

## to tame a wild thing

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# to tame a wild thing

by [ShanaStoryteller](#)

## Summary

Nagini isn't a name. Nagini was never meant to be a name.

It's a title.

## Notes

so, like, fuck jkr

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Nagini isn't a name. Nagini was never meant to be a name.

It's a title.

"My mother was Nagini Krisha," she says, and Sujin wants to take her hand, wants to hold her close and kiss her and take away all the horrible things she's locked away. "Her cousin was Nagini Vaishnavi, and Vaishnavi's sister was Nagini Mishka, and Mishka's aunt was Nagini Lakshmi." She swallows, and continues, "I am Nagini Diya."

"When did it become a curse?" she asks, and she hates to ask, hates to see the hollow look in Diya's face. But she has to know.

She shrugs and looks away. "Lakshma's mother was Nagini. But she did something terrible, so the naga gave her a choice, and she chose the better option. Which is this. Being Nagini isn't supposed to be something bad, it's supposed to be a gift. It's an honor to be Nagini."

Maybe it was, before. But it's not anymore. Something went wrong, and now Diya's whole family is cursed. Now it's what's going to tear Diya from her, and she hates it.

~

"No thanks," the shopkeeper says as soon as he gets a look at her, and Sujin shoves the door back open before he can close it.

"It says you're hiring," she says, tries not to glare. They don't like it when she glares.

He sighs, folding his arms across his chest. "At least you speak English. Not even much of an accent."

She doesn't have *any* accent, she was born here. Not that it should matter. Not that it does matter. "I'm better at transfiguration than anyone in this city. I can do the work."

He looks at her, long and hard, and she raises her chin before she can think better of it. She needs the work. She needs access to his libraries. He must like whatever he finds, because he shrugs like it's nothing, and says, "It's not like the customers will have to see you, at least."

Sujin doesn't care for the day to day of it, for fixing broken magical objects that should probably just be thrown out, but it doesn't matter, that's not the point.

She needs to learn how to unmake something.

~

Diya is the strongest witch she's ever met. Sujin wields *precise* magic, and she wields it well, but she's not what anyone would call strong. But Diya is, she's so much stronger than Sujin is in so many ways.

She used to go by Sue, back when she thought it made things easier. It didn't.

She wears robes in muted colors and sensible skirts and high collars, grey on white on black. She does everything she can to blend in, trying to make herself fit in a world that seems too small to have a place for her.

Diya doesn't do that.

She wears clothes made of bright fabrics, sometimes long dresses and other times pulling out the long strips of fabric that wraps itself around her hips and flings itself over her shoulder with a single swish of her wand.

People can tell Diya is powerful just by looking at her wand. It's teak and fourteen inches long, thin and straight. The core is her mother's own crystalized venom. It looks delicate, but it doesn't bend, just like it's owner. Diya's so powerful that it almost feels like dating a forest fire in the shape of a person, her magic constantly crackling and shifting under her skin. She works in the Department of Mysteries, doing things she can't tell Sujin about. She took the job because she hoped she could discover a way to save herself.

She hasn't found anything. She says that's because there isn't anything to find.

But Sujin can't give up hope.

It's not fair. She doesn't have anyone else, parents and grandparents long dead, and no family to go searching for back in Korea. She's completely alone.

Except for Diya.

Diya, who's kisses feel like firecrackers, who brings her chai when she's up late working, who knows all her sensitive places, who knows how afraid and small and useless she feels constantly, and loves her anyway.

Sujin loves Diya and can't tolerate the thought of losing her.

~

They don't go to zoos, they avoid the forests and countryside, and live in the very heart of the city. But sometimes one of them finds her anyway.

"They're always yelling," Diya complains, shooting a dirty look at the grass snake attempting to slither after them down the street. "It's what they get for living here. They should leave."

It's not that easy to leave, Sujin think, even for snakes, but she doesn't say that. "What do they sound like? Is it just all hissing?"

She shrugs. "I don't know. It just sounds like Hindi to me."

"Oh," Sujin says, disappointed by the answer and wanting to know more, but knowing better than to push. "Want to go out for dinner?" They can't afford it, not really, but she doesn't mind skipping lunch for the week if it gets that look off Diya's face.

She kisses her in answer, and it's all worth it, getting to hold an inferno in her arms is worth the burns.

~

The first real fight they have is about horcruxes.

"It would work!" Sujin insists, hands clenched in fists around her notes, crumpling hours of hard work. "It makes sense, it could save you—"

"It would damn me," she hisses, her gorgeous brown eyes going yellow and her pupils narrowing to slits. Sujin doesn't flinch, not even as fangs grow out of her mouth and past her lower lip. "I won't do that. How could you ask me to do that?"

"People are sentenced to death every day. We could find one of them, a rapist or serial killer, someone really awful, someone who deserves it," she says. She's thought of this. She's done *research* on this, knows where the muggle jail is, knows how to find the people that no one would miss. Muggles don't know about killing curses, they'd say it was a heart attack or something equally benign. No one would have to know.

Her skin is shifting to scales. "You want me to kill someone and use it to tear my soul apart."

"I want to *save you!*" she cries. How can Diya not know that? How can she not know that Sujin loves her more than anything? "If you tear apart the bit of soul that's cursed, you can stop it, you can stop the curse and you'll be fine and we'll be fine, and I won't have to lose you!"

Sujin doesn't realize she's crying until her vision blurs, and she angrily rubs her arm across her eyes. Diya's face is hard and unyielding. "I won't do it. I won't become a murderer. I may not be able to stop myself from becoming a beast, one day I'll be nothing more than – than a creature that needs to be killed. But I won't make myself into a monster to escape that. Whether I take a life or grow fangs, I'm still a monster, and I refuse to become monstrous of my own choice."

"You're not listening to me," she says, hating the way her voice comes out thin and high, the way it breaks in the middle.

"*You* are not listening to *me*," Diya says, gentler, and her hands twitch like she wants to reach out for her. Sujin wishes she would. "There's no stopping the curse. Five generations of women lived with this fate. If there was a cure, don't you think we would have found it already?" Sujin shakes her head, less in answer to her question and more in denial of everything she's saying, and Diya finally steps closer, finally touches her, grasping her shoulders with a strength that's bruising. "Sujin. The only way my family can escape the curse is to do what we have been doing. Dying out. I'm the last of us, understand? No more aunts or uncles or cousins for this curse to latch onto. I'm the last one, and this curse dies with me."

Sujin pushes closer, cupping Diya's face in her hands, brushing her thumb over her bottom lip. "That's not escaping the curse. That's succumbing to it."

Diya kisses her instead of answering, which is answer enough. “Let’s not waste the time I have left arguing,” she says, “let’s not waste it looking for something that doesn’t exist. Fuck, I’m sorry, I know it’s selfish – but you’re all I care about losing. Let me keep you for as long as I can.”

She wants Diya to keep her forever, but she won’t push it, can’t push it. She can’t expect Diya to choose her over her own humanity, after all.

~

The first time Diya transforms into a snake and can’t transform back right away, Sujin curls around her massive scaly body in their bed. This is the start, this is the beginning, and she feels like her heart is breaking a little more every day.

One day, she won’t transform back at all, one day she’ll be nothing more than a woman trapped in a snake’s body. Then she’ll become even less than that, her human consciousness slipping away by degrees, until she’s just an unusually intelligent snake, until the curse overtakes her soul and there’s nothing left of the woman Sujin loves.

She can’t do this. Losing Diya slowly is going to kill her.

There’s something else she hadn’t told her about, some other way that will save her.

~

Sujin puts a sleeping potion in her tea and waits with bated breath until she hears a thump from the next room over.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers, dragging Diya’s unconscious body into the middle of their living room. She lights a circle of candles around them, and pulls her book closer, the one she’d stolen from work, careful to get the sigils exactly right. She pricks her finger, writing complicated symbols on Diya’s face and chest in her blood. Then she does the same to Diya, pricking her finger using her bleeding finger to draw the matching symbols on her own skin.

This spell doesn’t require consent. It requires blood, and stillness, and sacrifice.

Sujin thinks about kissing her, one last time, but it seems wrong. She lost that privilege when she drugged her.

She takes out her wand. It’s ten inches, thick and round, with a unicorn hair core. It’s nothing special. She places it to the bloody symbol on Diya’s forehead, and begins to chant.

It’s old, precise magic, magic that shouldn’t exist anymore. It’s a mostly forgotten spell she’d found on accident, but it doesn’t need power, it needs precision, it needs exactness and clarity, and that she has to spare.

Sujin feels the moment it takes, the bloody sigils glowing and something heavy and hard settling into the center of her chest. It’s like the worst craving she’s ever had and an itch she desperately needs to scratch all at once, and scales are already covering her arms before she

realizes what she's doing. She forces herself to breath, to calm and push it away, just like she's seen Diya do so many times before.

Diya isn't cursed anymore.

She is.

Even now she can feel the snake squirming around in her trying to get out, in a way that's not quite physical or mental, and somehow both at the same time, and it makes her skin crawl even when she's back to being completely human.

She doesn't have any family, she's the last of her line, so the curse won't move on to anyone else, it will die with her. It will die with her, and Diya will live, will grow old and grey.

Sujin throws whatever she can fit into a suitcase, takes one last look at the woman she loves, and walks out the door.

The spell doesn't require consent.

Diya will be furious, but Sujin doesn't think she'll hate her, even if her anger feels that way. But she won't let this lie. She wouldn't kill a stranger in order save her life, she won't let Sujin take her curse, not without a fight.

Sujin doesn't want to fight. She wouldn't win. Diya is stronger than her, has more magic than she can possible contend with, and she's not certain she wouldn't use imperio to force Sujin to reverse the spell. But she can't allow that to happen, can't give her the chance to take this back.

So she has to run. She has to go where Diya won't find her, has to hope that she'll give up searching after a while, and just live her long, happy life. She hopes Paris is far enough.

She's saved Diya, but she's lost her too.

That's okay. She loves Diya more than anything, including her own happiness. Her own humanity.

~

Snakes are always calling after her now. Even when she's completely human, there's something about her that tells them what she is.

*"Nagini!"* they call, slithering and chasing after her, trying to get her attention. *"Nagini, Nagini, Nagini!"*

She doesn't answer. She has nothing to say. She's Nagini Sujin now, not that it matters. She's not Nagini like these snakes seem to think she is, she's not part of the temple, not descended from any gods, not part of the naga. She's just what she's always been.

Alone.

~

She falls into sex work first. She doesn't mean to, not really, but she likes how she has to use her body. Has to be *aware* of her body at every moment, because she should savor this. Soon, her body will betray her, and she won't be able to force it to do anything.

Sometimes her customers irritate or anger her, and she thinks of opening her jaw wide and swallowing them whole, but doesn't, because dead customers don't pay.

She thinks about horcruxes a lot.

But there's no point, not really. She's not strong enough to make one, and even if she was, it doesn't matter. If she kills for her own selfish gain, then she'll become a monster even before scales permanently replace her skin, will become someone Diya would be repulsed by.

That's the crux of it, really. She can't force herself to become someone that Diya would hate, even if it would save her life, even though she'll never see Diya again.

She's going to become a giant, venomous snake, first in body and then in mind, and even as the thought nearly cripples her, she doesn't regret it.

~

When she sees the advertainment looking for freaks, she snorts.

But she needs money. She has to stay at the edges of society, to dark corners and shadows in case someone recognizes her, in case Diya is still looking for her. It's hard to find work.

But she can turn into a giant snake, the ringmaster's eyes shine with greed rather than fear, and she'll take what she can get. "What's your name, sweetheart?"

"*Nagini!*" one the snake charmer's cobras calls out to her, trying to sway into her line of sight. "*Nagini, look at me, pay attention to me! Nagini!*"

"Hey!" He snaps his fingers in front of her face. "Name?"

"Nagini," she says without thinking, then says, "No, sorry, it's Sue."

He grins, waving a hand, "Nah, Nagini sounds better. More exotic. You're Nagini now."

She needs the money.

"Okay."

~

She actually enjoys the circus when she forgets to hate it.

The snake charmer's name is Lou Potter, and he has the same dark skin as Diya. He corners her the second day and asks, "Why do my snakes know you?"



“What?” she says, startled.

“They keep calling out your name. Why? How do they know you?”

“You’re a Pareselmouth,” she says, surprised.

Lou’s eyes narrow. “What of it?”

“Nothing. Just – uh, they know I can turn into a snake. It’s an unusual Animagus form?”  
Because that’s what she’s pretending to be, a woman with a distinct and interesting Animagus animal, not someone cursed to become a snake forever.

“Right,” he says, and he clearly doesn’t believe her, but he’s nice to her after that, and, well. She’ll take what she can get.

~

She’s never wanted children and has never felt particularly maternal, but she meets Credence and yearns to take care of him, because it looks like no one else ever has. It doesn’t matter that he doesn’t look that much younger than her, she still has to resist the urge to ruffle his hair.

He joins their circus, and he’s jumpy, keeping to himself. She doesn’t like that.

“Hungry?” she asks, holding out her portion of dinner to him. He’d eaten his so fast it gave her a stomachache just to watch him.

He clearly wants to say yes, but hesitates. “Aren’t you hungry?”

“I had a big lunch,” she answers, instead of saying that she’s losing her taste for cooked meat. She’ll need to keep that to herself, otherwise they’ll have her kill and eat prey in her cage for the audience, and it’s one thing to be looked at like a freak. It’s another to be looked at like an animal.

He takes it from her hands slowly, and this time he eats at a more sedate pace. She sits by him, pressing her knee against his. It’s the first human touch she’s had in while. She’s very careful not to touch anyone here, not to look at them too long, in case they get the wrong idea. She already has to spend so much time in this tight, slinky black dress that she hates, that’s nothing like her at all, and if she’s too friendly it’s easy for people to get the wrong idea.

She hears that he’s having a hard time in bunks, people mocking him for being small and quiet, which she thinks is particularly stupid considering what his act is. She shows up to the bunks, where all the men are stacked on top of each other and says clearly, “Credence, you can stay with me.”

She brings in a lot of people, so she has her own room. It’s little, barely big enough to cram a bed in and almost more like a crawl space, but it’s hers.

Credence rolls out of his bunk, his pack clenched to his chest, eyes wide. “Sleeping your way to the top?” someone jeers, and she’s already half snake before he’s finished speaking, hissing and lunging towards the noise.

No one else says anything.

“This isn’t a sex thing,” she says on their way to her room, watching him carefully, “I just thought you could use a friend.” She could use one too, honestly.

He relaxes, peeking up at her, and looking so much younger than his age. “Thank you.”

She smiles and smooths his hair back, an absent minded gesture that she’s never made before.

Her bed is small, and she sleeps curled against his back, her chin over his shoulder. He’s bigger than her, and stronger than her, but it doesn’t matter. He still seems like he needs protecting, and this is all the protection she’s capable of providing. She hopes it’s enough.

~

Credence is her only friend, but she doesn’t mind. Sometimes she thinks she’s being selfish for caring about him, but it’s not like she can make herself stop. One friend is enough. The less she has, the less there is to lose.

It’s been over a year since she came to Paris, and she’s walking with Credence on a rare night off, shoulders brushing together. She can feel her bones shifting inside of her all the time now, always straining to become a different shape. The end looms ever closer, and there’s nothing she can do to stop it. She hopes Credence will be okay without her.

She’s just considering pulling him down an alley with her to get a crepe when her hair stands up on the back of her neck. She reaches for her wand without knowing why, but it’s the right move, because in the next moment they’re surrounded by cloaked figures. It’s not apparition, they were there before, they just couldn’t see them.

“Shit,” Credence whispers, shoving her behind him, “Nagini, run!”

“Are you out of your mind?” she snaps, pushing back in front of him, wand raised.

He’s trying to push her away again, but she digs her heels in. “They’re here for me, you have to go!”

“No,” she snaps, “I’m not leaving you.”

“Actually,” says an old, creaky voice from underneath a hood, “we’re here for her.”

Sujin blinks in surprise while Credence snarls, “You can’t have her!”

“We’re not here to harm her,” she says, and as one they all lower their hoods.

Credence gasps and Sujin forgets to breath.

Surrounding them are a dozen Indian women, varying in age from a teenager to the old woman who'd been speaking. They're beautiful, long black hair and beautiful bright clothes.

They're also snakes from the waist down with yellow eyes and slit pupils. They move differently, as if the snake is a part of them, as if they're not two things forced to occupy the same space but one complete being, completely comfortable in this form.

But that's not what Sujin is staring at.

"Diya," she breathes, fear and want flooding her system with enough adrenaline that she's dizzy with it. "What are you doing here?"

She's expecting anger, it's what she deserves, but Diya only shakes her head, not moving from her place from standing slightly outside the circle. She doesn't look angry. Why? Why isn't she mad?

"I am Nagini Manasa," the old woman says, and she shifts, easily melting into a fully human form before her eyes as if it's nothing, as if it's easy as breathing. Maybe, for her it, it is. "We are here to remove the aberration on your soul, Nagini Sujin."

"Why?" she demands, keeping a calming hand on Credence's arm so he doesn't do something impulsive and stupid. "Why would you do that? You created this curse for a reason."

"It is a punishment," Manasa agrees. "But we allow the punished to choose the terms of their sentence. Diya asked to change her terms, as is her right."

Sujin freezes, then she's rushing forward, trying to get to Diya. "No! What did you give up? What did they take? Why?" If it's something she hadn't tried before, if this is something she could have done the entire time and chosen not to, then it must mean the sacrifice was too great, that the cost was too high.

"Be still, Nagini Sujin," Manasa says sternly, and all the naga women raise their hands. They're not holding wands, but Sujin doubts they need them. "This will only hurt for a moment."

She doesn't have the time to question that before a searing pain causes her to stumble and fall to her knees. She thinks she's screaming. It feels like her bones are being ripped out of her flesh one by one, and when it's over, she's left panting with Credence's arm over her shoulders, keeping her upright.

When she opens her eyes, it's just in time to see a massive snake slithering out of the circle and into the night. The snake that had lived inside her and threatened to consume her is gone, literally gone, having disappeared around the corner of the building.

"Nagini!" Credence says, squeezing her, "Are you okay?"

"She is Nagini no longer," the old woman says, and the naga raise their hoods to cover their faces, and then they're gone just as suddenly as they came.

Sujin is just sitting there, on her knees on the cold pavement, more lost than she's ever been. The hunger, the pain, the itch along her spine – it's all gone. She's just Sujin again.

As soon as the naga are gone, Diya runs forward, falling to her knees in front of her and cupping her face in her hands. Diya is crying. She's never seen Diya cry before. "Sujin, are you okay? Is it gone, are you alright? Tell me you're okay!"

Diya's hands on her skin feel different than they have before. "What – how did you even find them? What did you give up? What's your new punishment? Why didn't do that before?"

"We tried," she says, trying to push herself even closer, nearly pushing herself into Sujin's lap. "We all tried, five generations of women begged the naga, but they always refused, saying our circumstances hadn't changed, and so neither would our punishment." Sujin reaches up to brush her tears away, using the sleeve of ridiculous dress. "But then I told them about you, about what you did, and – and the naga couldn't stand for that, couldn't stand someone innocent withstanding the punishment they'd cursed upon my family. So they let me take on a new one."

"What is it?" she demands, "What did they do to you?"

"Can't you feel it? They took my magic. I'm a squib now." She's smiling as she says that, and Sujin doesn't understand.

But that's why her skin feels different. The inferno Diya's carried around inside of her is gone, it's all gone. "No – Diya, no, that's awful, I'm so sorry."

"I'm not," she says. "I love magic. But I love you more."

"You're not mad at me?" she asks uncertainly.

Diya shifts, and now she is in Sujin's lap. "Furious. I'm so, so angry. But I'll forgive you, if you forgive me. I just – you still love me, don't you?"

What an incredibly stupid question. She would sooner stop breathing than stop loving her. "I'll always love you."

Then she's getting kissed, warm lips on hers and Diya's arms around her neck and her body against hers, something that Sujin never thought she'd have again. But now she gets Diya, and Diya gets her, forever.

They eventually pull apart, and Diya murmurs, "Who's your friend?"

Sujin panics and pulls back, but Credence is still there, a few steps away with his arms behind his back as he looks up at the sky. "Credence," she says, and he looks down at her, flushed pink. "This is Diya. Diya, this is Credence. He's my friend." Diya seems unwilling to get out of her lap, so she only waves. "Diya, we should go. Get – out of here. Out of Europe, I mean. Things are getting bad." It hadn't mattered so much before, when her life was ending anyway, but it matters now.

“I can’t go back to India. Ever been to Korea?” she asks, pressing soft kisses along her cheekbone between every word. “At least one of us should blend in.”

Sujin shakes her head, but carefully, so Diya can keep kissing her.

“Then I’ll guess we’ll figure it out together,” she says, and Sujin feels warm all over.

She looks over to Credence, and he tries to smile, but he doesn’t do a very good job of it. That’s the look of someone who thinks they’re about to be left behind, about to be forgotten. “Come with us?”

“I – what?” Credence blinks.

“Come with us,” Sujin says. “Come to Korea with me and Diya. You’re running from something, aren’t you? Run with us.”

“I’m running for a good reason,” he says quietly. “I’ve done – really terrible things.”

Diya asks, “Are you going to keep doing them?”

“I – no. I’m not. No.”

“Then come with us,” Sujin says simply, like it’s that easy. Because it is. For once, Sujin will make it be that easy.

She doesn’t want to be another thing that he’s lost, and Diya doesn’t protest. Credence doesn’t say anything for a long moment, staring at them with wide eyes, and then he says, “Okay. I’ll run away with you.”

Sujin kisses Diya one more time, then pulls them both to their feet so she can grab Credence’s hand in her own.

This is her chance at a happy ending, and she’s not letting it escape her.

## End Notes

i hope you liked it!

feel free to follow / harass me at: [shanastoryteller.tumblr.com](https://shanastoryteller.tumblr.com)

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