

To Master Death

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To Master Death

by [AshDuet](#)

Summary

While searching for Glendower, the raven gang stumble across a mysterious castle in Scotland - soon they find that the hunt for Glendower is inextricably tied up in the affairs of wizards.

Notes

I've stolen the raven gang near the beginning of Blue Lily, Lily Blue, with most canon details intact except that they're all a year younger (so I can put them into 5th year) and Maura has not in fact disappeared into a cave (to give me and everyone some peace of mind). We've going to ignore the fact the timelines don't match, and say this all begins in what is vaguely 1994 with some room for anachronisms.

The Village

"It was there," Gansey said, for possibly the twentieth time. He fiddled with his electromagnetic-frequency meter, but even he could tell there was no point. An hour ago it had sparked out beyond any hope of repair, all but combusting in his hand.

"We all saw it," Adam agreed. He was still eating, sandwich in one hand, pen in the other, Gansey's notebook - the new Scotland one - open in his lap.

They had glimpsed the ruin by helicopter some five or six hours ago. A glimpse was all they got, the dark and vine-claimed skeleton of an ancient castle. It was a cloudless mid-afternoon, visibility unmatched. They had meant to fly right up to it and land outside.

That had not happened. Gansey couldn't figure out, in retrospect, exactly what had gone wrong: something about air currents, or fuel reserves, or a simple miscommunication with the pilot. They had dipped out of sight of the castle and completely failed to find it again.

After half an hour of circling, when the pilot's annoyance had threatened to boil over, Gansey had given up on air travel. He felt he had a sense of where he'd seen the castle, and sometimes these things didn't like showing more than a glimpse of themselves if you didn't approach the right way.

So they set down and set off on foot, laden with sandwiches and water bottles, instructing the helicopter to return for them when Gansey called. And then, feeling confident and adventurous and self-sufficient, they had marched off, following the whims of the electromagnetic frequency reader.

Some five hours after that, sweaty and sore-footed and utterly confused as to the location of any castles hereabouts, Gansey was beginning to feel like less of a genius.

"I don't think it wants to be found," Blue said. She'd taken her sandals off and was flexing her toes in the grass as she munched.

"Then should we leave it?" Gansey asked, surveying his splayed group of fellow adventurers, all looking tired and quiet and mildly sunburned. They could research the castle, figure out what might be out here, come back informed and prepared and with more than sandwiches for dinner.

Blue shrugged. "It doesn't seem upset about us being here. Just tricky. Like it's trying to play hide and seek with us."

Adam polished off the last bite of his sandwich and considered the horizon. "It should be easy to walk in a straight line across a field. But between setting out and getting to the other side, I'm never exactly where I expected to be. It's redirecting us."

"But we have a compass, don't we? Ronan?"

Ronan was lying on his back, the dappled shade of the oak tree making him into a mosaic of light and shadows. He tilted the compass this way and that above his head. "It's not working," he said.

Blue shot Gansey a look, one which happened to include the very delicate, very sensitive, very useless hunk of metal and wiring on Gansey's lap.

"What about it isn't working?" Gansey asked.

Ronan tossed the compass at him. "North keeps bending."

"So what do we do?" Gansey asked, eyeing the compass. It wasn't fluctuating so much as it was vaguely floating, the directions settling down in a slightly different orientation each time he twisted it.

"The castle isn't where we think it is," Adam suggested. "Or rather, it's making us feel like the wrong direction is the right direction."

"Then what - close our eyes and do the opposite of what our intuition tells us to?"

"Sure, and walk straight off a cliff," Ronan said.

"Then what do you suggest?"

Ronan tilted his head at Gansey with a sharp smile. "We walk back to town."

"To Glenfinnan? Two hours away by helicopter?" Gansey confirmed, as Blue toed her sandals back on with humour in her eyes and Adam snapped shut the new notebook.

Not half an hour later, they crested a ridge to find a little town spread out before them like an illustration in a children's book.

*

The thrill of this would never wear off, Blue thought, as the four of them half ran, half stumbled down the rise, toward buildings and cobblestone streets. She had never really believed that she'd be here, halfway across the world on one of Gansey's quests. But already this felt inevitable. Just as much her quest as Gansey's. It was a fresh start, a new beginning, far removed from the tangled danger searching for Glendower in Henrietta had become.

It had seemed like everything was coming together. The ley line was awakened and repaired, Caveswater returned. It had gifted them an entrance that seemed certain to be the next step. Of course it was never that simple.

Half a world away, there was a cave that had almost killed them. They knew that their next steps were there, but their first few forays inside had shown that the cave was as unsafe as it was unpredictable - and it was very, very unpredictable. Somewhere in that place, where

thought made reality and time didn't work, Glendower slept, possibly steps away from the place Blue and the boys had given up searching for him.

But they had given up. If the cave wasn't safe even for Adam and the Greywaren, it wasn't safe for anyone. After they'd had a chance to recover from their cave-oriented ordeal, Adam had coolly explained his insight: if they were going to return, they would need a key. Anyone could enter the cave, but to bring anything out they would need the same artefact Glendower used to navigate it all in the first place. They needed to go backwards in order to go forward.

So they had returned to the realm of Gansey, research and exploration. He had risen to the occasion magnificently, summoning up a destination, an embarrassing number of contacts, and a sudden but all-encompassing enthusiasm for learning how, exactly, Glendower managed to sleep eternally in the first place. Blue wished she could switch polarity so easily: a glimpse of a castle could not sustain her, not when she knew the depth of strangeness waiting for her at home.

Gansey seemed to have no such hesitations. He was wild and determined, and his glee at finding this town was undeniably contagious. Gansey, who was leading the way into the town, hair mussed by hours of wind, his shoes muddily enough to be indistinguishable from Blue's. As he landed on the cobblestone street he surveyed it like it was his, like he was orienting himself in a township he presided over, not a completely unknown and unexpected handful of buildings somewhere in middle-of-nowhere Scotland.

It didn't seem like a real town - nothing in the UK had, so far. There was no sign of any cars, no power lines or neon signs. It was all cobblestone streets and thatched roofs, little shops with delightfully quirky names like Dervish and Banges. Quaint could describe Henrietta: this town could have been hidden here for the past few centuries without noticing the world changing outside it.

Gansey spun slowly on the spot, joyful and thoroughly charmed. Adam had walked a ways down the street, now standing in front of the town sign in the process of unfolding a map.

Ronan had frozen, staring down the street at an approaching pedestrian. She had flyaway grey hair, wore flowing robes in a sort of pale blue colour, and had an owl sitting on her shoulder. She made a fine pair with Ronan, in his ripped jeans and black muscle tee, Chainsaw perched on his shoulder staring down the fluffy owl. As strangely as she was dressed, the woman was the one who looked at home here: the outfit matched the narrow streets and bright shop windows filled with oddities. It all clashed with Ronan, stark and modern.

The woman ducked into a store that Blue was fairly certain she'd had no intention of visiting before Ronan caught her in his stare. It was called Honeydukes: the smell of sugar wafted out the door after her.

"Where are we?" Gansey asked as Adam walked back toward them.

"Nowhere," he said. Gansey gave him a *do tell* look, and Adam elaborated: "this town isn't on our maps."

Gansey's grin became several shades brighter. "And what's nowhere called?"

"Hogsmeade."

"*Hogsmeade*," Ronan repeated, and he managed to sound both scathingly skeptical and rather impressed.

"Do you think this is what we saw?" Adam asked.

"No," Gansey said, and Blue knew that the castle was impressed into his mind as well as hers after all those hours of searching. Gansey shook his head, but his grin crept back in. "But I imagine they'll know where it is."

They stared around the street. The row of shops, all leaning together, was really quite intimidating. Blue had absolutely no idea what to ask of whom, where to start. You couldn't just walk up to someone and ask whether their town was hidden from maps, could you?

In the end their decision was quite practical. They had walked for hours in the baking sun, and a couple sandwiches had done little to assuage their hunger.

So they went into the first pub they saw - the Three Broomsticks, Blue noticed, amused. They tried to avoid each others' sunburnt arms and sweaty knees as they piled into a booth, and five minutes later they were all drinking deliciously cooling glasses of pumpkin juice.

"Do you know of a castle somewhere around here?" Gansey asked the bartender as she passed around the drinks from her tray. They all felt much more equal to this new mystery now that they were out of the sun.

"Do you mean Hogwarts?" she answered.

Her name was Madam Rosmerta, and she was more than happy to answer their questions. Not a minute later she had pulled up a stool and sat down close to them, smiling around at them like they were going to make an excellent story later.

"You mean to say you're not wizards?" She asked, surveying the boys. She had looked more delighted with every inquiry they failed to understand.

Gansey's eyes were wide and excited. He had started out flushed and tumbled, and he fell further into unbridled enthusiasm every time one of Madam Rosmerta's answers led to five more mysteries. He shook his head, bursting to ask what she meant.

Adam and Ronan were eyeing each other. Both intensely magical, neither a wizard exactly. Trying to decide if either of them would say anything.

"A wizard in what sense?" Blue asked, to save them the trouble.

"This one," she laughed, shaking a wand from her sleeve into her hand and waving it, causing the empty drinks tray to zoom back into the kitchen.

"Ah. Well, I suppose I'm a witch then."

The boys all turned to her as one, staring three different types of accusing at her. Gansey looked almost perplexed. Adam looked almost betrayed. Ronan looked almost amused.

Blue shrugged, fished her wand out of her backpack, and turned her glass of juice into a teacup. Gansey opened his mouth and closed it. Adam leaned back in his seat and stared. Ronan laughed, a swift, decisive laugh.

“Oh, good,” Madam Rosmerta said, smiling warmly at Blue. “I was beginning to wonder how you had all gotten past the wards. I’ll just grab you those mains, now, and stop Gus from brushing up on memory charms in the kitchen.”

She left their table, which was suddenly full of a lot of people wanting to say a lot of things.

“Blue...” Gansey said, and there was too much hidden in the way he said her name to parse out. Maybe the fact that he had used her real name was enough.

Adam was more specific. “You could do magic the whole time, and you never told us?”

“Well, it’s kind of a secret,” Blue said. “And besides, it was never relevant.”

“Tell me how this was never relevant,” Gansey said. He had collected himself into something impersonally indignant.

“It’s relevant now, and here I am showing you,” Blue said, possibly testily.

“Showing her,” Adam corrected.

“Okay, then, here you go. Hi, I’m Blue, I come from a family of psychic witches. I can’t see the future, but I can do this.” She shot sparks from the end of her wand; they almost set Adam’s hair on fire, and Ronan sniggered.

Trying to act more calmly than she felt, Blue transfigured her teacup back into a glass and took a sip.

“Did you know about this place?” Adam asked, but he was looking abashed, asking the question like a peace offering.

“I had no idea,” Blue told him truthfully. He nodded, and they were back to being a slightly complicated version of okay.

Madam Rosmerta returned, filling their table with plates. “She did right not to tell you,” she said, patting Adam on the shoulder. “The statute of secrecy is a serious thing to break.” She sat down again, leaning an elbow on the table as she settled in properly. “My question is, if only one of you is a witch, and if none of you knew about this place before stumbling into it, what do you want with Hogwarts?”

It only took a moment for Gansey to be right back in his element. “How much do you know about Welsh kings?”

“Nothing at all,” she said, conversationally, and poured herself a glass of pumpkin juice from the pillar on the table, a clear invitation for Gansey to begin.

So he did, bringing the story to life as successfully in this unexpected pub in Scotland, surrounded by magic he had never imagined, as he did at home in Virginia. He recounted Glendower’s rebellion and goals, the magic that surrounded him - his power of invisibility, the mages he was said to travel with, the prophecies of Merlin he had brought to fruition. Madam Rosmerta nodded along: this was her version of everyday history.

Gansey spoke of ley lines - recognition dawning in Madame Rosmerta’s face - and how he believed Glendower’s body had been transported to the New World. And he stopped there, neatly sidestepping Henrietta, and talked about the quest that had led them to Scotland. Scotland had been an ally of Glendower’s in his war of independence against England, and as it was independent from England at the time, it would have made an excellent safe haven to retreat into when Glendower found himself with a price on his head. Gansey had found signs that linked both Glendower and his magicians to Scotland, and there was a place - just here, Gansey believed - where two ley lines intersected. One led directly to Wales, Glendower’s home. The other arced perfectly to the Americas, landing right in Virginia.

When Gansey told the story like this, it sounded like every indicator had led them here. Madame Rosmerta could not have guessed that this was a snap decision, a veering sidequest brought up only when all the paths forward in Henrietta seemed blocked.

Instead, it seemed the natural conclusion to their story so far that, to find where Glendower was buried now, it was essential to find out exactly where he had started.

"That's incredible," Madam Rosmerta said, when Gansey had finished. Blue looked around the table: everyone else's eyes echoed exactly what she herself felt, when they were listening to Gansey unravel the truth like this. "I would love to help you," she continued. "Shame you say you're a muggle."

“I say what?” Gansey blinked.

“You’re a non-wizard,” Madam Rosmerta clarified, then shook her head and frowned around at the group. “I really don’t know how you found your way here, unless it was you, young lady.”

Gansey and Blue looked at each other.

“I was leading the way,” Gansey said. “Mostly I followed this.” He took a moment to rifle through his bag, and emerged with the dowsing rod he’d been using.

Madam Rosmerta blinked at him. “But that’s a wand.”

“Is it?” Gansey asked.

Certainly it was unusual for a dowsing rod, but Blue had never questioned it: the line between detection and witchery had always been blurry.

Madam Rosmerta held out a hand for it, and Gansey quite willingly handed it over. She held it, pointed it at the nearest candle. Nothing happened at first; she frowned down at it. "It's a tricky one," she allowed, "but still. Nox." She pointed it again: the candle snuffed, then - "lumos" - it lit again.

Gansey stared at it in much the way he'd stared at Ronan, upon learning that Ronan could take things from dreams. "It could do that all the time?"

"Well, maybe not for you," Madam Rosmerta said kindly. "A wand is a good start, but even so... it shouldn't have led you here if you were just carrying it. A wand and a muggle does not a wizard make; there's no reason the wards should have let you through unless you were truly a wizard. What does it feel like when you hold it?"

Gansey frowned. "Like dowsing always does, I suppose. It's a very sensitive instrument."

Madam Rosmerta raised an eyebrow. "But most divining rods are very complicated mechanisms, aren't they? This is just a stick."

"Well, I'm sure there's something more to it than meets the eye," Gansey ventured. He had shifted into a self Blue didn't see often, deferential and bright, the eager student.

"There is," Madam Rosmerta said. "But not for you, if you have no magic of your own." She looked him up and down, put his dowsing rod - his wand - down on the table in front of her, then took up her own wand and started casting on Gansey's: "Priori incantatem."

And the wand reacted: pale and strange, a puff of light emerged. Then a dark and smokey shadow. After that it vibrated softly, emitting something like a trail in dark smoke that quickly dissipated.

"Oh, my word," Rosmerta said.

"What is it?" Gansey asked, transfixed. "What does it mean?"

"A sensing charm," she murmured, then levelled a gaze at him. "That does it. Young man, you're a wizard."

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Madam Rosmerta left the group at their table, both to give them time to process and to tend to the rest of the pub, which was filling up as the evening began in earnest.

They didn't process, per se, so much as they stuffed themselves on good solid pub fare before falling into satisfied, carb-induced silence. However astonished they'd been by Blue's revelation, the prevailing mood was of relief. If Gansey was a wizard, if witchery was

connected to Glendower in more ways than Blue had imagined, then they had come all this way for good reason.

They were still tentatively basking when Madam Rosmerta returned.

“Well then,” she said. “A group of young wizards and witches, here to research a medieval wizard. I can’t see any reason you won’t be allowed to tour Hogwarts, but you’d best wait until tomorrow. I’ll send word up to the castle, see who’s around to meet you. I imagine they’ll send someone to show you the way up. You’re lucky - most of the staff are here, even in summer, to oversee the preparations.”

“Preparations for what?” Gansey asked.

“Well that’s the question, isn’t it?” Madame Rosmerta said, wiggling her eyebrows. “I’ll set you up with rooms for the night, then?”

They were given two connecting rooms, but everyone piled into the one intended to be for the boys, sitting on the neatly made beds in order to cluster around each other. Gansey wanted a revised history of their entire time together, based around the new information that she was a witch. Blue humoured him, but it didn’t change much: the witching world, or at least her corner of it, had little to do with Glendower and more to do with charms to multiply and mutate the chaos of home life.

But of course their time together was only the tip of what Gansey wanted to know, and Blue ended up talking about her childhood more freely than she’d ever been able to before. How magic was as natural as life, the air filled with charms, the kitchen with potions, the conversations with prophecy. She hadn’t known it wasn’t normal until she was kindergarten aged and her mom had taken her aside and explained the way the rest of the world lived. Blue’s wand had been made for her before she was born, and there was never any doubt she would grow into it, even as she failed to grow into the psychic half of the family’s powers. In a sense, the magic that Blue could do was the least of her family’s skills, and certainly the most ordinary: she knew that there was a larger community of witches and wizards in the world, and she’d had the option to go to one of a selection of schools for magic, but they were all distant, and she had never questioned her idea to remain at home with the magical home education of a house full of witches.

She had Gansey’s full attention, and it was an undeniable pleasure to be the one holding forth, the centre of a new mystery. He barely even interrupted her to ask questions, just soaking in every bit of information. Was this how it felt to be Gansey in a crowd of curious strangers, with that unexpected power of binding them to his words?

But Blue knew the people she was talking too much too well. Gansey was one thing: Adam and Ronan were another.

Ronan was just watching, absently chewing on the leather bands around his wrists as he reclined on the further bed. She couldn’t tell what he was thinking, but the general air of satisfaction that had surrounded him since her revelation was still in play.

And Adam.

He retreated further into herself with Blue's every enthusiastic sentence. She could feel him pulling away into some dark corner, taking what rubbed off on her like resentment and bundling it up inside himself. If she hadn't known him so well she might have thought he was fine, just quiet, but instead she could feel his muddled disappointment and resignation and sorrow leeching at her. When she looked at him, tried to include him, she got a hard-edged smile with blank behind the eyes.

Finally, she could take it no more. She banished Gansey and Ronan to the sitting area by the room's charming bay windows.

Adam, realizing a moment too late that she had cornered him, looked to be bracing himself.

"You're jealous," Blue said, but quietly. After all, she hadn't yet given him time to be kind. She wasn't here to start an argument if she could help it.

Adam looked away. "I'm happy for you," he said, gently if not truthfully.

"I don't even know if you need to be, is all I wanted to say," Blue told him.

He looked back to her, but blankly, like hope was a cruel thing.

Blue shrugged. "You're our magician."

"Cabeswater is our magician. And Ronan. And you and Gansey, now, I guess."

Blue frowned at the beginnings of bitterness in his voice; she stood up suddenly, and he looked up at her, sitting cross legged on the bed. Just looking, delicate and unsure, his eyes holding an apology but the downturn of his mouth still refusing to hope. They further they got from the ley line the more human he seemed; he had been thoroughly mortal bracing his way through the plane ride, and he had retained a sense of approachable mortality ever since.

"Here, just try it," Blue said, plonking a decorative pillow down in front of him. "Like this, swish and flick, and think levitation. Persephone's been teaching you - it's the same kind of focus. If you can make it move some time in the next half hour, you're a wizard."

She put her wand in his hand and then turned her back on him: there was nothing worse than having someone watch you as you attempted to perform magic you weren't sure you could do. Instead she sat down on the floor beside the window, where Ronan and Gansey had begun playing an extremely absentminded game of cards while Ronan examined Gansey's wand and Gansey put down his cards every few seconds to jot down something in his notebook.

"Deal me in?" Blue asked, and soon she had a handful of cards and realized that they were, improbably, playing Go Fish.

"So men are wizards, women are witches, and you can all do magic spells with wands and put glamours on castles to make them impossible to find," Gansey confirmed, separating out the present-day pieces from the stories Blue had been telling.

“Pretty much,” Blue agreed.

“Any aces?”

“Nope.”

“Go fish,” Ronan added, holding the wand up to his ear and shaking it. “Is there something inside this?”

“It has a core, I don't remember exactly what,” Gansey explained. “Some kind of hair, I think.”

“Hair?” Ronan repeated. “Creepy.”

Gansey reached for a card: as soon as he touched it it exploded in a *bang* and a shower of sparks, taking the rest of the draw pile with it.

Ronan roared with laughter as Gansey pointed at it, looking betrayed. “Did I do that?”

“Almost definitely not,” Blue said, half giggling.

“Where'd you get those cards, man?” Ronan asked.

“In the side table.” Gansey turned to Blue. “Magic exploding cards?”

“Magic exploding cards,” Blue agreed gravely.

If it hadn't been for the quiet that followed, they wouldn't have heard the sound of Adam's exhaled breath. Blue turned to Adam just as Adam turned to them, glowing with quiet pride.

Released from his attention, the cushion fell from its hover near the ceiling and landed on the floor with a definitive thud.

The silence in the hotel room was positively dazzling.

The Castle

Chapter Notes

Many thanks to insertsomethingwitty for helping me edit

And more thanks to the people who left kudos and commented :) this is a highly self-indulgent work and it's lovely to know there are some people out there who are enjoying it!

I hope to keep up my weekly schedule for at least a little while, so there should be a third chapter coming next Tuesday!

“Stop it, Lynch! What did my pillow do to hurt you?!”

Adam’s voice echoed clearly through the walls into Blue’s room the next morning. Blue stretched in the unfamiliar blankets, awakesness filtering in quicker than the morning light through the room’s large windows. They were in Hogsmeade, a magical town on a Scottish ley line. The boys were all next door, pounding footsteps and chaos.

Gansey burst through the door into Blue’s room. His hair was wet, and he was still buttoning his aqua polo shirt as he closed the door behind him. “Morning, Jane,” he said, and his voice was bright with laughter. “Rise and shine - Ronan’s trying to destroy our room.”

“Ah. That makes sense,” Blue said sleepily. She was still getting used to spending every hour of the day with these boys; normally she at least had an hour to wake up before being confronted with a shirt in such a horrendously bright shade.

They listened to the shouts from the next room over, Gansey running his fingers through his hair and peering out the windowsill to look out at the world below, Blue supposing she had better get out of bed after all. A minute later, as Blue was unearthing clothes from her suitcase, Adam tumbled into her room with Ronan quickly following.

While Adam flushed at finding Blue in her pajamas, quickly joining Gansey by the windowsill, Ronan marched straight up to her and held out a wand.

“What’s the problem?” he asked.

Blue took it. It wasn’t Gansey’s, but a wand made of reddish wood, a little charred at the end.

“What do you mean?”

“Is it me or the wand?”

“It just sets everything on fire,” Adam clarified from over by the window. “Could be both.”

Ronan gave him a playful glare, and Blue shook her head at them before going over to the sink and casting a water charm. Steam billowed out.

“It’s the wand,” she confirmed. “Besides, I never even taught you a spell for fire.” Though, on second thought, she should test that too: she shouldered the boys out of the way of the window, opened it, and stuck her head and shoulders out. She waved her wand, the usual spell for lighting candles.

A gout of flame billowed into the air, reaching six feet long before dissipating, and startling a witch and wizard strolling along the street below.

“Sorry!” Blue called, and closed the window.

“It’s the wand,” Blue announced.

“No kidding,” Gansey mumbled, looking properly shocked by this display of magic; Blue smirked at him, then turned to Ronan.

“Try again tomorrow night,” she said, handing back the flame-happy wand. “Now all of you, get out of my room so I can get dressed.”

They were all gathered around plates of hot breakfast, the table full of far too many meats for Blue’s general tastes, when their guide showed up, ducking a little to get through the doorway. He was an enormous man, and wild-looking, with a large beard and long hair. Blue was prepared to admit that she was plenty short, but this man was outside of the realms of ordinary height. For a moment, as he stepped inside, he brought an air of menace with him. Then he smiled hugely at everyone in the bar and ambled over to them.

“Now, yeh’ll be the kids I’m here to show around the castle, is tha’ right?”

“That’s us,” Blue said.

“Are you one of the professors at Hogwarts?” Gansey asked, and if he sounded elegantly amazed, it was no more than they all felt.

“Sure am,” the giant man said. “I’m Rubeus Hagrid - jus’ call me Hagrid. I’m Keeper o’ the keys and grounds at Hogwarts - and I teach Care o’ Magical Creatures.”

“What kinds of magical creatures?”

“There are magical creatures?” Blue and Gansey spoke on top of each other.

“All sorts,” Hagrid answered both of them, grinning broadly. “Just at Hogwarts we’ve got thestrals and centaurs, and plenty of bowtruckles and knarls and things. The lake is chock full of them, too, what with the mermaids and their flocks. If you stay here long enough you might be seeing some more exciting sorts - dragons and sphinxes and all.”

“Centaurs?” Ronan asked, just barely not interrupting.

“There are *dragons* ?” Gansey floundered, very much interrupting as Hagrid opened his mouth to answer Ronan.

Blue grinned. She was a witch, sure, but this was already nothing like the magical world she knew. She had imagined futures where she’d travel strange countries and meet strange creatures: but here she was, living it, leading her friends into the magical world. They had found it on their own, completely unconnected from Blue’s witchery, but she still felt like a proud benefactor introducing them to this world. It was the kind of feeling she could get used to.

And she couldn’t wait to see the castle.

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Cabeswater was singular. That much had always been clear to Adam. There was no place like it, and stepping onto the Hogwarts castle grounds didn’t change that. But it did put Cabeswater in a very different position: it was singular, yes, because Hogwarts was nothing like Cabeswater. And yet if Hogwarts was like anything, it was like Cabeswater.

Adam didn’t know what the others felt as they walked up the path that stretched a winding path from the gate to the castle itself. Perhaps this stretch of lawn was much the same as any other grassy hill they’d passed. But Adam felt awake, aware in a way he hadn’t been since he left Henrietta. When he didn’t pay attention, his steps took on a ritualistic quality - his foot fell in the place that felt right. When he did, he could feel a well-cared-for harmony in the air.

Cabeswater was wild and sharp. This place... well, it basked.

It was in the care, Adam thought. Cabeswater leapt on him, the only one serving its needs for ages untold. It had grown like a weed around everything in its path, struggling for power and harmony in a world that walked over it uncaring. But Hogwarts was like a prize rose, every ounce of its energy smoothed into place. As Adam watched, Hagrid reached out unconsciously to pluck a stray branch from a bush; the resulting calmness was the tiniest ripple in Adam’s mind, and Adam knew without a doubt that it had always been like that, since Hogwarts’ inception. It had always been watched over. It had never been alone.

Didn’t it make sense, then, that where Cabeswater pulsed, Hogwarts hummed? Stepping up to the castle smoothed away ragged edges Adam didn’t even realize he was holding onto. He relaxed at the threshold, feeling as if he had just come home.

They were led past wonder after wonder: moving staircases, picture frames whose occupants waved and ogled, the great hall’s fathomless ceiling. Adam didn’t have room in his heart for it all. It was so different to encounter this space with Hagrid’s narration - “don’ worry, yeh’ll get used to it quicker than you think. I remember me firs’ time in the great Hall, now, me old

dad was quick with a charm for cooking or cleaning, but ‘e never did nowt flashy like yeh see here, yeh’ll see if yeh’re here for any time, every firs’ year looks at this hall with their mouths open for a good while.” They’d stumbled into a world unlike any other, and Adam didn’t need the wide-eyed glances of his friends to know that they all wanted it like he did, so badly that it hurt to think of more than just the castle and its humming harmony, Hagrid’s comforting explanations, the meeting they were heading toward and the infinity beyond it.

They reached the headmaster’s office far too soon, and Hagrid ushered them into a room with a spiral staircase, which rose them up like an escalator.

Professor Dumbledore awaited them. Adam was amazed by how much he looked like a wizard from a children’s book, wearing deep purple robes and a pointed hat, with long silver hair and beard. He smiled at them as they came in, a real smile, with twinkling eyes and everything. He looked like he had done everything in his power to look harmless and charming, and Adam immediately distrusted it. However welcoming Hogwarts seemed, he knew it couldn’t really be a fairy tale.

“Welcome, young scholars!” Dumbledore said, waving expansively at the four chairs. “And thank you, Hagrid, for bringing them to me. I trust you found the walk pleasant?”

“Very pleasant,” Gansey said, casting an equivalent smile back at Dumbledore. “Thank you for making the time to meet with us.”

“I must say, Madame Rosmerta has teased me with the beginning of what promises to be a singularly interesting tale,” Dumbledore said. His gaze was piercing, turning the phrase that might have been a request into an order that brooked no argument.

Certainly, Dumbledore was sharper than his eccentric friendliness indicated. A quick glance told Adam that Blue and Ronan had gathered as much. Nonetheless, they all sat down, and Gansey launched into their tale.

Gansey’s conversation with Madam Rosmerta had been delighted, casual, bordering on conspiratorial. For Professor Dumbledore, seated before his desk in that round room of a scholar’s decadence, Gansey was his most polished self. He related the story precisely, careful with every fact and piece of evidence he presented, less like he was relating a tale and more like a series of sums. The genuine spark of his obsession was still there, but muted, hidden beneath a layer of charm. It was only in his eyes that you could see the depth of his wanting.

Across from him, Dumbledore was a studied picture of curiosity, restrained in his own way. His eyes, too, were the only place that betrayed his own deeper emotions, and it looked to Adam that they tempered his excitement with fear.

“Well,” Dumbledore said. “That was, perhaps, even more fascinating than I was led to believe.” He looked at each of them in turn, exchanging a measuring look like a handshake with Gansey, engaging with - and then quickly disengaging from - Blue’s and Ronan’s defiant stares.

On Adam, the professor paused longest, looking into his eyes with drill-like focus that nonetheless came back dissatisfied. *Can't see the forest for the trees*, Adam thought. He wondered what Dumbledore thought he would see. He wondered what Dumbledore was so worried about.

"I'm afraid, however, that even in the wizarding world -" Blue's eyes narrowed at the use of the word "wizarding" - "there are some things beyond the natural realm of what magic can accomplish. The avoidance of death is foremost among those things."

"I understand," Gansey said. "And yet, if all the signs are to be believed, Glendower found a way."

"And you seek to uncover it."

"I do."

"And what then?"

Nobody had ever spoken that question aloud before: Adam hadn't realized how much of a taboo it was until Dumbledore said the words. Adam was not the only one reacting, either: on the other side of Gansey, Ronan was holding his breath.

But Gansey's eyes shone. Adam knew Gansey's answer, as they all did. It was so deeply personal, an unspoken truth of Gansey. He did not want to find Glendower; he needed it. It was the necessity that drove his heartbeat.

It was too personal a story to share with this stranger. A foundational piece in their friendship, and Adam felt oddly possessive imagining Gansey sharing the whole story with Dumbledore.

But Gansey had never been secretive, and apparently he had learned little since Whelk. It was one of the most irksome things about him: if there was knowledge to be shared, he shared it. The confidences that Adam held so dear were commonplace things to him.

It was almost unbearable to sit in this office in the sunlight, Ronan and Blue sitting as helplessly as Adam was, and hear Gansey talk about his death.

When he had finished, there was a long silence as Dumbledore watched him, considering. Finally, Dumbledore spoke, in a very intentional tone: "so you want to find Glendower, and wake him, if he is to be woken. And then... let him free? Return him to the world, and consider yourself complete, and embark on another journey?"

He was looking only at Gansey. Adam, on the periphery, knew his thoughts tumbled from one death to another, between favours and dead friends and dying friends. He was glad Dumbledore was not focusing on him.

"That's right," Gansey said easily, without breaking eye contact. Maybe Ronan's glares had been good for something after all.

“Extraordinary,” Dumbledore pronounced, and broke into a smile. “A noble quest indeed. I know little about Glendower myself, but if you will permit my bragging, we have an excellent collection of books in our library on the subject. You shall, of course, be welcome to examine its contents as thoroughly as you should like. I hope you’ll find what you’re looking for.”

He didn’t sound like a man telling the whole truth. There was a briskness to his manner, too glossy for the raw emotions Adam had seen earlier.

Then again, Adam’s silence made Gansey complicit in an incomplete truth as well.

“But before you do, I’m afraid I must ask you to do something exponentially more difficult. Professor McGonagall’s office is on the first floor of the Defence Against the Dark Arts tower - Hagrid can direct you. She generally takes her tea at 1 o’clock, and she’s always happy to have company drop by.” He paused, became proudly apologetic. “She may be concerned about having three untrained young wizards running around the castle, even under the supervision of a responsible young witch like yourself.” He winked at Blue. “I’m sure none of you would blow up the castle intentionally,” he added graciously.

None of them had said anything about being untrained. Of course, thought Adam, this was a warning: telling us that he can see through our lies. Of course he’s phrasing it like he’s on our side, but at the same time calling us out. Putting us in our place.

But Gansey looked delighted. “Thank you so much for your time, Professor Dumbledore,” he said, standing and shaking Dumbledore’s hand across the desk. “And for allowing us access to the libraries here. This place is absolutely incredible; our research has led us to some strange places, but seldom anywhere so beautiful or historically resonant. I can hardly imagine what we might learn about Glendower here.”

Dumbledore smiled, eyes twinkling, and if there was a tightness to the smile, Adam half thought he was imagining it. “The enthusiasm of youth, when turned toward study, is always delightful. If you learn anything interesting, my office door is always open.” This wasn’t a request, and none of the group believed it was. “But if I may impart one last word of advice - you are young. Enjoy the castle while you’re here: explore the grounds as well as the library. Hogsmeade is a beautiful town in summer, and if I let you leave here without having gone to Honeydukes, I shall regret it for the rest of my days.”

“We’ll be sure to keep that in mind, sir,” Gansey said. He smiled back at Dumbledore, and for a moment (maybe just in the way that time seemed to flow and shiver around Gansey) they looked identical, like a portrait of the same man at different stages of life, like a set of twins separated by some murky idea of Americanness or newness or wizarding dress sense.

You could become this , Adam thought, with complete certainty. There was a future Gansey who was exactly this man; Adam just hadn’t known such a man existed before.

Please don’t become him .

There wasn’t any rationality to the second thought, but Adam shied away from this future vision of Gansey as thoroughly as he detested the suited and red-tied possible Gansey. Adam

couldn't bear a Gansey who was lonely in the way that this Dumbledore so clearly was. Adam did not want to know a Gansey who had learned how to lie.

The tour continued, led again by an enthusiastic Hagrid. He offered them his afternoon, to show them around the castle and the grounds - "not that I know the half o' Hogwarts's secrets, but I get around alright, an' yeh'll need the skill of it too if yeh're stayin' here fer any length o' time."

They told him they needed to meet Professor McGonagall at one, and he promised to get them to her office in time - but first he showed them the library, the way to the hospital wing, and pointed out the best places on the lawns to study - "but mind yeh stay away from tha' willow there, it's got a nasty temper, an' best keep yer distance from the squid's layabouts unless yeh fancy a dip. And as Dumbledore's constantly havin' to remind the students, the Forbidden Forest is out o' bounds. A dangerous place, the forest, unless yeh know yer way around."

Once Hagrid had finished with the important places, there was still plenty of time - he introduced them to portraits, and eventually asked if they wanted to come down to his to meet his dog and have a spot of tea.

"Thank you for showing us around," Gansey said as they all strode across the grass.

"Not at all, not at all," Hagrid said, beaming at them. "Been a lovely mornin'. To tell yeh the truth, I miss havin' students around. It's too quiet in the summer. Not nearly as much goin' on. Though with the preparations fer the t - I mean, ah, tha's the pumpkin patch, or it will be in a month or two. Sometimes I do melons, but not this year."

He sped up, walking double time

"We've been hearing a lot of talk of preparations," Gansey said, as they jogged to catch up. "It seems like a lot of upheaval in the castle. I'm sure we'll be doing our best to stay out of the way, but that would be much easier if we knew what we were staying away from."

"Nah - I can't be telling students," Hagrid said. "It's ministry secrets, isn't it?"

"But we're not really students," Blue said, putting a hand on his elbow and smiling conspiratorially up (way up) at him. "Besides, I'm sure we'll find out eventually with everything going on around us. You'll just be giving us a little help."

"Oh, alright," Hagrid said, chuckling. "Well then. I don't suppose any o' you've heard of the Triwizard Tournament?"

*

“You mean to say,” Professor McGonagall said faintly. “That you discovered you were wizards last night?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Adam agreed. Ronan and Gansey nodded. They had been released quickly from their lunch with Hagrid (and a good thing, too, since Ronan had been a second away from saying something unkind about Hagrid’s... inventive cooking.), and now were sitting clumped together in Professor McGonagall’s office, being stared down by the stern matriarch.

“You were never educated in America.”

“No, ma’am.”

“You were allowed to exist, completely ignorant of your wizarding blood, no knowledge whatsoever of who you are and what you are capable of?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I am astonished,” Professor McGonagall said, with brittle gravitas. She did not sound astonished - she sounded horrified. “I shall most certainly be getting in touch with my American contacts. This is absolutely untenable. In the meantime, I am very glad that you are here.”

She said it harshly. Adam, who had been feeling more and more guilty about something that was almost certainly not his fault, was now heartily confused.

“Very well,” she continued. “Let us begin. Who among you has a wand?”

Blue and Gansey scrambled for their wands, presenting them quickly. Ronan flashed Adam a very rueful look.

“That will do for now, though I imagine the two of you will be eager to acquire your own. You can borrow Miss Sargent’s and my own for the time being.” She folded her hands and surveyed them crisply. “You see, my conscience simply cannot let you leave this castle without at least a rudimentary education. Ideally, you would all enroll here and be taught properly, but I do understand that your homes are far away, and you are not under my jurisdiction. Nonetheless, I expect to see the three of you in my office each morning - Miss Sargent, you are welcome to join them, but you are not required - at nine o’clock for a few hours of instruction. Once you have demonstrated to me that you will not cause magical havoc upon returning to the muggle world, you will be free to spend all your time in research.

“I’ll have beds for you set up in the guest wing, there’s no sense in you travelling from Hogsmeade every morning. And I’ll inform Madam Pince that you are expected in the library. Dinners are served in the Great Hall from 6 to 8, breakfast and lunch is available throughout the day. And while you’re here, do consider spending the year at Hogwarts. It will be a great deal of work to catch up to the other students your age, but you will quickly learn the extent of your abilities, and the ways they can change your life.

“Now. Miss Sargent, would you be so kind as to demonstrate a simple spell for your friends? I have no appointments until 3 o’clock, and there is no time like the present to begin our instruction. A levitation charm should be a good place to start, if you would.”

Blue flashed Adam a startled, smug look, and Adam was startled with gratefulness to be back into her good graces. Then she waved her wand in exactly the way she had demonstrated last night, causing one of the quills on McGonagall's desk to spin into the air.

Professor McGonagall blinked at her. “A non-verbal spell is very impressive at your age, however, your friends will appreciate it if you give them the magic words.”

“What magic words?” Blue repeated blankly.

“Wingardium leviosa.”

“I’ve never heard those words before in my life,” Blue said.

“You haven’t? You mean to say that you learned the spell non-verbally to begin with?” Now Professor McGonagall did look astonished.

Blue shrugged. “That’s how we did most spells. Some of them had words, I think, but I never remembered them.”

“How very unorthodox,” Professor McGonagall said, but she looked rather impressed. She asked Blue to demonstrate several more spells while the boys practiced - it was a strange sort of exam, Blue didn’t know half the spells at first, but kept puzzling Professor McGonagall more and more with the substitutions she suggested. Blue left the ordeal feeling both gratified and defensive: she hated being asked to perform a spell she had never heard of, but McGonagall’s general air of astonishment at half of what Blue pulled off left her feeling at least a little bit smug on her mother’s behalf.

They brought their suitcases up to the castle that evening, bellies full of Hogwarts’ food. They’d eaten in the great Hall, surrounded by witches and wizards: huddled in the corner, they had talked for hours about everything they had seen and done that day, and gawked as subtly as possible at the different staff members coming in and out. The food appeared on their plates by magic. The sky became dusky above them as they ate. They had the run of the castle, and they were all overwhelmed by it - they’d spent an hour in the library before dinner, but hadn’t read much: there was only so much new information they could accept in one day. Instead, Ronan had a nap and tested out a second wand - much more successfully, though he still wasn’t satisfied. Blue got confused trying to figure out which spells in the basic book Adam had borrowed she already knew. Gansey just tipped his chair back and stared at it all.

Now they wheeled their suitcases along the path as dusk fell. The plastic wheels bouncing against the gravel felt strange, just as Blue had been feeling more and more odd in her jean skirt and layered tank tops with every robed professor who passed them. At home, witchery

blended in so well with the everyday: here they were a world apart from anything mundane. And yet, it felt as real as anything, the castle solid in front of them, welcoming lights blooming in its windows to complement the dimming lavender sky. They'd been folded into it seamlessly, placed in a suite of rooms halfway up one of the towers, with sparse bedrooms connected into a little sitting room, men's and women's bathrooms down the hall. They were given a curfew and assured that the teachers were only a few doors away, and then left to their own devices. They had free reign over the castle, the library, the grounds. Their meals would await them and their things would be washed if set in the right places.

It should have felt strange, maybe even sinister, but it made a peculiar sort of sense. Hogwarts was a place that took care of its people, just as Fox Way welcomed everyone who belonged there. What was one more witch crowding its halls?

Hogwarts was the same, only grander and less familial in its embrace. It made room for them, Blue and Ronan and Gansey and Adam, because they belonged to it.

*

"I like it here," Noah said, pulling out a chair and sitting down punctually.

They were at breakfast - early again. There was too much excitement for any of them to sleep long.

"Noah!" Blue exclaimed.

Noah took a scone from the middle of the table and started pulling it to pieces on his plate, glancing up occasionally and then down again when, every time, he realized they were all still staring at him. He still looked pale and not-quite-all-the-way, but Blue thought he still looked better than he had in a while. Even though he was sitting right next to her, she barely felt cold.

"How did you get here?" Gansey asked.

Noah shrugged, uncomfortable with all their attention. "It seemed like a nice place."

"Well, I'm glad you're here," Blue said. "We missed you."

He gave her hair a few pats, beginning to look less furtive as the intensity of their stares diminished. This place was on the ley line, after all: on two of them. It was a powerful place of magic. Instead they just exchanged hopeful looks - it had been too long since they'd seen Noah. They all, in this moment, felt both guilty for leaving him behind and relieved that he didn't seem to harbour any ill feelings from travelling halfway across the world to find them.

"Well, that settles it," Blue said. "You guys go to your magic lessons. Noah and I are going to try to find the giant squid."

They agreed to meet up in the library afterward, and spent the rest of breakfast chattering over each other about everything they'd seen, too many words to spread them out. Blue lent Adam her wand for the magic lessons, and then linked arms with Noah and walked into the bright, fresh morning.

Decisions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the span of a week at Hogwarts, Gansey learned more about Glendower than he had since he had first begun his research. There were whole shelves of books on him, and bookcase after bookcase of books with chapters or sections alluding to his life, his acts, his magic. Between magic lessons in the mornings, and the irresistible hours around dinner when they all set off to explore the castle and grounds, even the four of them researching had barely put a dent in all of the new material available. And what they had learned...

It was like Gansey had been searching a room by the dull glow of a streetlight through the window, struggling to separate shadows in a space where everything looked like everything else. And then someone had come in and turned on an overhead light.

Glendower was a wizard. It made everything glaringly bright, stark and colourful. Glendower had walked these halls six hundred years ago. His magical abilities, the strange events surrounding him, the shadowed pieces of his history - all were part of a system so much greater than any of them could have guessed. Gansey was at the beginning again, and there was nothing Gansey liked so much as beginnings, taking a thousand pieces, jumbling them together in his notebooks and thoughts, and watching as connections began to form until they resolved themselves into a cohesive story.

He was breathlessly happy here, and he wasn't the only one.

Adam had taken to the magic lessons with a fierce joy. None of them were exactly reluctant in their lessons, but Adam was the first to master each spell: lumos, petrificus totalus, every charm and hex. He had already turned a mouse into a snuffbox, which neither Gansey nor Ronan could even begin to manage.

Ronan walked through the grounds like they were his own home, dragging them swimming in the lake or to read their library books under shady trees, testing the edges of the Forbidden Forest with Blue or Adam at his side. His third attempt at dreaming up a wand had passed Blue's muster, setting things on fire only when asked to. He used it from lessons from then on - and as soon as he had his own wand, his spellwork leapt forward. It shouldn't have been a surprise that he took to magic naturally, the change so marked that McGonagall attempted to question him about the new wand - but after telling her it was made of Red Oak, he would only answer her with eloquent shrugs. Blue had never heard of wizards who could bring things out of dreams, so Ronan was in no hurry to share his ability, at least until they had learned whether it was a known phenomenon in the wizarding world and, if it was, what it meant.

Blue fit in at Hogwarts, too. In ordinary times, in the ordinary world, Blue was astonishing. She couldn't be compared to the people around her, because she was so clearly living her life by a different set of rules.

Here, though, everyone was strange. Moreover, there was a distinct part of that strangeness that overlapped with Blue's. She knew it, and it was like everyone around her could sense it. While Gansey stumbled into this world, wide-eyed and uncertain, Blue had become their taskmaster. She was the one who found entries on Glendower in unexpected books, she set them up in the best parts of the grounds, she rescued them from trick stairs and ordered them to go get picnic lunches and laughed as a book unexpectedly shut and refused to open again. This was her world, and Gansey loved it even more because of the version of Blue he got to see.

And Noah was with them too, more alive-seeming than he'd been since Gansey had learned what he was, joining them through the whole day as they wandered and explored.

They'd all been alarmed and delighted when they'd learned everyone here could see Noah. Professor McGonagall had given Noah a confused and concerned stare when Noah had filed into her office behind them, giggling with Blue as she related the story of Ronan setting the carpet on fire during their last lesson.

"Who might you be?" Professor McGonagall had asked.

Noah had jumped at being addressed, but he'd introduced himself and held out a hand. She'd merely stared at it.

"He's our friend, ma'am," Gansey explained. "Noah Czerny. He wasn't with us on the first day, but..." he lost his steam halfway through, realizing he hadn't decided how he should pass off Noah's appearance to a witch.

"But I'm here now," Noah said. "Can I watch the lesson?"

"I don't see why not," Professor McGonagall said, and she had this mildly stricken expression about her. "But I would like a word with you in private after the lesson, Mr. Czerny, if you don't mind."

"Oh, it's okay, I know I'm dead," he said, patting her shoulder. She flinched, and he drew his hand back, cradling it in a chagrined way. "And I know I'm not like the other ghosts here. Peeves was excited to see me too, but I'm not like him either. I wasn't a wizard."

"I see," Professor McGonagall said, looking at him searchingly while the rest of them exchanged glances: everyone seemed to be thinking the same things as Gansey, like *other ghosts?* and *Peeves?* and *when did Noah do all this?*

"Well, I have no problem with you staying with your friends," Professor McGonagall said, "so long as you respect the same rules that they do. Take that chair in the corner, if you're more comfortable sitting."

And that had been that. Noah was just part of the gang, and the other professors soon learned his name and greeted him affably in the halls, without fuss. He belonged here just as well as - well, as they all did. They'd been here a week, and there'd been not a single word about when they should leave. Gansey suspected that every one of them wanted to stay as badly as he did.

*

“Say we stayed here for the year,” Gansey suggested, as they sat in the Great Hall, filling their plates from the dishes that congregated near their usual seats. He was trying to measure the tone of his voice, to modulate his excitement. He wanted to demand that they must all stay, that this was too fantastic an opportunity to miss. But he could already imagine the arguments; he wanted to try to avoid them. “Hypothetically. It’s not the plan. It’s very far from home. Is there a way it could work? If it did... would you want it to?”

To Gansey’s astonishment, Adam was the first to reply. His answer was as methodical as it was immediate:

“We would need to talk to Professor McGonagall,” he said. “There’s tuition to think about, and mundane details as well - study visas, that kind of thing. She said that the school would be happy to take us, but it might not be so simple: the semester starts in only a few weeks. We’re international students. I don’t know the rules in the magical world, but if it’s anything like our world they would need to bend a lot of rules to let us attend at this point. We need to find out if they will - and, even if they do, if we can meet the standards and last-minute funds.”

Gansey wasn’t the only one staring at Adam. He’d been braced for an argument - but instead, he got a well-reasoned plan of action. Adam had thought about this, maybe even more than Gansey had.

“I want to stay,” Adam said quietly, withdrawing into faint embarrassment.

“So do I,” Gansey said, and he felt it as well - he was so very pleased to be of the same mind. He never expected it with Adam, not anymore. Whenever it happened, it felt like a gift. Especially about something so big as this - it felt like sharing something with him, something important.

“Then we’ll talk to McGonagall,” Blue said, and Gansey could see in her eyes that she wanted to stay too.

*

"There is no tuition fee," Professor McGonagall explained crisply. "On the contrary, there are bursaries for muggle-borns to ensure that they are able to afford books and uniforms. Room and board at Hogwarts is, of course, included for all students - for their own safety, we cannot have students rooming outside of Hogwarts dorms.

"If you choose to come, you will need to be sorted into your house. This is traditionally done at the start of term feast, but as you are entering in a later year we will set up a time to sort you before the term begins. This will allow you to buy the correct ties, scarves, and sundries, and allow us time to draw up your timetables and prepare your rooms. You will need to make a trip to Diagon Alley - transport by floo can be arranged, I should think - to purchase books and supplies. Booklists will, of course, be provided, and I can recommend some additional books to fill in the gaps in your knowledge.

"You'll enter into fifth year. It will not be easy, but that will give you a year's study before taking your O.W.L.s. You will all have to work hard to keep up with your peers, but I believe you will be up to the challenge. You have each shown a great aptitude for magic, and in the past week your single-minded efforts to learn everything I set in front of you has been noted. I have no doubt that, if you apply yourselves just as effectively in the last weeks before term begins, you will be in a good position to join the other students your age."

McGonagall spoke with the sort of efficiency that seemed to indicate this was an everyday affair, when Gansey knew that it wasn't. She had pulled strings without being asked, had made decisions and come up with this plan, because she wanted them here. A magical world, and they were wanted here.

*

"So? Are you guys staying?" Noah asked hopefully. "You should really stay."

He was with them as soon as they left McGonagall's office, leaning into the group to wait for their responses.

"Where were you for that?" Adam asked. "And this morning, when we were talking about it."

"Well, I'm not going to be a student," Noah said, a little sadly.

"But do you want to stay?"

Noah hesitated, walking quietly beside them for a minute. "I feel normal here," he said eventually. "I don't go away. And there are the house ghosts too, and we can just... stay. And everyone knows I'm here," he kept going excitedly. "Nick was telling me that all the students can see ghosts. So when the castle is full, I could,"

He stopped, maybe realizing that he had said more words at once than he had in a long time. "I could go with you," he finished more quietly. "I wouldn't be left behind."

Blue squeezed Noah's shoulders.

"I'm going here," Ronan said, with obvious relish.

"And me," Adam said.

Gansey was overwhelmed with a sense of fatedness, of things falling into place. He could see the future he'd been tentatively imagining throughout the past week gathering weight as it prepared to become reality. "Agreed."

"Well, I want to talk to my mom," Blue said. "Not to ask permission, though. Don't worry. I'm staying."

They managed to be serious for a second longer before they had all devolved into slightly disbelieving grins.

*

Adam and Gansey trekked outside of the castle, in the wind of a cloudy afternoon. They had originally meant to just go a little ways down the path, but the way to Hogsmeade was apparently just as magical as Hogwarts itself so they had strayed off the side of the road, wandering through bramble-covered hills until Gansey's cell phone finally accepted the fact that there was reception. Now he paced back and forth across the hilltop, Adam watching the dualism of a wind-swept and sparkly-eyed Gansey speaking in the voice of a future president.

"I'm not going back to Aglionby this year," he told his phone. "I'm still in Scotland, yeah. There's this school here - you won't believe it. It's just incredible.

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Yeah, I know, I'm getting to that. It is magic. No, I'm not joking. And no, you won't find out anything about it online - look, fly into London when you have a chance, I'll show you everything.

"Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. No, I don't need anything - it's this close-knit community, they make sure to educate their own - no, it's not a cult! A magic school, like I said. I mean it, come to London. I can meet you there - when do you have time? Next weekend? - no, yeah, Wednesday is fine. We'll get dinner. I'll show you everything."

Imagine that, Adam thought. Summoning your parents across the ocean for a dinner out.

He shook away the bitterness of the thought. For once, it didn't matter. They were both going to Hogwarts; they were both on equal footing.

"Okay good. Great. See you soon. Love you. Bye."

Gansey hung up and swept his arms through the air. "It's done. God, I can't wait to see my mom's face as she steps into Diagon Alley."

Then he stopped, and frowned down at his phone. That expression meant only one thing.

"Make Ronan do it himself," Adam said. If there was a touch of venom in his voice, it was only because he'd seen this expression on Gansey's face too many times.

Gansey just shook his head, of course, rubbing the bridge of his nose for a moment before dialling.

"Ronan and I are going to Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this year," he said, announcing it like a campaign slogan. He paused. He winced, and held the phone five inches from his ear. Then set it down.

"What was that?" Adam asked.

Gansey gave him an "I have no clue" smile. "He swore at me for a while, said okay, and hung up."

Adam pondered that for a second. "He knows what Hogwarts is."

"Apparently so."

"And he's not trying to stop you."

"I don't know *what* he was trying to accomplish." Gansey had another face.

"Don't let him get to you," Adam reminded him.

Gansey shrugged helplessly. "I had a whole speech prepared. I thought it would be a *thing*. God - do you think he's a wizard too?"

"Well," Adam said. "You could call him up and ask."

Gansey exhaled a laugh.

"Forget about it," Adam said, more seriously. "He didn't say no, and Ronan wasn't going to listen if he did. This was the best you could expect."

Gansey stretched, tucking his phone away and surveying their surroundings with an adventurer's contemplation. "Maybe so. How do you think Blue's getting on?"

Adam shrugged. "She'll figure it out. And then we're free. Should we go tell McGonagall we want to go into London on Wednesday?"

Gansey gave him a delighted smile, then. Happy to be an "us," maybe, or just happy to have them all well within his reach.

Adam stopped himself, again. He wasn't following Gansey, wasn't just staying because Gansey's side was the place to be. Hogwarts was something bigger than either of them, and it had every one of them under the same spell. They wanted to stay together, sure. But Hogwarts sang to them, too. It promised them something bigger than any of them could find by themselves.

Adam wanted to know what he could become, if he stayed here.

*

Blue lay on her stomach in Professor McGonagall's office, legs crossed in the air above her knees, chin on her wrists. Her head was fully in the fire, flames dancing around her ears. The lower couple feet of her backyard was visible from the bonfire she was looking out; Maura was sitting cross-legged on the ground in front of her, leaning forward so that they were more or less on the same level. Persephone and Calla sprawled around her, and everyone else kept flitting in and out of the space Blue could see, toasting marshmallows above Blue's head and waving hello.

"Would it have made any difference if I told you *not* to run away and join a magic school on another continent?" Maura asked.

"Nope," Blue said.

Maura sighed. "Well, that's that, then."

"Yep."

They held their standoff for a few more moments, until Maura's face softened. "I miss you. I thought I had a whole year left with you."

"I'm not gone forever," Blue said. "And I'm not *dead*."

Maura laughed. "You're off on your own," she amended. "I haven't had time to get used to the idea of this house without you living in it."

Blue shook her head. "One of you is going to need to learn how to buy vegetables."

Maura's laugh turned into a cackle. "Listen to her! I'll have you know we survived for years before you were old enough to worry about vitamins, missy."

Blue felt herself smiling.

"Be careful," Maura said after a moment. "I know you want to tune that out right now, just because it's your mother warning you, but I mean it. Hogwarts is just like anywhere else - it isn't perfect. It might be safe right now, but it won't stay that way. Even if you do stay out of it all, it still won't be any safer than Henrietta."

Maura didn't say aloud what "it all" was. Blue didn't point out that there was no chance whatsoever of her staying out of whatever was going to happen. Maura just looked fierce, and Blue decided to interpret it as fierceness on her behalf, rather than fierceness directed at her.

"You'll see the first of it soon," Maura said. "Call us. And send letters. And we'll see you at Christmas."

It wasn't an order, because Maura never ordered Blue to do anything. But it wasn't a request, either: just a fact.

"And you can always come home," Maura concluded.

"I won't," Blue said.

"I know," Maura said. "But you can."

They smiled at each other, identical smiles.

"I love you," Maura said.

"I love you too."

Chapter End Notes

If this story had a prologue, this would be the second last chapter of it. Next time, there'll be Sorting and Diagon Alley, and then the setup will be complete and we can really get into it!

Thanks again to everyone who's left kudos and comments :) This is the first fanfiction I've published on ao3 and every word of affirmation just makes my day!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!