

CHAPTER 1: In the Eye of the Pyre

THE YEAR 1940

It was as if fire had burst in the sky above. The rays of the dying sun had become an amazing mingle of scarlet, gold and surprisingly, a slight silver. Yet, it was the red that caught the attention of the tall man with long dark brown hair and beard and a crooked nose, on top of which stood a pair of half-moon shaped glasses. The colour made his otherwise light-blue eyes seem deep purple, looking unearthly, mysterious.

Blood-red. That colour had always been a bad omen-especially in the wizarding world, to which he belonged. However, Albus Dumbledore was not that easily scared. Many believed him to be one of the most powerful wizards of the time, rivalled only by the Dark Lord Grindewald. Yet, now, as he was standing by the top window of the tallest Hogwarts tower-the Astronomy one, he couldn't help but shiver at the strange sensation of danger and death, which the scarlet colour of the sunset had awakened in his heart.

He shook his head to clear it of the dark thoughts. No, this wasn't the time to be dwelling on omens and superstitions, be they wizarding or not. He suddenly swept his gaze down on the school meadows, where several students were still chasing each other by the lake. He recognized three 12-year old boys, who he thought he knew. Well, saying that actually didn't mean much, because these three guys were each an endless universe and it was too difficult even for him to ever get to know them completely. At least, it was true that he knew them reasonably well, them being his students.

They weren't exactly friends but it didn't stop them from being close and reliant on each other. Dumbledore smiled. Yes, they were indeed unique! He watched with a slight smirk as Abraxas Malfoy-a boy of medium height, with almost white blond hair and grey eyes almost jumped two meters in the air, when Orion Black's short dark-brown hair and chocolate eyes, together with his stern features and respectful muscles popped suddenly out of the lake. At that very point the third boy-Tom Riddle, flung his longish jet-black hair away from his face, his coal-black eyes glittering, as an inevitable laughter made his handsome features even more pronounced. His clothes could hardly disguise his finely toned body-actually quite well-built for a 12-year old. No wonder he was one of the most popular guys at Hogwarts among girls of all ages. The same could be said about his two companions as well. The fair sex literary worshiped the three.

Abraxas-the eternal philosopher would often indulge in profound discussions on topics, sometimes so trivial, that they'd make most adults laugh. Yet, the

female population of Hogwarts listened to him enthralled, not so much by his reasoning, but by his handsome face and stormy-grey eyes. Orion, or as more widely known by his second name-Garth, would always get attention too-mainly through getting himself into a fight and he was mostly admired by girls for his physique. However, Tom, Tom was something totally different.

He looked well older than his age and unsurprisingly was the most popular of the three. Dumbledore knew that if their pride didn't stop them, many girls would just throw themselves at his feet. Abraxas had their minds and Garth-their eyes, but Tom possessed their hearts, yet he didn't notice them, he didn't care. They called him 'The Ice Lord'. For no Hogwarts girl could ever touch *his* heart.

The word itself startled Dumbledore. "Lord" was this a sign? A beginning towards a possible future he had seen that day, when he had first met with Tom in the orphanage? He again shook his head. No, this was a mere possibility, not a certainty or a fact!

The sun was setting and as the day was dying the adult wizard couldn't help but feel a bit dazed. Tiredness it seemed was finally taking its toll on him as he suddenly found himself transfixed by the crimson sunset. He blinked a couple of times to try and clear his mind and gaze from the weariness. 'Strange' he thought as the sun now looked more like a raging fire, the colour of blood. Dumbledore was startled, it simply couldn't be...

...There was a man in the centre of the fire, a man Albus and many others knew all too well these days. Grindewald.

And yet it wasn't him in way. His eyes were all of a sudden a pair of flaming pits and he had around him a distinct aura of some unearthly power, something not of this world...He turned to his side and extended a hand to someone Albus couldn't see yet. However mere seconds later another hand slipped in Grindewald's outstretched palm, a hand made of flames...

Dumbledore just stood there watching unable to move at all. The other person finally became clear and he couldn't help but gasp.

It was the figure of a woman, her whole body-as if made of fire. She turned her gaze first to the man next to her and her extraordinarily beautiful face lit up with something awfully akin to pleasure. Then her eyes averted to the unwanted witness. Two burning embers fixed on Dumbledore's shocked face. He watched as they suddenly turned from crimson to dark-blue and the flames slowly died around her leaving her long, wavy, blood-red hair flowing in the slight evening breeze.

Her smile became an almost feral grin as the wind carried her melodic voice to the Hogwarts Transfiguration teacher, “The past is not forgotten...Judgement is yet to come...”

In that moment Grindewald took her in his arms and they dissolved into nothing leaving Dumbledore completely dumbfounded and seemingly in a trance...But then he snapped quickly out of it as an owl flew so close that it almost knocked him in the face. Dumbledore grabbed it just in time before it hit him. He quickly took the piece of parchment attached to its leg, read it in one breath and ran down the stairs of the tower so fast that he nearly knocked Professor Slughorn off his feet.

“Albus, what’s the rush about”, asked the Potions Master totally out of breath, as they had collided quite painfully.

“I’m really sorry, Horace, didn’t mean to, but, you know, the time has come!” The smile on the Transfiguration teacher’s face widened even more. Slughorn nodded in understanding.

“I remember...”, he then swept Dumbledore in a hug so tight that the latter felt as if being strangled by a bear.

“Congratulations, my friend! So she’s born already?”

“Not yet, but she’s on her way.”

“Then what are you waiting for-run!” and Slughorn gave Dumbledore one more bear hug and almost pushed him through the door, smiling at him wholeheartedly, as Dumbledore indeed ran as fast as he could towards the nearest exit from Hogwarts.

The Berlin Wizarding Hospital or the BWH for short was unusually full that day when the same man-Albus Dumbledore, tried to make his way towards the maternity ward. There were wizards and witches everywhere, which was strange indeed, but the Hogwarts Transfiguration teacher had no time to stop or look at them, let alone to talk and find out what was wrong. He passed quickly a group of very miserably looking warlocks and in one breath climbed the stairs to the ward for future mothers. As he pushed the door open, he suddenly froze at what he saw and a smile drew slowly on his face. There was his family, all of them gathered around the small bundle, which Selene, his brother Abberforth’s daughter-in-law, tenderly held cuddled in her arms, her beautiful face shining with happiness, as was that of the happy father- Frederick, Albus’ nephew. Abberth and his wife Estella were smiling down at the infant, caressing lovingly her rosy cheeks. The great-uncle approached slowly that warm scene and it was then that the rest finally noticed him. They lifted their eyes up to him and he felt that he could finally share their happiness. Selene gently gave him the baby

and Albus took her with inexperienced hands so carefully, as if she were made of crystal. She had the loveliest eyelashes-long and fine and when her heavy lids lifted, a pair of dark-blue eyes met his own. But when he caressed the infant's little forehead, the blanket in which she was wrapped, fell back slightly and revealed the blood red ends of her already growing hair. The old cold hand gripped his heart again, as the frightening vision from before flashed once more in front of his eyes. The little girl had suddenly started crying, as if having sensed her great uncle's dark premonitions. He tried to clear his head of these thoughts, they were so inappropriate for such an occasion, but in vain - the sensation was still there, stronger than ever. He gave the baby back to her parents, as terrible possibilities ran through his mind. "Is it her? Is she the one to bring our end?" shook his head, it couldn't possibly be, he was probably too tired and wasn't able to think clearly.

To chase away the lingering darkness, he asked them, smiling:
"Have you already picked a name?" Selene and Rick answered back almost as one, their eyes glittering with pride. "Laura. Laura Victoria Selene Snape."

But before anyone could say anything more, an owl had flown in and landed on the mother's bed, right next to the baby. Abberforth picked the letter it was carrying and the bird, as if chased by fire, flew out as quickly as it had entered.

The letter bore the crimson and black stamp of the German Ministry of Magic and everyone just looked at the others puzzled - what would they want with them? There was a general bewilderment for several moments, before the envelope, after having passed through everyone else's hands, had finally reached Selene's and to everybody's surprise her initial astonished expression melted into a happy smile. She quickly opened it and read out aloud:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Snape,

Following our records, your daughter must already be born. According to the Ministry data, she is half-German and thus, eligible for all programs of the German Ministry of Magic, as well as those of the Institute for Magic Durmstrang.

Therefore, we are pleased to inform you that, according to our monitoring methods, she possesses very pronounced potential (actually the greatest we have seen in years) for becoming one of Die Wählen - the most elite special squad in the whole wizarding world.

Whether she attends Durmstrang and participates in the special unit and its separate educational programs is left entirely to your choice, due to the girl's mixed nationality. If you wish to enrol her, send us an owl as soon as possible.

*Sincerely Yours,
Gertrud von Werder
Senior Monitoring Officer
Department of Expansion and Development of Human Resources*

German Ministry of Magic

“They want Laurie for The Chosen*!” exclaimed Selene joyfully. Everyone else seemed to be sharing her excitement and Albus wasn’t surprised. With Selene being German and having had, as had Rick, attended Durmstrang, of course they were going to be proud. Abberth had some doubts as to the nature of the studies actually being entirely suitable for his granddaughter, but he fully supported the parents’ decision that the infant would one day be part of Die Wählen. The thing was, Albus supposed, that Selene and Rick, themselves being Chosen, naturally wanted a continuation of the family tradition. But that strange sensation was still plaguing him and he couldn’t resist voicing his concerns:

“I don’t mean to question your judgment” he turned to the young parents “but I would really like to ask – are you completely certain about this? I mean, Laurie could as well attend Hogwarts. It won’t be a problem to quash all the possible favouritism rumours, which, I suspect, may arise from me teaching there.”

Contrary to what he was expecting, though, it was Abberforth who answered.

“Brother, if I didn’t know you, I wouldn’t ask you in turn- what is bothering you, just share it with us!”

‘Say it uncle, you don’t need to hold it back- we won’t be offended’ he heard Frederick’s thoughts in his head. He sure mastered brilliantly his tremendous telepathic abilities. The elder Dumbledore sighed. How was he going to simply state to the young couple that their newborn child could be the bringer of death and destruction? He braced himself.

“I don’t know how to start-the thing is that I have had a sort of premonition. I do not claim to possess the powers of the legendary Cassandra Trelawney.” his eyes glinted with humour behind the half-moon shaped glasses. “However...either Laurie will be in great danger in the future or she herself will be entangled in the events that are going to bring about such life hazard to others.” He promptly stopped to observe their reactions.

To his surprise, however, they were nothing he expected. Selene and Rick both started discussing how to protect best their baby, the concern more than evident in their rushed whispers. Este was as worried as any grandmother would be and Abberth was trying to calm her down and soothe her fears. No one seemed to pay attention to the subtle remark, that the infant could in the future be the bringer of death herself. And thinking about it, he decided that it was maybe better this way-they were worried enough already. He sighed again, not heard by anyone. This was going to be hard, he would have to lead the fight against this... this...oh, for goodness sake, she was just a baby! He was really losing it, he thought. This, no doubt, constituted the problem - there were no

scenes of the future, just his aging brain's twisted visions. Get a grip Albus, he scorned himself.

"But why would Grindelwald want Laurie-she'll never join him, we'll see to that!" Este was, as always, a bit detached from the wizarding world, yet it was normal. A muggle background usually meant no or very limited knowledge and experience of the 'other world'. She was one of the lucky few, in the whole history of magic, to have ever been fully admitted to it and to some of its secrets.

"It's just a matter of time before he tried to come after me and Selene." Frederick explained, his voice carrying absolutely no trace of fear for himself, only worry for his loved ones.

"That's true." The young witch supported him. "No matter that it could take him ages, when he finally learns who Scarlet Shadow and Fire Heart really are, we won't escape persecution to either recruit or kill us." and all knew that she was completely right. Once Grindelwald discovered the true identities of the German Ministry's two best Chosen, it wouldn't be long before they headed his 'to destroy' list. There was only one option left:

"You need to go into hiding. I'd suggest we use the Fidelius Charm." the older Dumbledore proposed his voice trembling with withheld emotions. It certainly was going to be dangerous not to mention the risk of hiding with a newborn. But they absolutely had to try- they had no other choice.

"Are you sure this is the best decision? I'd say we better try the new spell – the Exsculpo Curse. The results so far are more that excellent." Rick was referring to one of the experimental pieces of magic of the Ministry which he had quite big part in developing. It was called a curse only because they hadn't been able to come up with a satisfactory answer is there a difference between it being classified as a charm or as a curse-bureaucratic stuff really. The spell had the power to eradicate any proof of the existence of the person it was performed on whether magical or normal. With all traces gone it would be virtually impossible for anyone to ever find them.

"Any known side effects?" asked his uncle in a business like tone.

"None so far and there is ample evidence that there aren't any at all. Well that is if we exclude the fact that it would be tremendously difficult to restore the affected person's existence for in front of the world."

"I don't think we should worry about that yet." added Estella and Selene nodded in agreement. Once they were safely hidden the problem of coming once more into existence would always come second.

“Then it’s decided.” stated Albus. “We must do it as soon as possible! When the time comes for Laurie to start school we’ll come up with a personal defence for her so she’d be able to go freely there without danger. Don’t worry - the Ministry’s sensors will know that she still exists, Exsculpo doesn’t work on them. Perhaps even by then Grindelwald would be gone for good...”

Several pairs of eyes met in silent agreement to their war strategy. And as they gathered together for what could well be the last time before the young couple almost literally seized to exist, they knew one thing for sure - the battle for survival was on!

Authors note: *Die Wähen= The Chosen(German).