

“What’s the matter with ye, ye craven mutt?” Hagrid asked, shaking his head affectionately as Fang whimpered again. “I swear ye could get spooked by yer own shadow, not that you could bloody see it tonight.”

“Your dog is right to be frightened, Hagrid,” a voice called out, and the half-giant turned to see Firenze approaching.

“Why?” Hagrid asked, his face falling. “What’s wrong?”

“We have some unwelcome guests in the forest this night,” Firenze replied. “You asked me nearly a decade ago to tell you if I ever saw evidence that the beast you called Greyback had returned. He has, and he’s not alone, though I don’t know how many others are with him.”

“Greyback’s here?” Hagrid breathed. “That don’t make sense. It’s a new moon.”

“It is, and yet, we have detected his stench,” Firenze replied.

“Are the centaurs going to move against them?” Hagrid asked, and Firenze shook his head.

“They’ve been smart enough to avoid our territory, and Magorian is not willing to risk our lives against them when they’ve made no move to come after us,” Firenze replied.

“But ye know what that monster’s like,” Hagrid argued. “Everything he touches he hurts, and he’s never been one to discriminate in who he goes after. Avoiding you lot actually shows a surprising degree of sense from him, actually.”

“Mere caution is not the only reason why Magorian elected not to try engaging the werewolves tonight,” Firenze murmured. “The stars have been warning of great trouble for quite some time now, and I fear it might be coming this night.”

Hagrid clenched his eyes shut, trying to think for a moment about what he should do when one particular option occurred to him that actually made him smile. After Greyback attacked in eighty-four, he’d sworn he’d never let the monster come this close to the school again without regretting it, and he had a few things he could do to keep that promise.

“Firenze, I know ye’ve already done a lot coming here, and I appreciate it, but do ye think ye could go to the castle and tell Professor Dumbledore?” Hagrid asked.

“I could, though I wonder why you don’t wish to do so yourself,” Firenze replied, and Hagrid grimaced, scratching the back of his neck.

“I’ve gotta meet with someone else who could...help deal with Greyback,” he replied, and the centaur furrowed his brow at him.

A moment later, he figured out what Hagrid meant, and his bright blue eyes went wide as saucers as he said, “You can’t mean them!”

“Ye said yerself they’re not near yer people’s territory,” Hagrid replied. “Um, where are they anyway? Wouldn’t want to send ‘em to the wrong spot.”

“By the fates,” Firenze muttered, shaking his head. “They’re camped by the large oak tree east of the stone circle. The really knotted one.”

“That’s...that’s really close to the school,” Hagrid muttered.

“I had more reasons than one to come warn you,” Firenze said. “Fine, I will bring the headmaster my warning, but I cannot do more.”

“Ye’ve done plenty,” Hagrid smiled. “Thank you, Firenze, really.”

“I hope this works out the way you expect,” Firenze muttered. “Take care with them.”

“Ah, they’d never hurt me,” Hagrid chuckled, waving off the idea. “Least not as long as their pa lives. Known him nearly my whole life, I have.”

“We’re aware,” Firenze said dryly as he turned to leave. “I will never understand how you managed to befriend one of those beasts.”

Hagrid chose not to comment on that and simply wished the centaur well as he ran off to deliver his message. He knew that he could be a little loose-lipped at times, but there was one secret he’d managed to keep from the centaurs his entire adult life, and he knew that it was one he genuinely needed to keep.

“Go home, Fang,” the half-giant commanded. “Off with ye, ye mutt. Ye know ye’ll look right tasty to ‘em.”

Fang yelped at that and ran off as Hagrid picked up his lantern and made his way north towards the one part of the forest that he was sure the werewolves would never dare touch. The night seemed to grow darker and darker as he went, the light of the stars having an increasingly difficult time getting through the trees, covered as so many of them were in thick webs. The clicking of mandibles reached his ears before he saw any of them, and he simply smiled and waved. He’d known most of these little beasties when they were barely the size of his fist, and now most of them were nearly as big as their father.

“They grow up so fast,” he sighed as a dozen acromantulas approached him from all sides.

“They do indeed,” Aragog replied, descending from the nearest tree and landing in front of him. “Stay away from Hagrid. You know he’s off limits.”

The others muttered at that but obeyed, backing off and giving them space.

“You shouldn’t come here after dark, my old friend,” Aragog said softly. “If I’d been asleep...”

“I can handle myself, Aragog,” Hagrid chuckled before growing more serious. “Listen, I...I need a favor.”

“Name it,” Aragog said. “If you wish for silk to make new robes for yourself, I...”

“No, no, nothing like that,” Hagrid replied. “There are some people in the woods tonight, really, really bad people. Werewolves, actually.”

“We have smelled wolf in the air for years now while your school was in session, and this year that scent grew stronger,” Aragog replied.

“Oh, not those two; they’re good wolves,” Hagrid replied. “The ones in the woods now attacked us years ago, and they’re led by one of the worst ones to ever live. Dumbledore could stop them, sure, but the last time this happened, that really bad one got away and...he needs to be stopped.”

“So you would like for us to deal with him?” Aragog asked.

“Ye and yer brood could easily chase them off, and if ye happened to...well, frankly, if anything were to happen to them, there ain’t no one alive who’d do worse than thank ye,” Hagrid said, and Aragog chuckled.

“This creature must be monstrous indeed if you’re asking me to get my children to go after him,” the giant spider murmured, and Hagrid sighed.

“I’ve known too many people whose lives he destroyed,” he said. “He’s not as bad as Tom, I guess ye could say, but...he’s bloody close.”

Aragog growled at the mention of that name, remembering all too well how Tom Riddle had lied about him and his friend.

“Where are these werewolves?” he asked.

“Ye know that really tall, really knotted oak tree a good ways east of the stone circle?” Hagrid asked. “They’re camped near it or under it...look for the tree.”

“I’ll take care of these wolves for you, my friend,” Aragog said, giving him the spider equivalent of grin, as his eight eyes lit up. “It’s been some time since I tasted human flesh.”

“Yeah, I...er...figured ye’d like the idea,” Hagrid muttered, feeling suddenly uncomfortable.

“Bloody hell, this is almost as good as the invisibility cloak,” Ron breathed as the six of them ventured out onto the grounds, having waited just after the sun set to try and make this trip.

“And just as much not a silencing charm,” Hestia grumbled, making him blush, something that he was glad Tonks’ disillusionment charm hid.

The six of them, well aware of the fact that they were all mostly invisible and out at night, realized that they needed to have some sort of idea of where the others were, and so they were linked, arm in arm, in pairs and using the muddy ground as their guide. Walking slowly, the three pairs made sure to step into the footprints of those in front of them, with Hermione and Chiara in front so they could make the most of the werewolf’s enhanced sense of smell.

The area they were looking to start their limited search in wasn’t far from the exit they’d gone through, and all total, Chiara had said that she expected this to take a couple hours at most, so they figured they were pretty much in the clear, so long as they didn’t run into anyone before they actually got to the woods. It was thus deeply unfortunate when, almost immediately after they left the castle, they immediately heard footsteps nearby and froze.

“That’s...oh,” Chiara breathed, letting Hermione go and stepping forward as she realized that she was hearing hooves instead of feet. Spotting the familiar centaur and realizing that something had to be terribly wrong, she called out, “Firenze.”

The centaur halted and looked in her direction, sniffing at the air.

"Whoever you are and whatever you hoped to accomplish this night, it was for naught," Firenze declared. "Turn around now, for you are all in grave danger."

"Alright, screw this," Tonks muttered, undoing the charms. "What danger?"

"There is a small group of werewolves in the woods, camped out perilously close to the school," Firenze replied, and they all looked at him in wide-eyed shock. "Hagrid has gone to request the aid of the acromantulas..."

"Okay, maybe we should just let Dumbledore handle the whole Malfoy thing after all," Ron said, growing pale almost immediately. "He's a bumbling idiot, anyway. It's not like his plan would work."

"Unless this was his plan," Chiara said darkly. "Firenze, the wolves...are they led by anyone you recognized?"

"Fenrir Greyback prowled through the dark forest once more," Firenze replied, solemnly, and a low growl emerged from deep within Chiara's throat.

"Chiara?" Hermione asked, taking her hand, and the white-haired girl relaxed slightly.

"We're going back right now," Chiara muttered. "Did you come to warn the professors?"

"Hagrid asked me to bring the message to the headmaster," Firenze replied and she nodded.

"We'll do it," Harry said. "Thank you, Firenze. Um, with there being werewolves out there and acromantulas on the way to deal with them, will you be safe getting back?"

"I will be fine, though, thank you for asking," Firenze replied. "Stay safe this night; portents of danger exist all around us."

With that, he turned and left, leaving the six students alone to process what they'd just been told.

"Are you alright?" Hestia asked softly as Tonks rubbed Chiara's shoulder, and she sighed.

"I'd love nothing more than to rip the son of a bitch's head off," she muttered, "but I know I'm no match for him, much less him and goodness knows how many others. Even without the full moon, he's still one of the most dangerous men alive, if you can even call him a man."

"The acromantulas should kill them all," Ron assured her. "Trust me, they're terrifying and very hungry."

"We should still tell Dumbledore, though," Tonks said.

"Yeah, let's get going," Hermione muttered. "Luckily, it's still just barely before curfew."

"We're still going to have to admit that we were on the grounds when we met Firenze," Harry pointed out, and she sighed. "You lot go back and I'll do it; say it was my idea and I went alone, not wanting to risk anyone else."

“He’ll think you’re an even bigger idiot than he’s going to think we were for this,” Tonks pointed out. “At least with our plan, we had someone who could smell danger coming and knew the woods pretty well.”

“Yeah, and I was the one who pushed the hardest,” Ron added. “We’ll tell him together.”

Harry sighed at that, and they turned to go inside, with him in the lead. As he reached the door they’d left through, he grabbed the handle, only to hiss as he felt the sting of something cutting him.

“What the fuck?” he asked, looking down at his bleeding hand.

“Oh, this handle’s cracked,” Hestia murmured, taking a closer look at it and making a point of pulling on it without touching the cracked part.

“Is that deep?” Tonks asked, and he shook his head, holding onto the edge of his left hand with his right.

“Not terribly,” Harry shrugged. “Come, let’s get going. We can tell Dumbledore about the handle too.”

The six of them went back inside, quickly making their way up to the headmaster’s office.

“Tell Dumbledore that Fenrir Greyback has been spotted nearby,” Chiara said. When nothing happened, she growled, “Did you hear me? I said...”

“I heard you, girl, but the headmaster is not in,” the gargoyle replied, making them jump.

“I didn’t know you talked,” Tonks muttered.

“I try not to,” the gargoyle replied dryly as Harry pulled out the map and spoke the passphrase.

“Oh, fuck,” he muttered. “They’re having a staff meeting.”

“Oh, goody, Snape will be able to tell us and take points for Dumbledore,” Ron sulked. “You know, the acromatulas likely will kill them.”

“Or chase them in here,” Chiara scowled. “No, the professors need to be told.”

Grumbling to themselves, the six of them made their way downstairs, quickly finding the staffroom, which was guarded by a different gargoyle.

“Unless this is an emergency, I am not permitted to let anyone in,” the gargoyle said.

“It is an emergency,” Chiara replied. “There are werewolves in the woods, not far from the school and...”

Before she could even finish that sentence, the door swung open, revealing Dumbledore, the four heads of house, as well as Professor Lupin, Professor Sinestra, and Professor Binns.

“Oh, it’s the headmaster and the professors for the core subjects,” Hermione mumbled under her breath.

“Potter, whatever this is about, we hardly have time...” Snape went to say.

“Fenrir Greyback is here,” Chiara said before he could finish, and they all went silent, more than a few of them paling immediately.

“Where?” Lupin asked, his eyes narrowing.

“In the woods, not far from the castle,” Harry replied. “Firenze, the centaur, was on his way to tell you when we ran into him.”

“And where, pray tell, did you run into him?” Snape drawled.

“Severus, this is hardly the time...” McGonagall muttered, sounding exasperated.

“I would like to know that as well,” Dumbledore murmured, eyeing Harry.

“That thing we talked about before...I trusted you to handle it, but I also wanted to be the one to...deal with it,” Harry admitted. “It was stupid, and I’m sorry, and I’ll accept whatever you deem necessary, but...this is, as Professor McGonagall said, not the time. Hagrid has sicked the entire acromantula colony on Greyback and his pack, and goodness knows what...”

“WHAT?” more than a few of them exclaimed at once as Dumbledore removed his half-moon glasses and pinched the bridge of his crooked nose.

“We will be discussing this at length, and I am more than a little disappointed that you didn’t do as I said,” the old man sighed, making Harry wince, “but you might have actually done the school a service in this particular instance.”

“Albus, if the acromantulas just descend on the werewolves, there’s no telling what direction they’ll flee in,” Lupin muttered. “I don’t know what Hagrid was thinking.”

“He was thinking that there was a threat to the school and he knew some creatures who could help,” Dumbledore replied. “A few years...nearly a decade ago, actually, Greyback was spotted in the forest with a few other werewolves. We dealt with them, and there weren’t any casualties among the student population or the staff, but it rankled Hagrid a bit, and I can’t truly blame him for acting as he did this time. You six are going to stay here so I know where to find you, and once we’re certain that the danger has passed, I’ll return.”

Harry nodded, and the six of them sat down as the staff left to confront the wolves.

“That could have gone better,” Hermione sighed.

“It could have gone worse too,” Chiara muttered.

“I’m so sorry, guys,” Ron groaned. “You all tried to convince me it was a bad idea, and I talked you all into it anyway.”

“Mate, it’s not like any of us needed that much convincing to try to fuck over Malfoy,” Harry said, patting his shoulder. “This does raise a very disturbing question, though.”

“Did Malfoy mean to trick us into getting eaten by werewolves?” Tonks asked darkly.

"I know he's a little prick, but do you really think he'd try something like that?" Hestia asked.

"He spent most of last term actively trying to get Buckbeak killed," Hermione pointed out.

"Yeah, but, and don't take this the wrong way, Buckbeak's a hippogriff," Hestia replied. "I'll admit that his reaction to suffering a minor scrape was...frankly a little nuts, but it was the sort of nuts I'd expect out of a spoiled little brat who spent his entire childhood getting anything and everything he wanted. Trying to lure someone, even someone he hates, into being murdered like that is a whole other level of psychosis."

"You have a point there," Tonks murmured. "He's never struck me as the kind of guy who would have the balls to do something like that. Don't get me wrong, he wouldn't piss on any of us if we were on fire, at least until he was sure we were dead, but actually trying to kill us is very different, and how the hell would he even get in contact with Greyback anyway?"

"He couldn't," Chiara replied, "but his father could."

"Lucius is absolutely enough of a prick to do this, but why now and why like this?" Harry asked.

"No idea," Tonks muttered. "If Lucius is behind it, though, I'd not expect my dickhead cousin to know anything about the werewolves. Lucius would absolutely be smart enough to give his son plausible deniability if he chose to use him for something like this."

"So, what, you think Malfoy actually thinks that there's something in the woods that Harry could get sent to prison over?" Ron asked.

"Or, he just legitimately thought that me getting caught out in the woods might get me in trouble in a way that his father could use against me," Harry suggested. "He has actively tried to get us in trouble before, and that does sound a lot more like something he'd do than attempted murder. Like Tonks said, he's never given us any reason to think that he'd have the balls to try something like this."

"Professor Dumbledore will question him," Hermione said. "It's too great a coincidence for him not to at least wonder if they were connected. In this case, we're absolutely letting him handle it."

"Yeah, we are," Harry sighed, trying not to think about how badly things could have gone tonight if they hadn't run into Firenze.

"At least we finally found a good use for spiders," Ron chuckled, shaking his head. "I can't believe Hagrid actually did that."

"He's the groundskeeper," Tonks grinned, "and this was him keeping the grounds nice and safe."

"If Greyback gets eaten by acromantulas, I'm buying Hagrid something nice," Chiara muttered, making the others snort.

"I'm surprised the centaurs haven't even come close," Boris said as the werewolves all sat around their campfire.

“The star lovers are cowards, all of them,” Brutus spat. “The human governments all consider them to be subhuman filth like they call us, and yet have they ever risen up against them? Even the goblins have tried, and they’re just tiny, ornery cunts.”

“They’re smart and can kick like horses,” Red, the only ginger in the group, mused. “They actually should have attacked the humans by now.”

“Like I said, cowards,” Brutus sneered.

“They don’t matter,” Greyback declared. “They’ll stay out of our way, we can be sure of that, and soon enough, we’ll be able to go.”

“You think the kid’s going to come tonight?” Alrik asked.

“If not tonight, then in a night to come,” Greyback rumbled. “I know his type, the hero, the meddler, the boy who thinks sticking his head inside the gaping maw of danger makes him look big. He’ll come if that pampered fool did as I said, and if not, then we’ll need to wait for the summer and track him down then.”

“Do we have time to wait?” Duncan asked. “If that potion works like we fear...”

“We’ll stop it,” Greyback growled, digging his claws into the ground next to him as fury threatened to boil up inside him. “We can’t let the humans best us like that, and we won’t.”

“It would be worse than wolfsbane,” Brutus muttered. “That’s costly, and the weak, craven pups who take it still get to taste our gift. If they didn’t turn on the moon at all, though...”

“Then the humans would come for the true wolves among us,” Alrik glared. “There isn’t a man alive whose throat I couldn’t tear out with my bare hands, one on one, but in numbers, and focused on just us instead of all werewolves...”

“Like I said, I won’t let it come to that,” Greyback swore. “We’re going to kill Harry Potter, and then we’re going to kill Sirius Black and anyone else connected to this new potion until nothing of it remains. I...”

“Greyback?” Boris asked, growing instantly concerned as he saw his alpha go stiff.

“Shut up,” Greyback hissed, standing up and holding up a hand as he tried to hear what he thought he had before. He swore that he’d heard a chittering sound, as if numerous limbs that ended on very narrow points were moving across the ground and knew of only one sort of creature who sounded like that as it walked, a type that he knew dwelled in this forest. After a moment of hearing nothing, he decided that it must have been rustling leaves in the distance and said, “Nevermind.”

“What did you think you heard?” Brutus asked, and he shook his head.

“Nothing that we need to...” Greyback went to reply, only to, on pure instinct, jump to the side just in time for a massive, black body to land where he’d stood a moment earlier.

“Acromantulas!” Brutus shouted, drawing his wand and lobbing a banishing charm at the beast just as it tried to jump at him.

He hit it square in the chest, sending it flying into the nearby oak tree, and grinned savagely when it was crushed by the impact. The other werewolves were all on their feet a moment later, drawing their wands, save for Boris, whose wand got caught in his pocket.

“Get ou...ahh!” he screamed as another acromantula knocked him down and sank its venomous fangs into his neck.

Greyback roared in rage, ripping one of the spider’s limbs off with a sharp yank and stabbing it through its head. Another acromantula rushed at him, and he hissed out a severing charm, bisecting it cleanly. A dozen more of them emerged from the brush, surrounding the wolves, who looked around wide-eyed and furious.

“Fuck off back to your webs,” Greyback growled. “You’ll find no easy prey here.”

“Prey doesn’t need to be easy to be enjoyable,” a spider in the back replied. “Hagrid sends his regards.”

The nearest wave of acromantulas leapt towards them as the only one who deigned to speak said that part and the noise they made as they did obscured one very crucial word to Greyback’s ears.

“Did that fucking thing say Harry?” he wondered to himself as he jumped backwards, evading the leaping spider, and then clawed through its head. *“If I get out of this, I’m going to tear that brat’s limbs off one by one.”*

The forest echoed with the sound of battle as the five remaining werewolves fought against wave after brutal wave of acromantulas, hopelessly outnumbered and yet far from cowed.

“Ah, there ye are,” Hagrid sighed as he spotted the other professors. “Firenze brought you my message?”

“In a way,” Dumbledore replied. “What exactly has happened?”

“Firenze came to warn me that Greyback was in the forest, cause I asked him to after last time, and so I sent him to you and went to ask Aragog for help,” Hagrid replied. “The spiders should take care of them, but just in case, it’s good that yer all here.”

“Rubeus, as...impressed as I must admit I am with your initiative, are you certain that employing acromantulas against the werewolves is wise?” Snape asked dryly.

“The forest is their home too, and no one likes that sort of werewolf,” Hagrid shrugged.

“How is this the first I’m learning that there’s an acromantula colony in the forest?” Aurora asked peevishly.

“We do call it forbidden,” Snape drawled.

“That is a matter best discussed later,” Dumbledore said. “Hagrid, while I understand your reasons, and am I glad that the werewolves haven’t made it to the castle’s grounds yet, I would prefer that you discuss taking measures like this with me in future.”

“Er...right, sorry, sir,” Hagrid stammered, reddening slightly.

“Where are they?” Lupin asked.

“I’ve not seen them myself, of course, Hagrid replied, “but Firenze said they were near one of the biggest oak trees in the forest, not too far east of the stone circle.”

“That gives us a place to start, at least,” Lupin muttered. “Albus, how do you want to handle this?”

“Given the added danger of the acromantulas, I don’t want us venturing into the forest to find them,” Dumbledore replied. “We’ll split into pairs and patrol around the edge of the forest while you, Rolanda, will fly overhead and try to see if you can spot anything of interest.”

“Just make sure to keep yer distance in the air,” Hagrid warned her. “Great jumpers acromantulas are, and...not all of them are the best listeners.”

“We are absolutely discussing this in the general staff meeting,” Hooch muttered as she mounted her broom.

“Remus, you’re with me,” Dumbledore said. “You have a better chance of sensing Greyback than any of us.”

“His smell is one I’m unlikely to forget as long as I live,” Lupin sighed, nodding.

As the professors all took their positions, each one well aware that they were likely in for a rather long night, a battle raged on just far enough away from them to go unheard.

“Fuck,” Brutus hissed nearly an hour later as he and Greyback skulked off together, escaping the disastrous fight they’d each barely managed to get away from.

Neither one could say how many acromantulas they’d actually managed to take down before it became apparent that they had no choice but to flee. The others were all dead, their insides likely already being liquidated by spider venom, and the two remaining wolves swore if they ever got the chance they were going to get their revenge on the horde.

“Shut up,” Greyback hissed, and Brutus looked at him strangely.

“You said you managed to silence this thing,” he replied, and his alpha growled.

“I don’t know for sure,” Greyback admitted. “When I get my hands on Potter...”

“Potter isn’t why we’re in this mess,” Brutus growled. “Malfoy was one who sent us. If this was a trap...”

“Malfoy has no reason to send us into a trap, and didn’t you hear the spider who spoke?” Greyback asked. “He said, ‘Harry sends his regards.’”

“Is that what he said?” Brutus asked. “I couldn’t make out a word of it. How the fuck did Potter manage to send a whole acromantula colony after us?”

"Maybe I'll ask him before I rip out one of his femurs and beat him to death with it," Greyback hissed.

"Where'd you even get this thing, anyway?" Brutus asked, brushing his fingers over the soft, silk-like fabric of the invisibility cloak draped around them.

"Some dumb prick thought it would save him from me a few years ago," Greyback replied. "I sniffed him out and proved him wrong, and when I was done with him, I decided to take it as a trophy. Kept it stuffed in my moleskin pouch all these years just in case I ever needed it."

"We're lucky it still works," Brutus muttered, coming to a halt as they reached the edge of the forest.

Out in the clearing, they spotted a pair of wizards walking together, clearly patrolling the grounds and trying to be stealthy about it.

"They know we're here," Brutus growled. "Maybe we should leave."

Greyback knew his right hand was correct, that they'd walked into a situation that was nothing like what they expected, and already paid a steep price for that, but rage burned within him in a way it hadn't in decades. Potter had learned what they were up to, clearly, and not only sent a horde of giant spiders after them but also informed the Hogwarts staff. He'd walked into a trap he never would have imagined possible and lost four werewolves because of it, including one of the most promising young pups he'd come across in ages. Someone had to die for that, and he knew exactly who he preferred.

"We'll get a little closer," Greyback declared. "I've always wanted to see what the school's defenses were like up close."

"Yes, sir," Brutus replied submissively, and Greyback grinned, waiting until the pair of guards continued onward to sneak closer.

The wind was against them, which was good, as with it came all manner of scents, a couple of which he recognized immediately.

"Lupin," he whispered, scowling as he recalled one of his greatest disappointments.

"One of us?" Brutus asked, recognizing from his tone alone what he was talking about.

"Yes, and he's not the only one here I can smell," Greyback replied. "The other one I turned as well, though her scent is fainter; she's gone back inside."

"This Lupin could smell us," Brutus said, and Greyback nearly laughed.

"No, he won't," he replied. "That one has spent so many years denying the gift that he's grown weak. The last time I saw him, he was such a withered wreck that I nearly killed him out of sheer embarrassment before deciding that he deserved to suffer more. He...blood!"

"I smell it too," Brutus nodded, sniffing at the air. "It's coming from closer to the castle."

Doing their best to avoid the patrols, the two wolves moved in, drawn by the familiar scent, and when they discovered that it was on a broken door handle, they both grinned.

“Someone managed to damage this,” Greyback murmured, poking his wand out past the cloak and casting a few detection charms that, as he realized what he was looking at, made him grin. “Whatever they did they managed to disrupt the runes on it.”

“Wait, you’re saying this is unlocked?” Brutus asked and Greyback, being careful not to cut himself on the handle, turned it to demonstrate. “The wolf bitch was here too. The blood isn’t hers, but I can smell her. She’s ripe, fertile...”

“Focus,” Greyback hissed, looking around to make sure that no one was nearby before reaching through the cloak and opening the door. “We should move quickly in case there are other defenses here we don’t know about. I expected more though maybe Dumbledore didn’t raise everything that he could have, thinking that he and the others would stop us before we got this far.”

“He wouldn’t have expected us to have an invisibility cloak or to be this stealthy,” Brutus pointed out, and Greyback chuckled.

“We wouldn’t have if not for the spiders,” he grinned. “Potter thought he was clever using them against us, and now that choice is going to get him killed. We’ll track whoever bled here and make them take us to him while the professors continue to patrol the grounds.”

Brutus chuckled, swearing he could already taste the blood to come, and as they slipped inside, each swore they were going to make Potter pay for the disaster in the forest. Unbeknownst to either of them, the Hogwarts wards would have normally stopped them, but Greyback having the blood of a currently registered student on his hand, having picked it up from the handle, let the both of them slip through without being noticed. That was far from the only defense that the school had, however.

“Why in the world did we not just leave well enough alone?” Hermione muttered, pacing back and forth as she had been since about thirty minutes after the staff left them alone. “Professor Dumbledore assured us that he was going to handle it and we had no reason to doubt him.”

“In our defense, we’re not exactly used to the staff handling anything around here,” Ron pointed out. “Our first two years here we ended up facing dangerous shit because they either didn’t believe us or couldn’t do it for us.”

“We also really, really wanted to screw over Malfoy,” Harry reminded her, “and frankly, no one can blame us for that.”

“No one got hurt, and we barely broke any rules,” Tonks said reassuringly. “Dumbledore and the others will be a little annoyed, but it’s not too bad. The really important thing is that we didn’t go into the forest. That would have been really bad.”

“Yeah,” Hestia sighed. “We might end up in detention and lose some house points, but that’s leagues better than ending up caught in the middle of a fight between werewolves and acromantulas.”

“No argument here,” Ron muttered, shivering at the thought.

“Chiara, are you okay?” Harry asked, and Hermione turned at the mention of her name.

"Yeah, just...he's here," Chiara said, staring down at her hands. "I've feared running into that monster again since I was girl, and now he's a stone's throw away."

"The professors will deal with him," Tonks assured her.

"If the acromantulas haven't," Ron added. "Can't overstate how fucking terrifying those things are."

"We'd all be well rid of him," Chiara scowled. "Greyback is a monster, even among werewolves, the worst of the worst."

"You're not all monsters," Hermione said softly, and Chiara smiled, her eyes going misty.

"Thank you," she said. "I...that smell, I haven't smelled it since...no."

"What's wro..." Hermione went to ask when the door behind her exploded, sending her hurtling towards the ground.

Quick as lightning, a massive, hulking figure rushed in and grabbed the disoriented girl before she hit the ground, pulling her back and sinking his teeth into her shoulder, making her scream.

"NO!" Chiara shrieked, the sight of Hermione being bitten breaking through her terror. She summoned her robes, pulling her out of Greyback's grasp and catching her shaking form.

"How the fuck..." Tonks went to ask when another man stepped from behind Greyback, shorter and slighter, and yet no less terrifying.

Like Greyback, this one looked like he was half wolf, as if the last time he transformed back into a man as the sun rose to banish the full moon, it hadn't quite worked. Unlike Greyback, he had a full beard, as wild, tangled, and black as his hair, though like the other wolf, his glowing amber eyes seemed to radiate palpable malice.

"Potter," he hissed, spotting Harry's scar. "You're going to pay for sending the acromantulas after us."

"Wha...I didn't..." Harry spluttered, more confused than anything.

"*Depulso!*" Tonks cried, hitting Greyback square in the chest and sending him hurtling into the other werewolf. As the two of them were sent tumbling out of the room, she shouted, "Transfigure everything you can into weapons."

"No, no, no, no, no," Hermione whimpered, clutching her bleeding, mangled shoulder as she shook with mortal terror. "This can't be happening."

"Hermione, Hermione, it's alright," Chiara breathed, tears filling her eyes as she held the trembling girl in her arms. "He's..."

"Chiara!" Hestia shouted, barely managing to shield against a blasting curse that came her way. The concussive force of the curse, as it hit her shield caused the shelf next to her to shake and a heavy book on it fell down, hitting Hermione in the head and knocking her unconscious.

Harry and Ron had both been frozen in shock since Greyback burst in, horrified as much by the fact that the two men were in the school as by how one of them had bitten Hermione, but seeing her get hurt again snapped them out of it, and they immediately started transfiguring everything they could find into blades, which Tonks sent flying towards the two intruders with vicious speed. Greyback and his companion raised and transfigured the floor tiles into shields to block that, returning fire every chance they got, only to grow furious as Hestia and, after a moment, Chiara worked to shield against them.

“Where the hell are the professors?” Harry shouted, and Tonks grunted, wondering that herself.

Several minutes earlier, on the grounds, Lupin and Dumbledore were still patrolling together, neither one wanting to stop until they had some proof that the werewolves had either fled or been killed. The latter wouldn't have been the old man's preference usually, as he truly did think that even the worst of the worst deserved their due process, but he couldn't undo what had been done, and, if he were forced to be honest, he couldn't say that he'd shed any tears for them if it turned out that the acromantulas truly had done them all a favor in this instance.

“It was that damn potion,” Lupin muttered after a moment, and Dumbledore cocked an eyebrow at him.

“You think this is over Elfwynn's potion?” he asked.

“I can't think of any other reason for Greyback to do something as stupid as attack this school again,” Lupin replied. “It's not like my presence would have drawn him in when we've had another of our kind here for the past six years.”

“How would he have learned about it, though?” Dumbledore asked. “Even if Horace had written about it yet, which he hasn't, I somehow doubt that Fenrir Greyback has a subscription to Potions Quarterly.”

“Horace is a brilliant man, one of the finest teachers I had, but let's be honest, Albus, the man adores attention and praise,” Lupin muttered. “I'd be shocked if he hadn't yet told anyone that he was working on a new potion meant to end the scourge of lycanthropy forever, especially when Harry Potter of all people is involved.”

Dumbledore was loathe to speak ill of a friend, especially one who had saved his life not long ago, but he found he couldn't dispute that. There was every possibility that Horace had already told people about his latest project, and word of that could have reached Greyback, but deep down, he suspected that the person who told the deranged werewolf about it had done so with the clear intention of sending him after Harry.

“I doubt that questioning young Draco will yield much, as I lack any cause to call the aurors and he would just deny any involvement in this, but I refuse to believe that it's a coincidence that on a night where Harry was given cause to wander into the forest, there just happened to be a small pack of werewolves waiting for him,” Dumbledore thought to himself. *“I also dearly hope that a third-year boy wasn't knowingly involved in a plot to murder one of his fellows. I will question him, of course, but I know that his father was far more likely involved. Was this because of the horcrux we suspect lies in Bellatrix's vault, or did the impetus for it come when Sirius was exonerated?”*

He shook his head at that, wondering, as he had so distressingly many times, just when one of his old students had become such a monster. Lucius had been polite and capable as a boy, haughty, and not incapable of cruelty, yet generally a good student.

“Nicolas told me more than once that my biggest problem was that I never stopped, on some level, seeing my former students as the innocent children they once were,” he thought to himself. *“Maybe there’s a little more to that than I thought back in the day.”*

“Albus,” Hooch called out as she flew towards him, landing with the natural grace she’d displayed since her first few flights on a broom.

“Rolanda, did you spot anything?” Dumbledore asked.

“If I never see another spider again, it will be too soon,” Hooch muttered, shuddering. “I saw a massive column of acromantulas marching towards the north, carrying the bodies of at least a dozen others on their backs, along with four distinct humanoid shapes wrapped in silk.”

“Four down,” Remus muttered. “The question is, is that all of them?”

“And is Greyback among them?” Hooch asked.

“We’ve seen no signs of them fleeing towards us, so it’s possible that that was all of them or that they simply fled further into...” Dumbledore went to say it, only to gasp when he was alerted that one of the gargoyles within the school had been attacked.

Contrary to what many believed, the wards of Hogwarts did not tell him everything that went on within the castle’s walls, as that would have been overwhelming and thus counterproductive, but there were some things that he was immediately informed about, and damage to the school was one of them.

“The staffroom,” Dumbledore breathed, his heart sinking as he realized where that alert had come from. “Harry.”

“What is it?” Lupin asked.

“Greyback’s inside the castle,” Dumbledore hissed. “Fawkes!”

“How is that possible?!” Lupin exclaimed as the phoenix appeared on Dumbledore’s shoulder.

“There’s no time!” the headmaster replied, grabbing his shoulder. “Rolanda, tell the others. Fawkes, please take us to the staffroom.”

The three of them disappeared in a plume of phoenix fire as Rolanda flew off to alert the rest of the staff, reappearing a moment later in the hallway just outside the staffroom and they were shocked by the sheer extent of the damage that they found. The door to the room had been destroyed, the singed edges around it suggesting that a blasting curse had been used, one that took out half of the gargoyle as well. The two of them recognized Greyback at once, his broad face and far hairier than that of any normal man, and long, matted grey hair as distinct as ever, and while they didn’t know his companion, that proved irrelevant as, a moment after he arrived, the other wolf took a blasting curse to the face, splattering his entire skull and brain onto the wall behind him.

“Oh shit!” Tonks exclaimed as someone inside the staff room threw up. “Sorry, Ron.”

"I am going to fucking ki..." Greyback snarled, only to freeze as he sensed Lupin and Dumbledore.

Still blocking the constant stream of curses being lobbed his way, he turned and glared at them, realizing finally that he was beaten.

"It's over, Greyback," Dumbledore said sharply, leveling the elder wand at him. "Do yourself a favor and surrender."

"No one will ever take me in alive," Greyback hissed.

"That works for me, you son of a bitch!" Chiara shouted. "Fulmen!"

Greyback redirected the lightning bolt at Dumbledore, who effortlessly blocked it and transfigured the floor around Greyback into chains, which started wrapping themselves around him. He vanished the chains, still shielding against or dodging every spell coming his way, now from Tonks, Chiara, Hestia, Harry, Ron, Lupin, and Dumbledore, and while he knew that he was a skilled duelist, he also knew he was completely outmatched and would be overwhelmed in less than a minute if this kept up. Something had to give, and when he saw a blasting curse coming his way and realized that it was going a little high, rather than try to block it, he ducked and let it destroy the window behind him.

Without even thinking about it, he ran through the hole, deciding to try his luck in the forest, and Chiara saw red. She'd hated Fenrir Greyback with every fiber of her being ever since she was a child, and seeing him again after all these years and watching him hurt Hermione, she wanted to kill him more than she'd ever wanted anything in her entire life. Without a second thought, she moved her wand behind her back, pointing it at herself and hissing, "*Depulso*."

This was a potentially very bad idea, something that is generally true of casting offensive spells on oneself, but all she knew in that moment was that she needed to stop Greyback from getting away more than she needed air, and she was more than willing to take this risk to do it. The blue beam hit her square in the back, sending her careening out of the school and right into Greyback, who grunted as he was knocked to the ground by the silver-haired missile and then screamed as he felt teeth sink into his throat. Dumbledore and Lupin arrived at the hole in the wall a moment later, the latter giving the space he'd just seen a student fly through an incredulous look as the former disarmed the fallen Greyback.

"Get off...agh!" Greyback shrieked in pain, reaching behind him and clawing at Chiara's back as she pulled with all her might, tearing out a chunk of the man who had ruined her life.

Chiara cried out in pain, desperately trying to escape the claws digging into her back as she was suddenly hit right in the face with a gushing blast of warm liquid. Greyback let her go immediately, clutching at his throat as his lifesblood spilled out of him in time with the beating of his racing heart.

"Miss Lobosca," Dumbledore breathed, reaching down to rest his hand on her shoulder and sighing when she flinched and looked back at him, horror etched all over her blood-soaked face.

"I...I..." she stammered, and he hit her with a sleeping charm, figuring it would be for the best.

As he levitated her away from Greyback, noticing that the monstrous man was mere seconds from death, a sizable part of his carotid artery having been torn out by Chiara's teeth, he decided that trying to save him would be unlikely to work even if he were more inclined to do it.

"Is he..." Lupin asked, feeling a distinct sense of satisfaction as he saw the man he hated most in all the world go limp on the ground.

"Professor, Hermione's hurt!" Harry called out, and both of them turned around, heading back inside.

Dumbledore levitated Chiara's unconscious form behind him and, when her friends all gasped in horror at the sight of her, said, "She's just asleep. I felt it best when she looked like she was going into shock."

"What happened?" Lupin asked, grimacing as he saw the bite mark on Hermione's shoulder.

"Greyback bit her, and she went catatonic," Hestia replied. "That book there then fell on her head after one of their spells knocked it down"

"She'll need to be checked for a concussion," Lupin murmured as he cast a few charms to check on her general condition

"Is she...I mean, she was bitten..." Ron fretted and Lupin sighed.

"Greyback wasn't transformed, so it shouldn't have any lingering effects, but it will need to be treated and...it will scar," he replied.

"Albus, what...oh, no," McGonagall breathed as she and the others arrived.

Harry could understand her and the others' horror, coming upon the scene of two dead werewolves, one whose head was currently painted across the wall, and two unconscious, wounded students.

"We need to get Miss Granger and Miss Lobosca to the hospital wing," Dumbledore said gravely. "You four will need to be examined as well, for possible magical exhaustion, if nothing else."

"Anything that we need to discuss can wait until the morning," Lupin added.

All four of them nodded at that, too focused on Hermione and Chiara to even consider the trouble they might still be in.

"Is she going to be alright?" Harry asked as Madam Pomfrey finished treating Hermione's bite wound with a mix of powdered silver and dittany.

"Miss Granger will recover," the healer replied. "The bite wound will scar; there's nothing I can do about that, but it's already sealing, and the imminent danger to her has passed. As for whether or not she'll end up suffering from the curse, I cannot say. Normally, I would think it impossible, as werewolves can only pass on their curse under the light of the full moon while transformed."

"But?" Ron asked.

"But Greyback was...different," Lupin replied as he walked in. "How did your examination of his body go?"

"The results were inconclusive, but I cannot definitively rule out the possibility that he, through whatever means he used to remain partially transformed like this, retained the ability to pass on his curse even in this form," Madam Pomfrey replied.

"So she might be..." Hestia went to ask.

"This is all my fault!" Ron exclaimed, looking like he was going to be sick again.

"No, it's not," Harry insisted.

"If I hadn't badgered you all into going into the woods with me, we wouldn't have been in the staffroom when Greyback attacked," Ron argued.

"Ron, he still would have got in and he still would have come after me," Harry replied. "If this is anyone's fault it's mine. Why the hell he thought I sent the acromantulas after him..."

"That we might never know, but Albus and I think that you were his target at any rate," Lupin replied, and Harry gave him a stricken look.

"The potion," he breathed, and Lupin nodded.

"We think he learned about it and was sent after you," he replied.

"Sent?" Harry asked, his voice low and dangerous.

"By who?" Tonks, still seated by Chiara's bed, asked.

"That we cannot say, Miss Tonks," Dumbledore sighed as he walked in, looking every bit his age.

"Malfoy!" Ron growled. "That little worm did this! That's why he let Hermione and Chiara overhear him talking about getting you in trouble."

"Mister Malfoy was still awake when Severus, Remus, and I went to the dungeons," Dumbledore replied. "We questioned him extensively, and he claimed, eventually, that he was just lying to Mister Nott to make himself look more important than he is."

"He's lying!" Harry exclaimed.

"I suspect he is, but before we asked him about that, we asked him about werewolves, what he knew of them, if he'd heard any rumors that there were any in the forest, things like that, and he was genuinely confused," Dumbledore replied.

"I could hear his heartbeat, and I know that he wasn't lying about that," Lupin replied.

Dumbledore nodded at that, knowing that it was both true and a convenient way to explain how they knew Draco truly didn't expect any of them to be killed without having to admit that he'd probed the boy's surface thoughts through the entire conversation.

"What are you saying?" Hestia asked.

"I suspect that Mister Malfoy was led to believe that it would be fun to trick you six into venturing into the woods at night and then sending the professors after you to get you in trouble," Dumbledore replied. "He did not know about the werewolves or, I suspect, that you would actually be harmed, and that complicates matters quite a bit. If I called in the aurors and they spoke to him, I don't believe that they'd find enough through questioning him to justify using veritaserum, and even if they did, I suspect that the person who used him in this instance made certain that he didn't know enough to implicate either of them in anything."

"The likelihood of the aurors being allowed to use Veritaserum on him at all, when the first thing Lucius Malfoy would do would be to call the minister and every other official who owes him favors to get them in to intervene, would be minimal anyway," Lupin muttered. "In fact, I think if we called the aurors, the only one who would end up in any trouble would be Hagrid."

"For what?" Harry spat. "He saved us from having to deal with more of them."

"Yes, but he already has a record, and while the government wouldn't care at all that werewolves were harmed, there are more than a few people in it who would gleefully take advantage to do harm to a half-giant," Lupin sighed.

"The government is really that corrupt?" Tonks asked.

"Not all of it, Miss Tonks," Dumbledore sighed.

"It was his father, wasn't it?" Harry asked, and Dumbledore nodded.

"That is what I suspect, yes," he replied, and Harry growled.

"Why is it so impossible to do anything to this guy?" he demanded. "He could have killed half the school with the diary last year and now this?"

"The only one who could definitively tie Lucius to the diary incident is a house elf, whose testimony would not be accepted under any circumstances, and in this case, we have nothing tying him to Greyback other than speculation," Dumbledore said. "If you had been attacked in the woods, having been tricked by Mister Malfoy into venturing into them, that might have given me something that I could use to have him questioned properly, but as that didn't happen, legally, I have nothing usable."

"And Lucius Malfoy is too smart to tell his son anything that could land him in hot water anyway," Tonks muttered.

All four of them glared murderously at the floor, each wanting nothing more than to wring the blonde man's neck, or his son's for that matter.

"Can anything be done to the Malfoy here, then?" Harry asked, and Dumbledore sighed.

"All I have him on is lying to his friend about planning to do something to you," he replied. "If I could force him to admit that he did so knowing that he was being overheard and did it intentionally as part of a plot to get you in trouble, that could land him in detention, but given that he didn't know about the greater plot he was part of, I'd have no justification to do anything more, and if I tried, his parents would complain to the Board of Governors, who would then ask why I saw fit to punish a student excessively, one whose father I've openly quarreled with in the past at that."

Ron went to say something else when Hermione woke up with a gasp and sat up.

“Miss Granger, take care moving,” Madam Pomfrey fretted as the brunette looked around the room in confusion and then gasped again, clutching her shoulder.

“I...what happened to Greyback?” Hermione asked.

“Chiara killed him,” Hestia replied. “Tonks killed the other one.”

“Oh,” Hermione breathed. “Are you two in trouble?”

“Miss Lobosca will be receiving the thousand galleon reward on Greyback,” Dumbledore replied. “It’s exceedingly rare for the I.C.W. to place rewards on people’s heads like that without specifying that they needed to be brought in alive to collect it, but he had terrorized so many countries over the years I was overruled when I argued it would only get people hurt.”

“God, I’m so sorry I froze like that,” Hermione muttered. “The moment I realized that he’d bitten me, I forgot that it wasn’t a full moon. What happened?”

Before any of them could answer that, she finally noticed Chiara lying in one of the other beds and clapped a hand over her mouth. “Is she okay?”

“She’s fine,” Tonks replied. “He scratched her back up pretty badly, but she was mostly in shock over killing him, and they decided to make her sleep through the night.”

“To answer your other question, a book fell on your head and knocked you out,” Harry replied. “How do you feel?”

“My shoulder’s sore, but otherwise, fine,” Hermione replied. “I guess this is going to leave a scar, isn’t it?”

They all looked at each other, none of them sure just what they should tell her, though they were spared having to decide by a sudden chime that rang out from Madam Pomfrey’s office.

“Hold that thought for just a moment,” she said, giving Harry and Ron a pointed look as she went to check on the elixir that she had a drop of Hermione’s blood swirling in in her office.

It was the most effective test they had for lycanthropy, one that had been developed back in the fifties. Prior to its invention, the only test was waiting until the next full moon and hoping for the best, something that the potions’ masters who developed it argued was unnecessarily cruel, especially given that suspected werewolves were, for obvious reasons, locked up that first night just in case they turned. If the test came back negative, the elixir would be a dull brown color, which is why Madam Pomfrey’s face fell the moment she saw the gleaming silver in the vial.

She picked it up and brought it out, figuring that Hermione would demand proof if she told her how it had turned out, and when the brunette let out an anguished sob the second she saw it, she knew that, perhaps unsurprisingly, she’d already read about the test.

“No, that...but it wasn’t a full moon,” Hermione sobbed, and Ron and Harry immediately moved to hug her.

As she wept in their arms, feeling the same sense that all new victims of lycanthropy did that their lives had been ended despite the fact that they still drew breath, everyone else in the room looked on sadly. Tonks rushed over and hugged Harry, while Hestia continued to run her fingers through Chiara's hair, well aware of how hard this was going to hit her old friend when she learned what happened.

"I don't care how long it takes or what I have to do," Harry thought to himself vengefully. *"I'm going to make the Malfoys pay for this."*

As he thought that, Dumbledore was having very similar thoughts as well, convinced that, for the safety of the school, Lucius had to be locked away for good, though even as he thought that, he knew that taking down one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the country was going to be exceedingly difficult, even for him.