

## Brianna Goes to Hogwarts

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# Brianna Goes to Hogwarts

by [Jafars\\_apologist](#)

## Summary

On her eleventh birthday, Brianna Randall receives a letter that will change her life. Entering the magical world of Hogwarts, she will need to find answers to many burning questions, but will also find true friends, adventure and mischief.

## Notes

Hello everyone! I'm very excited to start this story with you. I will update whenever I finish a new chapter.

English isn't my first language and one of the reasons I'm writing this fic is to improve. I encourage you to point out my mistakes and correct me! Thank you.

# Chapter 1

Birthday at the Randall family wasn't a grand affair, but Brianna always looked forward to it. Usually there would be a special breakfast - full English breakfast for any of her parents, pancakes or waffles with a milkshake for her - and a send-off to work or school with a little gift and birthday card, only for the real gift to be given at dinner in a restaurant. Brianna expected her eleventh birthday to be very much the same, and spent most of the night awake, waiting for her parents to burst into her room with balloons and songs. Instead, she heard them fight. Again.

They were in the kitchen, and although Brianna knew better by now, she crept to the top of the stairs to hear them better. She kept a tab on her parent's fighting - she and her friends would analyze them later at school. Gale, Bree's best friend, said the frequent mention of a woman named Sandy was a sure sign of an impending divorce, because her dad was cheating for sure. Brianna didn't want to believe it, but she spent a few hours organising her clothes and toys in two neat piles, just in case she needed to pack and move quickly.

And so, for the sake of her and Gale's morbid interest in the crumbling relationship between Claire and Frank Randall, Bree situated herself by the stairs and listened.

"I took you in, pregnant, and you gave me one promise. One promise, Claire! To leave all of that... idiotic bullshit behind us!" Brianna heard the sound of glass breaking. Then, Frank's voice continued. "We came all the way to Boston to raise her to be normal!"

Brianna's ears perked up at the mention of raising. When Courtney's parents got a divorce, they said it wasn't her fault; could the same thing be said about Brianna?

"I tried, Frank! You can't tell me I didn't do absolutely everything in my power to become your normal wife! I learned to be a Muggle healer, for Christ's sake. This isn't about you or me. Magical children need to learn magic or they will die, it's as simple as that."

Magical?

She must've misheard.

Curiosity ignited, Brianna took another careful step down the stairs. In her concentration she misstepped and before she knew it, she was in her father's arms.

"Careful there, birthday girl," he said. The transformation was spectacular. Gone was the anger and distress. The only sign Brianna could see to his previous aggression was a small cut on the inside of his palm. He noticed her eyes straying there and hurried to explain. "Oh, I tried my hand at the milkshake. Better leave that to your mother." He smiled, but Claire's eyebrows were scrunched together with animosity.

"Happy birthday, my baby!" Said her mama, stepping closer to take Bree from Frank's grip and envelope her in a hug.

"I'm not a baby," Brianna said, pushing her mother back. "I heard you fight. You broke a glass on Daddy. I didn't hear a blender, so I know there's no milkshake."

With that, she ran up to her room, getting dressed with tears threatening to fall from her eyes. She would not cry on her birthday, Brianna decided. She picked her outfit the day before, so within seven minutes she was by the door.

Her mind was heavy with thoughts, and they kept her ears from hearing the hushed argument around her. She was lucky - it would've taken more than a fellow eleven year old's advice to unpack that.

"You ruined her birthday!"

"I don't want to raise a witch. I will not do it."

"Well, hurry up with the divorce papers then, because we're going to England."

"To follow that ghost of yours? You'll not kidnap my daughter - "

"Well, you said it yourself, you don't want to raise a witch. That's what she is, and the school in England is better, the one here doesn't accept native Americans, if you can imagine - "

And the sound of a slap.

Then once again Claire's voice.

"I hope you and Sandy will have a great life here."

She was by the door when Brianna made her hasty way downstairs.

"Come on Bree, I'm taking you to school."

Brianna's eyes darted between her parents and she decided not to argue.

Brianna didn't notice where they were going until they stopped next to her favourite diner.

"I'm sorry about your birthday breakfast, dear," her mother started. "Let's get inside? You can order anything you want."

Brianna, while still very upset, was not one to refuse a good milkshake.

It was only when her mother started browsing through the menu that she spoke.

"Shouldn't we wait for daddy?"

Claire didn't look up. Instead, she was looking through her purse.

"Well, I thought that since you are eleven years old now, we should have a little ladies chat," Claire stated.

"Ew! I know about periods already, let's not talk about that please," Brianna immediately dropped the menu from her hands.

"Really? You do? No point in ordering the red berry milkshake then?" Her mother teased.

"I think there's another reason daddy's not here," Brianna stated. "You were talking about... magical children?" She finished her sentence almost silently, unaware if it were a subject to be discussed in public or not.

Finally, Claire lifted her hand out of her purse. She was holding a stick, which Brianna found very odd because Tiffany, the first girl who got her period, didn't mention anything about a stick. Claire waved it discreetly under the table and suddenly all the noises that filled the diner - utensils and plates clanking, people speaking, the obnoxious song playing in the background - disappeared. Brianna noticed that the people were still eating, so there must have been noises. When she stared at the people, she noticed no one returning her look. It was as if they were invisible.

"You really are a witch, then?" She asked. Claire, who seemed content to watch her daughter analyze the world around her, nodded.

"Are we invisible?"

Claire shook her head. "Simply harder to notice. If you were to wave a waitress over, I suppose she would come."

Brianna stared at her, her eyes wide as saucers.

"Will I die?"

Her mother lifted an eyebrow in confusion.

"I suppose, yes, eventually. Why do you ask?"

"You said if magical kids don't learn magic they die, and I don't know any," Brianna explained.

Claire rubbed her forehead. "You heard me and your father?"

Brianna nodded. She was now sitting as far away from Claire as she could be within the booth. Deep in her mind, she was disappointed - if she had to share a magical world with one of her parents, couldn't it be daddy? She quickly silenced that thought.

"Look, dear," Claire started. "Magic... It's very much like puberty, except often a year or two earlier. You only started displaying the traits this year. You are not in danger, all right? You will learn everything you need to know."

Brianna didn't even nod, the next question already on her lips.

"Displaying the traits?"

Claire smiled. "Remember when you were sent to the principal's office for dying your teacher's hair blue?"

"I didn't do it!" Brianna protested.

Claire continued in a calm voice. "Didn't she upset you before that?"

"She asked if daddy doesn't mind that you dabble with silly medicine - that doesn't have anything to do with it!"

Claire seemed touched by the explanation, but resumed her own. "Well, when you feel strong emotions, sometimes odd things happen, don't they?"

Brianna thought back to the time a boy dared her to climb a tree faster than him and she didn't even remember touching the branches, or the time Courtney came to school with a bruise on her neck and it faded when Brianna touched it.

"Say that they do," she agreed. "What does it mean? If I'm a witch? Does daddy know?"

"Well, both of us didn't really know until a letter came in today from the American school for witchcraft and wizardry, announcing you are to attend next year."

"Didn't you say we're going to London?"

Claire nodded. "You do have sharp hearing. Yes, I'll sort it all with the ministry of magic, don't worry."

"Daddy said he doesn't want to raise a magical child."

Claire placed her hand on Brianna's, her lips pressed together. "I know, baby. I'm so sorry. But it will be his loss, not yours, I promise."

Holding to her resolve not to cry on her birthday, Brianna bit her lower lip.

"I think I need a stiff drink," she said.

"Will you stop calling milkshakes that?"

Claire sighed. "Peanut butter and banana?"

Brianna hated the new cottage in the middle of nowhere, across the ocean from her friends. She hated having no one to spend her summer vacation with but her mother. She hated that she couldn't tell her friends the truth about why she was leaving. She hated her dad - or Frank, as she resolved to now call him - for not being there. Mostly, she hated magic.

# An all girl's shopping trip

## Chapter Summary

Bree needs a wand. She needs answers.

Brianna didn't have time to get used to her new life before another letter arrived to disrupt it - this time, via owl. Her mother assured her she would have to get used to the feathery method of communication and after letting it eat cereal off the palm of her hands, Brianna decided she didn't mind.

The new letter was addressed to Brianna Ellen Randall, Castle Comb, The cottage at the end of the road, the bedroom with the large window. Brianna couldn't help but feel quite spooked by their extreme knowledge of her whereabouts.

"Oh, Bree, this is your Hogwarts acceptance letter! I remember getting my own when I was your age, I was so excited!"

Bree nodded and opened the letter. After the initial congratulations and train ticket - platform 9 and three quarters? Why did wizards have to be so weird? - she found a list of requirements. Books, wand, robes, quills and even a caldron.

"Is there a magical general store we can stop by?" She asked.

"Something better. Are you ready to go shopping?"

Brianna shrugged. "It says here I can have a pet. May I?"

"Well, I suppose we should get you an owl, so you can send me letters easily."

"Isn't there a phone I can use?"

Claire smiled. "It's a magical castle, Bree. They use parchment and quills."

"Fine. But I'm taking some ballpoint pens with me."

Claire smiled. "Always practical."

"Do we need a taxi for the train station? I don't imagine this place has anything more than a grocery store."

Claire sighed. "Again, Bree, being here, away from the public eye, protects us."

"You never tell me what from, yet you find hours every day to teach me about made up plants," Brianna complained.

"They're not made up, I'm just trying to give you a head start on herbology classes," Claire returned. "Anyway, we don't need a cab. We're going there the magical way. I think you'll like it."

Brianna certainly did not like traveling by flu. She would've taken the train any day to avoid the gut wrenching feeling of falling through cold fire. After emptying her stomach in a trashcan on the street, Claire gave her a root to chew on and insisted the worst was behind them. Brianna begrudgingly followed her mother, who was uncharacteristically smiling, out of the fluing station as she called it and onto the street.

The sights outside did nothing to help her stomach settle, but they were enough to distract her. It was an alley filled with everything she imagined a wizard would need and then some

things she didn't immediately recognise. This will be an interesting shopping trip indeed, she noted.

Suddenly, her sweater and jeans felt extremely out of place amongst the people in the colorful robes and witch hats. She noticed her mother nervously tugging on her own skirt.

"Should we get some clothes to fit in?" Brianna asked. When she looked up to her mother's face, she was startled not to see the usual smokey makeup over golden eyes, nor the small nose of her mother's. Instead she now had blue eyes, no makeup at all which somehow made her look younger, and a larger, Roman nose. With her hair blow dried and pinned up, her mother was unrecognisable.

"What the hell, Mama? Who are you?" Brianna asked, letting go of the woman's hand and looking around to see if her real mother was somewhere behind them, looking for her.

"Relax, Bree, it's me. It's just a glamour spell, I didn't want to be recognised." Claire waved her hand over her face and for a split second, Brianna could see the face that greeted her every morning for eleven years.

"Just warn me next time," she grumbled.

Claire smiled. "All right. We will get both of us new robes, but our first stop has to be the bank."

Brianna started groaning in complaint, but Claire looked as if going to the bank was the most exciting ordeal ever, and Bree had nothing to do but follow her.

When they neared the large marble building, Brianna noticed an inscription on the door.

Enter, stranger, but take heed  
Of what awaits the sin of greed  
For those who take, but do not earn,  
Must pay most dearly in their turn.  
So if you seek beneath our floors  
A treasure that was never yours,  
Thief, you have been warned, beware  
Of finding more than treasure there.

"That's not terrifying at all," she remarked.

"Well, lucky for us, we're here to take our own money," her mother replied cheerfully as the doors opened for them. "Gringotts is the safest bank in the world. Rumor has it they keep a dragon below the ground, to watch the vaults."

The mention of a dragon did wonders for Bree's disposition, who now had a renewed glint of curiosity in her eyes. Her eyes slid over the counters, which were manned by elf-like creatures either speaking to costumers, filling parchment scrolls with tiny inscription or measuring rubies and blocks of gold. Claire quickly found the one who seemed the least busy and approached him with a tiny silver key she dug out of her purse.

"The Beauchamp vault, please," she said politely, keeping her voice low. The creature grumbled much like Brianna did at the mention of going to the bank, inspected the key and nodded. Without a word he led them to what looked like a miner's trolley. Brianna sat next to him at the front, excited for a chance to see the dragon. Claire sat behind her and wordlessly placed another piece of the bitter root she chewed up before in her hand. "This can be quite a thrilling experience for some - people!" She almost screamed, and Bree definitely screamed as the trolley started moving at an incomprehensible speed, croaking beneath them. The creature seemed amused, and Brianna noticed he wasn't even steering the vehicle. She could

hear the screeching of other trolleys, but had nothing to do but pray not to run into them. A few moments later, the initial shock died down and Brianna just felt like she was in a rollercoaster without the loops or drops. She now opened her eyes and tried to look for the dragon, and she could swear she saw a flame right before they turned a corner and stopped in front of one of many small doors in the wall. Most of the doors had intricate metal designs on them and so did this one, flowers made of silver and brass twinkling in the faint light the creature's lamp provided. Claire handed him the key and he used it on a lock that was hard to recognise between the flowers. When he turned the key, the flowers seemed to shrivel and wilt as the door parted in the middle, making way to a room the size of a broom closet, filled with piles and piles of gold and silver coins.

Claire pulled a leather wallet out of her purse and started dropping handfuls of coins into it. The wallet must've been enchanted, Brianna noticed, there was no way a normal one could hold that much metal. After a few moments of standing awestruck by the door, Claire rose and stood next to her. "Thank you," she said to the creature. "We're ready to return."

The thought of the return trip made Brianna's stomach turn, so she popped the bitter root into her mouth before bravely stepping back into the trolley.

"How do you have so much money?" She asked when they were back on solid ground.

"It's not much, in the wizarding community," Claire told her. "Most of it is from my uncle Lamb, he was a very successful curse breaker. Some of it's from my father's job at the ministry, some of it's my own, I used to work as a magical healer."

Brianna nodded. This made sense for her mother. She would have to dwell on the subject of curse breaking later.

"So both grandpa and uncle Lamb were wizards? What about grandma?"

Claire shook her head. "She was a Muggle, like Frank. It's pretty common, really, inter marriage. The wizarding community is fairly small."

Brianna nodded.

"Where to next?"

Claire smiled, her eyes almost shining with excitement.

"Well, I thought you would like to find your wand," she said, holding Brianna's hand in hers. She led her to the least impressive shop in the alley - a dusty little storefront filled with disorganized boxes. The sign above the door said Ollivanders in old, golden letters.

The man inside seemed like an absolute lunatic, silver hair surrounding his face and a twinkling smile directed at Brianna. He seemed to talk mostly to himself and not to her, but it didn't surprise Claire so Brianna didn't say anything about it either.

A silver measuring tape measured all kinds of lengths of Bree's body while his owner walked about the store. He seemed confused with her mother, sending not-so-discreet looks her way.

"Mr Ollivanders, what's wrong?" Claire finally asked.

"I remember every wand I ever sold," he said, "and I can't seem to remember yours. Care to tell me?"

Claire looked around the store, confirmed it was empty and then spoke. "Dragon heartstrings and pine, eleven inches, flexible," she listed.

"Claire Beauchamp! I thought you died in the war!"

"I'd like to keep the general population thinking that, Ollivander, if you don't mind," she said, a kind smile on her lips, but her tone was stern.

Brianna didn't have time to ponder on the new information as she was presented with a box by the man. "Cedarwood, unicorn hair, nine inches and a half, rigid," he announced. Brianna



gripped the short wand and waved it around, causing boxes to come crashing down from their shelves.

"It appears not," the man noted. He quickly offered her another wand, and another, and by the seventh one both him and the store were in an extreme sense of distress.

"Fine, but it's mostly a guess," he mumbled to himself and offered Bree another box.

"Ebony and phoenix feather, ten and a half, flickable," he listed and Brianna gave a practiced wave.

It immediately felt different. She felt a breeze running through her hair, and the wand emitted red sparks.

"We found it!" The man announced proudly. While her mother tended to the payment, Brianna took the chance to wave the wand around some more, a warm tingle climbing to the edges of her fingers.

Brianna knew she had to keep her questions - mainly, why did her mother fake her own death - until they returned to the cottage, but the wonders around her kept her busy. She was bored by the cloak fittings, but immensely enjoyed buying books and stationary, and she loved the pet shop, in which she spent over an hour getting to know the owls, cats, frogs, rats and other animals she didn't recognize, before leaving with a long eared owl she decided to name Owlfonzo.

By the time they floored home, she was too tired and motion sick to speak. Bree and Owlfonzo quickly went up to her room, and he cooed at her as she fed him some oats before crawling into bed.

The summer went by quickly after that. Claire subscribed them to The Daily Prophet, a magical newspaper, and Owlfonzo brought it to them every morning. Through it, Brianna learned a lot about the magical world - the ministry tax on flu connection was increased and so she learned about the ministry and the network, reporters and interviewees presented as a "former gryffindor" taught her about the houses and their significance. She was mostly fascinated by quidditch, but her mother refused to get her a broom.

She also refused to speak of the war.

Brianna hoped that before going to school, her mother would open up to her, if only to tell her what secrets she had to keep. In the meantime, she had most of her conversations with Owlfonzo.

## Socks and Stories

"You have to tell me the truth."

Claire didn't move her head, her gaze fixed on the road.

"Fine," Brianna huffed. "I'll just find out. I'm sure everyone in school will be excited to tell me everything once I tell them my mother is Claire Beauchamp."

Claire pulled over to a gas station without a word. It was just after dawn, but neither of them could sleep that night, so they decided to leave early for London.

Owlfonzo hooted in his cage, upset about not getting his proper beauty sleep on solid ground.

"She's going to tell me everything by the time we get there," Brianna assured the owl. He didn't respond.

A few silent moments later, Claire returned with two styrofoam cups. She handed Brianna one, and the girl could smell hot chocolate.

"Resorting to bribery?" Brianna asked sarcastically.

"I just thought you could use something warm for a story like this," Claire said, evidently tired. She rubbed her eyes and took a big gulp of coffee.

"Right. I told you about my uncle Lamb," she started. Brianna nodded.

"You must've guessed by now he didn't actually die of a heart attack. He died... he was exploring a castle in Ireland for what he suspected to be a poltergeist. Instead, he found an orb containing a prophecy. This is the standard way of keeping prophecies around, mind. He was going to transfer it to the department of mysteries in the ministry, so he kept it in a case at home, just for one night. This was Christmas Eve, so I was there on holiday from my seventh year of Hogwarts.

That night, masked wizards broke into our home to take the orb. He told me to hide, and he fought them. I'll never forgive myself for not helping him."

"Mama, it wasn't your fault. You couldn't even do magic legally out of Hogwarts." Brianna placed a comforting hand on her mother's, who's eyes were closed in concentration. After years of distant relationship, her mom was finally opening up - Bree could almost not contain herself, but she knew she had to stay silent for her mom to finish the story.

"This next part is a secret. Any of it, actually. You can't mention uncle Lamb, anything I'm about to tell you. Understood?"

Brianna nodded.

"They knocked him to the floor with a killing curse. While his body was falling, he broke the orb, and all of us heard the prophecy.

I won't repeat it, but it told us all about the outcomes of a war we didn't yet know was coming. This was the second wizarding war.

We learned George the second was to win this battle, break the statute of secrecy and install some form of magical class in control of the new world.

I escaped the house after the men left and ran to your father."

"I don't want to hear about him."

"I'm not talking about Frank, Brianna. Back then I was dating your real father."

"Yeah, I know, Frank said he took you in while you were pregnant and I wasn't born until 1946, which is after the war."

Claire sighed. "You have the memory of an elephant," she said. "It's relevant to the story, just listen."

Brianna took another sip of her hot chocolate. It was growing cold, and Claire waved her wand towards it to reheat it.

"As I was saying, I told your father everything. We decided that to save as many lives as we could, we would infiltrate the forces of The Bonnie Prince - there weren't any forces yet, but we knew he would be the one to stand up to George. We thought that if we stopped the other side from organising, George would win quickly and we would spare those who would die in battle."

"Why not just spend your time trying to strengthen the Prince's forces?"

"We knew we would lose."

"You didn't lose."

"We didn't know that."

"So you fought against the statue of secrecy?"

"It was against our beliefs, but yes, we did. Eventually it became evident that the prophecy was wrong, and George's side began to lose. By then, I was pregnant with you. Your father and I faked my death, and I ran to America, married Frank and had you."

"Why didn't he come?"

"Your father... he felt duty to his men. He couldn't abandon them, knowing they would be walking to their death.

After the final battle, he was captured and marked a war criminal. They put him in Azkaban, that's magical jail. A few years later he died while trying to escape. This was when I stopped hoping to return to him, so I took up medicine and tried to make a life for all of us in Boston."

Brianna took a moment to consider.

"Why did we return to England then? You're a war criminal, Mama. Why didn't we stay?"

"That's... that's a story for another day," Claire decided. "We have to get to London in time."

"Just promise me you didn't commit any more war crimes."

"I didn't. Nor do I intend to, in the future."

Brianna nodded.

"Can you forgive me?"

The insecurity in her voice surprised Brianna. Her mother was always so confident.

"You're my mom, I don't really have a choice," she said. Claire's face fell and so did one tear from her eye.

"I'm not upset with you for what you did, Mama. It's clear you meant well. Just... I wish you'd have told me."

Claire nodded. "No more secrets between us," she vowed.

Brianna interlaced her pinky finger with her mother's. "No secrets."

"I'm not going to run head first into a brick wall!"

"I'll do it first, then. Look closely."

Her mother, once again glamourised into someone unrecognisable, took Brianna's luggage and started running towards the wall between the ninth and tenth platforms. Brianna looked in horror, preparing herself for the inevitable sound of luggage and an owl hitting the ground before her mother does, but to her surprise when coming in contact with the wall Claire just kept running as if it was a mere corridor.

Once her mother was out of sight, Brianna took a deep breath. She followed her mother into fire before, the flu powder did little to calm her then. She can follow her into a wall.

And so she ran, narrowly avoiding a pair of tourists, and braced herself for impact. Instead, she felt like walking through a dark doorway. When she opened her eyes to the other side she

was glad her mother was there to hold her hand, otherwise she would've thought this was a coma induced dream.

An old steam train, red and large with smoke coming out of the locomotive. Frank used to play Train Station with her, he got her historically accurate trains and all, of course he did. Brianna shook the memory away.

The scene around them was crowded. Claire clung to Brianna as much as the other way around, her eyes darting from one bad attempt at Muggle fashion to another. Brianna was scanning the children - she would have to find someone to share a cabin with, the book she got about magical history of the 20th century would hardly keep her for the long ride to Scotland.

Claire gave a glance to her watch. "Right. We should get you on board in time to have your pick at the cabins," she said, her voice distant.

Brianna made a move to take the luggage from her mother, but she didn't budge.

"What's wrong, Mama?"

Claire carefully placed the owl cage on the ground and wrapped Brianna in a hug.

"I'm going to miss you," she whispered into Brianna's auburn hair.

"It's just four months," Brianna reminded her mother, awkwardly rubbing her hand up and down the woman's back.

Claire straightened up and gently tapped the tears on her cheeks. "Right. Well. On the train you go, we can't have it leave without you," she said, once again calm.

Brianna gave her another quick squeeze before grabbing everything.

"You have enough socks?" Claire asked, moving a cluster of curls to its place behind Bree's ear.

"Every single sock that I own is in the suitcase," Brianna calmed her.

"Wand?"

Brianna nodded, smiling. It wasn't like Claire to fuss so much about her going to school.

Claire dug into her purse and brought out a small pouch of coins. "Get yourself some candies on the train. Write to me. I love you!"

"Love you too, Mama," Bree said, already walking. Did her mother's first show of emotions have to be in front of her future classmates?

Brianna climbed into the train and walked through several full cabins before finding one with a curly boy who seemed as nervous as she was. She slid the doors open.

"First year?" She asked. The boy nodded.

"May I join you?"

"Welcome," the boy said, and Brianna noticed a strange accent.

"French?" She said, setting her belongings down.

The boy nodded and reached his hand forward. "I'm Fergus. What's your name?"

# Friends and Frogs

## Chapter Notes

I changed the fic title to be more indicative of what's inside, also because some plot points changed. The story is plotted up until the middle of Bree's second year - stick around to find out what happens :)

Brianna was setting out the things she needed for the ride - some water, a shawl, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and her book - when she and Fergus heard another knock on the door. On the other side of it was a blond, short boy, starting at them nervously.

"Come in!" Fergus called to him. The boy's shoulders slumped with relief and he joined them in the cabin.

"Ian Murray," he introduced himself. "That's me, I mean."

Brianna was happy to see someone was more awkward than herself. "I'm Brianna Randall," she said, "and this is Fergus..."

"Mackenzie," Fergus completed, his French accent making the name sound novel and new.

"Ye're a Mackenzie? No way! My grandma was a Mackenzie - she ran off to marry my grandsire, the family wasna all too pleased... her name was Ellen. Do ye have an aunt Ellen mebbe?"

Brianna was in awe of the boy's sudden rise in confidence, but Fergus replied in kind.

"I don't know," he responded truthfully. "I'm French, I grew up in a brothel in Paris. I don't have any money or magical relatives, so Beauxbâtons didn't want to take me. I thought I just won't be a wizard, but then MacDubh came - he's the groundskeeper at Hogwarts - and said I could live with him and come to Hogwarts. I didn't have a last name, so he gave me his," the boy concluded.

"Oh, I ken MacDubh!" Ian exclaimed. "My brother Jamie was always coming to his hut when he was at Hogwarts."

"Do you have many siblings?"

Brianna surprised herself with the amount of envy in her voice.

"Aye, am the youngest of six. I dinna tell ye this, but at home everyone calls me Young Ian," he said, a bit of embarrassment in his voice.

"What about you? How did an American lass find her way here?"

Brianna took a deep breath. She practiced her story in front of a mirror just this morning.

"My father is a Muggle and my mom's a witch, and she's from England. She came to Boston to marry him, but they got a divorce, so I'm here now."

Fergus placed a comforting hand on Brianna's shoulder. Ian was a bit shocked at the concept of divorce, but it took him no longer than a few seconds to change the subject.

"What house do ye think ye're going te? My Mam's side of the family all went te Gryffindor, but my Da was a Hufflepuff. Most of us are gryffindors like Ma," he concluded.

It took Brianna but a moment to compose her answer. "Well, my Mama was in Ravenclaw, but I don't think we're very similar, so I don't know. What about you, Fergus?"

"Mr. MacDubh isn't much of a talker. He didn't tell me about the houses. I think he was in that... door le griffon that you said, but I'm not sure."

Ian was happy for the chance to explain everything to Fergus, and Brianna relished the chance to hear an actual magical boy's opinions on the houses - biased as they might be.

The hour has passed pleasantly as Brianna and Ian found another common subject, quidditch, and explained it all to Fergus in great detail. Brianna was glad she managed to convince her Mama to get her a book about it - she decided on A Play by Play Guide to The Chadley Cannons - so she could take an active part in the conversation, and she was happy to note Ian was just as frustrated as her about the rule forbidding first years from joining their house teams.

By then, a lady went by their cabin with a sweets cart. Brianna pulled out the coins Claire gave her and resumed to completely ignore Ian's thoughtful recommendations in favour of buying a bit of everything that spiked her and Fergus's curiosity, which was almost everything. The sandwiches forgotten, the trio set to discover the new world of magical delicacies. They once again ignored Ian's warnings, and as Brianna found herself with a mouthful of medicine tasting jelly beans, Fergus almost puked at the bitter flavour of earwax. Ian found it all very amusing, and the other two vowed off the candy for good, in favour of the chocolate frogs and the cards that came with them. Ian's joke connecting the fondness of frogs to Fergus's French origin fell on deaf ears as the two tore through the packages, waving to the little moving characters on the cards and chasing the chocolates around the cabin.

Once the bellyaches and the sugar rushes wore off, it was time to change into the uniforms, and Brianna left the cabin in search of one void of boys. The one right next to her own fulfilled that requirement. It had three ladies. One had smooth, straw-colored hair and was already wearing her uniform, and she was helping a brown haired girl into hers. The other was a tiny, mousey haired girl, who stuttered a welcome at Brianna while trying to figure out her shirt buttons.

"I'm m-Mary," the little girl introduced herself after Brianna buttoned up her shirt for her.

"Hi Mary, I'm Brianna," she said, getting her skirt out of her bag. "You?"

The straw blond answered first. "Marsali Mackimmie," she said.

"And I'm Lizzie," said the third one, straightening her skirt.

"Why did ye sit wi' the boys and not wi' us?" Marsali inquired.

"I didn't know you were here," Brianna justified herself. Lizzie came to her aid against the shirt buttons and she continued, "I still have a ton of candies left, you should come over once we're all dressed."

"A good peace offering," Marsali declared. "Ye're welcome to be our friend, Brianna."

"Honoured," Brianna answered with a smile. "Thanks, Lizzie. Shall we?"

The train stopped and the merry bunch left for the platform. Brianna felt excitement bubbling in her belly, but she reasoned that it could just as well be the ten chocolate frogs, so she could stay calm and hold Mary's trembling hand.

They were pretty confused until Fergus joyfully shouted, "Milord!"

"First years over here," bellowed the man Fergus referred to. He was tall enough to make Brianna's neck hurt by looking at him. His hair was red and long, connecting to a long, messy red beard. He wore a brown Barret over it. His eyes, the only detail of his face not obscured by hair, were piercing blue, as he stared at Brianna.

"I'm a first year," she said, quietly.

"Come here, then," said the man, who crouched down to hug Fergus and then turned to her. "Dinna fash, lassie. Ye're in my charge now."

Brianna nodded. The man resumed to greet every single first year, and then they all followed his lantern into a row of little boats.

Fergus joyfully climbed into the boat with MacDubh, and as Mary refused to part with Brianna, they climbed into a boat with Lizzie and Marsali, Ian reluctantly resolving to make new friends, a brown haired Scottish boy and a short black girl.

Brianna couldn't close her eyes nor lift her jaw due to the awe she felt at the view that was unfolding around her. The water was calm and dark as a mirror in a dark room, reflecting the starry night above them. The lake was too large for Brianna to see where it ended and the ground started, but as the boat was pulled forward in a calming pace of magic, the lack of immediate ground didn't terrify her as it otherwise would.

The most amazing detail was, of course, the castle. Being Frank's daughter, Brianna saw endless pictures of castles from around the world, but never one that wasn't at least a little affected by the centuries past, and never one with so many warm, twinkling lights in the windows. Just the sight of it was enough to ward the chill of the night off her bones.

"Mind yer heid," MacDubh warned them, and the girls bended down to the boat, crossing a stone ceiling into a large underground dock. The boats docked themselves and within the moment, MacDubh was there to help the short and trembling children off of them. He led them down a long corridor into what seemed to be a small, underused entrance hall, where a stern looking woman in green velvet robes was waiting.

"Welcome to Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry," she said, her voice calm and measured, immediately silencing all of the chit chat around the room. "I'm professor Cameron, the professor of transfiguration and the heid of the Slytherin house. I'll come to collect ye all in a few moments for the sorting ceremony."

Once the witch left the room, nervous chatter rose to fill the silence. Ian immediately told everyone who would hear that Jocasta, the professor, was his aunt, until Fergus asked if it meant she'll want him in Slytherin.

"What do y-you think happens in the s-sorting ceremony?" Mary nervously asked.

"Ye probably have to preform a spell," Marsali suggested. "Tis a magical school after all."

"But I don't know any s-spells!" Mary seemed close to tears, and Brianna grabbed her hand again in encouragement.

"Neither do any of us," she said, sending Marsali a formidable look. "They'll probably teach us first."

"Ye only have to wear a hat, dinna be silly," Ian interferred.

"No way, that's too easy," Marsali defended her stance.

There was no conclusion to the debate, as professor Cameron re-entered the room. The first years sorted into a long line and she marched them into the great hall.

The hall, in Brianna's opinion, was indeed great. The ceiling reflected the clear night sky, candles were floating around, and the tables were full of people expecting them.

The professor stationed them in front of an old, battered witches hat. It seemed at least a thousand years old, and so Brianna was quite startled when one of the tears at the front opened and the hat started to sing.

"Since when do hats sing?" She whispered to Fergus in front of her.

"It's a magical world, Bree," he whispered back, and motioned towards the bickering Ian and Marsali - who insisted they might still do a spell.

The hat's voice was croaky and unpleasant, and all she did was describe the houses in

rhymes. Brianna sighed with relief when it stopped.

Next, professor Cameron started calling the names of the students. One by one, they sat on the stool with the hat on, and a few seconds later, the hat bellowed the name of one of the houses. In response, the mentioned house table erupted with claps and cheers, and the student joined them at the table.

The first student Brianna recognized was Lizzie, who got into Hufflepuff, and after her Mary who went to Gryffindor. Next was Fergus, who was ecstatic to be called to the Gryffindor table as well, Marsali who was declared a Slytherin, and Ian who followed his siblings footsteps to Gryffindor.

Brianna was becoming antsy with anticipation. All of her friends were sorted and they were only on the letter M. A few more students were sorted and Brianna noticed that MacDubb was in the hall, sending her an encouraging nod. She smiled, and just then her name was called.

She all but ran to sit on the stool, and as the hat dropped over her eyes, covering the hall with darkness, she was startled to hear another voice in her own head.

"You'd make a fine Ravenclaw, I'm certain," said the voice. "Although that doesn't drive you, does it? The thirst for knowledge? You are a curious little mind, incredibly intelligent, but you'd rather have a more... hands on approach. Alright. GRYFFINDOR!"

Slightly deafened by the hat's shout, Brianna stumbled to the Gryffindor table with a huge grin on her face to join her friends. Within a few students - Wakefield to Ravenclaw, Whelan to Slytherin - and a short speech from headmaster Tryon, Brianna and her friends got the chance to stuff their faces with food and were afterwards led through a moving, talking picture of a fat lady to a warm and inviting common room, where she bid Fergus and Ian good night, and up a staircase to a bedroom with four maroon colored four-poster beds. Each one of them had a girl's luggage waiting under it. Brianna quickly found her bed, changed into pyjamas and barely managed to hear the other girls's names - Phaedra and Fiona - before dropping into bed and drifting off to sleep.



## Like a Bird

The first week had passed Brianna, Fergus and Ian by in a whirlwind. On the first day of classes they met their head of the house, a grumpy and greying charms professor named Murtagh Fraser.

They also met other professors: the young and enthusiastic professor Grey for defence against the dark arts, the motherly professor Fitzgibbons for potions, professor Geillis Duncan in astronomy, professor Graham in herbology and professor Mackenzie, an old wizard with crooked legs Brianna thought her mother could easily fix, in history of magic, the subject she expected most keenly.

Between getting lost on their way to and from classes, the one time all three of them forgot the Gryffindor password and had to go looking for Mary and the potions incident never to be mentioned again save for Marsali's taunts of Ian, Brianna didn't have the time to miss her mother. She did write to her the first day, after struggling for a whole hour trying to find the owlery where Owlfonzo was kept, but didn't hear back until Friday.

Brianna was still getting used to the whole owls-coming-down-at-breakfast routine when Owlfonzo landed by her, spreading his wings with self importance and knocking over a bowl of cereal. Brianna couldn't find it in herself to be upset with her feathery friend, and let him feast on a stripe of bacon while untangling the letter off his leg.

*My dearest Bree,*

*This week has been the longest time I've ever spent apart from you. The only balm to my mother hen-ly soul was reading through your letter again and again, confirming you are happy and learning and safe.*

*I was so glad to hear you got sorted into Gryffindor! Your head of house, Murtagh, was a dear friend to me - though you are not to remind him of it, of course. This was your biological father's house as well. I'm glad to see you are taking after him.*

*As for me, you guessed correctly: I'm working on getting my doctor's permit in England, and I intend to work at least part time in the nearest hospital. This keeps me busy, although not as much as spending quality time with my dearest daughter.*

*I debated against myself in length whether or not I should tell you this, but you deserve to know: Frank has called. He said that he missed you and asked me to send you over for Christmas. I'm negotiating to see if his words are truthful and not a ploy to keep you away from magic, but in case I ensure he does indeed intend to return you to me come new year's eve, the decision is up to you. Frank had said some hurtful things, but he loves you dearly. He urged me to ask you. Of course, you don't have to give your answer now.*

*Enclosed are three chocolate frogs. I'm hoping the cards will be rare and the taste will make you smile.*

*Love you to the moon and back,*

*Mama.*

Brianna didn't notice her eyes becoming teary while reading, but a first year from across the hall, who was just getting up to leave, certainly did.

"Little crybaby misses her mommy?" He asked, snatching the letter.

"Give it back, Bonnet," Brianna said, blinding white rage pumping through her. This letter was personal. It had details of her mother's past. She couldn't let him read it.

"Stop it, Bonnet," Fergus chimed in.

"Or what, froggy boy? You'll bring the only man in the castle too stupid to be a wizard to tell me off?"

"He'll kick yer shins," Ian said, rising unexpectedly behind the blond, sneering boy to kick him to the floor. He retrieved the letter and handed it to Bree inconspicuously, lending his hand to help Bonnet rise. "Now, I'll thank ye not te mess wi' my friends again, yer heid of house is my auntie, so we'll see who she listens te."

Bonnet almost ran out of the hall, but Brianna was still shaken, gripping the letter to her heart. Fergus had his hand on her shoulder in an instant.

"Do you want to tell us what's in it?" He asked. "Not here."

Brianna nodded and the three walked out of the great hall and sat next to a tree by the lake. Brianna's shaking subsided by the time they arrived. "Thank you both," she said once they were settled. "I'm sorry he called MacDubh stupid." Fergus nodded. "The thanks is for the brave young Ian, a true Gryffindor," he jested, and Ian made a face detailing exactly what he thought about the Young title.

"It's my dad," Brianna started. "Well, maybe my dad."

"You said he was a Muggle," Fergus promoted.

"He is. I didn't tell you, but... I didn't know about magic until I got my letter, you know? Grew up as Muggle as they come, and later I learned that was dad's condition for marrying Mama."

"No magic? That's ruthless," Ian whispered.

"He... he didn't want to raise a witch. And since I'm a witch, he didn't want me anymore. So Mama and I left him, but now he asked that I come to him for Christmas. I just don't know

what it means, you know?"

Once she finished blurting it all and wiped off her tears, she noticed the boys were still sitting in silence, playing with the blades of the grass. Fergus was tapping his thigh with his fingers, a gesture Brianna learned to connect to deep thinking.

"I don't know what to do about Christmas," he admitted, "but I know what can make you feel better."

And so, the three strode to MacDubh's cabin.

"Ach, lad, I didn't expect ye till noon! No, dinna fash, come on in the three of ye." MacDubh, who was busy tending to his garden, sensed the group's delicate situation like a cat senses illness in a friend and ushered them all inside. Said inside was rather shabby but had a homey feel to it. A burning hearth, a lumpy bed and a smaller mattress underneath it, a little couch, a table and a closet with a dark wooden broom leaning on it were all the man had. Nothing to decorate the walls, Brianna noticed. Yet, Ian mentioned his oldest brother coming here. This can't be a new residence.

"I'm afraid I have nothing but firewhiskey te offer ye, and ye're a wee bit too young," he said as they settled into the lumpy couch in front of the hearth. Fergus added a few logs to the fire and MacDubh set a kettle on a hook above it. The man pulled a chair from the dining table and set himself next to the children. Fergus started talking immediately.

"Brianna's dad invited her for Christmas but Steven Bonnet stole her letter! Ian took it back, but she could use some guidance, Milord, so we came here."

MacDubh furrowed his brows in thought.

"Once again, slower, lad. Are ye Brianna?"

Brianna nodded, trying to make herself smaller between her friends. Fergus didn't say it would be a visit to the counselor.

"What a name for a wee lass."

"If you have a problem - "

"Dinna fash, lassie, let me hear yer story. Who is that father of yers?"

Brianna didn't want to talk, until something climbed from the floor into her lap. The something was an exceptionally fat cat, grey all over with twinkling green eyes.

"Ye caught the fancy of Adso," MacDubh noted. "That's no easy fit. Mebbe he felt ye needed the comforting."

With the purring mass in her lap, Brianna did feel comforted.

"I'm sorry fer what I said about yer name, lass. Will ye like te tell me what has you distressed?"

Had it not been for the kindness in his eyes and the genuine smile hiding beneath his mustache, Brianna would've held her tongue, but with another encouraging purr from Adso she started telling her story - her Muggle upbringing, the rejection, the offer, even her suspicions about Frank's bad treatment of her mother.

"Sounds like he isna a verra good father to ye, a nighean. I understand if ye still crave his approval. I still crave that from my own Da, and he's been gone since I was yer age. But... if all ye need is a father in yer life te be proud of ye and help ye when ye're down, ye don't have te go all the way te Boston, Brianna. I'll do that for ye, so ye don't return to a man who does'na accept ye."

He didn't even take the time to think before offering that. Brianna was stunned for a moment and looked up to his face. There it was again, the sincere glint in his eyes, the squaring of the jaw, and she knew he meant it.

"I might still give Frank a chance," she said. "But I'll keep your offer in mind. If he misbehaves."

"It will still stand. I don't have bairns of my own by birth, but I have this lad," he affectionately ruffled Fergus's curls, "and I'll be a Da for whoever else needs me."

As much as Brianna was excited for history of magic, she might as well have been indifferent to it with how she counted down the seconds for flying lessons to start. Not only was MacDubh the instructor, and she could use another chance to take her measure of the man, she has been fascinated by flying even when it was only for planes and birds. The prospect of soaring through the skies with nothing but a glorified branch and her own wiles to guide her filled Brianna with unimaginable joy. Ian, while more experienced than herself, was not any less thrilled. His older siblings, the twins Janet and Michael, who were in fifth year, were the beaters for the Gryffindor team, and Ian was for once proud of having them.

Pulling the anxious Fergus and Mary after them, Brianna and Ian made their way to the quidditch pitch, where two neat rows of brooms were waiting. The gryffindors found their place by the brooms as the Slytherin students trickled in and filled the opposing line. Brianna gave Marsali an excited wave and she returned in kind. Both girls sent subtle looks to the boy who stood at the edge of the Slytherin line. The embarrassment and anger Brianna felt at Bonnet's assault were still raw.

Bonnet was smug, leaning on his broom and telling everyone who would listen, who wasn't a great many people, how he was born on a broom, how his flying saved his life on one occasion, how he would certainly be allowed on his house team although he was a first year. A further glance towards him told Brianna he was thinner than he should be for his height, he had a scar near his eye and his clothes were ill fitting. It wasn't the equally strong nemesis Brianna imagined, but she remembered his insult to MacDubh and wasn't going to forgive.

Ian was bouncing in his spot when they noticed MacDubh above them, flying in circles and loops above their heads on his dark wooden broom.

He landed to a class of cheering children. With a theatrical bow he stood in front of them, and the class began.

The lass had talent, this much was clear since the moment she stood by a broom. It was itching to latch onto her fingers, and at her command of "up!" It jumped to her. When instructed, she floated but a few feet above the ground, immediately confident, and floated around her friends, correcting their posture without being instructed.

Once even the most squeamish students managed a low float, MacDubh tossed Brianna a Quaffle and let her lead the braver ones in a basic game of catch. This wasn't a random decision - MacDubh saw Murtagh and Jocasta walking together towards the pitch. He knew it was forbidden for first years to play, but he wanted them to see the options they had for next year.

Brianna was screaming with delight after making a full barrel roll and catching the Quaffle when another broom came sweeping in her direction. MacDubh felt like the world slowed down as he gripped his own broom and raced up towards Brianna, who was swirling around in the air, urgently gripping her broom and yelling profanities she would otherwise earn detention for. She caught the broom with both of her hands but it continued to swerve and MacDubh noticed the culprit, a Slytherin, holding his wand and concentrating on Brianna. He could run him to the ground in seconds, but he was busy reaching for Brianna. With herculean effort, the lass lifted herself and managed to lay a knee on the broom. She was so close to remounting it and MacDubh almost calmed down, but another violent jerk of it sent her towards the ground.

MacDubh was only half aware of the screams on the ground, three of Murtagh's levitating charms missing the target and young Ian rushing shakily towards them. He dived quickly, as he trained himself to do so many years ago, and caught her just as she was making contact with the ground. He slowly lowered her, and the other teachers were around them in seconds.

"He took my letter," Brianna mumbled, the pain of a broken arm making her dizzy. "Bonnet. I was just flying."

"Dinna fash, a nighean. I'm wi' ye."

Brianna woke up to a pile of chocolate frogs and the worried faces of Fergus and Ian. A look around her told her she was in a hospital of sorts, though the potions on the cart next to her indicated it was still in the magical world.

"What happened?"

"You fell off your broom," said Fergus, eyeing the pile of chocolates. She nodded her permission and he dug in.

"She dinna fall! Twat that prick Bonnet, we're going to get him - "

"No," Brianna stopped him. "Not we. Me."

Ian nodded and then continued. "At least I think professor Fraser was impressed by yer resolve te stay on. Ye have a good chance in the team next year, I think."

Brianna smiled. She did like flying.

"MacDubh saved me, right? The details are a little fuzzy."

Fergus nodded with his mouth full of chocolate. "Milord was there in a second! He flies like a bird!"

Bird.

Mama.

"Ian, can you get Owlfonzo? Fergus, do you have a piece of paper and a pen?"

# Christmas

## Chapter Notes

I jumped forward to the part I wanted to tell you about, because it's my story and I can. Don't worry, we'll get back to Bonnet soon.

Two announcements:

1. The next chapter will be in a week, because I didn't see my boyfriend in six weeks and now we have a week together so I won't be doing anything else
2. The whole story is plotted! We'll have themes and foreshadowing now! I'm not just going off randomly. Hope you'll like what I have in store ☺

Brianna added travel by portkey to her list of achievements, much to her belly's reluctance to cooperate.

Her wand was left in a safe in Hogwarts, as you had to get a wand permit in the states - you didn't for a gun, Brianna mused, but eyebrows certainly would be raised had the eleven year old had been seen with one, as opposed to it's more potent alternative.

With a hook seemingly taking place in her stomach and forgoing it's release, Brianna bent over in an alleyway just a few blocks from her old home.

"I'll drop you off, and then if you need to get me, tap on this," Claire, dressed in a deep green poodle dress, reminded her anxious daughter. She demonstrated once more the use of the bi-directional mirror, gave her brave daughter a fortifying hug, then started walking towards the house.

Frank and his Candy or Sandy or Cindy were waiting on the front porch, waving enthusiastically. Claire couldn't help but notice the man seemed much more put together than the one she left just six months ago. He was cleanly shaved, sported new glasses that fit his face better, and seemed to really fill his body, not crouching down to minimise the space he was taking. Part of her was happy for the man who was her saviour all those years ago, but another part couldn't help but be angry. How dare he move on so quickly. She knew he didn't exactly move on, that he had Mandy in his life for years now, but still.

The mother bear in her had another grievance. How dare he be so happy without his daughter?

"We would've picked you up from the airport!" Frank quickly came off his porch to grab Brianna's suitcase.

"We didn't use it," her Mama said, her voice as quiet and as cold as water freezing into ice on the first really cold night of the year. The warm, almost clingy demeanor Brianna was growing fond of was gone. Here was her mother as she was for most of her childhood. She really did hate Frank.

"What did you tell Brandy?"

"Claire, her name is Sandy, please show some respect - "

Claire cut his speech sharply. "You didn't."

Frank let out a sigh and nodded.

"Told her that you were a massive bitch and that Bree was accepted into a prodigy international school."

"You said good things about me?" Brianna asked, surprised. "That's a first in a while."

Frank grimaced. "I was hoping we could put it all behind us. Have a fresh start."

Brianna nodded. "This is your last chance," she clarified.

"How did you become so much like your mother so quickly? My baby girl."

"Still a witch," she reminded him.

"Not next to Sandy, please."

Brianna gave her mother a hug as large as she managed, and saw some of the color her cheeks lost after seeing Frank return.

"I'm a phone call away," her Mama reminded her and tapped on her pocket where the enchanted mirror safely resided. Brianna nodded again and followed Frank and Randy inside.

Her old room was still there, though it was stripped of all that was her's. It was nothing but a guest room now: a neatly made twin bed by the window, a linen closet, they even hanged a generic painting of the ocean that served as the only decoration in the room. The only thing left in there that was Brianna's was an old puzzle patterned rug.

"You must be exhausted from the flight!" The frail blonde cooed at her. "Let's get you settled, and then if you want we can go Christmas shopping, just us girls!"

Brianna promised herself to be kind to the lady, but her voice was squeaky and she wasn't Claire.

"Whatever you want, Andy," she said with her fakest smile. Sandy made a sound of a wounded animal, but then gave Brianna a curt nod and left the room.

Brianna did go on a shopping trip with this fake new mother. She had a childish necklace, a long white sweater and a crimson scarf to show for it. Sandy had interrogated her boarding school and Brianna told her what she could: the houses, the location in a medieval castle (Sandy filled for herself that it was rebuilt), the giant library, the friends. It did help the facade that her best friends were of different nationalities.

It was just a day later that Frank woke her up all excited and told her that he got a tree and they were to decorate it.

"Frank, it's so early," she whined.

"Please call me Daddy," he pleaded.

"I would if you hadn't disowned me," she returned, completing the exchange that had become a routine over just under twenty four hours. Brianna wondered which one of them would budge first.

"Listen, today is really important for Sandy and me, okay? I really need you to just... be yourself with us. Your old self. Where's that little girl who loved debating against me that the Jacobites had a just cause?"

Brianna rolled her eyes. "You kicked her out, remember?"

"I don't know why you would come here if you intend to treat me like the enemy," he said.

This calmed Brianna down.

"Right. I promised you a chance."

She got dressed and came downstairs. Sandy was waiting with waffles, milkshakes and a



warm smile.

"I don't like milkshakes anymore," Brianna informed her. How could she, after her birthday? "Thank you for breakfast though," she quickly added, and avoided the "Dandy" at the edge of her tongue.

The odd mismatched group of people trying so hard to be a family sat down to eat. Frank talked about his work and Brianna didn't listen, and for once everything felt normal.

They had just finished clearing out the table and setting out the decoration box when the doorbell rang. The adults sprung to answer it, leaving Brianna to untangle the Christmas lights. A moment later Frank returned with two strangers, and Sandy followed with a bowl of fresh fruit and mugs of steaming coffee.

"Brianna, these are Dan and Francine from the adoption agency," Frank said cheerfully.

"They came to evaluate your Daddy and new Mommy and see if we are fit to raise another child." His voice, saccharin and fake, was enough to make Brianna's stomach turn even before registering the condescending way he spoke - she wasn't five - or his words.

"Adoption?" She repeated, her bottom lip shaking with anger.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Sandy chimed in.

"Yeah. You should definitely adopt a kid, Daddy," she said, her last word stretching for half an eternity. "I'm sure you'll never abandon it."

A spell of uncomfortable silence settled on the group.

"Brianna, do you want to help me check on the cookies?" Frank said, his eyes twitching in the tell tale way of displeasure.

Brianna rose from the floor and followed him. She checked the oven.

"What the hell, Frank, there aren't any cookies in here."

"Language."

"Excuse me? Language? I think you lost your rights to educate me. Adoption, Frank, really?"

"You sound so much like your mother," he said. His venomous tone suggested this was an insult, but Brianna couldn't help but feel her chest swell with pride.

"I don't understand why you are being so difficult," he said, pointedly keeping his voice low.

Brianna spluttered. "Don't understand? Let's see, shall we, Frank? So, you had a daughter.

She adored you. She wanted to be a historian because she thought you were the greatest person in the whole world, that's how much she loved you. Then one day you just, don't want to be her dad anymore! That, for one, should be a reason. Another is that you used to beat Mama, and I'm not sure you wouldn't hit me once you knew I was old enough to keep it a secret out of shame. Then, if that wasn't enough, you invite me here to be a model daughter for your new life with Ghandi here, just for a week before you forget me again. Did you expect me to be easy? Did the whole thing go smoothly? You didn't even tell me about this plan!"

Her look turned away from him and his terrified gaze followed to see Dan standing by the kitchen island.

"You - go to your room, young lady!" Frank spluttered.

"It's in England," she said. Then she turned her gaze again, this time to drill into Sandy's grey eyes.

"None of it's your fault, Handy. I hope you can find a real family someday. I hope he doesn't beat or abandon you."

She started walking towards the enchanted mirror in her room when Frank's hand grabbed her wrist, his knuckles white.

"Bree, you're being unreasonable - "

"Get your hands off me!" She screamed. Suddenly, the heat that was building in her body,

that she considered anger, emptied itself. All of the kitchen cabinets and cupboards flew open, every bit of glass and china shattering on the floor.

Among the faces in the kitchen, Brianna's was the most terrified.

"Shit."

"Language," Frank mumbled weakly, his skin pale.

Brianna ran up the stairs and tapped the mirror urgently.

"Mama! Mama come here please! I didn't mean to! Mama, please come," Brianna didn't notice the tears that started trickling down her face.

Claire was there within five minutes, swiftly fixing plates and cups and the memories of the shocked Muggles.

"Come, Bree, we have to leave."

Back in England, Brianna swore never to return to the United States. Not only because she would face charges if she did, but because the bare thought of Frank's betrayal made her breath short and her eyes puffy.

Christmas was rather quiet after that, thankfully.

# The Surprise

## Chapter Notes

This is not my best work but I didn't know how to improve it so there it is - Brianna and her friends process Christmas and a few more things happen. The next chapter will be here tomorrow!

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

Fergus spent Christmas at Hogwarts, but other than him Brianna's whole gang huddled in one train cabin to hear all about how Frank botched his chance at being her father.

"Fergus would want to hear this, he hated that guy. He told me MacDubh offered ye his services as a Da? Wants to be yer family, that wee frog," Marsali started even before Brianna had a chance to settle down between Ian and Mary.

"I'll tell him everything later," Brianna promised and got to the story. Mary held her hand comfortingly during the hard parts, which for Brianna was the whole story.

"Dinna mind him for one second," Ian encouraged. "What a clothhead."

"He didn't even say it was your sibling! The adopted one, I mean," Lizzie was as upset as Bree.

"He's no longer interested in being my dad, that's all."

"Dinna fash about it, Brianna," Marsali interrupted. "Fer me it was a quiet Christmas, but my sister Joanie and I made ye all cookies!"

The offering and change of subject was welcomed by the group. More gifts were exchanged: Brianna got everyone books she thought they'd like on her quick trip to Diagon alley with her mom. Ian got a play-by-play analysis book on the last world championship, Marsali got potions tips and tricks, Mary got a magical poetry book that suited itself to her mood and Lizzie, a Muggle born, got the newest Sinatra record. Bree got a pack of colour pencils from Lizzie and magical color correcting paper from Marsali and Mary. Ian gave her a moving Chadley Cannons poster and a promise for another gift. The gift for Fergus, The Incomplete Guide For A Muggleborn in Hogwarts, stayed safely in her bag until they arrived.

More presents were waiting by her bed at Hogwarts, in addition to some letters from people who didn't know her address. She rushed downstairs to open everything with the boys.

First was a soft, rectangular gift wrapped in brown paper. Ian was excited to announce it was from the Murray family. Brianna tore through the paper to find a quilted blanket made from parts and scraps of fabric.

"Fergus got one too. Every Murray gets one, and when I told Ma that ye only had two parents between ye she decided to add ye to the clan. It really keeps ye warm, and every year we sit around the tree and sew in another piece. Thought ye could join one day, if ye'd like."

Brianna threw her arms around the blonde Scot, somewhat to hide her reddening cheeks.

"This is the most thoughtful gift I ever got," she said, her eyes glassy.

"So not the poster? Nea offence taken," Ian returned.

Fergus had few chances to get anyone anything, so he made the three of them bracelets from

wax strings and pretty rocks he found in the forbidden forest.

The next gift was from MacDubh. Brianna opened the lumpy package to find a roughly carved lion with her name carved on it.

"He made me a strawberry! That's not fair!" Fergus complained. Brianna held the lion close to her chest and reminded herself to find a gift for the kind man, or at the very least thank him.

It was the final note in her pile that made her shriek with happiness.

"Look! Look!" Bree huddled her friends around her to double check the note was real and not a dream.

"Rabbie MacNab, the Gryffindor quidditch captain, invited ye to the quidditch team's training until their chaser's arm is healed? Brianna, ye're the luckiest lass I ken!"

Brianna nodded. "Coming back here really makes up for Boston."

Between classes and quidditch practice, it was almost a week before Bree and Fergus made their way down to MacDubh's cabin. He was wandering on the edge of the forest, but his entire face lit up upon seeing the two and he abandoned his task, which he said was "looking fer either hoof prints or student footprints, whatever I find first".

"I've taken te keeping the cabin stocked wi' candy te convince the wee rascal te come more often," he said, rummaging through his cupboards and emerging victorious with three chocolate frogs.

"You're hiding them from me, Milord? It's in a different cupboard every time," Fergus teased. Under his thick beard, Brianna could only faintly make the shape of his smile.

"Tis hidden from me. Bad fer the teeth, in my auld age," he said, popping an entire frog into his mouth. Brianna fumbled with hers.

"So her biological father is officially le pire," Fergus said, leaving it to Brianna to explain further if she so chose.

"The worst? Really?"

"It doesn't matter anymore," Brianna cut in.

MacDubh nodded solemnly. "My offer still stands, a nighean. I'm sorry yer first Da is too daft to finish his job. Anyone would be lucky te have a daughter like ye."

Brianna opened the chocolate frog's package to avoid answering. She wondered why MacDubh was so insistent, why didn't he have kids of his own. All of those thoughts left her mind as soon as she pulled a black card out of the package. Thinking this was a rare edition card, she turned it over only to drop it in shock. MacDubh grabbed it before it hit the ground.

"Why is there a card of my - of Frank?" She asked, her voice shaken. She lifted her eyes to meet MacDubh's, which held some uncharacteristic alarm in the deep blue pools.

"Lass," he said, his voice shaking. "Is yer father Black Jack Randall?"

She gave him a confused look and he returned the card to her.

There it was again - the familiar long face, the lines over the cheeks. On closer inspection, Brianna spotted the differences. A darker shade of hair, gray eyes instead of brown, a slimmer face, a missing front tooth.

"It's not him," she said, almost whispering. Her eyes were plastered to the card as the man inside flashed her a malicious smile.

MacDubh snatched the card from her hand and threw it in the burning hearth.

"This canna be good," he mumbled.

"What does it mean, Milord?"

"Tis a warning, though I dinna ken what from." He turned his gaze to Brianna as she made a choking sound. Her tongue was inflating in her mouth rapidly. She thought this was an

allergic reaction, but quickly dismissed the thought. She had a hundred chocolate frogs before.

"Must be poisoned," MacDubh reached the same conclusion.

Without a warning, he picked the red headed girl like she weighed no more than his cat and rushed back to the castle, Fergus on his trail. Brianna was getting dizzy and could only make out the change in her surroundings after she was placed on a stiff hospital bed and had something injected to her veins that made her puke almost instantly.

"Should do the job. I'm sorry, la Fille, you'll have to just flush it out of your system, and it's not going to be pleasant." Brianna had already met Master Raymond on her last visit to the hospital wing. The short man's methods were never gentle, but always effective.

She tried to mumble a thank you but only managed to spew her sick into the bucket placed before her. She heard Fergus and MacDubh argue about who will stay to watch her, but to her relief Master Raymond kicked them both out, saying his medical attention will suffice.

Brianna spent the entire next day in the hospital wing, most of it spent complaining to everyone - her friends, the perfect who came as a part of his duty, Master Raymond - that she was missing the quidditch team's training, and that there's a game next week. No one mentioned that she wasn't officially on the team and couldn't legally participate in the match, not in her condition, and Brianna just kept hoping they'd keep her on just for that game, if not for the whole season after she proves her talent.

She didn't expect the last visitor of the day.

"So. Can't even eat candy without getting hurt?"

"Leave me alone, Bonnet. Are you upset you don't get to go to the hospital wing? I'll try to get you in, the service is top notch," she said, then stopped to puke into her bucket again. It was mostly water by now, but it didn't make it feel any better.

"Oh, I'll never be jealous of you," he said.

"Did you come in here for something?"

"Just to watch you suffer."

"Enjoy the show then," she said and puked again.

He waited a moment to see she was finished before speaking again.

"Aren't you going to get upset or something? You usually can't contain your temper."

Brianna shrugged, albeit weakly.

"You were really skinny when the year started, you never get any letters, I know you didn't come home for Christmas and your clothes are threadbare and don't fit you. I just feel sorry for you. Are you an orphan?"

"I'd like to be," the scrawny boy huffed.

"I get that feeling. My father disowned me when he found out I'm a witch."

"Both my parents left me when they found out."

A silence stretched until Brianna threw up again.

"I'm not going to be your friend, Bonnet, but I also have no interest in being your enemy. If you do want to go down that path, I'll just remind you that I have many friends here. You don't. Shouldn't be too hard to make you sorry for your choice."

Stephan Bonnet huffed and left the room. Brianna knew her friends won't let her hear the end of it - forgiving Bonnet after he took her letter and made her fall from her broom? She could almost hear Marsali calling her insane - but she finally felt right.

## Chapter End Notes

Next time: a quidditch game!

# Wings

## Chapter Summary

I only just saw that I published the last chapter twice! This is what I meant

In the following days Brianna couldn't catch a moment alone. Her friends took it upon themselves to escort her everywhere, and MacDubh seemed to be more attentive to her than usual. Bree didn't have time to worry about Bonnet or Black Jack with the upcoming quidditch match demanding every single free moment of her time. A jealous Ian followed her around ever since Rabbie MacNab stopped by to inform her professor Fraser approved her playing in the next match, not for her safety but to strategize with her, warn her about his siblings shortcomings as beaters and try to feel like it was him participating and not just watching from the stands.

Brianna just landed from her rounds around the pitch and tossed her broom to the left pile. "Bad brooms, all of them," she scoffed at the pile, that was significantly larger than the one to her right.

"Just take one of the good ones, why do you have to check every single one?" Fergus complained.

"I told you, you're free to go," she replied absentmindedly and gripped the next broom.

"Bree, you'll be fine," he tried.

"I have to be better than fine, Fergus. This is more than just a match. If I do well enough, maybe first years will be allowed in the team next year."

Ian nodded enthusiastically. "She's doing it fer kids like me."

Fergus groaned. "fine. Ian will stay. I'm going to MacDubh."

Brianna barely slept that night, and all of her roommates scorned her for tossing and turning. Eating was out of the question, and she found herself only poking at the porridge in front of her. A worried hum from Mary turned into a shriek when Owlfonzo landed next to the cooling porridge, carrying a long and slim package. Ian, on her other side, was fighting his hands to stay by his side and not join when Bree gingerly opened the package to reveal a familiar dark wooden broom. For the first time, she noticed a name carved on the side - Donas. Mary dug a note from between the discarded wrapping.

"MacDubh says to return it after the m-match," she informed Brianna. The red head turned to the professor's table to see a larger redhead nodding at her with a smile.

Fortified by the broom in her hand and vibrating with excitement, Brianna changed into her crimson uniform and tied her hair up. Within the minute she was in the air. Her concentration in the Quaffle shifted only after their first scoring, and she saw all of her friends with MacDubh in the stands. Marsali and Lizzie made a sign that said "go Breeffindor" that made Brianna chuckle. She was glad none of her friends was a Ravenclaw so they could all root for her, and wondered what her mother would think about it, but then the ball was back in the air and she rushed to catch it from chaser Carmichael, gripping the broom with only her knees.

She dove and passed it to chaser Diane and dodge a buldger when she saw a face that made her blood freeze.

She had to throw the Quaffle to the loop and the next time she looked, he wasn't there. Instead was a brown haired Ravenclaw student. Brianna shook her head. This was sleep deprivation playing tricks on her. Gryffindor was ahead by thirty points and she had to make that margin bigger.

The game was over before Bree had the chance to stop worrying and enjoy it. Before she knew it she was hoisted up in the air by ecstatic gryffindors, cheering filling her ears.

Brianna couldn't stop thinking about the figure she saw. After the game there was a bit of a loosening in the leash her friends kept around her to protect her, and she cherished the freedom.

The next day Brianna took Donas back to MacDubh's cabin. She gripped the broom tightly while walking around the small cabin, and gave the appropriate attention to Adso, but his owner was nowhere to be found. Brianna considered leaving the broom by the door and going back to the castle, but it was clearly too dear to MacDubh to be treated this way. She gave Adso another pat and held Donas close as she stepped into the forbidden forest.

She found MacDubh by the rumbling sound of his Gaelic murmuring. He wasn't too far from the cabin, standing in a clearing with a sack that smelled like fresh meat. Brianna was confused to see him pick a slice of meat out of the sack and toss it up in the air, where it immediately disappeared. MacDubh then seemed to pat the invisible, meat-eating beast, and murmur encouragements in Gaelic.

"What is that?" She asked. She forgot MacDubh didn't know she was there, and was as surprised by his sudden jump and his hand going to a dirk on his belt as he was by hearing her voice.

"A nighean," he said once he regained his stance. "Ye're a sneaky one, walking up to me like that."

"I brought Donas but you weren't there," she explained herself. "You're feeding something invisible. How do you know it's there?"

MacDubh smiled and sat by Brianna, leveling his eyes with her. He grabbed Donas, its size seeming much more fitting in the giant man's hands.

"It makes me happy that you canna see them, a nighean," he said.

"Them?"

"Big black horses wi' wings like a bat is what I'm feeding," he said. "They're called Thestrals."

"I'm surprised a horse-bat would be carnivorous," she noted. "How come you see them but I don't? Why does it make you happy?"

MacDubh ran his fingers on the smooth wood of his broom.

"If ye can see them, it means ye watched someone die," he explained. "Ye're pretty young, so I prefer ye'll think them invisible."

Brianna dug her fingers into the soft ground. "Who did you see die?" She asked quietly.

"Tis no a polite question, lass. I saw too many people die. I fought in the war, ye ken."

"Right. I should've realised, I'm sorry."

For a moment there was no sound but the general liveliness of the forest. Birds Brianna was sure she wasn't familiar with sang, leaves swung in the wind and the ground itself sounded alive with insects and underground creatures. When Brianna listened closely, she could hear snuffles from the direction that was fed earlier. Truly horses, she thought. She wondered if



she'd ever get to see them, and noted to herself to seek a drawing of them in the library.

But she wasn't done with her task just because the broom was in MacDubh's hands.

"Is this how you met this Black Jack? The war?"

MacDubh sighed. He rose to his feet and started feeding the Thestrals again.

"I deserve to know, I almost died because of his warning to you," she added. Guilt never hurt anyone. Well, it did, but it was so effective.

MacDubh grumbled but finally answered.

"Aye. He fought fer the winning side, but he was an extremist. Thought the right way te balance magical and Muggle society was te murder all Muggles. He was a Muggleborn himself, but he put his money where his mouth was. Killed his own brother, Alexander. We were bitter enemies. I thought he died in Azkaban."

"He should have," Brianna said. Her face was paler than before. "His own brother?"

"Aye. No matter what ye believe, if ye take it te the extreme ye'll find horrible things, and he did."

"I think I saw him. In the quidditch match."

MacDubh's eyes widened but returned to normal quickly.

"He coulna have been there. Hogwarts is too well protected. Yer mind was playing tricks on ye, is all," he said.

Brianna nodded. "I thought so too," she admitted. "I couldn't sleep before the game."

"Aye, I couldn't sleep before my first game either," he said.

"You played on your house team?"

Jamie nodded. "Built this broom wi' my Da fer my second year and it didn't disappoint all along my career," he said proudly.

"Thanks for letting me borrow it for the match. The school's brooms wouldn't have managed to avoid the buldgers."

He smiled. "And ye did quite a lot of that. Better say a word te the Murray twins."

She giggled.

"I'll make one wi' ye next year, if ye want," he said. "I saw Fergus on a broom, Lord knows he'll no need one," he said. It elicited another giggle.

"I'd like that," she said. Then she got up.

"I'd like to pet the horses. People are probably not too nice to them," she said.

"They are thought te be omens of death," he said. "there."

With his giant, callused hand, he guided her hand to soft tufts of hair over a smooth, bony body. She affectionately patted down the fur.

"Good boy. Skeleton boy. Doing a good job," she cooed absentmindedly as Jamie reached to feed it some meat.

"Right, lassie. Tis getting dark, let's get ye back inside."

She nodded. "I'll take you up on your offer over the summer," she warned him.

"Aye. It will be good fer Fergus te have some company too," he said.

This would be considered a calming afternoon on all accounts, but Brianna was still restless. She thought she'd be the only one in the library, having woken up so early on a Sunday morning as beautiful as this one, but to her surprise she found another first year inside.

"Hi Roger!"

## Lost and Found

"I canna find much about him before the war," he said, placing the heavy stack of old Daily Prophet issues on the table next to her and receiving a cold look from the librarian.

"He wasn't a very prominent student, then," she decided. "And after?"

"The catalogue system isna very efficient, it's sorted by date and not topic," he said. The remark was seemingly directed at the librarian, and she sneered.

"Thanks for helping me, Roger," she said again.

"Lass, ye said as much ten times now," he said and divided the pile in two.

"Actually, I think I should contact my father first," she said.

"Are ye sure? I heard Christmas wasna all too great."

"How - you sat next to Marsali on charms one class - "

He offered a smile. "Twas Lizzie actually, but she dinna ken I was within earshot. Go write the letter, I'll get started on the papers."

"Are you sure? I don't want you to do my work for me - "

"I'll never pass on some detective work," he reassured her, and she was out of the chair.

Her head hurt. Her arms hurt. She couldn't see.

There was something obscuring her mouth, although she could still breathe through her nose and smell urine and dust and cold metal. Her arms were tied behind her back, but feeling the softness of the material on the other end ensured her that she wasn't against the wall. They barely moved, but it was a person alright.

Brianna struggled against her shackles, if only to wake her partner to the kidnapping. She tried to kick her legs to make a sound but they were anchored to the ground by something weightless. The scream she tried to produce died in her throat but she realised it wasn't any material obscuring her mouth and concluded it had to be magic.

Finally, she felt movement behind her - two sets of it, two people experiencing the same disorientation she had just a moment ago. She leaned her head back and onto two other heads, one's curls tickling her forehead, the other's straw-like strands scratching at the back of her neck.

Fergus and Ian.

At least, so she hoped. They were about the same height as her, so they had to be either pre teens or petite ladies.

A clammy hand grabbed hers and she shook it in encouragement, but it seemed not to be pleased with the gesture. It was trying it's best to draw her towards the back pocket of the hand's owner's pants, bending itself as much as it could, but it was up to Brianna to reach her fingertips as far as she managed and grab at what she hoped would be a wand but ended up being a lump of polished wood. She felt around it and found the etching that she knew was Fergus's name. MacDubb's strawberry.

Frustrated at the inefficient find, Brianna struck the gift against the floor as hard as she could. To her surprise, the seemingly solid piece of wood cracked open and she heard MacDubb speaking quickly in French. Behind her, she felt Ian's jolt of surprise and Fergus struggling against the invisible mouth blockage to reply. He didn't make any sound, and suddenly the voice seemed to come from further away. Brianna frantically searched for the strawberry only to find it gone from the space she could reach.

Then they heard another voice.

"Shh, none of that, Jamie. I have the children. You know where. Just come here alone and we'll see about the terms of their release."

The voice was almost familiar, and it made Brianna's blood freeze. She tried to scream again, not sure if she wanted to convince MacDubh to come or to stay away.

"Dinna hurt the bairns, ye wretched bastard," MacDubh - Jamie - screamed. No, don't anger him, Brianna tried to say, tried to think loudly enough for him to understand it.

"Now, little girl, you should stop trying to struggle or I'll just choke you into unconsciousness again." Jamie's voice was gone and she could only hear her father's voice, only colder, less attached.

Brianna had no choice but to stop. She tried to feel around her friends pockets for anything useful but found nothing save for the friendship bracelets Fergus made on their wrists. An idea struck itself in her mind and she tugged on Ian's bracelet, prying it free. She remembered Ian complaining to Fergus about a sharp stone in his bracelet, and with a fair amount of fidgeting she managed to turn the sharp edge to Fergus's bonds. He froze at first, but then stretched his hands as far apart as he could to allow Brianna the space to work. Brianna was keeping an ear on Randall's pacing around the small room - he didn't have much space with them in it, and judging by the echoes it had to have a rather low ceiling - to make sure he wasn't getting too close.

The rock really wasn't that sharp, and it took what felt like an hour to make a dent in the rope, but once she did Fergus pried himself loose. He started working on Brianna's rope while she used the rock to help Ian out and before too long they were relatively free.

This wasn't too helpful, of course. Their feet were still anchored to the floor and they couldn't see. Brianna figured that her eyes weren't covered, but instead it was completely dark around them, when a sharp angle between the rock and the rope created a spark of light that caught in her peripheral vision. Randall didn't miss it either and came to them - it was time to strike.

With a silent scream, Brianna lifted her aching arms in an attempt to stop Randall from coming any closer or to scratch him hard enough to draw blood. Her friends followed suit, Ian even managing to kick up a little bit before they were pulled back to the floor.

Come on, up, Brianna thought, frustrated, as Randall neared her, his breath foul. As if they were a broom, Brianna's legs lifted themselves with enough strength to kick Randall in a soft part Brianna prayed was the nose. He made the sound of a wounded animal, but more like a wounded wolf, almost a howl.

"Little prat, I'll teach you - "

Brianna managed to spit in his face, though not yet to speak. He lifted his hand and Ian kicked it, Fergus still struggling with his grounded feet.

She knew MacDubh was on his way. The task now was to bring Randall to the worst possible state they could.

MacDubh couldn't use magic.

This thought drained Brianna's fighting spirit. Even if they managed to survive until he arrived, could he truly save them?

He could bring a pistol and deal with it like a real person, Brianna thought. Or one of the devil horses, bring Randall to the ground with it's hooves.

The new target was separating Randall with his wand. She kicked harder, trying to aim at his hand and hitting the air. Ian did hit something, and although her legs were getting extremely tired from both the kicking and the opposing magic, she kept trying.

A door burst open, blinding her with light. Brianna didn't know what happened in the next few seconds but once she came to her senses she found herself hurling heavy coins onto a

ragged, skinnier version of the man who raised her, her mother and professor Fraser engaging him in a wizarding duel. Neither child had their wand, but the coins were heavy and there was an abundance of them.

Her mother was blonde today, but Brianna had no doubt it was her when she avoided a spell by lowering herself almost to the ground and using this position to give Randall a kick in the shins.

Brianna realised they were in Gringotts when she saw an elf-like creature enter the vault. He motioned her to come to him and suddenly Brianna recognized the smiling goblin that led her and her mother to her vault just a few months back.

The trio followed the goblin out of the vault and Brianna dropped to her knees and hugged him.

"Thank you! You saved us!"

He pushed her back, his face a shade darker.

"I'd do anything for a kin of Mr. Q," he said, his voice shaking a bit.

"You knew my uncle?"

"Bree, not the time," Fergus reminded her and the goblin pulled the three into a cart.

"The big redhead is waiting outside," he said.

"Wait! What's your name?" Her voice was squeaky in her ears, it's echoes bouncing off the stone walls.

"Firouz," the goblin said and set the cart in motion. "I'll stay to help his other kinswoman.

Good luck!"

The big redhead was indeed MacDubh, who was paler than ever before but seemed to heal somewhat at the sight of the children. He fell to his knees and brought them to his embrace. Brianna finally felt safe, but it lasted hardly the length of a second.

"Stay here! I have to go help Murtagh and yer mam. I'll be right back," he said, jumped into the cart that screeched in protest and expected to start moving.

"You need a goblin's help for that," Brianna noted.

"So ye're no going wi'out us," Ian added.

"The goblin seemed to like Brianna," Fergus completed.

With a mention of "dear uncle Q", the trio and the big redhead were on their way downwards again.

# Slowly but Surely

## Chapter Notes

It's been almost a year, I know! But I finally found my groove again. Welcome readers, old and new!

"Lad! Ye were meant te stay up wi' the bairns, not come here!"

Despite the stress, Brianna scoffed when she heard her giant protector being referred to as a lad. Her mother was busy magically restraining the attacker - Brianna's uncle, she reminded herself with a shiver - to the wall with the help of Firouz the goblin. The man spat on the goblin, mumbling something not entirely legible but certainly racist, and her mother - the fiery creature Brianna learned that she was - slapped him without a second thought.

"I'm a healer by profession," she almost barked into his ear. "I know how to make you hurt."

At that, Brianna heard a strong thud and turned her head to see MacDubh fainted on the floor. Professor Fraser seemed equally stunned, if still conscious. Even her mother left the fully tied up man aside and ran to the fainted redhead, her face paler than Brianna has ever seen it and her locks slipping back into their original bushy condition.

She and the professor spoke at once.

"Jamie?"

"Claire?"

"Murtagh! It is me!" Claire hurled herself onto the older man's hug, both smiling brightly.

Brianna beamed too, until the human filth tied to the wall decided to open his mouth.

"Oh, as if it wasn't obvious. Brianna Ellen Randall? You knew she couldn't be related to me, my dirty Muggle brother is sterile, as they should all be. It's about time you all reached the conclusion!"

Firouz snapped his fingers and the man's voice was silenced. "Idiot humans," Brianna heard him mumble.

"Wait - the lass is yours?" The professor asked. The word seemed to have reached MacDubh even in his puddle state, and he sat up tentatively. "The lass?" He repeated.

"Jamie!" Claire all but toppled him back onto the stone floor.

"Ye were never te return - "

"I thought you were dead!"

"The lass?"

"I'm here," Brianna interferred. "Mama, is that..."

"I reckon it's time ye introduced them officially," the professor chimed in. "Preferably in a place where we can stand."

"What about him?" Ian asked, pointing at their kidnapper.

"Leave him to me," Firouz said menacingly.

"Do we trust him?" The professor turned to Claire, not as quietly as he thought he did.

"With our life," she replied. "Help us up before you do anything criminal, will you?"

The goblin grumbled but obliged, sending them up in two carts. MacDubh seemed fit to faint

again during the journey, but Claire was holding his hand firmly and kept him a little less green.

"I see where I got the motion sickness from," Brianna said, and was rewarded with a weak, apologetic smile from her - well, from Jamie.

He was not as she imagined her birth father to be. First of all, he was huge. Brianna wondered if this meant she would outgrow all of her classmates, and if so, when. Also, he was quite the man of few words, not what she imagined that her mom would like or even tolerate, ever the academic.

And he was sensitive, and kind, and quick to show affection. Not like her base for fatherly comparison, Frank, who was reserved at his best.

Out of mercy for Jamie, the group reconvened in The Leaky Cauldron instead of making the floo trip to Hogwarts right away.

All sat down with a warm drink, Claire finally started to explain.

"Brianna, this is your real father, Jamie Fraser," she said, her eyes brimming with emotion.

"James Alexander Malcolm Mackenzie Fraser, at your service," the large man said, tentatively offering her his hand to shake. Brianna snorted.

"And this little brat is our daughter, Brianna," Claire said, her voice shaking.

All three stayed silent for a moment.

"And what about her favourite grand da?" Murtagh cut into the silence.

"You're his father?" Brianna said. She gave the ageing man another look. If he were younger...

"Godfather. Much better, if ye ask me," the man replied and ruffled Jamie's long hair.

"Does this make us cousins?" Ian finally processed the new information.

"Aye," Jamie replied. "Sassenach, there are a few more introductions I need to make, if ye dinna mind. This is wee Ian Murray, the youngest son of Jenny and Ian."

"I'm your Auntie Claire," she shook his hand and he took it just as awkwardly.

"And this," he proudly pointed to the other boy, "is my adopted son, Fergus."

Fergus wasted no time being awkward. "It's an honour to finally meet the lady Milord calls for in his sleep," he said with a charming smile that made Claire giggle and Jamie blush.

"Ye should ken, Mo Chride, that when yer so called husband was horrible to the lass over Christmas, I offered her my services as a father," Jamie mentioned off handedly. Claire seemed to melt at both the nickname and his declaration.

"You must've known," she replied. "Deep inside."

Jamie pulled her into his embrace. Brianna never saw her mother this calm and content.

On further inspection, she wondered how she didn't see it before. Sure, most of Jamie's face was obscured by long, copper curls of both hair and beard, but the color in itself should've been a clue. She couldn't go around suspecting every ginger man, but when you add his blue almond-shaped eyes, sitting over tall cheekbones, like her own, it was almost obvious.

They were only gone for a few hours, but the rumour mill had already started turning.

Through feigned condescension, even the older students wanted to see the first years who beat the war criminal - all by themselves, as the rumor would have it. Fergus and Ian took to it naturally, the story seeming grander every time they told it to a wide eyed third year, but Brianna was more reserved. She spent some time thanking Roger profoundly, as he was the one who called for help. Then she spent the remaining weeks of the school year winning one last quidditch game, sitting around with Marsali who seemed to be the only one unfazed by

the whole event, and other than borrowing a broom for him, completely avoiding Jamie.

Not that she was scared of him or anything.

She just didn't know how to start. How do you treat a man who was supposed to raise you, who tried his very best to do so since you've met, who was still, at the deepest part of your soul, not your father?

It wasn't that she missed Frank, Brianna reasoned. She thought about writing to him, to tell him of his brother's deeds at the very least, but she kept dismissing the idea. She didn't want his approval anymore.

But did she want Jamie's? The large, kind man, who kept smiling at her from across the Great hall, making her stomach twist?

What did she want from him?

She held onto the thought of seeing her mother on platform nine and three quarters like a life line as the days strung by. While they spoke a lot via owl, Claire had promised Brianna a week at the Castle Comb cottage for just the two of them - no friends, strictly no Jamie. Brianna would figure it all out by then.

She was on edge for the whole train ride, and no exploding snap or chocolate frog mountains could distract her - they did a lot to vanquish both her eyebrows and her appetite. She was all out of promises to write, to visit, to coordinate the Diagon Alley visit, to call Lizzie in her Muggle parent's house, and the train made no sign of stopping. She changed into jeans and a sweater, had Lizzie braid and unbraid and rebraid her hair, and the excruciating journey seemed no closer to its end.

She wished it was longer, in retrospect. She wished she'd never have reached the station.

## Family Relations

This was not how Brianna pictured her summer would go.

They saw something was off from the very beginning. While normally crowded, the station always looked rather organized. It was not the case that day. People were screaming, running, vanishing. No - disappearing. Brianna couldn't find her mother - she didn't know what she would look like today. When Ian recognized his father being disappeared off by a shadowy figure, the children erupted into screams.

One by one, through the foggy windows of a moving train, they saw family members disappear. Others appeared in their places, people in grey robes who seemed like police officers in their demeanor, but they were too late for Ian's Da, for Roger's adopting father, for little Joanie, standing alone in the crowd without her mother.

By the time the train stopped and seventh years, full of self importance, rushed to the rescue, the billowing figures that took people were gone. Brianna was off the train too, screaming for her Mama, but she knew by then that the chances for a reply were slim.

Instead, a strong, large palm gripped her shoulder.

"It'll be fine, Mo Nighean," Jamie said. "Keep yer friends together. We'll go to John's place, figure out what to do."

Brianna obeyed unflinchingly. She abandoned the idea of a quiet week of heart-to-heart conversations with her mother, and instead called out to Fergus, Ian and the rest. A short, Scottish and brown haired woman, who by his description would be Ian's mother, side-appeared the three to an unfamiliar sitting room and vanished before Brianna could ask where they were. When she finished retching the insides of her belly outside, she noticed the room was now significantly fuller. All of her friends were there, along with Jamie, his sister, some of Ian's siblings, Joanie and professor Grey.

He waited for her to sit down and Brianna did quickly, feeling like she was late for class.

"We don't know exactly what happened," Grey confessed. "Those who don't know where to go can stay here. We'll figure this out, I promise. Get you back to your parents." With that, he left the room, followed by the rest of the adults. Chaos followed shortly after.

"They took both of my parents!" Lizzie cried. Mary was comforting her - she didn't seem too upset that her old uncle was missing. Marsali was trying to get her seven year old sister to stop crying hysterically. Roger sat quietly, overwhelmed, as Fiona - who as far as Brianna knew was something of a cousin to him - tried to violently shake him out of it. Ian's older brother, the beater, was indeed shaking his brother, while the sister was threatening to call Mother. Fergus sat down by Brianna.

"Sorry they took your mother," he tried.

"At least MacDubh was on the train," she said. They were still calling him that in public.

"We were going to come with you two to a cottage," Fergus said. "after a few days in Lallybroch."

"I suppose she'll be your Mom too," Brianna continued her previous line of thought. "We have to find her."

"We need to trust the adults."

"I don't have the patience," she confessed.

"Aye. Me neither."

They were interrupted by a younger boy - nine or ten years old - offering them a biscuit.



"Who are you?" Fergus said, casually piling a few on his palm.

"William," the kid said. He had slick brown hair and a somewhat nasal voice, but the biscuits looked good. Brianna took a careful bite.

"I live here," William clarified. "This mansion belonged to my late mother, and now it belongs to me."

"So, professor Grey has no say on the matter?"

"He's keeping it for me until I'm of age. He's something of a father to me, I suppose. My own father is gone."

"You are awfully posh for an orphan," Fergus noted. "I have no parents but MacDubh. But I don't have a castle, either."

"MacDubh? He's here?" The boy's eyes lit up.

"Do you know him?"

"He worked on the estate when I was a boy! He taught me how to ride a broom. I never thought I'd see him again!"

The boy didn't continue the conversation. Instead, he walked purposely to a door, the other two quick to follow. They crossed several corridors and doorways before finding MacDubh in a smaller, thought not less crowded sitting room. Grey was there, as well as Murtagh, Jenny Murray and professor Cameron, Master Raymond, and some people the children didn't recognize.

"It really is you!" William exclaimed, nearing Jamie.

"Willie, this is not the time," Grey said quietly.

"What is going on, Papa?"

Fergus sniggered. "Something of a father," he whispered to Brianna, but she was preoccupied.

"Yes, what is going on? Our parents are missing. We want to help."

"Yer'e a braw lass and a Gryffindor to boot, Mo Nighean, but ye dinna ken enough magic te help," Jamie said.

"You don't even have a wand," she returned. "What makes you better?"

"Miss Randall," Grey warned.

"Don't call me that."

"Dinna call her that," Jamie said at the same time, looking similarly disgusted.

What should I be called? Brianna wondered. Beauchamp? Fraser? None of those felt right enough.

"We'll call ye in when we figure out what to do," Murtagh promised.

"Who are you? What is this group?"

"The Ridge," Fergus mumbled. "I saw a photograph of you once."

"Aye, yere nose gets in many places where it doesna belong," Jamie noted.

"Don't take your stress out on the lad," Murtagh chastised. "We're a group o' like minded individuals aiming te maintain order in the magical community. Mac's father started it." He gestured to Jamie.

"Yer Mam is a part of it too," Jamie mentioned.

"Save her, then," Brianna challenged, unfazed.

"Wait in the living room."

Brianna groaned and led the boys out.

It was just like her mother to be a part of a secret society and not tell her.

God, she needed her here.

Back in the children's lounge, Marsali was rallying the troops.

"The Aurors are not doing anything!" She all but shouted, the crowd murmuring in agreement. "We canna let whoever stole our parents get away wi' it. We're small, they wilna wait for us. We have te act now."

"And the three of them beat a war criminal!" Fiona added, gesturing at Brianna, Fergus and Ian.

"Wi'out so much as a wand," Ian added proudly, earning a smack on the back of his head from his sister.

"W-we should let the adults lead this," Mary mumbled, her voice hardly above a whisper. Roger seemed to have woken from his daze by this.

"Those were dementors," he said quietly, without a tone.

Brianna didn't know what those were, but she did not like how silent the room suddenly felt.

"What's a dementor?" Fergus whispered in her ear.

"Obviously the opposite of a mentor," she returned in a hushed tone. William did not pick up on their humour in time of crisis.

"They are the guards in Azkaban," he said, not even whispering, exposing their ignorance for all to see. Luckily, Lizzie seemed to be in the same position and her ears perked up at the explanation. "My Papa used to run the whole place," the boy felt the need to add.

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"They shouldn't," Roger said with a shaky voice. "Unless someone told them to."

Brianna locked eyes with Fergus and Ian.

Black Jack Randall.

There was no reason for it to be him, and yet she felt almost certain that it was.

"Let's go ask Firouz," she said.

A floo trip later, Brianna was gripping a marble pillar at the entrance to the bank to regain her stability. She took a deep breath and followed the boys inside.

Firouz reluctantly walked up to her, ushering the three to a small room, filled with broken desks and carts and dust.

"Is he out?" Brianna asked, although she didn't think there was a reason to after looking into the goblin's eyes - both terrified and ashamed.

"That wretched thing had inside contacts from inside a vault," he confirmed, frustration clear in his voice.

"It's not your fault," she started.

"No, it's your mother's. She forced me not to kill him then and there, like I should have! And now she's paying the price. Again. Just like poor mister Q and his brother and the beautiful wife... for being to kind..."

"Wait. Is my mom dead?" She found her hand gripping the goblin's arm, distressed.

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Brianna jumped him with a hug and he stammered in surprise, not returning it.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't think it wouldn't be - "

"It's not common in goblin culture, at least not here, but I do know what a Hugg is," he said, struggling with the word. "Your uncle had an affinity for those too."

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# Mutual Realisation

## Chapter Summary

The Frasers handle chaos together for the first time

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What choked Jamie's throat had equal chances of being tears or bile, and either was threatening to burst from their tight confines. Murtagh was holding one of his shoulders, John's hand on the other. Jenny was standing in front of him, almost tearing her hair clean off. Master Raymond cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, we must focus on the true target."

"Oh, is bringing our loved ones home not target enough fer ye, frog man?" Jenny lashed out.

"Janet," aunt Jocasta raised her voice with a scolding tone.

"What I mean is, someone must be behind this," he continued, unbothered by the rude comment. French as he was, Jamie knew she was commenting on him being half goblin. He knew Master Raymond was used to that, but after what the ones at Gringotts had done to reunite his family, the insult was much more offensive.

"He's right. The dementors didn't just up and leave Azkaban," John noted, squeezing Jamie's shoulder in reassurance before dropping more bad news on him. "So we're faced with three questions - who did this, where are the people, and who was guarding the prison when the dementors were gone."

Jamie didn't even think about this until now. A hundred dangerous criminals on the loose. Angry, as they must've been, every other emotion having been sucked out of them for the last twelve years. Blindly loyal to whoever did this, as Jamie was when John helped him escape. Except this time it wasn't John. Jamie had a strong, horrible feeling as to who might be behind him sitting here, away from Claire and the children.

God, seeing all three of them in front of him - even Willie, he thought he'd never see Willie again - almost brought him to his knees. Having lashed out on Fergus like that, sent them away...

"It must be Randall," he managed to squeeze through his blocked throat.

"Not every terrorist act is directed at ye," said Dougal.

"It's no' about me. Is he in custody? Any word on his location?" Jamie returned to his uncle, the head of the Aurors.

"No' as of yesterday - "

"So look fer him," Jamie said, his voice dripping with poison. "Or I will."

A frantic knock on the door stopped the intense staring contest from becoming any more violent. Behind the door was John's - or rather, Willie's - house elf, Fanny. The lanky wee thing couldn't hold her tears long enough to form a sentence.

"The children - Master William and the redhead and two boys - they're gone! Floored out!"

Both John and Jamie jumped to their feet in an instant.

"Do you know where they went, Fanny?" John asked, his hands jittering. All Fanny managed for an answer was a sob.

"They must've reached the same conclusion as we did," Jamie muttered. "Jenny, Murtagh, we have to leave fer Gringotts. The rest of ye, try to find our families."

"I think we all know where they are," Collum Mackenzie interjected. "Go on, lad, check yer theory. Bràthair, it's time to give some orders to yer so-called police force."

A moving picture was plastered to the front of the giant marble building, proving their suspicion before any goblin could. It had two faces - one long, his brown eyes cold and calculated. The other, a greying blond who looked a great deal like his son, was struggling against the wand pointed at his throat, visibly in pain.

To Jamie's surprise, the man in the image spoke loudly enough that the whole street came to a halt to listen. Jenny gripped his arm in distress.

"The magical community has been growing weaker by the day," he said, twisting Ian's hair in his hand and eliciting a yelp. "We let Muggleborns like him marry into our strong and influential magical families, soiling their pure heritage. We let Squibs, failures, live amongst us. We cower in fear in the face of Muggles, lest they see us.

This ends today! I'm calling to the ministry of magic. You have until sundown to answer the demands you have received. After that, for every hour that it takes you to make up your minds, I shall rid our species of another weakling. Starting with this one."

Ian's eyes flickered with fear as the image disappeared.



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