Thank you for the support and comments, everyone. For anyone wondering about the pacing, this story was always planned to be epic in length. At least 500k words if my calculations were correct, but don't be surprised if it goes to 700k words.

This chapter was edited by Gladiusx.

Unknown time,

Lucius shivered once again as he struggled to uncap the vial. He cursed his stubbornness in refusing to accept the insulting *elderly dispenser* that was offered to him that was so much easier to use. He had spent nearly twenty thousand galleons on the most unscrupulous Potions master from abroad to brew him two weeks' supply of the Emberheart Elixir, something he would have normally trusted Severus with if not for the highly illegal ingredients of the potion. Lucius did not trust his friend on such a delicate matter, not with Albus Dumbledore involved.

The Emberheart Elixir was an obscure and highly complicated potion that even he did not know the full ingredients of. He knew Fireblossom Petals were part of the recipe, a Hearthstone Crystal, and, most importantly, the ashes of a phoenix, caught before it could be reborn. He was certain there was more to the potion that the brewer refused to elaborate on, yet Lucius' experience told him some human sacrifice was required in the brewing process.

Not like he cared, he would do anything in the world to be rid of the *cursed **cold!***

The progress in finding a suitable sacrifice for his ritual was mixed. Lucius had hired two warlocks, the Hawkins brothers were acquaintances from the older days, who assured him they would capture him a suitable offering. A talented witch instead of a muggle woman, so that he would not lower himself to bed the latter. Lucius was sceptical, especially as the ritual did not care whether it was a witch or a muggle; three were required if the offering was unwilling. Then again, he could always send them after more witches, as they would be more receptive to the ritual than mere muggles. That only the older brother, Marlon, returned and demanded their payment without any results to show was damning enough, yet the Malfoy Lord did not bicker with the man and paid him what he demanded. He was too weak to contest any demands, and it irked him to be blackmailed like this.

Which was why Lucius did not think twice about hiring Walden Macnair to go after the fool, paying him upfront and promising the executioner any gold he found on the warlock, provided Macnair gave him Marlon's head. Lucius glanced at the bleached skull on the nearby desk, and even through his agony, he managed to smirk. No one messes with a Malfoy!

The search for three suitable muggle girls continued. The requirements for the ritual were very specific. In the case of using muggles as sacrifices, they needed to be close in blood and pure in body. At first, he had thought it would be beyond simple to find such targets with how religious the muggles were, yet the reality was… disappointing.

How could Lucius have known the sheer depravity that had overtaken the muggle populace over the past decade?! Girls as young as his son, rushing to get rid of their purity like it was the plague and even getting with child? Lucius was many things, yet he much preferred his women on the north side of their teens. To think his only hope dwelled with a cauldron peddler… that fool had better find him those girls before the solstice.

Finally, he managed to pull off the stopper and gulped the orange liquid greedily, instantly feeling warmth flowing through his body and sweet numbness overtaking his mind. The uncontrollable shivering disappeared like it never existed, and the tightness of his face from the severe stress and worry he had to endure melted like an ice cube in the desert. An unbidden smile stretched on Lucius' lips as he dropped the empty vial and laid on his bed, giddy, childlike warmth and pleasure overtaking his mind. He idly wondered about the possibility of a child's sacrifice being needed for the potion, but his addled mind only had one last thought.

If only Narcissa had done her duty…

A*L*S*M

Monday, 14th of June.

DMLE interrogation room

"We know you did it, Prewett! The remains of a wizard were found in your backyard, and he was identified as Jeffrey Hawkins. Where is his brother, Marlon? No amount of pleading will save you from this. Just make this easier for both of us and confess to where you hid the body." A man dressed in an overly extravagant purple suit slammed his hands on the table as he glared at another man chained to his seat.

"…" The squib simply ignored him as he folded his arms and glared distastefully at his interrogator as if he was a bug.

Amelia looked stoically behind the one-way glass; it was charmed for people outside to hear and see, but anyone inside would not even differentiate the window from the wall. Killian Prewett was brought in two days ago while she was distracted with Potter's issue. Initially, it was to take his testimony and was acquitted of the death of Jeffrey Hawkins by virtue of self-defence. However, things changed once she left for the weekend because *someone* accused the *lowly squib* of murdering the other assailant when it was revealed he was the other Hawkins brother. She arrived

this morning to learn he was still held in a DMLE cell for murder, away from his daughter, who had yet to wake up in St Mungo's. To say Amelia was incensed would be an understatement. She was bloody fucking *furious!*

"Utterly pathetic display." She glanced at Mad-Eye Moody and the gaggle of trainees he dragged to give them a measure of how interrogations worked. "Disregarding the farce of keeping a clear victim in custody, whoever the git interrogating Prewett is a bloody fool. Listen well, you little tykes. The first rule of interrogation is CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

The unexpected bark had the trainee Aurors jump, and Amelia hid a smirk. Ahh, she had missed having fun with students. Maybe she could poach one of them from Mad-Eye?

"Second rule - never lose your cool." Moody continued once the trio of trainees regained their bearing. "Third rule - do not let the other party dictate the pace of the interrogation. Well? Why aren't you writing this down?"

"Yes, sir!"

The trainees hurried to write, but the familiar pink-haired Metamorph that joined her at Potter's Manor kept glancing worriedly at the interrogation room, lips upturned in disgust. Amelia shook her head inwardly but turned back to the interrogation.

"… don't have to be like that, you know. Your parents are dead, your brothers are dead, your sisters have fled the country, your cousins are dead." The interrogator's face was gleeful as he stared at Prewett for a reaction. "Merlin, your grandmother disowned you, refusing even to return an owl on your behalf once we took you into custody. You don't have any supporters, and the Hawkins family are out for blood for the loss of their two sons. If I take this to the courtrooms, I guarantee you would face at least a decade in Azkaban, which would be better than whatever the Hawkins plan for you."

"…"

Sadly, whoever that man was, he had no idea how the Prewett mind worked. With their fiery red hair, burning rust-coloured eyes, permanently furrowed brows, and the way their jaws slightly jutted outwards in defiance, the Prewetts were famously stubborn to an extreme, so much that they could make a mule seem reasonable. Not to mention the interbreeding they did with the Weasleys over the centuries; another family of redheads known for their reckless moments had made them even more volatile. She should know; Amelia had inherited her Prewett grandmother's jawline, brows, and stubborn nature.

“Do we know who is interrogating Prewett?” This morning had been busy, and she had only just arrived earlier once she learned Killian was still in custody. Amelia was about ready to call it for the day before that flying paper plane landed on her desk.

“Not one of ours. A prosecutor assigned to the case by whoever worked behind the scenes to get Prewett in trouble.” Moody grunted as he checked a form on the wall. “Gilbert Travers. I think he's some toadie from court proceedings. There are far too many *scribes* and *counsellors* working for the courts.” Alastor shook his head, and Amelia had to agree; the bloated bureaucracy of the ministry was legendary in all the wrong ways. “Any updates on finding out who is behind this?”

“I'm having Proudfoot on the prowl. That man can somehow get through red tape and any obstacle to find what I need, like a niffler smelling gold.” Amelia shook her head fondly at one of the rising stars of her office. “I wish I had half his patience in dealing with fools. Hopefully, our esteemed undersecretary to the minister isn't involved in this.”

“Why, Amelia, weren't you just saying earlier you hoped she would give you a reason to pay her a visit?” Moody’s smile was a grotesque thing to look at, and she could hear the awkward shuffling of one of the trainees at the terrifying sight.

“Er, Madame Bones?”

The Director of the DMLE turned to the pink-haired trainee, surprised she actually had the guts to interrupt her banter with Mad-Eye; the Auror in question looked about ready to bite the girl’s head off.

“Yes… Nymphadora, was it?”

The girl’s eyebrows twitched, and her fellow trainees outright snickered, yet the girl held her gaze. “Yes, ma'am. Nymphadora Tonks, though I prefer to go with my last name.”

“Interesting. Now, how can I help you, Nymphadora?”

This time, even Mad-Eye’s lips quivered in amusement, and Amelia grinned inwardly as the girl's hair turned a vibrant shade of red for a second before returning with a deep breath. “Shouldn't we be helping Mr Prewett? This interrogation is a complete farce, and I was here on Saturday when he was brought in - there's nothing for the prosecutor to work on unless he forces a confession.”

“Is that so?” Amelia frowned at the audacious girl, even if she looked at her in interest. “Why do I sense that you are taking this personally? Are you allowing your bias to affect your judgement? I believe your father is taking care of Mafalda Prewett in St Mungo’s.”

“No! Well, there’s that, but I just say it how I see it; this poor bloke is being propped up like a pig for the slaughter so that git could pad out his list of accomplishments.” Nymphadora’s hair had

turned an angry red again, along with her eyes. One of her friends tried to calm her, only for her to shake them away; the girl looked undaunted as Amelia stared her down. “Travers doesn’t care about the truth, only that he gets his next bonus and secures a promotion. Mr Prewett had just lost his wife, his daughter is now alone and unconscious, and only Morgana knows if she’ll wake up at all. That we are even pandering to this farcical display of corruption makes me *sick.*”

Nymphadora Tonks heaved for breath once she finished, her face twisted into a furious scowl and her eyes still an angry red as she glared through the window. A couple of minutes passed in complete silence, the two other trainee Aurors not daring even to breathe out loud as they looked at their colleague as if she were on death row. Amelia, however, felt elation and disappointment as she looked at the girl, who finally seemed to realise what she had done. The Metamorphmagus turned to her with fear and worry in her eyes, yet she stood straight and resolute.

“Those are serious accusations you are making, Auror Trainee Tonks. I will give you one chance to retract them.” The rasping voice of Alastor Moody barked at the girl, causing her to flinch as she turned to him. “An Auror is not one to throw accusations and allegations at any random bloke, especially not ministry employees.”

“B-but, sir! These are *not* random accusations. I’ve spent the past two years learning and shadowing you and other Aurors; I’ve seen more and worse of what I just said.”

“And you will see even worse, girlie, once you are a fully-fledged Auror. Why did you even want to become an Auror if you could not handle the first sign of injustice in front of you? If you aren’t prepared for such games and the politicking that comes with the job, you might as well quit.”

The ultimatum caused the girl’s eyes to widen as she clenched her teeth. “*Why*, you ask? Because I’m sick and tired of this shite happening all the damn time with no consequences for those doing it. To fight the blatant injustice the ministry allows and the corruption that festers in our society, especially towards anyone they deem *unworthy,* is why I became an Auror!”

Amelia couldn’t help but smile, even Mad-Eye smirked. The girl needed better control over her emotions and not allow others to lead her on like that so easily.

“Tell me, Nymphadora, why do you think Mr Travers didn't use Veritaserum? Mr Prewett is a squib with no family to protect him, after all.”

Nymphadora looked shocked at the sudden question and bit her lip for a second. While Amelia had been impressed with the girl’s resolve, it meant nothing without the wits to back it up.

“Veritaserum is a relatively new invention and expensive to brew, one would need approval to get it used. It's the excuse purebloods use to avoid it - all they need is someone on the inside declaring it unnecessary or that the stockpile had been *misplaced*. In this case, it's utterly useless because

Travers wants a fake confession. Using Veritaserum, or any kind of truth serum, would backfire heavily."

"Does that not mean that so long as Mr Prewett remains silent, then Mr Travers would not have a case?"

At the girl's hesitant nod, Amelia pointed at the window. "What do you see when you look at the two men inside?"

"I see a very frustrated wizard whose hand is inching towards his wand, and a quiet man with eyes full of anger and resentment." The girl replied after watching the interactions inside further.

"Excellent observation. Now, a final question, since you were here on Saturday. What time did Killian Prewett come in for questioning? And what time is it now?"

"He came in at…" The trainee's eyes widened. "Of course! No one can be kept for questioning for longer than forty-eight hours unless they are charged with a crime. Two days have already passed, and Travers has nothing!"

Amelia smiled at the Metamorph's excitement and nodded to her. "I do believe that Mr Travers has overstayed his welcome. Could I ask you to escort him out?"

Nymphadora grinned wickedly as she saluted before dragging her two colleagues inside. The shouting match that ensued was hilarious, but Amelia had eyes only for Moody.

"You do realise there is no way that Prewett could have known that."

"Of course, he didn't. He barely knows anything about the magical world and only knew the location of St Mungo's because he was taken there as a child." Amelia scoffed as she watched the aforementioned man getting released from his bonds while Nymphadora looked ready to hex the non-compliant Travers. "What your trainee doesn't know won't harm her. Killian was simply being the stubborn bastard that all Prewetts are. He would probably glare a hole into the wall if you taunted him enough about it."

"Heh, still as crafty as ever, Amelia. I still can't believe you didn't join me in Slytherin back then, you snake in badger fur."

Amelia barked out a laugh as she glanced at her oldest friend. She would never show more emotions than necessary to anyone other than her family, but Alastor was special. They were both the same age, yet Mad-Eye had been cursed so much that he looked far older than her.

"What do you plan to do with Prewett?" Mad-Eye read through the case's report with a frown. "His house was destroyed in the scuffle, and the muggle authorities have put the blame on him for the

murder of his wife. Jobless, no magic, and his daughter's condition still on the air, I'm surprised the man hadn't gone bonkers yet." Mad-Eye scratched his craggy chin, "She is clearly a witch, the rest of that family might demand custody of her… or what remained of them."

"I will not separate a father from his daughter; we will wait until Mafalda recovers, but we will most likely have them stay in Diagon Alley. Anything else can be discussed with him later. Hopefully, once the muggle authorities calm down, we could work something out and have his case disappear, or he could assume a new identity."

"Works for me."

They silently looked on as Tonks finally sent Travers packing, but not before she turned his brown hair and pompous suit a garish black and yellow when he threatened to curse her. A Hufflepuff as well, Amelia was liking the girl more and more, though she wondered about the audacity of a mere clerk to threaten one of her Aurors even if she was a trainee. More importantly, Nymphadora actually managed to get Prewett to say something, though it was just a grunt when asked if he wanted to see his daughter.

"She's a good girl. When is the soonest you could have her ready for work?"

"Hah, liked her that much, huh?" Mad-Eye rasped. "I know you're short-staffed, but it's not like you to be so easily enamoured with someone, Amelia. What gives?"

"Oh, like you wouldn't know, considering that test you gave her." Amelia grinned at the man's rasping laugh, "She has a good heart, which is uncommon but not rare, but also a spine of steel. How many people do you know with both?"

"A fair few, though far less than I'd like and most of them dead." Alastor shrugged carelessly. "I could tell she was a powerful witch and a diamond in the rough."

"Quite intelligent, too," the director of the DMLE hummed. "As would be expected from a granddaughter of House Black. Even if her mother was disowned, her *passion* certainly bred true."

A knock on the door leading to the hallway sounded, and Amelia looked curiously at Alastor, who had his eye on the door. "Proudfoot"

Amelia nodded and bid the Auror to enter.

"What have you found, Robert?" His face looked grim as he stood at attention.

"Clearwater came through, the man eager to get some dirt on the woman, but it wasn't Umbridge. Just a few hyenas smelling blood and barking up the wrong tree. I will have a full report on your desk by the morning."

“Shame. I had hoped Dolores would still be baying for blood, but it appears Fudge has managed to leash his dog. You have done well, Robert.” She nodded to the young Auror, who nodded curtly. “I suppose I better go in before my new protégé talks Killian’s ear off, the poor man hadn’t had a solid meal in two days and still needs to bury his wife. So much to do…” Amelia sighed as she slyly glanced at her friend.

“Already decided on taking her in, eh? Not going to take the rest of the trainers’ report on her?” Unfortunately, Moody wasn’t taking the bait. He had agreed to return as a trainer but not to take up the badge again.

“Your word matters more to me than the others.” Amelia smirked at her old friend, “Like you said, a diamond in the rough. The first thing I need to teach that girl is how and when to keep her mouth shut. Some Occlumency would be in order and a way to stop her from losing control of her powers. Maybe have her and Susan work together on–”

She was interrupted by a cough from the still grim-looking Auror. “What is it, Robert?”

“Sirius Black has broken out of Azkaban.”

A*L*S*M

Tuesday, 15th of June.

Potter Manor

Harry waved his wand at the section of the fence surrounding his property, repairing it as much as possible. The rust peeled off, and the bars straightened and righted themselves. This was the last section that needed repairs, and as he watched his handiwork, the Potter Lord sighed in relief.

His estate was expansive, yet there weren't any actual legal limits to its borders, as long as they didn't encroach on muggle holdings. That would be a risk to the statute, and Harry was content with the size of his land anyway, not to mention the superb natural defences that came with it. The fence stretched for half a mile between two cliffs that boxed in his property and acted like a natural wall, with the massive mountain in the backdrop. The mountain, which contained the elusive wildland, didn’t even appear on any of the muggle maps he perused, yet it was so large and tall that his vast demesne only covered the eastern outskirts of it. The wildland itself could not be accessed except from his side of the mountain, but Harry did not risk entering, for he had no idea what could await him there.

Nestled in a vale between the rocky cliffs, his demesne contained plenty of features - woodlands full of wild game, a large lake with a stream that fed out of it to join other rivers to the Irish Sea, along with a few hills, a bog, and even a quarry. There were a few promising spots where he would love to build a castle, perhaps a town… or maybe both.

Harry chuckled from his seat on his Nimbus 2000 as he gazed in satisfaction at his lands. *His lands!* For so long, Jon Snow desired to have lands to call his own. First, it was Winterfell itself, but once he understood that would mean he would usurp his brother, Jon would have been satisfied with any holdfast. Now, he was the proud owner of nearly thirteen thousand acres of land, which, while massive for the UK, was barely more than a masterly house's holdings in the North. If he recalled correctly, a newly risen lord would be granted five thousand acres of land in the North, though that would still be forest and uncultivated moorland.

It was unfortunate that for all this land, it was empty. No witches or wizards lived anywhere near, nor did he find any sentient beings like Centaurs or similar creatures. Plenty of mundane and magical wildlife, with most of the magical passing through his lands towards the mountain, which he had not yet gotten around to visiting. The wildland was newly formed, and magical creatures could sense it and craved to live in it. The Hippogriffs were one of them, as he could have sworn he saw a flying figure by the mountain staring at him. At least, he did not need to worry about trolls anymore, not when he strung up the rotted corpses of several of them around his land.

Shaking his head, Harry flew towards the gate and looked to the east, where a dirt road meandered down the mountain all the way to a small village of muggles. It barely had a few dozen people in it, and Harry did not feel optimistic about convincing wizards and witches to move in with the truckers and shepherds that called it home. He had already visited the village, so insignificant that they didn't even have a proper name for it, and not a single magical soul called it home; more of a rest station for trucks that passed by the nearby highway.

More reason for him to follow his original plans; establish an all-magical village in his demesne. That's for later, though, much later. For now, he needed to return and help Chiara with cleaning up the manor. Thinking about the older girl caused him to smile. The past few days had been hectic as they worked tirelessly to clean the manor. They still lived in the Leaky, but hoped tonight would be their last stay there before moving here permanently. Old Tom had been sad to see his adoptive daughter go but gave them his blessings and even gave him a shovel talk, which was highly amusing.

Harry flew over the grounds as he got closer to his home, the land beneath him clean and pristine thanks to Dobby's hard work. Not all of his land was tamed, of course, only the area leading to his manor and its immediate surroundings. Said manor now appeared in front of him, and while it still looked a bit banged up, they at least managed to fix or replace all the broken windows and changed the roof. Magic was so convenient and that he had the gold to spend also helped as he did not shy away from purchasing the best for his home. Although it would take time for all he purchased to arrive. Hopefully, before the end of the month, he will have the entire manor back to its glory… at least the surface areas of it.

The insides still needed work, and as Harry dismounted from his broom, he noticed Chiara waiting patiently for him by the door's entrance. The older girl had a serene smile and proudly wore a silver hairpin in the shape of a wolf he had gifted her. It was his way of implementing a crest for his House, as the Potters never bothered with establishing a heraldry. Chiara had joked about him not making it easy for her to hide her affliction. He didn't mind; he wanted her to be proud of it, and Harry would always protect and help one of his own.

"Welcome back, Mr Potter. Had a pleasant flight?" His first human retainer opened the door for him and followed him into the repaired foyer. He had tried to have her relax around him but she insisted on being formal at all times lest she forgets herself around guests. Glancing around the foyer, there were still signs of neglect; not everything could be repaired with magic, yet it would do for now. At least until that contractor, Reginald promised, came to visit.

"Yeah, fixed up the fence while I was at it." The lord of the manor placed his broom in a newly purchased broom closet, set next to the double doors, before heading to the kitchens for an early lunch. It was barely eleven in the morning, and he wondered if Hedwig was back from visiting his friends. Closing his eyes for a second, he felt she was an hour away.

"My, even when Dobby specifically *asked* to leave it to him?" Chiara placed a hand on her mouth as she giggled, following him demurely.

"The annoying bugger should not bite off more than he could chew." They found the elf in the kitchen, spreading lunch on the table, and Harry instantly forgot any issues he had with him.

"Master Harry, Ms Karia. Dobby has just finished preparing lunch. Please take a seat."

"Thank you, Dobby, and it's *Chiara*." Chiara had a soft spot for the elf, who had instantly taken a liking to her, even if he butchered her name on occasion. Once they started eating, no more talking was allowed, as he preferred his meals silent. Lunch was an Italian affair, pasta with white sauce and seafood toppings like shrimp and clams. It was a nice change, though Dobby still gave him a serving of Basilisk steak once he was done, which Harry washed down with Pepsi - a drink he found to greatly enjoy, even more than liquor. Chiara had taken things in stride after he explained to her about his diet and the current ritual he was on. Sadly, she had no knowledge of rituals aside from the regular seasonal prayers they do here in Britain.

Once they finished eating, Hedwig swooped in with three letters on her; one on each leg and one tied to her back. Quickly, Harry grabbed her plate of treats. "Hedwig, glad you made it. Here's your lunch."

The snowy owl first chirped for him to take her load, which he did before she hopped to her plate. Harry smiled as he checked the letters; one was from Tracey and her sisters, one was from Neville, and the last one was, strangely enough, from Nymphadora Tonks.

“Harry, before you open your letters, there is something important I should show you.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“I believe I found this manor’s vault but could not access it.”

Harry’s eyes widened as a smile crept up his face; he knew that every wizarding house had its own vault for keeping valuables that could not be entrusted to the goblins. For the past three days, they had worked tirelessly in cleaning up the manor of all debris and infestations; Chiara was such a godsend in that regard, for she knew exactly how to treat the pests of his home. The girl had vanquished a pair of Boggarts before he could discover his greatest fear, something he would have been mightily interested in. A pack of feral Ghouls, unlike the docile loner on the Weasley property, had to be slain, along with more doxies and a plethora of other creatures both in the manor and the grounds. The manor was almost reclaimed, except for the basement.

“Where was it?”

“It was a hidden room in the library. The room required answering a muggle puzzle to access, but it would not open unless you were keyed in with blood.” The werewolf’s smile turned shy as she averted her eyes, “I’m glad I spent so much time learning about the muggle world, for the puzzle was a logic game that would have stumped most wizards.”

“Well then, let’s go check it.” He pocketed the letters and made his way through the hallways and up the stairs to the library, followed closely by the werewolf. The library was probably an impressive chamber in its heyday that Hermione would have fallen in love with, but now it was a shadow of its former self. Almost all the books lost their preservative enchantments from the pests eating them and were little more than tinder now - Harry vowed to restore it, no matter the cost.

“Here,” Chiara pointed to a part of the wall hidden by a rotted bookshelf they destroyed earlier, where there was an open door with some sort of mechanical puzzle. Walking into a small closet, they found the wall was completely smooth and made from one granite block with a simple door handle in the centre. “Let’s pray the mechanism identifies you as a descendant, as I’m unsure whether you were keyed into it. You will have to place your palm on this small spike and channel magic through it. Just a tiny amount of it, and the rune will activate.”

Harry did as asked, and the spike stabbed slightly into his palm and drank his blood. He waited with bated breath and grinned widely when the door opened to reveal a dark room inside. The Potter Lord did not get more than a few seconds to look inside before a voice barked out.

“Who the bloody hell are you, boy?”

Harry stared in bewilderment at the large portrait of a white-haired old man with brown eyes and an extravagant beard styled into mutton chops.

We got an update on Lucy; at least now he can sleep.

Amelia digs for copper and finds gold! Tonksie gets a mentor and connection high up.

Finally, we take a look at Harry's lands.

If you would like to support me, or read five chapters ahead, feel free to join me on Pat(re)on under the same pen name.