

Chapter 6 Six

Professor Dnaw stood on a custom-made stool that had built-in steps on the side for him to ascend and descend to get the best vantage point of his students. "Ana Q'wer Tyuiop," he called out from the list of names on a turquoise parchment that floated in front of him.

Murmurs circulated, especially amongst the undergraduates who were still waiting on their own professor to conduct their ceremony while they watched the postgrads.

Ana was a blonde, blue-eyed woman, but the commotion wasn't so much caused by her looks, but because she was the first huntress to walk through the walls of Thavma, a feat celebrated by both the lycan kingdom and human territory. An octopus birthmark sat on her nape at the end of her short ponytail. Taking a breath, she matched her steps to the faint orange footprints on the ground.

"Yes, good. Keep going Ms. Tyuiop. Pace is good," Professor Dnaw said, waving Liam to bring over an opened, empty wooden chest that was probably older than the eldest being in the university.

Non-incantas watched in wide-eyed wonder at ingredients diffusing out of jars or flying out of their cases from the shelves, floating toward the path – toward Ana, like Ana was the magnet attracting them. Ana herself couldn't help but watched the hovering objects walking with her – a plain gray hippogriff feather, a wrinkly violet leaf called a violéta, two pebbles taken from the same region as the violétas, and bits of golden dust she couldn't see and didn't know was faery dust extracted from the warmest region in Incanta.

Only faeries could see faery dust. Other beings either had to wave their hands or wands in the air to see the glittering things.

At the end of the path, Ana stood before Professor Dnaw as the ingredients floated into the long, wooden box Liam held. Ana pulled a strand of hair off her head and dropped it in there as the final ingredient. Professor Dnaw placed his hand on the box and uttered, "Loot a Emoceb."

Upon the professor's nod, Liam opened the box.

Ana marveled at the black stick in wonder, and Professor Dnaw encouraged her to give it a slow wave to test it out. Oohs and aahs

echoed when everyone saw a trail of multicolored faery dusts upon the brief flick of her wand. Ana beamed brighter and gave it a second wave just to see the dotted colors in the air again, and when she was asked to step off the path, she almost forgot to thank the professor.

The next student was hairless, so as the last ingredient, ear wax was used, and after each student had taken their wand, Liam and Theo took turns cleaning the box.

When it was Ianne's turn, she took her first nervous step, her eyes finding Liam's encouraging ones as she took the next step, flinching when a petal from the wolley rewolf came out of its jar and floated around her amongst the other ingredients. When getting her first touch of the wand, she half-expected the essence of the lethal flower to poison her, but she felt nothing more than a sense of rightness.

A few others went next. Those who walked too fast had the ingredients knocking their cases or jars off the shelves, which Theo and Liam had to catch on time by freezing them in mid-air. Those who walked too slowly had their own ingredients hastening them – like how a rare leaf swatted his owner's arse so that he'd walk a little faster.

Reida's turn finally arrived, and if there were murmurs before, they were all silenced at this point. Anonymity wasn't something she was blessed with, not even in a world far from home, and it was a fact that she and her siblings had grown to accept.

Walking down the path, her curiosity had her gazing at the rows of ingredients. A griffin feather, blood red petals from an evolxof, and musty red fairy dust sourced from the oldest civilizations drifted toward her. But the ingredient had several eyes bulging wide and chatters ensuing was a fungus of purple and amber – a prolégo mushroom.

Reida didn't think much of it until she reached Professor Dnaw, who stared at her in equal parts shocked and dismayed.

"Perhaps a redo, Professor?" Theo asked, brows furrowed in a way that made Reida wonder how bad an omen were her ingredients. Casting a cursory glance at the objects floating around her, she wondered which one was the issue.

The professor harrumphed, shaking his head slowly and almost sadly. "No, the results won't differ. The ingredients are never wrong. They only gravitate toward a creature of a matching energy."

"Perhaps someone put a spell on the ingredients as a prank," Theo whispered, the insistence in his voice carried a sliver of defensiveness.

Professor Dnaw considered, then turned to his shelves, waved his hands and uttered, "Nacs." When nothing happened, he turned to Theo and said, "Afraid not, Theodore. And redoing the process would only embarrass her and ourselves."

The professor gave Reid a nod to place her strand of hair into the box Liam held, and even her own cousin seemed concerned. Once Reid collected her wand, she felt exactly as Ianne did – a sense of rightness, so why was everyone reacting the way they were?

"Ms. Paw-Claw, please uh... wait over there for a moment. I'd like a word with you," Professor Dnaw muttered, counting on her lycan hearing to hear him.

There were only two more students after Reid. After the vampire and hunter received their wands, Theo, who had been fixing an icy glare on the gossiping undergraduates to shut them up, now waved his wand at the shelf near them and cast, "Noititrap." A partition went up, sealing away the last of the stares and chatters.

Liam was unsmiling, thumbs hooked at his pockets.

Theo's eyes were fixed on the prolégo mushroom sitting innocently on the shelf, and he wanted nothing more than to burn the fungi in a cauldron. He replayed the scene of the prolégo mushroom floating into Reid's box, the same way it floated into his when he was seven.

"Have a seat, Ms. Paw-Claw." The professor gestured to the empty space in front of his desk as a chair from the side hopped over and stopped at the exact position the professor waved at.

Reid sat and waited, trying her best to hide her anxiety and sweaty palms, not knowing much about prolégo mushrooms, except the fact that they're inedible fungi used for decorations.

Clearing his throat, Professor Dnaw began, "Are you familiar with prolégo mushrooms in wands, Ms. Paw-Claw?"

She gave a brief shake of her head, still unable to speak.

Professor Dnaw's fingers intertwined on his desk as he began, "It's not a usual ingredient. Fewer than fifteen had it in the last millennia."

Despite her honed skill in keeping her composure, Reid's eyes widened, unable to hide her shock. She'd feel special but the atmosphere in the room gave her a feeling that this wasn't something to be celebrated.