone looked at me and saw the person who defeated Voldemort. After the war, I wanted something quieter.”

Shevonne understood. “So, you became a healer.”

“Yes.”

“And you love it.”

Harry smiled. “I do. I like being able to help someone without having to fight a battle to do it. I like watching someone walk into my office frightened and uncertain and then seeing them leave knowing they're going to be all right.”

Remus smiled. “That sounds more like you than fighting ever did.”

“Maybe.” Harry's expression became serious again. “But wanting peace doesn't mean refusing to act when peace is threatened.”

Sirius stared at him and Harry looked toward the floor.

“I don't want to become the person everyone expects to save them again. I don't want to be some symbol.” His hand closed around his wand. “But I'm still capable of recognizing danger.” His voice hardened. “And I'm not going to ignore it simply because I spent the last few years learning how to heal instead of how to fight.”

Remus's smile disappeared. “You think this is dangerous.”

“I think we don't know what it is.” Harry looked at all three of them. “And that's enough reason to take it seriously.”

Sirius nodded slowly. “That's the Harry I remember.”

Harry smiled faintly. “I'm still me.”

“Unfortunately,” Sirius said and Harry laughed.

Then the floor trembled and everyone froze. The parchment inside Harry's robes suddenly grew warm. He pulled it free. The copied symbol was glowing.

Harry stared at it. “That isn't supposed to happen.”

Shevonne closed her eyes and the golden thread between herself and Remus flared, warmth moving through her body. “I can feel it.”

Remus immediately turned toward her. “What?”

She opened her eyes. “Something beneath us.”

Harry stepped closer. “What does it feel like?”

Shevonne concentrated. “Not angry.” She hesitated. “Not exactly.”

Sirius frowned. “What, then?”

Shevonne looked toward the floor. “Like it's waiting.”

Harry stared at her. “Waiting for what?”

She shook her head. “I don't know.”

The symbol pulsed once, twice and then it went dark. Harry looked down at the parchment.

He had spent years believing the healer and the person who had once fought Voldemort belonged to different parts of his life. Maybe they didn't. A healer prevented wounds, a protector

prevented people from being hurt, and sometimes protecting someone meant confronting the danger before it had a chance to strike.

Harry slipped the parchment back into his robes. “I need to talk to Minerva.”

Sirius looked surprised. “You said we shouldn't tell her.”

“I know.”

“What changed?”

Harry looked at Shevonne. “Everything.”

Remus nodded and Sirius sighed. “Fine. But no running off alone into ancient magical chambers.”

Harry smiled. “I'm not twelve anymore.”

“That's exactly what someone about to do something reckless would say.”

Shevonne laughed softly and the tension eased.

Harry looked at her. “One thing.”

“What?”

“If you hear that voice again—”

“I won't answer.”

Harry nodded. “Good.” He reached for the door, then paused. “And Shevonne?”

“Yeah?”

“You're not the patient anymore.”

She frowned. “What does that mean?”

Harry glanced toward the place where the symbol had disappeared. “It means I don't think your magic is something that needs to be fixed.” He smiled. “I think it's something we need to understand.” Then he left.

For several moments, no one spoke. Shevonne looked at the closed door. Remus's arms tightened gently around her.

Sirius finally broke the silence. “Well.”

Shevonne glanced at him. “What?”

Sirius smiled. “Harry's back.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “He never went anywhere.”

“No,” Sirius said quietly. “But something changed in him after the war.” He looked toward the door. “And now I think he's remembering that the two parts of himself were never really separate.”

Shevonne understood. Harry hadn't abandoned the healer he'd become, he had simply realized that sometimes healing meant making certain there was never a wound to heal in the first place.

CHAPTER 24

When Harry returned to the library, he wasn’t really surprised to find Hermione there. She spent many of her Saturday afternoons in the Hogwarts library. With Harry’s inheritances and successful healing practice, Hermione did not have to hold a full-time job. After their first child, James Daniel was born, she had decided to try her hand at writing and had several published works under her belt, including a text about the Second Wizarding War.

Harry stopped a few feet away and just watched her for several moments. She grew more beautiful to him every day and sitting there, surrounded by books and parchment, with their second child due to arrive in just a few short weeks, she was more radiant to him than she had ever been.

Hermione looked up. “You were supposed to be finishing my surprise.”

“I was.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Then why are you here?”

Harry crossed the room and sat opposite her. “Because we have a mystery.”

Hermione immediately put down her quill. “What kind?”

Harry reached into his robes. “It concerns Shevonne.”

Her expression changed instantly. “Is she alright?”

“Physically, yes.”

Hermione relaxed slightly.

“But something happened after the binding was removed.” Harry placed the parchment on the table.

“When her magical core opened, a soul bond between her and Remus awakened. The castle reacted.”

Hermione looked at him sharply. “How?”

“A tremor, then this appeared on the floor of the hospital wing.”

He unfolded the parchment and Hermione studied the symbol and her expression slowly changed. “That's ancient.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what it is?”

“I thought I did.”

She looked up. “Morgana?”

“Possibly.”

Hermione studied the symbol again. “But?”

Harry shook his head. “It isn't exactly like the symbol associated with her.”

Hermione leaned closer. “I've seen something similar.”

“Where?”

“One of the older texts on pre-medieval magical societies.”

Harry smiled faintly. “Of course you have.”

Hermione gave him a pointed look. “You married me. You should know better than to be surprised by what I've read.”

Harry smiled, but his expression soon became serious again. “I've been looking through records about Morgana.”

Hermione's eyes returned to the parchment. “And you think the symbol appeared because of Shevonne.”

“I don't know.”

“But you think it did.”

“Yes.”

Hermione considered that. “What exactly happened?”

Harry explained. “The castle trembled when Shevonne's magic became fully accessible. The symbol appeared immediately afterward. Shevonne felt something beneath Hogwarts.”

Hermione looked up. “What did she feel?”

“Something calling her.”

Hermione's eyes narrowed. “Calling?”

“She said it felt like something had awakened.”

Hermione was silent.

Harry waited. “What?”

“I'm thinking.”

“That usually means I'm about to dislike whatever you're going to say.”

A faint smile touched Hermione's lips, then just as quickly it disappeared.

“Harry, ancient magic doesn't usually react to a person without a reason.”

“I know.”

She looked at the symbol. “What if it wasn't reacting to Shevonne?”

Harry frowned. “What do you mean?”

“What if it was reacting to what happened to her?”

“The binding?”

Hermione nodded. “Think about it. The binding was placed on Shevonne when she was an infant. For thirty years, whatever magic was inside her was hidden.”

Harry nodded.

“Then the binding was removed, her magical core became accessible and her bond with Remus awakened.”

“And Hogwarts reacted.”

“Yes.”

Hermione looked at the parchment. “That is too much of a coincidence.”

Harry leaned forward. “That's what bothers me.”

“Why?”

“Because if something beneath Hogwarts was simply awakened by the release of her magic, then we need to know what it is.”

Hermione's eyes lifted. “And if it wasn't awakened?”

Harry looked at her. “What if it was waiting for her?”

The room seemed suddenly quieter. Hermione slowly leaned back. “What did Shevonne actually say?”

“She said it felt like something was waiting for her.”

Hermione's expression changed. “That's very different from saying something simply woke up.”

“How?”

“Waking suggests an event.” She tapped the parchment. “Waiting suggests intent.”

Harry went still and Hermione continued.

“If something has been dormant beneath Hogwarts for centuries, and it reacts specifically when Shevonne's magic is freed, then perhaps it wasn't awakened by her.”

Harry's eyes narrowed. “Perhaps it recognized her.”

Hermione nodded. “Exactly.”

The word seemed to settle between them. Harry looked down at the symbol. “Recognized her as what?”

Hermione sighed. “I don't know.”

Harry smiled faintly. “I was afraid you were going to say that.”

“You keep expecting me to have all the answers.”

“You're Hermione.”

“And you're Harry.”

“That doesn't mean anything.”

“It means you've spent most of your life expecting impossible things to become possible.”

Despite himself, Harry smiled but it quickly faded. “The symbol didn't feel like a warning.”

Hermione looked at him. “What did it feel like?”

Harry thought back to the moment in the hospital wing. “Like a door.”

Hermione frowned. “A door?”

“Not literally.” He shook his head. “More like an indication that something had opened.”

Hermione looked down at the symbol. “And Shevonne was the key.”

Harry didn't answer, he didn't need to. The possibility hung between them. For the first time, Harry felt something beyond curiosity. Responsibility. He had spent years trying to leave the wars behind. He had become a healer because he wanted his hands to save people rather than destroy them. But perhaps those things had never truly been opposites.

Sometimes healing meant preventing the wound and sometimes protection meant confronting the danger before it reached the people you loved and Shevonne was now his aunt. He would not allow something ancient to reach her without understanding what it was first.

Hermione suddenly looked up. “I think we're asking the wrong question.”

Harry blinked. “What do you mean?”

“We keep asking what Morgana wants with Shevonne.”

“Yes.”

“But what if that's not the question?”

“What is the question?”

Hermione leaned forward. “Why can Shevonne hear the voice at all?”

Harry stared at her.

Hermione continued. “We know Shevonne has magical ancestry. We know someone placed a binding on her when she was an infant. We know the binding hid her magical core. We know that when the binding was removed, her magic changed.”

Harry nodded.

“And now something beneath Hogwarts recognizes her.”

“Yes.”

“And the symbol appeared only after her magic was freed.”

Harry looked toward the shelves. “What are you suggesting?”

Hermione's gaze returned to the parchment. “I'm suggesting the binding may not have been placed on Shevonne simply to suppress her magic.”

Harry's eyes narrowed. “What else would it have been for?”

“To hide her.”

He stared at her. “Hermione?”

“Think about it.” ”If someone wanted to prevent Shevonne from using magic, they could have suppressed her magical ability. But according to what you've told me, the binding did more than that.”

“It obscured her magical core.”

“Exactly.”

Harry slowly nodded. “So, whoever placed it may have wanted to make her invisible to magical detection, but why?”

Hermione shook her head. “That is the question we need to answer.” She picked up the parchment again. “And this symbol may help us.”

Harry looked at it. “You think it's a marker?”

“It may be.”

“A marker for what?”

“I don't know yet.”

Hermione stood and walked toward the shelves. She ran her fingers along several ancient volumes before pulling one free. She returned to the table and opened it carefully.

“Ancient magical families used symbols to identify bloodlines, magical territories, oaths, inheritances, and places of power.”

Harry frowned. “Places of power?”

“Yes.”

She turned several pages. “Some forms of ancient magic were tied to locations. A witch or wizard could leave magic behind that remained connected to a particular place for centuries.”

Harry thought of Shevonne's description. Waiting. “Like something sleeping beneath Hogwarts.”

Hermione looked at him. “Exactly.”

Harry felt a chill move through him. “Hogwarts was founded over a thousand years ago.”

“I know.”

“Morgana predates much of the modern wizarding world.”

“I know that too.”

“You're suggesting she may have left something here?”

“I'm suggesting it is one possibility.”

Harry stared at the book. “And if it's been waiting all this time?”

Hermione's expression became grim. “Then we need to find out what it's waiting for.”

A sound behind them made both of them turn. Shevonne stood at the end of the aisle.

Harry immediately stood. “Shevonne.”

She smiled faintly. “I was looking for you. I thought maybe I could help with the research.”

Shevonne walked closer and when she saw the symbol on the parchment, she stopped and her breathing changed.

Hermione noticed immediately. “Are you alright?”

Shevonne nodded slowly. “I think I've seen that symbol before tonight.”

Harry exchanged a glance with Hermione. “When?”

Shevonne touched her chest. “A long time ago.”

“When you were a child?” Hermione asked.

“No.” Shevonne shook her head. “Older.”

Harry frowned. “How can you remember something older than your childhood?”

“I don't know.” Shevonne looked down at the parchment. The symbol seemed almost to shimmer beneath her gaze. “But I think this symbol was meant to be found.”

Hermione went very still. “By you?”

Shevonne looked at her. “I think so.”

For several seconds, Hermione simply studied her, not as Harry’s patient, not as Sirius’ newly discovered sister, not even as Remus’ partner, but as someone standing at the center of a mystery that might have existed long before any of them were born.

Hermione slowly closed the book. “Then we start with the oldest records we can find.” She said.

Shevonne looked at her. “You believe me?”

Hermione smiled. “I believe you felt what you felt.”

She glanced toward Harry. “And I believe there's a reason you recognize that symbol.”

Harry nodded. “So do I.”

Shevonne looked between them. “What happens now?”

Hermione's expression sharpened with determination. “Now we find out why.”

Shevonne looked once more at the symbol, looked at Harry and Hermione and she no longer felt like she was merely waiting for the next thing to happen, she was going to help find the answer herself.

CHAPTER 25

Shevonne remained standing beside the table long after Hermione closed the book. For the first time since the binding had been removed, she felt as though she had a choice.

Until now, everything had happened *to* her, the headaches, the discovery that she was Sirius's sister, the truth about her mother, the binding, the soul bond with Remus, the symbol and whatever had called her from beneath Hogwarts.

She had spent much of the past several days trying simply to understand what had happened. Now she wanted something different, she wanted answers.

"Where do we start?" she asked.

Harry leaned back in his chair. " I think the first thing we need to do is figure out what you mean when you say you've seen the symbol before."

Shevonne nodded. "I wish I could tell you."

"You said it felt older than your childhood."

"It did."

Hermione returned to the table. "Let's start there."

She pulled the parchment toward her again. "Close your eyes."

Shevonne hesitated. "Why?"

"Because I want you to think about the first time you remember seeing it."

Harry glanced at Hermione. "Are you sure that's safe?"

Hermione looked at him. "We're not performing Legilimency. We're asking her to remember."

Harry nodded, though he still looked uneasy.

Shevonne noticed. "You're worried."

"I'm a healer."

"That isn't an answer."

"It is when I'm worried."

Shevonne gave him a small smile, then she closed her eyes. At first, there was nothing, only darkness. She could hear the faint crackle of the library fireplace, the rustle of parchment, someone turning a page.

She breathed slowly. “Nothing,” she whispered.

“Don't force it,” Hermione said. “Just let the memory come if it wants to.”

Shevonne closed her eyes and tried again. After a moment, a warmth moved through her chest and her breath caught.

Harry straightened. “What?”

“I remember something.”

Hermione immediately leaned closer. “What do you remember?”

Shevonne's brow furrowed. “Stone.”

Harry exchanged a glance with Hermione. “What kind of stone?”

“I don't know.”

Her voice became quieter. “It's dark.” Shevonne's breathing quickened. “There are candles.”

“How many?”

“I can't tell.”

Hermione kept her voice calm. “Are you inside Hogwarts?”

Shevonne shook her head. “No.”

“Then where?”

“I don't know.”

The image shifted and for one brief moment, Shevonne saw a room, not as it existed now, but as it had existed long ago. There were no bookshelves, no tables, no enchanted lamps, only stone walls and a circular floor.

And in the center of that floor—The symbol. Shevonne gasped.

Harry reached for her hand and the moment their fingers touched, the vision disappeared. Shevonne opened her eyes. Her face had gone pale.

Remus's voice came from the doorway. “What happened?”

Shevonne turned, none of them had heard him enter. He crossed the room immediately and went to her side.

“I remembered it.”

Hermione stood. “Where?”

Shevonne looked down at the parchment. “I don't know.”

Harry frowned. “But you saw something.”

“Yes.”

“What?”

Shevonne took a deep breath “A room.”

Hermione's eyes sharpened. “Under Hogwarts?”

“No.” She shook her head slowly. “It wasn't Hogwarts.”

Harry exchanged a look with Hermione. “Then where was it?”

Shevonne looked at them. “I don't know.” She paused and her eyes returned to the symbol. “But, it wasn't empty.”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

Shevonne struggled to find the words. “I wasn't alone.”

Remus's hand tightened around hers. “Who was there?”

“I couldn't see her face.”

Hermione went very still. “Her?”

Shevonne nodded. “I don't know why I know that.”

Harry's expression hardened. “What did she do?”

Shevonne closed her eyes again. “She was standing beside the symbol.”

A chill moved through the room. “And?” Hermione asked.

“She was waiting.”

For several seconds, no one moved. Shevonne remained seated, her hand still wrapped around Remus's.

“She was waiting,” Hermione prompted quietly.

Shevonne nodded. “Yes.”

“For you?”

“I don't know.”

Hermione studied her face. “Did she speak?”

Shevonne closed her eyes, trying to reach for the memory again. “No.”

“Did she look at you?”

“I think so.”

“You think?”

“It wasn't like remembering something that happened yesterday.” Shevonne opened her eyes. “It felt different. More like remembering something I'd forgotten that I was supposed to remember.”

Harry frowned. “That doesn't make sense.”

“I know.”

Hermione shook her head. “Actually, it might.”

Harry looked at her. “Explain please.”

Hermione walked slowly around the table. “If the memory is connected to ancient magic, it may not be a conventional memory.”

Shevonne frowned. “What else would it be?”

“A magical imprint.”

Remus looked at her. “You mean someone put the memory there?”

“Possibly.”

Shevonne felt a chill. “Why would anyone do that?”

Hermione didn't answer immediately. Instead, she looked at Harry. “The binding.”

Harry's expression changed. “You think the two are connected.”

“I think we have to assume they are until we prove otherwise.”

Shevonne looked between them and Hermione sat down again and folded her hands over her baby bump.

“We know the binding was placed on you when you were an infant. We also know it obscured your magical core rather than simply preventing you from using magic.”

“Yes.”

“If someone wanted to hide you, they would have needed to hide more than your magical ability.”

Shevonne's brow furrowed. “My memories?”

“Possibly.”

Remus stiffened. “Would that even be possible?”

“With sufficiently powerful magic?” Hermione hesitated. “Yes.”

Harry leaned forward. “But why leave a memory behind?”

“Maybe whoever created the binding couldn't remove it.”

Shevonne looked at the symbol. “Or didn't want to.”

Hermione met her eyes. “Exactly.”

The thought settled heavily over the room and Shevonne looked down at her hands.

“So someone hid my magic.”

“Yes.”

“They may have hidden me from whatever is beneath Hogwarts.”

“Yes.”

“And they may have left me a memory that I'm only beginning to recover.”

Hermione nodded. “That is what I'm wondering.”

Harry stood and walked toward the shelves. “Then we need to find out what kind of magic could do that.”

Hermione followed him with her eyes. “Memory modification?”

“Not exactly.”

“Memory concealment?”

“Perhaps.”

Shevonne suddenly spoke. “No.”

Everyone looked at her. Shevonne stared at the symbol. “I don't think it was concealed.”

Hermione's eyes narrowed. “Why?”

“Because when I saw it, I knew it.” Shevonne touched her chest. “I didn't remember learning it, I didn't remember being shown it, I simply recognized it.”

Harry returned to the table. “What are you saying?”

Shevonne looked at him. “I think the memory wasn't hidden.” She paused. “I think *I* was.”

No one spoke. Her words seemed to change the entire room. Hermione slowly reached for the ancient book. “That's an important distinction.”

Remus squeezed Shevonne's hand. “Meaning?”

Hermione looked down at the pages. “Meaning perhaps the magic wasn't designed to erase something from Shevonne.” She turned another page. “Perhaps it was designed to prevent something from finding her.”

Harry's expression hardened. “And now it can.”

Hermione nodded. “Now it can.”

A silence followed while Shevonne looked toward the library windows. The afternoon light had begun to fade, casting long shadows across the floor. “How long?”

Harry looked at her. “How long what?”

“How long has it been looking for me?”

Hermione closed the book. “We don't know.”

“But it called me.”

“Yes.”

“And it knew my name.”

“Yes.”

Shevonne's voice became quieter. “Then maybe it has always known where I was.”

Remus looked at her. “Except when the binding hid you.”

Shevonne nodded. “And now the binding is gone.”

Harry's expression became grim. “So whatever has been waiting may finally be able to find you.”

Shevonne looked at him. “Then we need to find it first.”

Harry stared at her for a moment, then he smiled faintly. “That sounds like something I'd say.”

Shevonne returned the smile and Remus gave Harry a pointed look. “Don't encourage her.”

Harry laughed softly. Hermione, however, had returned to the book. “I think I've found something.”

Everyone turned toward her as she ran her finger slowly down a page. “This is a reference to magical concealment.”

Harry moved beside her. “What does it say?”

“Not much.”

“Of course.”

Hermione ignored him. “It describes a form of ancient magic used by certain families during periods of conflict.”

Sirius's voice came from the doorway. “What sort of conflict?”

Everyone turned at the sound of his voice. He stood there with his arms folded. Hermione turned the book toward him.

“I'm not sure this is about a war.”

Sirius approached the table. “What is it?”

Hermione pointed to a passage. “An ancient protection ritual. It could conceal a person's magical signature from other magical beings.”

Sirius's expression became serious. “Other beings?”

“Witches and wizards. Potentially creatures with magical senses as well.”

Harry looked at Shevonne. “But why would a child need that?”

Sirius went very quiet and Shevonne noticed. “What?”

He looked at her. “I don't know.”

Shevonne's eyes narrowed. “You're lying.”

Sirius sighed. “I don't know the answer.”

“I don't believe you.”

He looked down at the book. “There are some things I haven't told you.”

Remus straightened. “Sirius.”

Sirius pulled out the chair beside Shevonne and sat. “When I found the records concerning your birth, there were sections that didn't make sense.”

Shevonne stared at him. “What sections?”

“References to your mother being afraid.”

Shevonne's breath caught. “Afraid of what?”

“The records never named it specifically.”

Hermione leaned forward. “What did they say?”

Sirius hesitated. “They said Shevonne's mother was trying to keep her child hidden from something that could find her through magic.”

Shevonne felt cold. “Through my magic?”

“No.” Sirius looked at her. “Through your blood.”

Shevonne stared at him. “My blood?”

Sirius nodded slowly. “That's what the record suggested.”

Hermione's face had gone very still. Harry looked toward the symbol. “Then the symbol…”

“Could be connected to her bloodline,” Hermione finished.

Shevonne looked down at her hands. “Who was my mother hiding me from?”

Sirius shook his head. “I don't know.”

Shevonne looked at the symbol. “But something knows.”

Hermione nodded. “Yes.”

Shevonne stood. “Then let's stop trying to remember it.”

Harry looked at her. “What?”

“If the memory is connected to whatever my mother was hiding me from, forcing myself to remember may be exactly what we shouldn't do.”

Hermione slowly smiled. “That is an excellent point.”

Shevonne looked at the ancient book. “Let's find the answer another way.”

Harry nodded. “And how do you suggest we do that?”

Shevonne looked toward the shelves. “We find out what my mother knew.”

Sirius stood. “She left very little.”

“Then we find what little she left.”

Remus rose beside her. “And if there's nothing?”

Shevonne looked at him. “Then we look harder.”

A faint smile touched Remus's face and somewhere beneath Hogwarts, something ancient remained silent, waiting.

CHAPTER 26

“I know where we can start.” Sirius said as the light through the library windows dimmed and the last traces of daylight disappeared behind the mountains.

“Where?” Harry asked.

“The records I found at Gringotts about Shevonne's birth.”

Shevonne turned toward him. “You said there were sections that didn't make sense.”

“There were.”

“Do you have the records with you?”

“They're in my quarters.”

“Then let's go.”

“Shey.” Remus said, catching hold of her hand gently and continued when she looked at him.

“We've been at this for hours.”

“I know.”

“You've had a concussion, cracked ribs, and you're still recovering.”

She frowned. “I'm fine.”

“You said that earlier.”

“And I was.”

“You were unconscious shortly afterward.”

Sirius nodded. “We can continue tomorrow.”

Shevonne looked toward the ancient book lying open on the table. She looked down at Remus's hand, still wrapped around hers.

For a moment she considered arguing. Then she sighed.

“You're right.”

Remus's expression softened as he brushed his thumb across her knuckles.

“Good.”

They gathered the books and parchment, leaving the ancient volume open beneath the protective charms Hermione had placed around it.

As they stepped into the corridor, Sirius, Harry, and Hermione headed in one direction while Remus and Shevonne turned toward her quarters.

For several moments, neither spoke, they simply walked, their hands remaining joined.

“You're worried,” Remus finally said.

“You can tell?” she asked, glancing at him.

“I can feel it.”

“The bond.” she said looking down at their joined hands.

“Yes.”

She was quiet for several steps.

“I still don't completely understand it.”

“Neither do I.”

“That bothers you.”

“A little.”

“You don't like not knowing things.”

“I've spent most of my life knowing exactly which things I didn't want to know.”

“That sounds like something Sirius would say.” she said.

“He would probably say it louder.” Remus smiled.

She laughed softly, then the smile faded.

“Remus?”

“Yes?”

“What if tomorrow changes everything?”

He stopped walking, turning toward Shevonne.

“What do you mean?”

“We've spent so much time trying to understand what happened to me. My mother, the binding, the Black family, the symbol.” She swallowed. “Now we may actually find answers.”

“That doesn't necessarily mean they'll be the answers you want.”

“I know.”

“And whatever we find—”

“You won't face it alone.”

Her eyes softened. “You keep saying that.”

“Because you keep forgetting it.”

“I don't think I forget.”

“You do.”

She looked at him for a moment. “Maybe I'm still learning what it feels like to have someone beside me.”

His expression changed. “We'll learn together.”

His words were simple and they meant more to her than he probably realized. Shevonne reached up and touched his cheek.

“I love you.”

Remus went completely still but did not hesitate. “I love you too.” He said and leaned down and kissed her gently. For several seconds neither moved, then Shevonne looked toward the corridor ahead.

“We should probably keep walking.”

They continued toward her quarters and when they reached her door, Shevonne turned toward him.

“Would you stay for a little while?”

He smiled. “I was hoping you'd ask.”

Inside, the quiet of her quarters was comforting. Shevonne removed her shoes and sank onto the sofa. Remus placed his wand on the small table and sat beside her. For a few moments they simply sat together.

Then Shevonne leaned against him. “I'm still getting used to this.”

“To what?”

She rested her head against his shoulder. “Home.”

Remus looked down at her as Shevonne continued.

“I spent years believing home was a place I had left behind. Then Hogwarts became home. Now, I have another brother, a nephew and great-nephew and I have a new name.

“Selena.”

She nodded. “Shevonne Selena Black.”

Remus smiled. “It suits you.”

She turned her head. “You think so?”

“I do.”

“Even the Black part?”

His expression became thoughtful. “You aren't becoming someone else because you use the name.”

“I know.”

“You're choosing what parts of it belong to you.”

She was silent. “I used to think names were simple,” she finally said. “You were given one. You carried it. That was it.”

“And now?”

“Now I think names are complicated.”

Remus nodded. “They can be.”

She touched the sleeve of his shirt. “My mother gave me Selena.”

“Yes.”

“And Sirius gave me Black.”

Remus smiled. “No. I think you chose Black.”

She looked at him. “You're right.” She leaned back against him. “And you?”

“What about me?”

“Remus Lupin.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“What about it?”

“Did you ever choose it?”

He thought about the question. “I never thought of it that way.”

“Maybe you should.”

He looked down at her. “You're very philosophical tonight.”

“I've had a long day.”

“That explains everything.”

She elbowed him lightly, making him laugh. She smiled at him but then her smile faded. “Remus?”

“Yes?”

“If something happens tomorrow…”

He immediately understood. “Nothing is going to change how I feel about you.”

“You don't know that.”

“I know myself.”

She looked at him and a quiet sense of being exactly where they were supposed to be washed over them. Their bond stirring beneath their skin.

Shevonne closed her eyes. “I can feel you.”

“I know.”

“Not your thoughts.”

“No.”

“Just…you.”

Remus looked down at their joined hands. “I can feel you too.”

She smiled. “It's strange.”

“It is.”

“Not unpleasant.”

“No.”

She rested her head against his chest. “Good, very good”

They remained that way for several minutes and Remus noticed Shevonne's breathing change.

“What is it?”

She lifted her head. “I don't know.”

“What are you feeling?”

She looked toward the floor. “That.”

Remus followed her gaze. Nothing had changed, the room was silent, then she felt it again. A faint pressure, not pain, not fear, but something more distant.

“It's back,” she whispered.

Remus's expression hardened. “The presence?” he said and she nodded.

“It's not inside me.”

“Then where?”

“Below us.”

They both looked toward the floor and as suddenly as it had made itself known, the feeling disappeared.

Shevonne exhaled slowly. “It stopped.”

Remus didn't relax. “Maybe it knows we're aware of it.”

She looked at him. “Do you think it's Morgana?”

“I don't know.”

“Neither does Harry.”

“No.”

Shevonne thought about the symbol, about the voice, about the single word that had come from somewhere beneath the castle.

Selena.

“What if it isn't calling me because it wants me?”

Remus frowned. “What do you mean?”

“What if it's calling me because it needs something from me?”

His expression became grim. “Then we'll find out what.”

She nodded. “Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow.”

Shevonne settled against him again. This time, when she closed her eyes, all she felt was Remus’ warmth and protection.

CHAPTER 27

The following morning, Shevonne woke with the strange certainty that something had changed. For several seconds she remained still, staring at the ceiling.

Then she remembered that she and Remus had spoken aloud their love for each other last night and a small smile touched her lips. She turned onto her side and remembered the way he had looked at her the previous evening when she told him she loved him. There had been no hesitation in his answer.

I love you too.

The words still warmed her.

She finally climbed out of bed and dressed. The moment she opened her door, she found Remus standing in the corridor. He was holding two cups of tea.

She blinked. "You're up early."

"So are you."

"Indeed."

She accepted the cup he offered. "You brought me tea."

"I did."

"How did you know I wanted tea?"

"You always want tea."

She took a sip. He was right. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

For a moment they simply stood there, then Shevonne noticed the look on his face.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"That isn't true."

He smiled. "I was remembering last night."

Her eyes sparkled. "So was I."

He stepped closer. "Regrets?"

She looked directly into his eyes. "None."

The relief that crossed his face was unmistakable. She reached for his hand. "Remus?"

"Yes?"

"I meant what I said."

“So did I.”

“I don't want what happens next to change that.”

His fingers tightened around hers. “It won't.”

Before either could say anything else, hurried footsteps echoed down the corridor.

Harry appeared around the corner. “Remus.”

The warmth in Remus's expression disappeared. “What happened?”

Harry looked toward Shevonne. “We found something.”

Shevonne's stomach tightened. “What?”

“Sirius found another record.”

“About my mother?”

Harry nodded. “And this time, it has a name.”

Shevonne went completely still. “Whose?”

Harry lowered his voice. “Your mother's.”

She felt Remus's hand close more firmly around hers.

“What was her name?” she asked.

Harry hesitated. “That's the problem.”

She frowned. “What do you mean?”

“The record gives her a name.” He looked directly at her. “But it isn't what we expected.”

A chill moved through her. “What name does it give?”

Harry's expression was grim. “Selena Black.”

Shevonne stopped breathing and Remus stared at Harry. “What?”

Harry nodded slowly. “The record identifies Shevonne's mother as Selena Black.”

Shevonne looked down at her hands. Black. The name she had only recently begun to claim. The name she associated with Sirius. With a family she had never known existed. And now—Her mother had carried it.

She lifted her eyes. “Then we finally know who she was.”

Harry shook his head. “No.”

She frowned. “We know her name.”

Harry's expression darkened. “We know the name she was using.”

Silence fell.

“There’s more,” he said.

They found Sirius, Hermione, and the records in a small room adjoining the library.

Several sheets of parchment covered the table. Sirius stood beside them with his arms folded.

Hermione was already reading one of the documents. She looked up as Shevonne entered.

“Good. You're here.”

Shevonne glanced at the papers. “What did you find?”

“The record I found at Gringotts wasn't the only document connected to your mother.”

Shevonne moved closer. “What else is there?”

“Three references,” Sirius said. “Different records. Different dates.”

“About Selena?”

“We don't know for certain that all three references are to the same woman.”

Shevonne looked at Hermione. “You're not convinced?”

Hermione shook her head. “Not yet.”

Shevonne nodded.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “You're not upset?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because if we're going to find the truth, I don't want anyone deciding what the truth is before we have evidence.”

Hermione smiled. “Excellent.”

Harry looked between them. “You two are going to get along very well.”

Shevonne gave him a small smile. “I think so.”

Hermione returned her attention to the parchment. “The first record mentions a Selena Black born in the early 1950s.”

Sirius frowned. “That doesn't fit.”

“Why?”

“Because my family records don't show another Selena.”

Hermione nodded. “Exactly.”

Shevonne felt a cold sensation move through her. “What does the second record say?”

Hermione turned the parchment. “It references a woman using the surname Black, but it doesn't give her first name.”

“And the third?”

Hermione hesitated. “It is the most interesting.”

Shevonne's pulse quickened. “Why?”

“Because it refers to a woman who was trying to hide a child.”

Silence filled the room and Shevonne stared at her. “A child?”

Hermione nodded. “The wording is vague, but the circumstances are remarkably similar.”

“What does it say?”

Sirius picked up the parchment. His expression hardened as he read.

“The mother fears discovery. The child must remain outside Britain. The child must not be entered into the family registry.”

Shevonne felt cold. “Why?”

Sirius continued.

“Those who seek the child may trace the blood.”

Shevonne's eyes moved slowly toward Harry. “Through my blood.”

Harry nodded. “That matches what we found yesterday.”

Hermione leaned closer to the parchment. “There's another line.”

“What?”

Hermione read it carefully. “The old magic must not be allowed to recognize her.”

Shevonne's heart began to pound. “What old magic?”

Hermione looked at her. “I don't know.”

Harry looked toward the symbol they'd been studying. “But I think we may have an idea.”

Sirius's expression darkened. “Morgana.”

Hermione immediately shook her head. “Possibly.”

Sirius frowned. “You don't think so?”

“I think we have evidence of ancient magic connected to Shevonne. I think we have evidence that something beneath Hogwarts is aware of her. And I think we've seen a symbol associated with ancient magical bloodlines.”

She placed her finger on the parchment.

“But we do **not** have enough evidence to say Morgana is responsible.”

Sirius sighed. “I knew you were going to say that.”

“Because it's true.”

Shevonne smiled faintly. “I like her.”

Harry laughed quietly and Hermione looked at Shevonne. “Thank you.”

Shevonne turned back toward the documents. “What did my mother know?”

Nobody answered immediately. Sirius's expression tightened. “We don't know.”

“But somebody did.”

Hermione nodded slowly. “Someone knew enough to make sure you disappeared from the records.”

Shevonne looked down at the parchment. “My mother died giving birth to me. So she couldn't have been the one who hid me.”

“No,” Sirius said quietly. “But she may have known it was necessary.”

Shevonne's fingers tightened against the edge of the table. “Then someone acted for her.”

“Or because of her,” Hermione said.

Shevonne looked at her. “What do you mean?”

Hermione gestured toward the older documents. “If your mother knew there was a threat before you were born, she may have made arrangements. Someone may have been waiting for the child to be born.”

Remus stepped closer to Shevonne. “And whoever took you may have known exactly why they were doing it.”

Shevonne looked at him. “Then that's where we start.”

“We'll find it,” Remus said.

Hermione suddenly looked down. “Wait.”

Everyone turned toward her. She was staring at one of the older documents.

“What?” Sirius asked.

Hermione moved the parchment closer to the candlelight. “This notation.”

Harry leaned over her shoulder. “What about it?”

“This isn't a family notation.”

Sirius frowned. “Then what is it?”

Hermione traced the faded mark with one finger. “It looks like a protective designation.”

Shevonne stared at the symbol. It was different from the one that had appeared in the hospital wing. Yet something about it felt familiar.

Her chest tightened. “I've seen that.”

Remus looked at her. “Where?”

“I don't know.”

Shevonne closed her eyes. For a moment, there was only darkness, then something touched the edge of her awareness. Not a memory, a feeling, warmth, fear, and beneath both, an overwhelming sense of determination.

Shevonne's breath caught. There was no face, no words, no image of a woman holding her, only the unmistakable feeling that someone had been desperately trying to protect her before she was even born. Then a single phrase seemed to form inside her mind.

Keep her hidden.

Shevonne gasped and opened her eyes.

Harry immediately reached for her. “What did you experience?”

She pressed a hand against her chest. “I don't know.”

Remus moved closer. “Tell us what you can.”

“It wasn't a memory.” She looked at the symbol again. “It felt like... something that was left behind.”

Hermione's expression sharpened. “An imprint?”

Shevonne nodded slowly. “Maybe.”

Sirius stared at the parchment. “Your mother?”

Shevonne swallowed. “I didn't see her. I couldn't have, but I felt her fear,” Shevonne continued. “And I felt that she was trying to protect me.”

Hermione looked down at the notation again. “Then this may have been created before you were born.”

Shevonne's eyes widened. “To protect me?”

“Possibly.”

Remus reached for her hand. Whatever the truth was, he wanted her to know that he was there. The golden thread between them warmed.

Then Shevonne looked toward the floor. That same pressure returned, faint, distant, waiting.

Her eyes widened. “It knows.”

Remus's expression tightened. “What?”

“It knows we're looking.”

The room fell silent, then the floor beneath them trembled once, the parchment on the table shifted, the candles flickered, and somewhere beneath Hogwarts, something ancient stirred.

Shevonne felt the golden thread between herself and Remus flare.

Harry drew his wand.

Sirius moved instinctively toward Shevonne.

Hermione remained beside the table, staring at the ancient notation. Then she whispered, “It is waking because of the research.”

Harry looked at her. “What?”

Hermione slowly raised her eyes. “I think the research is waking it.”

Shevonne stared at the floor and a realization settled over her. The thing beneath Hogwarts hadn't been waiting for them to find it. It had been waiting for **her**. Waiting for the moment she uncovered what had been hidden from her. Waiting for her to understand why someone had gone to such lengths to protect her before she was even born.

The tremor stopped, silence returned, but none of them moved, because beneath their feet, something had begun to wake. This time, it wasn't whispering her name, it was calling her.

CHAPTER 28

The room remained silent after the tremor stopped.

Shevonne could still feel it beneath her feet. Not movement exactly. More like awareness. Something below Hogwarts had become conscious of them, and somehow she knew that whatever had awakened had not done so by accident.

Harry was the first to lower his wand. “Everyone stay calm.”

Sirius gave him a look. “You say that as though the castle didn't just tremble because we're reading a piece of parchment.”

“I know how it sounds.”

“That isn't reassuring.”

Hermione ignored them. Her attention remained fixed on the protective designation. “There has to be something we're missing.”

Shevonne looked at her. “What?”

“This notation was placed on a record concerning your mother, but it isn't identifying her.”

Hermione tapped the parchment. “It is identifying something that was being protected.”

“Me,” Shevonne said.

“I think so.”

Remus moved closer. His hand found hers automatically. The golden thread between them warmed. Shevonne looked down at their joined hands.

“I think it knows my name because my name is part of whatever this is.”

Hermione nodded. “That may be why choosing your full name changed the connection.”

Sirius frowned. “Then perhaps we should stop saying her name.”

Shevonne looked at him. “Why?”

“Because whatever is underneath this castle seems very interested in hearing it.”

Harry shook his head. “No. I don't think the name itself is dangerous.”

“Then what is?”

Harry looked at Shevonne. “Recognition.”

The word settled heavily over them. Hermione slowly closed the old book. “We need Minerva.”

Sirius hesitated, then nodded.

They found McGonagall in her office. She listened without interrupting as Hermione explained what they had discovered. When Hermione finished, McGonagall's expression was unusually grave.

“I had hoped this matter would never surface again.”

Shevonne felt her stomach tighten. “You know what it is?”

“I know enough to be concerned.”

McGonagall crossed to a cabinet and removed a thin, black-bound volume.

“This was kept among the most restricted records at Hogwarts. Not because it contains dark magic, but because it contains magic that should never be used carelessly.”

She opened the book but the pages were blank. Then she touched a page and ink appeared.

Shevonne Selena Black.

Shevonne sucked in a breath and McGonagall looked at her.

“The castle recognizes you.”

“Why?”

“I don't know.”

Harry sighed.

McGonagall gave him a knowing look. “Harry, I believe you have finally learned that not knowing something is occasionally the beginning of wisdom.”

He smiled faintly while Hermione leaned over the book. “What does the record say?” she asked.

McGonagall read silently for several moments. “It says that long ago, an ancient magical current was sealed beneath Hogwarts. The founders believed it was a magic too powerful to remain uncontrolled.”

“Who sealed it?” Sirius asked.

McGonagall looked at him. “Morgana.”

The room went still.

“She isn't trapped beneath Hogwarts,” McGonagall continued. “That is the misunderstanding repeated in later histories. Morgana lived in this area of Scotland long before Hogwarts was built.”

“How and why did Morgana seal the power?” Shevonne asked.

“That is what you must discover.”

Remus tightened his grip on Shevonne's hand. “Whatever lies beneath Hogwarts, Shevonne, you will not face it alone.”

Shevonne looked at the others. For the first time since the mystery began, she believed that.

———————

They returned to the library and Hermione spread the oldest maps of Hogwarts across the table. Harry compared them with architectural plans. Sirius searched family records. Remus stayed beside Shevonne.

For nearly an hour, nothing happened, then Shevonne touched one of the maps. Her fingers tingled. “There.”

Everyone looked at her. She pointed to a section beneath the oldest part of the castle. “There is something here.”

Hermione leaned closer. “That isn't on the modern plans.”

Harry studied it. “Because it isn't a room.”

“What is it?”

“A passage.”

The moment he said the word, the golden thread between Shevonne and Remus warmed and a faint line appeared on the parchment. It led from the library toward the oldest foundations of Hogwarts.

Sirius stared. “I suppose we're going down there.”

“No,” Harry said.

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “No?”

“We are going down there prepared.”

Hermione smiled. “That's Harry's way of saying we should bring every protective spell we know.”

They gathered what they needed, McGonagall insisted on accompanying them.

The passage was hidden behind a section of wall that had no visible door. Shevonne placed her hand against the stone. The wall warmed beneath her palm, then it opened. Cold air moved through the passage.

They descended and the deeper they went, the stronger Shevonne's awareness became. She could feel Hogwarts around her. The castle was not simply stone, it was magic layered upon magic, ancient protections, founders' spells, centuries of memories.

At the bottom of the stairs stood a circular door. There was no handle, only the symbol. The same symbol from the records.

Shevonne stepped forward and Remus caught her hand. “You don't have to do this.”

She looked at him. “Yes, I do.”

“Because it is calling you?”

“No.”

She smiled faintly. “Because I choose to find out why.”

She placed her hand against the symbol, but nothing happened. Then she whispered her full name.

“Shevonne Selena Black.”

The door opened. Beyond the door was a chamber unlike anything any of them had ever seen. The walls were covered in ancient writing. At the center stood a pool of silver light.

Hermione stepped forward. “This isn't a prison.”

Harry shook his head. “No.”

“It is a sanctuary.” Hermione whispered.

A voice filled the room, not loud, not threatening, simply old. “Finally.”

Shevonne froze at the sound of the voice. Remus moved beside her. “Who are you?”

The silver light brightened and a woman's silhouette appeared above it.

Shevonne could not see her face clearly, but she knew one thing immediately. This was not her mother, this was someone much older.

“Morgana,” Hermione whispered.

The figure looked toward Shevonne. “No,” the voice said.

“I am what Morgana left behind.”

CHAPTER 29

The figure remained suspended above the silver pool as Shevonne stared at it. “What did she leave behind?”

“A choice.”

Hermione frowned. “What does that mean?”

The figure turned towards Hermione. “Morgana understood what would happen when powerful magic was divided between those who wished to protect and those who wished to control.”

Harry stepped forward. “What was divided?”

“Knowledge.”

The word echoed through the chamber. “Morgana discovered a form of magic capable of recognizing blood, memory, intention and identity. She knew it could be used to protect entire communities—or destroy them.”

Sirius folded his arms. “So, she hid it.”

“She sealed it beneath this place.”

Shevonne looked at the silver pool. “And my family?”

“Your bloodline was entrusted with remembering the seal.”

Shevonne's chest tightened. “My mother knew?”

“Yes.”

The answer hurt more than she expected. “She knew what I was?”

“She knew what you carried.”

Shevonne swallowed. “Then why did she have me hidden?”

“Because others wanted the inheritance.”

Hermione looked at Sirius. “Who?”

The figure's expression remained unreadable. “Those who believed ancient magic belonged to whoever was strong enough to take it.”

Harry's jaw tightened. “Dark wizards.”

“Yes.”

Shevonne stared at the pool. “My mother died giving birth to me.”

“Yes.”

“She never had a chance to protect me herself.”

“She protected you before you were born.”

The words struck her. “How?”

“She prepared the memory.”

Shevonne understood. The feeling she had experienced earlier, warmth, fear, determination, an imprint. Her mother had left something behind, not a conversation, not a vision, but a final act of protection.

“She knew she might die.”

“Yes.”

She did not need memories to know that her mother had loved her. The evidence was everywhere, in the hidden records, in the binding, in the life she had been given, in the name Selena.

Remus moved closer. “You alright?”

She nodded. “I think I finally understand.”

“What?”

“My mother didn't just disappear when she died, she protected me.”

The golden thread between her and Remus brightened and thrummed. The figure watched them.

“The bond matters.”

Harry looked sharply at it. “Why?”

“Because ancient magic recognizes intention. A person acting alone can be manipulated. A soul willingly joined to another is harder to corrupt.”

Remus went still. Shevonne looked at him. “What does that mean?”

“It means you are not the key alone.”

Harry frowned. “Then what is?”

The figure looked between them. “Choice.”

No one moved immediately.

The word seemed to settle over the chamber, heavier than the silence that followed it.

“Choice,” Shevonne repeated softly.

The figure remained motionless.

“What choice?” Harry asked.

The figure's gaze shifted toward Shevonne. “The choice of what the magic becomes.”

Hermione frowned. “But if Morgana sealed it, didn't she already make that choice?”

“She made hers.”

Shevonne felt a chill move through her. “And now it's mine?”

The figure did not answer directly. “The magic cannot be inherited as an object. It cannot be claimed as property. It can only be accepted, rejected, protected, or surrendered.”

Sirius's expression hardened. “And if someone tries to take it?”

“The magic will resist.”

Hermione slowly turned toward the walls. “That explains the inscriptions.”

Harry looked at her. “What do you mean?”

Hermione stepped closer to the nearest marking. The faint silver light running through the ancient symbols had begun to spread, illuminating sections of writing that had been invisible moments before.

“They're changing.”

Harry raised his wand and examined the nearest wall. “Can you read them?”

“Some of them.” She moved closer. “They're not instructions exactly. They're warnings. Morgana wasn't trying to tell someone how to use this power. She was trying to make sure no one ever mistook power for ownership.”

Sirius looked toward the darkened crack in the floor. “And now the seal is failing anyway.”

“Yes,” Hermione said. “Which means whatever is beneath us has been pressing against it for a very long time.”

Shevonne felt another pulse beneath her feet, this one stronger. It traveled upward through the stone and into her bones, making the golden thread between her and Remus flare brightly. Remus noticed her expression immediately.

“Shey?”

“It's getting stronger.”

He moved closer without hesitation. “Then stay close to me.”

She looked at him. “I'm not afraid of it.”

“You don't have to be afraid for me to stay beside you.”

A faint smile touched her lips. “I know.”

The golden thread pulsed once more, and Hermione watched it carefully. “Maybe that's part of the choice.”

Shevonne turned toward her. “What is?”

Hermione glanced between Shevonne and Remus. “The magic isn't responding to one person anymore.”

Remus's expression tightened. “What does that mean?”

Hermione shook her head. “I don't know yet.”

Before anyone could say more, the chamber trembled beneath their feet. This time, the silver pool did not ripple, instead, the ancient writing along the walls flared brighter, illuminating markings that had been almost invisible moments before.

Harry stepped between two of them and raised his wand. “Hermione, if the seal is already weakening, can you determine what's holding it together?”

Hermione studied the markings. “I'm not sure.”

“Try.”

She pulled her wand and began tracing the symbols in the air. The markings responded with a faint silver glow. “It's old,” she murmured. “Much older than anything I've studied.”

Sirius glanced toward the crack in the floor. “But the seal was still intact until recently.”

Hermione hesitated. “Not completely.”

Harry looked at her. “What?”

“I think it has been weakening for a very long time. Slowly. So slowly that no one would have noticed unless they knew exactly what to look for.”

Shevonne felt another pulse beneath her feet. “Then what changed?”

Hermione looked at her. “You.”

Shevonne's expression tightened. “I weakened it?”

“No.” Hermione shook her head. “That's not what I mean.”

Harry understood first. “Her magic was bound.”

Hermione nodded. “And when the binding was removed, whatever is beneath this place could finally sense her clearly.”

Shevonne remembered the strange pull she had felt beneath Hogwarts—the feeling of something calling to her.

“So, my magic didn't break the seal.”

“No,” Hermione said. “It exposed a connection that had been suppressed for years.”

The chamber trembled again and Hermione turned back toward the inscriptions. “And now the seal is responding to that connection.”

Harry stepped closer. “Can it be repaired?”

Hermione's expression changed. “I don't think so.”

“Why?”

She pointed toward the ancient writing. “Because the original magic wasn't designed to be maintained by force.”

“Then what was it designed for?” Sirius asked.

Hermione looked at Shevonne. “Consent.”

The word seemed to echo through the chamber. Shevonne looked at the golden thread between herself and Remus. “That's why the bond matters.”

Hermione nodded slowly. “Maybe.”

Remus looked at Shevonne. “And if you're the one who has to choose?”

Hermione's eyes moved between them. “Then I don't think you're meant to make that choice alone.”

The golden thread pulsed and Shevonne turned toward the silver pool. “Then we don't let it decide for us.”

The figure watched her silently and Shevonne lifted her chin. “Tell me what Morgana would have wanted.”

The answer came softly. “She would have wanted you to make the choice she could not make for you.”

The floor split open before anyone could respond.

CHAPTER 30

The floor split open and the stone groaned beneath their feet. Everyone stumbled as a jagged crack raced across the chamber. The silver pool surged upward, its surface breaking into twisting strands of light.

Harry reacted first. “Everyone back!”

He raised his wand, stepping between Shevonne and the widening crack.

Remus reached for Shevonne at the same moment, pulling her away from the fractured stone. “Are you alright?”

She nodded, but she barely heard him. Something was moving beneath them, not physically. She could feel it through the soles of her feet, through her bones, through the magical connection that had been growing stronger ever since her binding was removed.

The golden thread between her and Remus flared making Shevonne gasp. “It’s awake.”

Hermione stared at the crack. “What is?”

Shevonne shook her head. “I’m not sure.”

The darkness beneath the floor shifted. For an instant, a deep silver light appeared within the fissure, illuminating shapes that seemed to move far below them.

Sirius tightened his grip on his wand. “That wasn't there before.”

“No,” Hermione whispered.

Harry glanced toward the figure. “You knew this would happen.”

The figure remained suspended above the pool. “I knew the seal would open.”

Harry's expression hardened. “You knew it was going to fail.”

“It was already failing.”

Hermione looked sharply at the figure. “Then the weakening wasn't caused by us?”

“No.”

Shevonne looked toward the crack. “Then what caused it?”

“The seal was never permanent.”

The chamber trembled again. “Then why was it created?” Sirius demanded.

“To hold what could not safely remain unbound.”

Hermione stepped closer to the inscriptions. “And now?”

The figure looked at Shevonne. “Now the choice can no longer be postponed.”

Shevonne stared at it. “What choice?”

The figure's answer was quiet. “Whether what Morgana sealed away remains sealed.”

Shevonne looked down at the darkness beneath her. “And if I choose to leave it sealed?”

“You preserve the boundary.”

“And if I choose to open it?”

“You allow the ancient magic to return.”

Harry's expression tightened. “And what happens to Shevonne?”

The figure was silent for a moment. “That depends upon her choice.”

Remus stepped closer to Shevonne. “Then she isn't making it alone.”

The figure turned towards him. “No.” The golden thread between them brightened. “She is not.”

Harry stepped up beside them. “I’m with you.” He spoke.

“I am as well.” Hermione said.

Sirius gave Shevonne a crooked smile. “You’re stuck with us.”

Shevonne looked at Remus, then at Harry, Hermione, and Sirius and suddenly she understood. This was not about discovering what Morgana had hidden, it was about deciding what should happen to it, and that decision had finally come to her.

Suddenly the crack widened and a wave of dark magic rushed through the chamber.

Harry stepped in front of Shevonne and the force struck his shield and sent him backward.

“Harry!”

He caught himself against the wall. “I’m fine.”

“Stay behind me.” Remus said trying to push her behind him, but she shook her head.

“No.”

He looked at her unhappily.

“I can feel it.”

“What?”

“It isn't trying to kill us.” She closed her eyes. “It wants to be recognized.”

Hermione stared at her. “That's impossible.”

“Is it?” Shevonne looked toward the crack. “What if Morgana didn't seal it because it was evil?”

Harry lowered his wand slightly. “What are you thinking?”

“That she sealed it because it couldn't be controlled.” The darkness surged again, but this time Shevonne stepped forward.

Remus caught her wrist. “Shey.”

She looked at him. “I know what I'm doing.”

“You don't.”

She squeezed his hand. “But I know what I'm feeling.”

The golden thread flared and the darkness recoiled.

Hermione's eyes widened. “It's responding to the bond.”

Harry looked at the connection between them. “Then the bond isn't just emotional.”

“No,” Hermione said. “It's magical.”

Shevonne looked at Remus. “Together.”

He nodded. “Together.”

For one heartbeat, Shevonne thought she could hear every voice that had ever tried to tell her who she was.

Adopted child.

Muggle.

Black.

Professor.

Guardian.

The words pulled at her from different directions, each one threatening to become the whole of her if she allowed it.

Then she heard Remus, not aloud, but through their bond. “Shey.” The sound of his voice and the warmth of his presence in her mind steadied her.

She looked at him and saw no expectation in his face. He wasn't asking her to save them. He wasn't asking her to become something extraordinary. He was simply there. That mattered more than she could explain.

Harry moved to her left. “Tell us what you need.”

Shevonne closed her eyes. “Don't fight it.”

Harry hesitated. Every instinct he possessed as a healer and protector told him to shield her from the thing reaching for her.

Hermione understood first. “Harry, she's right. If the magic is responding to resistance, an attack could make it worse.”

He lowered his wand a fraction and Sirius did the same. Remus never released Shevonne's hand.

The darkness rose around them, but Shevonne no longer felt hunger alone. Beneath it was something older: fear. Not their fear, but the fear of something that had existed for centuries without being understood.

“You were never meant to be owned,” she whispered.

The darkness trembled.

“Neither was I.” The bond flared between her and Remus. Shevonne drew a slow breath. “We don't have to destroy each other.”

The force pushed against her one final time. She refused to surrender any part of herself. When the pressure broke, it did not feel like victory, it felt like release.

The silver light spread through the chamber, touching every inscription. One by one, the ancient words settled into silence.

Hermione lowered her wand and stared at the walls. “It's rewritten the boundary.”

Harry looked at her. “How?”

“Not as a prison.” Hermione's voice was almost reverent. “As a covenant.”

Sirius stared at Shevonne. “What does that mean?”

Hermione smiled faintly. “It means the magic agreed to be contained because someone chose not to possess it.”

Shevonne looked at the silver pool. For the first time, the chamber did not feel like it was waiting for her, it felt as though it was letting her go.

CHAPTER 31

They stood at the edge of the crack. The darkness moved beneath them like smoke trapped under glass.

Shevonne could feel it searching, not for power, for permission. She finally understood. The ancient magic was not a creature, it was a force.

Morgana had created a boundary around it because she knew what happened when people tried to possess something that could not truly belong to anyone.

The force had been waiting for a successor. Someone who could choose without seeking control. Someone whose identity had been deliberately hidden. Someone who understood what it meant to belong to more than one world.

Shevonne looked at Harry. “You said magic recognizes things.”

“Yes.”

“What does it recognize in me?”

Harry considered the question. “Your choices.”

Hermione nodded. “That's why the binding mattered.”

Shevonne looked at her. “The binding hid me.”

“Yes. It hid your magical signature from the ancient magic.”

“Because my mother wanted it to forget me.”

“Until you were old enough to choose for yourself.”

Shevonne understood. The binding had never been a punishment, it had been protection.

“Orion knew that if my mother found out about your inheritance, she would use you to try and control the ancient magic.” Sirius said, seeing their father in a new light.

The darkness surged and Shevonne stepped forward. “I won't give you control.”

The chamber trembled. “I won't destroy you either.”

The darkness stopped.

“I don't know what you are.”

The silver pool brightened.

“But I know what I am.” Shevonne reached for Remus's hand. “I am Shevonne Selena Black.”

The golden thread blazed.

“I am the daughter of a woman who died giving birth to me.”

Another pulse.

“I am the sister of Sirius Black.”

Sirius swallowed hard.

“I am the daughter of the people who raised me.”

The magic grew brighter.

“And I am Remus'.”

Remus's eyes filled with emotion.

Shevonne looked at him. “Not because magic says I belong to him.” She faced the darkness again. “Because I choose him.”

The chamber exploded with light and Remus staggered but did not release her hand.

The darkness struck them, but their bond held.

Harry raised his wand. “Now!”

Hermione began reciting the ancient words from the wall. Sirius joined her.

The chamber shook violently and the force pushed against Shevonne. She could feel it trying to separate the pieces of her.

Shevonne Alexander.

Selena Black.

Muggle.

Witch.

Daughter.

Sister.

Teacher.

Partner.

She refused to let it divide her. “I am all of them.”

The pressure broke and the darkness collapsed inward.

For one terrible second, the chamber went completely black, then the silver pool erupted and a wave of magic swept outward.

It passed through Shevonne without pain, the crack sealed, and the chamber became still.

Harry lowered his wand. Hermione stopped speaking. Sirius stared at the floor.

Remus turned toward Shevonne. “Are you alright?”

She nodded and then she laughed. A shaky, exhausted laugh. “I think so.”

He pulled her into his arms and she buried her face against his chest. “I was scared.”

“I know.”

“But I wasn't alone.”

“No.”

She looked up at him. “I never want to forget that.”

“I won't let you.”

Behind them, the silver pool slowly changed and the woman's silhouette appeared once more. This time, her face was visible.

It was Morgana, not alive, not dead, an imprint, a memory left in magic.

She looked at Shevonne. “You chose well.”

Then she vanished.

They followed the passage they had descended back up and instead of returning them to the library as they expected, they instead came out on the grounds.

They spent the first hour after returning in a strange state between exhaustion and disbelief. No one seemed quite ready to leave the courtyard, as though stepping into ordinary life might somehow make what had happened less real.

McGonagall eventually broke the silence. “Inside.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “That's your response?”

“My response,” McGonagall said, “is that six exhausted people should not be standing outside a castle before sunrise discussing ancient magic on an empty stomach.”

Hermione gave a tired laugh. “She's right.”

Harry nodded. “She usually is.”

McGonagall looked at Shevonne. “How do you feel?”

Shevonne considered the question carefully. “Different.”

“In what way?”

“Quieter.”

Remus glanced at her. He understood exactly what she meant.

For months, Shevonne had carried a constant sense of something pressing against the edges of her awareness. Now that pressure was gone, not erased, simply no longer demanding an answer.

Later, Hermione spent most of the morning comparing the new record with the oldest magical texts she could find. Harry checked Shevonne's condition twice despite her protests.

“I'm fine.”

“You nearly had ancient magic tear through your nervous system.”

“And I'm still fine.”

Harry gave her a look.

She smiled. “Thank you for worrying.”

He softened. “That's what I do.”

Hermione looked up from the parchment. “And apparently what Remus does is hover.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “I do not hover.”

Sirius snorted. “You've been hovering since midnight.”

For the first time since they had entered the chamber, everyone laughed together.

Sirius’ face sobered after a moment. “There is one thing we haven't discussed.”

“What?”

“Your mother.”

Shevonne's expression softened.

“What about her?”

“We know she prepared for your protection. We know she knew enough to understand the danger.” He hesitated. “But we don't know where she learned any of it.”

Shevonne thought for a moment. “Maybe we don't need to.”

Sirius frowned. “You don't want to know?”

“I do, but I don't need to chase every unanswered question. My mother gave me a name.”

She looked at Sirius. “You gave me a family.”

Then she looked at Remus. “And you gave me a future. I think that's enough.”

Chapter 32

The first few days of normality felt almost stranger than the crisis itself.

Shevonne kept expecting the castle to tremble beneath her feet, or for another symbol to appear, or for another ancient voice to whisper her name.

Nothing happened. Students argued about Quidditch scores, someone set fire to a homework assignment in a corridor, Peeves dropped a bucket of water on an unfortunate second-year. Life continued.

Shevonne began to relax into her new normal. She began replacing sections of the old textbook with her own lessons, carefully correcting assumptions without mocking the people who had written them.

She taught her students that Muggles were not less intelligent because they used machines instead of magic. She taught them that technology could be every bit as transformative as a wand.

One afternoon, a student brought in a battered Muggle telephone and placed it on her desk.

“It doesn't work here, does it?” he asked.

“Not reliably.”

“Then why bring it?”

Shevonne smiled. “Because understanding something doesn't require it to work the way you're accustomed to.”

The lesson stayed with several of the students long after the bell rang.

In Hogsmeade, Harry and Hermione had settled into their own rhythm as well. Harry continued his healer's practice, but he found himself increasingly drawn into questions that had nothing to do with treating injuries.

Hermione noticed. “You're thinking about the chamber again.”

Harry looked up from his notes. “Yes.”

“Because you're worried?”

“Because I don't think my job is only to heal what is already broken.”

Hermione smiled. “I wondered when you would figure that out.”

He laughed softly. “You knew?”

“I've known for months.”

_____

Meanwhile, Remus and Shevonne discovered that peace gave them something danger never had: time.

They ate meals together when their schedules allowed. They read in the library. They argued over books. Shevonne occasionally stole his tea, and Remus pretended to be offended even though he always made her another cup.

Their bond remained quiet, warm and unmistakable. It no longer felt like something deciding their future, it felt like something they were choosing every day.

The following weeks were quieter. Hogwarts returned to its routines. Lessons continued and students complained about homework.

Sirius continued finding reasons to irritate Remus, Hermione returned to her writing, Harry returned to his healing practice, and Shevonne returned to her classroom.

The first lesson after everything happened was the most important one of her career.

She stood before a room full of her students. “Today,” she said, “we're going to continue our discussion about Muggles.”

A hand went up. “Yes?”

“Professor, is it true Muggles used to think witches were monsters?”

“Some did.” she answered. “People are very good at fearing what they don't understand.”

She looked around the classroom.

“Wizards have done the same thing.” she stated.

The room became quieter. “The history of both worlds is full of people who were afraid of one another. Sometimes that fear became hatred. Sometimes it became violence.”

Shevonne smiled gently. “But history is also full of people who chose differently.”

She thought of her mother, Sirius, Remus, Harry, Hermione, all the people who had chosen to stand beside her.

“That,” she said, “is the part of history I want you to remember.”

CHAPTER 33

At the end of class, after the last student had left, Remus entered the room and shut the door behind him.

“How did it go?” he asked, leaning against the side of her desk.

She smiled. “Wonderful.”

“Good.”

Their eyes locked for a second, and she asked, “Do you ever think about how strange all of this is?”

“Frequently.”

“Thirty years of my life, I didn't know magic existed.”

“And now?”

She looked around the classroom. Her books were still scattered across her desk, parchment covered several of the nearby tables, and the faint sounds of students moving through the corridors drifted through the closed door.

“Now I can't imagine not knowing.”

Remus smiled. She studied him for a moment. “Do you ever think about what your life would have been like if none of this had happened?”

“I used to,” he admitted. “More than I probably should have.”

“And now?”

He pushed away from the desk and walked toward her. “Now I don't.”

Shevonne's expression softened. “Why?”

“Because every version of my life I can imagine without you feels incomplete.”

She looked down for a moment, suddenly unable to meet his eyes.

“You know,” she said quietly, “when I first came here, I was terrified.”

“I know.”

“I didn't know what was happening to me. There were so many times when I thought I was going to lose myself.”

Remus reached for her hand. “You didn't.”

“No.” She looked at their joined hands. “I didn't.”

The golden thread between them shimmered faintly beneath their skin making Shevonne smile.

“I think that was the part I was most afraid of. Not dying, not even the magic.” She looked back at him. “Losing the person I was.”

Remus gently squeezed her hand. “But you didn't lose her.”

“No.” She smiled. “I think I finally found her.” Something softened in his expression. “And you helped me.”

“I stayed.”

Shevonne shook her head. “You did more than that.”

“I loved you.”

Her eyes filled with tears, but she smiled. “Yes,” she whispered. “You did.”

For a moment neither of them spoke. Then Shevonne looked directly at him. “What about us?”

He smiled faintly. “What about us?”

“I spent so much time wondering what I was supposed to become. What my magic meant. What my family meant. What Morgana wanted me to do.”

She stepped closer. “But when I think about the future now, I don't think about any of those things first.”

“What do you think about?”

“You.”

His expression softened and he lifted a hand and gently brushed a strand of hair away from her face.

“I think about you too.”

Shevonne smiled. “I don't know how I ever lived without you,” she replied.

His expression changed, the quiet emotion in his eyes making her chest tighten. “You are the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

He stood fully and pulled her against him, cupping her face in his hands and kissing her deeply.

He had once believed his life would always be divided into before and after the full moon, had believed there would always be a part of himself he had to keep separate from the people he loved.

Now there was Shevonne. She didn't ignore the wolf, and was not afraid of the wolf. She understood that the wolf was part of him and loved him anyway.

The bond between them warmed, making Remus smile against her lips.

“What?” Shevonne asked.

“Nothing.”

She looked at him skeptically.

“I was thinking that Moony approves of you.”

She snorted. “Approves? You said he called me mate the first time you laid eyes on me.”

“That’s how I know he approves,” Remus said, grinning.

She laughed. “I love you,” she said.

“I love you too.”

This time, she kissed him, for several moments, neither of them spoke. The quiet between them wasn't uncomfortable. It never really had been.

Eventually Shevonne rested her head against his chest. “It feels strange,” she murmured.

“What does?”

“Being happy.”

Remus's arms tightened around her. “Why?”

“Because for so long, every answer seemed to lead to another question. I spent so much time trying to find out what I was supposed to become.”

“And now?”

She smiled. “Now I think I finally understand.”

Remus waited.

“I don't have to become anything.”

His expression softened. “No,” he said. “You don't.”

“I can just be Shevonne.” She paused, then smiled. “Whatever that means.”

“It means whatever you want it to mean.” Remus said, brushing his lips against her again.

She smiled. “That sounds simple.”

“Sometimes the simplest answers take the longest to find.”

“And you?” she asked.

“What about me?”

“Do you still feel like something is missing?”

He considered the question. Once, the answer would have been immediate. “No,” he said.

She smiled. “Good.”

He leaned his forehead against hers. “I've spent most of my life believing happiness was something other people were allowed to have.”

Shevonne's eyes softened. “And now?”

“Now I think maybe I was simply waiting for you.”

The golden thread between them pulsed warmly and Shevonne closed her eyes.

“I think I was waiting for you too.” she answered.

For a moment they simply stood there, holding each other in the quiet classroom.

Shevonne realized that perhaps this was what she had been searching for all along—not an answer to who she was supposed to be, but the freedom to decide for herself.

Remus kissed her forehead. "Ready for dinner?"

She laughed softly. "Eventually."

He raised an eyebrow. "Eventually?"

"I think I like having you all to myself."

His smile faded into something warmer. "Me too."

He kissed her again, slowly this time. When they finally parted, Shevonne studied his face.

"Remus?"

"Hmmm?"

"I've been thinking about our bond."

His expression became more serious. "What about it?"

"We know what it is now. Or at least we understand it better."

"Yes."

"We know it didn't choose us because we were supposed to fulfill some ancient purpose."

"No."

"We chose each other."

Remus nodded. "We did."

She took his hand. "Then I want to make that choice official."

He stared at her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Shey, you don't have to—"

"I know I don't have to," She squeezed his hand. "That is exactly why I want to."

He was silent for a moment. “There is a difference between the soul bond and a formal magical union,” he said quietly. “The bond exists whether we acknowledge it or not. A legal union is different.”

“How different?”

“It requires both people to willingly choose it.”

She smiled. “Then that's what I want.

“I want that too,” he confirmed.

“When?”

“Whenever you're ready.”

She smiled. “I think I'm ready now.”

“Then we'll speak to Minerva tomorrow.”

She smiled. “Tomorrow?”

“I thought you said you were ready.”

“I am.”

“Then why wait?”

She laughed. “Because, Remus Lupin, for once I would like to enjoy the moment before we start arranging things.”

He smiled. “Fair enough.”

He kissed her again and this time, something in the kiss changed. It wasn't simply affection, it was anticipation.

Shevonne felt it through the bond, a warmth spreading through her chest that seemed to mirror everything Remus was trying not to say.

She pulled back just enough to look at him. “You're nervous.”

“A little.”

“Why?”

His smile was almost shy. “Because I've spent most of my life believing I would never have this.”

She reached up and touched his face. “You have it now and I'm not going anywhere.”

His eyes closed briefly and when he opened them again, the guardedness that had lived there for so long seemed to have disappeared.

“Come home with me.”

Shevonne's heart skipped. “Remus…”

“You don't have to.”

“I know.” She smiled. “But I want to.”

He took her hand and they left the classroom together.

Remus's quarters were quiet when they entered. The fire had burned low, casting a warm glow across the room. The familiar bookshelves, photographs, and comfortable furniture suddenly felt different to Shevonne. Not because anything had changed, because she had.

She looked toward the photographs on the wall. The younger Remus smiled back at her from one of them, surrounded by James, Sirius, and Peter.

“You were so young,” she whispered.

“We all were.”

She turned toward him. “Do you ever wish you could tell that young man that he was going to be happy someday?”

Remus looked at the photograph for a long moment. “I don't think he'd believe me.”

“Then maybe you should.” She stepped toward him. “Tell him now.”

Remus smiled. “I was wrong.”

Shevonne touched his chest. “You weren't wrong.”

She kissed him gently. “You just didn't know yet.”

His arms slipped around her waist and the bond between them warmed again. Neither of them spoke, there was no need.

Remus kissed her, slowly at first, giving her every opportunity to pull away.

She didn't.

Instead, Shevonne wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. His hands settled firmly around her waist, drawing her against him as the kiss deepened. She could feel the strength in his embrace, the restraint he was still trying to maintain, and it sent a delicious shiver through her.

Shevonne's fingers slipped into his hair as his lips moved from hers to her jaw, lingering against her skin before finding the sensitive place beneath her ear.

She inhaled sharply and Remus immediately lifted his head. “Still sure?”

Shevonne looked into his eyes, her breathing uneven. “Completely.”

She pulled him back to her and, this time, there was no hesitation. His hands moved slowly over her back, then settled at her hips as she pressed herself closer to him. The warmth of his body seemed to chase away every remaining doubt.

Their connection flared between them and Shevonne felt the rush of his emotions through the bond—love, longing, desire, and beneath all of it the almost overwhelming tenderness he felt for her.

She touched his cheek. “I can feel you.”

His eyes darkened. “Everything?”

“Not everything.”

A faint smile touched his lips. “But enough.”

She kissed him again, and his arms tightened around her. Their kisses grew slower, deeper, each one lingering longer than the last. Shevonne felt his hands move along her back as she held him closer, no longer concerned with where one touch ended and another began.

There was no fear now, no uncertainty, only the heat between them and the certainty that this was something they both wanted.

Remus rested his forehead against hers. “Tell me if you want me to stop.”

Shevonne smiled. “I won't.”

His breath caught. “Shey…”

“I love you.”

Whatever restraint remained in him broke. He kissed her deeply, and she answered just as eagerly, her hands sliding beneath his jacket as his arms tightened around her. The golden thread between them brightened, responding to the intensity of what they were feeling.

Shevonne laughed softly against his lips. “I think the bond approves.”

Remus smiled. “I think it knows we're finally listening to it.”

“No,” she whispered, drawing him closer again. “We're not listening to it.” She kissed him once more. “We're choosing.”

His expression softened. “Always.”

He took her hand, and together they moved toward the bedroom.

The bedroom was modest—sparsely furnished with a wooden wardrobe, a small desk cluttered with papers, and a four-poster bed draped in deep burgundy hangings. Moonlight filtered through the narrow window, casting silver across the quilted coverlet.

Remus lit the candles with a whispered spell, and warm light replaced the cool lunar glow. He turned to her, and Shevonne saw the question in his eyes—not hesitation, but reverence.

"You're sure?" he asked again, his voice low.

Shevonne stepped toward him and began unfastening her buttons "I've never been more sure of anything."

His gaze tracked her movements, darkening as the fabric parted. When she reached for his shirt, he helped her, pulling the linen over his head and dropping it to the floor. The candlelight played across the scars on his chest—fine lines and silvered marks that mapped years of transformations. Shevonne traced them with her fingertips, feeling him shiver beneath her touch.

"These don't disgust you?" he asked quietly.

She looked up at him. "They're part of you. How could I love you and not love them?"

The bond between them pulsed, warm and insistent, and Remus made a sound low in his throat as he pulled her to him. His skin was hot against hers as he helped her free of the remaining layers of her clothing, his hands steady but his breathing uneven.

When they were both bare, he paused to look at her, his gaze traveling over her with such naked adoration that Shevonne felt her cheeks flush. "You're beautiful," he whispered.

"So are you."

He kissed her again, walking her backward until the edge of the bed met her knees. She sat, and he followed her down, stretching alongside her on the mattress. The burgundy hangings enclosed them in a private world of shadow and candlelight.

His hands moved over her with deliberate care—palms gliding along her waist, thumbs brushing the curve of her hip, fingers tracing the line of her collarbone. Every touch sent sparks through the bond, and Shevonne gasped as she felt his pleasure mirroring her own, a feedback loop of sensation that made her dizzy.

"Is it always like this?" she breathed. "Through the bond?"

"Not like this," he murmured against her throat. "Never like this."

She understood. The bond had always been there—connecting them, communicating emotion and intent—but this was different. This was deliberate, chosen, intimate in a way that transcended the magic itself.

Shevonne arched into his touch as his hand moved lower, his fingers finding her with gentle precision. She gripped his shoulders, her nails pressing crescents into his skin as sensation built between them. Through the bond, she felt his restraint, his desire to make this perfect for her, and she sent back reassurance—*yes, more, please*—in the only way the bond allowed, through emotion and intent.

"Remus," she gasped, and he understood.

He moved over her, settling between her thighs, and paused with his forehead resting against hers. The golden thread between them glowed visibly now, shimmering beneath their skin where they touched, connecting chest to chest, hip to hip.

"I love you," he said, the words rough with emotion.

"I love you too."

He entered her slowly, and Shevonne felt the sensation doubled—her own pleasure and his, intertwined through the bond. She cried out, and he stilled, checking, always checking.

"Don't stop," she whispered, drawing him deeper.

He moved with controlled rhythm, each thrust sending waves of warmth through the connection that bound them. Shevonne wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer, eliminating any space between them. The bed creaked softly beneath them, a steady counterpoint to their breathing.

The bond flared brighter as their movements grew more urgent. Shevonne could feel his love for her—not just the physical pleasure, but the years of loneliness that had preceded this moment, the disbelief that happiness was possible, the overwhelming gratitude that she had chosen him. And she sent back her own emotions—the fear she had overcome, the certainty she had found, the future she wanted with him.

"Shey," he groaned, his pace faltering as he fought for control.

"Let go," she urged him, arching to meet him. "I'm with you."

The bond shattered into golden light between them as they climaxed together, his release triggering hers and hers amplifying his in an endless loop that left them both trembling. Remus collapsed beside her, gathering her against him as their breathing slowly steadied.

For long moments, they lay tangled together, the bond quiet now but still present, a warm hum beneath their skin. Remus pressed kisses to her shoulder, her neck, her temple—soft, reverent touches that made her smile in the darkness.

"Are you all right?" he asked, his voice still rough.

Shevonne turned in his arms to face him, tracing the line of his jaw with her fingers. "I'm perfect."

He caught her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. "The bond... I've never felt anything like that before. So intense."

"Is that bad?"

A slow smile curved his lips. "No. It's very, very good."

She laughed softly and nestled closer, her head finding the hollow of his shoulder. His arm tightened around her, and she felt his contentment through their connection—a deep, abiding peace that matched her own.

Outside, the castle settled into nighttime silence. Somewhere in the distance, an owl hooted. But here, in the quiet sanctuary of Remus's quarters, wrapped in burgundy hangings and each other's arms, Shevonne felt no need for words.

She had spent so long searching for who she was supposed to become. Tonight, she had simply been herself—and been loved for it.

"Remus?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"Tomorrow, we will talk to Minerva?"

His chest vibrated with silent laughter. "Tomorrow," he agreed. "Though I suspect the castle already knows."

She lifted her head to look at him. "What do you mean?"

"The wards," he said, gesturing vaguely toward the ceiling. "Hogwarts knows when... significant events occur within its walls."

Shevonne felt her cheeks heat. "You mean the castle knows what we just did?"

"Not the specifics," he assured her, grinning now. "Just that something shifted. Something permanent."

She settled back against him, considering this. "I suppose a soul bond choosing to formalize itself would register as significant."

"I suppose it would."

They lay in comfortable silence, the candle burning low. Eventually, Remus reached for his wand and extinguished it, plunging the room into moonlit darkness. Shevonne closed her eyes, listening to the steady beat of his heart.

"Shey?" he whispered.

"Yes?"

"Thank you. For choosing this. For choosing me."

She opened her eyes to find him watching her, his gaze luminous in the darkness. "I didn't choose you," she said softly. "I chose us."

He smiled then—that rare, unguarded smile that transformed his face—and pulled her closer. "Us," he repeated, as if tasting the word.

"Us," she confirmed, and let sleep take her, safe in his arms and bound by more than magic.

CHAPTER 34

Morning came quietly. Remus woke first.

For several seconds, he simply stared at the ceiling, not entirely certain where he was. The familiar room slowly came into focus—the bookshelves, the faint gray light filtering through the curtains, the quiet crackle of the dying fire.

Then he felt the warmth beside him and he turned his head. Shevonne was still asleep, her hair spread across the pillow, one hand resting near his.

He smiled, she was here, not because magic had brought her to himot because some ancient force had decided they belonged together. She was here because she had chosen to be.

Remus reached over and gently brushed a strand of hair away from her face. Her eyes opened slowly.

“Why are you staring at me?”

“I’m allowed.”

She smiled sleepily. “I suppose you are.”

For a long moment, they simply held each other. Shevonne lay with her head on Remus’ chest listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat beneath her ear and for once, nothing was being demanded of either of them.

Shevonne closed her eyes. “This is nice.”

“It is.”

“Almost suspiciously normal.”

Remus smiled. “After everything we've been through, I think we're entitled to normal.”

She lifted her head. “Do you think Hogwarts agrees?”

“I doubt Hogwarts has ever been particularly interested in normal.”

She laughed softly. “That may be true.”

He studied her for a moment. “You're happy?”

She didn't answer immediately, instead, she looked around the room. At the books and photographs, at the morning light and then back at him.

“Yes.”

The answer was simple. Certain. “Yes, I am.”

Remus's expression softened. “Good.”

Shevonne reached up and touched his cheek. “You're happy too.”

“I am.”

“You sound surprised.” “I suppose I am.”

“Why?”

He considered the question. “Because for most of my life, I thought I knew exactly what my life was going to be.”

Shevonne's fingers traced lightly along his jaw.

“And now?”

“Now I have absolutely no idea what happens next.”

She smiled.

“I think that's probably a good thing.”

“Why?”

“Because if I've learned anything in the last year, it's that the best things rarely happen according to plan.”

Remus laughed quietly. “I can't argue with that.”

Shevonne settled against him, enjoying the warmth of his arms around her. For several moments, neither of them spoke. Then she sighed contentedly.

“We should probably get up.”

Remus tightened his arms around her. “Probably.”

“You don't sound very enthusiastic.”

“I was hoping you'd forget.”

“I haven't.”

“Worth a try.”

She laughed and kissed his chest before reluctantly pulling herself upright.

Remus watched her with a smile.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You're doing it again.”

“Doing what?”

“Staring.”

“I like looking at you.”

Shevonne shook her head, though she was smiling.

“Last night was wonderful.”

His smile became gentler. “Yes, it was.”

She reached for his hand. “I don't want to start worrying about everything yet.”

“Then don't.”

“That's your advice?”

“For once, yes.”

She smiled. “Good advice.”

He squeezed her hand. “We have plenty of time for everything else.”

She nodded. “Breakfast first?”

“Breakfast first.”

“And Sirius?”

Remus sighed. “Eventually.”

She laughed. “He's going to know.”

“He always knows.”

“Do you think he'll be happy?”

“He'll be insufferable.”

“That wasn't what I asked.”

“Yes, he'll be happy.”

“Good.”

They sat there for another moment, neither quite ready to leave the quiet of the room, then Remus finally stood and offered her his hand.

“Come on.”

She took it. “Where?”

“Your room so you can dress for the day, then breakfast.”

She raised an eyebrow.

Shouldn't you get dressed first,” she said, smirking at him.

Looking down at himself, Shevonne saw his ears turn slightly pink. “Uhhh, yeah, probably a good idea.”

“I'll go and change and meet you back here in thirty minutes.” she said, chuckling.

“Good plan.”

Together, they left the bedroom, closing the door behind them. For the first time since Shevonne had arrived at Hogwarts, the morning ahead held no mystery, just breakfast, friends, a conversation with Minerva and whatever came after.

For now, that was more than enough.

CHAPTER 35

By the time Shevonne returned to Remus's quarters, she had changed into a simple blue dress and pulled her hair back loosely from her face. She stopped outside his door and knocked.

A moment later, it opened. Remus stood there fully dressed, his hair still slightly damp from his shower. Shevonne looked him over.

“Much better.”

He raised an eyebrow. “I assume you're referring to the fact that I'm now wearing clothes.”

“I was.”

“Naturally.”

She smiled. “Ready?”

“As ready as I'll ever be.”

They walked together toward the Great Hall. The easy warmth between them had changed since the night before. Not dramatically. Nothing about the connection felt foreign or overwhelming, it simply felt settled.

When they entered the Great Hall, Sirius was already sitting at the staff table. He looked up and his eyes moved from Remus to Shevonne then back to Remus. A slow grin spread across his face.

“Oh, no.” Remus sighed.

Shevonne laughed.

“What?” Sirius asked innocently.

“You know exactly what.”

“I don't know anything.”

“You're smiling.”

“I smile all the time.”

“Not like that.”

Sirius leaned back in his chair. “Well, if you insist on accusing me of things before breakfast, I suppose I'll have to defend myself.”

Shevonne took the seat beside him. “Good morning, Sirius.”

“Good morning.” He looked at her again, then at Remus, then back at her. “I've been waiting months for this.”

Remus closed his eyes. “Sirius.”

“What? I'm happy.”

“I can see that.”

“Good.”

Shevonne couldn't help laughing and a few moments later, Harry and Hermione entered the Great Hall. They had been spending a lot more time at Hogwarts the closer Hermione came to her due date. Apparently James Daniel had been born at Hogwarts due to some unforeseen circumstances, and they wanted their second child to be born there as well.

Hermione immediately noticed the expression on Sirius's face. “What happened?”

Sirius pointed at Remus. “Ask him.”

Hermione looked at Remus, who shook his head. “Nothing happened.”

Shevonne smiled. “Something happened.”

Hermione's eyebrows rose and Harry looked between them and immediately understood.

“Well,” he said quietly.

Hermione smiled. “Finally.”

Remus gave them both a resigned look. “I regret having friends.”

“No, you don't,” Sirius said.

Remus glanced at him. “No, I suppose not.” he said, sighing.

Shevonne reached beneath the table and took his hand, his fingers closed around hers and for once, Sirius didn't make a comment, he just smiled.

Breakfast passed more peacefully than Shevonne expected. There were no dramatic revelations, just conversation, laughter, food and the familiar chaos of Hogwarts and that felt like the perfect beginning to the rest of her life.

When breakfast ended, Remus stood. “Ready?”

Shevonne nodded.

They found Minerva in her office. She was seated behind her desk, reviewing a stack of parchment. She looked up when they entered.

“I wondered when you two would come.”

Shevonne glanced at Remus. “I suppose you already know.”

Minerva’s expression softened. “Hogwarts has very few secrets from its Headmistress.”

Shevonne smiled. “That’s slightly terrifying.”

“It should be.”

Remus chuckled and cleared his throat. “We wanted to speak with you.”

“I assumed as much.” Minerva gestured toward the chairs in front of her desk.

They sat, and for a moment, nobody spoke.

Shevonne took a breath.

“I don't know exactly how to explain this.”

“You needn't explain everything.” Minerva looked at her. “You have spent the last several months discovering things about yourself that were hidden from you. Your magical heritage. Your mother's actions. Your connection to Hogwarts. Your bond with Remus.”

She paused.

“But none of those things require you to become someone other than who you already are.”

Remus looked at Shevonne. “She wants to stay.”

Minerva’s expression warmed. “I know.”

Shevonne blinked. “You do?”

“Your classroom is impossible to enter without encountering at least three Muggle objects, four books, and something that appears to be a telephone.”

Shevonne smiled. “I'm improving the curriculum.”

“Indeed.”

“And I want to continue teaching.”

“I know that too.” Minerva folded her hands on the desk.

“You are free to live your life without waiting for the next ancient revelation.”

Shevonne smiled. “That sounds wonderful.”

Remus glanced at Shevonne before speaking again. “There was something else.”

Minerva’s expression became slightly more attentive. “I suspected there might be.”

Shevonne looked down at their joined hands. “We want to make our bond legal.”

For the first time, Minerva’s expression held something close to amusement. “I see.”

Remus frowned slightly. “Is that a problem?”

“Not at all.” Minerva leaned back in her chair. “Though I confess I was beginning to wonder when you would get around to asking.”

Shevonne laughed softly. “You knew?”

“I have eyes, Shevonne.”

Remus sighed. “Apparently everyone knew before we did.”

“That is often the way of these things.”

Shevonne looked at Minerva. “What does it involve?”

“That depends upon what you mean by legal.”

Shevonne hesitated. “We don't want the bond to be something that simply exists between us. We want it recognized. Properly. We want everyone to know we choose each other, and we want that choice to have meaning in both the magical world and the life we're building together.”

Remus's fingers tightened gently around hers.

Minerva nodded. “Then what you are looking for is a formal magical union. The bond you already share would remain what it is, but the union would give it legal and social recognition.”

Shevonne looked at Remus. “That sounds like what we want.”

“It is,” Remus said.

Minerva smiled. “Then there is nothing preventing you from doing so.”

Shevonne exhaled, the tension leaving her shoulders. “That's it?”

“Not quite.” Minerva reached for a piece of parchment. “There will be paperwork. Witnesses. A formal declaration. And, depending upon how you wish to proceed, a ceremony.”

“A ceremony?” Shevonne asked.

Remus looked at her, his expression softening. “If you want one.”

She turned toward him. “I do,” Her answer came without hesitation.

Remus smiled. “Then we'll have one.”

Minerva watched them for a moment before nodding. “I thought you might.”

Shevonne squeezed Remus’s hand. “What about my name?”

Minerva raised an eyebrow. “What about it?”

“If we're making everything official, I suppose there are decisions about that too.”

Remus looked at her. “You don't have to change anything.”

“I know.” Shevonne smiled at him. “I just want us to decide together.”

Minerva’s expression softened. “Then that is something you can decide in your own time. There is no requirement that one of you surrender a part of yourself simply because you have chosen to join your lives together.”

Shevonne nodded. “That sounds fair.”

Minerva stood. “I believe that is everything.”

Shevonne rose, but before turning away, she stopped. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For giving me the chance to come here.”

Minerva’s expression softened. “I believe Hogwarts chose you for a reason.”

Shevonne smiled. “I'm beginning to think it did.”

Remus offered her his hand. She took it and together, they walked toward the door.

CHAPTER 36

The weeks that followed were wonderfully ordinary.

Shevonne taught.

Remus taught.

Harry returned to his healer's practice, although his conversations with Hermione increasingly involved questions of how he could incorporate his new understanding of himself into his healing practice.

Hermione continued her research, making plans for the next book she would write after the birth of their child.

Sirius returned to his habit of appearing wherever he wasn't expected and commenting on everything he probably shouldn't.

Life went on and for Shevonne, that was exactly what she wanted. Her classroom had changed considerably. The outdated textbook had been pushed onto a shelf where it was now labeled:

Historical Reference — Use With Caution.

Her students loved it. Shevonne introduced them to telephones, radios, television, automobiles and computers. She taught them about Muggle medicine, governments, Muggle families, and most importantly, she taught them that being different did not make one lesser.

One afternoon, after class, a second-year student lingered by the door.

“Professor?”

Shevonne looked up from her desk.

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

The boy hesitated. “Do you think Muggles and wizards could ever live together?”

Shevonne considered the question. “Maybe.”

His eyes widened. “Really?”

“I think people are capable of learning.”

She closed her book.

“But learning takes time. And it requires people to stop assuming that something unfamiliar must automatically be dangerous.”

The boy nodded thoughtfully. “Like magic?”

Shevonne smiled. “Exactly.”

He thanked her and left. Shevonne sat quietly for a moment. She thought about the woman she had been when she first received McGonagall's letter. She had known nothing about magic, Hogwarts, her biological family, yet, she had walked through every door that had opened to her.

She looked around her classroom. This was home now. Not because magic had decided it was, but because she had.

A knock sounded at the door.

Remus stood in the doorway.

“Tea?”

She smiled. “Always.”

He stepped inside. “Long day?”

“Very.”

He took the books from her desk and stacked them neatly. “You're coming with me.”

“Am I?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“My quarters.”

“Why?”

“Because I have tea.”

She considered that. “That's persuasive.”

He offered his arm and she took it. As they walked down the corridor, Shevonne leaned closer to him. “Do you ever think about how strange all of this is?”

“Constantly.”

“Good.”

“Why?”

“Because I thought I was the only one.”

He smiled. “You're not.”

They continued down the corridor. Neither noticed the faint golden shimmer that appeared briefly around their joined hands, it wasn’t a warning or a summons or ancient magic asking anything of them, it was simply the quiet reflection of a bond that no longer needed to prove itself.

EPILOGUE

Nine months later, Hogwarts had settled into the comfortable rhythm of ordinary life.

There were still ghosts in the corridors. Portraits still argued with one another. Students still found ingenious ways to get into trouble, and, despite Minerva's repeated insistence that the castle was not a playground, someone still managed to set off a series of enchanted fireworks in the fourth-floor corridor.

Shevonne stood beside the tall window in her classroom, one hand resting beneath the considerable curve of her stomach, watching the first snow of the season drift across the grounds. Her and Remus’ first night together had resulted in their first child.

“You're supposed to be sitting down.”

Shevonne smiled without turning around as Remus closed the classroom door behind him.

“I've been trying to behave.” she said.

“You've been trying to behave for approximately three minutes.”

“Four.”

She turned toward him. He was carrying two cups of tea and wearing the expression she had become very familiar with over the past several months. Concern, affection, and a growing

suspicion that she might decide to have their child at any moment simply to prove him wrong about something.

“You're hovering again,” she said.

“I'm walking.”

“You're hovering while walking.”

“I don't think that's physically possible.”

“It is when you're you.”

He handed her the tea. She took it gratefully.

“How was your class?”

“Wonderful.”

“That sounds suspicious.”

“One of my seventh-years asked whether Muggles really use telephones.”

Remus smiled. “And what did you tell him?”

“That some do.”

He laughed softly as Shevonne leaned against the edge of her desk.

“How was yours?”

“Three students attempted to convince me that they hadn't forgotten their essays.”

“Had they?”

“They had.”

“Did they at least make convincing arguments?”

“No.”

“Then you have failed them as a professor.”

“I'll try harder next time.”

She smiled and took another sip of tea. For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Remus's eyes drifted toward her stomach.

“You can say it.”

“Say what?”

“You're wondering if today is the day.”

He sighed. “I may have wondered.”

“She isn't due for another two weeks.”

“I know.”

“You've said that you know at least seventeen times.”

“I'm aware.”

Shevonne laughed and she felt the baby move, her expression softened.

Remus noticed immediately. “What?”

“She moved.”

He stepped closer. “Can I?”

“Of course you can, you never have to ask. I'm yours Remus, she is yours. You never have to ask to touch either of us.”

He placed his hand carefully against her stomach. For several seconds, nothing happened, then a small movement pressed against his palm.

His face changed. Every time it happened, Shevonne noticed the same expression. Wonder.

“You felt that?”

“Yes.”

“She has excellent timing.”

Remus smiled. “She?”

She looked at him innocently. “You've been calling the baby she for months.”

“I've been hoping.”

“Well, perhaps you should have asked Harry.”

“I did.”

“And?”

“He said the baby is healthy and refused to tell me anything else.”

She laughed. “That sounds like Harry.”

Their first child was still a few weeks away, but they had already prepared a nursery in their quarters.

Sirius had insisted on helping. That had been a mistake. He had purchased enough toys to fill half the room and had somehow managed to convince himself that a tiny broomstick was an appropriate present for a newborn. Minerva had confiscated it.

Sirius had appealed the decision.

Minerva had ignored him.

Shevonne had laughed for nearly ten minutes, and Sirius, despite all his complaints, had already made it clear that he intended to be the most obnoxiously devoted uncle imaginable.

Shevonne smiled at the thought. “Have you heard from Sirius today?”

Remus groaned. “Yes.”

“What did he do now?”

“He wanted to know whether we've chosen a name.”

Shevonne rolled her eyes. “Of course he did.”

“He also wanted to know whether he could be present when the baby is born.”

“No.”

“I told him you'd decide.”

“Good.”

“He said he'd be there anyway.”

Shevonne stared at him. “He wouldn't.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “You know Sirius.”

She sighed. “He would. I suppose our child could do worse than having Sirius Black as an uncle.”

“Much worse.”

“He's going to spoil her.”

“If it's a girl.”

Shevonne smiled. “If.”

Remus looked at her. “You really haven't told anyone?”

“No.”

“Harry knows?”

“Harry is my Healer, of course he knows, but I've sworn him to secrecy.”

“You know, I live with you.”

“And?”

“You can't keep secrets from me.”

Shevonne stepped closer. “Apparently I can.”

He smiled. “Fair enough.”

The classroom door opened and Harry stood in the doorway. Hermione was beside him, cradling their six month old daughter in her arms.

Their second child had inherited Harry's green eyes, but had Hermione's hair.

“How are you feeling?” Hermione asked Shevonne.

“Fine.”

“She's tired.” Remus said at exactly the same time.

Shevonne turned toward him. “I can answer for myself.”

“I know.”

Hermione smiled. “You two are going to be wonderful parents.”

Shevonne looked at Remus. For just a moment, neither spoke. Wonderful parents. The words were still strange, beautiful, terrifying, real. They were going to be parents.

Shevonne looked at the little girl in Hermione's arms, then at Harry and Hermione. Their family had grown, and would soon grow again.

“How's Lily Jean doing?” Shevonne asked.

Hermione smiled. “Wonderful. Although she has recently decided that sleeping is unnecessary.”

Harry sighed. “She gets that from Hermione.”

Hermione turned toward him. “She does not.”

“You would read until two in the morning if I didn't coax you into bed.”

“That's different.”

“How?”

“I'm reading.”

Harry smiled. “Exactly.”

Shevonne laughed and Remus shook his head.

“Some things never change.”

“No,” Harry agreed. “And that's probably a good thing.”

They stood together for several minutes, talking about ordinary things. Books, classes, the upcoming holiday, the baby's room, the possibility that Sirius might actually be banned from the nursery if he bought one more ridiculous toy.

Shevonne realized that this was exactly what she wanted. Not a life without magic, but a life in which magic wasn't the thing that defined every moment.

Eventually Harry and Hermione left with their daughter, promising to return for dinner. Shevonne watched them disappear down the corridor, then she turned back toward Remus.

“Do you ever think about how much has changed?”

“All the time.”

“Sometimes I still think about that first letter.”

He smiled. “The one that convinced you you were being pranked?”

“Yes.”

“And you still went to the café.”

“I was curious.”

“You were reckless.”

“Curious.”

“Reckless.”

She smiled. “Maybe both.”

Remus took her hand. “I think about it too.”

She looked at him. “What do you think would have happened if you hadn't met me?”

He was quiet for a moment. “I don't know and I really don't want to think about it.”

“Neither do I.”

Outside, snow continued falling over Hogwarts. Somewhere down the corridor, a student shouted and a portrait shouted back and a distant door slammed.

The castle was alive and ordinary and home. Shevonne looked down at their joined hands. The faintest golden shimmer appeared between them.

She smiled. The bond had once frightened her, then it had become a mystery, then a choice. Now it was simply part of them. Remus looked toward her.

“What?”

She smiled. “Nothing.”

He knew better. “That's never true.”

She laughed softly, then she felt it, a sudden tightening low in her stomach and her smile disappeared.

“What?” Remus asked, noticing her expression change.

She looked up at him. “I think…” Another tightening came and she took a slow breath.

Remus's face went completely still. “You think what?”

She looked down at her stomach, then back at him. “I think you should send for Harry to come back and then get Sirius.”

His eyes widened. “Now?”

She nodded. “Now.”

For perhaps the first time in his life, Remus Lupin looked genuinely terrified.

Shevonne began laughing.

“You're going to be a father.”

He stared at her, then slowly, wonderfully, he smiled.

“Yes.”

He took her hand and together, they stepped into the corridor.

Several floors away, Sirius Black suddenly sneezed and looked around suspiciously.

Sirius stood. “I think something's happening.”

Harry glanced up from where he had been playing with Lily. When they had left Remus and Shevonne, he and Hermione had gone to visit with Sirius.

“You've been saying that for twenty minutes.”

Sirius shook his head. “No. This time I'm sure.”

Harry opened his mouth to answer, but before he could, a silver wolf appeared in the doorway.

It crossed the room in a streak of pale light and stopped in front of Harry. Remus's voice came from the Patronus.

“Harry. Shevonne's in labor. Come back. Now.”

The wolf vanished and for one stunned second, nobody moved. Then Sirius's face split into an enormous grin.

“I knew it.”

Harry was already on his feet. “Hermione.”

She was standing before he finished saying her name.

“I heard.”

“I'm coming.” Sirius said.

Harry pointed at him. “You're staying here.”

“No.”

“Sirius—”

“I've been waiting for this for nine months.”

“You're not the one delivering the baby.”

“I know that.”

“Then why are you coming?”

“Because I'm the uncle.”

Harry stared at him.

Sirius stared back.

Hermione sighed. “Let him come.”

Harry looked at her in disbelief. “You're encouraging him?”

“No. I'm accepting the inevitable.”

Sirius smiled triumphantly. “See?”

Harry shook his head. “Fine. But if you get in the way, I'll personally escort you from the room.”

“I won't get in the way.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

Sirius amended, “Much.”

Harry laughed despite himself. “Come on.”

By the time Harry reached Remus's quarters, Madam Pomfrey was already there.

Remus stood outside the bedroom door looking as though he had forgotten how to breathe.

Harry hurried toward him. “How is she?”

“She keeps telling me she's fine.”

Harry smiled. “I'm sure she is. Her exams have been perfectly normal, and I don't foresee any complications.”

Remus glanced toward the closed door. “I've never been this frightened in my life.”

Harry placed a hand on his shoulder. “You're all going to be fine.”

Remus looked at him. “That's what people say when they have absolutely no idea what they're talking about.”

Harry laughed softly. “Fair enough. But I do know Shevonne's condition, and I've been monitoring her throughout the pregnancy. Everything has been exactly as it should be.”

Remus nodded, though he still looked unconvinced. From inside the room came Shevonne's voice. “Remus!”

His face immediately changed. “I have to go.”

Harry nodded. “Go. I'll be in shortly. Poppy and I will take care of everything.”

Remus disappeared through the door.

Sirius, who had been pacing nearby, turned toward Harry. “She really is in labor?”

Harry nodded. “She is.”

Sirius's expression softened. For once, he had nothing clever to say.

“They're really going to have a baby.”

Hermione slipped her arm through his. “They are.”

Sirius looked toward the bedroom door. “I've never been more nervous about something that isn't happening to me.”

Harry smiled. “That's because you're already acting like an uncle.”

“I am an uncle.”

“You've been an uncle for approximately thirty seconds.”

“I've been an uncle since I found out.”

Hermione laughed softly and Harry shook his head. “Try not to wear a groove through the floor.”

“I make no promises.”

Another cry came from inside the room and all three of them froze.

Sirius's eyes widened. “That sounded important.”

Harry's expression became focused. “It was.” He turned toward the bedroom. “It's time.”

Hours later, the corridor outside Remus and Shevonne's quarters had finally fallen quiet. Harry stepped out of the room, closing the door gently behind him.

Sirius immediately stood. “Well?”

Harry smiled. “They're both healthy.”

Sirius let out a breath he seemed to have been holding for hours. “A boy or a girl?”

Harry's smile widened. “A boy.”

Sirius stared at him. “A boy?”

“A very healthy boy.”

Sirius's eyes filled unexpectedly. “A boy.”

Hermione slipped her hand into his. “What did they name him?”

Harry glanced toward the closed bedroom door. “Kieran.”

Sirius's expression changed. “Kieran?”

Harry nodded. “Kieran Sirius Lupin.”

For several seconds, Sirius said nothing, then he looked away, blinking rapidly.

“He didn't.”

Harry smiled. “He did.”

Sirius rubbed a hand over his face. “That idiot.”

Hermione smiled. “He's going to be very loved.”

Sirius nodded. “Yes.” His voice was quiet. “Very.”

Harry gave him a small smile. “You can see them now. Just give them a few minutes.”

Sirius immediately looked toward the door. “A few minutes?”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Let Shevonne rest.”

Sirius sighed. “Fine.”

Hermione smiled. “You'll survive.”

“Barely.”

Inside the bedroom, Shevonne lay against the pillows, exhausted but smiling.

Remus sat beside her, their newborn son cradled carefully in his arms.

“He's beautiful,” Shevonne whispered.

Remus looked down at the tiny bundle. “He is.”

The baby stirred, making a small sound and Remus smiled. “Kieran.”

Shevonne reached out and touched her son's cheek.

“Kieran Sirius.”

Remus looked at her. “You're sure?”

Shevonne smiled. “Completely.”

He swallowed. “Sirius is going to cry.”

“He already has.”

Remus laughed softly. “I should have known.”

Shevonne looked at him. “He deserves this.”

Remus knew exactly what she meant. Sirius had lost so much. But this wasn't about replacing anything he had lost. It was about giving him something new to love.

A child carrying his name, not as a reminder of what had been lost., but as a promise of what came next.

Remus leaned down and kissed Shevonne's forehead. “Thank you.”

She smiled. “For what?”

“For our son.”

She reached up and touched his cheek. “We made him together.”

Remus looked down at Kieran again, their son, their future, their family.

For years, Remus had imagined his life ending in quiet solitude. He had never imagined this—the warmth of another person beside him, the sound of a child breathing in his arms, the knowledge that tomorrow would bring something new rather than simply another day to endure.

Shevonne shifted closer. “You're thinking too much.”

He smiled. “Probably.”

“What are you thinking about?”

Remus looked at her. “How much I love you.”

Her eyes softened. “And?”

He looked down at their son. “How much I love him.”

Shevonne smiled. “We love you too.”

A soft knock sounded at the door and Sirius' voice came through. “Can I come in?”

Shevonne looked at Remus who laughed. “He's been waiting for hours.”

Shevonne smirked and then raised her voice. “Come in.”

The door opened almost immediately. Sirius stepped inside and stopped, his eyes going directly to the baby.

For once, he seemed completely overwhelmed. “That's him?”

Remus nodded. “This is Kieran.”

Sirius approached slowly. “He's so tiny.”

Shevonne laughed softly. “They usually are.”

Sirius looked at Remus. “You named him Sirius?”

Remus nodded and Sirius swallowed hard. “You didn't have to.”

“We wanted to.”

Sirius looked at Shevonne. “Both of you?”

“Both of us. You are my brother and Remus’ best friend. We couldn't have given him a better name.” Shevonne told him.

He stared at the baby for another moment and then he smiled. “I think he's going to be trouble.”

Remus laughed. “Definitely.”

Sirius leaned closer. “Hello, Kieran.”

The baby opened his eyes briefly and Sirius froze. “He looked at me.”

Shevonne smiled. “He knows his uncle.”

Sirius's expression softened. “I hope he knows how much he's loved.”

Remus looked at Shevonne. “He will.”

Outside the window, snow continued to fall over Hogwarts. The castle stood as it always had—ancient, mysterious, and filled with stories.

But for Remus and Shevonne, a new story had begun. Not one written by ancient magic, not one decided by bloodlines, or secrets buried beneath the castle.

It was simply theirs, a family, a son named Kieran Sirius, a future they had chosen together.