
Nightmare
by: Jaxie

Dedicated to Bee, Lilo, Toby, and Diana

Thank you for allowing me to use your characters to write this story. I hope I did them proper justice. I love you guys.

1. ***Prologue: Franklin Grae Higgs***

Franklin Higgs was destined for a life of emptiness and pain. Unbeknown to her, she was never given true love in romance or family. Their entire life was planned out as a side character for their best friend. Despite that small detail, she lived it to the fullest, making sure her friends were happy— always before herself— and tried her hardest to be the good girl she was raised to be. Franklin to her family and teachers, Kei to her friends and colleagues, but Frankie to the only person who made her short life worth her living.

Kei exuded Hufflepuff qualities, even as a young child, though it came as a shock when she was placed there. Her entire magical bloodline was filled with Slytherins, she wasn't supposed to be a Hufflepuff— so imagine her father's surprise when he got an owl with the news. Contrary to popular belief, Albert Higgs, Kei's father was more understanding than most purely Slytherin households; especially with the promise of high marks and quidditch. In all fairness, they kept up half of their deal, nearly top of all their classes and friends with everyone they met; though quidditch was more of a secondary thought. Unlike her older brother, Terence Higgs, Kei was never placed on the house team as academics held a higher value to them.

Along with that, Kei was never one to follow rules. And the Higgs were big on rules. Throughout her childhood, she was always the wild card of the group: Never complied with the rules, completely non-conforming, always in her own world, but still kind, respectful, and loyal to a fault. Even a mellow, serious little boy didn't slow her down; Tiberius Moody had been their best friend since they both could remember— mainly due to the fact they were the only children similar in age at the Ministry Events their fathers went to. There was never a second thought on where the other was; if one were missing, they could probably be found with the other! But Kei loved games and thrived on attention, Tib (or Reese's, as she called him) did not.

Throughout the first few years at Hogwarts, Kei learned that attention wasn't always good. Being the trusting girl they are, Kei was usually sought out for comfort and friendship as she was as loyal as they came. Naive in the sense they trusted all of their friends, only to be deceived by someone she believed was a good person, Kei got hurt– badly. But life happened, Hogwarts is a place to find out more about yourself and it isn't always what one thinks it is. They only hope that their morals and judgement are strong enough to keep her where she is: Happy

with their friends and safe within the walls of Hogwarts. No place is safer than Hogwarts— at least, *that's what is said*.

2. ***Before***

Floo Powder was Kei's favourite way to travel because the bright green ashy glitter always felt fuzzy in her hands. The flames engulfed the three of them, causing Kei to squeal at the funny sensation of travelling through the networks, and landed them in the foyer of the Ministry of Magic. A small sense of fear was quickly overpowered by adrenaline and excitement. It was the first time Albert Higgs, her father, allowed her to accompany him to any of the Ministry Events— and this one was a big one: Christmas Ball.

Keeping his grip on Terence's hand, Albert pulled at Kei's little hand as the tiny girl smiled widely, looking around at all the witches and wizards. So enamoured by the scenery, the itchy dress she wore didn't bother her anymore and seemed to look forward to meeting other magical children like herself. As soon as Terence recognized the children he played with last time he went to an event, he let go of his father's hand and left.

At this, Albert Higgs stopped his stride through the foyer and crouched down to her height, "Frankie? You have to promise me to behave, okay? No running, no yelling, and no lights."

Lights was their little code word for magic. During periods of strong emotion, the six-year-old had a habit of magically flickering the lights and, even sometimes, causing some electrical appliances to explode.

"I promise," Kei nodded excitedly. She didn't mind the 'no lights' rule. "Can I have my buddy now?"

"Sorry, love, I don't think there'll be any kids your age here," Kei's face fell at the confession. "They're all older kids and adults."

The dress felt itchy again and Kei pulled all the long blue sleeves of her dress. Terence stood up, fixed his tux, and continued to walk with Kei around the room. People twirled her hair and pinched her cheeks, she grew tired and frustrated— it wasn't as if she were a shy kid, but the people were too much for the six-year-old. Letting go of her father's hand, Kei decided to take a tour of the manor herself. Down the corridor and towards the large table littered with treats.

Her path was blocked within seconds and she quickly fell. Kei wasn't one to cry, she was

used to getting scraped and bruised from running around in school or their own backyard. Looking up, she saw a young boy slightly shorter than her with a large frown on his face. But she couldn't care less— *my buddy*! She thought.

"Hi," Kei quickly said, standing up, "I'm Frankie!"

The boy looked at her, tilting his head. He didn't say hello back. Kei's smile slightly fell and huffed, "hello. . ? I said hi, I'm Frankie. What's your name?"

"My name is Tiberius. Tiberius Moody," he nodded.

"Hi Tibber. . . ree-is. . .reese's. Your name sounds like this muggle chocolate my mommy used to buy me. It's called Reese's Cup and has peanut butter inside. It's amazing. Have you ever had it—?" Kei didn't allow Tiberius to answer her question as she was too excited to talk to someone like her. "It's probably one of my favourites but there's this little. . ."

Tiberius watched the brunette talk about all kinds of muggle candies and treats. He had never met a muggleborn, more or less heard of all the sweets she spoke about— she definitely had to be a muggleborn. Frankie spoke with her hands a lot and nodded frantically, too energetic for his liking.

"You talk a lot," Tiberius blurted out. Kei stopped talking and slightly narrowed her eyes at him, "well, you don't talk."

Before either child could answer, both of their names were called by their parents. Kei turned around to see her father wide-eyed and slightly concerned. She gulped but recited the rules: No yelling, no running, no lights— she did none of those.

"Franklin," her father said sternly. Kei frowned. Albert Higgs looked up from his daughter and to the two people behind her. Turning around, she saw a man standing behind her new friend and widened her eyes.

"Ah, Alastor Moody," Kei's father addressed the scary looking man.

"Albert Higgs," he responded in the same tone.

"Who is this?" Albert motioned to the boy.

Alastor's mouth twitched in a slight smile, "this is my son, Tiberius. And I'm assuming this is your daughter—"

"—Franklin Higgs—" he introduced her but Kei cut her father off, "Frankie. My name is Frankie!"

An amused smirk grew on Tiberius' face to which Kei met with a gapped tooth grin.

———

Since their initial meeting– at the Christmas Ball of ‘84– Franklin Higgs and Tiberius Moody have made themselves a pair of unlikely friends, completely and utterly inseparable. The pair were always in some kind of trouble, but the last night before they went off to Hogwarts was one they needed to remember.

Kei managed to convince Tiberius out of his house at nearly midnight. Mischief never seemed to be far behind when the two buddies were together.

“Frankie, what’re you doing?” Tiberius groaned, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“Oh, don’t you worry. It’ll be worth your while!” grinned Kei excitedly.

Grabbing Tiberius by the hand, the little girl dragged her friend down the road and towards the small broken house. The pair lived in the muggle world, away from the beasts and wild wizards that lived in their world. The abandoned house didn’t seem scary from far away or during the day, but close up and at night, it sent shivers down Kei’s spine.

“We’re going in there?” asked Tiberius. He wasn’t scared, but more annoyed that Kei woke him up, just so they could finally go into the house Kei had been too afraid of to enter.

“Unless you’re scared, Reese’s,” teased Kei, sticking her tongue out at him.

Rolling his eyes, Tiberius advanced towards the house, climbing in through the broken window and clearing an area for Kei to follow. Disadvantaged by her height, Kei tumbled into the house, nearly bringing Tiberius down with her. The house was full of trash and crumbling walls, a safety hazard at least. But Kei didn’t care for its rough appearance, they were set on making the last summer before Hogwarts one of their best and visiting a ‘haunted house’ was the final task for success.

“So what do you plan on doing?” Tiberius whispered. “We’re here.”

“Why’re you whispering?” she mused. “Scared?”

“No,” he spoke in a normal volume, “I just don’t want to wake up the neighbours.”

Kei rolled her eyes and took out a small pocket knife she had stolen from her brother. Tiberius’s eyes widened at the weapon and took a step back.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake, Tib! I didn’t come out here to murder you,” she laughed.

Tiberius let out a forced laugh and slowly made his way back over to Kei who turned their attention back to one of the decrepit walls. With her knife, she carved out a symbol and a few words.

“Why’s it only my name?”

“Well, I’m not going to write both of our names. That would defeat the purpose of us doing this thing *together*! I carved out yours, you carve out mine,” Kei explained.

Nodding, Tiberius took the small pocket knife out of Kei’s hand, crouched down to where she had written ‘ + REESE’S FOREVER,’ and added ‘FRANKIE’ before the plus sign. He smiled at their vandalism and shook his head in disbelief.

‘FRANKIE + REESE’S FOREVER’ read the wall.

“What’re you kids doing?” a haunting voice said from behind them.

Kei gasped and spun around, Tiberius standing up and raised the small pocket knife in front of him as a weapon. Narrowing his eyes in the dark, Tiberius tried to take a step towards the voice, only for Kei to outstretch her arm and keep him behind her as a way to protect him. It was quite a laughable sight, Kei, who was barely 128 cm, was trying to protect Tiberius, who was at least 30 cm taller than her.

But before either of them could respond, a shadowy figure appeared through the wall and floated a few feet above the ground, directly in front of them. Kei looked like a deer in headlights whereas Tiberius narrowed his eyes at the apparition as if he were trying to intimidate it.

“Well?” the ghost said.

“W-We’re doing nothing!” Kei bravely said. “We’re wizards. We’ll hex you!”

The ghost sighed and fell slightly towards the ground, moving towards them, “sounds cool kid. Playing magic and all.”

Kei pushed Tiberius back to make room in between them and the ghost.

“We’re not afraid of you, ghost!” shouted Kei, puffing her chest out.

“Never said you were,” the ghost mused.

“W-Well, we’re not,” she tried again.

The ghost smiled slightly and moved a little closer. Being so backed up to the wall, Kei managed to corner themselves leaving no place for her nor Tiberius to move. She screamed.

“Oh!” The ghost shouted. “No–! Enough of that,” he floated backwards, shaking his head. “You’d think forty years of this kids’ve learned to not yell!”

“Forty years?” Tiberius spoke up, suddenly interested in the spirit. Tiberius moved out from behind Kei and stationed himself in front of them. Honestly, it was to get a better look at the ‘scary’ ghost. He was kind of nice and friendly looking: A very old man with a large belly

and wired glasses– kind of like how muggle's thought Santa Claus looked. Though, this Santa Claus was missing an arm and not so jolly.

"Yup, been dead since the fifties," he sighed. "Oh, what a time."

Kei peaked out from behind Tiberius to get a look at the ghost. *He seems nice*, she thought, but she was too afraid to talk to him. Well, until he provoked her:

"Come out, little girl, I don't bite."

"Hey! I'm not little and my name is Frankie, thank you very much," she hot headedly huffed.

"Well, my name ain't ghost," he chuckled, "it's Gerald. Gerald Zeitler."

"I'm Tiberius," he shrugged. "As Frankie said, we're wizards– actually, going to Hogwarts to learn how to be wizards properly."

"Wizards, aye? Didn't know magic was a thing," Gerald the ghost nodded.

"How did you die?" Kei burst out. Tiberius looked at Kei with wide eyes and slightly pushed her.

Instead of being offended, Gerald wholeheartedly laughed and even wiped a tear from his eye, shaking his head, "kids never change."

Kei's face flushed in embarrassment and, even though Tiberius didn't want to admit it, he was glad they'd asked how Gerald became a ghost. Gerald looked down at the two kids and smiled longingly at them as they had reminded him of his grandchildren he never got to see grow up.

"I died," Gerald started, gaining their attention, "when I was on a bloody walk."

"On a walk?" Tiberius asked, stepping forward.

"'Eah, I was takin' a walk and I guess I pushed too far, my heart gave out. Stopped beating right there. No one found me 'til morning."

"You died. . . from a heart attack? From old age?"

"Tiberius!" Kei scolded him. He was completely uninterested. "I'm sorry you died, that's so sad."

"Eh, I lived a full life. I was a soldier during the First World War, too old to fight in the second, though," Gerald sighed. "Had a lovely wife, two kids, and little ones were on the way."

Gerald had a soft smile on his face as he reminisced. He missed the life he had, lonely as a ghost in a random building.

“You mean to tell us,” Tiberius started suspiciously, “you were in a *war*, survived it, but then your heart gave out when you were safe? You died because you were old and *not* because of a war?”

“TIBERIUS!” Kei shouted and shoved him. Gerald only chuckled at his inquiry. He had thought the same thing.

“Nah ‘cause I had thought the same thing. Lost my bloody arm, lived to see another war start and end, and then managed to give up mid walk! Didn’t even get to see my bloody grandchildren grow up, ya’know.”

Tiberius shook his head in disbelief, he felt bad for the old bloke but also annoyed at the fact Gerald had died in such a mundane way. A war veteran dying from old age– death is never a good thing, but dying at war is such a noble death.

“Even though Tib is being *rude*,” Kei said, shooting her best friend an agitated look, “I know he is also sorry that you died like that. You should have died with your family, and seen your grandchildren grow up!”

Gerald smiled, “so you’re not ‘fraid of me, Frankie?”

Kei narrowed her eyes and scrunched up her nose, “I- I was never afraid! I just don’t like not knowing things and y-you’re a stranger so—”

“She was afraid,” Tiberius blurted, earning an elbow to his ribs. “It’s the truth!”

The lonely ghost watched as the pair bickered back and forth, arguing about the times the other had been scared. Tiberius and Kei reminded Gerald of his own children and what his grandchildren could have been.

“Gerald,” Kei said, clearing her throat. He grinned. “Would you mind if we came back?”

“Came back?” he echoed, leaning in closer to them.

“Yeah, like during holidays and in between terms. We leave tomorrow to go to Hogwarts and we won’t be back until the winter holiday and then the summer break,” Tiberius nodded.

“Why’d you want to come back?” asked Gerald.

“You seem cool and your place is neat,” Kei smiled as Tiberius mumbled, “even though you’re an uninteresting ghost.”

Gerald smiled as he felt himself warm. He wasn’t going to be alone anymore, but he didn’t want to keep them here if they truly didn’t want to be there.

“You kiddos don’t have to do that. I’m Gerald the uninteresting ghost,” he said with a

sad, pale smile. Tiberius instantly stopped the incoming elbow he knew Kei would jab into his ribs for his comment.

"No, this place is pretty cool! And you're. . . lonely. We'll come to visit," said Kei softly.

"Yeah, as uninteresting as you are, you're nice and *a bloody ghost*!" Tiberius exclaimed.

Gerald smiled and nodded, looking down at the two adolescents. He decided he liked the kids and their thought to keep him company in a calming way– though he could tell they were a chaotic pair, Tiberius and Kei most definitely worked well together and were very good friends.

"It's half past midnight, we've got to be up early in the morning," Tiberius said frantically.

"Oh Merlin, yes! I'm sorry, Gerald. I promise to keep a journal with all of the events of our year so we don't forget to tell you anything," Kei smiled widely.

"We should be back around Christmastime with all of the things that happen at Hogwarts," added Tiberius.

"Bye, Gerald, see you later," Kei waved at him as Tiberius helped her out of the window and into the night.

"Goodbye," Tiberius said before he climbed through the window himself.

"Bye, Kiddos," Gerald whispered to nobody as the pair ran off.

He hoped the pair would keep their promise in coming to visit him. In the short moment he met Tiberius and Kei, he had come to like them– a wild pair, definite to keep him on his toes with their stories of adventures. Gerald hoped his own grandchildren were as adventurous and friendly as they were. He could only long to know them and looked forward to Christmastime as he hoped Tiberius and Kei would keep him company.

Gerald the uninteresting and lonely ghost would no longer be lonely for he had made two new friends. And Tiberius and Kei were more than excited about their new ghost buddy as well.

3. ***First Year***

Alastor had agreed to take Kei and Terence along with Tiberius to the Hogwarts Express. He had never planned on it, but Albert Higgs had a meeting and was too busy to take his youngest to the steam train for the first time in her life. Terence was two years older than Kei and had been sorted into Slytherin, much like their father and grandfather. Kei was excited to be sorted into her family house and hoped Tiberius would be too.

“I think I’m going to end up in Gryffindor,” Tiberius nodded. “I’m brave and daring and—”

“But what if you get sorted into Slytherin, like me?” Kei asked.

“How do you know you’ll be sorted there? You’re nothing like—”

Tiberius was cut off as the door to their compartment was slid open. A pair stood at the door, both with bright blue eyes but wild brown hair; the boy stood in front of the girl, he was slightly taller but looked identical to the girl– twins, if Kei had any mind.

“Hi, can we sit here?” The boy asked.

Kei smiled and allowed them to come in, the brunette sitting across from her and the boy sitting across from Tiberius.

“Hi, I’m Kei and this is—”

“Kei? You’re Frankie,” said Tiberius, utterly confused.

“No,” Kei said in a hushed voice, “I- Call me Kei. I don’t want Frankie as a nickname anymore and I don’t want people calling me—”

“So is your name Kei or Frankie?” the brunette asked.

Kei shot Tiberius a look and turned to the girl, “actually my name is Franklin, but I don’t like it, so call me Kei instead.”

“Well my name is Georgina and I don’t like it either because my aunt only uses it to yell at me, so call me Gina,” she replied.

“I’m Vic, Gina’s brother,” the boy replied. The three of them looked over to Tiberius, he sighed, “I’m Tiberius.”

“No nicknames?” Gina mused.

He tried to not smile at her tone but it was near impossible, “fine, Tib works.”

“Got it,” Vic nodded.

Tiberius nodded and looked back down at his lap while Kei took the opportunity to make friends. She and Gina spoke about little things, like being sorted and which classes they looked forward to. Tiberius and Vic were the same, both very quiet and not talking until after the Sweets Cart came around.

After a few more hours of waiting, a voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately."

Kei, Tiberius, Gina, and Vic all left the train together and made their way to the fleet of boats that took the first years to the castle. The group of first years walked through the hall and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall. The Great Hall looked grander than she could have ever imagined it to be. It was decorated for the start-of-term feast. Golden plates and goblets gleaned by the light of hundreds and hundreds of candles, floating over the tables in midair. The four long House tables were packed with chattering students; at the top of the Hall, the staff sat along one side of a fifth table, facing the incoming students. It was much warmer there than outside.

Professor McGonagall strolled in as she led a long line of first years up to the top of the Hall, placing a three-legged stool on the ground before the first years and, on top of it, an extremely old, dirty, patched wizard's hat. All of the first years stared at it. For a moment, there was silence. Then a long tear near the brim opened wide like a mouth, and the hat broke into its song about how the sorting process works and the history behind it.

Professor McGonagall unrolled a large scroll of parchment.

"When I call out your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool," she told the first years. "When the hat announces your House, you will go and sit at the appropriate table.

"Bones, Shiloh!"

A pale girl walked forward, visibly trembling from head to foot, picked up the Sorting Hat, put it on, and sat down on the stool.

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat.

Shiloh Bones took off the hat and hurried into a seat at the Hufflepuff table, where everyone was applauding her. Kei smiled and clapped along as the next name was called:

"Carrow, Jaqen!"

"SLYTHERIN!"

Instead of going to the yellow table that Shiloh had gone to, Jaqen walked over to the loud and boisterous green decorated table. Tiberius wrinkled his nose at the name and rolled his eyes once another Carrow was called and sorted into Slytherin.

"Clearwater, Clemence!"

A curly-haired girl ran over to the Sorting Hat and nearly tripped on the stairs as she sat down and waited for the Sorting Hat to call out her new home for the next seven years.

"RAVENCLAW!"

The table littered in blue and gold clapped loudly as the nervous first year walked over to her new house. After a few moments of waiting, Kei's name was finally called.

"Higgs, Franklin!"

Tiberius squeezed Kei's hand and let go as she took tentative steps towards the front of the hall, very aware of all the eyes watching her every move. Sitting on the stool, she was forced to look at all of the quiet students in the Hall. It didn't last long as the oversized hat was placed on Kei's head, falling over her eyes.

Unlike how Terence had told her, the Hat didn't talk at all. She had thought that it would, but instead of conversing with Kei, the Hat made a humming noise and shouted:

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

Her heart dropped as the oversized hat was taken off her eyes. Looking at the green Slytherin table they could see the slight disappointment in her brother's face. But next to Slytherin, the Hufflepuff's clapped with vigour at their new housemate.

Walking off the platform, Kei shot Tiberius a sad look and hoped that the Hat would also sort him into Hufflepuff. It was highly unlikely. Kei took a spot across from where Terence sat at the Slytherin table.

"Don't worry, Fran. I don't think Dad'll mind," he reassured her.

"I wanted to be in Slytherin with you," Kei spoke over the cheers from the Gryffindors as they gained a new housemate.

"It's fine. You belong in Hufflepuff, the Hat thinks so," Terence smiled.

"Lestrange, Georgina," Professor McGonagall shouted.

Kei looked up to see her newfound friend walk up to the platform and sit on the stool. Looking over to where Tiberius was, she saw the disgust on his face as he took a step away from Vic. *Uh oh,* Kei thought. There was a small argument between the two as Gina was sorted into Slytherin.

"Lestrange, Atlas!"

Vic stepped forward and walked up to the stool once Gina sat down. Her brows furrowed at the name. *Maybe it's a nickname like mine*.

"SLYTHERIN!" The Sorting Hat bellowed.

Their former compartment mate walked off the stool and directly over to his sister who cheered alongside all of the other Slytherins.

“Montague, Atticus,” called out Professor McGonagall.

A lanky awkward brunet sauntered up to the stool and was sorted into Gryffindor who congratulated another member.

“Moody, Tiberius!”

Kei perked up and looked over to Tiberius who moved through the thinning crowd of first years and up to the Sorting Hat. Professor McGonagall placed the Hat on his head and Kei’s heart fell at its words. The Slytherin table cheered as Tiberius stood up from the stool and walked over to the Slytherin table. There was no room near Terence, so he sat on the far end, away from where Kei sat. There was a sudden sadness in her chest.

Of course, she was happy for Tiberius being sorted, but Kei was slightly jealous that he had been sorted into Slytherin, the house she wanted in, and not into Gryffindor how he wanted or in Hufflepuff with her. As the sorting continued, Kei tried her hardest to clap along with the rest of the students as more first years were sorted.

“Ward, Aurora!” Professor McGonagall called the final student. The Sorting Hat sorted the tiny girl into Gryffindor.

It took a few moments until the headmaster announced dinner and soon the dishes in front of the students were filled with roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup, and, peppermint humbugs.

Kei watched and listened as their housemates spoke and ate, piling their plates high with dinner and conversed about upcoming lessons. She looked over to the end of the Slytherin table to see Tiberius angrily stabbing his dinner.

“Fran, are you going to eat or just stare?” a voice said from behind her.

Looking up, she noticed she had gotten the attention of her brother and his friends.

“Oh, uh– yeah,” Kei said in a small voice as Terence’s friends snickered.

“Don’t worry about not being in Slytherin. And don’t worry about Tiberius, I’ll make sure he’s fine. He’ll make loads of friends here,” reassured Terence.

Loads of friends, his comment echoed in her head. There was a slight fear in Kei’s chest. She was terrified that Tiberius would make other friends and leave her. Friends were never hard for her to make, but she always preferred him over others. *What if he prefers a Slytherin over me*? Kei questioned herself and shook the horrible idea out of her head.

“Yeah, I know. Thanks, Ter,” nodding to herself. Kei pushed her dessert around her plate and waited to be dismissed from the start-of-term feast.

Quickly running up from her spot, she went over to Tiberius who waited at the end of the Slytherin table.

“Made friends?” he asked.

“Not necessarily,” Kei sighed. “You?”

“Nope.”

“What about Vic—?”

“Lestrange?” Tiberius’s nose upturned in disgust and, in a whisper, added, “he’s a Death Eater’s kid, Frankie. I’d never be friends with someone like him. He lied to me– he didn’t tell me—”

“Reese’s, come on. He’s nice and Gina’s also nice! I don’t see why you—”

“First years, please come along. The dungeons are far and I don’t want to lose any of you,” the Slytherin prefect said, cutting Kei off.

Tiberius shot Kei a look and squeezed her hand, “I’ll see you tomorrow. Sit near here, I’ve chosen my spot here. We’ll sit with each other every day, okay? Doesn’t matter if we’re in different houses. I’m not leaving you.”

Kei gave him a small, sad smile and hugged him before he left. Looking over to the other Hufflepuff first years, she noticed how they stood around waiting for instruction. The Hufflepuff prefect looked them over and smiled warmly, “our house is close by to the kitchens actually. . .”

4. ***Fifth Year Problems***

There was no word that could explain Kei’s excitement as she and Tiberius made their way through the Hogwarts Express. Kei had been made Hufflepuff Prefect and was beyond excited for her new position. Though upset Tiberius wouldn’t be able to join her, he was as supportive as any true friend would be. Leaving Tiberius in an empty compartment, she made her way to the prefect carriage where they’d learn what duties she was meant to do as prefect.

With a large smile on her face, Kei made her way over to where Cedric Diggory was standing. *He’s the male prefect*, she thought to herself. Looking around the room, Kei noticed she didn’t quite recognize the people there.

"Now," the Head girl, Amber Armsty of Gryffindor, said, "your duties as Prefects are to

patrol the corridors of the Hogwarts Express, today; patrol hallways to ensure that other students are not breaking curfew, on select days; and, tonight, after the start-of-term feast, you must show the first-year students, of your House, where your common room is."

"And," added the Head Boy, Isaias Peters of Ravenclaw, "as Prefects you have access to the Prefect bathroom on the fifth floor, along with the ability to take points away from other houses and give detentions as punishments. Though, you are not allowed to take points from or issue detentions to other Prefects."

At his moment, Kei looked around at the other prefects: Only the male Slytherin Prefect and female Gryffindor Prefect looked at one another.

"Slytherin and Hufflepuff Prefects report to me—" Amber Armstry said.

"— And Gryffindor and Ravenclaw Prefect report to me," Isaias Peters finished.

"Roll call," said Amber, pulling out a parchment with the Prefects' names on them. "From Hufflepuff: Cedric Diggory—"

"Here," he beamed.

"— and Franklin Higgs—"

“Kei,” she blurted out. “Call me Kei.”

Amber nodded with a soft smile and moved onto calling the names of the Slytherin Prefects. Isaias took the parchment out of Amber’s hands and read off the Prefects’ names for Gryffindor and Ravenclaw.

"Slytherins will take care of carriages one and two; Gryffindors, three and four; Ravenclaw, five and six; Hufflepuffs, seven and eight," Amber instructed.

"You are meant to do it for two hours and then are welcome to either come back to the Prefect carriage or go to your own compartments with your other friends," the Head Boy said.

"Oh," Amber gasped, "before I forget, you are meant to meet back here before getting off the train to get your common room passwords. Prefects make them two times a term, just so you know."

"Any questions?" the Head Girl added after a beat of silence. When no one spoke, she dismissed them for their duties.

Kei frowned at the assignment being that Tiberius was alone in their compartment in Carriage Three. But they took that time to bond with Cedric, whom she has never really talked to before that moment. He was everything and more, absolutely perfect at what he did and Kei

hated him for it. Once the two hours were up, Kei said her goodbyes to Cedric and went off to where Tiberius was.

"How was Prefect duty?" he asked.

"Boring," sighed Kei and plopped down next to him. "Cedric Diggory is the other prefect for Hufflepuff. He's nice but. . . too perfect."

Tiberius let out a laugh and tilted his bag of Lays towards them, which Kei happily accepted.

———

The entire school buzzed with information about Sirius Black and the Dementors which had made their new home the grounds of Hogwarts. It was horrible, all of the happiness sucking demons surrounding Hogwarts to keep the students safe from outside danger. Tiberius wasn't much happier than the rest of the students as he thought it was stupid that the Dementors were hanging.

"I bet Alastor knows what's going on," he grumbles as he stuffed a piece of toast in his mouth.

It was a month into the first term and everyone was seated in the Great Hall for breakfast. Tiberius and Kei made it a habit to sit near the doors of the Hall with their backs facing one another so they could talk during meals. Students of other houses weren't allowed to sit at other house tables and this was the only way the pair would be able to hang out outside of lessons.

"I reckon he does, but that doesn't mean you should pester him about Sirius Black," Kei rolled their eyes. "He's busy enough trying to capture Black as it is. No need to worry him about keeping you safe and out of his hair."

"Frankie, I'm telling you—"

"And I'm just telling you!" She cut him off. "You know how your father is. He won't like it. Just try to keep your Herbology marks up and that'll make him happy."

"But he's *training* me," Tiberius tried to reason though he knew there was no point. Kei was as stubborn as she was smart and, as much as he hated to admit it, he knew she was right.

"Training doesn't automatically make you a certified auror to go around putting your nose in places it doesn't belong." Kei raised her brow at him and turned back to her food, slightly raising her voice, "and just because he started *barely* training you over the summer, doesn't mean he'll continue to train you for slacking off."

Tiberius said nothing further and Kei knew they got through his thick skull. As chivalrous and valiant as he tried to be, she knew it was in his best interest for Tiberius to not get involved. There was nothing more Kei wanted to do than to see her best friend succeed in being an auror, as he planned, but he was extremely stubborn and not trained in the slightest. One little slip up could severely hinder him.

"Reese's?" Kei sounded and turned to face the Slytherin table. Tiberius merely hummed and slightly turned to her. "Potions, Muggle Studies, and Defence today right?"

He sighed knowing this was their way of trying to apologize after shutting him down so harshly, "yeah, but I have Alchemy after Defence."

Kei nodded, "that's me tomorrow– I have Arithmancy though, I dropped Alchemy."

Tiberius looked up at the grandfather clock behind the Professor's Table and sighed, "we have five minutes 'til Potions. Wanna go now?"

"Yeah, let's go," she quickly said and stuffed a strawberry in her mouth as she grabbed her bag. "Reckon Snape'll be worse this year, with OWLs and all."

"Oh yeah," he breathed, "bloody OWLs."

5. ***Fear***

"I swear on Merlin's *grave*, Snape is trying to kill us with the amount of work he's given!" Kei groaned as she and Tiberius walked from the Muggle Studies classroom down to the Defence Against the Dark Arts room.

"Not to mention Professor Burbage's new project assignment on electricity," Tiberius added.

"Well, at least we've got some advantage on that. My house is full of it, as is yours."

"But how're we going to find examples of electricity in Hogwarts?"

Kei slowed their pace and huffed, not liking the fact that Tiberius was right. Their slight advantage of knowledge didn't seem to help them much on the practical portion of the assignment.

"So Defence," Kei said, addressing their next problem. Every year Hogwarts had a new professor for the subject, one crazier than the next.

"Alastor didn't tell me much about him, but all I know is he's pretty decent– attended Hogwarts not too long ago," Tiberius shrugged. "Reckon we'll find out, yeah?"

Kei only hummed in response as they made their way into the classroom. The new Professor Lupin wasn't there when they arrived at his first lesson. Taking their normal spot in the class, Kei and Tiberius sat together with quills, books, and parchment at the ready.

"Good afternoon," a voice boomed from the back, causing all of the students to turn to face him as he walked in. "I understand that this is a fifth year class but I do believe there is nothing like a good refresher on old lessons."

All of the students looked at each other, Kei giving Tiberius a confused look at the idea of going back and addressing old lessons.

"I have come across an opportunity to showcase a practical lesson. Would you please put all of your belongings into your bags? You will only need your wands."

This caused a slight murmur in the classroom. There had never been practicals in previous Defence Against the Dark Arts classes– no reason to have any as there were no dark objects or creatures to defend against.

"Right then," said Lupin once everyone packed away their things. "If you'd all follow me."

Kei linked arms with Tiberius as they followed the crowd of fifth years to the empty staffroom with nothing but empty chairs and a large cabinet in the middle of the room.

"Now, then," said Lupin, beckoning the class toward the end of the room, where there was nothing but an old wardrobe where the teachers kept their spare robes. As Lupin went to stand next to it, the wardrobe gave a sudden wobble, banging off the wall. "Nothing to worry about," said Professor Lupin calmly because a few people had jumped backward in alarm. "There's a Boggart in there.

"As you all know, Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces," he continued. "Wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, the cupboards under sinks — I've even met one that had lodged itself in a grandfather clock. This one moved in yesterday afternoon, and I asked the headmaster if the staff would leave it to give a demonstration to a few of my classes.

"So, as a refresher, the first question we must ask ourselves is, what is a Boggart?"

Everyone seemed to look around at each other, no one wanting to answer, though it was obvious the fifth years already knew.

"C'mon, I know you know it," he encouraged.

Cedric Diggory slowly raised his hand and the teacher called upon him.

"It's a shape-shifter," he said. "It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most."

"Precisely," said Lupin. "So the Boggart sitting in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form. He does not yet know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a Boggart looks like when he is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us fear the most. This means that we have a huge advantage over the Boggart before we begin. And can anyone give me the reason as to why?"

At this, Tiberius raised his hand causing Lupin to give him a small smile.

"There are too many of us for the Boggart to focus on what to shift into."

"Well said, Mr. . ?"

“Tiberius Moody,” he answered.

There was a small glint in Lupin’s eyes at his name as though he was happy to put the name to his face. Kei tilted her head, slightly narrowing her eyes at the professor as she tried to figure out who he was. *Alastor probably knew him long ago,* she concurred.

“It's always best to have company when you're dealing with a Boggart. He becomes confused. Which should he become, a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I once saw a Boggart make that very mistake — tried to frighten two people at once and turned himself into half a slug. Not remotely frightening, the charm that repels a Boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing.

“And the charm to repel the Boggart?”

“*Riddikulus*,” called out Adrian Pucey.

“Good,” Lupin smiled. “Very good. Now that you’ve volunteered yourself—” Adrian’s eyes grew to the size of saucers at the professor’s assumption, “please step forward.”

The wardrobe shook again, though not as much as Adrian, who walked forward as though he were heading for the gallows.

“Right, Mr Pucey. First things first: What would you say is the thing that frightens you most in the world?”

“Er— my grandmother, quite honestly,” Adrian muttered. There was stifled laughter in the class. Kei slapped her hand over her mouth as Tiberius elbowed her.

“No need to laugh,” Lupin addressed the students and turned back to the Slytherin. “All

right, now imagine something that causes you laughter, joy even. Something you'd want your Boggart to change into."

Adrian nodded.

"When the Boggart bursts out of this wardrobe, Adrian, and sees you, it will assume the form of your grandmother," said Lupin. "And you will raise your wand — thus — and cry *'Riddikulus'* — and concentrate hard on your joy. All in theory it seems easy, but rest assured, I will be here in case anything goes wrong.

"If Adrian is successful, the Boggart is likely to shift his attention to each of us in turn," said Lupin as he turned to the students. "I would like all of you to take a moment now to think of the thing that scares you most, and imagine how you might force it to look comical..."

The room went quiet. Tiberius shuttered at the thought of his Boggart while Kei thought hard— there wasn't much that scared them other than failure. *But how will that translate into a Boggart*, she questioned herself.

"Everyone ready?" said Professor Lupin.

Everyone else was nodding and rolling up their sleeves.

"We're going to back away," Lupin instructed. "Let you have a clear field, all right? I'll call the next person forward... Everyone back, now, so Adrian can get a clear shot —

"On the count of three," said Lupin, who was pointing his own wand at the handle of the wardrobe. "One — two — three —now!"

A jet of sparks shot from the end of Lupin's wand and hit the doorknob. The wardrobe burst open. A fragile old woman creeped out of the wardrobe— she looked terrifyingly mean and seemed as though there was a permanent scowl on her face.

He backed away, his wand up, mouthing wordlessly. The old woman was bearing down upon him, wagging her finger at him.

"*R — r — riddikulus*! " shouted Adrian.

There was a noise like a whip crack. The woman stumbled; she was transformed into a red floating balloon with a badly drawn smiley face on it.

There was a roar of laughter; the Boggart paused, confused, and Professor Lupin shouted,

"Cedric! Forward!"

Cedric walked forward, his face set. The balloon floated towards him. There was another crack, and where it had floated was a bloodstained, bandaged mummy; its sightless face was

turned to Cedric and it began to walk toward him very slowly, dragging its feet, its stiff arms rising—

"*Riddikulus*!" cried Cedric.

A bandage unraveled at the mummy's feet; it became entangled, fell face forward, and its head rolled off. Lupin called everyone forward and the Boggart changed from a mummy to a rattlesnake to a banshee—

"Excellent! Shiloh, you next!"

Shiloh Bones leapt forward.

Crack! There was a confused murmur in the air. To anyone watching, it seemed as though a random black cloud had appeared. Shiloh looked around and understood what had happened: The black cloud represented her loneliness in the world; no one but air. The black cloud looming over her, ready to isolate her from all she knew. Kei looked over at the Hufflepuff to see she seemed furious. Professor Lupin nearly stepped in, thinking she had frozen. Then —

"*Riddikulus*!" she bellowed, and the black cloud vanished; it shifted into a garden of flowers, springing from an oversized pot.

"Tiberius, your turn!"

The Boggart changed from the flowers to a large storm cloud, thunder and lightning included. Tiberius sucked in a quick breath and cleared his throat, "*Riddikulus*!" and it transformed into a small white cloud with a rainbow popping out of it.

“Beautiful! Franklin! Go!”

Kei narrowed her eyes at the professor and just as they were about to correct Professor Lupin on her name, the rainbow changed into her best friend, Tiberius. He lifted his arm and pointed at her, silently laughing as he doubled over. Kei stared at him and only realized it was a Boggart when Lupin shouted, “Franklin, it’s not real.”

“O-Oh—” Kei breathed and raised her wand, “*Riddikulus*!” which caused a horrible rainbow wig and a large red clown nose to appear on him. She let out a shaky laugh and quickly walked to the back of the line as Lupin called forward the next student.

And then finally, Professor Lupin stood forward as the entire class watched the Boggart turned into what he feared the most. For a second, everyone looked wildly around to see where it was. Then Kei saw a silvery-white orb hanging in the air in front of Lupin, who said, "*Riddikulus*!" almost lazily and sent the Boggart back into the wardrobe for another class.

Grabbing her bag, Kei avoided Tiberius's looks. She didn't have another lesson after this one which meant she was free to escape to her dorm and sulk at how embarrassing her Boggart had been. Kei thought they were going to have to deal with the embodiment of failure but instead—

"Frankie," Tiberius called out, grabbing her shoulder. Though he turned her around, Kei didn't dare meet his eyes. "C'mon, look at me," he added softly.

Reluctantly looking up, she saw the sheer confusion etched on his face as to why he was her Boggart. "Yes?"

"Care to explain why your Boggart is me?"

"No, I wouldn't care to explain," Kei dismissed his question and turned around, ready to leave for Hufflepuff. They had tried to walk away from the conversation, but Tiberius followed Kei as she went.

"Frankie, cmon," he tried again to which she ignored. "Franklin."

Kei stopped and spun to look at him, "stop. Don't– Don't act like you get it."

"I don't. That's why I want you to explain it—"

"Reese's, you're my *best* friend," Kei butted in. "You mean the world and more to me. You are absolutely the only person I would *die* for. I thought my Boggart would have been the embodiment of *failure*. When it stood in front of me, as you– laughing at me, I realized that the thing I fear the most is failing. . . you. That Boggart was me failing you, you hating me, and then laughing at me for my failure because you hated me so much! Love the explanation?"

Turning away from Tiberius, Kei tried– for the third time– to walk away from her best friend. Instead of making it any further down the corridor, warm arms wrapped themselves around her; Tiberius was giving her a hug, comforting her.

"You could never fail me," Tiberius whispered. "You are my best buddy. There's nothing you could do that would cause me to hate you more or less laugh at you. Your fear is quite irrational. If anything, I'd be the one to fail you—" and before Kei could protest any, Tiberius added, "I'll always be by your side, okay? You're always safe with me. I'll never leave you, Frankie. I promise."

At his promise, Tiberius held up his hand and extended his pinky towards her. Kei let out a little laugh and sighed as she hooked her pinky with his, "I promise, too."

6. ***The Baguette Brigade***

Running into their first ever Arithmancy lesson, Kei looked around the room for familiar faces. They only recognized Shiloh Bones, but she was already seated next to a Gryffindor boy she didn't recognize. There were only two seats left in the class, one beside another Hufflepuff she didn't care to acquaint herself with and the other in the back of the room next to a very young looking student. Sighing in defeat, she decided to entertain the latter.

"You look quite young to be in this class," Kei smiled, sitting down next to the young Slytherin.

He only nodded.

"You don't talk much, do you?" They tried to hold a conversation with him.

"What an astute observation," the boy responded, not even looking up from his parchment.

"Hm," Kei smiled, "you use big words. You're funny."

The boy nodded.

"What's your name?" she tried

He didn't respond.

"My name is Franklin, but everyone calls me Kei. I'm a Hufflepuff."

"Silas. Slytherin," he finally said.

"Well, 'Silas. Slytherin.' pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Silas finally looked up, slightly narrowing their eyes at her, "Silas Burke."

"Kei Higgs," she responded, their smile growing.

"Likewise, I suppose."

The class dragged on with no proper achievements on befriending the Slytherin beside her. Every lesson it was the same, Kei doing more of the talking while Silas either nodded or ignored it. It wasn't until after the Christmas holiday that Silas made an effort in their friendship. In Kei's usually empty seat sat a perfect present wrapped in brown paper and sealed with a small amount of spellotape.

"What's this?" Kei smiled, picking up the parcel and placing it on the table before taking their seat.

"Well, it was just Christmas," said Silas as he scribbled down nothing. Kei bit back a smile, trying to contain her laughter. It was clear that Silas was nervous to see their reaction.

“So I can assume it’s a present?”

“You can assume whatever you like,” he answered and quietly added, “yes, it’s a present.”

Kei carefully opened the paper, trying her hardest to not rip it and saw it was a tattered old book. Though it was old, she could tell it was well worn and loved. Small little scribbles were written in the margins, annotating the story.

“Silas, I love it,” she gasped softly. “Y-You’ve even written in it!”

“I suppose I’ve read it enough to give it away to someone who would appreciate it,” he nodded, glancing at the Hufflepuff out of the corner of his eye.

Kei smiled and squeezed his arm softly, restraining herself from giving them a tight hug. Silas smiled softly and coughed as he swore his name, for the seventh time, on the top of his parchment. The bubbly girl seemed to have that kind of effect on people. And then sometime in the spring, she began to hang out with them outside of Arithmancy as they became proper friends.

With the marvelous idea of acquainting all of their friends with one another, Kei set up a date in the courtyard. Gina and Vic were already onboard with meeting her other friends as two of the other people Kei wanted to add to their group were in Slytherin as well. All it left was getting Silas and Tiberius to join the friend group.

Finally finding Tiberius in the library, alone, Kei plopped down next to him excited for her plan. He looked completely bored out of his mind as he did a two foot essay for Astrology.

“Talk to me, Moody,” sighed Kei, dramatically. “Are you bored? Tired of spending your evenings in the boring library, doing boring work, by your boring self?”

“What’re you going on about, Frankie?”

Kei sat up and faced him with a wide smile.

“Uh oh,” he breathed.

“No ‘uh oh’!” She laughed. “I have a plan and it’s absolutely *brilliant* and you’re going to love it.”

“Do tell what your absolutely brilliant plan is,” Tiberius repeated sarcastically.

She huffed, “you spend your entire free time here when I’m off with Clemence or Gina. It’s not fair! You’ve made no friends.”

“I have friends!” he retaliated.

“Name one.”

“Franklin Higgs,” smiled Tiberius.

Kei narrowed her eyes, “*besides me*.”

Tiberius rolled his eyes, “fine. What’s your plan?”

She squealed in delight, “are you busy right now? No? Perfect, let’s go!”

Without a warning, Kei pushed all of Tiberius’ books into his bag and pulled him up out of his chair. He let out a shriek as the small girl dragged him out of the library and down the corridor.

“And who exactly am I meant to befriend?” he asked.

“My friends,” Kei smiled and pulled him to move faster.

“I don’t want to meet your friends, Frankie,” Tiberius whispered in their ear as the pair made their way to the courtyard.

“C’mon, you’ll love them! Very diverse, even a younger student,” she laughed, dragging him down the steps to the group. Vic and Gina Lestrange, Lonnie and Jaqen Carrow, and Silas Burke sat around the large birch tree conversing with one another as they waited for Kei to show up with their ‘surprise.’

“I don’t like this,” he hissed, staring at the Death Eaters’ kids. “I don’t like anyone here!”

Kei turned to look up to the Slytherin and slightly narrowed her eyes at him, “yes, you do.”

“Give me one person I like.”

“Me!”

Tiberius rolled his eyes playfully and bit back a groan, “and if I said no?”

“Ouch, Reese’s,” Kei pretended to be hurt, “I’d have to rethink the last ten years then.”

He laughed awkwardly at their confession, keeping the gig going.

“TIBERIUS,” she shouted seriously, not liking his joke.

“I’m joking! I was joking,” Tiberius raised his hands in the air in surrender.

“Good, I’d be very sad if you weren’t,” Kei huffed.

“I’ll always like you, even if we are fighting,” Tiberius laughed and dramatically added, “even if you said you hated me.”

Kei gasped, “I would never say I hated you! Tiberius Moody, I am incapable of hating you. You’re my best friend– scratch that, my best buddy. No one can ever take that place and

nothing can change that. I love you, Reese's."

Tiberius smiled and draped an arm over their shoulders, "I could never hate you either. You're my best and only friend, my forever buddy. I love you, Lil Flower."

"Now stop the dramatics and come meet my friends," Kei smiled.

There wasn't much that occured after the meeting. It had taken Tiberius nearly four Hogsmeade outings to silently tolerate the other Slytherins as he was purely anti-Death Eater's kid. Silas didn't seem to mind any of their presences much and slowly acclimated to the loud group. April and May flew by too fast for Kei's liking and it was mid-June before she knew it, meaning OWLs were the next day for the fifth years.

Kei rocked on her feets as she waited for Tiberius, Gina, and Vic to walk out of the Great Hall after the written Charms exam. The written portion was much less stressful as they were excellent at theory, but it was the practicals that worried them.

"Well, it wasn't too bad, was it?" asked Kei anxiously in the entrance hall two hours later, wringing her hands nervously. "I'm not sure I did myself justice on Cheering Charms, I just ran out of time — did you put in the countercharm for hiccups? I wasn't sure whether I ought to, it felt like too much — and on question twenty-three —"

"Kei," said Vic sternly, "we've been through this before... We're not going through every exam afterwards, it's bad enough doing them once."

As small groups of students were called forward in alphabetical order, those left behind muttered incantations and practised wand movements, occasionally poking one another in the back or eye by mistake.

Being that Kei's name was called before any of her friends, she had no way to gauge on the difficulty of the practical exam itself.

"Higgs, Franklin?" Professor Flitwick called.

Stepping forward, she walked into the secluded room meant for the practical. In the room sat Professors Dumbeldore, Flitwick, and Tofty.

"State your name and house, Miss," said Professor Tofty.

"Franklin Higgs, Hufflepuff."

"Alright, please recite what the Slowing Charm is," Professor Flitwick asked.

Running her hands on her pants, Kei took in a shaky breath, "the Slowing Charm is a charm that can be used to slow the velocity of an object in motion."

"Demonstrate."

Flitwick dropped a bouncing ball and motioned them to display the spell. Taking their wand out from their waistband, Kei held it in her right hand. She quickly made a capital M-shaped movement at the bouncing ball, "*Arresto Momentum*!"

The red ball stopped in mid-air, holding its place two feet from the ground.

"That is all, Miss Higgs," Dumbledore said as Flitwick grabbed the ball in front of him.

The rest of the week consisted of more exams. As more exams were taken, practicals followed. The only practical Kei ended up messing up– that she knew of– was in Transfiguration where she managed to turn a Goldfinch into a Goldfish instead of a Gold Snitch just by a simple mispronunciation.

When exams were finally over, Kei felt as though they were free. Being that exams finished three days before the term officially ended, she was allowed to spend as much time as she wanted with her friend. Kei didn't focus her time on Tiberius, as she practically lived with him, but used her free time to talk with Silas, duel Gina, and snack on her left over muggle snacks with Vic. It was a pleasant end to a stressful year and Kei only hoped that the following year would be slightly better than this one.

7. Quidditch

Even with all of the chaos that had happened the year before, Kei made sure she had passed her OWLs with flying colours. There was no way she was going to allow anything to get in the way of making her father proud and being the best of her year.

Around the end of July, OWL results were out. The Hufflepuff was beyond excited to share her results with Tiberius and compare their marks together. The pair had an ongoing bet to see who would get the most Outstandings and in which classes. So when Kei got their results, she quickly Floo'd over to the Moody residence with her unopened letter and ran to Tiberius's room.

"REESE'S, YOU BETTER BE UP AND DECENT, I'M COMING IN," she shouted, running down the hall and into his room. It was just after ten on a Saturday morning, there was a possibility Tiberius was still asleep or at least in bed.

Without knocking, Kei ran into his room and flopped on his bed.

"Time?" groaned Tiberius, pulling the sheets over his head.

“Fifteen after ten,” Kei said, “now come on. I bet Alastor’s got your results.”

“Results?”

“OWLs, Tib. Your OWL results! I’ve got mine right here,” she squealed.

“Shut up,” Tiberius moaned and put his pillow over her head.

Kei struggled under the pillow and rolled off his head, falling on the floor with a thump. He laughed sleepily. After waiting for Tiberius to *finally* get out of bed, the pair headed down to the kitchens where his OWL results were laid. Alastor wasn’t around, he had a meeting with Professor Dumbledore apparently, as the note on the table next to the envelope said.

Together, Tiberius and Kei opened their results:

Ordinary Wizarding Level Results

Franklin Grae Higgs has achieved:

Arithmancy: O

Astronomy: E

Charms: A

Defence Against the Dark Arts: O

Herbology: O

History of Magic: E

Muggle Studies: O

Transfiguration: E

Potions: E

Kei squealed as she held out the parchment, “I got four O’s! And just one A in Charms– could’ve told you that one for free! And you?”

“Five O’s and an A in Astrology,” Tiberius smirked. “I win!”

“That’s not fair,” Kei gasped, “you’re lying! *Five O’s*? The A in Astrology I believe, but– let me see.”

Tiberius handed Kei his results and watched as Kei’s jaw dropped.

“Told you,” he laughed.

“Oh, stuff it!” Kei grumbled and handed him back the parchment. “Well, when I make Head Girl next year, I’ll just have to rub that in your face.”

“As if you’d make Head Girl,” Tiberius teased.

“You take that back!” she gasped. Tiberius laughed and began to run away from the

hotheaded girl. “Tiberius– I’ll hex you!”

That was an empty threat as they weren’t allowed to use Underaged magic unless supervised by Alastor as he was a Ministry Official. Kei groaned and chased Tiberius around with a discarded spoon as a weapon.

———

As a NEWTs present, Albert Higgs had given Terence tickets to the Quidditch World Cup and an extra ticket for Kei (she was convinced it was so she wasn’t home alone while Terence was out). In turn, Alastor allowed Tiberius to go with them.

The night before they were meant to leave for the match, Tiberius had to sleep over at Kei’s house– it was an experience for him. The yelling, the tension, everything– he hated it and soon figured out why Kei hated being home as well.

“Frankie, are you all right?” he asked as she closed the door to her room. Tiberius had taken the spot on her bed closest to the wall.

“I’m fine, why?” Kei breathed as she rearranged their bags for the next day.

“Um. . .” Tiberius trailed off, motioning towards the bedroom door.

Slowly, Kei turned away from the bags and looked at Tiberius to see what he was referring to and just sighed in response. They were used to it, but it was new to Tiberius.

“It’s fine. I just didn’t do something I was supposed to,” she shrugged and before Tiberius could say anything further, she added, “I don’t want to talk about it anymore, Tib. We have to get up early, let’s go to sleep.”

Tiberius sighed and dropped it, moving over to let Kei into bed.

Terence failed to inform the pair of the Portkey they had to take to get to the stadium where the Quidditch World Cup was held. Fitting in their muggle clothes, the three of them grabbed ahold of the hairbrush Portkey and glided through the air, landing in the midst of the field.

“Oh, that was horrible,” groaned Kei as she landed on her hands and knees; Tiberius managed to land on his feet, but stumbled a bit as he tried to gain his balance; Terence landed on his feet with no problems, laughing at the two kids.

Wobbling to her feet, Kei leaned on Tiberius for support as she tried to balance herself, only to knock Tiberius over– honestly quite a show for any onlookers.

“Come on you two. It’s just down this hill and over to the stadium. We’re not staying

overnight, just the match," Terence informed them.

The three of them made their way to the large stadium where the match was being held and Kei gasped at the sight. Not only was the arena taller than she'd thought, but the field was littered with different size tents and campsites, people were running around in colors of mainly greens and yellows, banners flying through the wind for Bulgaria and Ireland.

But the wonderful outing soon turned bitter after the match was done. Shouting and screaming could be heard throughout the camping grounds. Kei fought through the rabid crowd in search for Tiberius or Terence who had both accidentally separated from the girl.

"Merlin fuck," Kei cussed and turned around to see a figure in a long black robe. *A Death Eater*, they thought to themselves. With every ounce of strength in her body, Kei pushed past the person to her left and darted deeper into the thick campgrounds trying to make her way into the forest.

Just as she saw the treeline, an arm reached out for her. Kei quickly brandished their wand towards the person just to meet her eyes: It was Terence.

"Fran, let's go," he shouted at them.

"Where's Tiberius?" her voice was drowned out by the cries of the muggles and wizards around her.

"He's—"

"*Frankie*," a voice panted, coming up behind her brother.

Terence mumbled something under his breath and grabbed onto Tiberius' arm. "We're apparating."

"Appa—?" But Kei's words were cut off as Terence turned on the spot and pulled the pair into a swirl of red and green that faded into darkness. It was an odd sensation, the feeling of being pulled throughout her body as the trio finally landed.

Kei's knees gave out as they tumbled onto the ground, panting as her brain tried to figure out what had just happened. The match had ended and they had only been back to their tent for less than an hour when the first cries began. There were Death Eaters and levitating muggles and running and crying and—

"Franklin!"

Snapping out of her trance, Kei looked up at the two boys who had called her name, "yes?"

“I asked if you were okay,” Terence asked softly, kneeling down to meet her eyes.

“Yeah,” they responded. “I was just trying to recall—” Kei cut herself off and looked up at Tiberius, who had been lightly pacing. “Tibs, you should go home and tell Alastor what had happened because—”

“Death Eaters,” he finished.

“That’s a good idea,” Kei’s brother sighed awkwardly and stood up, puffing his chest out a bit as he stood next to Tiberius.

“I’ll get going and see what he can do,” Tiberius squeezed Kei’s shoulder lightly and gave Terence a nod as he left via Floo.

After loads of convincing, Terence managed to get Kei off the floor and put her in her room. Too stubborn for their own good, Kei wanted to stay up and wait for any news from Tiberius about the Quidditch World Cup Situation. But just as Kei went to turn their room candle off, there was a glowing green light and the slight roar of fire.

With their wand raised, Kei quickly and quietly made their way out of their room.

“What’re you going to do? Throw your wand at me?” Tiberius scoffed as he threw himself onto the couch.

Kei looked at him wordlessly. He looked aggravated and exhausted.

“You can’t do magic unless *Alastor* is present. Auror’s privilege,” he mumbled and sounded sour as he said his father’s name.

“Reese’s?” she said quietly and Tiberius reluctantly looked up at her. “What happened?”

Sucking his teeth, Tiberius moved and opened his arm so Kei could sit next to him as he explained. Within the two hours Tiberius was gone from the Higgs’ Residence, he managed to spark up a fight with Alastor over the Plan-of-Action with the Death Eaters. Alastor wasn’t a part of the Ministry Workers that ended up going to the campsite in hopes of catching the Death Eaters and was virtually clueless on what had happened besides the vague information Tiberius had given him.

“Why’d you come here?”

“You want me to leave?” Tiberius raised his eyebrow to which Kei blurted out a quick “No!” and furrowed her brows. “I ran away.”

“Ran away?”

“Yeah, just for the next few days,” he mumbled. “I left Alastor a note after he left— he

had gotten an urgent owl from the Ministry so. . .”

“Term starts next week,” Kei nodded.

“Yeah, I’ll stay here til the day before and leave with Alastor to Hoggies.”

“No train?”

“I don’t think he’s going on the train,” Tiberius sighed.

“Oh, all right,” she frowned.

“No worries, Lil Flower,” he gave her a small smile and pinched their cheek softly, “I’ll see you at the Feast.”

Kei wrinkled their nose and shoved Tiberius away from them. The pair fell into a fit of laughter as sleep slowly welcomed them. Just as any good friends were, the two were peaceful, safe, and at home in each other’s arms. Little did they know it would be the last time in a very long time.

8. Professor Moody

There was an unexplainable excitement that went through Kei’s body as she and Tiberius ran out of the rain towards the double doors of Hogwarts. All summer she had been looking forward to going back to Hogwarts and spending time with her friends again. She quickly spotted Silas Burke in a spot closest to the doors of the Great Hall while Gina and Vic Lestrange were closer to the middle of the Slytherin table near Jaqen and Lonnie Carrow.

Tiberius and Kei split and went to their own tables, Tiberius sitting somewhere in between Silas and the Lestranges and Carrows. Kei followed suit and sat in the spot across from Tiberius at the Hufflepuff table as she gave Shiloh Bones a small smile. It had felt like years until the first years finished their sorting and everyone had eaten. Between bites, Kei spoke with the second and third years they had befriended the previous years and turned around to Tiberius,

“Where’s Alastor?”

The pair glanced from each other to the empty chair and back to one another.

“I reckon he’s running late?” he answered in more a question. “Odd. . .”

Once dinner was eaten and the tables were magically cleaned, Kei watched Professor Dumbledore present his usual spiel about the upcoming year. Just as he had cancelled quidditch, there was a deafening rumble of thunder and the doors of the Great Hall banged open.

A man stood in the doorway, leaning upon a long staff, shrouded in a black traveling

cloak. Every head in the Great Hall swiveled toward— *Alastor*. Kei instantly perked up and reached out to hit Tiberius' arm only to see he was already looking at his father. But his presence seemed to be a little less than welcomed as the Great Hall had been rendered speechless.

As he made his way towards the teachers' table, a dull *clunk* of his leg echoed through the Hall on his every other step. He reached the end of the top table, turned right, and limped heavily toward Dumbledore. Another flash of lightning crossed the ceiling. Quickly, Kei reached over and brushed her fingers over Tiberius' hand causing him to look up. They met his gaze with a soft smile trying to quietly calm him from the odd storm of the magical ceiling.

It took a few moments until Alastor settled himself into his seat for Dumbledore to introduce him as Hogwarts' new Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor. Tiberius and Kei clapped wildly and laughed as the other students around the Hall clapped awkwardly. Alastor nor Dumbledore seemed to care as the Headmaster continued with his announcement. A giddy yet fearful feeling flew through her body as Professor Dumbledore introduced the Triwizard Tournament,

". . .well, some of you will not know what this tournament involves, so I hope those who do know will forgive me for giving a short explanation, and allow their attention to wander freely.

"The Triwizard Tournament was first established some seven hundred years ago as a friendly competition between the three largest European schools of wizardry: Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang. A champion was selected to represent each school, and the three champions competed in three magical tasks. The schools took it in turns to host the tournament once every five years, and it was generally agreed to be a most excellent way of establishing ties between young witches and wizards of different nationalities — until, that is, the death toll mounted so high that the tournament was discontinued," Dumbledore looked over the entire Hall with eyes of wonder and knowledge as he continued,

"There have been several attempts over the centuries to reinstate the tournament; none of which has been very successful. However, our own departments of International Magical Cooperation and Magical Games and Sports have decided the time is ripe for another attempt. We have worked hard over the summer to ensure that this time, no champion will find himself or herself in mortal danger.

"The heads of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving with their short-listed

contenders in October, and the selection of the three champions will take place at Halloween. An impartial judge will decide which students are most worthy to compete for the Triwizard Cup, the glory of their school, and a thousand Galleons personal prize money."

Kei widened their eyes as they looked over the table where most of the seventh years seemed excited when the Headmaster explained the age restriction. When the group was dismissed, she took that moment to seize Tiberius' elbow and earned a look from him.

"Don't enter."

He let out a soft laugh, "you're mad, Frankie. I'm not of age."

"Yeah, well you don't listen to rules too often and like to get what you want," Kei challenged.

"Not when Alastor is here," he raised an amused brow. "I rather him not hand me my ass in front of the entire school."

Kei cracked a smile and slackened her grip on his elbow, "fine, fine."

"Thinking of anyone who will enter?" Tiberius asked as they made their way down the stairs.

"The Weasley twins," she said after a quick moment. "They're determined and will probably attempt to try. Reckon they're not of age."

"Hm, I think your brother's friend will try," he hummed.

"Which one?"

"Seventh year, played chaser for Slytherin."

She nearly fell over laughing at the realization Tiberius was describing Cassius Warrington.

"Reckon you've figured who I mean," he came to the conclusion.

"Merlin, if he got in," Kei cracked a smile as they parted ways.

Groaning at the obnoxious ink blotch on their parchment, Kei subconsciously bit on the tip of her quill as they looked on the class assignment sheet. Sixth year meant choosing classes for NEWTs; choosing classes for NEWTs meant knowing what she wanted to do outside of Hogwarts; having a plan for after Hogwarts meant graduating, and graduating meant passing NEWTs. Needless to say, Kei was stuck in a circle of stress over the flimsy parchment on the table in front of her.

Tiberius had already marked up his parchment and got approved for his NEWT levels to be an Auror. He was waiting for Kei near the doors of the Great Hall. Though he had mentioned to Kei on which levels she should take for Auror or Healer, he knew her anxieties over the decision.

With one last swipe, Kei placed the quill back into the inkwell and handed Professor Sprout her NEWT level requests. Looking it once over, the woman gave her a crinkled eye smile and approved her request.

"You'll do well," she smiled and gave Kei's forearm a small squeeze.

Kei nodded and practically ran out of the Great Hall and to where Tiberius was standing, "okay, well–"

"What course?" he blurted.

"For Auror—" Tiberius cheered. "— and Healer." Tiberius stopped cheering.

"What?"

"I couldn't choose and panicked," they said quickly. "Being an Auror with you would be great, especially being Alastor has been letting me train with you in the summers but. . . I don't know if I want a Ministry job! I rather work in St. Mungo's or some other healing position. Plus both course levels share the same lessons needed to be a professor and—"

Tiberius laughed wholeheartedly, earning a frown from Kei. He shook his head, "you just have back up plan after back up plan after back up plan, huh? You're insane, Frankie."

"Shut up, Reese's," she wrinkled her nose and shoved him. "Not my fault I want to be prepared for what life throws at me! I always have back up plans— I won't end up like Gerald, waiting for death to take me. I'll always be busy, have something to do, and help in some way."

"You mean uninteresting?" mused Tiberius.

"Exactly," Kei gasped dramatically. "Maybe I'll make Professor Binns retire and I'll teach History of Magic once I'm a ghost."

"Oh Merlin, shut up," Tiberius pulled the hood of Kei's robes up over her head and pushed her forward, causing them to laugh loudly. "Let's go."

Waiting for Defense Against the Dark Arts to begin was excruciating pain. Most students would be embarrassed if their parents worked in the school they attended, but Tiberius was proud– Alastor would be teaching one of the most difficult subjects. Kei grew excited for his class due to the fact that she would finally be allowed to show Alastor that she was as good at the

subject as Tiberius was.

"Defense is my best subject," Kei grinned as she continued her walk with Tiberius. "Think *Professor Moody* will be impressed?"

"Kei, he already likes you," Tiberius chuckled under his breath and shook his head.

"Okay, he likes me as your best friend, but I want him to like me as a student, too! Imagine if he thinks I'm not a good student– what if I don't make top marks this year– Reese's, what if—"

Tiberius stopped in the middle of the corridor and pulled Kei aside. It was a normal occurrence for Kei to have her annual stress out at the beginning of term, being such a high achiever comes with its problems. Another anxiety of hers— first in the Great Hall and now in the corridor.

"Franklin–" Kei narrowed her eyes at him, "– enough of that. Stop stressing so hard about something you know won't happen. Alastor loves you, he'll appreciate your brilliance, you always make top marks, and you're an excellent student."

Tiberius smiled as Kei's furrowed brows relaxed.

She let out a soft sigh and looked up at him, "don't call me Franklin."

He smiled.

Kei pulled Tiberius away from the wall and towards the second floor corridors. Students awaited outside the classroom, huddled around and clamouring about the possible chaos that could occur– Defense Against the Dark Arts had a bad reputation, very wishy-washy on its teachers. It was almost as if the students were afraid to enter the classroom. A smirk grew on Kei's face.

With their head held up high, Kei walked through the crowd and into the room. She wasn't afraid, there was no reason to be, he's her best friend's father. Tiberius rolled his eyes and walked in behind her, following Kei to the third row on the left. Funnily enough, the crowd filed into the room.

The room buzzed with nervous chatter as everyone waited for Alastor to walk in. With a minute until class started, Alastor stomped in. To Kei, he seemed angrier than usual. Tiberius and Kei looked back, along with the rest of the class, to watch him walk to the professor's desk.

"I'm going to tell you the same thing I told the fourth, third, and second years: Books away, wands away, and eyes to the front," said Alastor. Everyone complied. But instead of going

through the usual start of term spiel on safety, wand regulations, and the importance of focus, Alastor took a different route. “Sixth years are supposed to be past counter curses and onto nonverbal spells, shield charms, and, my personal favourite, The Unforgivables.”

The tension in the classroom stalled instantly. Kei remembered the way Tiberius told her about how Alastor taught him about the Curses in the past and she was beyond excited– but no one knew of his teaching the way the pair did. Or so they thought.

“Well,” he continued, “in actuality, only the Imperius Curse and Cruciatus Curse would be taught, but I also wanted to teach the final one. Does anyone know it?”

Of course, everyone knew what the final Unforgivable Curse was, but did anyone dare to say it should have been the actual question. Alastor pointed to someone behind Kei. Someone did dare.

“The final curse is Avada Kedavra, the Killing Curse,” a low voice said. Vic Lestrange. Tiberius let out a scoff earning an elbow to his side by Kei.

“Lestrange, yes,” Alastor nodded once. The class didn’t dare to move. “The Killing Curse. For the first half of this term, I will be teaching the Unforgivable Curses through practicals—”

Tiberius instantly sat up in his seat as Kei let out a little gasp, looking over to her best friend. *Practicals*. There were never Practicals on Dark Hexes or Curses, only on the defensive spells. Kei grew confused at the thought. To teach each Unforgivable, it would require a demonstration.

Her hand shot up in the air, “A– Professor Moody, pardon my interruption but it is impossible to teach them for, one, it requires a subject for demonstration and, two, the Curses are illegal.”

“Well, *Miss Higgs*, obviously I have thought that out,” Alastor responded as he began to pace the front of the room. “I’ve got special permission from Dumbledore and the Ministry to teach these Curses, along with some insects to demonstrate on. Later on, in the first half of this term, we will have a class participation demonstration– but that’s for later.”

Tiberius’s jaw nearly dropped to the ground while Kei’s slouched slightly in their chair. The pair didn’t like what they heard: Kei was slightly offended with Alastor’s tone of voice and Tiberius was shocked with how his father was going to teach the lesson. Alastor continued on with the lesson as if he didn’t notice the two students’ reaction, but he noted, his mechanical eye

whirling to watch them.

The class continued on for too long and after ninety minutes of their first lesson, Alastor let them leave. Kei and Tiberius didn't move from their seats, having another fifteen minutes until their next lesson. Alastor noticed.

"Tiberius," he said.

He got straight to the point. "So the Curses?" Tiberius wasn't one to beat around the bush with pleasantries or sugar coat things, much like Alastor himself.

"Did you like the first lesson?" a half mouthed grin grew on his face. Kei furrowed her brows; she'd never admit it, but this was probably her least favourite Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson they'd ever had. Yes, it was exciting, but it was scarier than she had imagined.

"Liked isn't a word I would use to describe it, but it was captivating," Tiberius answered wearily.

"Hmph," Alastor said, taking a second swig of his flask. "And you?"

Kei's eyes moved from Tiberius to Alastor and shrugged, "I liked the class but I didn't think it would be taught using spiders."

"Fair enough." Before Tiberius could get another word out, Alastor turned away from the pair, "don't you two have another class to attend?"

The two friends looked at each other and raised their eyebrows. Grabbing their bags and pocketing their wands, they left the room with a chorused, "goodbye, Alastor."

9. Soulmateism

It was mid October when Kei finally got a moment alone with Tiberius. Since his birthday, Tiberius was acting weird— always so secretive, perpetually annoyed, and seemed to be avoiding everyone and anyone he knew. Though Kei made it her mission to always throw her best friend an amazing birthday party, Tiberius blew it off and claimed he was sick. Whatever "sickness" he came down with seemed to have changed his personality and Kei was tired of it.

Just as the students were dismissed from dinner, Kei hooked her arm into Tiberius' and gave him a look. He knew that look very well and most definitely knew better than to try and get his way out of it. With pure determination, Kei maneuvered their way through the corridors and into an empty stairwell where the pair could talk.

"Tiberius, we need to–"

“Yes, we need to talk,” he cut her off seriously. Kei raised a brow at him and let go of his arm, giving him a single nod to continue. Tiberius fiddled with the sleeves of his jacket and looked positively nervous, causing Kei to grow worried over their best friend.

“Reese’s,” she said softly, all of her previous fury melting away, “what’s wrong?”

“I– I don’t know how to– Well, you see. . . I—”

“Tib, you can tell me anything.”

Tiberius furrowed his brows and sighed softly before continuing,

“What do you know about. . . soulmates?”

Kei cracked a smile, “soulmates? What’re you going on about? Did you fall in love over the last month? Is that why you’re—”

“Frankie, I’m serious,” he huffed. “Do you remember the stories? The legends! You read all the time and you can’t even remember—”

“I never said I didn’t know them. I only asked what you were referring to. How is that relevant to why you’ve been avoiding me the past month?”

Tiberius groaned and pushed Kei down with him so they were both sitting on the steps, “I’m going to show you something, okay? You can’t react and you *have* to listen and let me explain because– because you have to! You’re my best friend and- and—”

“I’m your best friend. I’ll listen,” they smiled softly in reassurance.

Carefully, Tiberius pushed the leather sleeve up on his right arm to show Kei his secret. Kei tilted her head every so slightly and gasped softly, amazed at the lettering. Little scars littered the skin through and around the black tattoo-like penmanship. Big black letters swirled halfway up his forearm. Kei’s brows furrowed in confusion and slight disappointment at the mark.

“You got a tattoo? Without me?” she scoffed. “Not only a tattoo but you got Vic’s name—!”

“Franklin, shut up!” Tiberius snapped. Kei’s mouth went dry and she instantly froze. “Kei. . . you said you wouldn’t react and you’d listen—”

“I’m just– You don’t even like him. I’m just confu– Wait, why were you asking me about soulmates?”

“That’s the thing,” Tiberiu groaned and pulled the sleeve back down, leaning his head on the banister. “The last month I’ve been trying to find out information about this and all I've come

up with are the stories we were told about soulmates!"

"So, you mean to tell me," Kei said dangerously, "you've only come to tell me BECAUSE YOU NEED HELP?!"

Tiberius flinched and gave them a sheepish smile causing Kei to thump him on the forehead, "Kei!"

"'Kei' nothing! You dingbat, you should have told me from the beginning. I would have helped you since then and we'd probably already know why this has happened and know everything about it."

"I know, I know," he mumbled.

"Yeah, you know *so* well," she shot back and sighed deeply. "I will help you. You're my best friend. I promise we'll figure it out, okay? It's always you and me."

Tiberius looked up and met Kei's eyes with a small smile.

"And what about Vic? Does he match or. . .?"

"From what I've read so far, his mark will appear when he turns sixteen, too," he shrugged.

"All right," Kei said slowly and hummed. "Have you told Alastor?"

"No!" Tiberius said quickly and cleared his throat, "er, no. I don't think Alastor would appreciate that I'm practically fated to a Death Eater's kid, more or less right now being that he's been acting odd lately."

"He's just stressed, Tib," Kei blew it off. "Now c'mon, I rather not get points taken off for being out past curfew."

———

The day before Halloween there was a big welcoming feast for the Students of Durmstrang and Beauxbatons— the Bulgarian school sat with the Slytherins while the French girls took residence at the Ravenclaw table. Professor Dumbledore stayed standing as the Headmasters of each school took their seat on either side of Dumbledore's.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and— most particularly— guests," said Dumbledore, beaming around at the foreign students. "I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to Hogwarts. I hope and trust that your stay here will be both comfortable and enjoyable.

"The tournament will be officially opened at the end of the feast," said Dumbledore. "I now invite you all to eat, drink, and make yourselves at home!"

There was a great clamour around the Hall as Hogwarts students introduced themselves to the forgein ones. Kei looked over her shoulder to see Tiberius nodding along to whatever one of the Durmstrang boys were saying and nearly laughed as he caught her eye in pure annoyance. Once the golden plates had been wiped clean, Dumbledore stood up again. A pleasant sort of tension seemed to fill the Hall.

"The moment has come," said Dumbledore, smiling around at the sea of upturned faces. "The Triwizard Tournament is about to start. I would like to say a few words of explanation before we bring in the casket, just to clarify the procedure that we will be following this year. But first, let me introduce, for those who do not know them, Mr. Bartemius Crouch, Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation" — there was a smattering of polite applause — "and Mr. Ludo Bagman, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports."

There was a much louder round of applause for Bagman than for Crouch, perhaps because of his fame as a Beater, or simply because he looked so much more likable.

"Mr. Bagman and Mr. Crouch have worked tirelessly over the last few months on the arrangements for the Triwizard Tournament," Dumbledore continued, "and they will be joining myself, Professor Karkaroff, and Madame Maxime on the panel that will judge the champions' efforts."

At the mention of the word "champions," the attentiveness of the listening students seemed to sharpen. Perhaps Dumbledore had noticed their sudden stillness, for he smiled as he said, "The casket, then, if you please, Mr. Filch."

Filch, who had been lurking unnoticed in a far corner of the Hall, now approached Dumbledore carrying a great wooden chest encrusted with jewels. It looked extremely old.

"The instructions for the tasks the champions will face this year have already been examined by Mr. Crouch and Mr. Bagman," said Dumbledore as Filch placed the chest carefully on the table before him, "and they have made the necessary arrangements for each challenge. There will be three tasks, spaced throughout the school year, and they will test the champions in many different ways... their magical prowess — their daring — their powers of deduction — and, of course, their ability to cope with danger."

At this last word, the Hall was filled with a silence so absolute that nobody seemed to be breathing.

"As you know, three champions compete in the tournament," Dumbledore went on

calmly, "one from each of the participating schools. They will be marked on how well they perform each of the Tournament tasks and the champion with the highest total after task three will win the Triwizard Cup. The champions will be chosen by an impartial selector: the Goblet of Fire."

Dumbledore now took out his wand and tapped three times upon the top of the casket. The lid creaked slowly open. Dumbledore reached inside it and pulled out a large, roughly hewn wooden cup. It would have been entirely unremarkable had it not been full to the brim with dancing blue-white flames.

"Anybody wishing to submit themselves as champion must write their name and school clearly upon a slip of parchment and drop it into the goblet," said Dumbledore. "Aspiring champions have twenty-four hours in which to put their names forward. Tomorrow night, Halloween, the goblet will return the names of the three it has judged most worthy to represent their schools. The goblet will be placed in the entrance hall tonight, where it will be freely accessible to all those wishing to compete. . ."

And once Dumbledore explained the Age Line and dismissed the Hall, Kei watched as the forgein students made their way back to their carriages and ship to sleep for the night. The entrance hall was filled with students who wanted to watch the other school leave. She had just found Tiberius when a Beauxbaton girl tapped him on the shoulder and spoke into his ear. He gave her a soft smile and spoke with his hands. There was a slight pang in Kei's heart as they had just wanted to talk to him before retiring to their dorm. Sighing to herself, Kei turned and walked to Hufflepuff, making a mental note to speak to him the next day.

In the Hufflepuff common room, there was a loud buzzing as students spoke to each other trying to figure out who would enter the Tournament. Kei's fellow prefect had a group of friends shouting and laughing, practically encouraging him to join.

"You gon' do it?" Kei asked.

The little group of friends broke apart and allowed her to see Cedric with an awkward smile.

"I'm thinking about it," he shrugged. "You?"

"Not of age," she smiled. "Not that I'd want to— death tolls and all."

"But the *reward*," one of his friends groaned wishfully.

"No amount of money is worth putting my life on the line," Kei wrinkled her nose.

Cedric simply smiled at his partnered prefect, “well, it’s worth a shot. What’s my chance of getting in anyways?”

Kei hummed, “about nineteen percent if you take into account the four houses, the amount of seventh years, and the small portion of Of-Age sixth years.”

“I’ll take those chances then.”

“Best of luck, Ced,” Kei nodded and made her way towards the girls’ dorms when a voice called out to her,

“Root for me, will you?”

Kei rolled her eyes playfully and shook her head, “only if you make it in.”

“Guess I’ll have to count my graces.”

When Kei finally caught Tiberius, he was standing towards the back of the entrance hall, watching all of the students either try to get past Dumbledore’s Age Line or actually placing their name in the Goblet of Fire. Half way down the room, Kei spotted the Lestrange Twins hanging around with Jaqen; they looked animated in their talk.

“Any luck with the thing?” Kei asked.

Tiberius broke out of his trance and looked down at them, “what thing?”

“The mark.”

“Oh,” he responded and spared a look up at Vic. “No, haven’t had the chance this week. Maybe after the champion reveal.”

The pair watched as the Weasley twins attempted to put their name into the goblet, only to end up with long snowy white beards which resembled Dumbledore’s. Kei excused herself from Tiberius and walked over to Vic and Gina, once Jaqen walked away. She had passed Neville and gave him a small nod of acknowledgement and made a mental note to check up on Silas as the pair seemed to be acquainted more.

“Hey, Jellybean.”

Gina looked over from Vic, giving Kei a small smile, “hey, Sunflower. What’re you doing here?”

Before Kei could respond, Vic huffed angrily, “and me?”

“And you what?”

“Do I not get a nickname? You’ve been calling Gina ‘Jellybean’ for the last few years and I’m just *Vic*.”

Kei nearly cried as she laughed, which only caused Gina to laugh and Vic to narrow his eyes at them. “Well, let’s see. . . How about. . . Tater Tot?”

“What’s a Tater Tot?”

“It’s like shredded potatoes in a little cylinder. It’s really good,” Kei beamed.

“It's *food*?!”

“So is Jellybean,” Gina rolled her eyes. “She seems to give everyone food related names.”

“And what about it!” Kei bumped Gina with her hip, but before any of them could respond, Cedric Diggory came into the hall with his friends shouting and screaming. He was entering.

When Kei finally entered the candlelit Great Hall, for dinner that evening, it was almost full. The Goblet of Fire had been moved; it was now standing in front of Dumbledore's empty chair at the teachers' table. The Halloween feast seemed to take much longer than usual.

At long last, the golden plates returned to their original spotless state; there was a sharp upswing in the level of noise within the Hall, which died away almost instantly as Dumbledore got to his feet. On either side of him, Professor Karkaroff and Madame Maxime looked as tense and expectant as anyone. Ludo Bagman was beaming and winking at various students. Mr. Crouch, however, looked quite uninterested, almost bored.

"Well, the goblet is almost ready to make its decision," said Dumbledore. "I estimate that it requires one more minute. Now, when the champions' names are called, I would ask them please to come up to the top of the Hall, walk along the staff table, and go through into the next chamber" — he indicated the door behind the staff table — "where they will be receiving their first instructions."

He took out his wand and gave a great sweeping wave with it; at once, all the candles except those inside the carved pumpkins were extinguished, plunging us into a state of semi-darkness. The Goblet of Fire now shone more brightly than anything in the whole Hall, the sparkling bright, bluey-whiteness of the flames almost painful on the eyes. Everyone watched, waiting. A few people kept checking their watches.

“This ought to be good,” Tiberius mumbled into Kei’s ear.

The flames inside the goblet turned suddenly red again. Sparks began to fly from it. Next moment, a tongue of flame shot into the air, a charred piece of parchment fluttered out of it —

the whole room gasped.

Dumbledore caught the piece of parchment and held it at arm's length, so that he could read it by the light of the flames, which had turned back to blue-white.

"The champion for Durmstrang," he read, in a strong, clear voice, "will be Viktor Krum."

The large Dumstrang boy rose from the Slytherin table and slouched up toward Dumbledore; he turned right, walked along the staff table, and disappeared through the door into the next chamber.

"Bravo, Viktor!" boomed Karkaroff, so loudly that everyone could hear him, even over all the applause. "Knew you had it in you!"

The clapping and chatting died down. Now everyone's attention was focused again on the goblet, which, seconds later, turned red once more. A second piece of parchment shot out of it, propelled by the flames.

"The champion for Beauxbatons," said Dumbledore, "is Fleur Delacour!"

The girl who so resembled a veela got gracefully to her feet, shook back her sheet of silvery blonde hair, and swept up between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables. Once Fleur Delacour too had vanished into the side chamber, silence fell again, but this time it was a silence so stiff with excitement it could almost be tasted. The Hogwarts champion next—

And the Goblet of Fire turned red once more; sparks showered out of it; the tongue of flame shot high into the air, and from its tip Dumbledore pulled the third piece of parchment.

"The Hogwarts champion," he called, "is Cedric Diggory!"

Kei smiled widely at the newfound pride that grew in their chest, very well knowing a member of *their* house had gotten into the Tournament. Every single Hufflepuff had jumped to their feet, screaming and stamping, as Cedric made his way through the Hall, grinning broadly, and headed off toward the chamber behind the teachers' table. Indeed, the applause for Cedric went on so long that it was some time before Dumbledore could make himself heard again.

"Excellent!" Dumbledore called happily as at last the tumult died down. "Well, we now have our three champions. I am sure I can count upon all of you, including the remaining students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, to give your champions every ounce of support you can muster. By cheering your champion on, you will contribute in a very real —”

But Dumbledore suddenly stopped speaking, and it was apparent to everybody what had distracted him. The fire in the goblet had just turned red again. Sparks were flying out of it. A

long flame shot suddenly into the air, and borne upon it was another piece of parchment. Automatically, it seemed, Dumbledore reached out a long hand and seized the parchment. He held it out and stared at the name written upon it and read out —

"*Harry Potter*."

There was no applause. A buzzing, as though of angry bees, was starting to fill the Hall; some students were standing up to get a better look at Harry as he sat, frozen, in his seat. It took a long while until Harry Potter rose and left the way the three previous champions had gone.

“How’d he manage?” Kei whispered towards Tiberius who had his eyes trained on Alastor.

“I have no idea,” he mumbled back, “but I reckon Alastor’ll figure it out. Always something, every year. He’ll fix it.”

10. Hogsmeade

“There is absolutely no way you’ll— *Georgina*!” Kei gasped, barely blocking Gina’s hex.

“Less talking and more—” Gina began, but was cut off by blocking the jinx Kei had sent her way in return.

“What were you saying?” laughed Kei as the pair continued to duel one another.

With the weather beginning to cool, the two decided they’d take advantage of the randomly warm day and have a friendly duel in the butterfly garden. It was a normal occurance the two girls partook in— they both loved to duel, so they practiced regularly. Onlookers always said a duel between the two would never end unless the other died; which would never happen because they were best friends.

“Gina, stop stepping forward. You’re too predictable,” a voice said from behind their book.

“Yeah, I’d like to see you–” Gina grunted and threw a jinx of her own, before continuing, “duel me, Silas.”

“I’d rather not,” Silas shook his head. “You’d get too upset once I beat you.”

“Oh, really now?”

“Sil, stop egging Gina on,” Kei laughed.

“I’m not. I’m simply stating that Gina’s movements are far too predictable,” he scoffed. “I’ve only witnessed this single duel and I would most likely defeat Gina just before she cursed

me with an Unforgivable."

Kei gasped and stopped blocking to look at Silas. He raised his eyebrow as though he had said something quite normal.

"She would nev—"

"But I would," Gina laughed.

"Not on me," said Kei in a silky sweet tone before sending an unexpected Jelly Legs Jinx. Gina groaned as her legs buckled from underneath her.

Cheering, Kei raised a brow at Silas in means of challenging him to a duel, but he simply held up his hands in defense.

"I'd rather not," they shook their head and sighed, opening up their book once more.

"You're so boring, Silly," she pouted.

Silas spoke without looking up, "ask Tiberius."

Kei sighed, "I would but he's busy in the library."

"Wow," Gina said sarcastically, "since when is the library outside?"

They furrowed their brows as Gina pointed behind them. Kei turned over her shoulder to see Tiberius with an annoyed look on his face. He was stomping over to the garden and slowed his step at Gina's body on the ground.

"What're you doing down there, Lestrange?" he asked.

"Just enjoying the view, obviously."

"Obviously," Tiberius mumbled under his breath and addressed his best friend, "you'll never guess what just happened in the entrance hall."

"Oo, do tell," she answered as she took the spot next to Gina on the grass.

Tiberius looked from Gina to Kei and shook his head knowingly. He quickly looked over to Silas, who looked as though they could care less about what the two girls were doing, and spoke,

"Alastor turned Malfoy into a *ferret*."

"A *what*?" Kei's eyes widened comically. *Human transfiguration*, she thought to herself. "Why?"

"Dunno. I was walking down the stairs and saw him levitating this white thing— turns out the white thing was a student in animal form."

Kei and Tiberius shared an estranged look and only broke eye contact when a soft

chuckle was heard from the bench. The three of them looked up to see Silas hiding his smile behind his book.

"What?" Silas finally said at their stares. "Don't tell me that's not positively comical. *Malfoy as a ferret*. He probably said something awful to Professor Moody to endure that kind of torture. And to be flung around? Ferrets have fragile bones. I *almost* pity Malfoy."

There was an inner battle with Silas' words; Kei knew that it was probably undeniably funny to witness, but equally horrible to endure. And that's not to mention Silas' odd pleasure in Draco's discomfort. Despite that, Kei couldn't help but laugh a little at the mental image of a pure white ferret being trapezed around like a frisbee.

"You are horrible, Silas Burke," Kei laughed. Gina and Tiberius looked over to the Hufflepuff in concern and amusement. Silas gave Kei a timid smile and a mock bow before returning to their book.

"But that's so unlike Alastor though," Tiberius said softly, leaning over towards Kei.

"So unlike that crazed Auror?" Gina scoffed in disbelief. "To *torture* someone? You do know people say he's *insane*. Quite literally given the nickname *Mad*-Eye. Between his mental status and that flask filled with firewhiskey, I'm honestly quite surprised he was even given a position as our—"

"YOU SHUT YOUR MOUTH, LESTRANGE," Tiberius shouted, raising his wand to Gina.

"Whoa– Whoa, *Tiberius*," Kei warned, looking at him with wide eyes. "Don't you dare hex her."

Gina stayed in her position, not moving an inch knowing very well that Tiberius wouldn't dare harm her in Kei's presence. Not only was she Kei's best friend, but also knew the Auror's son wouldn't dare get in trouble with his father present at the school.

"Just put your wand away, Moody," Silas huffed. "No need to get in trouble over insolent words."

Tiberius huffed and slowly lowered his wand to which Gina gave him a one-sided smirk.

"Besides," the younger Slytherin continued, "you ought to have heard the hushed whispers around school– even the wizarding world itself. Don't act so daft, I know you've heard what they say about him. Though Gina's intentions were vile, doesn't mean the words held any less truth."

But before Tiberius could respond to Silas' words, Kei jumped up and changed the subject,

"So! Hogsmeade."

"I'm not going," Tiberius said flatly.

Kei's planted smile faulted, "what? No. Why?"

"You're going with Lestrange, right?" The two girls nodded. "Wherever this Lestrange goes, the other usually follows."

"You know," Gina said, standing up, "it'd be much easier to call us by our names whenever you speak to us."

Tiberius looked down at Gina with a bored expression, "that would require me to talk to you guys. I don't plan on it." He looked over to Kei, "I'm not going to go if—"

"He won't," Kei blurted. It was a blatant lie to which Tiberius knew, but she continued, "I spoke with him early and he said he was going to hang out with. . . Lonnie! Yup, Lonnie Carrow, the seventh year you met last spring. He's not coming with me or Gina, so ta-da! Right, Gingee?"

Kei shot Gina a pleading look. She reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"Even Silas will come!"

At his name, Silas looked up at the three of them and sighed, he was roped in.

"I'll come, but none of that couple shit. And if Vic shows up, I'm not dealing with their strange lovebird enemies stuff either, okay?"

Kei bit the inside of their cheek trying to not laugh at Silas' "lovebird enemies" comment as they very well knew how much of *lovebirds* Tiberius and Vic were *destined* to be.

"Please, Reese's?" she pleaded.

"Yeah, c'mon, *Reese's*, it'll be fun," Gina teased.

Kei shot Gina a death glare and elbowed her ribs before turning back to Tiberius with a large smile.

"Fine," he sighed.

Keeping up his side of the promise, Tiberius met Kei, Silas, and Gina in the entrance hall to get signed out for Hogsmeade. After spending so much time away from Tiberius, because of his whole soulmate mark debacle, Kei was excited to spend the day with her best friends at Hogsmeade.

The group made their way down the path towards Hogsmeade: Kei, threatening to deduct

points from people's houses as she saw the horrible pins they sported; Gina, making sly remarks to Tiberius any chance she got just to annoy him; Tiberius, pulling every ounce of self control he had to not hex the Slytherin in Kei's presence; and Silas, trying to not bash his head in at the scene the three idiots were making.

The fall festive little village was filled with students and lingering Halloween decorations. Leaves had fallen from their trees, shops were already beginning to brandish Christmas decorations, and the weather seemed to agree with the idea of Christmas as the wind blew the first flurries over the entire place. It was a perfect day for an outing and Kei loved every second of it.

Well, they did until the bell of the Three Broomsticks rang.

Kei, Tiberius, Gina, and Silas were all enjoying their butterbeers when three new people walked in. Although Kei didn't mind *most* of their presences, Tiberius did. Lonnie, Jaqen, and Vic all sauntered into the pub and ordered their own butterbeers. Gina instantly acknowledged the trio and invited them over to join the group. Tiberius and Vic shared an equally disdained look before Vic sat down in between Gina and Silas, Jaqen and Lonnie following suit.

"So what's going on here?" Lonnie asked.

"Just hanging out," answered Kei with a tight lip smile.

"Anything—?"

Jaqen couldn't get out a single word before Tiberius dramatically stood up, causing his chair to squeak and tumble over at his force.

"Tib—"

"I thought you said he wasn't coming," Tiberius rushed out in a low hiss.

"I–"

"Calm down, Moody," Vic scoffed. "I'm not here for you."

"Here we go," Lonnie mumbled under his breath as Kei sighed.

"Well, last I checked, I was here first. You're not welcomed—"

"Tiberius, don't start," Kei shouted.

But that did nothing as the pair began to argue. They shouted over nothing, insulting each other over the way they breathed to their grades, anything shy of blood status and loyalty. Kei groaned and gave Gina and Lonnie a sad look, ignoring Jaqen altogether, who seemed as though he couldn't care less of the situation going on. Silas didn't seem to care either, sipping on his

apple cider and watching the table tennis like argument rather than conversing with any of his friends.

"At this rate," Lonnie mused, "they need to be put into a room and told they can't come out until they kiss and make up."

Gina and Kei laughed just before Tiberius' attention was brought to them,

"That's not funny, Carrow."

"Oh, hello to you, too, Cop," Lonnie smiled widely

Kei could feel the rage coming off of Tiberius and groaned, slumping in her chair. Just as Tiberius went to have a go at Lonnie, Kei spoke up, "that's it! Vic, Tiberius, out. Now."

Her motherlike tone quickly shut down the entire pub. Everyone in the pub watched as the pair stopped fighting and mumbled under their breath as Kei followed them outside of Three Broomsticks. Gina, Lonnie, Silas, and Jaqen all followed the trio to the streets of Hogsmeade.

"Tell me what's the matter," she demanded.

"You know what's the matter," shot Tiberius.

"Don't get smart with me, Moody."

"Reckon they need more than just a closet to kiss and makeup," Lonnie sniggered.

"Lonnie," Kei warned and addressed the two quarreling lovebirds, "both of you need to stop. This Death Eater versus Auror shit needs to stop. You're not a Death Eater," Kei told Vic and turned to Tiberius, "and you're not an Auror."

"But—"

"But *nothing*," she seethed. "I will magic some handcuffs and *jinx* them to not come off unless you've made up if that's what it takes!"

"You wouldn't," Vic gasped and narrowed his eyes at them.

"Hm, the deadly look on her face raises that. I think she very much would," Lonnie smirked.

The group stayed quiet as Kei, Tiberius, and Vic seemed to be having a staring contest. Vic yielded and sucked his teeth while Kei and Tiberius continued to stare at one another. Kei raised their brow, daring him to question them, but Tiberius sighed and rolled his eyes. He knew Kei meant well, but hated that he knew she would one hundred percent go through with her threat.

"Now, if you please, I'd like to have a *good* day hanging out with my friends. If you two

are done acting like rotten children, you can join us in Zonko's," Kei wrinkled her nose and hooked her arms with Gina's and Silas'. "C'mon. Lonnie. Jaqen."

The four of them made their way up the High Street towards the joke shop as Tiberius and Vic stayed outside of the pub.

"I hate you, Lestrange," Tiberius mumbled.

"Right back at you, Moody."

———

It had taken a whole of three days for Tiberius and Vic to start fighting again— well, in front of Kei that is. The libraries and gardens were Kei's safe havens. No one dared disturb them. But they did.

Reluctantly, Gina and Kei devised a plan to help her brother and her best friend to get over their stupid six year grudge. Kei was meant to summon Tiberius to the gardens while Gina was meant to meet them there with her brother in tow.

Being that Kei wasn't the best at charms, they recruited Silas to help them with the spell for the handcuffs. Being the pacifist he was, Silas only tutored Kei on the theories behind bondage jinxes and emotion charms for the project as he wanted no part of the scheme to bind his two roommates.

The day wasn't a very good one to be outside as the sky was cloudy and seemed to threaten rain at any moment, but a little rain never ran Kei away from her sanctuary. Just after her final lesson of the day, Kei sent a summons to Tiberius' dorm and made her way to the gardens to "study." Studying entailed drawing the slowly whittling flowers and counting the old chrysalises of long gone butterflies.

There was a crunch in the leaves near the entrance of the gardens causing Kei to look up from her journal.

"You came," she smiled, pushing the cuffs deeper into her robes.

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Tiberius.

"Well, after yelling at you in the library and getting us banned for a month, I thought you wouldn't want to come see me."

"Eh," he shrugged, "gives me a reason to not study."

"*Tiberius*."

"I'm joking!" He raised his hands in defeat. "So, what's up?"

“Just wanted to hang out a bit. Gina’s supposed to be coming.” Tiberius glared at her. “Oh, lighten up! She’s my best friend. Of course I’m going to hang out with her.”

“Best friend, huh?”

“Tibs, don’t get jealous. She may be my best friend, but you’re my best buddy.”

“That’s not what I meant, but all right.”

It was Kei’s turn to glare at him, “I don’t know what you’re implying but—”

“Oh, you very well know what I mean, Franklin. Don’t play dumb, it’s not a good look on you.”

“I will hex you, Tiberius Moody.”

“I’d like to see you try,” he jeered.

Just as Kei raised her wand, Gina popped up behind him with a laugh, “merlin, you two are so high strung.”

“Lestrange,” Tiberius deadpanned.

“And here I thought my sister dearest was taking me on an innocent walk,” a voice said from behind Gina.

Tiberius nearly snapped his neck to look at Vic and quickly stood up. Kei followed suit, her hand on the handcuffs in her robes.

“Is this some kind of bloody intervention? Some kind of payback for the whole library banning?” his voice raised with every word.

“You are high strung,” Gina mumbled.

“Lestrange, this isn’t funny.”

“It’s a little bit funny,” mused Vic, earning a glare from all three of them.

“Franklin?” Tiberius questioned Kei for the second time in the last five minutes.

Kei groaned at the use of her name and looked over to Gina for help. She merely shrugged, Kei was on her own for an explanation. Not wanting to endure them any longer, Kei moved closer to Tiberius and clasped the handcuff over his right arm. At the same time, Gina pushed Vic into Tiberius allowing Kei to clasp the other cuff onto Vic’s left arm.

“*FRANKLIN,*” Tiberius shouted. They flinched at the sound of their name and quickly ran over to Gina’s side. “This isn’t funny. Take them off.”

“I can’t,” she admitted.

“Yes, you can. Take them off right now.”

“No, she can’t,” Gina explained. “They’re charmed. They’ll only come off once you two make amends and show some genuine friendliness towards one another.”

“That’s not funny, Gina,” Vic shouted. “I’ll saw my bloody arm off before being *friendly* with someone like *him*.”

“Another charm added,” sighed Kei. “You two can’t do any harm to one another. And the magic is impenetrable. There’s no way out without fulfilling the means.”

“I’ll drown him,” Tiberius ordered. Trying to get away from him, Vic pulled his arm away from Tiberius but instead managed to pull Tiberius into him, nearly knocking each other over.

“Oh Merlin, this is going to take forever,” mumbled Kei.

“Exactly, so take it off,” Vic demanded.

Kei groaned dramatically, “if you’ve been *listening*, I said it is *charmed* so it’ll only come off once the emotional connectivity is completed.”

“But you’re shit at charms.”

“Wow,” said Kei monotony, “thanks a lot, Vic.”

Gina just about had enough of the childishness and shouted at the pair, reiterating everything Kei had said without all the niceties. Vic and Tiberius glared at the Slytherin and ignored everything she said, complaining once more and pulling on the handcuffs, trying to get out of them again.

“It’s not going to—”

“I KNOW IT’S NOT GOING TO WORK,” Vic finally snapped. “You’ve stuck me to this idiot and now I’m going to never get out of this! We’ll be like this forever and it’ll be your bloody fault.”

“Vic, no. You just have to—”

“I loathe you, Higgs. You had to come and ruin everything. We were perfectly fine not being friends, but now look at us. You couldn’t just keep your fucking ideas to yourself, could you? Always have to be in everything, in everyone’s business. Having to help where you’re not needed, right? Now look at what you’ve fucking done.”

Kei crumbled into herself. Vic’s angry words hit her like a train and she felt horrible. There had never been a moment where Vic had been that way with her. Sure, she'd witnessed his rage that was aimed at others, but never her. They didn’t know what to do. There was nothing to

do. The magic was certain and only they held the key to unlock the handcuffs.

"Vic, I– I'm sorry. I didn't mean—"

"No, you knew *exactly* what you were doing," he spat.

She looked from Vic to Tiberius to Gina. None of them said anything. And to make everything worse, Tiberius, her best buddy, didn't even defend her against Vic's angered words.

Kei nodded stiffly and apologized under her breath before pulling her books to her chest and leaving her now ruined sanctuary with nothing but regret rattling her chest.

11. First Task

It took nearly a month for the handcuffs to fall off. Throughout the entire month of November, neither Tiberius nor Vic spoke to Kei unless it was to yell at her for their problem. But it was a huge surprise when Kei was awoken by Shiloh with the news that Tiberius Moody was slumped outside of Hufflepuff in a dead sleep.

"Alone?" they asked, to which she nodded.

Kei quickly put on a robe over their nightgown and went through the common room to find a sleeping Tiberius. She took in his image and sighed; Tiberius looked tired, annoyed, but slightly peaceful. *Probably not being attached to Vic*, she reasoned. And that was another curiosity, they got the handcuffs off.

"Reese's," said Kei softly, nudging Tiberius.

"Tib, wake up."

Nothing.

"Tiberius!" she hissed. He slightly stirred.

Groaning, Kei took out her wand and sent a small stream of water to his face. Tiberius yelped and moved out of the way, wiping his face before looking up to see the Hufflepuff.

"Oh," he sighed. He didn't seem too happy to see them.

"What– How– Are you okay?" Kei finally asked.

"I'm great," Tiberius groaned, standing up as he rubbed his neck. "Been out here half the night. Didn't think it appropriate to go into your house."

"I don't think Professor Sprout would appreciate nightly visits like that," Kei mumbled awkwardly.

There was a thick tension between them, not knowing where either of them stood with

one another. They hadn't spoken to each other since the incident in the gardens. Kei had to spend her dinners silent and her freetime alone as she didn't want to intrude in Slytherin to hang out with Gina, who wasn't very fond of being alone in the Hufflepuff common room.

"You got out," she finally said.

"So it seems," Tiberius deadpanned.

"Are we—?"

"I just wanted you to know that Vic and I obviously made up and got out of the charm," he cut Kei off, "but I'm also still upset with you for it."

Kei nodded solemnly and rubbed her arm, "well, I'm glad my charm worked?"

"I suppose Silas' tutoring really paid off," he responded.

The pair stood in awkward silence when a Hufflepuff came out of the portrait hole. Kei gave them a small smile and looked back at Tiberius,

"Will you sit with me for the task today?"

"No," Tiberius responded quickly. Kei frowned. "I'm not sure I'll go to this task. I'll just spend it alone. I'd like to be alone after nearly a month with no peace and quiet."

Though it wasn't a jibe, it hurt Kei. She nodded and took a step away from her best friend, "that's fine. I'll just sit with Gina and Clem, I believe."

"Noted."

And that was the end of their conversation. Kei felt hollow, as though she had majorly messed up and couldn't fix it. There were no goodbyes as Kei quickly turned and ran into their common room before Tiberius could say anything else. She had left him standing in the corridor alone.

The task was set for mid-morning, leaving Kei enough time to get ready and meet her friends in the entrance hall for the boat rides to the makeshift arena. Though there was no indication of what the First Triwizard Task was, there was a buzz of excitement in the air. Despite their constant threats of points to the people who wore the horrible pins, many students sported them in support of Cedric Diggory. Kei had seen the Hufflepuff champion in the common room before the task and wished him luck, as she had promised the night before Halloween.

Arm in arm with Gina and Clemence Clearwater, the three girls stepped out of the boats and made their way to their seats. The anticipation was heavy as horrible roars could be heard

just past the walls of the safehaven. Kei widened her eyes and looked at the girls with excitement,

"What do you think?"

"Well, being all the rocks and precautions, I'd reckon something dangerous," Clemence gulped.

"It's not going to be something easy," Gina sniggered.

"I feel bad for Harry, quite honestly," Kei groaned.

"Serves him right. He entered!"

"Did he though?" asked Clemence. "Based on his luck the last few years. . ."

Their conversation was cut short as a whistle blew, signaling the start of the tournament. A large double door opened to reveal a huge blue dragon as it walked over to a nest of eggs.

"*Dragons*?" Kei gasped.

The crowd roared as a champion walked out of the tent. Cedric Diggory. Kei's heart hammered in her chest as she watched her fellow Hufflepuff run out from a little passageway onto the battlefield.

"What kind of dragon do you reckon that is?" shouted Gina as the beast roared.

"Swedish Short-Snout, if I'm not wrong," Clemence answered.

She wasn't.

Cedric Diggory was meant to fight the dragon and grab her egg at the other side of the arena. The silvery-blue dragon watched as Cedric moved around the ditch. A bright blue flame flew out of the dragon's mouth, nearly hitting Cedric, who moved out of the way.

"Oooh, narrow miss there, very narrow," Mr. Bagman, the commentator, noticed.

The onlookers cheered and shouted, Kei sitting on the edge of their seat. Drawing his wand out from his bodysuit, Cedric threw a spell. It missed the dragon. Instead, it hit one of the rocks near the beast, transfiguring it to be a beagle. The Swedish Short-Snout took the bait and turned its attention to the dog. The crowd roared as Cedric took the distraction to dive towards the Golden Egg.

Halfway towards the egg, the ugly dragon turned its attention back to Cedric. It wailed at the sight of him and blew fire at him. The brilliant blue flame whizzed at Cedric, hitting him.

"I should have placed my bet with Krum, rather than Diggory, at this rate," mumbled Gina, earning a punch to each arm from the two girls next to her.

"Clever move— pity it didn't work!"

“Oh, stupid man,” Kei cussed under her breath.

Again, Cedric tried to hex the dragon, but this time, it hit her and she wailed. He slowly made his way past the dragon and towards the egg. The Swedish Short-Snout turned towards him but just tilted its head instead of narrowing its gaze towards Cedric. *It's blind.*

"Whoa, Ced blinded the dragon!" Kei exclaimed and turned towards their friends.

"How do you know?" Clemence asked, but her question was lost in the ear piercing cheers of the crowd.

Cedric made it to the Golden Egg and held it above his head like a trophy. A group of Dragon Tamers came over to the dragon and put it to sleep.

Mr. Bagman shouted Cedric’s success and called Fleur Delacour to the field.

“She’s quite beautiful,” muttered Kei.

Clemence nudged her slightly and smiled, “your type?”

Kei hummed and elbowed her friend, trying to hide her slight blush at the insinuation. *Is it really that noticeable,* thought Kei.

Through their little conversation, Fleur had somehow put the dragon to sleep. Slowly, she crept past the dragon.

"Oh I'm not sure that was wise!" Mr Bagman shouted gleefully.

At his words, the Common Welsh Green let out a huff of fire and knocked the end of Fleur's skirt. She shrieked and put it out using a water spell.

"Oh—"

The dragon's tail whipped in the air as it got comfortable again.

—nearly! Careful now," he said quietly, though his voice echoed in the stadium.

Fleur ran full speed towards the nest and grabbed the Golden Egg from the pile of eggs.

"Good lord, girl, I thought the dragon had her then!" Bagman said as the crowd erupted into applause once more. "And here comes Mr. Krum!"

Viktor Krum came out and had to face a Chinese Fireball. The crowd erupted into cheers and chanted his name, much like how the crowd did at the Quidditch World Cup. It took Viktor only ten minutes to get his Golden Egg as he also blinded the dragon.

"He's going to win," Gina said in my ear.

"I reckon so—" but as Kei said it, the dragon stumbled around, looking for Viktor, and

smashed nearly half of the real eggs she was supposed to protect. "Nevermind, he ought to lose a few points for that."

"But look—" Gina pointed at Viktor holding the Golden Egg over his head.

"That's some nerve he's showing — and — yes, he's got the egg!" Bagman shouted as the crowd bellowed out in cheers once more.

“Now it’s Harry’s turn,” Clemence gulped.

Kei had wished Tiberius was with them. She knew they’d have so much fun joking around about the task. Of course, Kei valued their time with their two friends, but sorely missed Tiberius. She looked at Gina and Clemence and let out a small sigh.

“Look!” Clemence shouted, pointing at the very terrified Harry Potter.

She pitied him. He must have been terrified with the entire school and two hoards of foreigners watching his every move. The crowd didn’t scream as loud as they did for the other three champions, causing Kei to frown.

The ground around us shook slightly and everyone seemed to quiet down. Opening large stadium doors, the humongous beast came out: A Hungarian Horntail.

"He's going to die," Kei breathed in disbelief.

At the other end of the enclosure, she crouched low over her clutch of eggs, her wings half-furled, her evil, yellow eyes upon him, a monstrous, scaly, black lizard, thrashing her spiked tail, leaving yard-long gouge marks in the hard ground.

The entire arena was silent, only the growls of the dragon could be heard. There was a bellow from in the stands, too far from where Kei stood to understand, but close enough to Harry for him to hear. His words echoed against the stands and met the silence as he summoned his broomstick.

Harry waited in his spot as the mean dragon stared at him. There wasn't a single sound in the stadium beside the dragon's heavy, hot breaths. There was another moment of silence before a swooshing sound cut through the silence. His Firebolt hurtled towards him around the edge of the woods and into the enclosure.

The entire stadium cheered as the three girls joined them, Kei jumping up and down in glee. Harry mounted his broom and shot up out of view. Within seconds, Harry raced down towards the stands, getting the attention of the Horntail.

"Great Scott, he can fly!" Bagman commented. "Are you watching this, Mr. Krum?"

Harry plummeted just as the Horntail opened its mouth, but this time he was less lucky — he missed the flames, but the tail came whipping up to meet him instead. I gasped at the sight and watched as he spiraled down, but then took off to the right.

The Horntail didn't seem to want to take off, she was too protective of her eggs. Harry weaved in and out of her reach, as if he were trying to get her to fly away from her eggs to get him. She extended herself as much as she could until she finally took his bait.

She reared, spreading her great, black, leathery wings at last, as wide as a small airplane— and Harry dived out of view. Before the dragon knew what he had done, or where he had disappeared to, he was speeding toward the ground as fast as he could go, toward the eggs now unprotected by her clawed front legs— he had taken his hands off his Firebolt— he had seized the Golden Egg—

And with a huge spurt of speed, he was off, he was soaring out over the stands, the heavy egg safely under his uninjured arm.

"Look at that!" Bagman was yelling. "Will you look at that! Our youngest champion is quickest to get his egg! Well, this is going to shorten the odds on Mr. Potter!"

Harry and Viktor Krum ended up tying for first place with thirty-nine total points. Cedric Diggory had gotten second place and Fleur Delacour in third and last place. Mr Bagman announced that the Second Task would take place on the twenty-fourth of February, exactly three months away.

12. Failed

As much as Kei wanted to give her best friends space, she grew impatient with the two boys. Two weeks had passed since they had gotten the handcuffs off and despite constantly pestering Silas on how it was achieved, they said nothing of the sort. Not only was Silas withholding information from her, which Kei assumed, but Tiberius and Vic also ignored her in every way.

“Tiberius,” Kei hissed as she mixed the contents of her cauldron.

Currently, the two friends were in Potions brewing some kind of potion she paid no attention to. Kei’s attention was currently on getting her partner to talk to her about something other than the assignment at hand.

Tiberius hummed, “if you’re going to talk, at least pass me an Ashwinder Egg.”

Kei sucked her teeth and handed him the cracked egg and shells, “really, Tib? Just talk to me already!”

“Miss. Higgs, I’d appreciate it if you focused on your potion rather than socialize in my class,” Professor Snape said, coming up behind the pair.

“Yes, Professor,” Kei mumbled.

“Rather not take points off from a prefect,” he hissed. Kei nodded once more and waited until Snape was out of range before talking,

"I reckon he's making us powder the moonstone instead of dissolving it to make the brewing time shorter.”

"It is, and that is also why we have to add less rose thorns and peppermint oil; to dilute the brew," Tiberius commented. Kei practically groaned in defeat.

They continued to make their potion-making in silence, Tiberius only talking to Kei to ask to pass the ingredients or share utensils. Kei watched as the liquid turned from a grey-white to an opal color, reflecting the light from the candles around the room.

"Ten minutes left," Snape called.

"Almost done?" Kei asked.

"It’s actually finished, I believe," Tiberius said, turning off the flame.

Kei nodded and mixed the potion slowly, not wanting to mess it up, "what do you smell?"

Tiberius narrowed his eyes and cleared his throat, looking over to Vic, who was sitting at the table behind them. Kei followed Tiberius’ glare and cleared her throat, causing him to drop his gaze.

“Well, I smell cinnamon, burning wood, the pine forest, and. . . that’s all I can smell,” he sighed and narrowed his eyes at Vic once more.

“What’s the last smell?” Kei raised her brow.

“I can’t smell it thanks to Vic’s strong cologne. I don’t appreciate drowning in that stench,” he scoffed.

Kei had to bite the inside of her cheek to stop herself from laughing at Tiberius. There was no way they would be able to tell Tiberius that Vic, in fact, stunk a bit and didn’t smell like his usual cologne at all.

“That’s fair,” she mumbled, biting back a laugh.

“And you?”

She leaned over the cauldron full of Amortentia and breathed in deeply, softly smiling to herself, “honeysuckles, the pine forest, pecan swirls, and some kind of chocolate. I’m not quite sure on that last part— it could be hot chocolate or chocolate chip cookies. Hm, I want cookies. . .”

Tiberius let Kei ramble, as she usually did. He thought about Kei’s amortentia and smiled to himself, shaking his head softly. He looked down at his best friend and missed them dearly. Of course, he was still upset over what had happened, but he couldn’t hold it against her anymore. He was now somewhat civil with the Lestrange kid he “hated” so much.

“We can go to the kitchens, if you’d like,” Tiberius said, cutting Kei off.

Kei snapped her head up and gave him a large smile. She felt as though she’d won; Kei had gotten her best friend back. Tiberius smiled back at Kei, happy that they were happy again. Though Tiberius knew how much it hurt her to be away from him, he was afraid to blow up on her once more.

“Yes, of course I—”

“Ten points from Hufflepuff for disrupting the class,” a voice called through the room.

All of the students looked over to Kei and Tiberius’ table. The two other Hufflepuffs in the class glared at Kei while their cheeks burned in embarrassment. Professor Snape looked over at the pair once more before continuing his lecture on the importance and danger of the potion in front of them.

Before dismissing the class, Snape passed out the exam they had taken the week before. He handed Kei her exam and upturned his nose before continuing down the aisle. Kei gasped softly as she glanced at her grade: An A.

“What did you—?” Kei cut themselves off as they looked at Tiberius’ exam. He had gotten an O. “You lucky bastard,” she cussed under her breath.

“How’d you manage an A?” Tiberius furrowed his brows.

“Reckon it’s from not studying with you,” she mumbled. “Gina’s nice to study with but jokes around too much for my liking.”

Tiberius sucked in a small breath, slight guilt eating at his chest. He knew it wasn’t his fault, but also knew how much Kei’s marks meant to her.

“It’s just one A. You’ll get O’s for the rest of the year,” he tried to calm the Hufflepuff.

Kei shrugged, “I know. It just sucks.”

Once class was dismissed, instead of going straight to the kitchens, Tiberius and Kei made a B-line towards Alastor's office. It had been a while since they talked to him outside of class. It was as though he had forgotten his own son attended the school he taught at.

The trek from the Potion's room to the Defence office was a short one and they made it just as the class ended. The odd thing was that Alastor was nowhere to be found. His room door was ajar and empty.

Tiberius called out to his father, but there was no response.

The candles were extinguished and it was as though no one had been in the office in ages. They both didn't understand where he was but thought nothing of it. Though Alastor wasn't the most social type of person, Kei blew it off as he was in the Teacher's Room. They weren't allowed there without a professor's escort.

"C'mon, let's just go to the kitchens," Kei sighed. "We can see him tomorrow after class."

"Yeah," Tiberius trailed off. "Yeah, whatever. Let's go. I bet the elves can make us some cookies and other treats."

Kei's previous foul mood lightened at the idea of sweets. She squealed and grabbed onto Tiberius' arm, pulling him out of the empty office.

Well, they believed the office was empty. The hidden figure in the shadows heard their entire conversation and vowed to watch them closer, not liking their nosiness.

13. Yule Ball

"The Yule Ball is approaching," Professor Sprout said excitedly once the entire Hufflepuff House entered the common room. "It is a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and an opportunity for us to socialize with our foreign guests. Now, the ball will be open only to fourth years and above— although you may invite a younger student if you wish. Dress robes will be worn and the ball will start at eight o'clock on Christmas Day, finishing at midnight in the Great Hall. Now then —"

She smiled around at all of the students before clearing her throat.

"The Yule Ball is of course a chance for the girls to let their hair down and the boys to make nice with the girls. But that does NOT mean that we will be relaxing the standards of behavior we expect from Hogwarts students. I expect that no Hufflepuff student embarrasses the

school in any way. Is that understood?"

"Yes, ma'am," chorused through the entire common room.

"Now, lastly, the Head of House will be having dancing lessons before dinnertime. If you wish to participate, you may attend. If not, I see no reason to waste your time. It is up to you! If you have any questions, please, feel free to ask me," she smiled.

With that, Sprout turned around and left the common room to her own office. The entire common room bursted out in excited laughter and talked about the upcoming ball.

"Excited?" Kei turned and asked Shiloh, her roommate.

"Hm, I suppose so," she hummed. "Give me a reason to dress up and dance away the night."

Kei smiled widely and grabbed onto Shiloh's arm squealing like every other girl in the room,

"Any idea on a date?"

Shiloh's face turned a shade of pink before she straightened her back and put on a hardened facade, "I think I have an idea, but I don't think he'd ask me."

"Do tell, Loh," she smiled.

The Hufflepuff's face broke out into a small smile, as though she were fighting with herself on her slight excitement, "well, there's this Gryffindor. . ."

"Oh? A Gryffindor," Kei teased.

Shiloh rolled her eyes and slightly shoved Kei, "oh nevermind that. You?"

"Well, I have no idea who would possibly ask me, but I hope I do get asked. I rather not go alone," they frowned, "that'd be quite sad."

Their conversation ended as Shiloh's own friends stole her away from Kei.

The line in the entrance hall was longer than Kei had ever seen. She found Tiberius in the midst of the chaos, only to find out the line was to put their names down for who was staying at Hogwarts for Christmas. Everyone in the fourth year and above seemed to be staying, and they all seemed to be obsessed with the upcoming ball. Walking around the castle was never something people had trouble doing, but thanks to the ball, it was nearly impossible as people stopped one another in hopes of invitations to the ball. Not only did the boys stare, but the girls giggled and whispered in the corridors, shrieking with laughter as boys passed them, girls excitedly comparing notes on what they were going to wear on Christmas night.

"Have anyone in mind that you'd like to ask?" Kei casually asked Tiberius as they made their way back from Ancient Runes.

“Not really,” Tiberius shrugged. “I haven’t a clue. Loads of girls have practically begged an invite out of me. It’s quite distasteful. And you?”

“I don’t have many guy friends besides you and Vic,” she responded. “Maybe Silas, but I don’t think dances are his scene. I would rather not force them to go just so I don’t end up alone.”

“Nah, you won’t be alone,” smiled Tiberius. “I bet you have loads of guys at your feet begging to go to the dance with you.”

“Reese’s, you think so high of me,” laughed Kei as they walked through the Great Hall doors together. “But you: Are you sure you haven’t a clue who you’d like to go with?”

Before Tiberius could respond, a gaggle of fourth year girls passed the pair; they gave Kei a glare before giggling and waving at Tiberius. Kei slapped her hand over her mouth to keep herself from laughing at the scene. Tiberius looked at them awkwardly and gave them a small wave, causing them to giggle louder.

“Well that was. . .”

“Oh Merlin, you truly are blind,” Kei laughed loudly before sitting down at the Hufflepuff table.

Tiberius took the spot behind her, at his table, and turned, “what’re you on about?”

“This only leads to the question of how many girls have *actually* thrown themselves at you in hopes of an invitation to the ball.”

His eyes widened at Kei’s insinuation and coughed slightly, choking on his pumpkin juice. Kei laughed once more while Tiberius caught himself.

“And you?”

“And me nothing. There’s no guys falling at my feet,” she rolled her eyes playfully. “Anyways, I reckon you ask your little lover.”

Tiberius’ face reddened as he narrowed his eyes at Kei, “shut up, Franklin.”

“Hey! Don’t be like that. I’m not wrong! There’s no harm in—”

“And you?” Tiberius raised a brow at Kei. “What about Georgina?”

It was Kei’s turn to blush, “I– I don’t know what you’re talking about! She’s my best friend.”

“You’re right,” he said slyly. “She’s probably going with Carrow.”

Kei instantly turned around and glared at the plate in front of her, ignoring Tiberius’ calls. They were nothing more than confused about their best friend. She had no idea how she felt about Gina, if she even felt anything like *that* for her. Sure, she’s finally come to terms with her sexuality and her preference over girls than guys, but Gina was her best *friend*. Nothing more and hopefully nothing less. Well, at least that’s what she chalked it up to be.

———

The last week of term became increasingly noisy as it progressed. Rumors about the Yule Ball were flying everywhere. Some of the teachers, like Professor Flitwick, gave up trying to teach their students much when everyone's minds were so clearly elsewhere. Other teachers were not so generous. Nothing would ever reflect Professor Binns, for example, from plowing on through his notes on the several different revolutions— as Binns hadn't let his own death stand-in the way of continuing to teach, they supposed a small thing like Christmas wasn't going to put him off. Professors McGonagall and Moody kept them working until the very last second of their classes too, and Snape, of course, would no sooner let them play games in class than adopt a Gryffindor.

Snow was falling thickly upon the castle and its grounds now. The pale blue Beauxbatons carriage looked like a large, chilly, frosted pumpkin next to the iced gingerbread house that was Hagrid's cabin, while the Durmstrang ship's portholes were glazed with ice, the rigging white with frost. The house-elves down in the kitchen were outdoing themselves with a series of rich, warming stews and savory puddings.

Just as Tiberius had predicted, Gina spoke highly about how Jaqen had asked her to the ball the night before. Kei spared a congratulations before excusing herself from the library where all of The Baguettes were currently hanging out. She practically ran out of the library and down the corridor towards Hufflepuff in hopes of putting as much space between herself and her friends. There were another set of footsteps behind her.

“Frankie.”

Kei stopped walking and turned around as she beat herself up for not taking up one of the fifth year’s invitations to the ball. Tiberius slowed his step and walked up to Kei with a small reassuring smile.

“Don’t worry about that too much,” he tried to reassure them. “Someone was bound to

ask her to the ball."

"I would rather it not have been *him*," mumbled Kei.

Tiberius chuckled at her blatant jealousy and shook his head, "c'mon, would you really have some stinky third year to take her?"

Kei laughed at the mental image of Gina dancing with some thirteen year old who would step on her feet any chance he got.

"There's my happy girl," Tiberius smiled. "You okay, now?"

"Yeah, I'm just upset because I'm going alone," their smile dropped as they looked sadly up at Tiberius. But her frown turned into confusion at his own contorted face.

"You're not going alone."

"I haven't a date, Reese's."

"You're going with me," laughed Tiberius as though it was common knowledge.

Kei tilted their head in confusion, "what?"

"Where've you been, Kei?" he knocked on her head comically.

"What?"

"I meant to ask you what color you're wearing so we can—"

"Tiberius, *what*?"

"Have you left your head in the library?"

Her mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water. Tiberius acted like Kei was the one in the wrong when, in reality, she had no recollection of him asking her.

"When did you ask me?" Kei asked. It was Tiberius' turn to question her. "Yes, when did you ask?"

"I was supposed to— No– what? I had assumed we would go together. It's just another Ministry Event but at school. We go together, like always."

Kei let out a bubble of laughter and shook her head in disbelief, "was I supposed to read your mind, Tib? I had no idea we were going together."

"Who else would I have gone with?"

"I don't know? Vic? Clem? Some other fifth or sixth year?"

Tiberius' face hardened at her suggestions and shook his head, "well, I'm going with you."

"Merlin, Reese's," Kei laughed and turned away from him, continuing her walk to

Hufflepuff.

"Wait! Frankie, what col—"

"Amethyst."

Kei laughed at Shiloh's attempt in doing her hair. Though her charms were strong, her own anxieties of going to the ball with Atticus Montague, the Gryffindor whom she hoped would ask her, hindered her ability to cast it correctly. Trying to hold in her giggle, Kei pushed Shiloh's wand down and cast the charm herself, perfectly curling her hair and placing it into an elegant updo. In turn, Shiloh helped Kei with their own hair.

Finally finished with preparations, Kei dressed in her Yule Ball gown. It was a simple A-line amethyst colored dress. There was a small slit on the left side of the dress while the neckline of the dress was modest. It was off-the-shoulder and flattered Kei's bust nicely. It was much nicer than any ministry dress her father had her wear. And, best of all, Shiloh had gifted Kei a leg garter to hoist her wand in while at the ball.

"Reckon you go meet your date, yeah?" Kei smirked at Shiloh.

She playfully narrowed her eyes and stuck her tongue out before adjusting the neckline of her charcoal emerald-waist dress. Once Shiloh left the door, Kei twirled once in the mirror and grew excited for the ball. She'd be going with her best friend and spending the night dancing away with all of her friends (minus Silas who didn't want to attend regardless of him staying for Christmas).

Kei found Tiberius boredly conversing with an overly ecstatic Draco Malfoy. Unsurprisingly, he matched his pocket square perfectly to Kei's dress. The pair were oblivious to Kei's presence and snuck up behind Tiberius, managing to scare him.

"For an Auror's son, you're pretty oblivious," Kei teased.

"Frankie!"

She smiled in response, but hardened her features at Draco's disrespectful stare.

"Hey, Squirt, my eyes are up here," she snapped her fingers at him. His cheeks flushed slightly as he cleared his throat. "Your date?"

"Pansy," Draco shrugged.

"Reckon you go find her," said Tiberius finatively. Draco gulped, nodded, and quickly descended the stairs to find his date. "Bloody git."

"You clean up nice," Kei rolled her eyes, looping her arm with his.

Tiberius smiled down at her, “I could say the same for you.”

Once everyone was settled into the Hall, the oak doors opened once more and revealed the four champions and their dates. The ballroom erupted in polite clapping and stopped once the traditional waltz music began. It was hard to watch as some of the champions (only Harry, actually) completely butchered the dance. But Kei’s eyes soon looked away from the dancers as they looked at the Lestrange twins who sat at their table.

Gina wore a beautiful floor-length green gown with sheer long-sleeved puff sleeves and a thick shoulder band that had the glimmering tulle the rest of the dress had. She looked elegant and poised. Her date looked beyond bored as though he rather gouged his own eyes out than be at the ball. And Vic looked handsome, in his own right, wearing a full black suit with a white tie. He sat next to Gideon Flume who opposed Vic’s black suit with his own white one and a black tie. The embodiment of yin and yang.

After the painful-looking champion dance, they sat down and dinner was magically served. When all the food had been consumed, Dumbledore stood up and asked the students to do the same. Then, with a wave of his wand, all the tables zoomed back along the walls leaving the floor clear, and then he conjured a raised platform into existence along the right wall. A set of drums, several guitars, a flute, a cello, and some bagpipes were set upon it.

All of the champions stood up and went to waltz, as they were required. Soon enough, students joined the professors and champions. Kei had to clamp her hand over her mouth at the sight of Alastor doing an extremely ungainly two-step with Professor Sinistra, who was nervously avoiding his wooden leg. But Kei’s smile died as Jaqen asked Gina for a dance. They swallowed a forming lump in their throat as they watched the pair dance.

"C'mon, Frankie," Tiberius whispered into Kei’s ear. “You never dance with me at balls. This should be fun, let's put it to good use.”

The melody sung through the entire hall, bouncing off the walls, and resonating in her bones. Swaying to the music, Tiberius and Kei danced the waltz, spinning cohesively with the other pairs. Having her face not change, Tiberius took it upon himself to make Kei laugh.

"You know, this waltzing is getting pretty boring," he smirked. "I reckon we liven it up a bit, yeah?"

Kei squealed as Tiberius widely spun them around. They swept the dance floor and laughed as they swung each other around the floor. People began to steer clear of them. Kei

caught Gina's eye and they smiled despite the furrowed look on her face. The Weird Sisters stopped playing, applause filled the hall once more.

Their dancing finally stopped after an hour or so of spinning. Butterbeers and goblets of water were downed before Tiberius called a time-out on their dancing. Kei threw herself on a chair very unladylike and gave Gina a tired smile.

"Having fun, Sunflower?"

"The best," Kei laughed. "How's your date?"

"Boring, quite honestly," Gina shrugged. "I don't think balls are his thing."

Kei frowned slightly and had a quick inner battle before standing up and outstretching her hand, "dance with me?"

Gina tilted her head, "aren't you tired?"

"Not tired enough to have a dance with you, Jellybean."

The Slytherin grabbed her hand and gave Kei a small smile before the pair made their way to the dance floor. Instead of the lively music that had been playing, it changed to a slow dance. *How romantic,* Kei joked to herself, *like a fairytale.*

As the pair danced, Kei caught the eye of Tiberius who was sitting where she had been. He gave her a sly wink causing Kei to blush slightly, hiding her face in Gina's shoulder. Gina pulled her in slightly closer, taking Kei's movement as an advance to be held tighter. Tiberius watched the Lestrange girl and his best friend dance. His smile widened at the sight of them,

At least one of us is happy tonight.

14. Rumours

Tiberius began to notice how much Kei started to hang out with Gina. It was more than usual. Any free time the pair had was spent with one another. *So this is how they felt when I was with Clem*, Tiberius thought to himself. The only time the best friends hung out was when Gina was with Jaqen.

Finally, after nearly two months of watching Kei flirt with Gina, there was a problem. Not with them, but with Alastor. There was a rumour that Professor Snape's storage was broken into in the middle of the night— Alastor and Mr. Filch were both present when Snape found out. Making the decision to check up on Alastor, TIberius pulled Kei aside and gave her the news.

"What'll Alastor do?" she asked.

“I bet he’s devised some kind of plan to figure out who it was,” Tiberius said confidently. “Reckon it’s that Durmstrang Headmaster, Karkaroff. You know he was a Death Eater.”

“But he got dismissed?”

“Only because he ratted out his little buddies,” he scoffed, taking two steps at a time.

Kei had to rush up the steps to keep up with him, panting as she made it to the platform, “slow down, Reese’s. Merlin fuck, he’s not going to disappear.”

Tiberius all but knocked on Alastor’s door as he barged into the office. Alastor was at his desk, standing over a small cauldron when they barged in. In a quick movement, he placed a spell over the cauldron, closed his trunk, and raised his wand at the two.

“What’re you—?”

“What happened?” Tiberius asked quickly, cutting his father off.

“Hello, Alastor,” Kei said softly, smiling at him.

He ignored both of them and stalked over to the pair, “who do you think you are to barge into this office unannounced?”

Kei shrunk in on herself as Tiberius raised his brow and answered, “your son.”

Alastor’s gaze softened and he turned around before limping over to his desk, “that’s all fine and dandy, but what’re you two doing here?”

“Heard a rumour someone broke into Snape’s stores,” Tiberius sighed and sat on the little couch with Kei.

“Yeah, probably some snot nosed kid,” he dismissed. “Nothing to worry about.”

Tiberius leaned forward, “don’t think it’s Karkaroff? He’s always been a little suspicious.”

Dismissing his son once more, Alastor responded, “Karkaroff is a priss who wouldn’t try anything with me here, more or less in Dumbledore’s presence. And Barty Crouch is here. Too much Ministry presence for him to try. He’d be setting himself up for failure.”

“You’re not wrong,” Kei said, “but you still don’t think he could be responsible for—”

“No, it’s most likely a student,” Alastor scoffed, cutting Kei off.

She simply nodded. Seeing that there was nothing else that could be said, Tiberius stood up and said his goodbyes to Alastor while pulling Kei out of the office.

“That was a lovely talk,” they mumbled. Tiberius shot Kei an annoyed look, causing her to raise her hands in defence. “Any news on the soulmate stuff?”

“No,” he sighed, “I haven’t found anything but the legends. Fucking *sucks*.”

The week progressed with nothing important and the second task finally came around. Tiberius and Kei were accompanied by Vic, Gina, and Jaqen. Kei felt very left out in the group, Tiberius and Vic talking about some Defence project while Gina and Jaqen made googly eyes at one another. Looking out at the Black Lake, Kei noticed the judges’ stand, a floating platform, and only three of the four champions. Harry Potter was nowhere in sight.

“You all right, Frankie?”

“Just dandy,” she responded absentmindedly, leaning over the railing to see if she could spot Harry. It took about a minute before the task began for Harry to appear. Per usual, no one scolded Harry for being late and allowed him to participate.

Bagman pointed his wand at his throat and said, in a booming voice, "Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have precisely an hour to recover what has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One... two... three!"

The whistle echoed shrilly in the cold, still air; the crowd erupted with cheers and applause as they watched the champions intensely. Cedric and Fleur both said an incantation that caused a bubble to form around their heads and Viktor made himself into a half transfiguration of a shark. Harry, on the other hand, stuffed something into his mouth and stood there stupidly.

Kei gasped as Harry grabbed his throat and appeared to be choking. He all but fell into the lake. No one seemed to have noticed the Gryffindor fall into the lake. *I hope he doesn’t drown*, they thought. Within thirty minutes of the task, the crowd began to grow bored waiting for the champions to come up with their stolen item.

It had been forty minutes before someone came up: Fleur Delacour, but she was in hysterics. Her entire body was scratched up, her blue uniform was torn, and her face was red from crying. She shouted something in French and tried to go back into the water, but Madam Pomfrey and Madame Maxime restrained her.

Her actions caused a worried murmur through the stands, people speculating what had happened. There were loads of rumours of what the lake housed, a giant squid and wild grindylows were speculated. She was most likely attacked by the latter and was unable to meet her goal.

The large clock rang, signalling the given hour was up. A minute later, Cedric Diggory came up with Cho Chang in arms. The crowd erupted as at least one of the Hogwarts champions

came in first. Now the anticipation was heavy with excitement and apprehension.

People, Kei thought. *The task was to retrieve* someone *they'd miss the most*.

"Could you imagine that?" Tiberius asked Kei. She turned to see that he switched spots with Gina and Jaqen, moving closer to her.

"Having to save someone you'd miss the most, you mean?"

"I meant having to participate in this craziness."

"Though they didn't know what they'd be up against, they did sign up for it," Kei shrugged.

Tiberius hummed in agreement.

Kei looked over at Tiberius and frowned slightly, "you know. . . I think you'd be it."

"Be what?"

"The person I'd miss the most. The one I'd have to save," they nodded. "You're my best friend, I don't know what I'd do without you. I'd miss you too much to ever not be best friends with you. I'd do anything to save you."

Tiberius frowned and slung an arm around their shoulders, "you'd be my person, too—you *are* my person. I'd never let anything happen to you."

Kei laughed and rolled her eyes, "Merlin, you're such a big sap."

Before Tiberius could retaliate, the stands broke out in more cheers as another champion came up. Viktor Krum shot out from under the water with Hermione Granger in his arms. The Durmstrangs bellowed out their cheer and hit their large staffs on the bleachers. The last champion left was Harry, who hadn't risen yet; it'd been forty-five minutes outside of the hour time limit.

"I really hope he didn't drown," Kei said softly.

"Who? What- Who drowned?" Gina blurted, having barely heard Kei.

"Harry. He was choking before he fell into the water."

"*WHAT*?" The four Slytherins shouted in surprise. Kei shrugged.

It almost hit the two-hour mark when Ron Weasley and a small blonde girl popped up in the middle of the lake. The crowd screamed and the teachers moved forward on the platform as Ron pulled the little girl to the shore, but Harry was nowhere in sight.

Then, out of nowhere, Harry jumped out of the lake and five feet above water before falling back into the water. The entire shore cheered with delight as Harry Potter weakly swam to

the shore with a flock of merpeople surrounding him.

"Oh Merlin! He's not dead," Kei shouted in relief. "Harry's fine!"

Looking around the shore, Kei saw Dumbledore crouching at the water's edge, deep in conversation with what seemed to be the chief merperson, a particularly wild and ferocious-looking female. Finally, he straightened up, turned to his fellow judges, and said something to them that caused them to all huddle.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Bagman said in a booming voice, "we have reached our decision. Merchieftainess Murcus has told us exactly what happened at the bottom of the lake, and we have therefore decided to award marks out of fifty for each of the champions, as follows. . .

"Fleur Delacour, though she demonstrated excellent use of the Bubble-Head Charm, was attacked by grindylows as she approached her goal, and failed to retrieve her hostage. We award her twenty-five points."

Applause from the stands.

"Cedric Diggory, who also used the Bubble-Head Charm, was first to return with his hostage, returned one minute outside the time limit of an hour—"

Kei and her friends cheered along with the rest of her house, filled with pride at the win Hufflepuff finally had.

"— and we, therefore, award him forty-seven points.

"Viktor Krum used an incomplete form of Transfiguration, which was nevertheless effective, and was the third to return. We award him forty points."

Karkaroff clapped particularly hard, looking very superior.

"Harry Potter, who used gillyweed to great effect," Bagman continued, "was last to return, and well outside the time limit of an hour. However, the Merchieftainess informs us that he was first to reach the hostages, and that the delay in his return was due to his determination to return all hostages to safety, not merely his own.

"Most of the judges," and here, Bagman gave Karkaroff a very nasty look, "feel that this shows moral fiber and merits full marks. However, Mr. Potter's score is forty-five points."

Both Hogwart champions were tied for first place. Everyone applauded Harry and Cedric in their first place win as the rest of the crowd applauded hard, screaming in victory.

Fleur was clapping very hard too, but Viktor didn't look happy at all. It looked as though

he was attempting to engage Hermione in conversation again, but she was too busy cheering to listen.

"The third and final task will take place at dusk on the twenty-fourth of June," continued Bagman. "The champions will be notified of what is coming precisely one month beforehand. Thank you all for your support of the champions."

15. New Information

For about the seventh time that year, Tiberius was in a foul mood *and* ignoring Kei at the same time. She just about knocked down the door to Slytherin when Vic came out looking enraged.

“Vic!” Kei gasped.

“Hey, Padawan,” his anger melted into a small smile.

She frowned, “I’m Kei, not Padawan.”

Vic laughed loudly, “it’s a character I heard a few muggleborns talk about. It’s your nickname now.”

“Oh,” Kei furrowed her brows and chuckled, “anyways, I meant to ask you: Have you seen Tib? He’s been avoiding me the last few days.”

“Hm, he’s been pretty weird— weirder than usual,” Vic looked conflicted and then let a small smile fall on his lips, “you’re smart—”

“Thanks?”

“— You can help me!”

Kei grew more confused as Vic gave no kind of explanation, “I just need you to help me research someone.”

“Er– all right?”

“Library, tonight! You’re a lifesaver, Kei,” Vic explained, kissing her on the cheek before running off.

Having failed her mission of finding Tiberius, Kei made her way to the library later that night to help Vic with whatever troubled him. She found him sat in a secluded corner of the library with a few of Hogwarts records sprawled out in front of him.

“Vic?”

Vic looked up from the book in his hands looking disheveled and upset. Taking in Kei’s

worry, he grew nervous as though he regretted asking them for help. She made her way over to Vic and sat in the chair across from him.

"*Hogwarts Students: Nineteen Eighty-Nine*," she read. "What?"

"I've been looking through a lot of registers and I haven't found anything about it yet," he groaned. "Since my birthday, I've been holed up here just looking and looking and— Kei, I haven't found him."

"You said you needed help researching someone," Kei recalled. "To get information, right? Who are you researching?"

"Er– Yes, information," Vic said nervously. "There's absolutely nothing about– I just can't– Ugh!"

Vic's frustration and nervousness caused Kei to frown. She slowly reached out to touch his arm, causing him to flinch, and frowned, "Vic, it's okay. I'll help you. You've just got to tell me what's going on. You can trust me, I promise."

Kei gave him a small smile and Vic nodded. Slowly, Vic pushed up the sleeve of his robe. She seemed to have dejavú due to the fact that Tiberius had done the same to her a few months ago. To her dismay, the letters spelled out someone who was unknown to her instead of the person she called her best friend.

"Edmund Dolohov," she read out softly. She touched the mark, expecting it to rub off at her touch, but it didn't. And it didn't bear Tiberius' name either. "Oh that's. . ."

"It's, uh– It's a soulmate mark apparently," Vic explained.

Kei simply nodded, very well knowing what it was. Tiberius had the same one, but with Vic's name on it.

"The name of your soulmate, yeah?"

"Yeah. . . that's what I read," he frowned.

"Hm, I don't know an 'Edmund Dolohov'," Kei recalled. "They'd have to be similar in age, yeah?

Vic nodded, "do you think I could find out about him in any other books? I've read up on every single book about the Dolohovs! Looked in every Hogwarts record from the eighties to the current third years."

"Well," Kei thought aloud, "if they're our age then they should be in our year of birth records." Though Kei was discouraged that Vic's mark didn't say Tiberius' name, she still

wanted to help one of her closest friends. Vic frowned deeper. “If not in the Hogwarts records, then maybe in the Ministry books.”

Vic’s head snapped up in an instant, “oh Merlin, I’ve gone through all of the Hogwarts books and even the Sacred Twenty-Eight families. I haven’t found a thing– Maybe they go to another wizarding school?”

His voice rose with every word and Kei did her best to quiet him down, his excitement bound to get them kicked out of the library.

“Maybe Edmund was sent to Durmstrang or even shipped off to Ilvermorny?” This caused Vic to slouch in his chair, Kei quickly added, “*but* the British Ministry is bound to have his birth being they told every magical birth in this region! He’s a Dolohov.”

“But that. . . that’s going to take a long time, Kei.”

“I don’t mind helping,” Kei smiled softly. “I finished my galaxy astrology assignment, so I can help. Plus I’ve advanced in all my lessons, so no need to study just yet.”

“We had homework?” Vic croaked.

They frowned, “don’t worry about that. We’ll just focus on the records.”

“Well, where are they?” And at Kei’s cringe, Vic added, “Kei, please tell me they’re not—”

“They are,” they cut him off, causing him to groan. “But it’s fine! I can probably ask my father to help, right? He works at the Ministry and I’m sure he’d be glad to help me. I could probably spring up some kind of lie or whatever and get you the records!”

“Really?” Vic shouted and instantly shrunk, remembering where the pair met up at. “That’s brilliant– You’re brilliant!”

Kei beamed, “thank you, Vic Lestrange. Anyways, for now, we can search up the other schools’ records while I send my father an owl.”

“Most definitely,” he nodded frantically. “Tell him it’s urgent.”

“Of course.”

There was a moment of silence as the two organized the books to put them back. Kei was thinking of a way to address the situation to her father as well as break the news to Tiberius as Vic called out her name. She quickly looked over at Vic, who looked as though he was expecting an answer.

“I’m sorry, repeat that again?”

“I asked if. . . have you ever seen anyone with– with this kind of mark?” Vic’s new timid nature was back.

Kei gulped, preparing herself to lie as she had promised Tiberius to never speak of his mark, “I– uh, what do you mean? Like the soulmate mark?” Vic nodded. “Well, they’re quite rare. . . Just talk of legends and myths. They’re unique.”

“So, you haven’t,” said Vic.

“I mean,” Kei tried her hardest to not blatantly lie to Vic when he was in such a vulnerable position, “I’ve read up on the legends before. I’ve never seen. . . pictures of them.”

Vic nodded and placed another book on the shelf in front of him, “yeah, who didn’t? They were every wizarding kid’s bedtime stories. I never believed the stories because they were too. . . out there.”

Kei sighed softly, “I always loved the stories. The very idea of there being someone *destined* for you– to be loved solely by them? Every girl’s dream.”

Vic’s scoff brought Kei out of their little daydream-like trance, “I never *ever* believed someone could. . . love me.”

“Don’t say that,” Kei quickly blurted, thinking back to Tiberius’ mark. “Someone is quite destined to love you,” she motioned towards his arm. “They were basically made for you, Vic.”

He said nothing and walked back over to their table, picking up his bag, and handing Kei her’s. Vic looked absolutely destroyed at the idea of the soulmate thing not working out. Kei could imagine how Tiberius would feel and felt her heart break for her friends. *Some love triangle,* they thought.

“What if it doesn’t work?” Vic broke the silence.

“What if what doesn’t work?”

He turned towards Kei looking more broken than she ever thought he could.

“Vic, what if what doesn’t work?”

“What if he hates me?” his voice cracked ever so slightly. “What if I’m not enough for him? Franklin, what if he *died*?”

“Don’t,” Kei hissed. “Don’t you dare say that, *Atlas*. He won’t hate you. You are enough for him, he will *love* you. He’s not dead, there’s nothing pointing to that.”

Vic laughed bitterly, “this bloody mark is the only good thing I have. The only thing keeping me. . . the only thing giving me hope.”

“Let it give you hope. Let the dreams and ideas of finding your love consume you. He is your love, he is your soulmate, Vic,” she pleaded with him. “Let it be something worth fighting for! You are enough for him.”

“Kei. . .”

“I’m serious, love,” Kei stepped forward and grabbed his hand. “It will be okay. We will find him and you will unite with him. It will be everything you could ever dream of. Let yourself believe something *good* can happen to you, okay?”

“Okay,” Vic finally breathed.

Kei smiled and pulled him into a hug. She felt Vic stiffen at the contact, but didn’t let go. Eventually, he gave in and hugged them back, melting into their embrace.

———

Running down the corridor, she tried her hardest to keep up with his long strides. Tiberius had left Defence just before Alastor dismissed the class. Kei was left pushing all of her quills, inkwell, and parchments into her bag before running off to catch Tiberius before he managed to disappear. At this rate, she was sure he had somehow learned how to Apparate, inside the walls of Hogwarts, being he always disappeared around the corner.

“Tiberius Moody, if you ignore me one more second I will announce to the entirety of the school about what you did at the Beltane Ball when we were eight,” Kei shouted across the corridor.

He froze and allowed Kei to catch up to him. Onlookers waited around to hear the not-so-juicy story about how he knocked over the entire chocolate fountain on Madam Bragman by accident. Kei hooked her arm in his and pulled him into an empty classroom so he couldn’t run away from her.

“Talk,” they demanded.

Tiberius looked at her with a depressed expression, “about?”

“Why’re you so sad? Why’ve you been ignoring me?”

“No reason.”

“Cut the *bullsit*, Tiberius,” Kei shouted. “You’re not fooling anyone with your moping and hiding. You’re most definitely not fooling me. I haven’t seen you in over a week. You don’t even talk to me during lessons anymore!”

“I have nothing to say,” he deadpanned.

Kei's rage only rose as they stared at Tiberius.

"I have loads to say."

"I'm all ears," he said sarcastically.

Sucking her teeth, Kei huffed, "you know, Vic came to me the other day."

At the mention of Vic, Tiberius stilled and subconsciously pulled his sleeve lower on his arm. Kei didn't miss the motion and frowned.

"Tiberius. . ."

"I know, okay?" Tiberius blurted sourly. "I was there, Franklin. I saw the entire thing. He was born at night. I wasn't even in the room but Silas found me and– He was in pain. *I* knew exactly what pain he was in. The dorm was a mess, he was losing his shit and *I saw it*."

"I– Tib, I didn't know. . . I'm sorry," she whispered, her rage fizzling out in pure dread.

"Yeha, well. . . now you do."

Kei couldn't think of anything to do but tackle Tiberius with a hug. Tiberius was destined to be soulmates with someone who was destined to be with someone else. It broke her heart to know how devastated her best friend probably was. He didn't hug her back, letting Kei suffocate him in a tight embrace.

"You said Lestrange went to you?" Tiberius recalled.

They pulled away and looked up at Tiberius, "yeah. He wanted me to help him research who the Dolohov kid is. We didn't find anything, but I sent an owl to my father in hopes of getting some information from the ministry."

Tiberius solemnly nodded.

"He asked me about his mark and I said nothing about yours, if that's any comfort," Kei tried. He didn't react. "I'm sorry, Reese's. I really am."

"It's not your fault," he mumbled.

"I wish you didn't have to deal with this. It's awful. . ."

"Me too, Frankie. Me too."

16. Suspicious

The school term had been a real challenge. Yes, Kei loved a good challenge, but passing Defense Against the Dark Arts– their favourite subject– was more difficult than ever before. And it wasn't due to the fact that the material was hard, defensive spells and hexes were her expertise,

but because focusing in lessons was hard. Alastor was hard on her, maybe just not her but the entire class– especially Tiberius and Kei. Tiberius blew it off as being stressed from learning he had an ironic soulmate, but Kei chalked it up to being that Alastor didn't like her as a student. And it hurt them. But it didn't stop her from trying to get on his good side.

Pointing her wand at the Slytherin in front of her, she thought of a jinx. A spray of cool water shot out from the tip of her wand and to Tiberius' side.

"Hey!" he shouted, jumping at the wetness. Kei let out a laugh and clutched her sides, overjoyed that their nonverbal spell worked. The pair were outside, in the butterfly garden, studying for the upcoming Potions quiz. The weather was warming up so the flowers began to bloom and the butterflies hatched from their chrysalises. "That's not funny, Kei."

"It is actually quite hilarious," they smiled. "I haven't had a laugh like this in a while."

Tiberius stopped trying to wipe the water off his jacket and looked up at her, "is it still because of Al—"

"Alastor? Yes!" Kei exasperated. "He hates me this term. It's not like I'm flunking his lessons, I have one of the highest marks in his class– nearly all O's, but—"

"Yeah, I've been meaning to bring that up," he started off seriously. Kei stopped her complaints and turned to fully look at Tiberius. "Well. . . haven't you noticed him acting odd?"

"Odd?"

"Yes, odd. Like– okay, you've spent enough time with us in the summers to know how he's supposed to be. He's not as. . . calm and collected as he usually is. He's more fidgety and—"

"Nervous?" Kei finished for him. Tiberius nodded. "Well, it's nearly April. The year hasn't been the easiest, especially with the Tournament and teaching an entire school Defense lessons. . ."

"Yes, but he's different," Tiberius emphasised.

"Tib, it's nearly the end of the year and you're bringing this up now?"

"Well I've been. . . busy."

"Yes, busy falling in love with Vic Lestrange," Kei rolled her eyes playfully.

Tiberius narrowed his eyes at the Hufflepuff, "I am not falling in love. More or less with *him*."

Kei laughed, "fine. Let's pay your daddy-o a visit then."

With a nod, Tiberius grabbed his things and nearly sprinted out of the gardens before Kei

could even stand. Both of them walked the grounds, up the side entrance, past the Great Hall, and to the second floor offices where Alastor's would be. A quick *Alohomora* from Tiberius and the door unlocked. Kei threw her stuff on the small couch next to the door and curled up in it, while Tiberius took the singular armchair near the burning fire and large travelling chest as they waited for Alastor to walk in.

They had been alone for almost ten minutes until Alastor burst through the doors with his wand pointed at the pair. He looked at Kei while his magical eye turned to look at his son. Kei slightly ducked, preparing herself for Alastor's usual hair ruffle, but it never came as he lowered his wand and walked to his desk.

"It's just you two. . . again," he grumbled. "What're you two doing in here?"

"I'd say lock your door a bit better, first years could get in with a simple unlocking charm," Tiberius mused, wiggling his wand.

"Don't get smart with me," Alastor spat. Kei cocked her head with a small surprised look on her face.

"So," Kei started, "are you liking this term? Do you like teaching?"

"Yeah, to the teachable," his mechanical eye looked at her. *Ouch*, she thought.

"Oh, yeah," she nodded. "That'd make things easier. Any difficult students in. . . particular?"

Alastor blew off her question and took a swig of his flask. Tiberius looked from Kei to Alastor and narrowed his eyes at him, "what's your problem?"

"Tib—"

"What're you going on about?" Alastor asked in a huff.

"With Kei. In class and now. You're constantly dismissing them and being. . . weird with her," Tiberius continued. "I get you're hard on me, but with her? Is it a favoritism thing? Do you not want to seem like you prefer her because she's my—"

"Girlfriend?" He cut him off. Kei and Tiberius both widened their eyes in shock. "Protecting her? As if I'm treating her any different! Asking me about difficult—"

"What?" Kei breathed.

"Why would you say that?" TIberius's eyebrows furrowed in pure confusion. *That was odd*. Alastor scoffed. "She's my best friend, not my girlfriend. You know this. . . They like girls." Alastor seemed to choke a bit and covered it with another scoff. "You've even tried to set her up

last year with Sage Bragman's daughter."

"Just a thought," Alastor waved his comments away. "Never know. Things change. I see the way you're with her."

"Alastor, I– I don't like him like that," Kei laughed nervously. Between his comments and the dismissal, they were hurt and confused. Maybe Tiberius was right, something was off.

Before either of the other two could talk, there was a loud bang causing all three of them to jump. It came from the travelling chest next to Tiberius.

"What's in there?" Kei asked.

"Nothing important. Just a lesson for the seventh years. Keeping it safe 'til needed," Alastor nodded.

"What lesson?" Tiberius asked.

Alastor narrowed his eyes and sighed, "Chameleon ghouls. Nasty things, put up quite a fight when they're not sedated." He stood up and walked over to the trunk. "Now, unless you want to see an unsedated ghoul, I reckon you both ought to leave."

"Wait, I—" Kei stood up in excitement, quite literally wanting to see a beast, especially for a lesson for the older students, but Tiberius shot her a look and cut them off.

"All right, yeah. No need for unnecessary problems, right?" said Tiberius. Kei frowned and Alastor nodded. "See you in the Great Hall for dinner. Bye Alastor."

Tiberius gave him a small salute and walked over to Kei, picking up her discarded bag and grabbing her wrist. Before Kei could protest or say their goodbye, Tiberius pulled her out of Alastor's office, through the Defense classroom, and into the second floor corridor.

"Reese's, why didn't you let me—"

"Do you see what I mean?" He asked hastily. "It's worse than the fall."

Kei stammered and shrugged, "maybe he's just stressed. Difficult students, a long year, the Triwizard—"

"You didn't think any of that was weird?" Tiberius cut them off. Kei's mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water. "The way he dismissed you, insinuated we are together, or that bloody ghoul in his trunk?"

"Tib, I– The dating thing, yeah, but everything else. . ." she sighed. "Maybe I am difficult and he probably just wanted us safe from that Chameleon Ghoul."

"Yeah, well maybe isn't definite," he firmly said. Kei had nothing more to say, nothing to

reassure him or debunk his persistence.

"A definite is you're going to get hexed next time if you try and dislocate my shoulder with your superhuman dork strength," they said, pulling their arm out of his grip. Tiberius rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Let's go to the library now, it'll give you a reason to give me some peace and quiet."

———

Gina full fledged grabbed the girl and yanked her away from the library. Kei threw an apologetic look to Tiberius over her shoulder as she was dragged away. Making no stops, Gina opened the way into the Slytherin common room and up to her dorm. Her eyes widened in surprise as Gina threw her onto, what she assumed, her bed.

"G-Gina—?"

"No, let me talk."

Kei nodded.

"You're usually this happy go-lucky girl, always a ray of sunshine. You've been more gloomy than a thunderstorm. Explain yourself! There's something going on, the lot of you are so moody, it's *depressing*," Gina lectured.

Kei said nothing, not knowing what to say. Between the love triangle between Tiberius, Vic, and the mystery Edmund person, Alastor's disdain towards Kei, and the stress of upcoming exams, they were taut.

"You can talk now, you know," Gina rolled her eyes and flopped onto her bed.

"I know, I just don't have anything to say," Kei responded. Her nose wrinkled at the memory of Tiberius' words when she asked him what was wrong. "I just mean that its menial and not of much use to talk about."

"Nope, not buying it, Sunflower," she smiled. "Talk to me!"

Kei groaned and threw herself back onto the bed, "fine! Alastor hates me, exams are killing me and they're not even for the next two months, and Tiberius' moody mood is draining me. Ta-da, that's all."

"Well," Gina started, turning on her side to prop her head on her hand, "Professor Moody is an absolute dunce who doesn't care for anyone, exams will be dealt with when they come, and Moody is always moody."

"Gina," Kei groaned, warning her.

“Fine, fine. Professor Moody is odd. He’s super strict for no reason and doesn’t even make DADA fun— I much prefer last year’s professor, the werewolf.”

“I know but—”

“Ut,” Gina cut them off, “I’m not done talking. Now, as for exams: As you’ve said, they’re two months away. You’re one of the brightest witches I know, you’re going to get all O’s, per usual!”

Kei rolled her eyes and gave Gina a small smile, propping herself up as Gina had.

“And as for your little leech of a friend— hey, shut up,” Gina laughed at Kei’s glare. “As I was saying, he’s his own person, Kei! You can’t baby him forever. He’ll figure out whatever the fuck he needs to figure out on his own, like a big boy.”

Gina gave Kei a mock frown and smiled at Kei’s narrowed eyes.

“I could say the same for you,” Kei raised her brow in defiance. “Letting Vic figure things out for himself. He may be your twin but he can do things himself. I see you fixing his problems, letting him cheat off of you on exams and such.”

“Yes, but he’s my *twin*,” she rolled her eyes.

“The better reason to let him do his own thing!”

“Franklin, you are making no points.”

“And you, *Georgina*, are annoying the ever living shit out of me, so. . .”

Gina narrowed her eyes at Kei, “call me Georgina one more time and I’ll hex you into oblivion.”

“I would say the same thing to you, Gingee,” Kei scoffed.

At this, Gina lunged at Kei, causing her to yelp in surprise. It turned into a wrestle, Kei trying to get out of Gina’s grasp while Gina tried her hardest to keep Kei pinned against the bed. Both girls were laughing and shouting at one another, using empty threats of hexing one another and jinxing each other.

“Merlin, Gina. I didn’t know you liked it rough,” Kei cocked a brow at her. Taken off guard, Gina slackened her grip and allowed Kei to throw her off of themselves. “You will never beat me at a fight if a simple sexual innuendo is enough to throw you off your game.”

“I wasn’t expecting it,” Gina shouted, sitting upright as she fixed her robes.

“Evermore the reason to do it,” smirked Kei.

“I hate you, Higgs,” she mumbled.

“I love you more, Lestrange.”

17. Happy Surprises

With exams and the third task coming up, the entire school was on edge. Stress was eating at Kei, their nose in a book every moment of every day and the threat of hexing whoever bothered them was on the tip of their tongue all the time. May flew past in an instant and it was finally June. And to furthermore sour her mood, it was her birthday.

None of her friends acknowledged it.

Kei had only gotten one owl, from her brother, and that was the extent of her festivities. There was a small bubble of hope when Tiberius invited her to go to Hogsmeade with him. She grew excited at the newfound civility of the group: All of her friends were sitting around a table, talking with one another, *without* fighting.

“Well, this is nice.”

Gina looked up from whatever Jaqen was showing her and smiled, “I threatened them with a proper hex if they fought any longer.”

The Hufflepuff laughed at the comment and rolled her eyes, sitting in between Silas and Tiberius. But that was the extent of the festivities. No ‘happy birthdays,’ no presents, no acknowledgement. Kei watched as her friends acted as though it was a normal day. *I stopped studying for. . . nothing*, they thought sourly.

By dinner, Kei was completely displeased with her friends. They missed her birthday. Even Tiberius was ignoring her, having sat with the Lestrange twins and Silas. She was alone.

Not having an appetite, Kei left the Great Hall without touching her dinner. She didn’t spare the group a second look before booking it to the Hufflepuff dorms. Just shy of changing into her pyjamas, a timid first year knocked on Kei’s dorm door.

“There’s a Slytherin shouting about letting her in,” she whispered.

Kei sighed and knew it was most likely Gina, “Did she threaten you?”

The poor Hufflepuff nodded frantically and looked as though they would cry if they spoke.

“I apologize for her. I’ll go address her,” Kei smiled softly at the first year.

She was all but fuming when Kei stepped outside of the common room to see a joyful Slytherin rocking on her feet.

“There you are, Sunflower.”

“Gina, you completely terrified that first year! I’m taking five points off from Slytherin. You can’t do that,” Kei lectured.

Gina simply rolled her eyes and grabbed Kei’s wrist, pulling her through the corridor. Before she could question her friend, Gina opened the passage to Slytherin and ushered Kei towards the dorms. There was no time to catch their bearings as Kei stumbled down the steps, catching themselves just before they face planted into the wall.

A door opened to her left and Gina pushed her in. The only sense that worked was her sense of smell; it smelled like guys.

Just as she made the connection, the candlelights flickered on and confetti was thrown at her. Kei squealed in surprise as her eyes focused. In front of her stood Tiberius, Vic, Silas, and Gina.

“Surprise! Happy Birthday, Kei,” they chorused.

Silas gave Kei a shy smile while Tiberius beamed at her. Vic and Gina had begun to argue about the execution of the surprise. Kei’s eyes began to water as she took in the scene. Yellow and purple streamers were decorated on every four post beds, a makeshift table of trunks held all kinds of sweets and salty treats, a badly arranged bouquet of flowers were held in Tiberius’ hands, and a small pile of presents were stacked on Vic’s bed.

“I thought– what,” Kei breathed.

“Frankie, you really think we’d forget your birthday?” mused Tiberius. “That *I* would forget your birthday?”

“Hey! I remembered,” shot Gina.

“When did you–?” Kei frowned slightly, “why did you pretend to forget?”

“It’s a surprise party, Padawan! We couldn’t say anything without you knowing,” Vic rolled his eyes as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Plus, regardless of whether the other person wants one, you always arrange our birthday parties,” shrugged Silas. “Tiberius thought it a good idea.”

Kei playfully raised her brow, “so it’s Tiberius’ fault you ignored me all day?”

This paused Gina and Vic’s bickering and Silas looked over to Tiberius with an amused look.

Tiberius smiled sheepishly at them and laughed, “c’mon, Frankie, you know you love

us."

Shaking her head, Kei opened her arms to welcome their embraces. Only Tiberius moved and hugged her, while the other three Slytherins stood around awkwardly. Kei pushed Tiberius off of herself and walked up to Silas. They had a wordless conversation to which Silas sighed and slowly wrapped his arms around the Hufflepuff.

"Are you two not going to give the birthday girl a hug?" Kei joked.

Again, there was a slight reluctance in the embrace. Gina came up first, giving Kei an awkward hug, while Vic stood around. But as he watched his sister embrace their friend, Vic slowly walked up to the pair and joined their little hug. Tiberius took that as a group hug and grabbed Silas' wrist, forcing them to join the hug.

As the evening continued, the five of them played games and recalled stories of the past few years in good humor. Kei smiled to herself watching Tiberius enjoy himself with someone other than herself, especially with "someone like them" as he'd say. There were a few moments that Kei was afraid the entire party would go sour whenever Vic would tease Tiberius on something or whenever Gina made a jab at Tiberius' close-mindedness, but it seemed as though the group had come to an agreement to be completely civil for her.

When it was time to sing Happy Birthday, Vic pulled out a bottle of alcohol that reeked of cinnamon. Kei instantly realized it was firewhiskey and wrinkled her nose at the memory of her and Tiberius getting drunk at a Ministry event.

"Wait, wait, before you sing," Kei bursted out in laughter. "Vic's Firewhiskey reminds me of the time—"

"No," Tiberius groaned knowing what she was going to retell.

"— that Tiberius and I got *so* drunk on Firewhiskey. It was about two years ago at one of the Ministry's Ostra Balls!"

Kei stopped, trying to regain their breath. The other three Slytherins looked completely invested in the story.

Tiberius groaned, "fine, fine! I'll continue: Kei and I had gotten ahold of one of Alastor's bottles of Firewhiskey. Half a bottle each, mind you we were busy all day— barely had breakfast before taking the entire day to get ready. Empty stomachs—"

"That's not so important, Reese's," Kei wheezed. "All right, so we finally made it back to the party, drunk, and trying *so* hard to seem sober— merlin, that was horrible. To us, we were

doing great, talking straight, keeping our heads up! But imagine, *half a bottle*."

"Frankie, you're taking too long," said Tiberius, rolling his eyes.

"Hey, no! Let me—"

"One of you continue telling the story," Vic laughed. "This is too good and you two are taking too long."

Tiberius looked over to Kei and she smiled, agreeing to continue,

"Okay, so since we're absolutely starved, Tib and I made our way to the refreshments table and stocked up on everything in sight. Tiberius, here, manages to stuff himself so full. . ."

"No," Gina gasped in awe.

"He's complaining 'I'm gonna throw up,' 'Frankie, I feel sick,' yeah, yeah, all of that! And I'm trying my hardest to get him out of the way and to a bin but this woman— she's the Senior Undersecretary of the Ministry, a horrible woman— comes over and tries to engage us in conversation. Bloody woman was a force and didn't let us leave.

"Tiberius is green at this point and is silently gagging," Kei giggled. The Slytherins looked horrified as Tiberius looked completely mortified at the retelling. "I managed to move out of the way and Tiberius *vomited* all over this woman's horrible pink dress! I still say he made her dress look better."

No one in the room moved, mouths slightly ajar at the story. Kei smiled widely and laughed. Tiberius buried his head in his hands.

"Yeah, but that was the last time we ever had Firewhiskey."

Silas was the first to talk, "and that is why I will never have alcohol. Thank you for that, Kei."

Kei beamed and held her hand out for the cup of Firewhiskey Vic held.

"Absolutely not," Gina laughed. "I rather you not vomit like your little buddy over there."

"Hey," warned Tiberius with a slight frown.

Once the shock of the story wore off, the group continued their festivities. Vic reluctantly handed Tiberius a shot of alcohol while Silas declined the offer. Kei swayed as they horribly sang to her and cut the cake into five slices.

The rest of the night was spent dancing and drinking. Silas retired earlier than the sixth years, earning the nickname 'Grandpa Sil.' But the party ended just after curfew as Kei had to

make it back to Hufflepuff without getting caught, not being able to stay with the Slytherins despite their pleas.

Kei didn't mind that Lonnie had a tutoring session or that Jaqen was off with his brother doing Merlin knows what. It was the best birthday she'd had.

18. Bad Vibes

Exams had snuck up on everyone with the excitement of the Final Task. People walked around with their noses in books, but Kei was all studied-out and, instead, tutoring her friends for their exams. Silas had been in and out of the Great Hall doing his OWLs, using his freetime to help his older friends study.

"If you manage to get anything lower than an E," Kei warned Vic, who seemed to want to twirl his wand rather than studying, "I will personally shove—"

"All right, Sunflower," Gina butted in, pushing Kei back into her seat, "I think you've helped us enough. How about we go get some snacks?"

Kei looked up at the Slytherin and gave her a sad smile, "I've love to, Gingee, but Tib still—"

"No," he cut them off, "I'm—" Kei quickly looked at him and silently pleaded with him. "I actually need a lot of help with Astrology. Can't stand it. Exam's tonight. Gotta- Gotta study!"

Gina frowned and nodded, "I'll just bring back some cookies."

Not waiting for a response, Gina turned and left the common room. Kei watched her leave and frowned at her absence. Although Kei wanted to spend time with Gina, she was terrified. The more and more time they spent with her, Kei could feel herself begin to like her. It *terrified* Kei. Gina was her best friend. She didn't want to do anything to ruin their friendship, more or less be the cause of their friendship ending over something as silly as a *crush*.

"So do you want to ta—?"

"No," Kei deadpanned.

"Are you going to help—?"

"No."

"Alrighty then. . ."

Waking up the next day for the last task was horrible. The Astronomy exam lasted well after one in the morning. Some Hufflepuffs had decided to throw a party for Cedric in light of the

last task and those who weren't taking midnight exams attended but they didn't stop until nearly four.

Groggy as ever, Kei made her way to Slytherin just after noon. Just her luck, Vic had come out of the passageway.

"Kei?" he asked.

"Is Tib in there?"

Vic raised a brow at her, "good afternoon to you, too. But no, he said something about the library."

"Thanks, Tater Tot," Kei saluted him and went on their way to find their best friend.

That was more of a problem than intended. She had spent the entire afternoon searching for Tiberius, only to give up just before dinner. Tiberius was seated in his usual spot at the Slytherin table, pushing around the food on his plate. Kei stalked over to him and flicked his ear in annoyance.

"Ouch– Kei?"

"I've searched for you *all* day, Resse's," Kei complained.

"Sorry, I was. . . busy."

Kei narrowed her eyes at him and pushed him aside, taking a seat next to him instead of sitting at her own table. Not caring about the looks from the surrounding Slytherins, Kei grabbed one of the empty plates and served herself a bit of dinner. Tiberius watched the entirety of the show and sighed,

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I just spent the entire day yesterday helping the lot of you study, was forced to stay up past exams because of a bloody pre-congratulatory party for Cedric, and then spent today feeling like a idiot as I checked every room but your dorm for you because Vic Lestrange said you weren't there. I'm just *tired* and I needed to ask you something but have evidently forgot being I spent nearly five hours searching—"

"Frankie," Tiberius said softly.

"Don't 'Frankie' me," she looked up at him with a narrowed look.

"Yes, I'll 'Frankie' you because," he smirked, "Frankie is being cranky."

Kei tried their hardest to keep a stoic face, but failed as they broke out in a slight smile, "I won't hesitate to hex you, Tiberius. I am sleep deprived and hungry."

“By all means, eat.”

The dinner before the final task didn’t last long. The champions were ushered out of the Great Hall, their families and friends cheering them on as they left. Not many people stayed afterwards, the Hall emptying quickly.

“Go get us good seats,” Tiberius said to Kei. “I’m going to go talk to Alastor before the final task.”

“Right now?” Kei whined.

“Yes, right now,” he rolled his eyes. “You’ve got our muggle snacks. I won't even be fifteen minutes.”

“Fine,” they sighed and left for the stadium.

Kei sat impatiently in the stadium at the final task. Before she knew it, all of the champions were walking out with their appointed chaperon. They spotted Alastor with Harry Potter, the second Hogwarts Champion. Looking around, Kei tried to find any sign of Tiberius but he was nowhere to be found. *He promised he wouldn’t be late*, she thought.

Worried, Kei ran down the stairs and to Alastor in hopes of answers.

“Excuse me,” she said politely, weaving in between students and professors. She made it past Dumbledore and to her best friend’s father. “. . . Professor Moody, have you seen Tib? I can’t find him.”

Alastor looked over from Harry to Kei, “aren’t you supposed to be in your seat?”

“I– Yes, but I can’t find Tiberius.”

“How would I know where he is? Isn’t he attached to your hip?”

Harry stifled a laugh earning a quick glare from Kei.

“He said he was going to see you before the tournament. He had something to ask you. You didn’t see him?” they inquired.

“Uh, nope. Haven’t seen him. Maybe he’s looking for you in the stands,” said Alastor.

“Right,” Kei nodded. She looked over to Harry, “good luck, Harry.”

He nodded an acknowledgement as Kei turned on the spot and ran back towards where she had been seated.

The champions left into the maze. No Tiberius.

Fifteen minutes into the task, no signs of champions or her best friend.

Thirty minutes, she looked as nervous as the loved ones of the champions. She headed

back down to Alastor.

“Alastor, Tib hasn’t shown up yet,” her breaths were fast from anxiety and running down the stands.

“Miss Higgs, I haven’t seen him.”

The finality in his voice told her to leave once more. A sadness waved through her body, did he leave me? Her mind told her to stop being ridiculous, he wouldn't.

Another thirty minutes. An hour. The stands were as stressed as they were– Fleur Delacour had come out of the maze, forfeited. And no signs of Tiberius.

Another run through the stadium and down to Alastor Moody.

“Professor,” she addressed him, “I haven’t seen your son. There’s no sign of him. I don’t see him. What if something—”

She was cut off by the blinding lights of emergency sparks from the maze in the shape of the Durmstrang Crest– Viktor Krum. This meant Hogwarts won, but Kei didn’t care, she was too worried.

“Franklin, there are more things important than your friend being lost. There’re Champions in the maze fighting for their lives. This is Hogwarts. Here it is safe. Go back to your seat,” he lectured them. “If you come back once more, I will personally *Incarcerous* you to your chair.”

Her stomach dropped and her breath stilled. With a single nod, Kei turned and ran back to her seat. Clemence and Gina, the two friends she was sitting with, looked at her. They knew her worry for Tiberius and his sudden disappearance. Kei didn’t take notice of their questions as questions whirled in her mind. Alastor had never yelled at her in such a manner, not even when she and Tiberius would get into trouble. It was too unlike him, along with his unconcern with the whereabouts of his son.

Another thirty minutes passed by without signs of the Champions or Tiberius. Kei was itching to ask Alastor once more, or even just excuse themselves to go search for him on her own when there was a flash of light in front of the maze. The Champion came out.

But chaos occurred. Screams all around her. People sobbing and screaming. Someone died, she knew it– she could feel it. It was Cedric Diggory. Kei’s alertness had never heightened in such a manner, she couldn’t react or even feel upset– worry and dread flowed through her system. People fled the stands; Trying to get better looks, trying to leave the makeshift arena,

trying to find their friends. They needed to find her own.

Running, she took the fastest path to Hogwarts. The Hospital Wing was empty. Running down to the dungeons, Kei shouted the password and made it up to Tiberius's dorm to find it stale, no sign of anyone. With one last shred of hope, she ran to Alastor's office to find Professor Snape running out towards the direction she came from and Professor McGonagall running towards the grounds. They didn't yell at her.

The door to Alastor's office was wide open. Rounding the corner, she could see Professor Dumbledore standing beside the opened travelling trunk, Harry slumped over in an armchair– barely conscious, and Tiberius, enraged, pacing the office. All signs of logic left Kei's mind as she ran into the professor's office grabbing the attention of every person in the room. But what terrified them was the evil snide on Alastor's face and the broken look on Tiberius's.

"Wha—"

"Miss Higgs, go down to the Hospital Wing and wait there. Mr Moody will be down in a moment," said Professor Dumbledore with such authority, Kei didn't dare question him.

Slowly, she looked back at Tiberius, her heart shattering for him as he looked defeated, disappointed, and afraid. With a nod, Kei left the office feeling completely lost– she found him, after hours of worry and waiting, but she knew nothing of what happened in the maze or to Tiberius. But she found him nonetheless.

Kei had waited for what felt like *hours* before there was any commotion in the Hospital Wing. In reality, it had been a few minutes short of a half an hour. First, Madam Pomfrey came back while levitating a gurney with Alastor on it. She gasped as he barely looked like the man that she had seen hours before, but Kei didn't move from her spot. Next was Tiberius, who limped over to Kei. In an instant, they embraced him.

Tears stained his face and there was a streak of blood coming from his temple. His body shook and his spirit looked destroyed. Kei knew better than to ask any questions and simply held him. The double doors opened once more and Harry Potter walked in, a big black dog following him.

Kei pulled away from Tiberius and tilted her head over her shoulder to look at Harry. He looked horrible, limping and holding his bloody arm. Dirt and sweat caked his face, his glasses were broken and his clothes were disheveled. She turned her attention back to Tiberius and moved him so he sat in a cot with herself sitting in a chair in front of him.

"Reese's," they whispered, "what *happened*?"

A tear slipped from his eye as he took a shaky breath. He looked down at Kei and grabbed her hand, explaining to her what happened before he woke up and why Alastor looked so horrible. Tiberius said that he had made his way through the corridor towards the Defense room like they had a few months ago. *This time, the classroom door was wide open. The normally eerie room was spookier than usual with the foreboding suspense in the air. He was nervous.*

"Why?" Kei asked softly.

"I– I thought something was off about Alastor," admitted Tiberius. "I tried to be as fast as possible. . ."

He explained how he knew Alastor wouldn't appreciate him snooping through his things and how Kei wouldn't be happy being kept for so long. Kei frowned. *The room felt heavier than the time before, but that could have very well been his own anxiety heightening his senses. The tip of his wand glowed a small light in order for him to get around. The usually lit fireplace was out and the curtains were pulled closed, leaving his wand as the only light source.*

"The smell was so bad, Frankie," he cringed at the memory. "I thought it smelled like the potions' room. It was so pungent– I passed the chest—"

"The one with the Chameleon Ghoul?"

Tiberius frowned and shook his head, "there wasn't a ghoul in there."

Kei furrowed their brows as the Slytherin continued. *Alastor's flask was in the armchair behind his desk. Tiberius picked up the flask and he examined it as if he were looking for some clue. Flipping the lid opened, the strong smell intensified but he couldn't put his finger on it. Tiberius sniffed the liquid only for his stomach to flip at the horrible smell. Just as he thought to try and pour the contents, the office door swung open.*

Tiberius dropped the flask in shock and quickly turned on his heels to see Alastor clunking into the room full of anger and rage.

"What're you doing in my office?" Alastor shouted. Tiberius looked from his father to the flask on the floor to see the murky yellow liquid pouring out of the container.

It was as though a lightbulb went off over his head. Tiberius drew his wand up to Alastor's chest, "YOU! DON'T– DON'T COME ANY CLOSER!"

The man in front of him looked from Tiberius to the liquid on the ground.

"WHO ARE YOU?" Tiberius bellowed in fear. He recognized the liquid; they had gone over it in Potions back at the beginning of term.

An evil snide grew on Alastor's face. Though it was the one of his father, Tiberius very well knew it wasn't him.

"I was wondering when you were going to catch on," he sneered.

*"*Stupefy!*" Tiberius yelled, but 'Alastor' deflected it wordlessly.*

"I taught you nonverbal casting and you shout your offence?" he cackled.

"It– It wasn't Alastor?" Kei breathed, barely audible.

Tiberius shook his head, "no, a-and the worst bit was his jibe before knocking me out: 'Son of the great Mad-Eye Moody. Didn't even recognize his own father– or lack thereof. What a good son you are.'"

"Reese's, no. . ."

"How didn't I– He wasn't wrong. I was so in my own shit, I couldn't even tell that our professor wasn't even my dad," he whispered, letting a tear fall.

Kei stood up and wrapped her arms around him, not knowing what to say. There were no words that could ever comfort Tiberius. The man they'd called Alastor for the last ten months was an imposter. Tiberius trusted him this entire time, only to find out he was a fake. The imposter's jibe was what really made Tiberius crumble. Kei rubbed his back and leaned her head on his, letting him cry or just even rest on her.

It was a long while until Tiberius allowed Kei to release him. She finally pulled back and sat next to him on the cot, rather than in the chair she previously sat in. Leaning their head onto his shoulder, a question came to Kei,

"Tib?"

He hummed in response.

"Who. . . was the imposter?"

"Barty Crouch Junior."

19. Grimmauld Place

It seemed as though Tiberius was attached to Alastor's hip, more than usual. The events of the last year hit him hard, making him feel vulnerable. Barty Crouch Jr. never got to face his trial and get locked up in Azkaban again, but instead for the Dementor's Kiss in the Defence

Against the Dark Arts' office.

Trying to make Tiberius feel better, Kei had suggested taking a trip to visit Gerald, since they hadn't seen him since last August. He declined. Having to go alone, Kei made sure the day was still light as she made the trek towards the abandoned house.

"Gerald," Kei sang out, climbing through the open window and making her way into the farthest room.

"Where's Tiberius?" a voice called out.

She frowned, "home."

"Didn't want to come see Ol' Ger? Heartbreaking, Frankie," Gerald feigned hurt.

"Gerald, you wouldn't *believe* the year we've had," she groaned, plopping down on a wooden barrel.

"By the sound of it, it wasn't a good one."

Kei shook their head and explained the events of the last school year. Her story was all over the place, focusing on the Alastor imposter, then the Triwizard Tournament, and lastly Tiberius' current issue with his destined love. She knew Tiberius wouldn't mind her telling Gerald as he would have himself had he been here. Plus, who could Gerald *possibly* tell.

"All of that in ten months?" he gasped.

Gerald was a very good listener. He nodded in all the right places, gasped at the bad parts, and smiled at the soft ones. The ghost also gave excellent advice— well, as good as an eighty year old man, who lived through war, could give.

"Doesn't it sound absolutely horrible? Someone *died*, Alastor was kidnapped and held hostage, and Tiberius is. . . well, he's out of luck on the love part."

"I wouldn't say out of luck, but what about the Lestrange kid?" he prompted.

"My father owlled me a file just before exams and I gave it to him after Dumbledore's speech about Cedric's death," frowned Kei.

Gerald hummed, "loves a tricky thing— soulmate or not. The only thing he can do is wait. There ain't much that can be done. Tellin' the kid too early or too late could ruin everything. Tib'll just have'ta be patient."

"I've been telling him. I feel awful about everything. . . Helping his soulmate find their soulmate who doesn't match anything and can't even be found! It's– it's absolutely frustrating."

"How's the lad holdin' up with the whole thing with 'is father?" asked Gerald.

“Watching him like a hawk. Making sure Alastor is in bed before he is, eating at the right times,” Kei sighed. “We’ve been back a week and Alastor can’t seem to go to the bathroom without Tiberius knowing!” Gerlad gave them an indignant look at their crude language— it wasn’t very ladylike, “sorry, Gerald.”

“And you?”

“What about me?”

“Tiberius this, tournament that. I’ve heard nothin’ ‘bout how you’ve been doin’, missy,” he smirked.

Another thing about the nosey ghost was he was, in fact, nosey and absolutely knew whenever Kei or Tiberius were hiding something from him. Kei restrained an eye roll and felt her face heat up at the idea of possibly telling Gerald about her current crush.

“I’m fine. Got really high marks, mainly O’s— those are the highest at Hogwarts. Our friends threw me a surprise birthday party and—”

“That’s not what I wanna hear,” he gave Kei a knowing look. “You’re sixteen, you’re bound to fancy someone. Some girl, aye? Tell me about her.”

Kei knew there was no backing out of his interrogation and bit her lip in anticipation,

“All right, fine. Well. . . Remember how Tiberius is destined to Vic Lestrange, his roommate?”

Gerald nodded.

“I kind of. . . fancy—”

“*Him?”* Gerald blurted.

“Merlin, no! Gerald, I don’t like *boys*, I’ve told you this,” Kei groaned and ran a hand through her hair. “I like his *sister*— his twin, at that.”

Their voice was airy and spoke in a single breath. Gerald smirked at her frustration. *She’s got it bad*, he thought.

“And what about it?”

Reluctantly, Kei finally added the tidbits of information she withheld from him: From their duel in the gardens to their dance at the Yule Ball. He smiled at her expressions as she retold the events. Gerald knew that look. It was the same look his daughter had given him when she spoke of the boy she liked; that boy ended up her husband.

“. . . and before I left I told her to owl me if she needed anything. Narcissa Malfoy isn’t

so nice from what I hear, I can only imagine what happens during the summer to her niece and nephew. I wish Vic and Gina could come hang out with me but I think the Malfoys would die at the idea of them properly associating themselves with *half-bloods*."

"By the tone of your voice, I reckon you won't be telling her anytime soon?" sighed Gerald.

"No!" Kei's eyes widened. "She's– Gina's my best friend and Vic is Tiberius' soulmate. If anything were to *ever* happen between Gina and me and it goes sour, I don't want to mess things up for Tib. Plus, besides Tiberius, she is my best friend– my first friend at Hogwarts and my only girl friend. I don't want to mess any of that up. And besides, I'd rather not pursue anything that won't happen."

Gerald smirked, "So what I'm hearing is that you are no longer the brave little girl that walked into an abandoned house and threatened to hex a ghost."

"Gerald," Kei warned.

"*And* that you and Tiberius seem to have the same taste in lovers," he finished.

Kei's jaw dropped and they sputtered out, completely at a loss for words. Gerald let out a hearty laugh and disappeared into the wall.

"G-Gerald! You come back here you blasphemous ghost," they shouted into the empty room.

———

The summer night's wind was brutal. Kei loved flying, having played quidditch with Terence when he attended Hogwarts. But they hated waiting and being told to be patient. Patience was not a virtue Kei possessed. The same for Tiberius.

Per usual, Harry needed rescuing. Alastor grumbled about how idiotic his Order appointed guardians were being and used every cuss word to describe the way the Ministry was handling the situation. Before sending the pair away, Alastor made sure to give them clear and concise instructions. Along with reporting straight to the Order, they weren't meant to use *any* magic and to fly above the clouds to not be seen.

Kei and Tiberius landed on a barren street. The street sign read 'Grimmauld Place,' their destination. The pair shared a confused look before following the Auror's instructions: "Close your eyes and think of the address."

There was a slight rumble and Kei popped her eyes open to see a door materializing in

front of her eyes in between doors eleven and thirteen, followed swiftly by dirty walls and grimy windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way.

"This is the place," Tiberius mumbled.

She simply nodded and stepped forward, her broom on her side. Anxiety ate at her bones at the information Alastor had given her: This was the headquarters to the Order of the Phoenix and the home belonged to Sirius Black— who was on the Order's side, apparently.

Tiberius grabbed the gawking Hufflepuff and pulled her up the steps and into the now open door. The air smelled damp and dusty, almost rotting. The pair were welcomed by Molly Weasley, who smiled widely at them.

"Tiberius! Haven't seen you in ages," she beamed, turning towards Kei. "And you must be Franklin. Quite lovely to meet you."

Kei gave her a polite smile, "likewise, Mrs. Weasley. Please call me Kei."

"Of course, dear," she said loftly before looking over her shoulder. "Mad-Eye told me you two would be coming and were meant to wait for his instruction. I'm not quite sure if you both are staying overnight, but the twins are upstairs. Franklin, I'm sure you've been acquainted with Hermione and Ginny— up the stairs, to the left."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley," Tiberius quickly said, causing Kei to close her mouth which was most likely opened to correct the ginger woman.

With that, Kei was once again dragged up the stairs and towards the rooms Molly had pointed out to them.

Tiberius let go of her wrist, "play nice."

"Hey! I am nice," Kei scoffed as he walked into the room where Fred and George were in.

Reluctantly, Kei made their way into the room to see Hermione, Ron, and Ginny talking in frantic whispers. She felt as though she were intruding in some kind of scheme. Hermione was the first to acknowledge Kei,

"Franklin, right?"

"Kei," she corrected.

"Right," Hermione said softly and looked over to the two Weasleys sitting on the bed. "That's Ron and Ginny, I'm sure you know."

“Er, yeah. You’re Harry’s friends,” Kei smiled weakly. Ron seemed to be annoyed with the introduction while Ginny raised an eyebrow. “I’ve seen you guys around the corridors. Hard to miss, quite honestly.”

The trio said nothing.

“What year are you in?” she asked them.

“I’m going into fourth year,” Ginny spoke up. “They’re going into fifth. You’re a seventh year, yeah?”

Kei nodded. It was a very awkward tension and she hated every second of it. Besides Silas, she’s never befriended students from younger years.

“I’m– I think I’m just going to check on Tiberius,” Kei forced a strained smile on my face. “The twins with him wouldn’t make such a good combination. Pranks and all. . .”

Quickly, Kei turned around and bolted out of the door. Without knocking, they barged into the room. The three boys looked at her in surprise and confusion.

“You didn’t play nice, did you?” Tiberius laughed.

“I would’ve thought she’d last at least five minutes with them,” one of the twins laughed and handed Tiberius five sickles.

“Did you bet on how long I would—?”

“Ginny and Ron aren’t very amicable with others,” the other twin teased.

“Which is which again?” sighed Kei, looking between the twins.

“Fred.”

“George,” said the twin that handed Tiberius shickles.

Kei nodded and groaned, sitting on the empty bed.

“That bad, huh?” asked Tiberius.

She lolled her head from side to side, “not bad but Ginny’s resting face is slightly terrifying. Not to mention the fact that Ron said nothing to me. Plus, I’m sure I interrupted their scheming?”

“No scheming,” Fred shrugged. “They’re going over how they’re going to break it Harry about this entire place.”

“Keep secrets like that from me and you’ll lose more than a friend,” Kei raised a brow at Tiberius.

He laughed, “c’mon, Frankie, I keep no secrets.”

20. Regrets

Summer seemed more stressful than the entire year. From spending half of July at St Mungo's with Alastor and the rest of July and two weeks of August helping Tiberius do everything around the house, Kei was absolutely exhausted. The three of them were never home as Alastor constantly needed to go to Grimmauld Place for Order meetings. That being Tiberius had taken it upon himself to keep an eye on Alastor and care for him, whereas Kei took it upon themselves to make sure Tiberius also took care of himself while running around.

Kei tried their hardest to take care of Tiberius and it worked for a while, until Hogwarts Letters came around. Just like fifth year, Kei's letter came bulkier than before– this time with a Head Girl's badge instead of a Hufflepuff Prefect one. With this new information, she became focused on how she wanted to go about running her position and was excited for the new year.

"Tib, Tib, you'll never guess—" She had run out of the fireplace, ignoring the usual green flames, and straight to the sitting area where she knew Tiberius was. Kei cut herself off at the look of sheer annoyance on his face. Looking around, she noticed Alastor's absence. "Wait, where's Alast—?"

"I have no bloody idea. I fell asleep for two seconds and he—"

"Tib, it's fine," Kei shrugged. "He probably just went to Grimmauld Place for a meeting or something."

Tiberius scoffed and stood up, leaving the room. Kei's eyebrow furrowed in confusion at his dismissal. *Have I done something*? She followed Tiberius to the fireplace she just came out of.

"What're you– Where are you going?"

"To go find Alastor!" Tiberius shouted, grabbing a handful of Floo Powder and threw it into the soft flames.

"Wait, you can't just– Tiberius, stay here! He'll be back soon. Just relax for a moment," sputtered Kei.

"No. I have to—"

"You 'have to' nothing! I think Alastor can survive without you for an hour or so. You have been tailing him for the last month and a half. The entire summer you've been stressed out, barely taking care of yourself. . ." Kei shook her head and tried to lighten the mood by changing the subject. "How about instead of worrying so much, we go visit Ger—"

“No,” Tiberius cut her off. “I don’t want– I have to be here when—”

“Tiberius, I understand your sudden need to care after Alastor, especially being he’s the only family you have, but—”

“There are no buts, Franklin. You don’t understand! Your family is safe, your dad and your brother are both safe. Nothing happened to them. They’re not in the Order, they’ve got no target on their back, nothing!” Tiberius snapped. “You can go back to your family any time you’d like.”

Kei nervously played with her fingers. The entire summer Kei wanted to make sure their last holiday before graduating was the best one, mirroring the last summer before she and Tiberius left for Hogwarts. But instead, Kei had spent the entire summer being there for Tiberius without a second thought for herself.

“I just. . .” Ultimately, Kei felt defeated. “I just wanted to help. And I thought we could just hang out– the two of us.”

Tiberius groaned, “Kei, I just said I can’t. What don’t you understand about that? How brainless– I know you wanted to help but you’re not.”

It was an accident. Word vomit he didn’t mean to say and didn’t believe, pure annoyance clouding his judgement. Tiberius instantly regretted saying it at the look on Kei’s face.

“If I’m not helping and being so *brainless*, then why am I here?” Kei’s sad expression twisted into anger. “I’ve been here all summer! There hasn’t been a day I haven’t. You’re so– so ungrateful, Tiberius! Never once have you said thank you. Never once have you asked me why I was helping or if I was okay.

“You don’t think it was scary not knowing where you were, walking into that bloody office, or finding out that my prefect partner had apparently been killed by *him*?” She paused and felt a sour taste in their mouth, “But no, Tiberius, only you’re allowed to sulk because your father was hurt and you’re afraid if you’re not with him something bad will happen!”

Her comment hurt and Kei knew it. It hurt her two times over as Tiberius looked both offended and broken but he wasn’t the only one afraid something would happen to Alastor. Kei only said that to get back at him for his remark, she hurt them both. Tibeirus and Kei both stood in the middle of the living room, huffing angrily at what the other had said. Silence was thick and the tension was high as neither of them dared to move or speak. In all their years of being friends, the pair never got into such a heavy argument over something so serious.

The Slytherin spoke first:

“If- If you didn’t want to be here, you didn’t have to come.”

There was a very present uncertainty in his voice. Tiberius didn’t want Kei to go but based on her words, she didn’t seem to want to stay. He stood up a little straighter and flattened out his tone,

“Leave. Take your day off, enjoy the rest of your summer while I take care of *my* family while you go on and take care of yours.” Kei opened her mouth to speak, but Tiberius quickly cut her off, “I don’t care for your empty words, Franklin. Don’t try to apologize if you were going to, I don’t want to hear it. All summer I’ve been worrying. I just– You don’t get it. *I* couldn’t even tell Barty Crouch Jr on Polyjuice apart from Alastor, my bloody dad. I should have– You know, what? Just leave. Let me *sulk in peace*.”

There was nothing that Kei could say to make the situation better.

“Fine, I will leave,” she whispered bitterly.

Tiberius's face contorted at her tone, “enjoy the rest of your *stressless* summer, Franklin. Say ‘hi’ to *your* dad for me.”

Kei gritted her teeth as she turned around to face Tiberius. Their expressions mirrored each other, pure anger.

“*I hate you*,” Kei said untruthfully. Rage backed up her words as she spewed out the venomous phrase. Tiberius’s face broke at her confession but quickly hardened into a stoic expression.

“Okay.”

With a huff, Kei quickly turned around and resisted the urge to hug him in apology. She didn’t mean it and most definitely did not hate her best friend. But instead of reassuring Tiberius, Kei jumped into the fireplace and bellowed out her home address. The large green flames engulfed her as Tiberius’s sad expression disappeared beyond the fire.

“Shut up! ‘M so stupid,” Kei shouted as she wiped her tears, running out of the fireplace. She groaned in frustration, angry at herself for being so childish and at Tiberius for pushing her buttons.

“Fran, I thought you were going to Moody’s. What’re you—?”

“No,” she said, cutting Terence off and stomping up to her room. She didn’t want his questions or concern, she wanted to hide away in her room and be alone, as they thought they

deserved to be. A room so unused, empty without memories of friends or moments; Kei hated being in her own home– well house because it never felt like home.

Kei regretted everything she had said to Tiberius and couldn't think of a way to fix it. She threw the stupid badge on her desk and crawled into bed. Angry tears rolled down her face. All Kei wanted to do was show her best friend the ultimate achievement she had been rewarded: Head Girl. Franklin Higgs, out of the entire seventh year, had been made Head Girl due to her "excellent expression of sportsmanship, unity, and drive."

"Stupid, stupid," she groaned throwing her pillows across the room.

This had caused unwanted attention.

The door to their room slammed open, revealing an angry man in the doorway. Kei's father looked furious. In fear, she quickly wiped her face of any evidence of tears and sat up straight, carefully inching towards the edge of the bed.

"What're you going on about?" he bellowed. "Shouting at Terence, throwing doors and shit in my house! Who do you think you are?"

"I– I'm sorry– I didn't mean—"

"No, you never mean to do anything," he butted in, his fury rising. "Why wouldn't you just be a good girl? Quiet and proper? Instead I'm stuck with a daughter like you: Disruptive and unladylike. Don't think I don't hear you sneaking out at night—"

"It's nothing like that," her eyes widened in fear of what she was accused of. "I promise, I—"

"See how disrespectful you are? Talking out of turn and being rude."

Kei said nothing, afraid to "talk out of turn" again. Every bone in her body wished she had stayed at Tiberius' house and just fought him on wanting to be there instead of letting her own temper get in her way.

"Speak!" Albert Higgs shouted.

"I was crying because I had a horrible fight with Tiberius," Kei blurted out.

He chuckled sourly, "finally got sick of you, huh? Probably if you were respectable—"

"Stop! I am respectable and I'm kind and I have great friends and it might have been my fault we had gotten into a fight, but it was because– because I—"

"If you *ever* raise your voice at me like that again, Franklin Grae," her father shouted, "you can—"

“Dad!” a voice called from down the corridor. “Where is the extra Floo Powder?”

Albert gave Kei a warning glance and turned away from the door, yelling a response to his son as he made his way. Kei took the opportunity and grabbed her school bag, stuffing a week’s worth of clothes, her Head Girl badge, and a bag of Galleons she had saved over the past few years, before running out of her room. Bolting down the stairs, they tried their hardest to keep their footsteps to a minimum.

With a shaky breath, Kei grabbed a handful of Floo Powder from the very full container and bellowed out ‘Moody Household.” Just before the green flames engulfed her, she saw a very angry Higgs running down the steps, shouting something indistinguishable, and the quiet brother she thanked for the quick escape.

All the lights were out when she fell out of the fireplace. There was no sign of Alastor or Tiberius. The welcoming house felt cold and stale, fear bubbled in her chest.

“Tiberius?” she croaked out, a few tears falling.

Silence welcomed her.

“Alastor?” she tried again.

She let out a sob and ran through the house, not knowing where to look. Every room was quiet and empty. It had to be well past dinnertime. Kei had been holed up in their room for a few hours. She panicked at the idea of her father following her to the house, knowing very well he knew where’d she run away to.

Sending out a little prayer, Kei hoped that Alastor’s house was connected to the Floo Network Grimmauld Place was on. Instead of her usual excitement of travelling via Floo, Kei’s heart raced as she threw the ashes into the lightly burning fireplace.

Kei cleared her throat and focused on the house, “Twelve, Grimmauld Place.”

Green flames engulfed her once more and the dim entrance room disappeared as the dark and dusted sitting room of Grimmauld Place appeared.

“Who was that?” a voice called from the kitchen.

“We’ll check,” two voices chorused.

Fred and George quickly ran out of the kitchen with their wands raised, only to put them down at the sight of Kei’s broken state.

“Kei?” asked George.

“W-Where is– Where’s Tib? H-Have you seen him?” she sputtered. “I checked his

h-house and Alastor isn't t-there and Tib—"

Fred advanced at her, pulling her into a hug, rubbing her back, "he came here about two hours ago, yelling about Mad-Eye. He sent Tiberius to our room."

"He's here?" breathed Kei.

"Yeah," George's smile could be seen once Fred pulled away. "You know where our room is."

Kei nodded and ran up the steps, straight to the room she usually hid in with the twins and Tiberius. Throwing the door open, they saw Tiberius sprawled out across one of the beds, twirling his wand in one hand while reading a Charms book in the other. At the sound of the door slamming, Kei and Tiberus both jumped.

"Kei, what're you— What's wrong?" he changed his question at the sight of his best friend. He instantly stood up and slammed her into his chest in a tight embrace. "What happened? Why do you have your bag?"

"I'm so sorry," she cried, gasping for air.

It wasn't only the fact that she had hurt Tiberius with her words, but the words her own father had said to her, the way she ran away from her home for good, and the feeling of finally being at peace with her best friend.

TIberius shushed her, rubbing her back. He'd never seen her cry that hard in her life. He had no idea what had happened after she left, but knew that it had to be something horrible.

"Don't cry, Frankie. It's okay, I'm here now," he reassured her.

It had taken quite some time for Kei to calm down. In that time, Tiberius noticed her school bag and how full it was— of clothes, a jangling drawstring bag, and a large yellow badge. Connecting the dots, he came to the worst conclusion that the joke of a father she had had kicked her out of her home.

"Can you talk now?" Tiberius asked carefully.

Kei nodded but said nothing.

Tiberius frowned, "I promise I'll listen. I'm sorry for blowing up early. I didn't—" Kei shook their head, causing him to stop.

"I'm sorry," they finally said. "I didn't think my words t-through and I don't hate you. I could never hate you."

"I know, Frankie," he sighed. "And I know you just wanted to help me. I know I've been

selfish and ungrateful, as you've said. I haven't said thank you for your help this summer, nor taken any time to hang out with you or visit Gerald. I appreciate you. I really do."

Kei simply nodded.

"Is that why you're crying?"

She sniffled and shook her head.

"Can you tell me why?"

Taking a laboured breath, Kei began to tell Tiberius what happened from the moment she left his house up until she barged into the room. He was furious when his best friend told him what her father had said.

"You're more than what your father's made you out to be, Frankie," Tiberius gave them a small smile. "You've even made Head Girl."

Kei looked up at him with furrowed brows, "how do you know that?"

"I saw the badge in your bag," he shrugged. "It's bigger than your Prefect badge."

She nodded once more.

"*I'm proud of you, Frankie*."

Tiberius nearly leapt for joy at the sight of Kei's genuine smile.

"Thank you," they whispered.

The Slytherin wracked his brain for something to do that would lift Kei's spirits and came up with a plan:

"I heard the Weasley twins talking about some kind of device to help them listen in on Order meetings. Reckon they've heard something. Even if the meeting's over, we can probably scavenge the kitchens for some sweets and muggle foods. Arthur's quite the muggle lover, I bet he's got loads."

Kei let out a small laugh and sniffled once more before standing up. Tiberius followed suit and grabbed Kei's hand, signalling them to follow him quietly. The best friends were back and Kei was finally starting to feel okay.

21. Ministry Infiltration

Obtaining the items on the books list was harder than intended. The couple of Galleons Kei had saved was *just* enough for their inventory, but finding a new trunk for their final year at Hogwarts was harder. Her owl to Terence had gotten intercepted by Albert Higgs and sent back

with a very colourfully worded letter in return. Sirius Black heard of the situation and lent the Hufflepuff his old school trunk, allowing her to add the monogram of her own name where his previously was.

Despite the small problem, Kei was over the moon about beginning seventh year— especially as Head Girl. Tiberius was meant to wait in a compartment for her, but ended up sitting in the Prefect compartment as Kei gave her spiel to the new fifth year prefects.

She was quite upset with the tension that went on in the Prefect Carriage as the students came in— particularly between the Gryffindors and Slytherins. The Slytherin Prefects, Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson, glared harshly at Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, the Gryffindor Prefects. Kei wasn't having it. *Nothing* was going to ruin her seventh year.

"If there's a problem," she addressed the four of them, "I will happily report to Dumbledore that the Head of House's choices for this year's prefects seem to not possess the qualities needed for good leadership and are bad examples. Is that actually the case here?"

All of the prefects stared at Kei with wide eyes, not knowing what the meaning behind their comment was. All eight prefects shook their heads despite her threat being towards the feuding four. Tiberius hid his smile.

"Perfect," she smiled widely and turned to Asa Fortescue, the Head Boy, "Shall we begin?"

Asa gave Kei a shy smile and cleared his throat, "we're meant to go over the duties of being Prefects, what is expected of today and the next three years, and what privileges you're welcomed to with your new roles. It shouldn't take longer than ten minutes and then you're free to be Prefects."

Kei looked over at the Ravenclaw and waited for him to continue, but that was all he had said.

"Oh– Well, yes. As Asa had mentioned: Your duties. Being Prefects is a *reward* for perfectly upholding the qualities expected of you as students. As it is a reward, it can be and will be taken from you if you deem yourself unworthy and above others purely because you hold a shiny plaque to your chests," they raised a brow at the students.

The poor fifth years looked terrified of the Head Girl, taking in her words with comprehension and absoluteness. Kei internally smiled, proud to be getting through to them.

She continued, "you all know the rules of Hogwarts, being fifth years. Along with the

usual rules, your duties include patrolling the hallways to ensure safety, taking note of good and bad behavior of your house and others, and reporting any suspicious behavior and delinquency to either me, Asa, or your Head of House. Today, your job is to patrol the train carts for the first two hours of the ride to Hogwarts and help direct students towards the carriages once the train reaches Hogsmeade Station. Then, later tonight, after the start-of-term feast, you are to show the first years, who belong to your house, where your common room is located and tell them the password to enter."

"Although the work may seem tedious or overbearing, being a Prefect does come with it's perks," smiled Asa, trying to lighten the serious tension Kei had created. "Since you are to take note of your fellow students and be wary of the things that happen inside and outside of your houses, the lot of you have been given the ability to deduct and add points from other houses and your own. On top of giving and taking points, you may also write up detention slips *but* they have to get approved by your Heads. Though you are not allowed to take points from or issue detentions to other Prefects, you are allowed to report them."

At his comment, the Slytherins and Gryffindors glanced at one another with mischief written all over their faces. Kei rolled her eyes at their childishness.

"And lastly, Prefects, obviously, have access to the Prefect bathroom on the fifth floor—left wing, fourth door," he added.

"Now," Kei clapped her hands, "Gryffindor and Ravenclaw Prefects are meant to report to me—"

"And Slytherin and Hufflepuff report to me," Asa finished.

"Each week, there is a report that needs to be written up about all of the misconducts noted and an estimation of how many points were taken or given," explained Kei. "If we do not receive the reports by the end of each week, you will be given a demerit. After three demerits, you lose your Prefect title. Understood?"

The Prefects nodded.

Asa took out the list of Prefects and called out the Slytherin and Hufflepuff's names before handing it to Kei, who did the same but for the house's she was assigned to. After assigning each set of Prefects to patrol two carriages, Kei nearly dismissed them before she remembered the last assignment.

"Oh," they gasped, "before I forget, you are meant to meet back here before getting off

the train to get your common room passwords. Prefects make them two times a term, just so you know.”

"Any questions?" the Head Boy added after silence. When no one spoke, he dismissed them for their duties.

“Nice one, Frankie,” said Tiberius sarcastically. Asa laughed as Kei glared at the two boys,

“I can't stand you both.”

As Tiberius stepped off the carriage, Kei decided to jump off, nearly toppling over him. Her excitement ran high as they were proud to have been appointed Head Girl and successfully given the introductory meeting. Franklin Higgs was the first Hufflepuff Head Girl in nearly a decade as it seemed that only Gryffindors and Ravenclaws were given the title.

The first few carriages had been emptied at the door allowing the flood of students into the castle in front of them.

“If you don’t slow down, you’re going to slip and fall,” Tiberius warned.

“And you’ll be there to break my fall, Reese’s,” grinned Kei.

He rolled his eyes and continued the walk through the stairs and into the Great Hall. Instantly, he stopped causing Kei to slam straight into him. She muttered a few words under her breath and slightly shoved Tiberius.

“Franklin,” he spoke, pointing towards the teacher’s table.

Following his finger, their eyes saw what caused him to stop. Sitting in the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor’s chair was the Head of Improper Use of Magic and Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, Dolores Umbridge– their least favourite ministry member.

“Oh no,” Kei breathed.

“I know,” tsked Tiberius.

Kei groaned and stomped her foot.

“What if we leave?” the Slytherin suddenly said.

“Tib, we can’t leave.”

“We’re seventeen– well, I’m nearly seventeen. You’ve barely been sixteen for four months, but what if *I* leave?” he mused.

Kei turned and glared at him, “you can’t leave–” Tiberius opened his mouth to protest–

“and you’re not leaving me!”

Tiberius tried to hide the forming smirk on his face, “well. . . it’s not my fault you’re not an adult—”

“WE’RE STILL IN SCHOOL,” Kei shouted in a whisper.

“So?”

“You can’t leave,” said Kei finitively.

She narrowed her eyes, challenging him as she tapped the large golden plaque on her chest. Kei’s eyes lit up as Tiberius sighed in defeat. He very well knew he couldn’t leave, more or less be allowed to, but had hoped they would have humoured him.

They didn’t.

22. Defence Against the Dark Arts

With the debacle of last year’s Defence Professor, Kei and Tiberius were wary of going to the lesson. They knew the kind of person Undersecretary Umbridge was, they didn’t want to think about how the awful woman was going to teach.

“That’s the woman Moody threw up on, right?” Gina asked Kei softly.

She nodded, maneuvering through the corridors with she, Tiberius, and Vic, “granted it was a few years ago, she hasn’t changed.”

“Is she really that awful?”

“*Yes*,” Tiberius and Kei said together.

The twins blankly looked at one another, having their own twin telepathy conversation.

“Let’s not be late then,” Vic grumbled, not so excited about the lesson.

When they entered the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom they found Professor Umbridge already seated at the teacher’s desk, wearing the fluffy pink cardigan of the night before and the black velvet bow on top of her head. Vic sniggered, Gina elbowed him and followed Kei and Tiberius towards the middle of the room. Per usual, the two best friends sat at a table together with the twins finding themselves in the one behind the pair.

The *torment* of class had to be Umbridge’s childlike instruction towards the seventh years. There were only so many “Good morning, children” and snide remarks on mannerisms Kei would take before she wanted to bang her head against the desk. Roll call was the best part of the entire lesson:

“When I call your name,” Professor Umbridge began sweetly, “you raise your hand and call out a well heard ‘Present’ in return. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” she had instructed them to respond in unison.

There were a few names she smiled at and other’s she kept a stoic look. It seemed as though she had a reason to dislike Gryffindors as she upturned her nose when Atticus Montague was present.

“Miss Franklin Higgs?”

“Present,” Kei called out.

Umbridge looked up from her clipboard with a wide smile. Her eyes found the Head Girl pin on Kei’s chest and, Kei swore, the professor was going to jump with joy. Tiberius’ name followed Vic’s and, once again, Umbridge seemed pleased that he was in her class.

Unlike how Kei thought, Umbridge didn’t address the pair any more than her overzealous demeanour. But the first lessons dragged on and it *dragged*. Professor Umbridge believed that the students shouldn’t be allowed to use their wands in the class as there was no reason to put themselves in danger.

“Spells gone wrong,” she reasoned.

Kei restrained an eyeroll and covered her disdain by rubbing sleep off her face. Ninety minutes of sitting in quiet, rereading a summary of last year’s assignments and teachings only to conclude that the first month will be a refresher course. A four foot assignment was due by next lesson, wands were meant to be out of sight, and hands raised if questions needed to be asked.

Six minutes after the lesson was supposed to end, Dolores Umbridge finally dismissed the class. Nearly everyone bolted out of the room, except for Tiberius and Kei, who were asked to stay back. Restraining a groan, Kei plastered a smile on their face as they pushed the books into their bag.

“Have we done something wrong, Professor?” Tiberius asked sweetly. Kei coughed as she covered a bubble of laughter. His condescending niceties seemed to have gone over the professor's head as she beamed at the properness.

“Of course not, Mr. Moody,” she sighed happily. “Miss. Higgs. I’m so glad you two are in this class. Such respectable students! Head Girl, too— I’m sure your father is pleased with your success.”

Kei's smile faltered slightly before nodding stiffly, "he is most pleased. Since my brother got on the Quidditch Team second year, my success in getting Head Girl was the best news he had gotten since then."

"And you?" Umbridge addressed Tiberius, "sad to see Headmaster Dumbledore didn't appoint you Head Boy. I'm sure your father could have said something."

Maybe he didn't miss Tib's condescension, Kei thought to themselves at Umbridge's slight jibe.

"I would rather focus on my studies than be incharge of fourteen students," TIberius shrugged nonchalantly.

"Very well," she classed her hands. "I just wanted to personally welcome you both into my class and your final year. I expect greatness from you both."

With that, the pair chorused a thank you and quickly left the classroom. They waited until leaving the wing before finally relaxing.

"Isn't she just lovely, Mr Moody," Kei rolled their eyes.

Tiberius let out a laugh and bumped Kei, "hopefully she's not as bad as the dunce from third year."

"Oh Merlin, the professor with that horrible stutter?" she gasped. "I don't think he was too bad—"

"Right, no. The worst was fourth year, the famous author," he groaned.

"Says you!" Kei laughed as she climbed up the steps. "You were *obsessed* with him. Between his adventures and easy assignments, you were enamoured!"

"I was not," Tiberius shot back, earning an eye roll from Kei.

The pair continued to argue about their preference of professors before making it to History of Magic where Gina and Vic were waiting for them. They looked as though they were having their own argument. When Gina noticed the pair, she hit Vic's arm and pushed something into his bag. Vic flung his bag over his shoulder before plastering a small smile onto his face.

"Everything all right?" Kei asked.

"Of course," smiled Gina. "Ready to be bored to death?"

"Don't remind me," Vic groaned.

Tiberius rolled his eyes and walked into the classroom before the other three.

"Who spit in his breakfast?" mumbled Gina as she sat next to Kei.

Kei glanced over to Tiberius and responded to Gina, “Dolores Umbridge.”

23. Lovers

The entire school was on edge; between all of Harry Potter’s outbursts about Death Eaters over the last month and the new High Inquisitor Umbridge’s reign of terror, Hogwarts seemed less and less like home and more like Azkaban. Defence lessons began to be a bore as Professor Umbridge had better enforced a ‘No Wands’ rule in her lessons– not even defence practicals. But Kei, being the gossiping witch they were, heard a rumour about a secret meeting during the weekend’s Hogsmeade trip. And it involved Harry Potter, of course.

“Hermione Granger,” Kei called out after the fifth year. Hermione stopped and slowly spun around. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you.”

“To me?” her eyebrows furrowed. The confusing act didn’t fool Kei; she very well knew Hermione was a bright witch and one of Gryffindor’ Prefects assigned to her.

“Yes, you,” Kei smiled warmly. “I’ve heard something and I wanted to confirm with you whether it’s true or not.” Hermione’s eyes slightly widened with fear and Kei knew their speculations were right. “An outing. Butterbeer, gossip, studying? All the works, yeah?”

“Yeah,” she said slowly. “Um, the works.”

“A huge study group,” Kei nodded. *For a bright witch, she sure is slow*, they thought.

“Oh,” Hermione breathed. “Yes, the– the study group. Are you going to come?”

“I’d like to hear what it’s about. See if it’s worth the time.”

“All right, well you know where—”

“And is anyone allowed to attend?” asked Kei. Hermione nodded. “Slytherins included?”

“You’re not a Slyth—”

“Yes, but Tiberius is and I’m not going to waste my time if my best friend won’t be welcomed purely due to some stupid house animos—”

“Tiberius Moody?” Hermione confirmed. Kei nodded. The Gryffindor smiled, “of course he can. Yes, yes.”

Kei cocked her head and loudly stated, “and make sure you log your rounds correctly so you don’t get marked a demerit.”

Hermione quickly understood Kei and agreed, waving a quick goodbye as she left. She rolled her eyes and went on her way to find Tiberius. Having just left Arithmancy, Tiberius was

down one of the corridors, leaving his Alchemy lesson. But instead of finding Tiberius, Kei found Silas. She hadn't seen much of the younger Slytherin over the past month.

"Silas!"

He flinched at her loud tone and tried to place a smile on his face, "hi, Kei."

"You all right?" she frowned.

"I'm fine. Just tired," he shrugged.

"You sure?"

Kei didn't believe him one bit. The quiet happy boy they had gotten to know over the last two years was just a shell of sadness. Kei never minded the quiet nature he held, but the sadness was new. She worried she wasn't the only one with a tough summer, her frown deepened.

"Yes, Kei. I said I'm fine," they dismissed her. "I have class, I've got to go."

"See you. . . around," Kei faltered as Silas was already out of sight and scurried down the corridor.

That weekend, Kei planned to drag Tiberius away from Three Broomsticks where he was with Vic. Within the last month, he seemed to have acquainted himself with Vic more. There were less arguments and more hushed conversations with quiet laughter between the two Slytherins. But in turn, it gave Kei more time to hang out with Gina.

The two girls were seen to be practically inseparable. Though Kei restrained from taking points away from Slytherin for the mischief Gina caused, she greatly enjoyed her time with the girl. It was harder and harder for Kei to not fall for her best friend– all of the quiet moments and bubbly feelings made it impossible. It wasn't a noticeable change unless someone were to be watching the two girls intently, but it was enough change for Kei to struggle with controlling their word vomit of affection.

"Kei–?" Tiberius blurted as she walked up to the pair.

"Awe, cute little date," she teased. The boys instantly tensed. "I'm only joking. Vic, I hate to pull your lover away, but I need his help."

Before Tiberius could respond, Vic spoke, "you can't do it without him?"

"Not entirely," said Kei shyly. "I promise to bring him back. Give me about thirty minutes. I promise!"

Vic rolled his eyes and waved his hand, dismissing the pair. Kei grabbed Tiberius' arm and shot Vic a wink before running out of the pub.

“Care to explain?”

“Explain what?” asked Tiberius.

She laughed, “your little not-date date!”

“We were hanging out.”

Kei rolled their eyes and pulled Tiberius towards the Hog’s Head Inn where Hermione’s meeting was being held. Arriving just before the meeting time, the entire Inn was filled with students who were all patiently waiting for it to begin. Hermione stood up once she noticed everyone was present and the slight chatter calmed down. The Gryffindor spoke in a small voice as though she was afraid to mess up, only to get cut off by one of the Ravenclaws.

Her nose twitched and she took a steady breath, "but I want more than that, I want to be properly trained in Defense because. . . because. . . because Lord Voldemort's back."

Kei’s eyes widened as she looked over to Tiberius who raised a brow at the daring fifth year. There were more jarring responses, some spilled their drinks and others nearly fell out of their chairs, but almost every single student stared at Harry, who sat quietly next to his friends.

But by the end of the meeting, Harry had managed to gain the trust of the group– even some of the more sceptical students, like Zacharias Smith. Ernie Macmillan, one of the Hufflepuff Prefects, had grown wary about signing his name on the member’s list.

"You just said this group was the most important thing you'd do this year," Hermione told him. "Mind you, Ron and I are also prefects. Franklin Higgs—” She motioned over to where Kei and Tiberius stood– “is here and she’s Head Girl. There's no argument: Either you're in or out."

The line of students all signed their name on the spread-out parchment, Kei and Tiberius following suit, only for Harry to stop the pair before they could leave.

“Uh, Tiberius,” he called. He and Kei stopped at the door. “Can I ask you something?”

“I suppose,” said Tiberius.

Kei looked from the trio to her friend, “uh, I’ll meet you over at Zonko’s.”

Tiberius leaned against the wall near the door while Kei left the Inn. Walking around the High Street of Hogsmeade, she glanced into the shops towards Zonko’s. She noticed a particular head of brown hair accompanied by a tall boy. Her eyes narrowed into the windows of Flourish and Blotts. Gina Lestrange stood next to Jaqen Carrow, laughing at whatever idiotic thing he had said. Kei felt odd watching the pair but couldn’t seem to look away.

Jaqen bent down to whisper something into Gina’s ear and she pulled back, covering her

mouth to stifle her laughter. Shaking her head, Kei looked away from the show and continued her trek to the joke shop. She hadn't noticed the boy coming towards her and collided with him instantly.

"Whoa there, Kiwi," he steadied the girl.

"Sorry, Nev," she muttered looking up at Neville Longbottom.

He frowned at her, "are you okay?"

"Yeah, just a lot on my mind," Kei thought of the encounter she witnessed through the windows.

"Harry's defence club, yeah? It seems pretty well thought out. Not much could go wrong," he assumed and added, "well, as long as we don't get caught."

"I'm sure with Harry's experience, he'll come up with a way for us to not get into trouble," she nodded.

Neville tsked and sighed, "hey, are you busy?"

"Mm, not really. Why?"

"Well I'm on my way to meet up with Silas," he smiled dreamily. "You can come hang out with us. I'm pretty sure we're just going to get a few supplies, stock up on Honeydukes' sweets, and—"

"I'd rather not," Kei smiled sadly. "I don't want to intrude."

"But—"

"It's all right, Nevvy. I'm on my way to meet Tib at Zonko's anyways." She placed a hand on his arm, "I'll see you around. Tell Sil I said 'hi,' all right?"

With that, Kei left Neville to continue her walk to Zonko's. But with her sudden mood change, the joke shop didn't seem like such a good idea. Instead, Kei made a B-line towards the quill shop.

Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop wasn't very busy allowing the Hufflepuff to browse the shelves for whichever quills they wanted to purchase. Terence, though as helpful as he wanted to be, had sent Kei nearly seventy Galleons for the rest of the year but with a note that said she wasn't allowed to contact him anymore in fear of their father finding out. And just like that Franklin Higgs was cut off from her blood family and practically disowned.

Adding up the price of the quills she wanted, Kei tried her hardest to salvage her gold the best she could. She hadn't even noticed the new presence watching her until she dropped the

swan feather quill. A person bent over and picked up the quill, handing it to Kei.

"Oh," Kei gasped.

"What a coincidence to find you here, Sunflower," Gina smiled.

"Coincidence my ass," she laughed. "Were you *watching* me, Georgina Lestrange?"

"If I were watching you, I think I'd do a better job to stay hidden, don't you think?"

Kei rolled her eyes and collected the four quills she had chosen. Gina simply followed her around the shop and to the till. Once Scrivenshaft gave Kei the remaining gold and her purchased quills, Gina walked out of the shop with her.

"Hang out with me."

"And if I were busy?" Kei teased.

"I can always just accompany you on your shopping splurge," shrugged Gina.

"I'm not splurging! I'm buying my necessities!"

Gina rolled her eyes and waited for a response from Kei.

"C'mon, I was on my way to Zonko's. I reckon Tiberius will be here waiting for me to take him back to Vic."

The two girls walked through Hogsmeade towards the huge joke shop at the top of the street. Students littered the streets, going in and out of different shops holding parcels of their buys. Kei wanted to ask Gina why she wasn't hanging out with Jaqen anymore but felt there'd be no good way of explaining how she knew they were together without exposing her awkward watching.

Gina pulled open the door of Zonko's, allowing Kei to walk in. With a quick scan of the shop, they saw no sign of Tiberius. She made a mental note to check Hogshead or Three Broomsticks for her friend.

"Anything in particular you want?" the Slytherin asked.

"Not in particular, but I like this store. It's different from the other ones in Hogsmeade. It's so fun in here, don't you think?" Kei turned to look at Gina.

She smiled, "yeah, it's nice. Things in here are good for pranks."

Kei shot Gina a warning look, the Head girl badge she wore shining in the candlelight.

"I'm joking!" Gina laughed and mumbled, "I don't need pranks to cause destruction."

"*Gina*!" Kei shouted.

This caused the girl to laugh louder. People around them quickly glanced over to see the

cause of the laughter. Kei flushed and grabbed Gina, pulling her away from the entrance and into one of the aisles.

"Dungbombs," read Gina.

"We're *not* buying Dungbombs, Gingee," Kei narrowed their eyes on her.

"When'd you get so boring, Higgs?"

"When did you get so destructive, Lestrange?"

"I've always been destructive," Gina smirked. "I reckon that means you've always been boring."

Kei gasped, "I'm not boring! You take that back."

"Oh, really? Prove it. Prove you're not boring, Miss Head Girl Star Student," she teased.

Gina smirked, thinking she finally got the Head Girl to break her own rules. She didn't. Kei smiled and leaned forward, pressing her lips to Gina's. It was a quick kiss as Kei hadn't even fully processed what had happened until she pulled away. Kei was so set on proving herself to Gina, she didn't even think about what she was going until it was done. Being impulsive wasn't boring. And Franklin Higgs had decided to impulsively kiss her crush of nearly three years.

Between proving Gina wrong and the wild feelings they held in their heart, Kei decided to do the unthinkable.

Both girls stood in shocked silence: Kei was as straight as a board, glued to her spot with her heart soaring; Gina's eyes were wide in shock, her fingers pressed to her lips, trying to figure out if that had actually happened or not. The sounds of laughter and talking was muted as the girls stared at one another.

"Gina, I–" Kei cut herself off as she had no words.

Gina hummed, "I guess you aren't boring."

Kei let out a bubble of laughter as her heart crumbled at the idea of messing up their friendship. She hadn't meant to kiss her best friend. She hadn't meant for her crush to be known to anyone besides the ghost back home.

"I– I've got to go find Tiberius," she blurted. Before Gina could respond, Kei added, "I'll see you at dinner or something. Bye, Gina."

The Hufflepuff nearly ran out of Zonko's and back towards the Hogshead Inn where she hoped Tiberius would be. A thousand things ran through her mind, the number one question was 'What now?'. *What the fuck, Franklin*, she cussed to herself.

Tiberius was walking out of the Inn when Kei finally saw him. He looked pleased and slightly confused. When he took note of Kei's wild presence, his confusion doubled.

"What—?"

"Let's go," Kei cut him off. "Back to Three Broomsticks or whatever. Just out of sight of Zonko's, okay?"

"Frankie, what happened?" Tiberius forced Kei to stop walking, placing his hands on her shoulder.

Kei placed her head in her hands, full of confusion and shame, "I can't believe I kissed Gina. *Tiberius, I kissed Gina*. I can't believe I fucking did that!"

Tiberius dropped his hands and scoffed, "I bloody can."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kei scoffed, lifting their head out of their hands.

He smiled, "no one is as oblivious as you and Georgina are. I can tell you like her."

"Shut up," she gasped softly. "No– It's not obvious! I don't– We– Shut up."

Tiberius let out a laugh and looped his arm with her's, "c'mon, I'll get you a butterbeer and you can tell me what happened."

The two walked towards Three Broomsticks in silence. Kei replayed the incident over and over again trying to figure out how Gina felt about the entire situation. Tiberius was smirking to himself, thinking about how Kei finally did something about her crush on his soulmate's sister.

"Wait," Kei stopped just outside of the pub as she saw Vic at a table by himself. "If Vic is here, Gina is probably going to come find her brother. Tiberius, I can't go in there! Gina's going to arrive and I'm not ready to face her again. I- I ran away! I can't– No, I'll meet you in the library later tonight, but I can't—"

"Frankie, it's fine," Tiberius smiled softly. "You don't have to come in. I'll bring you back a butterbeer or we'll go to the kitchens for some hot chocolate, okay?"

"Yeah, okay, that's good," Kei sighed in relief. "I'll see you later."

"I'll see you then," he said, planting a kiss on her head. "Don't worry too much about the kiss. I'm sure she likes you just as much as you like her. Just don't hide away from her or any of us. It'll do no one any good and you'll just be wallowing for nothing when you don't even know if anything is wrong. It'll be okay. Trust me."

Kei gave Tiberius a small smile and unraveled her arm from his. She watched Tiberius

walk into the pub and sit across from Vic once more. They gave each other a smile and began to talk to one another. Vic smiled widely and took a sip of his butterbeer. Kei sighed in relief and turned away from Three Broomsticks, making her way back to the castle with another thousand thoughts in her head.

24. Dumbledore's Army

Kei took their position as Head Girl *very* seriously, to the point of coming off as annoying but it worked. She scheduled rounds perfectly for the first meeting of Harry's defence lessons and no one suspected a thing. Just in time, Tiberius passed the knight statue on the third floor where he promised to meet Kei to go to the secret meeting room together. The pair finally managed to get into the room only to be surprised at how large and prepared the room was.

"I think that's the last of you," a voice came from the front. Kei looked over to see Harry nervously rocking on his heels at the front of the room.

The pair took their seats and waited for instruction. The nervous fifth year conducted the lesson in a respectable manner starting it off with Expelliarmus– Tiberius approved.

Kei very much approved of disarming Tiberius time after time, teasing and mocking him for the two-hour-long lesson. Obviously, he disarmed Kei with great pleasure and success for they were equally matched. A lighthearted lesson, easy and controlled.

"I'd say I'm letting you disarm me, but we both know that's not true," laughed Kei.

"Frankie, don't beat yourself up over it," Tiberius said. "It's only practice."

She rolled her eyes as she walked the corridors with Tiberius. It was just before curfew. Kei had enough time to walk with Tiberius to his common room and make it to Hufflepuff before she'd get into trouble.

"You've been quiet the last two weeks," Tiberius noted.

"I'm not quiet," scoffed Kei.

"I meant about what had happened at Hogsmeade. You and Georgina."

Kei slightly slowed her steps as she thought of something to say to Tiberius. He wasn't wrong, she had been quiet about the kiss since she left him at Three Broomsticks with Vic. And anytime she and Gina were together with their friends, they only spoke to each other about whatever assignment was at hand. Neither of them spoke of the kiss, more or less their feelings.

"I mean– There's not much to say," she shrugged. "Gina and I are fine. Everything's

normal and we still hang out. I see no reason to—"

"Don't do that," he sighed. "You should talk to her about it."

"No," Kei said stubbornly. "We're fine. And that's final."

Tiberius turned to look at Kei, who looked straight ahead, and raised a brow at her stubbornness. He knew there was no way to get through to her. Their stubborn nature was the reason why he was wary about telling them a development in his life. Tiberius glanced down to his sleeved arm and nodded to himself.

"I think I can handle the walk back to Slytherin," he said. "No need to go out of your way just to double back to go to 'Puff."

Kei snapped her head up and looked at him.

"Goodnight, Kei."

She frowned slightly and stopped walking, allowing a distance to grow between them. Kei grew afraid that her short answer about Gina had upset him. They wrinkled their nose and scoffed under their breath. *How I decide to deal with my friendship shouldn't upset him*, she thought. Turning on her heel, Kei went back the way she had come and left to go to her own house.

By that Saturday, the pair were perfectly fine. It was the day of the first Quidditch match of the season: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. Comically, the Hufflepuff dressed up in green, having stolen a Slytherin jumper from Tiberius, in means of supporting her friends' house. Walking through the Hufflepuff common room was an experience as most of her housemates supported Gryffindor.

After lunch, Kei met up with Tiberius, Gina, and Vic to find a spot together for the Quidditch match. Tiberius tried to warn Kei about some crown-shaped pins that were floating around the castle, but they paid no mind until they saw the pins themselves.

"I don't get it," frowned Kei.

"I don't think they're meant to be taken in a positive light," Vic muttered.

With that, Kei picked up the box of pins and officially confiscated them, taking ten points off from the Slytherin who was handing them out. Vic glared at his friend and mumbled something about regretting telling her under his breath. Having heard him, Kei stuck her tongue out at Vic, earning a laugh from their friends.

"Let's just get some good seats," Tiberius rolled his eyes.

Gina and Kei led the way, Tiberius and Vic tailing them as they made their way up the quidditch stand. The way they stood, Kei was sandwiched in between Gina and Tiberius, leaving Vic to stand next to Tiberius. Their little feud seemed to have fizzled out and the pair were now *actually* civil with one another.

"Who do you think'll win?" Gina said in Kei's ear as everyone in the stands spoke to one another.

Kei felt a chill go through her body, causing her to pull her sleeves down. She turned to look at Gina, who was extremely close to her. Her eyes flickered from Gina's lips to her eyes, "er– I'm hoping Slytherin, but I reckon Gryffindor'll win."

Gina smirked at Kei, a hot flush rising to her cheeks.

"Obviously I'm. . . I'm supporting Slytherin," Kei mumbled.

"Yeah," Gina said, turning away from Kei, "I'm pulling for them, too."

Kei glanced over to Tiberius for help but he was too engrossed in his conversation with Vic to notice his best friend's fluster. Soon, the doors of the Quidditch pitch opened and out flew both teams. Cheers erupted all around the stands, most of them cheering for Slytherin. Madam Hooch placed her whistle in her mouth and blew. The balls were released out of the Quidditch box and the fourteen players shot upward.

The game was horrible. Being the first one in over a year, one would suspect there'd be a better show of sportsmanship, but instead there was a horrible song going about Ron Weasley, the Gryffindor Keeper. Slytherin had gotten forty points before Harry caught the Snitch, a win for Gryffindor.

Half of the crowd cheered while the other half booed.

"And to think—" Tiberius' comment was cut off as the four of them leaned over the banister to witness a fight between the two teams, specifically Harry, the Weasleys, and Draco.

"I knew he'd be a problem," grumbled Kei.

All of the students were dismissed from the stands and told to go to their houses. Kei suspected the only reason they were told to report to their common rooms was due to the fact they didn't want to create any more problems and suspicions about the fight. But once everyone was cleared to leave to the Great Hall, Kei made a B-line to Slytherin. It wasn't often that Kei entered other houses, as it was frowned upon, but she needed to see Gina.

Kei had been thinking about what Tiberius had told her and knew he wasn't wrong. They

needed to talk. Knocking on the seventh year girl's dorm door, she patiently waited for Gina to answer.

"Hey, Sunflower," she smiled. "This is unexpected."

Kei peered into the room to see it was empty. They were alone.

"You all right?" Gina asked at the Hufflepuff's silence.

"I just– Yes, but I have a few questions to ask you," they breathed.

Gina opened the door wider, inviting Kei in. She walked over to Gina's bed and took off her shoes, sitting cross legged. Gina followed and sprawled out onto her bed.

"Talk to me," said Gina.

"Do you like me?" Kei blurted.

There was a beat of silence before Kei's face began to burn with embarrassment. She had a plan, but ultimately messed up the plan with her impulsiveness. Gina made her nervous, the entire situation made her nervous, and Kei just wanted to figure out where they stood with each other.

"Of course I like—"

"No," she butted in, "not the friend like. I meant– Like do you. . .*like* me?"

Gina slowly sat up and looked at Kei. She could feel the nervousness radiating off of the Hufflepuff.

"Do I like you?" Gina repeated, tilting her head with a goofy smile, "well, I liked when you kissed me."

Kei wanted to melt right then and there, for the floor to open up and swallow her whole. Their entire face grew hotter than it had been before and Gina laughed softly.

"Well– I mean that answers my next question– It wasn't a question but more of a statement," Kei stumbled with her words. "I didn't mean to kiss you– It was just like an. . . accident."

Gina shook her head, "don't apologize. It wasn't bad, just took me by surprise."

Kei groaned in response.

"Stop it, Sunflower, it's okay. If it were *bad*, then I'd allow you to apologize."

At this, Kei threw themselves back on Gina's bed and groaned into their hands.

"What's your next question for this interrogation?"

She sighed, "are we okay? Like I didn't mess up our friendship? We're still friends,

right?"

"Friends?" repeated Gina. "Er, yeah, I suppose so."

Slowly, Kei sat up and frowned at Gina. She didn't know what else to say and wanted to run away, quite frankly. She and Gina were all right, they were still friends. Kei still didn't know if Gina *actually* liked her the way they did, but took her acceptance of their kiss as a positive sign.

"Sunflower, nothing could ever come between us," Gina randomly said. Kei gave her a sad smile and sighed, "I know, Jellybean."

"Now, if you are ever awkward with me again, I will not hesitate to hex you!"

"Merlin, Gina," Kei groaned.

There was one more thing Kei wanted to do before leaving the Slytherin dorms altogether. Saying goodbye to Gina, the Hufflepuff made their way through the dorms towards the boys' dorms in hopes of catching Tiberius.

"YOU GUYS BETTER NOT BE DOING ANY WEIRD SHIT IN THERE, I'M COMING IN," Kei shouted before entering the dorm.

Only Vic and Tiberius were in the dorm and they were laying on their own beds, next to each other, but completely out of breath. *Thank Merlin I gave them a warning*, Kei shuttered.

"Padawan," Vic shouted as Tiberius said, "Frankie!"

"Hello boys. . ." she answered and looked directly at Tiberius, "I did the thing."

"The thing?" Vic asked.

"What'd she say?" Tiberius said, ignoring Vic.

Kei tilted their head, "she didn't exactly say no."

"Who didn't?" tried Vic.

"So what's the plan?"

"Well," said Kei, "there isn't exactly a plan but we're still—"

"STOP IGNORING ME," Vic suddenly shouted. "I want to know."

Tiberius looked at Kei, waiting for her answer, but she simply shook her head no. Although things were right with Gina, they weren't ready to tell her brother that they kissed her.

"You'll find out soon, Vic," Tiberius told him.

Kei raised her brow at him and cleared her throat slightly, "I need to talk to Tiberius in private so. . . Vic, I'm either kicking you out or taking Tib away. You choose."

Vic began to mumble something under his breath and slipped on his shoes, leaving his dorm for Tiberius and Kei to talk. Kei took the moment to jump onto Tiberius' bed and groan in a sigh of relief.

"Okay, I know you said you wanted to talk to me, but I have something one hundred times more important to tell you," Tiberius rushed out.

Kei instantly looked up from where she was laying to see him looking more serious than he had ever looked.

"Okay, tell me. What's wrong?"

"Do you remem– It has to do with– I might have done something bad, Frankie," he stumbled over his words.

Her heart pounded in her chest at all the possibilities that could have happened. Tiberius was usually level headed, collected, and knew how to deal with situations. But this wasn't the case there.

"Tiberius, just tell me."

His mouth opened and closed, at a loss for words.

"Use your words, Reese's. It's okay."

"Edmund Dolohov," he said.

Kei nodded suspiciously. She feared Vic may have found him and broke Tiberius' heart.

Tiberius said nothing more and just pointed at his chest.

"Dolohov, what?" her brows furrowed in confusion.

"*Me*," he breathed. "I am. . . him."

The sounds of the lake and their breathing were the only things that could be heard in that dorm. Doors closed and opened down the corridor of the dorms, people ran past Tiberius' room, but no one entered the dorm. Vic had left, Silas was nowhere to be found, Kei stared at Tiberius in pure bewilderment.

"You?"

Tiberius nodded.

"Y-You're saying *you* are Edmund Dolohov."

He nodded once more.

"But you're Tiberius Moody. I don't– Why?"

"I don't know!" he exhaled, standing up off his bed. "Our mother- My mother!

September fourteen– I just don't—"

"Tib, how did you find this out?" Kei butted in. "What makes you think you're him or– or that's he's you?"

Tiberius groaned and rummaged through his school bag before throwing a folder at Kei. She looked it over: *COPY of Edmund Dolohov*.

"Is this– Tiberius, this is the file I gave Vic," she stated. "The one my father owled me for him."

"I know," he breathed.

"How do you have it?"

"I. . . stole it? *Borrowed*! I borrowed it with every intention of giving it back but I needed to talk to you before I gave it back– you'd know what to do. *I* don't know what to do with this!" Tiberius shouted as he began to pace.

"What! How would I know what to—?"

"Just look at it," he cut her off.

Kei sighed and opened up to the first page. Her eyes scanned the pages in front of her and she gasped. There, in black bold letters, was written Edmund Dolohov's parents— most importantly, his mother, Elena Blodwyn.

After over a decade of knowing Tiberius, Kei was most certain they knew who their best friend's dead mother was, but at that moment, they questioned their memory. Her eyes scanned over to the birthdate, it was Tiberius'.

"Tib," she gasped, looking up. "This is your mother's—"

"I know! There's only one thing that means," he sighed, stopping his pacing.

She glanced from the file in her hands up to her best friend. He was Edmund Dolohov, but also Tiberius Moody. *That doesn't make sense*, she thought.

"You have to tell Alastor," she decided.

"And say what! 'Hey *Dad*, I've found out you're not actually my dad *for the second time in a year*.' That'd go swimmingly, Frankie," he exasperated.

"Don't get smart with me, Tiberius," Kei glared at him. "I'm just saying that Alastor can give you the answers you need on why you're a Moody instead of a Dolohov or why there's a disappearance date or why any of this is happening. You haven't even told him of your soulmate mark! How many more secrets are you going to keep from him?"

Tiberius was rendered speechless at Kei's lecture. He knew she was right, but didn't know how to go about any of it. There were so many things that could go wrong, but he had to set things right. He weighed the possibilities and sat on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands. No matter's Kei's words, he didn't know what to do or *who to be*.

"At least tell Vic," she whispered.

"No," he looked up, glaring over at Kei.

"Tiberius."

"No, Franklin," he said. "At least not now. I have to figure this out– I have to just. . . think! I can't think and I can't even begin to understand what all of this means and—"

"You're Vic's soulmate, Reese's," Kei said softly. Tiberius' face softened. "You always were. You didn't know it but you were— *are*. If you are truly Edmund Dolohov, then it is *your* name on Vic's arm. Not some random stranger. He deserves to know. . ."

"I know he does," Tiberius whispered. "But I don't know how to tell him."

Kei closed the file, "well, you don't have to tell him now, but you should tell him eventually. Alastor already knows your. . . true identity, so I suppose you can hold off on telling him, but Vic doesn't. He deserves to know."

Tiberius sighed and nodded. Once again, Kei was right. It was infuriating. She did know what to do despite her not knowing how to help. Kei held out the file and gave him a look, silently instructing him to put it back where it belonged instead of his bag. He complied with a sigh.

"It'll be alright, Tibs," Kei gave him a one sided smile.

25. St. Mungo's

Kei's stubborn nature was easily equally matched with Tiberius'. There was nothing more that infuriated Kei than not being listened to, especially by her best friend. Despite their advice in telling Vic Tiberius' newfound birth name, Tiberius still hadn't told his soulmate. It had been two and a half months since the reveal, being it was nearly Christmastime, and Tiberius hadn't even spoken about the file.

She tried her hardest to bring up the situation with Tiberius, but he constantly shut her down, claiming more important things were going on. The "more important things" were actually the tyrant Umbridge. Her rule over the school was exhausting and growing more and

more terrifying as the days went on with her thousand decrees and abnormal rules. Kei supposed an Azkaban break would be simpler than not breaking one of Umbridge's decrees.

It was the day before Christmas break and Dumbledore's Army were simply refreshing taught jinxes and charms. Some of the younger students perfected a couple of higher level spells while others, like Neville Longbottom, had finally gotten down *Expelliarmus*. It was an easy lesson, most of the students enjoying themselves before the holiday.

Kei and Tiberius were practicing *Stupefy* when Harry came over to them. With a slick smile, Kei sent a wordless hex to Harry, causing him to fly backwards *Stupefied*.

"Frankie!" Tiberius gasped, trying to withhold his laughter. Students around them laughed as Harry groaned, standing up. "That was sly."

"Well, I was raised by Slytherins," she grinned, giving the room a mock bow.

"You all right, Harry?" asked Tiberius, rolling his eyes at his best friend.

"Yeah, just caught me off guard," he responded. "Nice one, Kei."

She smiled, "did you need something?"

Harry looked between the two friends and nodded, "I wanted to know your thoughts on teaching Patronuses next meeting, after Christmas."

Kei beamed at the idea while Tiberius silently agreed, just nodding. The Hufflepuff had wanted to perfect the charm, only being able to possess a non corporeal Patronus during the sixth year lessons.

"I think that's actually a really good idea," said Tiberius thoughtfully.

Once the meeting had been dismissed, Tiberius and Kei left to their respective dorms to finish packing for the break. Instead of staying at Hogwarts, Kei planned on spending the holiday with Tiberius and Alastor– well, mainly Tiberius being Alastor would most likely be off doing some kind of Order work. Every year, Kei would spend half of their holiday with their family and the other half at the Moody residence; this year was different. Kei wasn't welcomed home and planned on only spending it with Tiberius and Alastor.

The idea of not seeing her brother hurt, but she chose this– Kei chose to leave. But never had she thought that she wouldn't be allowed to go back to her childhood home. *I deserved this*, she thought sourly, folding one of her sweaters and placing it into her bag.

The night dragged on until morning and Kei hadn't slept. Too many thoughts whirled in her mind. The sun had barely come up and they were walking out of the common room towards

Slytherin. Curfew had just lifted, but no one was awake. The Slytherin common room was quieter than the Hufflepuff common room had been, leaving it to be slightly eerie.

Kei placed her ear on the door, listening for any moment. When it was quiet, she slowly pushed on the door to reveal four sleeping boys. She smiled down at Tiberius and walked over, slightly nudging him.

"Frankie?" he moaned sleepily.

"Scoot over," she whispered.

In his sleep, Tiberius complied and moved, lifting his blanket and letting her in. Kei curled up against Tiberius and listened to the breathing of his roommates. Only two of them had rhythmic breathing as Tiberius slowly fell back to sleep. Kei tilted her head up to see eyes shutting close, acting as if they had been asleep the entire time.

"I know you're not sleeping," she called out softly, hoping to not wake any of the sleeping boys. "Rough night?"

"Yeah, I'd say," Silas responded. "You?"

"Beginning to not be a fan of familial holidays," sighed Kei. "Going home today?"

Silas shook their head, "no. I'm staying here, I usually do."

"Your parents won't miss you?" she frowned.

"My dad's busy with the shop. My mom isn't around much," he shrugged, sitting up a bit. "What're you doing here?"

Kei said nothing and laid her head back down on her arm. They heard Silas readjust himself in bed and sigh softly.

She figured it was just past eight when one of the boys awoke. By the sound of it, it was most likely Vic. Kei stilled as she heard the creaking of a bed and then felt an added pressure near her. Tiberius groaned and moved.

"Why's Kei here?" Vic whispered quietly.

"Came in earlier," Tiberius sleepily answered. "Time?"

"Five after eight. How'd she get in?"

"Door," he mumbled and moved, trying not to wake the Hufflepuff up. She was already awake. "Shut up so she can sleep."

Vic grumbled something and moved away, sitting in his creaky bed. After a few moments, Kei slowly sat up. She hadn't been asleep, but her eyes burned as they adjusted to her

surroundings.

"Morning, Trespasser," Vic greeted.

She glared at him, "you snore."

He dropped his jaw at her hostility and let out a little scoff, Tiberius laughed. Kei looked down and saw him barely awake.

"You okay, Frankie?"

"Dandy," she responded, standing up and stretching. She looked over to Silas' bed to see it empty. Maybe she had fallen asleep and they had left then. "Reckon we should get ready for the train back home."

Tiberius groaned and pulled the blankets over his head. Kei rolled their eyes and looked over to Vic, he was getting ready.

It had taken nearly an hour for Tiberius to get ready. The three of them made their way down to the Great Hall just after nine. As soon as Professor Snape spotted them, he summoned Tiberius and Kei, leaving Vic by himself.

"Mr Moody, Miss Higgs, you both are to use Floo to *the house*," he said inconspicuously. The pair looked at one another. Snape let out a disgruntled noise, "Alastor instructed you both to arrive by ten. Since you took your sweet time to get down here, you are to leave now."

"Yes, Professor," Kei answered.

Without instruction, Professor Snape walked past the pair and through the Hall. Compliantly, Tiberius and Kei followed the Slytherin Head to his office to take the Floo to Grimmauld Place. There was no explanation on why they were meant to go at that moment or as to why Grimmauld Place rather than Tiberius' house.

The beautiful green flames caused a new kind of panic in Kei's chest. Seeing their anxiety, Tiberius gave Kei's hand a reassuring squeeze before going first into the fireplace, calling out the destination. Just before Kei made it into the fire, Professor Snape called out to her,

"I would greatly appreciate it if you kept this request to yourself. It would not do any good to speak about your allowance in taking Floo home, more or less the destination."

"Of course, Professor," she responded robotically.

"And the situation," he added after she stepped into the Floo. Kei had no time to ask what situation he meant as the green flames engulfed her, bringing her to the dark sitting room of Grimmauld Place.

Tiberius was greeting Sirius when Kei walked out of the fireplace. The two looked up at her, Sirius' eyebrows knitted at the sight of her while Tiberius smiled. They weren't allowed to say anything as Molly came bustling in.

"Tiberius! Franklin. I am so glad you both have come in time," she smiled. Her face was pale and looked quite shaken.

"In time?" Kei repeated softly.

Molly said nothing as she continued to talk about how all of the Weasleys and Harry were currently taking naps and that Alastor and Tonks were on their way. Kei smiled at the mention of Tonks, one of her favorite Ministry members.

After ushering the pair into the kitchen, Fred and George walked through the door with strained smiles on their faces.

"If it isn't our favorite Slytherin Hufflepuff duo," George greeted.

"And to think our break would be dull," added Fred.

"Talking about a dull break," Kei said, "why're we here? What happened?"

The twins looked at one another and sat across from Tiberius and Kei. They took turns explaining the situation Professor Snape had been talking about: Arthur Weasley had been attacked on an Order mission and, apparently, Harry had seen it in a vision of sorts. Tiberius asked all the right questions, his Auror training coming in handy. But before the twins could elaborate any more, Harry, Ron, and Ginny came in to eat lunch and that's where the interrogation had ended.

Everyone was told to dress like muggles as they were going to be taking a train into the center of London. Alastor and Tiberius were having a heated and hushed conversation as Kei and Tonks led the group to St Mungo's. Up the moving stairs and out the station, they stepped out into the wintry air on a broad store-lined street packed with Christmas shoppers. Alastor grunted about something Tiberius said and pushed Harry a little ahead of him, stumping along just behind.

"Reckon Tib said something to Mad-Eye?" Tonks whispered in Kei's ear.

Kei looked back to see Tiberius' glare at the back of Alastor's head.

"They're the same grumpy men," they rolled their eyes.

Tonks let out a little laugh before stopping in front of Purge and Dowse Ltd. The place had a shabby, miserable air; the window displays consisted of a few chipped dummies with their

wigs askew, standing at random and modeling fashions at least ten years out of date. Large signs on all the dusty doors read *closed for refurbishment*.

She leaned forward, towards this very ugly female mannequin whose false eyelashes were hanging off and modeled a green nylon pinafore dress, fogging up the class, "Wotcher... We're here to see Arthur Weasley."

Kei stepped through the glass with Tonks and watched as the Weasleys walked through, Tiberius following them. There was a moment before Alastor walked through holding Harry by the upper arm. He looked extremely confused and uncomfortable, Kei stifled a laugh.

Once the group made it to Arthur's room, Molly allowed her children and Harry to go in while Alastor, Tonks, Kei, and Tiberius waited in the corridor. Kei began to think that the only reason the two were allowed to accompany the group was so they weren't left alone at Grimmauld Place. Though visiting the healing center was never good, Kei grew bored of waiting.

Leaning closer to Tiberius, she asked, "have you talked to him?"

Tiberius glared down at Kei, "I'll tell you later."

Kei huffed at being blown off and leaned over to look at Alastor and Tonks, who were both having their own conversation, "am I allowed to ask why Arthur was in the place where he got hurt?"

"You can ask, but that doesn't mean we'll tell ya'," Alastor answered.

Growing tired of being blown off, Kei looked up at the ceiling and began to count the tiles. It wasn't long before they heard the shrill of Molly's voice shouting "that's enough," followed by the children exiting Arthur's room. Alastor and Tonks went into the room and closed the door of the ward behind them. Fred raised his eyebrows.

"Fine," he said coolly, rummaging in his pockets, "be like that. Don't tell us anything."

"Looking for these?" said George, holding out what looked like a tangle of flesh-colored string.

"You read my mind," said Fred, grinning. "Let's see if St. Mungo's puts Imperturbable Charms on its ward doors, shall we?"

"What're you two doing?" Kei asked.

"Finding out information," George smirked.

After handing out the Ears, the group listened in on the conversation. The mood went

south as Alastor suggested that Harry could be possessed by Voldemort himself and the reason as to why Harry saw what he did.

"What do you two know?" Harry asked Tiberius and Kei. He looked at Tiberius in fear, "you're Alastor's son. You ought to know something we don't."

Tiberius' face hardened, "I don't know anything. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you. Obviously you aren't told anything because you're too young and inexperienced and *not* a part of the Order."

Fred and George stood up straight and nodded, not liking Tiberius' answer. Harry stared at him with a blank look as though he were slowly processing Tiberius' words. Kei frowned at her best friend's hostility. She assumed something had happened from lunch to now and she was determined to find out.

"Explain yourself," they said, closing the door to an empty room.

Having long left St Mungo's, Kei and Tiberius went into one of the many empty rooms to talk about whatever happened on the way to the hospital and outside of Arthur's ward. She didn't like the tenseness he was creating, she wanted to know why.

"Why'd you come into my dorm this morning?" He tried to change the subject.

"I couldn't sleep. First holiday away from Terence," she complied and changed it back to him, "why're you being such an asshole this afternoon?"

Tiberius went rigid at Kei's foul language and scoffed, "thanks, Frankie."

"Tiberius, I'm serious."

"Don't you mean Edmund?"

Realization hit Kei. He most likely spoke to Alastor on the way to St Mungo's.

"What did Alastor say?"

Tiberius sighed and ran a hand through his hair, taking a seat in one of the empty chairs. Kei stayed standing, holding themselves, scared of his answer.

"I am Tiberius Edmund Moody after being adopted by Alastor. I was originally Edmund Dolohov, only child to Antonin Dolohov and Elena Blodwyn. When Antonin was taken to Azkaban for being a Death Eater, my mom kept me. Some of his buddies killed her before she could get away. I hid apparently," Tiberius cringed. "Alastor found me or something and took me in. He erased my memories, changed my name, and took me as his son so I'd be safe."

"Reese's. . ." gasped Kei.

“He was my mom’s *best friend*,” he shuttered. “And for as long as I knew, I was Tiberius Moody, son of Alastor Moody, the great Auror. But I’m actually Edmund Dolohov, son of Antonin Dolohov, convicted Death Eater. A Death Eater’s son.”

“Tiberius, you are not his son. He may be biologically your father but that does not make you his son,” Kei raised her voice slightly, stepping up to her friend. “You were raised by Alastor, you are *his* son and he is your *father*. The only one you’ve ever known.”

“The only one I remember,” mumbled Tiberius.

“Just because Antonin’s DNA is in you doesn’t make him your father,” she deadpanned. “A father is someone who raises you, loves you, and makes you the person you are. Alastor has done that and more.”

Tiberius looked up sadly at Kei. Her heart broke for her best friend, she wished for his happiness. He looked so broken. She frowned and moved into a chair next to him, resting her hand on his knee.

“Tib, he’s in Azkaban, you’ll never have to deal with him. Be the son your mother wanted you to be and the person Alastor raised you to be. You’re more than just ‘a Death Eater’s *biological* son’ and ‘an Auror’s *adopted* son.’ You are Tiberius Edmund Moody, co-leader of Dumbledore’s Army, friend to all students in any house, seventh year Slytherin, Gerald’s favorite boy, and, most important of all, my best buddy,” Kei gave him a goofy smile. “What more could you possibly want? You are whoever you want to be, whoever you choose to be. Good or bad, Auror or muggle, Tiberius or Edmund. It’s your choice. Legacy doesn’t control you, you control you.”

Silence welcomed them. Tiberius thought about Kei’s words. Kei worried their words weren’t enough to get him to brighten up. Tiberius finally lifted his head and looked over to his best friend,

“Most importantly your buddy, yeah?”

Kei let out a little laugh at Tiberius’ smirk, “better bloody be!”

Christmas day came and went. Arthur was back at Grimmauld Place and everyone was no longer feeling sullen over the events of the last few days. The tarnished chandeliers were no longer hung with cobwebs but with garlands of holly and gold and silver streamers; magical snow glittered slowly melted over the threadbare carpets; a great Christmas tree, obtained by Mundungus and decorated with live fairies, was left up and blocked Sirius's family tree from

view; and even the stuffed elf heads on the hall wall wore Father Christmas hats and beards as no one had taken them down.

As fast as the Holiday started, it ended. It was the last day of Christmas break, Kei spent it bent over a desk, scribbling down a summary of the events of the last week. After their conversation with Tiberius, there wasn't a moment that they weren't writing. All break she had gotten and sent owls.

"Franklin, what're you doing up there," a voice shouted from downstairs as the door to the study had opened.

Kei quickly snatched up the parchment and stuffed it into her jumper, "nothing, Alastor!"

"Finish up your letter, send it, and come down," he bellowed back.

Her face flushed knowing that Alastor used his magical eye to see what the Hufflepuff was up to. Turning around, Kei saw Tiberius leaning against the doorframe with a little smirk.

"Can I help you, *Edmund*?" she narrowed her eyes at him.

Tiberius rolled his eyes and pushed off the doorframe, making his way to her, "how's 'nothing' doing, *Franklin*?"

It was Kei's turn to narrow her eyes at him, "'nothing' is doing just fine. Now, if you'd like to give me some privacy, I'd like to finish doing nothing so I can go see what Alastor needs."

"Just some preparation for tomorrow's trip back to Hogwarts and some family dinner stuff he wanted to do," Tiberius blew off as Kei slowly pulled the crumpled letter out of their jumper. "So, who're you writing to?"

"No one— hey!"

Tiberius had run up at Kei and snatched the letter out of hands. He smirked and flattened out the letter:

"*Pretty dull. I'm glad to be going back to Hogwarts. I've missed you the last few days. Can't wait to see you tomorrow! I'll see you on the train, Jell. . .*

Ah, so it's to Georgina?"

"Tiberius Moody, you give that back now or I will hex you into the next millennium," Kei threatened, raising her voice. Her cheeks flushed in pure embarrassment.

"Cute little love letters," he teased. "Reckon you've hidden them in your bag, yeah?"

"IF YOU TOUCH MY BAG, I WILL HANDCUFF YOU TO THE BLOODY HOUSE

ELVES ON THE WALL WITH A PERMANENT IMPENETRABLE CHARM."

"Relax, Frankie," he laughed and handed the parchment back to her.

Kei huffed in frustration, her chest heaving.

"I'll leave you to your love letters, but I reckon you have less than five minutes before Alastor comes up here himself," Tiberius said with a sly smile as he left. Kei muttered a few choice words under her breath to which Tiberius shouted, "I can't hear you!"

26. <u>The Dolohovs</u>

Being that Harry had "remedial potion lessons" with Professor Snape, Dumbledore's Army meetings were postponed until further notice. Most of the members grew annoyed with the message, complaining about missing the fun. It had been almost a month and a half since the new term began. And to Kei's great disappointment, Tiberius made no move on revealing his bloodline to Vic. But on the upside, Kei and Gina had gotten much closer.

For the new term, Kei switched with Vic in potions, allowing herself to be paired with Gina. In addition, Vic and Gina sat with Tiberius and Kei in every other class the four had together. But good went bad when *Daily Prophet* came out a week before Valentine's Day. Though Kei wasn't much into gossip, there was a witch near them who was. A gasp left the Hufflepuff's mouth, causing Kei to look over at her.

On the front page of the news script, ten black-and-white moving pictures filled the entire page, nine showing wizards' faces and the tenth, a witch's.

"What the—?" she gasped, leaning over to pick up the discarded paper.

Some of the people in the photographs were silently jeering; others were tapping their fingers on the frame of their pictures, looking insolent. Each picture was captioned with a name and the crime for which the person had been sent to Azkaban.

Antonin Dolohov, read the legend beneath a wizard with a long, pale, twisted face who was sneering up at Kei, *convicted of the brutal murders of Gideon and Fabian Prewett*.

Augustus Rookwood, said the caption beneath a pockmarked man with greasy hair who was leaning against the edge of his picture, looking bored, *convicted of leaking Ministry of Magic Secrets to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*.

The only witch on the page looked more crazed than all the other wizards combined. She had long, dark hair that looked unkempt and straggly in the picture. She glared up at Kei through

heavily lidded eyes, an arrogant, disdainful smile playing around her thin mouth. The only resemblance Kei could recognize were the cheekbones the witch had. Both of them shared that trait with their mother.

Bellatrix Lestrange, convicted of the torture and permanent incapacitation of Frank and Alice Longbottom.

In big bold black letters, the headline said:

Mass Breakout From Azkaban

Ministry Fears Black is "Rallying Point" for Old Death Eaters

“Can I?” Kei asked the girl. She nodded.

Quickly, Kei stood up and squished herself in between Tiberius and Silas, brandishing the *Prophet*. Tiberius turned to look at her, indignance written all over his face as Kei had interrupted their conversation.

“Have you guys seen this?” She threw the paper in front of the twins, allowing Tiberius and Silas to both see the front page.

Kei watched for a reaction from the Lestrange Twins. Their eyes widened in surprise and Kei felt herself release a breath she didn’t know she had held.

“Mother’s out,” Gina said, a small sigh falling out of her lips.

Tiberius was frozen. Not long ago Kei had said how Antonin was in Azkaban and he’d never see him, but the papers said differently. He stared and stared, waiting for the picture to fade or Antonin to call out to him, claiming him as his son, but nothing happened.

But Kei’s focus on Tiberius’ reaction was interrupted as Vic scoffed, standing up and walking out of the Great Hall. Gina shot Kei an apologetic look and followed her brother. Silas was quieter than usual, just staring at the paper.

“You all right, Sil?”

Silas snapped out of his trance and looked up at Kei, “yeah. Just a bunch of Death Eater’s breaking out of Azkaban, nothing huge.”

Kei took their sarcasm with a grain of salt.

“I don’t have an appetite,” he suddenly said and left the same way the twins had.

And then it was two.

“Tiberius,” Kei said softly.

“He’s out.”

“I saw.”

“I don’t want anything to do with him,” Tiberius whispered harshly. “He’s a bloody Death Eater. Fucking scum.”

“You don’t have to talk to anyone you don’t want to,” Kei reasoned. “Death Eater or not, okay? Like I said, it’s your life, it’s your choice.”

Tiberius’ head snapped up to look at Kei, “you also said he was stuck in Azkaban with no way out. There he is.”

He abruptly stood and walked out of the Great Hall. The Hufflepuff was left all alone at the Slytherin table. They took one last look at Bellatrix Lestrange’s laughing snide and picked up the news script, handing it back to the Hufflepuff who ordered it.

Surprisingly enough, Kei found Gina in the library later that day. It was one of the last places she thought she’d ever find the Slytherin, but lo and behold there she was. Gina looked torn and hurt, as if she didn’t know what to do.

“Gingee?” Kei called out, setting their books on the table Gina sat up.

Gina’s eyes snapped up to Kei with fury, but once she realized who it was, her eyes softened, “oh, hi, Sunflower.”

“Are you all right?”

“Of course I am,” Gina forced a small smile onto her face.

Kei sighed, “I know you’re not though. Your mother is out.”

“So it seems,” she nodded.

“Now I ask again, what’s wrong?”

“There’s nothing wrong, Kei. My mother is out, that’s that,” Gina answered the same way Silas had.

“Did you know she was going to escape? Or at least where she is n—?”

Gina cut Kei off with a little laugh, “are you seriously going to question me about my mother?”

“Well– I mean– I was just. . .” they stammered, not knowing how to respond.

“Come here,” she instructed.

Kei stood up and slowly made her way over to the Slytherin, taking the empty chair next to her. Gina grabbed Kei’s hand and laced her fingers in theirs. A light flush grew on Kei’s cheeks at the action.

“So I think I have an answer to your question,” Gina said after a while.

“I thought you didn’t want to talk about your mother,” they tilted their head in confusion.

She laughed softly with a smirk, “not that question, Sunflower.”

Kei’s brows furrowed in further confusion as she tried to rack her mind for any possible questions Gina would want to answer.

“I do like you,” she answered.

“*Oh*,” Kei breathed. A fluttering feeling filled her chest at Gina’s affirmation.

“Let me take you on a date,” Gina offered.

Kei was still speechless and just nodded with a lovestruck smile. She felt as if nothing could go wrong. The girl she was so enamoured with liked her back, wanted to take her on a proper date, and– kissed her.

She only realized what was happening when Gina’s hand touched her cheek. Georgina Lestrange was *kissing* her. Kei reacted a moment too soon as Gina pulled away, leaving Kei sitting in a shallow hole of disappointment.

“You kissed me,” Kei said airly.

“That I did,” smiled Gina.

Kei frowned, “do it again. I wasn’t prepared.”

Gina let out a laugh and leaned forward, kissing Kei again. This time, Kei was ready. It was a light kiss as though Kei would break if Gina were to apply any more pressure. Bubbles of butterflies filled Kei’s stomach, she loved it. She laughed into the kiss as she pulled away. There was a flush on Gina’s cheeks, just as Kei’s had.

“Satisfied now?” Gina asked with a raised brow.

“I mean, I could always go for more kisses,” Kei mumbled to herself, earning a laugh from Gina.

Their secret hushed moment was ruined by Tiberius. He looked as though he were going through something when he came up to the pair. Taking a glance from Kei to Gina, he made the connection that he had most definitely ruined something.

“I didn’t think you’d be here,” he said to Gina.

Gina rolled her eyes, “I’ll leave.”

Before Kei could say anything, Gina grabbed her bag and a book and left the area, walking out of the library. Tiberius didn’t even react, taking the seat Gina previously had. At this,

Kei grabbed one of the many books in front of her and hit him over the head with it.

"What," he exclaimed.

"You have the *worst* timing," Kei groaned, hitting him once more.

Tiberius rolled his eyes, "did Georgina tell you anything about her mother?"

"No, she didn't. I asked, but she kissed me instead," Kei admitted nonchalantly. "Did Vic?"

"I bet she kissed you to distract you," he mumbled to himself. Kei felt her heart get ripped out of her chest.

"You *dick*," she huffed.

Tiberius looked up, realizing he had said it aloud.

"Frankie—"

"I happen to have a date with her on Valentine's, the next Hogsmeade weekend," Kei stood up.

"I didn't mean it like that," Tiberius groaned. "I was just—"

"Jealous that I got the person I like yet you haven't even said anything to Vic and are completely dateless for Hogsmeade? Good day to you, Tiberius," Kei shouted and stalked out of the library.

Tiberius didn't even try to stop Kei from leaving, knowing it would do him no good to shout through the library and only get him banned for another month. All he wanted was to talk to Kei about what Vic had said. At least Vic talked to him before kissing him.

The next morning, at breakfast, there was a thick tension throughout the Great Hall after the owls dropped off all the posts. A wax sealed envelope made its way from Gryffindor all the way to Hufflepuff before Kei got their hands on it. The entire Great Hall spoke of an 'Edmund Dolohov.' Kei didn't dare look over to the Slytherin table, too afraid to meet Tiberius' or Vic's eyes.

"That's not yours!" one of the fourth years shouted at Kei when she snatched the envelope from her.

"And it's yours?" she shot hotly. "Last I checked, you aren't a Dolohov, more or less Edmund as it is a male's name."

"Why can you take it and not—?"

"*I* am Head Girl. It'll do you good to remember that next time you want to catch an

attitude with me," Kei raised a brow at the girl. Instantly, the girl shut down, grumbling under her breath. Kei didn't care to try to hear.

Groaning, she knew she'd have to face either one of the boys. And in her haze of annoyance, Kei openly handed the envelope to Tiberius. It took two seconds for her to realize her mistake; Tiberius didn't take it and Vic watched her with wide eyes.

"I– I guess you should send this to Alastor," Kei tried to cover up her major mistake.

The entire group was silent: Tiberius looked equally outraged and shocked; Gina couldn't care less, too caught up in her own mind to realize what was happening; Silas looked as though a lightbulb had just gone over their head, puzzle pieces finally coming together; and Vic looked hurt and scandalized.

"*No fucking way*," he gasped. "Y-You—" he pointed to Kei, "I- I trusted you!" The entire Great Hall began to silence, watching the ordeal go down. Vic looked at Tiberius, hurt clouding his eyes, "and you just flat out *lied* to me. Y-You– You're. . . you're *him*."

At this, Vic stood up in disbelief and stalked out of the Great Hall. Gina had finally snapped out of her trance and looked around at the three remaining friends.

"Thanks a lot, Frankie," Tiberius mumbled and snatched the letter out of their hands, running after Vic.

"What just happened?" Gina asked.

"A shit ton," breathed Silas, rubbing his hands on his pants.

Kei groaned and turned around, looking at the entire Hall, "all right, show's over. Go on about your breakfast!"

And once the forks began to scrape the plates and students began to mutter to each other, Kei took it to leave the Hall and go after her friends.

It wasn't hard to guess that Tiberius would go to his dorm. Since he had just left, it wasn't hard to find him in the corridors towards the dungeon.

"Tiberius!" Kei called out.

He ignored her.

"Reese's, please. I'm sorry!"

He continued walking to Slytherin.

"I will call out your name," she threatened.

Tiberius slowed down and turned to face her.

“I’m so sorry,” Kei apologized, running up to him. “I really am. I didn’t even realize what I was doing until I had already held it out.”

“Are you sure because you’ve been telling me to tell Alastor and Vic for the last five months?” he shouted.

Kei took a step back, “I’m being genuine. I was so angry with that bloody fourth year, that I didn’t realize I had handed it to you out in the open. My plan was to give it to you later tonight, but. . . I just blanked.”

“I need to talk to Vic,” Tiberius sighed, turning to continue walking.

“What’re you going to do with your letter?” she asked, following him.

“Burn it?”

“You don’t want to see what it says? You don’t even know who it’s from,” Kei tried to rationalize.

Tiberius scoffed, “I have an idea.”

Kei knew what his idea was and agreed, but she was most curious about what the letter said. She wanted to see what Antonin Dolohov said.

“So are you really not going to open it?” they whispered.

“If I open it, will you stop pestering me and let me go to Vic?” he snapped, turning to face Kei.

She frowned and nodded as they opened the passage to the Slytherin common room. Tiberius walked over to where the chairs were sitting and took the spot closest to the fireplace. With a shaky breath, he opened the incriminating letter. His eyes zoomed back and forth as he read the short message. Tiberius scoffed and shoved the letter into Kei’s hands:

Edmund,

I hope this finds you. I wish I knew where you were. ~~I need~~ I've been waiting years to see you again, to hear from you. Finally, I can. I've heard you're alive and well.

My boy, I hope you've grown up strong and smart, like your mother. Made good, pure friends out there.

Meet me soon. There's a plan I can't say over owl, but I want to hear from you. Soon. I'll be waiting for you, for us to reunite.

Don't listen to what they say, I am not all what they say. You once knew me and you

will know me once more.

Wishing you health,

Antonin

"'Don't listen to what they say'? Who is 'they'?" Kei scoffed.

"The ministry? Alastor? Merlin knows what that psycho means," Tiberius rolled his eyes. "I want nothing to do with him."

Kei handed Tiberius the letter. With one swift movement, Tiberius threw the letter and envelope into the fireplace, letting it burn. They both watched as the parchment crumbled, turning into dust. A swelling feeling grew in Kei's chest, glad Tiberius had read and burned the parchment. Though they had no worries that Tiberius would choose his legacy, there was still the slight fear that Antonin would get to him.

Tiberius scoffed and shook his head, standing up from the armchair, "I've got to speak with—"

"Go get back Vic," Kei said softly, placing her hand on his arm. "Explain to him, talk to him, *reassure* him that you are good and that you mean well. It'll be okay, Reese's."

"I really hope so," he responded and walked past them, taking two steps at a time to go to his dorm where he hoped Vic Lestrange was in.

27. Angel Ministry Kids

Shiloh gave her a knowing smile as Kei panicked about getting ready. Clothes were thrown all around the dorm, littering the floor and beds. Restraining a laugh, Shiloh sighed and pulled out of the long discarded light purple sweater dresses Kei had looked at earlier.

"Wear this, Kei," she gave the Head Girl a knowing smile.

Kei met the girl's eyes through the mirror and shook her head, "drop your smirk, Bones."

Shiloh said nothing as Kei took the dress and quickly changed, pulling leggings up her bare legs. Taking a quick glance at themselves, Kei grew thankful for Shiloh; she looked good.

"Thank you."

"Who's your date with?" inquired Shiloh.

"Gina Lestrange," Kei mumbled.

"I was waiting for that," she admitted, earning a look from Kei. Shiloh shrugged, "you're always with her. Plus I see the way you look at her when she's not looking— you forget that just

because she's not looking doesn't mean no one else is."

Kei sighed softly and arranged her hair into a braid, "and you? Date with your Gryffindor."

She smiled sadly, "we all can't have what we want."

"What?" They stopped and turned to face her.

"Bloody idiot didn't ask me out," Shiloh shrugged.

Kei grumbled, "I hate boys."

Shiloh laughed in agreement.

Finally finishing getting ready, Kei pocketed her wand and slipped on her shoes giving Shiloh one last smile before leaving. There seemed to have been a permanent smile on the Hufflepuff's face as they made their way to the entrance hall in time to meet Gina for their Valentine's Day date. Kei slowed her walk as she noticed Gina. She was talking with Vic, looking slightly angry, per usual.

"Gina," Kei smiled, walking up to the pair.

"Hey, Sunflower," she greeted as Vic looked Kei over, "bye, Higgs."

That was the end of the conversation as Mr Filch finally allowed them to leave for Hogsmeade. Kei grew nervous, feeling on edge about hanging out with Gina. Of course they'd had loads of hang out together, but never had it been a *date*.

"Are you and Vic all right?" Kei finally asked.

She hadn't missed Vic's dismissal or the heated nature of the twin's talk just before she had walked up. It wasn't unusual to see them arguing about menial things, but taking the events of the last week, Kei felt slightly on edge.

But Gina only rolled her eyes, "we're fine, Kei. You and Moody?"

Kei sighed, "we're fine. I didn't mean to– I just wasn't thinking."

"That's fine. It was bound to happen," she said. "He should have told Vic though instead of him finding out by accident and by you."

They cringed, not liking hearing what they already knew. Gina noticed Kei's discomfort and ran her hand down Kei's arm before lacing her fingers through theirs. A wave of butterflies went through Kei at Gina's action. *She really likes me*, Kei thought.

Their walk to the love themed village was quiet but pleasant. Kei didn't mind the quietness as she revelled in feeling Gina's hand in hers. Never had she thought that there'd ever

be a moment like that between the two girls, it left her feeling giddy. They thought back to the Yule Ball last year, their dance with the Slytherin— that had been one of the best moments they'd had, but this most definitely topped it.

They wandered toward Dervish and Banges. A large poster had been stuck up in the window and a few Hogsmeaders were looking at it. As the couple moved into the crowd, Kei found herself staring once more at the ten pictures of the escaped Death Eaters. The poster ("By Order of the Ministry of Magic") offered a thousand-Galleon reward to any witch or wizard with information relating to the recapture of any of the convicts pictured. Kei's eyes met those of Bellatrix Lestrange and felt the girl beside her tense at the sight of her mother's wanted photo. People around the couple looked at them, noticing that the Hogwarts Head Girl was holding hands with an escaped Death Eater's daughter.

"Let's go," she whispered, pulling Gina away from the judgemental eyes. "I'm sorry, maybe coming to Hogsmeade was a bad—"

"No," Gina cut her off, "don't apologize. It's fine. I'm used to the glares of being 'Bellatrix Lestrange's daughter'."

Kei looked over to see Gina already staring at her, brows furrowed in deep through.

"Plus," she added, "I want to be here. . . with you."

A small smile found its way onto Kei's face. They were happy with her. Pulling Gina down the High Street, Kei decided on going into Honeydukes. She decided that they'd go to the Sweets Shop for a bit before heading to Hogs Head Inn for a late lunch; *it'll be less crowded than Three Broomsticks*, Kei reasoned, *and people won't stare at 'Bellatrix's daughter.'*

"Here?" asked Gina, looking up at the Honeydukes sign.

"Unless you want to go elsewhere?" she offered nervously.

She let out a small laugh, "I've been needing to stock up on Chocolate Frogs and Pepper Imps."

"Pepper Imps?"

"You should see Vic's face when he tries to steal my chocolate," her brow raised. "Idiot thinks I don't know he does and nearly chokes every time. You'd think he'd already learn his lesson but. . ."

Kei let out a loud laugh and pulled the door to Honeydukes open for Gina. The atmosphere of the Sweets Shop was more than welcoming, the air full of sweetness and warmth.

The cold February wind melted off their faces, leaving warmed smiles. She watched as Gina quickly made her way over to the chocolate section, pulling six or seven boxes of Frogs into her arms with a wide childlike smile.

"Merlin, Gingee," laughed Kei. "Planning to stock up for the rest of the year?"

Gina playfully rolled her eyes, "this'll last until next Hogsmeade weekend."

The pair made their way through honeydukes, Kei grabbing handfuls of Cinnamon Balls, Peppermint Toads, and a box of Maple Pecan Toffee, along with Gina's Pepper Imps. But before Kei could pull out her bag of coins, Gina threw down two Galleons and pulled the Hufflepuff out of the shop with their bags.

It had taken them a second to realize what had happened and Kei dug their feet in the melting snow to stop the Slytherin from pulling them anymore.

"Sunflower—"

"Why did you pay for my candy? I bought so much," frowned Kei.

"I asked you on a date," Gina smiled sweetly.

Kei's cheeks flushed and they huffed, "well, don't do it again."

Hogs Head Inn was nearly empty, except for a few drunk wizards who were too far gone to even notice the couple's presence. Kei ordered four bottled butterbeers for them and two orders of fish and chips. Paying the fee, they tried to balance the bottles and trays, but nearly dropped them as Gina took two of the bottles and one of the trays.

"Too proud to ask for help?" She laughed, "swore you were a Hufflepuff, not a Gryffindor."

"Oh, shut up," Kei rolled her eyes, taking her seat across from Gina.

Their conversation ranged from memories to aspirations. It wasn't hard for the two to get along and not have one of those awkward first dates as they were already well acquainted. Kei knew better than to touch on the topic of family, not wanting to tell Gina about her father or upset her about her mother. The date was short, lasting no more than an hour after Gina took the last fry off of Kei's plate and happily ate it despite their glare.

"Must you always take my food, Gina?" she groaned.

"Must you always complain, Kei?" mimicked Gina.

Kei rolled her eyes, "what next?"

Gina gave Kei a sarcastic glance and said, "was this not enough?" knowing very well that

would cause the Hufflepuff to grow panicked. And it did. Kei's eyes widened and they stammered, trying to come up with something else to say to redeem themselves. Obviously she hadn't meant it as being dissatisfied, but it was still early and Hogsmeade outings were her favourite— Kei wanted to enjoy the date just a little longer.

"I'm messing with you, Sunflower."

Kei groaned, rolling her eyes at the Slytherin, "you're evil, Lestrange."

"*You love it*," she smirked. "But yes, there is one more thing."

"Let's go," they exclaimed.

Gina rolled her eyes in amusement, "it's not something to go to."

Trying to figure out what Gina meant, Kei grew silent in thought. The girl was completely confused, not being able to come up with anything. Knowing how clueless her best friend was, Gina leaned forward and twirled a lock of Kei's hair in her hand. Only then did she realize what Gina meant— *a date isn't complete without a goodbye kiss.*

Kei followed suit and leaned forward, placing her hand on Gina's cheek. They enjoyed kissing Gina as of lately, finding it calming and sweet. But this kiss wasn't calm and sweet like the others had; there was something behind it. It felt heavy like a promise or an apology, something meaningful like that. Gina leaning closer to Kei, trying to close the non-existent gap between the two girls, kissing her deeply. There was a fuzzy feeling in Kei's head causing her to pull away.

Gina gave her a quick little kiss before smiling softly, "so. . .?"

"Thank you?" Kei said awkwardly, not knowing what to say.

The Slytherin nearly fell out of her chair laughing at Kei's awkwardness. Once she regained her breath, she said, "oh Merlin! You've never been asked out, have you?"

"You already asked me out," they furrowed their brows.

"I mean that you've never been asked to be someone's girlfriend before."

Kei stilled at the shock, "I– uh, no. . . I haven't." And when Gina continued to stare at them, they added, "are you asking me to be your girlfriend?"

"Yes, I am," Gina nodded.

She let out a little laugh, "was I supposed to read your mind, Jellybean?"

"And here I thought you were bright, Sunflower," she teased. "Since when do I kiss people I don't want to date?"

“All the time?” Kei raised her brow.

“*KEI*!”

“I’m just teasing you, but yes, I would love to be your girlfriend,” they blushed.

Kei was ecstatic on their walk back to Hogwarts. They felt as though they were on top of the world. Gina was her girlfriend. She won.

But there was a slight fear in telling Tiberius what had happened. The last time she had expressed her affections for Gina, he had claimed it was all a ploy. Doubt seeped into their bones as *their girlfriend* escorted them to their house. With a sweet kiss, Gina went to Slytherin to get ready for dinner as Kei numbly walked through the common to her dorm.

Finally, after another month of waiting, Harry finally taught Dumbledore’s Army the Patronus Charm. The Patronus lesson was taught during their fifth year of Defence Against the Dark Arts, but nearly none of the students of her year managed to produce a corporeal Patronus– until now.

“Just choose a memory strong enough, one filled with love and protection,” Harry advised.

Her wand sparked at the tip and a silver little wisp flew out, swirling and swirling above her until a shark cut through the wisps causing her to lose her focus. Kei’s head snapped to her right to see Tiberius laughing– he managed to make a corporeal Patronus.

“Reese’s, don’t do that! I almost had it,” Kei groaned and elbowed him, his own Patronus faltering.

“Just listen to Harry, c’mon, it’s easy,” encouraged Tiberius.

Sighing, Kei tried to focus on multiple happy moments from Hogsmeade outings to professional Quidditch games with her father but nothing worked. Racking her brain for a good enough memory, Kei tried one of the simpler one. She had been so focused on a purely happy moment that she hadn’t thought of the possibility of a bittersweet moment being enough.

Kei focused on the tears that had fallen down ten-year-old Frankie's face. She was afraid to attend Hogwarts as she didn’t want to be alone once Tiberius chose new friends. In hopes of a forever friendship, Frankie made the pair matching friendship bracelets— both pink and yellow, three plastic flower beads hanging from the braided twine. Tiberius happily accepted it, not caring that it was “too girly” or flowery, and reassured Frankie that they will always be each other’s buddies and no one could take that away from them.

"*Expecto Patronum*," her wand whipped out in front of her and the wisps transformed from a silvery cloud to a jumping dolphin. They had done it. A silly dolphin swam around her wand, down her arm, and around her body. Tiberius cheered and laughed as his own shark circled him, meeting up with Kei's dolphin and disappearing into the mirror in front of them.

"Look at that," Tiberius laughed. "Sea animals!"

The overjoyed feeling was soon interrupted as the door of the Room of Requirement opened and closed. The pair were close enough to Harry to see a house elf run up to him, but not close enough to hear the beginning of the conversation. Only when the house elf let out a howl, and began beating his bare feet hard on the floor, shouting in agreement, did anyone in the room hear.

"WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?" Harry bellowed. "RUN!"

Everyone pelted toward the exit at once, forming a scrum at the door, then people burst through; feet echoed as the members sprinted along the corridors trying to not get caught.

"Tiberius, come on!" Kei groaned, pulling him along.

She had a plan, run down to the sixth floor and walk. Kei always had their badge with them, especially in case of moments like this— she pulled it out of her pocket and pinned it to her chest.. She hoped people had the sense to not try and make it all the way to their dormitories, too far to make it when Umbridge was patrolling the corridors with her lackeys.

"Where are we—?" Tiberius began but once Kei hit the sixth floor, she stopped running and laughed, "what else did Vic say?"

He looked at her in utter confusion, "what do you mean? What?"

The pair turned the corner and bumped into High Inquisitor Umbridge herself. Kei's back slammed into Tiberius' as the Hufflepuff was repealed back.

"What are you two doing here?" she said sweetly.

"Rounds," Kei furrowed her brows innocently.

A lightbulb went off in Tiberius' head as to what Kei was doing. He knew she was smart enough to not get caught, but didn't know what extent she'd go to— he quickly figured it out.

"And you, Mr Moody?"

"Just hanging out with Frankie before curfew. I know it's just after, but she was escorting me back," he nodded. "Is that all right, Professor Umbridge?"

"Of course," she gave them a tight smile. "Miss Higgs, make sure you keep watch of the

corridors; I got news of a little congregation that violates Decree twenty-six."

"Yes, Professor Umbridge," Kei smiled with a nod. "I will keep a watch. Have a good night."

At that, Umbridge gave a little nod in approval and scurried down the corridor the pair had just gone through. Once her footsteps weren't audible and the two were down a few floors, Tiberius forced Kei to stop.

"What was that?"

"Saving our ass," she mumbled, letting out a breath of air. "Bloody good I thought of it or else we'd get more than a little detention."

"How'd you know that was going to happen?"

"If you think I'm the one who told that foul woman, *I didn't*," Kei scoffed. "I didn't know it was going to happen, but I always have my badge on me in case I have to walk one of the younger students back to their houses. I'm always prepared."

Tiberius frowned, "I didn't mean it to sound like I was accusing you of being a rat."

"It's fine," they sighed. "Just on edge. I wish I could check on all the students, make sure they got back fine."

"You're such a mother," he laughed, continuing their walk to the dungeons.

"Someone's gotta take care of these children," Kei sighed to themselves.

28. The Lapdog Club

March turned into April and April turned into May. By the end of May, Kei wasn't the only one with a shiny badge on their chest, except they were the only one to be happy about it. At the end of May, *Headmaster* Umbridge instated another Decree and created her own little elite group called the Inquisitorial Squad. To Kei's humor and Tiberius' dismay, the Slytherin had been recruited into the little club. Tiberius hated every part of it but had no say being that Umbridge wanted "a respectable leader" to help keep the younger students of the squad in check.

Umbridge got the "Head Boy" she wanted.

"Look at you, finally detached yourself from Vic," Kei teased as Tiberius stomped into the library.

"And I'm surprised you finally detached yourself from his sister's lips," he bit back, discarding his bag on the floor and sitting in the chair across from them.

“I do not—”

“Anyways,” Tiberius cut her off, “heard anything important?”

“I should be asking you that, lapdog,” Kei raised a brow at him.

“Something about fixing the school, yada-yada,” he dismissed. “I’m so happy we graduate in a month.”

Kei nodded in agreement, ending the conversation at that. NEWTs were in three weeks and the pair were throwing themselves in studying but between Tiberius’s Inquisitorial Squad duties and Kei’s Head Girl role, they both had more on their plate than they could possibly handle. The year wasn’t turning out the way Kei had planned, but they weren’t entirely upset about it.

In turn of different events, Tiberius and Vic were finally officially together— they had been for a few months— and Kei was with Gina. The two best friends got their happy ending, their silver lining in the dictatorial rule of the Ministry Infiltrator.

“You think it’ll be good?” Kei suddenly asked Tiberius.

He hummed, looking up from his book, “what do you mean?”

“After graduating,” she said, thinking back to the happy memories of the last seven years at Hogwarts, “with Vic and Gina. I’m. . . kind of scared.”

Tiberius sighed, “I think it’ll be good. Not the best, with all of the Death Eater stuff, but we’ll be happy.”

“I hope so,” they nodded. “As long as we have each other, we’ll be okay.”

“And we’ll always have each other so there’s no need to worry,” Tiberius smiled at his best friend.

The weekend after Kei’s birthday, the Hufflepuff was *finally* allowed to take their Apparation test— they passed! Tiberius had passed back in April when all of the seventeen year olds took their test in Hogsmeade, but being that Kei wasn’t turning seventeen until June, she had to wait. And that following Monday, Gina stole her away, taking her on a little impromptu date.

“Gingee, you could have just put a blindfold over my eyes,” Kei laughed. “You’re squishing my nose!”

Gina grumbled, trying to walk up the steps while putting her hands over Kei’s eyes in order to keep the destination a secret.

“This is harder than you think,” she groaned.

“Hence why I said you should’ve used a— Ouch,” Kei shrieked, stumbling over their own feet and falling up the stairs, as Gina fell with them. “*Georgina*!”

“Okay, we’re going to the corridor between the Astronomy and Ravenclaw towers,” Gina deadpanned, tired of how much effort romance was.

Kei laughed and rubbed her elbow as Gina helped her up. Hand in hand, the pair walked over to the corridor. On the bench near the large floor to ceiling window, there was a basket. Just from the smell, Kei knew there were all kinds of pastries in there and, most importantly, chocolate chip cookies.

“Did you do this?” they gasped softly at the sight of the picnic basket.

“I did,” said Gina. “I had even tried to make the cookies myself, but after I managed to add an entire egg— shell and all— the house elves took over. . .”

The Hufflepuff squealed and threw their arms around their girlfriend, kissing her on the cheek, “I love it, Jellybean!”

The two girls sat on the floor and faced the large window that overlooked the forest. Gina pulled out two huge cinnamon rolls, a few pumpkin pasties, a tin of cookies, and bottled apple cider.

“I would have brought butterbeer, but the house elves said they didn’t have any,” she scoffed.

“No, it’s perfect,” Kei smiled. “This is absolutely perfect.”

Gina and Kei had a perfect date, laughing at what each other said as though it were the funniest thing in the world. At that moment, there was no one but them. And once all the pastries and sweets were eaten, Gina handed Kei one last thing.

“Here,” she said, pushing the drawstring bag into their hands.

“Uh, thank you for the bag?”

Gina rolled her eyes, “open it, silly.”

Kei flushed and slowly opened the emerald bag. Inside was a gold bracelet, little charms, perfectly spaced, were threaded in between the links. They let out a little clink as Kei pulled the jewelry out, she studied each charm carefully: A sunflower, square rune that meant wellness, cupcake, butterfly, and a flat heart.

“I think I prefer the bag,” they teased.

The Slytherin tsked, “then I’ll take the bracelet—”

“No!” Kei blurted. “I’ll keep it. Go away, it’s mine now. You can’t have it back— never ever.”

Gina rolled her eyes in amusement at her girlfriend. It was cute how excited the Hufflepuff was over the simple gift. Being the one who always gave gifts, Kei was happy to have received one. Extending their arm, Kei handed Gina the bracelet and had her place the jewelry on her wrist, right next to the friendship bracelet she had with Tiberius.

“Thank you,” she sighed.

“I’m glad you like it,” Gina smiled.

Before Kei could respond to her, there was a loud explosion cutting them off. Both girls looked at one another with wide eyes. Another *Boom!* went off, shaking the floor. Gina quickly stood up and followed Kei down the corridor towards the noise.

Dragons composed entirely of green-and-gold sparks were soaring up and down the corridors, emitting loud fiery blasts and bangs as they went. Shocking-pink Catherine wheels five feet in diameter were whizzing lethally through the air like so many flying saucers. Rockets with long tails of brilliant silver stars were ricocheting off the walls. Sparklers were writing swear words in midair of their own accord. Firecrackers were exploding like mines everywhere they looked, and instead of burning themselves out, fading from sight, or fizzling to a halt, these pyrotechnical miracles seemed to be gaining in energy and momentum the longer the girls watched.

Trying to not get hit with any fireworks, Kei and Gina ran through the corridor following the crowd as they exited the castle. Laughing, Kei ducked down low, ran to a door pulling her girlfriend along. Students were standing all around the walls in a great ring; teachers and ghosts were also in the crowd. Prominent among the onlookers were members of the Inquisitorial Squad, who were all looking exceptionally pleased with themselves— except Tiberius who looked as though he rather do lines than be associated with the group—, and Peeves, who was bobbing overhead, gazed down upon Fred and George, who stood directly in front of them with the unmistakable look of two people who had just been cornered.

"So!" said Umbridge triumphantly, "you think it amusing to turn a school corridor into a circus, do you?"

"Pretty amusing, yeah," said Fred, looking back up at her without the slightest sign of

fear.

"You two," she seethed, gazing up at Fred and George, "are about to learn what happens to wrongdoers in my school."

"You know what?" said Fred. "I don't think we are."

He turned to his twin.

"George," said Fred, "I think we've outgrown full-time education."

"Yeah, I've been feeling that way myself," said George lightly.

"Time to test our talents in the real world, d'you reckon?" asked Fred.

"Definitely," said George.

And before Umbridge could say a word, they raised their wands and said together, "*Accio Brooms!*"

Kei jumped at the loud crash somewhere in the distance. Looking past Umbridge, Fred and George's broomsticks, one still trailing the heavy chain and iron peg with which Umbridge had fastened them to the wall, were hurtling through the castle toward their owners. They turned left, streaked down the stairs, and stopped sharply in front of the twins, the chain clattering loudly on the flagged stone floor.

"We won't be seeing you," Fred told Professor Umbridge, swinging his leg over his broomstick.

"Yeah, don't bother to keep in touch," said George, mounting his own.

"If anyone fancies buying Whiz-Bangs, as demonstrated inside, come to number ninety-three, Diagon Alley — Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes," he said in a loud voice. "Our new premises!"

"Special discounts to Hogwarts students who swear they're going to use our products to get rid of this old bat," added George, pointing at Professor Umbridge.

"*STOP THEM*!" shrieked Umbridge, but it was too late. As the Inquisitorial Squad pushed through the crowd in attempts to close in on them, Fred and George kicked off from the ground, shooting fifteen feet into the air, the iron peg swinging dangerously below. Tiberius finally found Kei in the crowd and rolled his eyes at her. She met him with the same disdain he held, shaking her head in disbelief.

Fred looked across the courtway at the poltergeist bobbing on his level above the crowd, "give her hell from us, Peeves."

And Peeves, who had never taken an order from a student before, swept his belled hat from his head and sprang to a salute as the Weasley twins wheeled about to tumultuous applause from the students below and sped out of the open front doors into the glorious sunset.

29. Unpleasant Surprises

Since Kei didn't have a NEWTs exam this block, they were meant to be patrolling the halls. OWLs were currently taking place in the Great Hall and Kei grew tired and hungry, lunch was pushed back for the tests. Giving up on patrol, she decided to head off to the kitchens to ask the house-elves for a snack when she caught the troublesome trio sneaking around the corridor whispering in hushed voices.

"Aren't you lot supposed to be in exams?" the Head Girl asked.

The trio froze.

"We. . . we finished early," Ron Weasley tried.

"Yeah, it doesn't matter if you finished early, you shouldn't be allowed out of the Hall until everyone is finished," she proposed. "Or unless something happened."

"Harry didn't feel well," said Hermione, to which Harry nodded profusely.

"Then why isn't he in the Hospital Wing?" Ron opened his mouth to talk, but before he could, Kei added, "and before you say you're on your way, the Wing is in the opposite direction."

They froze once more, caught in their lies.

"Now, before you try and lie again, just tell me what you're up to. I've been at this school long enough to know you three are always up to something," she sighed.

Harry didn't falter his furious gaze, it wasn't directed at Kei but they knew it was the reason behind Ron and Hermione's nervousness.

Kei rolled her eyes, "listen, I am on your side, I understand, but I can't help you if you don't tell me what's going on."

Hermione looked at Ron who glanced over to Harry, but none of them responded to her.

"I'm not part of Umbridge's little tattle-telling squad, so I'm not going to rat you guys out," they sighed. "Being Head Girl means I can either help you or hurt you, it's your choice. Tell me what the problem is and I can try to help you. I'm being honest."

The trio shared a look and stepped down to meet Kei, explaining their plan of breaking

into Umbridge's office once more with some help from their friends. Though the plan had originally ounded ridiculous, Kei helped her fellow DA members in their plans of getting into the High Inquisitor's office– though they didn't specify what they needed to do in there, she understood the importance of it and knew it shouldn't be something idiotic like stealing one of her cat plates or stupid pink pillows.

Taking their positions, Kei used her Head Girl status to get people out of the corridor, threatening to take away House points and reporting them to Umbridge. Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood gave the nastiest faces they would and assisted Kei in having people leave.

"This corridor is closed! Go around by the swivelling staircase, Headmistress Umbridge's orders," Kei ordered.

Ginny and Luna shouted about some kind of Garroting Gas. Their plan worked much better than intended as news about the gas spread like wildfire. Standing guard, Kei continued to help divert the students away from the corridor of Umbridge's office, only to see Tiberius dragging his feet. A nervous smile made its way onto her face in his presence.

"Hey Reese's, how's it going?" Kei forced a large grin on her face trying to ignore the look of pure annoyance.

"Frankie, please tell me you're not—"

"I'm not doing anything," she cut him off. "I'm Head Girl and there's just a small problem and I'm diverting—"

"C'mon, cut the shit, what're you up to?"

Knowing she could never blatantly lie to Tiberius, Kei told him what she was going and explained how she caught Harry and his friends, along with the importance of keeping people away from Umbridge's office. But just as she was going to tell Tiberius Harry's plan, Kei noticed a little silver-haired ferret rounding the corner with devious eyes.

She groaned as Draco Malfoy sneered at them. He had caught Kei basically explaining the plan to Tiberius.

"I knew she was with them," Draco cackled. Tiberius rolled his eyes before turning around to face him. The fifth year halted. "W-Well, are you going to restrain her? She's against Umbridge! Against the Inquisitorial Squad! Against you—"

"All right," Tiberius shut him down, "I got it. Quit your yapping." Begrudgingly, he turned back to face Kei and gave her a look of pure annoyance. "I have to," he said and grabbed

her upper arm in means of ‘capturing’ her.

“Okay, *lapdog*,” groaned Kei as he walked with her to where Umbridge was waiting for her squad and their captures. Draco bounced along behind them completely exuberated that he helped catch a seventh year.

Umbridge wasn’t as excited.

“Miss Higgs–? You as well?” she gasped upon their arrival. Kei looked around and noticed all of the conspirators were caught in the grasps of the kitty lover club. “How disappointing. A seventh year! And a daughter of a Ministry Head as well. Hmph. What a shame.”

Kei rolled her eyes once the stout pink lady turned around. Tiberius chuckled. Umbridge began her torture-like interrogation on Harry of his reasoning for breaking into her office.

"So, Potter," she said, “you stationed lookouts around my office and you sent this buffoon," she nodded at Ron, and Draco laughed even louder, "to tell me the poltergeist was wreaking havoc in the Transfiguration department when I knew perfectly well that he was busy smearing ink on the eyepieces of all the school telescopes, Mr. Filch having just informed me so.

"Clearly, it was very important for you to talk to somebody. Was it Albus Dumbledore? Or the half-breed, Hagrid? I doubt it was Minerva McGonagall, I hear she is still too ill to talk to anyone. . .”

Kei stopped listening, growing bored of Umbridge’s droning. They rolled their head, leaning it on Tiberius’ chest.

“You know,” Tiberius whispered in Kei’s ear, “I would have thought you’d have done a better job in not getting caught.”

She silently mocked him and elbowed his ribs in annoyance. Umbridge’s interrogation was torture for everyone in the room as the woman would not stop talking. Tiberius grew bored and internally groaned as Hermione Granger began crying. Kei tried not to laugh as Ginny Weasley stomped on the foot of one of the fifth year Slytherins earning a look of annoyance from Draco.

“How do you plan on getting out?” Tiberius asked quietly.

“Well, I still have my wand,” Kei muttered.

“Yeah, I knew better than to take it,” he sourly reminisced. If there was one thing Kei was protective over, it was their wand.

"Fine," Kei heard Hermione say, sobbing into her hands again, "fine! Let them see it, I hope they use it on you! In fact, I wish you'd invite loads and loads of people to come and see! Th-that would serve you right — oh, I'd love it if the wh-whole school knew where it was, and how to u-use it, and then if you annoy any of them they'll be able to s-sort you out!"

These words had a powerful impact on Umbridge. She glanced swiftly and suspiciously around the room, her bulging eyes resting for a moment on Draco, who was too slow to disguise the look of eagerness and greed that had appeared on his face. Umbridge contemplated Hermione for another long moment and then spoke in what she clearly thought was a motherly voice.

"All right, dear, let's make it just you and me... and we'll take Mr. Potter too, shall we? Get up, now —"

As the pair left with the pink witch, Kei groaned in relief as Tiberius let go of his loose grip on her arm.

“Wha—”

“Okay so,” Kei began, cutting off the brown-nosing Slytherin, “*Expelliarmus*!” She pointed her wand at the thin Slytherin holding Ron’s wand, disarming him, and allowing Ron to take back his wand and his captor’s.

At that moment, jinxes and hexes began to fly throughout the room. Wordlessly, Tiberius and Kei protected themselves and the students, trying to make sure only the Inquisitorial Squad were getting hit.

“*Not him*,” Kei shouted at Ginny, deflecting one of her jinxes which was aimed at Tiberius. Without questioning them, Ginny turned and proceeded to hex Draco. With all of the Inquisitorial Squad jinxed and hexed, the six of them escaped the office without a scratch.

“So what’s the plan?” asked Tiberius.

“Uh, find Harry and Hermione. Then ask them what the plan is,” Ron responded. Kei and Tiberius shared a look and agreed, they’d help no matter what the plan was.

But Tiberius ended up not approving of the plan, Kei did. He wasn’t on board with breaking into the Ministry of Magic, but Kei overlooked that major problem and focused on saving a member of the Order of the Phoenix– the organization they both badly wanted to join once they graduated.

Fear began to work its way into Kei’s chest once they landed the Thestrals and ran through the entrance of the Ministry of Magic, past the large golden fountain. Having grown up

with constant trips to the Ministry did not advantage either of them due to the fact that they've never been allowed *near* the Department of Mysteries more or less in it.

"Come on," said Harry quietly and the eight of them sprinted off, following him.

Harry stabbed the number nine button, the grilles closed with a bang, and the lift began to descend, jangling and rattling. When the lift halted, the cool female voice said, "Department of Mysteries," and the grilles slid open again, they stepped out into the corridor where nothing was moving but the nearest torches, flickering in the rush of air from the lift.

With every closed door, spinning rooms, and questionable offices, Kei grew confused and worried, but Tiberius seemed to trust the motivated Gryffindor so she tried to hide her wariness. Their wandlights reflected off the eerie bottles and illuminated the path where Harry's godfather was supposedly being held captive. Kei's faith in Harry's word crumbled as aisle after aisle came up empty, filled with nothing but clouded, dusty containers littered on shelves higher than their eyes could see.

"It's — it's got your name on," said Ron.

"My name?" said Harry blankly.

Harry stepped forward and squinted at the little sign that was under the dusty glass bottle. Harry reached over to grab it and Hermione quickly yelled at him.

"Harry, don't touch it!" she hissed. "I told you before we got here! In and out, no lingering or—"

"Why not? It's got my name on it," Harry snapped at her.

Kei didn't care about whatever the trio began to argue about with each other and grew impatient, feeling on edge in the dark unknown. Anxiety crept up over her as she stood defensively next to Tiberius.

"Reese's, I don't have a good feel—"

"Very good, Potter. Now turn around, nice and slowly, and give that to me," a drawing voice said. Kei looked from Tiberius to Harry, who picked up one of the mystery bottles, and then towards the direction of the voice.

She knew that voice. Kei recognized it and her stomach dropped. Black shapes were emerging out of thin air blocking their way left and right; eyes glinted through slits in hoods, a dozen lit wand tips were pointing directly at their hearts. Instinctively, Tiberius sidestepped in front of Kei as they both raised their wands to block any incoming curses.

"Where's Sirius?" Harry said.

Several of the Death Eaters laughed. A harsh female voice from the midst of the shadowy figures to Kei's left said triumphantly, "The Dark Lord always knows!"

"Always," echoed Lucius Malfoy softly. "Now, give me the prophecy, Potter."

"I want to know where Sirius is!"

"*I want to know where Sirius is*!" mimicked the woman to his left.

It was a sick feeling. The feeling of believing you'd been taken for granted, tricked. . . betrayed. Kei gripped their wand as they tried to place the voice but had a sinking feeling they knew exactly who it belonged to. She didn't dare move her gaze from the speaking voices despite her instinct to look up at Tiberius for confirmation. The three of them continued to bicker as fear crept in all of their chests.

"Oh, you don't know Potter as I do, Bellatrix," said Lucius softly. "He has a great weakness for heroics; the Dark Lord understands this about him. Now give me the prophecy, Potter."

Bellatrix. The name echoed in Kei's mind, shattering her heart. She heard Tiberius suck in a shallow breath at the name, all of the stories and rumours they'd heard over the years began to run through their minds.

"You'll have to smash this if you want to attack any of us," Harry told Bellatrix. "I don't think your boss will be too pleased if you come back without it, will he?"

"Don't be foolish!" Bellatrix laughed.

"I don't care whatever this prophecy is, I'll smash it I tell you," Harry threatened. "I don't care that Voldemort wants it."

His comment proceeded to set off every single one of the Death Eaters. They considered it a disrespect to speak his name. Kei jumped as a soft voice spoke into their ear. "*Reducto* the shelves on Harry's mark. Pass it on," said Luna.

Kei tugged on Tiberius's jacket and whispered the order to him, earning a nod of acknowledgement. He was the last to receive the message. The pair waited for Harry's command and at his bellow, seven different voices bellowed out the hex, exploding the shelves around them and its contents.

"RUN!" Harry yelled as the shelves swayed precariously and more glass spheres began to pour from above.

Without questioning orders, Tiberius grabbed Kei's arm and spun on the spot, apparating them towards a door. He had aimed to one of the other rooms but hadn't taken into account the wards placed on the specific room they were in. The door was locked but opened with a simple unlocking spell. Kei could see Ron, Luna, and Ginny running in their direction.

"C'mon! Come this—" she began yelling to the three but shrieked as a yellow light was thrown her way. Tiberius deflected it and gave her a warning look, "stay on guard, Franklin. This isn't class, it's not a game anymore!"

Kei didn't dare question Tiberius and was too guarded to care for the use of her full name. Raising her wand, she sent a tornado of air in the direction from where the hex came from and smiled at the sound of a body hitting the wall. The three students ran into the room Kei had unlocked, the pair following them.

"*Colloportus*!" bellowed Tiberius, the door sealing itself with a squelching noise.

"Wait, where's– where's Harry and Hermione and Neville?" Ron gasped for air.

"Does it look like we know?" Kei said impatiently. "Wherever they are, they're fighting just as hard as we are, except they have an advantage: The Prophecy."

"Them, out there," Tiberius continued, pointing towards the door, "they don't care about us. We are collateral. They want Harry Potter and the stupid prophecy bullshit. They won't hesitate to kill you. This isn't the DA anymore. You need to stay on guard and use everything you know: Defensive, offensive, jinxes, hexes, everything!"

"We have to stay sharp, we can't let anyone get within reach of us, more or less within range of getting hit. Got it?" said Kei authoritatively. The three didn't say anything. "I said 'GOT IT'?"

"Yes," they choked out.

Kei nodded and let out a hot breath of air, taking in her surroundings. Tiberius tried to push his newfound information out of his head and focus on the task at hand: Getting out of the bloody room without dying.

"I think—" Just as Tiberius made a motion towards a door, it burst open. There was no way they could have known what would be behind there but it was just their luck it was Death Eaters.

"I think not!" Kei squealed as a fire raged out of the Death Eater's wand.

Different coloured lights flashed throughout the empty room in purples, reds, and whites.

Tiberius and Kei were back to back, deflecting the curses faster than they could throw them. There was a grunt to the right of Kei and they saw Ron flying across the room.

"*Bombarda*!" she bellowed, flinging the Death Eater back. "Ron, are you all right?"

"I'd like a side of potatoes please," he said drunkenly.

The five of them weren't even outnumbered in people but in strength and knowledge. The Death Eaters had years of practice and a better grasp of dark magic on their side, whereas the students were barely of age, more or less matched in skill. But with one Death Eater down, there were only two to go.

Tiberius and Kei fought one while Ginny and Luna fought the other.

"Give it up, kids," one of them called out. "Give us Potter and we'll let you go."

"I wasn't born yesterday, dingbat," Kei rebutted and lit his robes on fire. The man yelled and Tiberius took the opportunity to stun him. "All right, teamwork!"

But in Kei's vain celebration, the final Death Eater stunned her.

"Frankie— *Petrificus Totalus*!" Between the force of his hex and the sudden unbalance from the spell, the Death Eater spun and fell forward on his nose with a horrible crunching noise. All the Death Eaters in the room were defeated. "One of you two get Ron," he shouted to the pair as he ran over to Kei.

The Hufflepuff was sprawled out on the floor, unconscious. "*Rennervate*," Tiberius said and Kei groaned as they woke. He looked her over, searching for any signs of injury or wounds.

"What the actual *fuck*," she moaned.

"What did I say about—"

"Tiberius, for once, save the lecture."

Instead of arguing with her, he helped Kei to their feet knowing the headache she had was punishment enough for being so careless.

"Have you two got Ron?" Tiberius shouted. Kei placed a hand on his shoulder, shushing him slightly.

"Yes," they chorused.

With Ginny and Luna dragging Ron, Tiberius and Kei chose a door to go through. The group was at a large disadvantage for only two of the five wizards had their wand arms available. Tiberius held his wand at the ready while Kei unlocked the door. Just as Kei was about to step into the room, a heavy weight was thrown on her, causing her to topple over and bring Tiberius

down with them.

"Ron!" croaked Harry, dashing toward them. "Ginny— are you all —?"

“For merlin’s sake, get this *troll* off of me!” Kei shouted and tried to wiggle out from under Ron’s weight.

Luna and Tiberius helped pull Kei to their feet while Harry pulled Ron off. Over on the other side of the room, Kei could see Hermione and Neville leaning against the wall– they looked very badly hurt. Her headache didn’t seem bad anymore. Choosing a door to go through was like playing a sick game of Hide-And-Seek. There was a one-in-twelve chance they would go through the right door, but they needed to proceed either way. Harry leaned forward and chose a door, but across the wall, another door burst open with three Death Eaters speeding into the hall, led by Bellatrix Lestrange.

Kei’s chest constricted at the sight full of fear with an underlying shred of betrayal.

"There they are!" she shrieked.

Stunning Spells shot across the room: Harry smashed his way through the door ahead, flung Ron unceremoniously from him, and ducked back to help Neville in with Hermione. Tiberius nearly threw Kei through the door in hopes of putting space between themselves and Bellatrix. Everyone fell over the threshold just in time to slam the door against her. But it didn’t stop the Death Eater’s advance.

30. <u>The Betrayal</u>

All of the students hit the ground of the Room of the Veil. Kei panted, trying to see the people around her. Just as she reached out to Tiberius there was a burst of black smoke clouding the view. Something grabbed her and she felt the horrible pull of being Apparated. Kei screamed, trying to pull free of the hold they had on her, but it was no use. Once they stilled, she felt the burning tip of a wand pointed at her neck.

Kei tilted her head back, pulling away from the wand to see the ugly sneer of none other than Antonin Dolohov. Her breath hitched. Their eyes looked around to find their friends to see that Tiberius was being held by Bellatrix Lestrange. Kei felt her world crumble at the sight of everyone in the room, all of them being held hostage by Death Eaters. Harry was in the center of the room, face to face with Lucius Malfoy.

“Your race is run, Potter,” he laughed dryly. “Hand it over.”

Harry looked around the room, fighting with himself, “let my friends go and I will.

Bellatrix cackled and tightened her grip on Tiberius’ arm. Kei tried to jump forward, an instinct to save him, but Antonin’s wand burned her neck causing her to lean back into her captor’s chest.

“You are not in a position to negotiate,” Lucius gave him a mock frown, holding out his hand for Harry to place the prophecy.

“Potter,” Bellatrix called out, “give us the Prophecy or all of your friends will *die*.”

Kei’s eyes watered in the fear of Tiberius dying by Bellatrix’s hands. A cold, shuttering feeling washed over them, purely terrified of what they had gone into. Harry didn’t move, calculating his chances.

“And you?” she said, pushed her wand into Tiberius’ cheek. “Knock some sense into him.”

“You won’t get anything out of him.,” Lucius sneered. “He’s Mad-Eye’s son. Nearly as mad as his father.”

Bellatrix’s eyes glinted in rage and delight. Kei’s eyes narrowed at Lucius’s jibe but knew better than to be reckless enough to talk back.

“That’s not his son,” a voice said. Kei froze as the voice vibrated against her back. Antonin’s eyes narrowed, trying to see Tiberius better from across the dais.

In his distraction, Kei ripped her arm out of his grasp, “Harry, don’t!”

“You stupid girl!” Bellatrix shouted and took her wand away from Tiberius’ face, pointing it at Kei.

But a red light had flashed past Bellatrix. Five new wizards came to their rescue: Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Nymphadora Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and Alastor Moody.

The shock of their new arrival allowed the students to wrangle out of their captors’ grasp and dive off the dais, out of the way. Tiberius grabbed Kei’s arm and yanked them towards the wall. Through the fighting bodies, flashes of lights illuminated the room. Tiberius kept his eyes trained on the Death Eaters as Kei tried to break free of his hold.

“Franklin, quit it!”

“Tiberius, how can you expect us to be a part of the Order, once we graduate, if you don’t want to fight?” she shot. “We’re not children anymore. We *can* fight!”

Pulling their arm free from his grip, Kei ran forward and backed Tonks up, sticking the

Death Eater's shoes to the floor in time for Tonks to knock him out. Tiberius knew Kei was right and followed suit, assisting Alastor in his battle against one of the foe.

"What're you doing here?" Alastor yelled as they both duelled.

"Helping."

"Helping?" he repeated. "You'd be helping if you stayed at Hogwarts and finished your NEWTs. No place for a kid—"

"*I'm not a kid*," Tiberius shot, deflecting a hex from his left. "I've protected this group and am of age—"

"Of age? You're barely of age and not even graduated yet. Your job is to graduate and then worry about—" But Tiberius cut Alastor off as he flung himself to deflect the turquoise light from hitting his father.

"You're training me to be an Auror, have been for a while. I'm doing what I've been taught and I'm doing it right. Whether you like it or not, I'm here and I'm helping."

Alastor had no time to argue as more hexes and curses were being thrown at the pair. Kei continued to be Tonks' back up, helping block hexes as Tonks expertly threw them. Years of duelling with Tiberius paid off, she worked well in a duo.

Tiberius' fight was with Antonin. All the rage of his "father" holding his best friend captive, the stupid letter, and the hurt he felt fueled the duel.

"Are you proud of me?" Tiberius said venomously.

Antonin looked perplexed at Tiberius' question, still not realizing who he was.

"Am I everything you wanted me to be?" Tiberius deflected a purple lit hex and threw one of his own. "You wanted to 'meet me soon.' Here I am."

The realization distracted Antonin enough to allow Tiberius to *Stupefy* and *Incarcerous* him. The Death Eater's eyes glanced back and forth rapidly, trying to get a look at the son he didn't recognize. Tiberius let out a scoff and turned to fight another one of the many Death Eaters. Just as he turned his attention to Bellatrix Lestrange, there was a scream echoing in the room. But no one could have known what would have happened next.

One scream sounded like thousands of wails against the stone walls. Truly a series of misfortunes: The prophecy slipped from Harry's grip shattering on the ground, a single red light flew through the air and hit its target, and then the previous triumphs turned into despair as Sirius Black fell through the lone stone archway in the middle of the room, disappearing forever.

The fight was long over when Tiberius and Kei apparated into Hogsmeade. Alastor had requested for the pair to get to Hogwarts as soon as possible instead of waiting for him to escort them. The trail from Hogsmeade to Hogwarts felt too short, not enough time to properly collect their thoughts about what had just occurred at the Ministry and the new information they'd discovered.

Normally, Gina's presence was a blessing to Kei, something she would look forward to– but after the battle she just participated in, it was not. Kei was generally a nice person, very easy to please and hard to properly anger. There wasn't a lot that pushed their buttons or truly enraged her other than lying or feeling as though she'd been deceived, especially by those she trusted wholeheartedly.

And being the stubborn people they are, instead of going to the Hospital Wing, as instructed, they went straight to Slytherin.

There were few people left lounging in the common room as it was nearly curfew. At the steps, Tiberius and Kei split off– Tiberius went to his dorm whereas Kei made her way to the seventh year girls' dorm. Pushing the door open, she met the person she needed to talk to sprawled out on her bed as a self-writing quill did her assignment.

"Hey, love," she smiled, looking up from parchment at the sound of the door.

"I need to– We need to talk, Gina," Kei said heavily. Georgina Lestrange's smile faulted slightly at the tone of Kei's voice.

"Hey, no," Gina quickly sat up and took into account Kei's appearance. Only then did she notice the scratches and blood that littered Kei's body from the battle Gina knew nothing about. "What happened to my sunflower?"

"No– Don't do that," she took in a quick, sharp breath. "You can't—"

"Kei, what happened? Why're you– Why do you look like you've tumbled about the forest? Looking like you've been duelling a—"

"Yeah, duelling."

Gina slowly stood up from her bed and made her way over to Kei, who stationed herself near the door, not daring to get any closer to the girl in front of her. If anyone were to walk in, they'd see the mess in front of them: A broken girl, ready to cry her heart out, and a liar, ready to pretend to care.

"Who did you– Did Tiberius do this? Did you guys have a bad—?"

“No! How could you–” Kei took another deep breath and sidestepped, trying to put space in between herself and Gina, who outstretched her arms. “I just spent Merlin knows how long *fighting* them, but I just got back and—”

“Fighting? Fighting who? Kei, where have you been?”

A bitter laugh caught itself in the back of Kei’s throat. She couldn’t process whether Gina didn’t know or whether she was pretending to not know.

“Harry Potter isn’t crazy, Georgina,” said Kei quietly. Gina slightly flinched at the use of her full name. “I’ve spent my afternoon fighting *Death Eaters*. Running from your *mother*.”

No words could have described the hurt Kei felt when Gina’s face paled, it was like a child getting caught with their hand in the cookie jar. There was nothing that could be said to convince Kei of Gina’s ignorance about her mother’s whereabouts. Everyone knew that Bellatrix Lestrange had escaped Azkaban in February, but no one knew where she resided. But the look on Gina’s face told Kei that she did.

Gina opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. No excuses, no apologies, nothing to reassure Kei that she cared for her.

“Nothing?” Kei breathed. “You have nothing to say? Absolutely nothing?”

“I–” Gina shook her head. “No.”

Never had Kei seen Gina become wordless. The girl with the sharp tongue, quick comebacks, and an answer for everything had been rendered speechless; that infuriated Kei.

“Tiberius was right,” they scoffed in disbelief. “This entire time– t-the dates, the kisses— Is that why you did all this? Acting all lovey-dovey. The presents, the dates, the random kisses— all to dismiss me and act as though everything was okay, that you were clueless. You were lying the entire time?”

The words were sour on Kei’s tongue as she said them, her heart shattering with every syllable.

“No, no. It was all true! I didn’t want to lie to you— I didn’t lie, I just didn’t want to talk about it. I didn’t want to give you a reason to not trust me,” Gina tried. She took a step forward to touch Kei, but they took another sidestep adding space in between them.

“And when I found out, did you think I would still trust you then? Do you think I trust you now?” Tears welled in her eyes. Her best friend, her girlfriend, the girl she *loved*. . . had betrayed her.

“Kei,” Gina said softly, “please.”

“‘Please’ nothing! You get no pleas,” Kei shouted.

The silence filled the room and echoed in their chests, waiting for any indication of what they thought. Gina was never good with emotions or having people cry in front of her, more or less caring of making anyone cry; but seeing her girlfriend *hurt*, despite trying so hard to not, hurt more than she could ever have thought.

“Why?” Kei asked. Gina stayed silent. “Why didn’t you—” Their voice got caught in their throat at a realization, “Vic knows, doesn’t he? Of course, he does, he’s her son as well– your brother.”

“Kei. . .”

“No, Gina. Why?” her voice raised in volume and Gina stood up straighter, a natural response for her as though she was ready to fight at any moment. Kei let out a soft bitter laugh, knowing Gina’s body language.

“I didn’t want to hurt you, Kei,” Gina’s voice was strong though soft, trying to keep the emotion out but failing.

“GINA, YOU LIED TO ME,” she shouted. “I TRUSTED YOU, I LOVED YOU. YOU HAD EVERY CHANCE TO WARN ME, TO WARN SOMEONE BUT YOU DIDN’T. YOU SAID NOTHING AND LET US WALK INTO A BATTLE NONE OF US WERE PREPARED FOR.”

“I– It’s not that simple.”

“NOT THAT SIMPLE? GINA–” Kei stopped and took a breath, trying to stop the tears and stop the hurt, to calm down in every way she could. “I could have died, any of us could have died. Someone did die, actually. But we– *I*, one of your ‘friends,’ *your fucking girlfriend*, could have died.”

“That’s not fair and you know it.”

“You–” Kei broke off and her heart shattered. Nothing mattered, they wanted nothing held back. To Kei, there was no point anymore. “Georgina, you didn’t just break me, you’ve destroyed the very person I am. I trusted you with no question, took your word as law, and listened to every word you’ve ever said. You took me for granted, took my kindness as a chess piece to play to make sure I never questioned you. I loved you more than anything and you took my love and *poisoned* it.”

Gina shook her head in disbelief, “that’s not what I was doing! I do, Kei. I didn’t– I didn’t destroy you. I never wanted to hurt you. I love you—”

“No, you don’t,” she cut her off angrily. “Your words are empty, just pure *bullshit*. You don’t love me and you never did. The only person you love is yourself– if that. And if you had *any* respect for me or our friendship and relationship, you would at least have the *courtesy* to tell me YOU KNEW YOUR MOTHER WAS BACK AND WHERE SHE WAS.”

The Slytherin bit her tongue, a hollow feeling in her chest. Kei didn’t believe she loved her, but she did. At first it had been as she said: A trick to get Kei to stop questioning her, she didn’t want to lie to her best friend. The more Gina did all of the romantic outings and gestures, kissing them every time they saw one another, and the presents. . . it was real. Georgina Lestrange had managed to fall in love with her best friend. But it didn’t matter now, she hurt them. And Kei could see the realization on Gina’s face and it hurt her— Tiberius was right.

“I’m sorry. . .”

“No, you’re not. You never were and you never will be,” spat Kei. “You wanted to live up to the Lestrange name? Congratulations, you have. You are a pure Slytherin, evil as they come and just as cunning. You tricked me, you’ve fooled us all. Want to know why everyone is so bloody scared of you guys, the Death Eater’s kids? Because of moments like these where you have to choose between legacy and doing what’s right. You’re a Lestrange, through and through. You’ve chosen where you stand and now you’ll deal with it.”

“K-Kei,” Gina’s voice quivered at Kei’s confession. She never meant to hurt her, her love.

“This is going to end in a war and I hope you can trust who you have on your side because I thought I could, but it looks like I was wrong. We are done, Lestrange.”

With that, Kei turned and left Gina’s dorm heartbroken and alone. Walking up the stairs, Kei found Tiberius sitting on one of the couches near the fireplace. At the sound of Kei’s shoes, Tiberius looked up pale-faced and teary-eyed. She had assumed Tiberius had the same fight with Vic that Kei had with Gina. He wasn’t one to cry but this was the second time they’d seen him cry in a year. Slowly, Kei wordlessly made her way over to him and just nodded. Tiberius bit his lip and shook his head in disbelief.

“Reese’s,” Kei let out a sob, “that really just happened?”

Tiberius silently nodded.

Kei took the empty spot next to Tiberius and pulled her legs under her, leaning into his chest as he wrapped his arms around her. Her arm curled up to her chest, trying to push away all the sadness and pain. The bracelet on her wrist was ever so present as it pushed against her chest, ironically over her broken heart.

"I'm so sorry, Tiberius," she cried into him.

They could only imagine how much his breakup hurt him taking into account the stupid soulmate bond he had with Vic. Kei felt as though her world were crumbling, every ounce of trust she had put into everyone being questioned by the second. Every single ounce of progress that had been made over the last two years was lost within the last few hours. Without speaking, without questions of what they said to their exes, they both knew their speculations were right: Betrayed at the slightest and tricked in the worst way possible.

31. Goodbye Childhood

Alone.

Franklin Higgs was alone.

Looking over the Great Hall, there was a sense of emptiness that echoed through Kei's chest. Faces of her former classmates, their friends and family. Their father wasn't in the sea of people, no owl came in the morning with congratulations from Terence, no good luck kiss as she walked to the teacher's platform, nothing.

Alone. With nothing.

Standing behind Headmaster Dumbledore's podium, Kei plastered on a bright smile in means of reassuring the students in front of them. Her own eyes betrayed her as they found the bright blue ones she hadn't dared look into the last week. Kei's smile faltered.

Professor Dumbledore motioned over to where Kei was standing, bringing attention to the Head Girl and the witch with the highest marks. She had done it. Kei won. The title, the grades. But that was it. Her victory was empty as the charm bracelet clinked when Kei placed her hand on the podium.

"Good evening," she called out. "Congratulations on finally graduating Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As Head Girl, it is my honour to applaud you on your achievements over the last seven years. I would also like to congratulate Gryffindor for winning this year's House Cup for having the highest points."

Kei tried their hardest to hold her smile, talking about the good moments they'd all had at Hogwarts, but it grew harder as she wanted to reflect on her own memories. It didn't work. Tears sprang in her eyes and she let out a little laugh at her own foolishness.

". . . but now," she continued, following Dumbledore's orders on how to close her speech, "Professor Dumbledore invites you all to walk to the dock where the boats we took as first years will take us back to Hogsmeade Station as seventh years for the last time. The only request is that there are two to a boat rather than four— we have grown quite a bit since then."

An excited murmur echoed through the hall as students paired up in twos as Kei quickly made her way over to Tiberius. He held out his hand to her and she happily took it, leaning into him sadly. The first time they had been on the boats, the pair had sat with the Lestrange twins, having shared a compartment with them. Now, in their final time, it was how it always was: Tiberius and Kei only had each other.

As the graduating students walked out of the Great Hall and through the entrance doors, the other students applauded them. A small smile played on Kei's lips as the prefects and younger students said their goodbyes to her, happy that she had been their Head Girl and friend. There was a tap on Kei's shoulder, causing them to whirl around as Tiberius continued walking.

"They're kind of dying," they mumbled. "I'm not very good with plants— actually, I'm pretty dreadful at it."

"Are they honeysuckles?" Kei gasped.

Silas had a small bouquet of butchered flowers in their hands— one of them even had its roots still.

He nodded, "usually Nev would help me with. . . pruning, I think he calls it, but he's a little incapacitated at the moment. He's pretty slow, finally packing his trunk for the summer."

Kei's smile faltered slightly but forced out a laugh, "pruning isn't the correct term, Mr Thesaurus, but I'll let it slide this once."

There was a small awkward silence as Silas finally handed Kei the stems.

"I'm going to miss you, Silly," they whispered.

"I wish you had been in my year or I in yours," he admitted. "I don't like you leaving."

The graduated Hufflepuff frowned, "I don't either. But I promise to visit, I'll come to Hogsmeade weekends and take you away for Christmas break so you can see something other than the Black Lake for the holiday!"

A sad smile played on Silas' face, "you better keep your promise."

"Are you going to sit with Tib and me on the train to Hogwarts?"

"Actually, I'm taking the Floo from Flourish and Blotts to my dad's shop," his face hardened, clearly upset with the idea.

"That's all right," Kei sighed. "I'll send you owls. Hopeful I can see you this summer?"

Silas nodded, knowing it was highly unlikely, and Kei smiled along, knowing the very same thing. Unexpectedly, Silas hugged Kei, completely unprompted. She froze at the action, not expecting it— especially from the young Slytherin. They smiled softly and hugged him back, leaning their head on his.

When Kei finally made it to the dock, she found Tiberius in a boat by himself. He looked impatient, looking around at all the other pairs of people— some couples, other friends.

"Boo!" she shouted, causing Tiberius to spin around, rocking the boat slightly.

"Where've you be— What are *those*?"

Kei frowned, "honeysuckles from Silas."

"They look. . . that was sweet of them," Tiberius trailed off.

Shaking their head, Kei carefully stepped into the boat and waited for Hagrid to send them off like he brought them to Hogwarts over seven years ago. It was a bittersweet moment, more bitter than sweet, but Kei loved it nonetheless.

She looked over at her best friend and sighed to herself. Although she felt she was alone, she knew she'd always have Tiberius. And Kei didn't have 'nothing' either because no matter what they had their friendship. The threaded bracelet hung on her wrist, reminding her of the promise they had made to each other.

"Do you still have your bracelet?" Kei suddenly asked Tiberius.

He had been in his own world, looking at the reflection of the boats on the lake. At Kei's question, he looked over to them and nodded, holding up his left arm to show the weathered yellow and purple twine bracelet.

Kei let out a little laugh and smiled, holding up her own wrist to show the matching set.

"You know, I love you, right?" he asked.

They smiled, "I know. I love you too, Reese's."

"You and me against the world, Frankie. Just you and me."

It had taken Kei and Tiberius a week to devise a plan: Convince Alastor Moody to allow

them to be a part of the Order of the Phoenix. Granted this plan wasn't a very good one, but with their combined willpower and a bit of annoyance, they believed they'd get through to him. That and the fact they truly believed they proved themselves last month at the Ministry.

"Alastor, we need to talk with you," Tiberius said, walking into the kitchen with Kei.

"Talk," he nodded, taking a seat at the table.

Though Kei had known Alastor for nearly all their life and looked up to him as a father figure, there were times he really intimidated her– now was one of those times. Kei stood next to Tiberius and made sure she stood tall, straightening her posture and keeping her head high; in turn, Tiberius squared his shoulders and stood tall.

He cleared his throat, "we want to join the Order."

Alastor's face didn't allow any sign of acknowledgement, approval, or disapproval. Tiberius continued:

"Now, before you say no, we're not children anymore and have finally graduated."

Kei nodded in agreement, "on top of the fact that we both tied for the highest marks in our Defence Against the Dark Arts graduation records of our year, we've *proved* ourselves worthy of a place in the Order."

Kei paused and waited for some kind of a reaction from Alastor. He leaned forward a bit, his magical eye moved from Kei to Tiberius and opened his mouth, only for Tiberius to cut him off.

"By no means do we believe this is a game or some Hogwarts club we can join and drop out of once we get bored. We want to be able to fight on the right side, for the right cause, and help stop Voldemort."

"Okay," Alastor said. Kei's frozen face broke out in a small smile, but Tiberius didn't seem to understand him correctly.

"Alastor, we have got to do this. We're not going to sit around pretending our world is falling apart while there are people out there fighting. We want to fight, too. We're smart, careful, calculating—"

"I know," he agreed.

"—have matured greatly since we were last tasked with something important. The battle last month was just more proof that Kei and I need to be a part of this– to fight!"

"I agree," Alastor raised his brow and looked at Kei.

“Tib—” Kei tried.

“The Order will need more members. It’s been disbanded since the last war, members have died while others won’t want to rejoin—”

“Tiberius—” Alastor was unheard by his son.

“—but there will be people that will. During the First Wizarding War, Hogwarts graduates joined. Why can’t we? We’re just as good– daresay better, having you taught us. And personally, you’ve been preparing me for it since I can remember. For Merlin’s sake, I’m in Auror training, Kei’s been studying and duelling with me the last few summers. I don’t see why—”

“TIB!” Kei finally shouted, shoving his side. Tiberius stopped talking.

Alastor grunted, “for someone trying to convince me they’re attentive enough to be in a war you sure don’t pay attention.”

“What–?” Tiberius breathed.

“He agrees,” Kei nodded, trying to hide a smile.

Tiberius looked from Kei to his father in disbelief and let out a little breath, smiling, “you’ll let us fight?”

“Yeah, as long as you two take it seriously and don’t fool around,” he huffed.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t be thankin’ me yet. You say you want in ‘til you’ve got a wand to your throat and Death tryin’ta greet you early.”

With that Alastor stood up and went over to the sitting area, leaving the pair alone. Kei nearly squealed with joy and instantly hugged Tiberius. There was nothing more Kei wanted than Alastor’s approval; allowing them and Tiberius to join the Order, fight alongside them for something they believed strongly about, and all while treating her like an adult was more than Kei could ever hope for.

But despite “being adults” Kei and Tiberius still snuck out to see Gerald later that night. It was a feeling of relief when Kei Apparated into the abandoned building— if anyone could make her feel better, besides Tiberius, it was Gerald (and maybe Alastor, but it depended on the day).

“Don’t tell me youse ghosts,” Gerald groaned as the pair appeared.

“Called Apparating,” Tiberius rolled his eyes. “Like that muggle teleportation thing

where they go *poof!*"

"Took ya' long enough to come an' see me," he grumbled, glaring at Tiberius. Gerald turned to Kei, "nice to see ya', Frankie."

"Hey, Ger," she smiled, sitting on the discarded wooden barrel.

"Oh no, what happened now? First this one's father, what's next?"

Tiberius shot Kei a look as she smiled sheepishly. Since Tiberius hadn't visited Gerald last summer, she had told the ghost everything without him present. He wasn't aware of that.

"This has been a long bloody year," grumbled Tiberius.

He took the plastic bin next to Kei and groaned, telling Gerald all about the past year. Tiberius' storytelling skills were much more concise, not jumping around as much as Kei had last summer.

Gerald could tell how hard it was for Tiberius to talk about Vic and Gina, for Kei's sake. He frowned at the memory of the look on Kei's face when they spoke about the Lestrange girl. The ghost had hoped it would have turned out the way the pair had wanted, but life had a funny way of doing things. Lessons that needed to be taught, obstacles that needed to be passed— life wasn't fair and laughed at those who never succeeded in their own happiness.

". . . at least we graduated in one piece," Tiberius frowned. "Granted we have a few scars, some physical and other's emotional, but hey, we're adults now."

"Alastor even let us join the Order," Kei smiled widely, still excited over their accomplishment. "The Order are like the civilian Aurors, trying to take down Voldemort and his little clan of stuck up a—"

"Language, Frankie," Gerald raised his brow but smiled softly. "Well, I suppose I can't say that any longer. You *are* an adult now, apparently. Still seventeen, but, in your world, a full fledged graduated adult."

There was an odd tone to his words. He looked as though he were drunk, Kei laughed it off. But Tiberius narrowed his eyes at the ghost, not liking the moonlight that came into the room, causing him to grow more opaque.

"You all right, Ger?" laughed Kei.

He let out a content laugh, "*I'm s'proud of you both*."

Kei smiled softly. Tiberius' concentrated gaze softened.

"You both've grown up to be such great people," he sniffled. It was odd, thinking of a

ghost crying— Kei wanted to laugh. “You’ve gone an’ done it. Graduated wizards, doing what’cha wan’ do—”

Kei’s smile began to drop as the moonlight nearly caused Gerald to disappear. He sounded odd, the voice he used sounded like those of nightmares when the electricity runs out of an automatic doll.

“Gerald?” she breathed.

“— and no one can tell you different,” he laughed.

Tiberius stood up, taking a step forward, “Gerald, are you okay?”

“Tiberius,” he smiled sadly, “I’m better than okay. You’ve done it.”

“Done what?” Kei asked, standing up.

“Ya’ helped me. I thought of you two as my children– I only wanted ya’ to succeed and you did it. You got your aurorinator jobs and finished school,” Gerald beamed. “An’ don’t worry about your loves, they’ll come back in due time.”

“G-Gerald, what’s going on?” she shrieked, watching the loving ghost grow more and more opaque. Kei was scared that if she blinked, he’d disappear altogether.

But she needn’t blink.

“Thank you for everything, Franklin and Tiberius,” his voice trailed off as the ghost disappeared. The last words they heard of him was “I love. . .” and he was gone.

Kei let out a shutter, her heart breaking.

The ghost they had grown to love was gone and it was their fault. Unknowingly, Kei and Tiberius helped Gerald move on. All the trapped soul wanted to do was to watch his children grow up. He hadn’t been able to when he was alive, dying too soon, but life gave him a second chance. The ghost got the chance to watch two random kids grow up to be the people they wanted to be. Confiding all of their troubles and worries on the old man’s soul.

“Frankie, it’s okay,” Tiberius whispered to her.

“He’s g-gone!” she said and turned to the empty room, shouting as loud as she could, “Gerald! Gerald Zeitler, you come b-back this instant.”

“Frankie—”

“P-Please,” Kei pleaded into thin air. In the matter of a year, Kei had lost so much: Her house, father, brother, girlfriend, *friends*, and childhood. The only thing they seemed to be good at was losing. She looked over to Tiberius and shook her head, “Reese’s, please don’t leave me.

You're all I have, I can't lose you, too."

"I'm not going anywhere, Frankie," he shushed the girl. "It's okay. I promise."

32. The Order of the Phoenix

There were moments. Moments where everything was okay: Kei forgot they had graduated the month before; no, there hadn't been a fight at the Ministry; she didn't get her heart ripped out, and she was most definitely not alone. But even in the small lapse of memory, she still woke up in a cold sweat at the memory of Antonin's wand burning her neck or the cackle of Bellatrix Lestrange's insanity or even the empty look in the blue eyes she once loved.

Groaning, Kei peeled the blankets off her body, feeling disgusted about her wet skin. Nightmares were what they were. Memories of all sorts were poisoned— outings to Hogsmeade, dueling in the gardens, beloved nicknames turning sour.

The house was peaceful and quiet. Too quiet for her liking.

The clock read just after four in the morning.

Later than usual, they hummed

Sleep was beginning to be a chore rather than an escape. Her body had grown accustomed to waking some time around three, so sleeping in until four was a surprise. Kei learned that Alastor wouldn't be up for another two hours and Tiberius would have to be woken up unless he planned on sleeping way past noon— a quick *Aguamenti* and he was up.

Kei looked around her room and sighed, it was officially her room. Having stayed with Tiberius for the last few years, they were given one of the spare rooms to sleep in whenever they slept over. Now that she was graduated and homeless, Alastor agreed with Tiberius in letting Kei move in with them. She felt at home there.

Changing into muggle clothing, Kei apparated out of the house and in front of a house down the street. The lights were off, the blinds and curtains were drawn— it looked empty. She wondered where they were, how they were. Their eyes were drawn to the only window with its curtains drawn back.

Apparating into the room, she looked around– everything was the same. Kei hadn't known what to expect going into their old room. Remembering something, she squatted next to the bed and slipped her arm in between the box spring and the mattress, searching for the hidden item. Their fingertips pushed the cool metal and grabbed the small roll. The butterbeer cap rolled

on the thick string was still hidden. She wondered if the rest of the group still had theirs.

And doing the same at the foot of her bed, she pulled out a folded aged photograph. It was taken in fifth year when Kei had finally convinced Tiberius to meet her friends.

Kei was standing in the middle of the photo, in between Tiberius and Gina; Gina stood to her left with Vic on her left; Tiberius, to Kei's right, stood next to Silas, who looked nervously between the fifth and sixth year, Lonnie; lastly, Jaqen stood awkwardly to Vic's right, looking over at the group in slight confusion. A group of misfits. In the picture, Gina had been saying something, her hand moving behind Kei as though to hit her over the head. Kei racked their brain and came to the conclusion it had to do with something about Baguettes, hence the name The Baguette Brigade.

She smiled sadly at the photograph before stuffing it into her shorts. With one last look around the room, Kei apparated out of her childhood home and into the now forever empty building. In past summers, she and Tiberius would sneak away to visit Gerald whenever they were free or bored, loving to surprise him; this summer, only Kei came, in the middle of the night or during "bathroom breaks," just in hopes he'd magically appear and surprise him as they'd done in the past. But it was the past.

The building looked dingier than they remembered— the walls were crumbling, ivy filling the cracks; the floor bore a thick layer of dirt and dusty, claiming it'd been here for over decades; and trash, that had been brought in by animals and wind, littered the area coincidentally proving barrels and bins for the pair to sit during their visit. But besides the aged empty room, there was nothing.

In a fit of anger, Kei grabbed her well worn wooden barrel and flung it at the brick wall, letting it splinter all over the room. Since it wasn't even five in the morning, the noise echoed through the street, birds nearby took flight at the noise, and Kei flinched at the realization of possibly waking up the neighbours. Just as they went to leave the building, Kei noticed a slip of parchment floating down to the ground.

It wasn't muggle paper like the other trash around the room, but resembled parchment. Snatching up the page, Kei realized she was right– it was parchment. Her heart fluttered looking down at the mixed penmanship on the slip:

Muggle Films

➔ ~~A Canterbury Tale~~

➔ A Canterbury Tale

➔ Journey's End

➔ The Million Pound Note

➔ The Lavender Hill Mob

➔ The ~~Angle~~ Angel with the Trumpet

Kei had found the list of Muggle films Gerald had recommended to them. She let out a little laugh at the memory of her and Tiberius fighting over who got to use the *pen* to write some of the films the old ghost said. The list went on, most of them some kind of manly action film Gerald thought Tiberius would like. A little smile formed on Kei's face as she apparated directly in front of his door.

Their fist was just about to knock on his door when they realized the time. In her excitement and burst of happiness, Kei had forgotten the small detail of the sun not being risen yet. She absolutely hated waiting and tried her hardest to busy herself as time slowly went.

Alastor was surprised to see the girl attempting to cook later on in the morning. In their boredom, Kei decided to try and make breakfast— *try* being the key word. She was never good at cooking or baking and preferred to eat sweets than make them.

"Kei, what're you—"

"*Quoo-ih-chee*, I believe," she furrowed her brows in confusion.

"It's quiche," Alastor sighed as he looked around the kitchen. "Order training in the afternoon, make sure you get there on time. Clean this up."

Kei frowned, "got it."

It wasn't long until Alastor left, leaving her alone once more. And cleaning the kitchen was much faster than trying to make the pastry. Kei had failed immensely— the dough burned black but the egg was jiggly and raw— and it made sense that was why Alastor denied the baked goods.

Time crawled by so slowly, so bored, Kei was close to pulling their hair out in anticipation. Thinking back to the list of films, she came up with the idea to actually find a way to watch the films rather than just show Tiberius. And watching muggle films would give her something to do when she was awake at all hours of the night.

Not caring about the time, Kei ran up to Tiberius' room at eight forty-seven in the morning, banging on the door and swinging it up.

"*Reese's*, you will never believe— why do you look dead?" she paused.

"Sick," his voice hoarse and nose stuffed.

Kei frowned, "stop being sick."

"Gee, thanks a lot, Frankie."

Their exciting ideas went out of the window as Kei ran through the house, pulling out the potion cauldron, and got to working on a potion for Tiberius. As the healing potion matured, she tried her hardest on making a simple soup for him to drink in hopes of making him feel better.

It's the thought that counts, she cringed, ladling the potion into a small vial and the soup into a bowl.

"What is *that*?" he moaned, slowly sitting up in his bed.

"Er, soup," Kei grinned, "and Wiggenweld Potion."

Tiberius flinched as Kei opened up his curtains after setting the vial and bowl on his nightstand. They pushed open the windows, letting the warm summer wind circulate in the room.

"C'mon, stop your whining and take the vial, drink your soup, and listen because I have news," Kei instructed, handing him the vial.

He shot back the potion and shuttered before cautiously holding the bowl of "soup." Tiberius picked up the spoon for appearances sake and pretended to take a bite before Kei turned around and pulled out a slip of parchment.

"So," Kei began. In her excitement, she paid no mind to the sick boy who pretended to eat the soup. They explained their adventure to the Higgs residence where they got the butterbeer cap bracelet and the old photograph, along with going into the abandoned home where she found the list of films.

In his awe, Tiberius placed the bowl down and grabbed the list out of her hands. He smiled at the memory and rubbed his thumb over the pen marks. Kei smiled down at him and turned to retrieve the empty soup bowl, only to see it was full.

"*Tiberius*!" she gasped.

He jumped at her shrill and looked over at her sheepishly, "I'm not hungry!"

"I don't care if you're not hungry, it'll make you feel better," Kei reasoned.

"*That'll* make me feel *better*?" he said in awe.

"You take that back," she narrowed her eyes at him. "Fine, I'll just spoon feed it to you *like a child*."

Tiberius tried to move out of the way, but he was stuck in between the wall and Kei. He was unable to apparate because his wand was on the nightstand behind her. He was stuck.

Kei came at him with the spoon, "eat the soup! I made it just for you. C'mon, it'll be like airplanes!"

"That's not soup," he screamed, frantically trying to get out of Kei's reach.

"Yes, it is! It's got noodles and potatoes and liquid—"

"*LIQUID*? You can't even tell me what kind of 'liquid' the soup has and you want me to *eat* it?"

"Tiberius, just eat the bloody soup! Let me help you," Kei fought.

"You'll help better by not giving me that 'liquid'!" shouted Tiberius.

They fought for a while, Kei trying to give Tiberius the horribly made soup and Tiberius trying to put as much distance as possible between himself and the spoon she had. The soup debacle ended with Tiberius "accidentally" kicking the bowl out of Kei's hands and sending it flying into the wall across the room. Kei responded by screaming and launching the spoon at him, coincidentally hitting him in the face just below his eye.

Although the soup didn't do much for him, the potion Kei made did make Tiberius feel better just in time for the Order training Alastor had told Kei about. Instead of doing it at Grimmauld Place, the former Order Headquarters, the training was at the Weasley's house. Alastor thought it best that Kei and Tiberius train separately as they never did.

"It will do you both good to learn how to fight without one another or with others," he reasoned.

Kei didn't like the idea of not fighting alongside her best friend, but said nothing as Alastor paired her up with George. Tiberius was paired up with Fred and seemed to have enjoyed duelling him more than duelling with him. And after a few hours of training, Kei was exhausted. She envied Tiberius for he didn't look nearly as tired as she did.

Instead of finding someplace to get a television thing to watch muggle films, the Weasley twins invited the pair to their joke shop. Without question, Kei and Tiberius complied, apparating out of the Burrow and to Diagon Alley. It was horrible.

Although Kei knew what kind of horrors lived in their own mind, they never imagined

that the world could mirror it. The wizarding world now knew of Lord Voldemort's reappearance due to the battle they had fought the previous month. It seemed as though that battle didn't only affect those who fought, but those who knew of it.

The previously colorful, glittering window displays of spellbooks, potion ingredients, and cauldrons were lost to view, hidden behind the large Ministry of Magic posters that had been pasted over them. Most of these somber purple posters carried blown-up versions of the security advice on the Ministry pamphlets that had been sent out over the summer, but others bore moving black-and-white photographs of Death Eaters known to be on the loose. Kei suddenly felt selfish as she hadn't taken into account anyone but herself and the Order.

"Look at that," Tiberius smiled softly at the brightly lit shop.

It was Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, the joke shop run by Fred and George. Set against the dull, poster-muffled shop fronts around them, the shop's windows hit the eye like a firework display. The left-hand window was dazzlingly full of an assortment of goods that revolved, popped, flashed, bounced, and shrieked.

"I give them a lot of credit," Kei said, giggling at the gigantic poster on the right-hand window.

WHY ARE YOU WORRYING ABOUT
YOU-KNOW-WHO?
YOU SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT
U-NO-POO—
THE CONSTIPATION SENSATION
THAT'S GRIPPING THE NATION!

The atmosphere in the joke shop greatly opposed the suffocatingly dark feeling on the streets of Diagon Alley. Being it was just the beginning of August, students weren't meant to get their books list for another two weeks, leaving the High Street empty. Kei finally enjoyed herself, asking the twins all kinds of questions about the charms and potions used for their pranks and items. Tiberius watched and laughed along as Kei tried one of the horrible toffees. She grew sick to her stomach and puked right into the bin near the till. George quickly gave her the counter-toffee and Kei was all right again.

"All right, I think that's enough questions," Tiberius smiled weakly. He looked exhausted

and Kei only now realized how truly tired he must have been— he had woken up ill.

A sad smile played on her face feeling guilty for indulging in an adventure.

He noticed and slung an arm over their shoulders, “wanna go see if we can visit Silas? Reckon he’ll enjoy our company?”

Kei lit up slightly, only to rub her hands nervously, “I don’t know. . . Are you all right? You were ill this morning, plus I don’t want to get Sil into trouble! His father doesn’t seem too amicable.”

Tiberius gave Fred and George a quick nod before pulling Kei out of the joke shop and slowly down the street, “I’m fine quite honestly. And I know how much you miss Silas, so I don’t see why we can’t give him a quick visit.”

After a quick inner battle, Kei finally agreed to turn down Knockturn Alley. Even this street was quiet, not many wizards hanging around. If they were scared of Dark Wizards lurking in the shadows, Knockturn Alley wouldn’t be a place to go anyways. Just as the pair made it to Borgin and Burkes, Kei spotted a small curly haired boy wiping the inside of the dusted window clean.

Stepping up to the shop, Kei’s smile slightly faltered at Silas’ appearance. She never seemed to have minded their shy and quiet appearance, never thinking too hard on why they were so wary of hugs and seemed so rugged, but at that moment, Kei figured out why. A bright red bruise colored the small boy’s face, another blue and yellow bruise threatened to come out of his shirt and up his neck, and angry blisters littered his hands. It took a few seconds for Silas Burke to notice someone was on the other side of the glass, but when he did, Kei’s heart officially shattered.

Silas looked broken and numb, sadness radiating off his body with an underlying aura of darkness and fear. Kei went to run and open the door, but Silas beat her to it. He flipped the Open Sign closed, flicked the lock closed, and blinked at them.

“Silas?” she whispered.

He tilted his head slightly, “only customers are welcomed, but we’re closed.”

Kei quickly whipped her head around to Tiberius with her hand extended, “I need three Galleons. I have two, but I don’t think they’ll have anything under—”

“Frankie,” Tiberius breathed, “there’s nothing you could possibly want in there and—” he walked up to her, whispering into her hair, “— I don’t think he wants to see you right now.”

She looked up at him with tears brimming in her eyes. Kei took a quick glance at Silas, who at her gaze looked down, and nodded understandingly.

"Oh, all right," she breathed, taking another quick look at the boy behind the glass, "Sil, can we come back when you're open?"

Kei gave him a silent plea, hoping he'd allow them to see him. She wanted some kind of normalcy from her friends, but it only seemed as if Tiberius wanted her.

Silas nodded, "customers only."

Before Kei could say anything else, Tiberius took it upon himself and quickly apparate them out of Knockturn Alley and back home. Memories of Vic, Gina, and Silas flashed before her eyes— Death Eater's kids. *Maybe they all chose legacy*, they thought sourly.

Kei looked up at Tiberius and frowned, *not him. Never him.*

33. Hogwarts

August and September flew by fast. Celebrating his birthday wasn't something Tiberius wanted to do, so a small cake and trip to Muggle London was enough for him. Halloween was an odd holiday as Kei and Tiberius only now realized how many muggle children lived in their neighbourhood. It was nice to see the children not worry about an impending war in their war.

"Witches don't look like that," Tiberius commented as he closed the door on a seven year old dressed more like a goblin-witch mixture rather than an actual witch like Kei.

She laughed, "well based on the newer muggle films, witches and sorcerers look quite evil. The muggle children don't know any better."

November passed without a problem on their end as they were just studying the defenses they'd learned during Dumbledore's Army and all throughout their lessons at Hogwarts. But at Hogwarts, there had been a situation regarding a Gryffindor seventh year getting cursed by a necklace.

Alastor told the pair about the situation, information whirling around the Order as they tried to figure out what was happening. Tonks wasn't very pleased with the information as she had been on duty at Hogwarts in September and felt like she had missed something. Kei was certain that there was no way Tonks had missed anything more or less anything flying past Flitwick's wards.

And when December came around, Tiberius, who was officially training to be an Auror,

was meant to show up to one of the dreaded Ministry Events for the Christmas holiday. In turn, Kei was going to accompany their best friend in solidarity. Although the pair were finally out from under Alastor's and Albert's charge for the events, as Ministry workers, they had to go themselves.

"You know, I hate you for making me do this," Kei said, pulling on Tiberius' tie.

"C'mon, Frankie, you would really have me go by myself?" he laughed as Kei dropped their hands.

She grumbled something under her breath as she adjusted the baby blue dress she wore. The long sleeves allowed her to hide her wand in there as the dress she wore was too short and would show the garter belt wand holder Shiloh had gotten her during sixth year.

"Apparating, right?" asked Kei.

"'Course."

Kei grabbed only Tiberius' hand and turned on the spot, apparting them to Bragman Manor. Sage Bragman was one of the Ministry Officials that were holding the Christmas Gala. Tiberius let go of Kei's hand and offered them his elbow to play as a polite gentleman.

"You're not allowed any Firewhiskey this year," Kei smirked as the doors in front of them magically opened.

"Didn't plan on it," he scoffed.

"On the other hand, I will be enjoying myself," she raised her brow and picked up one of the flutes of bubbly alcohol. "You're apparating us back home. I apparated us—"

"*Franklin*," a voice muttered behind her.

At the voice, Kei jumped and dropped the glass she had in her hand. Before she could think, the glass disappeared. A house elf.

Kei turned to see it was Alastor that had frightened her. He looked wary.

"Hello, Alastor," she smiled, plastering her perfect ministry child charm on.

"No funny business. You both should be cautious of the people around here," he warned in a rushed whisper. "Last time, we didn't have any idea who was on what side, but this time, we have a history of knowledge."

Last time. Kei knew Alastor was referring to the First Wizarding War. A horrible chill ran up Kei's spine at the idea of there being a second war. Tiberius nodded, not noticing Kei's sudden stillness. He said something to his dad and Alastor walked away from the pair, but Kei

was too in her own thoughts to notice. The idea of there actually being another war scared her. Although they were well aware of what was at stake in the wizarding world at that moment, the childish side in her had hoped it wouldn't come to that.

"Frankie?" Tiberius asked, looking down at the girl.

Kei blinked and looked up at Tiberius, forcing her ministry smile back onto her face, "yes?"

"What're you thinking of?"

She sighed and whispered, "the war. Alastor is right: There's going to be an *actual* war and. . . we're on one side and there are people, who we'll know, on the. . . other."

It was a silent agreement. Tiberius knew exactly what Kei meant and what people they were referring to. It was a horrible thing to think about, having to go against the people you grew up with— but it seemed inevitable, everyone chose their own side and there was nothing to do. With a sigh, Tiberius grabbed two glasses from a table near them and handed one to Kei to drink.

Kei was curled up on the huge chair in her bedroom with the photo of The Baguette Brigade when Tiberius found her. He smiled to himself as he picked her up and put her to bed. Tiberius nearly succeeded until he stepped on a squeaky floorboard and woke them up. He found himself with a wand to throat as Kei looked at him, half asleep.

"Frankie, it's me," he whispered.

A look of realization passed through her face and Kei dropped her wand, letting go of a quick breath, and moving over on the bed.

"You all right? Why so on guard?" he asked.

Kei shook their head and turned away. Although she appreciated her best friend's concern, she couldn't tell him how afraid she was to face Gina in a battle, if it came to, or the idea of having to duel Vic once Tiberius couldn't. Not to mention all of the other students they had gone to school with who wouldn't be on their side. In no way was Kei naive to hope there wouldn't be a war, but held onto the wishful thinking of growing old without fighting in a war.

And the nightmare of a certain brunette holding her wand to their neck was more frightening than anything she could imagine.

When the second term started at Hogwarts, Tiberius and Kei were sent as Order Guards to keep watch in Hogsmeade for the month of January. Walking through the village of Hogsmeade was nostalgic, the last time they were there was when they had graduated.

“Isn’t it weird being back around here?” laughed Kei, watching the students walk through the village and up the pathway back to the castle they wanted to visit.

“I don’t entirely miss it, but yeah, a little weird,” he smiled.

Taking the familiar path back to the castle, the pair met Flitwick at the gate and got checked before being allowed into Hogwarts. They were meant to meet Dumbledore in the evening at Hogsmeade, but took it upon themselves to walk into the castle. Kei, in particular, wanted to see the garden once more.

“Frankie, it’s cold out,” Tiberius reasoned. “There’s going to be no flowers. There’s no point in—”

“What?”

Tiberius and Kei spun around to come face to face with one of their old friends. They stood small and nervous, but clearly surprised at the pair’s presence in the castle.

“Silas,” Kei gasped with a small smile.

“What’re you doing here?”

He didn’t seem too pleased with their appearance at school, but then again, he didn’t look too pleased when he saw them on Knockturn Alley in the summer.

“Just visiting,” Tiberius nodded.

“I told you we’d come and visit,” said Kei.

“But in the castle?”

Kei frowned at their tone. They swore Silas would be happy to see them. She was wrong.

“Are you all right?” she asked. “How’s this year going?”

“It’s Hogwarts, I suppose,” answered Silas. “Come to make sure there’s no Death Eaters here?”

Tiberius raised his eyebrows in surprise at the Slytherin’s assumption. The question seemed more hostile than curious and Silas’ peculiar motion to pull his sleeve down didn’t help Tiberius’ wariness.

“I guess you could say that. We’re here to make sure Hogwarts stays the safe haven it’s always been,” Tiberius stood up a little straighter, almost challenging Silas.

Kei noticed how Silas instantly reverted into themselves, nearly taking a step back from the pair. They were acting so odd, she missed the patient boy she had grown to love.

“Sil, is everything okay?” Kei asked softly, trying to stop Tiberius’ interrogation and

Silas' discomfort.

"Of course it is. I'm fine," he answered robotically.

They didn't miss the way his cheeks had hollowed or the deep, dark circle under his eyes. And the memory of the bruises and marks on their face didn't fade from Kei's mind either. She noticed the small scar on Silas' temple, the place where the cut had been in the summer. Only then did she notice how much thinner and smaller the Slytherin looked in his uniform, nothing like the boy she knew last year.

"Why're you lying?" Tiberius slightly raised his voice.

At this, Kei saw Silas immediately close off, sinking into his foot and officially stepping away from the pair. Although Tiberius didn't like lying or being lied to, as any person does, Kei didn't care for his tone of voice or hostile nature towards Silas. It was as though the old Tiberius was back; the Tiberius that hated Death Eaters and their children— but that wasn't Silas.

"Tiberius," Kei said firmly, looking over to her best friend, "that's enough. Go find McGonagall or Snape and tell them we're here early and want to meet Dumbledore." And when he opened his mouth to protest, they added, "I wasn't asking. Go."

He tsked and turned on his heel, heading for the Slytherin common room. Kei looked back at Silas to see him walking away from them in Kei's distraction.

"Sil, wait," she called out, jogging over to them. "I'm sorry for Tib, he's stressed," she mumbled. "What's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong, Franklin," he answered shortly. "I'm fine. *Just stressed*."

Kei pursed her lips, not liking his sarcasm, but pushed it aside. She supposed that Order members weren't the only stressed ones and, based on his appearance last she saw them, Silas wasn't immune to stress either.

"What happened this summer?"

Silas physically froze. His features hardened but his eyes casted downward, not daring to meet theirs.

"What makes you think something happened this summer?" he said lowly.

Kei didn't know whether it was right to bring up his bruises and scars, so opted in saying, "just a hunch. Summer was hard for everyone."

Silas barely looked up, making eye contact for a second or two before looking at something over Kei's shoulder as if they were in memory, "nothing unusual. Shop did well,

customers came and went, nothing. . . new."

"Are you sure?" Kei tilted their head.

"Customer confidentiality," he said blankly, glancing at his watch. "If you want to truly know whatever happened at my father's shop, then get Tiberius to get a Permission to search the shop. Aurors are just as good at putting their wands in other people's business as Death Eaters are at giving—"

"Silas, what are you getting—?"

But he cut her off, looking at his watch one more time, "I've got to get to my dorm and then to the Great Hall for dinner."

"Silas—" Kei tried, but he quickly turned away and continued the trek to the dungeons.

She frowned at Silas' odd nature and at Tiberius' instinct to question their friend. Kei was confused about what was happening but knew that, despite their confusion, they were meant to go meet Dumbledore and figure out a new plan of action to help keep the students safe.

34. Cold Faces

Coming towards the end of Spring, another student was put in danger through the term: Ron Weasley. He had gotten poisoned, by accident. Being it was originally meant for Dumbledore, this put the Order in high alert. And, barely at the start of Summer when Dumbledore alerted the Order of his secret trip away from the castle, they were all put on stand-by. He was sure that something was going to go wrong at Hogwarts and wanted to make sure the school was well cared for.

In turn, Alastor and Tonks told Tiberius and Kei to be at the ready for if and when they were needed.

Kei bolted upright as Tiberius shook her awake, careful to not get hexed by the half asleep witch. But the look of panic on Tiberius's face spoke loudly and they knew what had happened. Kei hadn't thought that both of their presences would be needed at the castle, but after all the hard work they put in during the past year, it seemed to have paid off. Tiberius and Kei were proper members of the Order of the Phoenix and needed to defend the castle.

"Hogwarts?" Kei confirmed, pulling her hair up.

"Yeah, we've got to go. Now."

Without hesitation, Kei turned on the spot and apparated outside of the gates of

Hogwarts. The apparition wards were still in place, not allowing them to get inside the grounds— that was a good sign. But the chaos had begun. This is what they had prepared for: War.

Running into the school, they were instantly met with a tense battle. The walls crumbled as they advanced and people ran in every which way trying to get away from the fight. The corridor was dark, the midnight moon being their only source of light besides the light of hexes and curses being thrown around. Blocking the incoming hexes, Kei quickly made their way down the corridor trying to disarm and stun any Death Eater they saw. But there was a sudden understanding of ruthlessness in her— she had to be as daring and powerful as the people they fought, if not moreso. Tiberius followed suit, throwing his own hexes as they proceeded into battle.

Looking around the corridor, the pair deflected the spells and ran around looking for familiar and friendly faces. The friendly face ended up being Tonks, who told them how Ron, Ginny, and Neville found her and got help.

"Where's everyone fighting?" Kei shouted, throwing a hex at one of the Death Eaters.

"Everywhere," replied Tonks.

"How do we know—?"

"*Franklin*," warned Tiberius, blocking a curse sent towards the two Hufflepuffs.

Kei groaned and moved out of the way, hexing the hooded figure across the way, "how do we know who to fight?"

Her voice was barely heard in the noise of the duel around them, but Tonks responded, "we don't. Be careful who you hex."

In a quick understanding, the three of them continued to run down the corridor doing their best to stay alive and unharmed. Two redheads accompanied one of their former Defence professor at the corridor near the Astronomy Tower. Within seconds of being there, a group of Death Eaters ran out the doors of the Astronomy Tower, laughing and cackling. The Order all jumped back and threw hexes and jinxes at them. It was a full-blown fight.

There were cries of pain and terror, bodies slumped against walls, students wailing and running around the corridors trying to not get hit. In the fight of it all, Kei lost sight of Tiberius through the fight leaving them alone. A tall thick Death Eater quickly came around the corner and stopped her, trying to hit her with the Cruciatus Curse. Deflecting it, Kei quickly stunned the

man to only be pushed past by Professor Snape, dragging Draco Malfoy through the throng of people. Their former Potions Professor didn't seem to want to fight and looked more preoccupied with getting the sixth year to safety than battling Death Eaters alongside the Order.

Paying no mind to him, Kei advanced down the corridor to see Tiberius duelling two Death Eaters. Just as she went to join their fight, Kei ended up flailing on the floor. It was a horrible pain, but slightly bearable. Instantly, they knew it was the Cruciatus Curse, but it wasn't too strong— probably a newer Death Eater recruit, someone they had graduated with or had graduated before them. Though she had stopped the other Death Eater from harming her, this Death Eater seemed to have caught her off guard. Kei maneuvered a way to hold herself on her hands and knees, trying to aim for the person cursing her, but it was no use as her eyes watered. But then the pain stopped. The person. . . stopped or had possibly gotten apprehended.

"Frankie," a voice called out. She looked away from the direction of the curser and saw Tiberius making his way to her. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Kei groaned, standing up as fast as they could and standing guard once more.

There wasn't much left to say as two Death Eaters made their way to the pair. Together, Tiberius and Kei fought vigilantly against them, blocking and hexing at their own defence. Just as Tiberius stunned the shorter of the foes, a red flash of light passed between his and Kei's heads. Kei spun around to see a Death Eater quickly turn and begin fighting a student.

"What's up with you?" Tiberius lectured her, exploding the space between them and the other half of the Death Eater they battled. "Pay attention here!"

"I'm sorry, we almost got hexed!" shouted Kei.

An explosion could be heard from outside the castle and the screaming increased. Minutes passed of duelling with hexes, dodged curses, pure chaos– then it just stopped. The Death Eaters stopped fighting and started deflecting hexes instead of throwing their own as they retreated. Kei advanced, basically trying to push them out of the castle, throwing her own hexes as anger fueled her fighting. But something caught her eye— actually, *someone*.

There was a moment where Kei felt as though the air in her lungs disappeared, her heart stopped, and her brain seemed to have melted. Everything they knew and were doing was suddenly gone at the sight of them. A blur of brown hair had run past them, nearly knocking into them, as she threw a hex that missed them by an inch. The Death Eater didn't wait around to see if their mark hit their target, but retreated through the nearest door and far away from her. There

was no way one could forget someone after spending nearly seven years of their life together. Mangled in the smell of burning, blood, and sweat, there was the scent of soft pines. Kei's advances had stopped in an instant, too stunned to do anything else.

"Franklin!" they heard Tiberius shout as a wand deflected a yellow hex that was aimed at their chest. It was the third time she'd been saved by him. With the last Death Eaters leaving the grounds, the dust in the castle began to settle and the damage could be seen properly.

Kei looked up at Tiberius, "did you see t-the girl who nearly hexed me?"

"Frankie, don't be an idiot, there were dozens of Death Eater's trying to hex—"

"Tiberius," she gulped, "was that *Gina*?"

He bit his tongue, not wanting to tell Kei the truth he most definitely knew. He recognized her instantly as she had passed Kei and knew it was Gina's stunning charm that nearly hit her. He knew better than to assume the Slytherin accidentally missed the shot at her ex girlfriend. Tiberius was aware that's what caused her to stall, Kei wasn't one to let up a duel for anything unless the opponent forfeited. Quite honestly, he was afraid of Gina being there– not for Kei's sake but for his own. Wherever Georgina Lestrange went, Vic Lestrange usually wasn't far behind; for once, Tiberius was glad he had not seen him.

With the aftermath of the battle, the deaths were also counted for— only one: Albus Dumbledore. Severus Snape had betrayed the Order, and Dumbledore, and then murdered him.

It was the next day, when the service was made, and the sun threatened to set. McGonagall put it together with the help of some of the Order and professors. Tiberius and Kei stood with Alastor and Tonks; nearly all of the Order of the Phoenix, along with Bill Weasley supported by Fleur, his fiancé, and followed by Fred and George, who were wearing jackets of black dragon skin. Then there was Madame Maxime, who took up two and a half chairs on her own; Tom, the landlord of the Leaky Cauldron in London; the hairy bass player from the Wizarding group the Weird Sisters; Ernie Prang, driver of the Knight Bus; Madam Malkin, of the robe shop in Diagon Alley; and some people whom were merely known by sight, such as the barman of the Hog's Head and the witch who pushed the trolley on the Hogwarts Express. The castle ghosts were there too, barely visible in the bright sunlight, discernible only when they moved, shimmering insubstantial in the gleaming air.

Kei watched as the students filed out of the castle as they followed their Head of House— Slytherin house accompanied by some other professor Kei didn't recognize.

People were whispering to each other; it sounded like a breeze in the grass, but the birdsong was louder by far. The crowd continued to swell; Kei found Neville being helped into a seat by Silas and pointed it out to Tiberius who smiled softly. Maybe all hope wasn't lost for them, staring at the Gryffindor and Slytherin Kei's hope in love rose.

The event lasted for a few hours, people coming to see Dumbledore's body, lying still on the table. A little tufty-haired man in plain black robes had got to his feet and stood now in front of Dumbledore's body. Kei's attention grew short as they thought of the events of the past night and could not hear what he was saying. Odd words floated back to them over the hundreds of heads. "Nobility of spirit" . . . "intellectual contribution" . . . "greatness of heart" . . It did not mean very much, empty words to fill the void of the listeners' hearts.

And soon, the little man in black had stopped speaking at last and resumed his seat. People around the lake waited for somebody else to get to their feet; having gone to a single funeral in the past, Kei had expected speeches, especially from the Minister, but nobody moved.

Then several people screamed and Tiberius grabbed ahold of Kei's arm in means of keeping them safe. Bright, white flames had erupted around Dumbledore's body and the table upon which it lay: Higher and higher they rose, obscuring the body. White smoke spiralled into the air and made strange shapes: It appeared, for one heart-stopping moment, that a phoenix flew joyfully into the blue, but the next second the fire had vanished. In its place was a white marble tomb, encasing Dumbledore's body and the table on which he had rested.

TIberius finally rose, following Alastor, and pulled Kei along. His death grip on her hand noted he was afraid— afraid of losing the war, afraid of what the future held, and afraid of losing his best friend. Kei was afraid, too, for the same reasons, but also afraid of what was to come with herself. The moment they had believed they saw Georgina Lestrange, all battle strategy and logic left their mind, leaving them defenseless and weak. That had to be stopped, she didn't want that— she *couldn't* want that.

"And now?" Tiberius asked, pulling Kei down the lakeshore.

Kei hummed in confusion, too focused on the crashing lake.

"I'm saying, what do we do now? Dumbledore is dead, Voldemort seems to want to win. I doubt Harry Potter *isn't* scheming something. . ."

"Well, right now there's nothing we *can* do but wait for orders from whoever the next leader is," Kei shrugged. "Who'll it be?"

Tiberius scoffed, “obviously Alastor. The way he orders everyone around and always has a back up plan for his back up plans?”

Kei laughed, “oh Merlin. You’re not wrong. I’d like to see Voldemort get past him.”

They fell into a comfortable silence, looking out towards the lake, past the trees, and up at the large castle on the horizon. There was a slight piece in the midst of the chaos and knew there was more to come. This was the calm, they could only imagine how bad the storm would be. A breath hitched in Kei’s throat, causing them to clear in inconspicuously, but Tiberius noticed and looked down at them.

“What’s wrong?”

Kei shook their head, their voice thick with emotion, “nothing. I’m just– This is going to get bad, isn’t it?”

“I’d be lying if I said no,” he answered truthfully.

“People are going to die,” they whispered softly, a tear rolling down their cheek.

“I know, Frankie, but not you. I’d die before I let you die,” he promised. “Gerald would be quite cross with me if I let you die and not be your knight in shining armour.”

Kei laughed and shoved him slightly, “you’re not going to die. I wouldn’t let you die.”

“Shut up,” Tiberius laughed along with her. “How’s this: I will die a noble death, unlike Gerald, and it’ll be saving your ass from getting hexed. You’re quite daft when it comes to duelling, as of late.”

“Hey!” Kei scoffed and untangled her arm from his, “if you die, noble death or not, I will bring you back and kill you myself.”

As Kei narrowed her eyes playfully, Tiberius rolled his eyes, laughing along at the idea of his best friend pulling a muggle spell out and attempting to bring him alive like in one of the muggle books they had read. Tiberius and Kei sat down by one of the old pine trees and watched the sunset in place. Kei sighed, lacing their hand with Tiberius’ and leaning their head on his shoulder.

Though the topic of death was a morbid topic, their conversation was lighthearted and loving. They didn’t fear death the way others did or probably the way they should, they had plans and dreams and aspirations— death needed to be put on hold. Kei no longer knew what was happening in the world between her friends and the war, but one thing she did know was that she was going to make it out with Tiberius by her side and Voldemort out of the picture.

35. Alone Together

The Ministry was suspicious. The old Minister was thought to be resigning and a new one was going to be put in his place, but Thicknesse was *odd*. Order meetings lasted weeks at a time trying to figure out what was happening between the Death Eaters and Harry Potter.

Chaos was happening.

No one trusted anyone and everyone seemed to fend for themselves. And despite the problems between the Order, they came to one conclusion: Harry Potter was in danger. Unknown to the new Order recruits, Dumbledore had told the veterans of Harry's protection. It expired when he became of age. So the new plan of action was getting to him before Voldemort's Death Eaters were.

Flying through the air, Tiberius smiled back at Kei, who sat on the Thestral behind him. Through the dark night, we rode through London towards Four Privet Drive to retrieve Harry. As they landed, Hagrid revved the engine of his motorbike, signalling Harry of the Order's arrival.

The curtains on the kitchen window moved to reveal the confused raven-haired boy. Alastor had a Disillusionment Charm placed on them so they wouldn't be spotted by any muggles or found by any Death Eaters. When it was lifted, Harry disappeared from the window and the backdoor swung open.

Hermione and Ron were the first two to advance at their friend, Hermione hugging him tightly. Ron clapped him on the back, and Hagrid said, "All righ', Harry? Ready fer the off?"

"Definitely," said Harry, beaming around at his saviours. "But I wasn't expecting this many of you!"

"I thought you'd be happy to see us, Harry," Kei whacked his head.

"I am," he rubbed the spot, "but I just wasn't expecting all of you!"

"Change of plan," growled Alastor, who was holding two enormous, bulging sacks, and whose magical eye was spinning from darkening sky to house to garden with dizzying rapidity. "Let's get undercover before we talk you through it."

Kei walked through the doors with Tiberius trailing them towards the kitchen. Alastor dropped the sacks on the ground.

"As Dedalus probably told you, we had to abandon Plan A. Pius Thicknesse has gone over, which gives us a big problem. He's made it an imprisonable offence to connect this house to the Floo Network, place a Portkey here, or Apparate in or out. All done in the name of your

protection, to prevent You-Know-Who getting in at you. Absolutely pointless, seeing as your mother's charm does that already. What he's really done is to stop you getting out of here safely.

"Second problem: You're underage, which means you've still got the Trace on you."

"I don't —"

"The Trace, the Trace!" said Alastor impatiently. "The charm that detects magical activity around under-seventeens, the way the Ministry finds out about underage magic! If you, or anyone around you, casts a spell to get you out of here, Thicknesse is going to know about it, and so will the Death Eaters.

"We can't wait for the Trace to break, because the moment you turn seventeen you'll lose all the protection your mother gave you. In short: Pius Thicknesse thinks he's got you cornered, good and proper."

"So what are we going to do?"

"We're going to use the only means of transport left to us, the only ones the Trace can't detect, because we don't need to cast spells to use them: Brooms, thestrals, and Hagrid's motorbike.

"Now, your mother's charm will only break under two conditions: when you come of age, or" — Alastor gestured around the pristine kitchen — "you no longer call this place home. You and your aunt and uncle are going your separate ways tonight, in the full understanding that you're never going to live together again, correct?"

The only thing that mattered was getting Harry Potter to the safe house as quietly and quickly as possible, without disruption and issues. Of course, that wasn’t the case; wherever Harry Potter went, trouble usually followed.

Alastor handed out egg-cup-sied glasses full of Polyjuice Potion that contained a piece of Harry Potter’s hair. Six people– Kei, Ron, Hermione, Fred, George, and Mundungus Fletcher– would transform to have seven Harry Potters, each escorted by an Order member acting as a protector, and fly away from Little Whinging, as no other method of transportation was safe. Though Kei was an Order member, they volunteered themselves to transform as there was a person short.

Tiberius looked absolutely uncomfortable with the situation and Kei felt it. The events of their sixth year left a foul taste in his mouth and hated the idea of Polyjuice but his duty as an Order member trumped his personal discomforts. Turning around, Kei grabbed his hand and

looked him in the eyes, “look, I’m right here. Look at me. Don’t focus on anyone else. See my shirt, it’s a black crop top with a pink bunny on the front. Want to see something funny?”

Putting the egg-cup to her mouth, Kei swallowed the foul tasting potion and shivered. In an instant, their line of vision began to get higher as she grew a few inches to Harry’s height. Looking at her and Tiberius’s laced hands, Kei began to laugh– she had man hands. The girly crop top looked funny on Harry’s body.

“Reese’s, look,” Kei laughed hard, pointing to her manly midriff. Tiberius forced a little laugh, trying to hide his discomfort. Letting go of his hand, Kei brought her wrist into view, showing the pink and yellow flower friendship bracelet she had made them years ago, “look, Tib, it’s me. Still the same Kei Higgs that melted your shoes into the pavement during fifth year and the same Flower that accidentally turned your hair green in Transfiguration third year. I’m still here. I’m not going anywhere. Pinky promise.”

“I– I know,” he said, clearing his throat and looping his finger with hers. Kei sighed and let go of his pinky to go get clothes to match the others.

Alastor set out pairs, Kei and Tiberius being paired up and given the mission of going straight to the Burrow.

"An' you're with me, Harry. That all righ'?" said Hagrid, looking a little anxious. "We'll be on the bike, brooms an' thestrals can't take me weight, see. Not a lot o' room on the seat with me on it, though, so you'll be in the sidecar."

"That's great," said Harry, not altogether truthfully.

"We think the Death Eaters will expect you to be on a broom," said Alastor. "Snape's had plenty of time to tell them everything about you he's never mentioned before, so if we do run into any Death Eaters, we're betting they'll choose one of the Potters who look at home on a broomstick. All right then," he went on, tying up the sack with the fake Potters' clothes in it and leading the way back to the door, "I make it three minutes until we're supposed to leave. No point locking the back door, it won't keep the Death Eaters out when they come looking. . . Come on. . .”

Tiberius and Kei mounted the Thestral they took to Harry’s house. Others took brooms and Thestrals as needed while Hagrid and Harry took Hagrid’s motorbike.

"All right then," said Alastor. "Everyone ready, please; I want us all to leave at exactly the same time or the whole point of the diversion's lost."

“Ready, Reese’s?” Kei asked softly.

He nodded, “ready as I’ll ever be, Frankie.”

"Good luck, everyone," shouted Alastor. "See you all in about an hour at the Burrow. On the count of three.

“One. . .”

Kei wrapped an arm around Tiberius’s waist, leaving her wand arm free to use her wand.

“Two. . .”

Tiberius held onto the Thestral with one hand and his wand with his other.

“THREE."

There was a great roar from the motorbike as Tiberius kicked the Thestral into motion. Watching the other pairs fly up on broomsticks reminded Kei of the Hogwarts Quidditch matches, but this wasn’t a game, it was very much life or death. Hagrid revved his engine and flew up in the air with the group, all on brooms and Thestrals. The Thestral flew higher and higher into the sky—

And then, out of nowhere, out of nothing, they were surrounded. At least thirty hooded figures, suspended in midair, formed a vast circle in the midst of which the Order members had risen.

Hagrid moved out of the way and left with the real Harry while everyone split up. Kei and Tiberius were set North, the same way Alastor and Mundungus were headed. Hexes and curses began to fly straight at the four of them, Kei pulling out their wand as Tiberius tried to steady the Thestral. Looking back, Kei noticed Alastor wasn’t too far behind the pair and gained speed on his broomstick.

Kei shrieked as green and red lights flashed before her eyes, Tiberius trying his best to cast hexes and steer the beast at the same time. Alastor quickly passed the pair and yelled at them to move West. But before Tiberius could steer, there was a flying black robe going through the sky followed by half a dozen Death Eaters on brooms.

Instantly, Kei realized the leader was Lord Voldemort himself.

“Fucking fuck, Tiberius. Go, go, go!” she shouted in fear.

Blocking hexes wasn’t the motive anymore, it was getting away from Voldemort and his deadly clan. Ahead of them, they witnessed the worst thing they could never have imagined. In pure fear, Mundungus Fletcher began to panic, muttering things to Alastor, causing him to bark

out orders.

"Don't you dare—" Alastor began, but before he could finish his lecture, Mundungus disapparated off of the broomstick, leaving Alastor alone.

"Alast—" Kei's own call was cut off by a heart wrenching wail.

Just before Mundungus disappeared, Voldemort had sent a green streak of light towards the pair in hopes of hitting 'Harry Potter.' In Mundungus' absence, Voldemort's curse hit Alastor full in the face, causing him to fall backwards off his broom and down into the night sky. Tiberius instantly froze, his arm dropping and ceasing his steering. The only family he'd ever known disappeared within seconds right before his eyes. And there was nothing either of them could do to save him. Voldemort had disappeared but Death Eater's still followed the pair.

"T-Tiberius! C'mon, I– We have to get out of here," cried Kei in a panic. Her heart broke for Alastor and her best friend. Fear crawled up her chest, the idea of losing herself or Tiberius frightening her. "There's too many of them. We will *die* if we don't go. *Please, Reese's.*"

That shook Tiberius out of his shock as he forced the Thestral to fly higher and faster. Looking back, Kei noticed the Death Eaters weren't leaving. A red bolt of light shot from their wand, cleaving a gap between them and the Death Eaters as they scattered to avoid the hex. Pushing back the frog in her throat, Kei shouted more hexes– too emotional to wordlessly cast– and tried to get the Death Eaters away from them.

Looking back, Tiberius shot one of the Death Eaters with the Impediment Hex causing the man to fall through the sky. One by one the Death Eaters either fell or left in hopes of finding Harry Potter. They had been flying through the night for quite some time as Kei began to transform back into themself.

"Tiberius," Kei whispered. He hummed in response. "We have to go further East to get to the Burrow."

He only nodded.

Kei's heart was in her throat knowing very well how painful it was to watch Alastor fall, but she also knew how much more it hurt Tiberius. There was no time to look for him as she knew they were already running late to arrive at the safe house. It had felt as though they were flying for hours before they made it past the Fidelius border on the Burrow.

They were the last ones to arrive and saw all of the Order members and fake Harrys waiting in the front yard. The Thestral landed and Tiberius quickly got off, helping Kei off as

well.

“Oh, thank God,” Molly shouted, clapping her hands together with a large smile. But the two didn’t return it. “Now we’ve just got to wait on Mad—”

“He’s dead,” Tiberius said monotonously. Kei’s heart squeezed in her chest as her stomach flipped.

“No,” Remus breathed.

Nobody else spoke, nobody moved.

“W-We saw it,” said Kei and explained what had happened.

Tiberius looked at his feet while Kei spoke. He felt horrible for not going to look for him, for not helping. Alastor, his father, the only family he’s ever had and remembered, was dead. But he didn’t want to believe it. There was no way it was true– Alastor Moody, so tough, so brave, the consummate survivor, he *had* to be alive.

At last, it seemed to dawn on everyone, though nobody said it, that there was no point waiting in the yard anymore, and in silence, everyone followed Mr and Mrs Weasley back into the Burrow, and into the living room, where Fred and George were laughing together.

"What's wrong?" said Fred, scanning their faces as they entered. "What's happened? Who's—?"

"Mad-Eye," said Arthur. "Dead."

The twins' grins turned to grimaces of shock. Nobody seemed to know what to do. Tonks was crying silently into a handkerchief: She had been close to Alastor, his favorite and his protégée at the Ministry of Magic. Hagrid, who had sat down on the floor in the corner where he had most space, was dabbing at his eyes with his tablecloth-sized handkerchief. Harry looked shocked at the news and stared into the kitchen fire.

Bill walked over to the sideboard and pulled out a bottle of firewhisky and some glasses.

"Here," he said, and with a wave of his wand he sent sixteen full glasses soaring through the room to each of them, holding the seventeenth aloft. "Mad-Eye."

Everyone echoed his name but Tiberius and Kei. Disgust filled Tiberius as he watched everyone pretend to care. *If they cared*, he thought, *they’d help find him*. Angrily, the chair scratched as he stood up pushing the firewhiskey glass into Kei’s hand. Everyone in the room looked at him as he stormed out of the house.

“I’ll go,” Kei said, putting their glasses down and quickly leaving the room without

looking at any of them.

Tiberius quickly walked across the yard and towards the Thestrals. From behind, Kei could see him rubbing his face every so often.

"Tib," she called out.

He stopped but didn't turn around.

"Tiberius," she whispered and stepped in front of him.

There were tears streaming down his face, he looked upset and angry all at once. Kei reached her hand out to wipe his face only for him to turn away from her touch.

"Reese's, please. . ."

"No, Kei. I'm not– not going to sit in there and drink to his name while he's still out there! He's Alastor Moody, he's not dead," he said angrily.

"We saw him—"

"Exactly! We saw him fall. Wherever he landed, he'll still be there. Franklin, he survived the first war losing his leg and eye. He survived Barty Crouch Jr's kidnapping for an entire year. He's fucking indestructable! He's still out there, alone."

"T- The light was green, Tib," Kei whispered. "You said it yourself. . . He might still be out there b-but—"

"*I can't lose him*! He's the only family I have. My biological father is *dead* to me, my mother is dead, and he is the only family I've never known. We lost Gerald, I lost Vic, I'm not going to lose my dad," Tiberius yelled.

"I- I'm your family."

"Kei, you have a family! A brother, a dad—"

"Both of which have paid no attention to me and haven't even sent an owl once in the last two years. No graduation, no birthday owls, *nothing*," said Kei sourly. "You are my family. Alastor was my family. You two are the only people I have!"

"Then help me find him!"

Tiberius moved past Kei and towards the Thestrals once more. Biting her lip, Kei followed after him and mounted the beast beside the one he was on.

"Thirty minutes, Tiberius. We go to where we were earlier. After thirty minutes, we go *home*," she negotiated.

Without acknowledgement, Tiberius kicked the Thestral and ascended into the air. Kei

knew Tiberius heard and understood the terms. It was still dangerous out there: Voldemort had been deceived, Death Eaters roamed the streets, and they were still Order members with a high reward over their head and a large target on their backs.

Kei and Tiberius flew into the night in hopes of finding Alastor Moody, the man they loved like a father and looked up to as a mentor. But deep down, the two knew he was truly gone, their rescue mission blatantly pointless. They searched the sky, streets, pubs, and even Saint Mungo's in hopes of finding him; thirty minutes passed by, and they added another ten, twenty, up until the hour mark.

"Tiberius," said Kei softly.

He didn't acknowledge them.

"I'm sorry, but—"

"I know, Franklin," he called out and turned the Thestral towards the direction of their house.

With heavy hearts and broken spirits, the two children left to go to the house they once called home filled with reminders of the person they lost. It was the only thing they had left from the family they'd known, only having each other being truly alone.

Tiberius jumped off the Thestral and apparated into the house. Kei hadn't even opened her mouth before he was gone. There was an empty feeling in her chest. And when she heard something smash against the wall, Kei instantly apparated into the house, wand raised.

"Who is— *Reese's*," they gasped.

He was a wreck. Tiberius grabbed frames and vases, flinging them at the wall and watching them shatter. Anger tears fell down his face as he shouted profanities. Kei watched as Tiberius destroyed their home. He couldn't call it home any longer, his father was gone and all that was left was broken memories.

There was nothing Kei could say to comfort their best friend. Just as Tiberius picked up the photograph of himself, Alastor, and Kei to throw it, she casted *Protego* around him to stop him from breaking it. The frame bounced off the shield and fell on the ground unharmed.

Tiberius turned and looked furious, "Franklin, get me out of—"

"No," she stated.

"Franklin, I—"

"Stop breaking things. Stop throwing pictures of you and Ala—"

"Don't tell me what t-to do," he bellowed. "Ala– My dad *died*."

Kei bit her lip, slowly walking up to him, "I know, Reese's. Please. . ."

Tiberius stopped moving and stared at them, "I don't know what to do. He's gone."

At this, Kei let the protection shield fall. Tiberius muttered things under his breath in a heap of tears. Kei let her own tears fall as she embraced her friend. Instantly, Tiberius wrapped his arms around her, crying into her shoulder.

"I'll never let anything happen to you, Reese's," Kei vowed softly, rubbing his back.

"Don't leave me," he mumbled, tightening his hold on the girl.

Kei sniffled, "I won't."

36. Party Crashers

Although neither of them were in the mood to celebrate anything, Tiberius and Kei were meant to report to the Burrow again to guard the Weasley Delacour Wedding. Once they had gotten ready, Kei saw how reluctant Tiberius was to go back to that place after the events of last week.

"We should go," Kei mumbled, nervously playing with the charm bracelet on her wrist.

"I know," he frowned.

Hand in hand, they both apparated into Ottery St Catchpole and took the short walk to the Burrow as there was an Anti Apparation ward around the property not allowing them to go directly there. They walked to the house to see Ron, Fred, and George standing outside of the large white marquee, in the middle of the orchard, awaiting the arrival of the rest of the wedding guests. There was another Weasley looking bloke standing next to the trio and Kei gave the boy a titled smile; they knew it was Harry Potter in disguise. Harry seemingly had taken a large dose of Polyjuice Potion and was now the double of a random redheaded Muggle boy from the local village.

All four of them were clutching seating plans. George took it upon himself to show Tiberius and Kei to their seats near the entrance of the tent where a majority of the Order members would be seated for the ceremony. Soon enough, Remus and Tonks showed up just a while after, just in time for the start of the wedding. The entire ceremony was beautiful, as was the reception afterwards.

In hopes of lifting Tiberius' spirits, Kei pulled him away from the table he was seated at

and forced him to dance with her.

“Frankie, no,” Tiberius groaned.

“Reese’s, c’mon! Dance with me,” she laughed.

The pair laughed as they danced, forgetting about the war at hand or the sad hand that they’d been dealt. Tiberius accompanied Kei to many dances despite his reluctance to continue.

“I don’t think I’ll ever dance like this again,” Kei sighed in awe.

“Not even at your own wedding?” Tiberius mused.

“Hm, if I ever do, I’ll probably have a dance with you and whoever my wife may be.”

Tiberius gave Kei a sad smile as she looked longingly at the Sweetheart table towards the back of the marquee. He knew they were dreaming of the girl who had betrayed them.

“And you,” she continued. “Gerald had some sense in his words— Vic will find you once more and you both’ll be together.”

“Frankie. . .” he warned.

“All I know is I best be the maid of honour like in the movies,” she laughed.

Before Tiberius could respond, something large and silver came falling through the canopy over the dance floor. Graceful and gleaming, the lynx landed lightly in the middle of the astonished dancers. Heads turned, as those nearest it froze absurdly in mid-dance. Then the Patronus's mouth opened wide and it spoke in the loud, deep, slow voice of Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"*The Ministry has fallen. Scrimgeour is dead. They are coming*."

Everything seemed fuzzy and slow, reality setting back in. Many people just realized something strange had happened; heads were still turning toward the silver cat as it vanished. Silence spread outward in cold ripples from the place where the Patronus had landed. Then somebody screamed.

Instantly, Tiberius and Kei stood guard, preparing for the worst. Guests were sprinting in all directions; many were Disapparating; the protective enchantments around the Burrow had broken. Kei screamed as something grabbed ahold of their arm, cloaked and masked figures apparating from black smoke in the crowd. Jinxes and hexes were being thrown all over the tent.

“Franklin, we have to do our job,” Tiberius shouted.

Kei fought valiantly against the incoming Death Eaters, binding and hexing the intruders in an instant. She, Tiberius, Tonks, and Remus raised their wands and shouted "*Protego*!" as cries

echoed on all sides in fear of the inevitable.

Looking around the tent, Kei could only see the incoming Death Eaters burning the cloth and sending Killing Curses to the people around them. Harry and his friends were nowhere in sight, probably having escaped already, but the chaos didn't stop.

"Tiberi— *you*," Kei bellowed.

The Death Eater stopped in their tracks, in a trance seeing their old friend. Rage fueled Kei's motives— the past deaths, the betrayal, and the hurt.

"Padawan," he gasped.

"*No*, don't you dare!" She shouted, throwing her hex at him.

Vic looked as if he didn't know what to do.

He ran.

He turned and ran to the witch that had just thrown a red lit hex before grabbing her wrist and disappearing.

"You– You— Argh!"

Kei continued to duel Death Eaters and help out their fellow Order members until they'd won. Tiberius was standing alongside Tonks, panting as they were completely exhausted from the invasion. The entire wedding had been ruined, scrubs and trees burning around the marquee, glass tables and decorations smashed into the grass, chairs splintered and destroyed— the entire reception was a mess.

"What the bloody hell was that?" Kei seethed.

"You very well know what that was," Remus said, not turning to look at them.

"And Harry? Ron? Hermione?" Molly asked in a tizzy.

Arthur sighed, "gone. But safe."

Fleur had been crying, holding onto her newly wedded Husband in comfort. Her dress was charred, hair disheveled, and completely upset with the events. She wasn't the only one. Kei had seen Vic in the mess of the battle, she had nearly hexed him out of rage— and she was terrified of telling Tiberius she had seen him. Not only had she seen her best friend's soulmate, but also barely saw Gina. They were there.

Vic and Gina fought against them at the wedding. *As Death Eaters*. Although Kei was certain she had seen Gina at Hogwarts in June, it wasn't certain, but she was certain she'd seen them then.

37. Ministry Information

Summer quickly turned into fall as the new school year started. The Ministry had gotten worse. Arthur, Tonks, and Tiberius had continued working there as they needed to seem as normal as possible, but it was hard, especially when there had been a Ministry break-in. Just before it had happened, Remus had tried to get information out of the three Gryffindors, only to go back to the Burrow furious at what Harry had said. As much as Kei attempted to console him, it was no use.

All Remus told them was what the Order already knew: Harry, Ron, and Hermione were completing a secret mission Dumbledore had given them before he was killed. Their mouths were shut tight, not allowing any information to be let out. And after the Ministry break-in, there were no signs of the mischievous trio anywhere in sight. They had fallen off the face of the Earth despite them officially being Unspeakables.

Due to the fact that Ron Weasley was seen in the Ministry, his entire family was put on red alert. The Weasleys had to be hidden– Arthur tried his hardest to keep going to his job, after the incident, but the pressure the Ministry was placing on him caused the entire family to go into hiding. Tonks, being married to a "half-breed" and being pregnant with his child, had to also stop going to work and was put into hiding. Tiberius was the last one working, being he wasn't an Unspeakable, related to one, or affiliated with the Order.

Tiberius and Kei continued to live in Alastor's house. A Fidelius charm had been put over the home, the Floo Networks closed off, and all kinds of wards were placed to make sure he and Kei were safe and hidden. Just before Christmastime, Bill's Patronus came to the house and found Kei alone— he told them of how Ron had come to him; no one was meant to know unless necessary. Kei felt some kind of relief and gratitude that Bill had confided in her and let her know that one of the children she cared for was all right.

It wasn't until mid-January that anything interesting happened to the pair. They had kept quiet, their nose out of anything suspicious, and mainly played the part of gold-star wizarding citizens. Tiberius had come home to see Kei absolutely furious and exhausted.

"What happened?" Tiberius said, noting their anger.

Although Kei had decided to not work in the Ministry, the girl found a job at St Mungo's, healing magically harmed witches and wizards. Though it wasn't what they had wanted to do with their life, it gave them some peace in knowing they'd be able to help out during the war

instead of hiding away like a frightened puppy.

"The wizarding world is horribly corrupt," Kei shrieked, throwing her book down. "Not only am I running thin helping everyone out— there aren't nearly enough mediwitches— but also the fact that I am meant to help *everyone* who comes through St Mungo's doors! It doesn't matter what side they are on, if they are in a cot in front of me, I am meant to help them."

Tiberius nodded, not fully understanding Kei's fury, "well. . . yes. But that's your—"

"Tiberius, I very well *know* what my job is," she snapped, "but I cannot stand to- to treat someone who bears the mark! I couldn't refuse— Madam Alemond was standing directly behind me! She saw the entire thing and then had the *audacity* to say 'Miss Higgs, are you not going to give him Wiggenweld?'!"

"The mark? As in—"

"Yes! The Dark Mark— Voldemort's dark—"

And in their heated fury, Kei had said the name they were warned to not say. That was why so many of the Order members went into hiding. Voldemort's name was jinxed. Anyone who said it was put on trial for daring to say his name. It was considered a crime to call the evil wizard anything but The Dark Lord.

Due to the Fidelius and Anti Apparation charm placed on the house, the spawned Death Eaters couldn't get in nor find the pair. Tiberius slowly and carefully moved towards the window to see four or five hooded men standing around, looking at the area. Kei clasped her hand over her mouth in pure regret as she realized the predicament she had put them in. The two had been so good at staying hidden and unknown, not daring to talk about Voldemort— more or less saying his name, that Kei felt her heart drop at the vast mistake.

"I'm going to lift the Anti Apparation charm," Tiberius whispered carefully into Kei's ear, "and as soon as I do, we're going to Apparate to the Burrow. There should be no one there, no Apparation restrictions or Death Eaters. Got it?"

Kei nodded frantically, terrified of what could possibly happen to them.

"At my signal, we leave separately. And if there is danger at the Burrow, you leave immediately— without waiting for me. Yes?" he asked.

"Reese's—"

"Franklin, it's not up for debate. I just need your confirmation," he shut her down.

Kei nodded once more, tightening her grip on her wand and standing in the position to

turn.

Tiberius held up his fist, silently counting as he raised his fingers:

One. . .

Kei took in a shaky breath, watching her best friend get ready to cast the countercharm.

Two. . .

Tiberius took a quick glance at Kei before looking back out the window to see one of the Death Eaters cautiously walk towards their house.

Three. . .

Kei screwed her eyes shut and waited for Tiberius' wand to whip in the air. The slight chill let them know the charm had been removed. She quickly turned on the spot, leaving Tiberius in the house. It took all but a second for the Death Eaters to feel the change in atmosphere— they instantly knew the magic had taken place. Just as Tiberius Disapparated, he recognized the face of the Death Eater closest to the house: Antonin Dolohov.

In a small room at the highest point of the tilted home, Kei landed on her hands and knees in an empty bed. Her breath hitched and her mind spun. They hadn't seen Tiberius apparate with them.

With a quick spell, Kei made sure there was no one in the house and called out for her best friend.

She was alone.

A hollow cry fell out of her chest as she hurried down the winding stairs. All of the doors in the house were open, the house ransacked and ruined. There seemed to have been a duel in the house, some places ruined while others blasted. Small holes littered the walls and windows were cracked and busted. It looked nothing like the cozy house she had seen a few months ago. The January wind made the home frigid and unwelcoming.

But the dishes were still washing themselves, a long trail of knitted yarn was forming on the floor of the small sitting room. Based on the slightly frozen cups of water and the ashened logs of wood in the fireplace, Kei was certain no one had been there in months. Her fingers trailed over the knocked down bookcase, it was covered in dust. The disheveled house reminded her of Grimmauld Place. There was no one.

"Frankie?" a voice called out.

Kei's stomach dropped and she ran out the door, her wand ready to hex any intruders.

The look on Tiberius' face was sour and angry. She feared he was angry with her.

"Reese's, I'm here," she shouted. "It's empty!"

At the sound of her voice, Tiberius looked up at her and dropped his disdain, giving her a soft smile. *He's not angry with me*, she thought, returning the grin.

"Are you all right?" he asked when she was close.

"I'm fine," Kei nodded. "The house is empty. It looks like there was a fight."

Tiberius' face screwed up in thought, "that probably explains why no one has answered my patronus."

It was dangerous being in the abandoned house, especially that it seemed as though it were mere seconds until it collapsed. The fact that it had been ransacked in the past and there were Death Eaters searching for the Weasleys and any remaining Order members didn't help their case either. Tiberius and Kei were left with the important decision of where to go or what to do now that they had no home to go back to. Kei didn't doubt that the Death Eaters would stay outside their home until someone came out which meant their previous residence was out of the question. Grimmauld Place didn't seem like a good choice as Remus had previously told them how Death Eaters were lounging about, waiting for the runaway Gryffindors to resurface. And with no idea on where the Weasleys or the Lupins were hiding, the pair were practically left to find for themselves.

With no guide on what to do or where to go, Tiberius gave the option of trying to find out where Fred and George were hidden. He knew of their wireless podcast show called Potterwatch and had heard that they were constantly on the run, trying to keep themselves safe.

Sometime around Ostra, or Easter as muggles called it, word of Luna Lovegood being taken was everywhere. Then, not soon after, talk of a 'Potter Spotting', as people called it, took place at the Lovegood residence. The wizarding world was in more chaos than it had been in the last seven months.

Tiberius and Kei hopped from place to place, too paranoid in being caught to stay in one area for too long. After a few months of hiding, they were found by Lee Jordan, a Gryffindor from their year and the best friend to the Weasley twins.

"Fred, George," Kei squealed, happy to finally see some familiar faces.

"We swore they'd have gotten you," Fred laughed.

"I didn't! I had complete faith in you both," George elbowed his brother.

“All right, all right,” Tiberius smiled, rolling his eyes. “So how have you three gotten away with your little show and hiding?”

“We move so much,” Lee groaned, throwing himself on one of the cots.

He had brought them to an underground bunker where the twins were setting up tonight's show on Potterwatch. A door opened and Remus Lupin came out, looking tired and aged. The stress did him no good.

“Remus, whoa,” gasped Kei in awe. “How’s it going?”

“Horrible really,” he smiled sadly. “The poor baby doesn’t let Tonks or me sleep much. Hard keeping a child quiet when in hiding.”

Kei smiled wishfully at the man, happy to hear some good news in such a sad and dangerous time. They were happy to hear he’d gotten over his fear of being a father and tried to make it work.

Tiberius and Kei stayed in the back as the twins, Lee, and Remus did their radio show. Kingsley showed up sometime in the middle of the broadcast, giving in his own two pence worth. Under codenames, they all reported on different events that had happened since the last airing two month ago: Reportings of wizarding deaths, goblin deaths, and even the newly uncovered news of Bathilda Bagshot’s remains that were found in Godric’s Hollow. Apparently Kingsley was the one who had found it and claimed it showed signs of Dark Magic. Along with that, Remus spoke about how Harry’s disappearance had affected the wizarding world.

"Romulus,” Fred asked, “do you maintain, as you have every time you've appeared on our program, that Harry Potter is still alive?"

"I do," said Remus firmly. "There is no doubt at all in my mind that his death would be proclaimed as widely as possible by the Death Eaters if it had happened, because it would strike a deadly blow at the morale of those resisting the new regime. 'The Boy Who Lived' remains a symbol of everything for which we are fighting: the triumph of good, the power of innocence, the need to keep resisting."

"And what would you say to Harry if you knew he was listening, Romulus?"

"I'd tell him we're all with him in spirit," said Remus, then hesitated slightly. "And I'd tell him to follow his instincts, which are good and nearly always right."

"And our usual update on those friends of Harry Potter's who are suffering for their allegiance?" Lee was saying.

"Well, as regular listeners will know, several of the more outspoken supporters of Harry Potter have now been imprisoned, including Xenophilius Lovegood, erstwhile editor of The Quibbler," said Remus.

"We have also heard within the last few hours that Rubeus Hagrid, well-known gamekeeper at Hogwarts School, has narrowly escaped arrest within the grounds of Hogwarts, where he is rumored to have hosted a 'Support Harry Potter' party in his house," he continued. "However, Hagrid was not taken into custody, and is, we believe, on the run. We would urge even the most devoted of Harry's supporters against following Hagrid's lead. 'Support Harry Potter' parties are unwise in the present climate."

The conversation continued until Lee finally closed out the show, giving the next show's password out. Tiberius frowned as the password was 'Mad-Eye' while Kei smiled softly, squeezing his hand reassuringly.

"What'd you think?" George asked, turning to face the pair. The others looked over their shoulders, also waiting for an answer.

"I think it's pretty neat," Kei smiled. "Letting the Wizarding World know what's going on and how it's affecting everyone."

"Though it's not the smartest idea, as if you're found you'll be detained," Tiberius said with reason, "you lot've done quite well. Well managed and hidden, you're doing good."

"Agreed," Kingsley nodded solemnly.

With their praise, the Weasley twins and Lee looked pleased with themselves. They knew they were doing the right thing, as did Kei. She just hoped it'd be enough to get information out to the world and finally help defeat Voldemort. Now, all they needed was Harry Potter.

38. Nobody

There was no doubt in Kei's mind that the Gringotts break-in was the work of Harry Potter and his two friends. Although she had no idea what would have ever prompted them into breaking into one of the most guarded places of the Wizarding World, she also knew it wasn't for some menial like gold. They had a true purpose and their reasoning was probably to do with whatever mission Dumbledore had them fulfill. All she hoped was that they got what they were looking for.

It wasn't long until news of a Potter Spotting went around. This time, he was spotted in

Hogsmeade. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that Harry was headed to Hogwarts.

With Fred, George, and Lee, Tiberius and Kei went to Hogsmeade— specifically Hog’s Head Inn— and took a secret passageway into Hogwarts. Kei was in awe at the entrance and even more surprised at where they had landed: The Room of Requirement. There was a group of people hanging around, talking and shouting. They were all standing in a circle, around Harry himself. At their entrance, people cheered and clapped, excited that more people were coming to. . . the rescue?

"Aberforth's getting a bit annoyed," said Fred, raising his hand in answer to several cries of greeting. "He wants a kip, and his bar's turned into a railway station."

Harry looked absolutely dumbstruck as Kei took in their surroundings. Silas was standing alongside Neville, a nervous but slightly unreadable look on their face.

“Silas,” Kei breathed, rushing up to hug him as people began to ask Harry questions.

He tensed but gave in, hugging the girl he hadn’t seen in over two years, “what’re you doing here?”

“Helping Harry out, obviously,” she smiled, pulling away from the small Slytherin.

Before Silas could respond, Harry called out to the room, “there’s something we need to find. Something — something that'll help us overthrow You-Know-Who. It's here at Hogwarts, but we don't know where. It might have belonged to Ravenclaw. Has anyone heard of an object like that? Has anyone ever come across something with her eagle on it, for instance?"

"Well, there's her lost diadem," Luna said. "I told you about it, remember, Harry? The lost diadem of Ravenclaw? Daddy's trying to duplicate it."

"Yeah, but the lost diadem," said Michael Corner, rolling his eyes, "is lost, Luna. That's sort of the point."

"When was it lost?" asked Harry.

"Centuries ago, they say," said Cho Chang. "Professor Flitwick says the diadem vanished with Ravenclaw herself. People have looked, but," she appealed to her fellow Ravenclaws, "nobody's ever found a trace of it, have they?"

"I can take you to see the statue of it, Harry," Cho suggested.

"No," Ginny said rather fiercely. "No, Luna will take Harry, won't you, Luna?"

"Oooh, yes, I'd like to," said Luna happily, and Cho sat down again, looking disappointed.

"How do we get out?" asked Harry.

"Over here," Neville pointed.

He led Harry and Luna to a corner, where a small cupboard opened onto a steep staircase. Soon enough the pair disappeared and everyone was left standing, not knowing what to do. It didn't take long for his other two friends to mysteriously disappear on their own little side mission. Kei just watched the portrait open and close letting in new people to help Harry fight.

Much to Kei's delight, more people rushed into the room, including Kingsley, Remus, Oliver Wood, Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet, Bill and Fleur, and Arthur and Molly. But when Harry and Luna came back, it seemed as if chaos had begun.

"Professor McGonagall wants everyone in the Great Hall," he said warily.

Kei and Tiberius followed most of the people as they filed out of the room and towards the Hall to wait for further instruction. McGonagall looked at the students and ushered them to one side of the room while the remaining members of the Order stayed near the front of the Hall where she was giving directions to all.

"The other professors and I have already placed protection around the castle," Professor McGonagall was saying, "but it is unlikely to hold for very long unless we reinforce it. I must ask you, therefore, to move quickly and calmly, and do as your prefects —"

But her final words were drowned as a different voice echoed throughout the Hall. It was high, cold, and clear: There was no telling from where it came; it seemed to issue from the walls themselves. Like the monster it had once commanded, it might have lain dormant there for centuries.

"I know that you are preparing to fight." There were screams amongst the students, some of whom clutched each other, looking around in terror for the source of the sound. "Your efforts are futile. You cannot fight me. I do not want to kill you. I have great respect for the teachers of Hogwarts. I do not want to spill magical blood."

There was silence in the Hall now, the kind of silence that pressed against the eardrums, that seemed too huge to be contained by walls.

"Give me Harry Potter," said Voldemort's voice, "and none shall be harmed. Give me Harry Potter, and I shall leave the school untouched. Give me Harry Potter, and you will be rewarded.

"You have until midnight."

The silence swallowed them all again. Every head turned, every eye in the place seemed to have found Harry, to hold him frozen in the glare of thousands of invisible beams. Then a figure rose from the Slytherin table, Pansy Parkinson as she raised a shaking arm and screamed, "But he's there! Potter's *there*! Someone grab him!"

“Thank you, Miss Parkinson," said Professor McGonagall in a clipped voice. "You will leave the Hall first with Mr Filch. If the rest of your House could follow."

McGonagall ordered the houses to leave, all of the underaged wizards left with a few of the of-age ones.

"Where are Ron and Hermione?" asked Harry as he walked over to the Gryffindor table where the Order stood.

"Haven't you found — ?" began Arthur, looking worried. But he broke off as Kingsley had stepped forward on the raised platform to create a battle plan with those who had remained behind,

"We've only got half an hour until midnight, so we need to act fast! A battle plan has been agreed upon between the teachers of Hogwarts and the Order of the Phoenix. Professors Flitwick, Sprout, and McGonagall are going to take groups of fighters up to the three highest towers — Ravenclaw, Astronomy, and Gryffindor — where they'll have a good overview, excellent positions from which to work spells. Meanwhile Remus" — he indicated Remus — "Arthur" — he pointed toward Arthur, sitting at the Gryffindor table — "Tiberius and Franklin" — he looked towards the pair standing beside him— "and I will take groups into the grounds. We'll need somebody to organize defence of the entrances of the passageways into the school —"

"Sounds like a job for us," called Fred, indicating himself and George, and Kingsley nodded his approval.

"All right, leaders up here and we'll divide up the troops!"

Unlike how Voldemort had said, he and his Death Eaters did not wait until midnight. Just as everyone began to disperse into their groups, chaos had begun.

Chaos. Death Eaters. Death. That was what awaited them outside of the Great Hall. The final battle.

It was horrible, fighting beside Tiberius as they tried to make it to their post. It was as though the protection wards placed on the castle had been broken through and lifted. Death Eaters infiltrated the once loving school and caused nothing from chaos and destruction.

Kei was aware of the fact that most of the Slytherins she knew and loved would be on the wrong side. She had never cared about bloodlines or surnames, they only saw the good in people– stupid and naive, quite honestly. But hexing her former classmates was never something she thought she'd be forced to do.

Being on guard was another part of the job as relaxation was something Kei found to be a luxury after the last summer. Between hiding from Death Eaters and keeping sane with Tiberius, Kei held on to her happy memories of the place she spent seven years of her life in. But that all changed.

As they blocked hexes and curses, throwing ones of their own, Kei realized how much Hogwarts became a hectic warzone. Dark magic seeped through the stone walls and into the hearts of the fighters. It was terrifying to see how fast the bodies dropped— students, Order members, Death Eaters. Bodies littered the once happy corridors. Running through the corridors was more like a maze than a pathway, between the bodies and hexes it was near impossible.

There was no indication of how much time had passed from when they left to Great Hall up to the moment Voldemort had made his Death Eater retreat. All Kei knew was that Tiberius was still by their side, slightly harmed but alive. They both were and she meant to keep it that way.

Tiberius pulled Kei along as she looked at the bodies of the students she remembered orientating during her seventh year, students that were supposed to leave for safety but ended up staying back to fight. Students that fought in a battle they weren't supposed to. Hurt echoed in their chests as they deflected and cursed duelling Death Eaters. The last ones that tried to make it out of the castle to serve their vicious and evil Lord.

Though they both expected the battle but never had they been prepared to see *them*.

"*Gina*!"

The name itself ran shivers down Kei's spine, but the voice nearly stopped Tiberius's heart. Both of them stopped in the empty corridor. They had been running, trying to find other Order members and students that needed help, duelling Death Eaters in hopes of helping the war to stop when Voldemort's message ran through the castle. Now, they were trying to get to the Great Hall to help attend to the hurt duellers, but the school had become indistinguishable. Lost, they ran around the corridors only to meet someone they hadn't seen in over two years.

Tiberius and Kei halted in their path. A figure ran towards them, disheveled and hurt, too

focused on calling out to their sister to notice the pair. Finally looking forward, Vic stopped. He had aged some since they last saw him: More built, full of bruises, bleeding wounds, and a new mark on his arm which was opposite to Tiberius's birth name.

The three of them stared at one another, too stunned to act.

"Tiberius—"

"No," Tiberius cut Vic off.

"It's not safe for you here," Vic tried.

"Yeah, you've made sure of that," he motioned to the Dark Mark on Vic's arm.

Kei watched them intently, waiting for any motion of duelling.

Vic took a single step forward, "I don't want to hurt you, Tybo."

"You already fucking have," shot Tiberius.

Removing her eyes from Vic, Kei looked over to the corner he came from waiting for his sister to appear but quickly looked at him once more.

"I'm sorry," he said softly.

"Go, Lestrange," Tiberius's voice was pure venom at this point, trying to hide the hurt and memories of seeing Vic had caused to resurface.

Vic didn't move, neither did Kei.

Tiberius slightly let his guard down and sighed sadly, "please. I don't want to have to fight you. Just leave Hogwarts."

"You think that matters? You think I can do that?" Vic raised his voice.

"PLEASE– Just– STOP ALREADY. LEAVE," Tiberius shouted.

"YOU STOP. YOU GO TO SAFETY. YOU TWO HAVE NO BUSINESS BEING HERE. NO REASON."

At his yelling, Kei slowly raised her wand only for Tiberius to push her arm down. It was his battle to fight, not theirs.

"NO, VIC. YOU'RE ON THE WRONG SIDE—"

"YOU THINK THERE'S SIDES? IT'S THE DARK LORD VERSUS THE WIZARDING WORLD. YOU THINK I HAVE A CHOICE TO PICK WHAT *SIDE* I WANT TO BE ON?" Vic laughed sourly. "PLEASE JUST– I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO—"

"To hex me, Lestrange? Do it," Tiberius said, opening his arms. "Hex me. Curse me. Be the fucking Death Eater you want to be."

“Tib,” Kei breathed.

Vic stood with his mouth agape, in disbelief of his words. Tiberius’s broken heart shattered in a thousand more pieces. His heart never recovered from their break up, then his father’s death, and now it was going to break once more as Vic had chosen his legacy over doing the right thing.

“I—”

“DO IT, LESTRANGE,” Tiberius shouted.

“FINE,” Vic broke.

“NO!” Instantly Kei raised her wand and *Stupefied* Vic Lestrange, sending him into the wall next to him. He laid unconscious on the corridor floor as Tiberius sucked in a breath of disbelief.

“Kei—” Tiberius started but saw an angry brunette run around the corner and halt at their presence.

Her eyes averted from the pair to her brother lying unconscious on the floor in front of them.

“You!” she growled and sent a wordless hex towards Kei.

“No!” Kei shouted and deflected it. “Gina, stop,” she deflected another hex.

Tiberius watched as Gina and Kei advanced at each other. Gina’s anger increased with every hex she threw while Kei only deflected, barely getting any hexes in. The pair continued to throw hex after hex, deflecting each other’s advances.

Since second year, they both had been duelling each other nearly everyday for fun. Kei and Gina enjoyed duelling, a pastime they both participated in. It was always something they looked forward to during breaks and outings. Gina knew Kei’s every move and vice versa. No matter if they could predict their next hex or where they were meant to move, they shared the same mind.

“Gina, please,” cried Kei as their advances ricocheted off the walls around them.

“Please nothing! Y-You hexed my brother,” Gina seethed. “I know he couldn’t,” she added, throwing an extra hex Tiberius’s way, which he deflected.

“Leave him alone, Georgina! Your fight is with me,” Kei shouted.

Gina gritted her teeth, “a duel you’re going to lose.”

But she knew there was nothing behind her words. In all the duels they participated in

against each other throughout the five years, Kei and Gina had both only won one each as the spectator would stop the nearly neverending friendly battle.

"Please, I don't want to—"

"'Please' nothing! You get no pleas," Gina deflected the hex, throwing one of her own.

"Gina, y-you're my best frie—"

"I have no friends. You made sure of that," another hex missed Kei, hitting the wall behind her and sending pieces of stone everywhere.

"IF I'M NOT YOUR FRIEND, WHY DID YOU SPARE ME AT THE ASTRONOMY TOWER," bellowed Kei.

This caught Gina off guard, nearly allowing Kei's hex to hit her– so close that the force blew a strand of her hair. Weakness was something Gina loathed; Kei was her weakness. Never wanting to harm the Hufflepuff, Gina actually cried the day Kei ended their friendship and vowed to never let anyone in again, more or less them once more. Kei, knowing that it was Gina who had missed her shot, was dangerous— weakness was dangerous.

Making the horrible decision, Gina pushed down any emotion she had and hardened her eyes at her previous best friend. "*CRUCI—*!" But her decision in bellowing her curse was in vain as Tiberius quickly sprung into action and *Stupefied* Gina just as Kei had done to Vic.

A breath got caught in Kei's throat as she nearly let out a sob. Georgina Lestrange was going to use an Unforgivable on her. Kei watched as Gina flew back and hit the floor with a thud. She hadn't expected Tiberius to intervene, stupidly focused purely on Kei instead of her surroundings. Kei was her weakness and that was why she laid on the floor, a few feet from her brother serving the same fate as him.

Tiberius and Kei were the Lestrange Twins' weaknesses.

By the time the pair made it to the Great Hall, there was another group battle. Instantly, hexes were thrown at them, having to deflect as they advanced. Order members and students fought against the Death Eaters as they tried to kill as many of the good side as possible.

Tiberius and Kei split up and they weaved through people and flashes of light. It felt like the Battle at the Ministry of Magic again. Harry Potter was nowhere in sight, his friends and their family fighting alongside the Order, everyone helping him try to defeat Voldemort. A wild woman caught Kei's eye, dancing on top of one of the House tables, cackling as she threw curses. Hatred boiled in her chest for poisoning her friends against them and Tiberius. But no

matter how furious Kei was, she knew better than to pick a fight with Bellatrix Lestrange.

Deflecting one of the many hexes thrown her way, the stream nearly hit Bellatrix, gaining her attention. Quickly hexing one of her opponents, Bellatrix turned her attention to Kei. A wicked smile played on Bellatrix's lips as she jumped down from the table and advanced towards her.

"You," she sneered happily.

Panic was evident on Kei's face. Bellatrix was one of the only people, besides Voldemort, that terrified them. Of course, she was afraid of Death Eaters due to what they represent and how ruthless they were, but Bellatrix was beyond ruthless with no care for anyone but herself.

Bellatrix sent a hex Kei's way, just to taunt her. She deflected as Bellatrix cackled.

"Ah, I remember you," she said in a singsong type of voice. A faux pout played on her face, "the Ministry—"

Another hex from her was deflected.

"— *My daughter's memories*."

Kei nearly missed repelling the hex Bellatrix threw. Just as Kei was Gina's weakness, Gina was one of Kei's weaknesses as well.

"Ah ah ah," she laughed. "Such a kind, gentle girl. Stupid and naive."

"Am not!" Kei stupidly threw a weak hex Bellatrix's way, which she lazily deflected.

"She talks!"

Kei took steps back as Bellatrix slowly advanced towards her. A piercing pain entered Kei's mind as Gina's mother glared at her.

"Stop it," Kei shouted, trying to *Stupefy* her.

"You bested my children. How adorable! Maybe you will be fun to kill," taunted Bellatrix. "Time to wilt the little Sunflower."

Her heartbeat quickened as Bellatrix advanced closer and disarmed her in the shock of the endearing name she once loved. Kei was defenseless. No wand, no magic. She was as useful as a muggle in this duel. With a look of faux surprise, Bellatrix cursed Kei.

It was though a million needles prodded at their skin as electricity flew through her body. Kei fell to the floor screaming and writhing from the pain. Her back arched as her mind felt as though it'd been put in a blender. From far away, she heard her name being shouted, but had no idea the voice belonged to Tiberius. Her screams blended in with the war cries of the people

surrounding them.

Deflecting hexes and ducking under the thousand streams of lights in the Hall, Tiberius ran towards his friend who writhed on the floor from Bellatrix's Cruciatus Curse. He tried to hex the witch, but she let go of Kei and repelled his advance. Bellatrix waited until Tiberius was within arms reach of Kei before sending a green light to her chest.

Tiberius bellowed out a cry as he sent his own Unforgivable to his best friend's killer. The Cruciatus Curse he sent wasn't strong enough to do anything but knock Bellatrix off her feet. Another opponent, Ginny Weasley, took the chance in trying to hex her. This gained the attention of two other students who joined the ginger in her duel against Bellatrix Lestrange, but Tiberius couldn't care less.

He fell to his knees and took Kei into his arms. Her lifeless body limped in his hold. Now, Tiberius was truly alone. He had lost his family, his soulmate, and now his best friend. A heart wrenching sob flew out of his chest as he rocked Kei in his arms. She was gone, there was no coming back from the Killing Curse. He had no one left.

"Frankie, please," Tiberius sobbed, "don't leave me."

She didn't move.

"You're all I have, I can't lose you, too. Frankie, please. . . Come back," he whispered.

The fight around him continued and he took joy in watching Molly Weasley obliterate Bellatrix Lestrange. People watched as Harry Potter duelled Voldemort, but his focus was on the girl in his arms. His best friend was taken from him without warning, without a fair fight. He felt bitter as people cheered at Harry's success in defeating Voldemort.

Though the wizarding world had been saved, his world had crumbled to pieces. Kei was his last shred of happiness in the dark world, his first friend since age five. Memories of their life together flashed in his mind and he remembered his tenth birthday– the last one before they attended Hogwarts. Kei had made bracelets for them as a sign of forever friendship for "as long as they wore them, they would always have a piece of each other with them forever."

Reluctantly, Tiberius untied Kei's colorful bracelet from her wrist and slipped it onto his own, next to the one she made for him. He noticed the lone charm bracelet clinked as it moved, one of the charms fell off— the flat heart fell on the floor, no longer with the others. He screwed his eyes closed, trying to push down the pain, but it didn't work. At least now, no matter what, Kei would be with him forever as he wore her bracelet and his own. They were forever each

other's buddies and no one could take that from him.

39. Epilogue: Kei's Afterlife

There was a calmness in the air, a fresh breath after such pain and impurities. Looking around, I realized I didn't recognize anything. I knew that the tall brown and green things were trees and the green carpet was actually grass, but besides that, I didn't know where I was. I was alone.

It was scary, the idea of being alone. And then I thought: Where was everyone?

"That's the whole point of being alone," I laughed to myself.

And then a dull pain rattled in my chest; it was longing. I missed Tiberius.

Again, I tried to look around for him, but he was nowhere to be found. Then I saw it, an old heavyset man walking towards me. He was short, wore funny wired glasses, and had a huge belly.

"Frankie," he said sadly.

"Do I—?" I began but he moved close enough so I could see him properly, "*Gerald*?"

"What've you done, love?"

I was stuck. This made no sense. It felt like a dream, slightly hazy, but I could also feel it wasn't a dream.

"I was. . . Tiberius was right there and we were—" I tried to recall. I didn't remember what had happened, but then I did: All the death, all the fighting, the *war*. "Am I. . . dead, Ger?"

"I'm sorry, darling," he said sadly.

He opened his arms and embraced me. I felt like crying, but I couldn't. And then I realized I was hugging a ghost, but he wasn't a ghost any longer and was actually solid.

"Is Tiberius okay?" I asked softly, afraid of my own voice. Although I was afraid of the answer, I needed to know.

Gerald tilted his head, "I wouldn't say he's okay, but he's alive."

I let out a little breath of relief, pulling away from his hug, "but where am I?"

"The afterlife, I s'ppose," he shrugged.

"Didn't think this'd be what it'd look like, huh?" a voice called out to me.

Spinning around, I turned face to face with someone I slightly recognized. A breath hitched in my throat as I finally realized who it was. With two eyes and two legs, I barely

recognized the man I would have rather called my father.

"Alastor!" I gasped, running up to him and pulling him into a tight hug.

"Whoa there," he said, stumbling back a bit at the force of my impact.

"I- I- I missed you so much."

He stood there, rocking me back and forth until I pulled away. There was no amount of words in the world that could describe the feeling I had finally seeing him. Though I wished I hadn't been able to see him, I was grateful he was here.

"I told you not to thank me about being in the Order," he grumbled once I pulled away.

I frowned at his hostility, "although I'm not glad I'm. . . dead, I'm happy I died a noble death."

I shot Gerald an amused smirk, knowing very well he knew I was referring to Tiberius' jibe about him dying from a mere heart attack. A pang of sadness hit me at the thought of Tiberius. I had left him alone, all by himself when I promised him I wouldn't leave him.

"Don't do that," Alastor sighed. "I know what you're thinking. I thought the same thing. He'll be fine."

"But I left him," I sniffled.

"It was bound to happen eventually. You leaving him or him leaving you. Death is inevitable. You did as you were supposed to, he won't hold it against you," he answered wisely.

Rubbing my nose, I looked between the two men that meant the most to me when I was alive. Though I was sad I was dead, I was glad I was with people who truly cared for me.

"I can look over, Reese's, right?" I asked quickly. "Wait, I can be a ghost and see him! Like- like how Gerald was and- and like Professor Binns and the ghosts at Hogwarts and—"

"I'm sorry, Frankie," Gerald apologized. "This is it. You've done what you were supposed to, you don't have anything unfinished to do in the living world."

"But. . . I didn't get to apologize to Gina or- or say goodbye to Tiberius or Silas and—"

"You would've wanted to say goodbye to me?" another voice asked, far behind Gerald.

At this, I did cry. Walking up behind Gerald was no sickly, bruised boy, but a strong, happy soul. I covered my mouth as tears streamed down my face.

"Silas, no," I cried into my hand.

Running past Gerald, I threw my arms around the small Slytherin and hugged him tightly. Instead of flinching or freezing as he usually did, Silas quickly wrapped his arms around me. He

wasn't afraid anymore.

"What happened?"

Silas pulled away from my hug and held onto my hand, "my dad. He wanted to kill Neville. I couldn't let him die."

"Neville?" I breathed.

"I love him and. . . So I pushed him away just in time, but in the process, I got hit with the curse that was meant for me. I bled out," Silas frowned.

"No," I cried. "Silas, no. . ."

"It was so cold," he admitted. "And then it was dark. I ended up in a nice little room but was upset because I was alone. I thought of Neville and you. . . then there was a light underneath the door in the room I was in and I opened it. It led me to you, to this garden."

"Sil, no, no," I shook my head. I had one job: To protect my friends, to protect the ones I loved. *I failed.* "I didn't mean to fail you. I'm so sorry."

Silas smiled at me and squeezed my hand, "you didn't fail me. I'm happy now. Don't apologize."

Only then did it hit me how sad he must have been to be glad he's in the afterlife. Though I was sad to have died and left Tiberius, I realized how. . . I was happy, too. I was free from having to live in fear of the war, free from the prejudices of blood status, and free to be whoever I wanted to be. Though I was dead, if I wanted to— I hoped—, I would be able to watch over my friends and see them move on with their lives and be happy. And that made me truly happy.

———

Kei watched as Tiberius entered the empty room. Chairs were laid out, awaiting guests to come watch the burial. Tiberius had formulated a funeral for his best friend, one he hoped she'd love.

He stood at the front of the room, looking at the accumulated people: Kei's fellow Hufflepuffs, the remaining Order members, and Terence Higgs. It was a small gathering, but he didn't mind. Tiberius rather it be small than filled with a bunch of people that hadn't known her.

The words flew out of Tiberius' mouth, memories of their adventures together from when they first met up until the end of the war. Although sour with the idea of the Lestrange twins coming to the ceremony, he glanced at the empty chairs knowing that Kei would have wanted them there— especially Georgina. Since they were convicted Death Eaters waiting for trial or

hiding wherever they were, the pair never made it to the funeral. He didn't even know if they knew of the Hufflepuff's death.

Then long after the funeral was done and all the people had left, Tiberius looked over the girl's body. Tears threatened to fall, but he promised himself he wouldn't cry anymore, especially not there. There was nothing more Kei wished than to console his friend, to let him know that she was okay and happy, that she wasn't alone and instead with one of her best friends and his father and the ghost they loved like family.

Once Tiberius finally left, Kei thought it would be the end. She nearly left when a figure Apparated in the room. Her long brown hair and broken figure was undeniably recognizable. Georgina Lestrange stood at the head of the casket, looking down at her lost best friend and lover. Tears brimmed in her eyes but she didn't dare let any fall. She wasn't worthy of crying because it was her fault. She let her mother into her mind, allowing Bellatrix to see all the memories and moments they shared together. Gina felt as though because of her, Bellatrix knew that Kei was her only weakness and extinguishing the weakness was the only way to *truly* gain all control of her daughter.

Blame after blame, Gina came to the conclusion that had she not tried to fight Kei in the corridor and instead given into the want of having the Hufflepuff in her arms again, that she would be alive and happy. Because of this, Vic will never be able to reconnect with his soulmate and she would never be with her love again. She was sure of it.

But Gina didn't know that Franklin Higgs wasn't meant to be happy in this life. Love wasn't a plan in her life for the gods didn't allow it. In this life, she was but a chess piece meant to help as many people as she could before her untimely death. That was the way it was always meant to be. Whatever people called her, Franklin Grae Higgs had lived her life the way the gods intended it. Maybe the people in her life believed she deserved more or better, but that wasn't the way it was meant to be. Maybe not in this life, but hopefully in the next.

FIN