

The Good Basilisk Luzura¹

MemoryOverload

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¹Please don't sue me, Dana.

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Prologue

Second Lunar Disappearance, 12 CE | Somewhere on the outskirts of the Left Hand

Tonight, it was Jara's turn to keep watch as the others slept.

They had gotten lucky the past few days, but Jara knew better than to put his faith in luck. Something was bound to go wrong. That was how the universe worked. It would lull you into relaxing before driving a dagger through your chest. That was how they had lost Toby. They had been foolish to blindly accept the help of a guard. That would never happen again.

Shaking his head to clear out the depressing thoughts, Jara turned from his post outside the makeshift tent and looked in on his sleeping wife and child. Ket looked as beautiful as ever. When the moonlight caught her aquamarine scales just right, they would give off the prettiest shine. She slept peacefully, arm draped over Manil in a soft, but firm, grasp. Manil was the cutest little basilisk one could ever see, with his light brown scales and a cute little nose with that small white birthmark on it that looked like a smile. Likewise, a small smile crept onto Jara's face. He enjoyed these moments, fleeting as they were, where a family and their newborn could simply relax, not having to worry about when their next meal would be, or how much longer they'll have to run from the Emperor's Coven.

After giving his wife a quick kiss on the forehead, Jara returned to his lookout duty. The night was uneventful so far. A few rogue fairies had given him a small reprieve from the monotonous nothingness of the surrounding woods, but other than that the area was free of any other signs of life. He felt himself begin to succumb to sleep when he heard a noise off in the distance. It sounded like feet, making their way through the woods. Jara estimated there to be about five people in the approaching party based off the cadence of the footsteps. Suddenly, a shout broke through the rustling of leaves.

“We know where you are, demons! Just give yourselves over, and we’ll make your deaths less painful.”

Quickly, Jara opened the tent flap and shook Ket. His wife was scared by the sudden awakening, shooting upright.

“Ahh! What in the name of the Titan are you doing?”

“We have to leave. Hunters are close by and could show up at any minute. We need to go now! You get Manil and run, I’ll fight off the hunters.”

“Are you sure you can handle them?”

“Yes. Now go!”

Jara was lying. He knew this fight would end in his death. He knew that, and he accepted that. As long as his family was safe, that was all that mattered. Jara quickly began shifting forms, going from species to species as fast as possible. He depleted his reserves as much as he could without leaving himself sluggish. A hungry basilisk is a dangerous basilisk, after all.

Jara made his way out the front of the tent and waited. He looked around the area. Nothing was happening. Not a single butterknifely, griffin, or demon hunter in sight.

“Hey! I’m right here! Come fight me face to face!”

Still nothing.

Deciding to go on the offensive, Jara began walking around the perimeter, making as much noise as he could.

“Come on! What are you, scared?”

A fireball flew past his face, narrowly missing.

“There we go! How hard was that?”

Jara laughed. He turned to face whoever had thrown that. He didn’t know how long he was going to fight, but he did know that he was going to be dining in Fólkvangr by sunrise.

Meanwhile, Ket took off running out the back of the tent. One hand was carrying her child while the other was shifted into a sword, knocking away obstacles. The forests of the Left Hand were notorious for their hard to traverse terrain, and this patch was no exception. Tree branches swatted at

her face, vines tangled her feet, and fairies screamed of their lust for skin, but she kept running.

Eventually, she grew tired. Her body was giving up on her. Her legs were burning, and her breathing was labored. She needed to find a place to slow down and catch her breath. Leaning her back against a nearby tree, she took those deep breaths like she had practiced. In-2-3-4, Out-2-3-4, In-2-3-4, Out-2-3-4. That was better. Manil had also calmed down as well, nestling into the crook of her elbow and taking a nap. As she slowly looked around and took in the surrounding scenery, she noticed a lake that miraculously wasn't boiling. Ever the opportunist, Ket made her way over to the body of water and gave it a closer look. She had to make sure there weren't any creatures lurking under the surface before she could risk taking a drink.

As she scrutinized the lake further, she noticed that it had an odd-looking shine to it, like it wasn't water that was lapping at the edges of the sand, but something else entirely. It was an odd color as well, being a navy blue instead of the normal gray and red hues found in other bodies of water on the Isles. Suddenly, a long-forgotten memory arose. Ket had heard stories about lakes like this. Her grandfather had told her that these spots were where the blood of the Titan and water had mixed together, ripping a hole in the fabric of reality and creating a portal between the realms.

Deciding to test her theory, she squatted down and dipped her finger into the lake. As her finger initially broke the surface, the lake felt warm and welcoming, but it eventually gave way to a cool and dry sensation, and she felt a light wind blowing just below the surface. Ket retracted her finger and stood up.

Ket then did what any sane demon would do in her situation: She closed her eyes, tucked Manil close to her chest, and dove into the lake.

July 16, 1983 | Outside the city limits of Neustadt, Pennsylvania

Ket slowly opened her eyes.

She looked down and saw Manil, still asleep and dreaming peacefully. Looking back up, she saw buildings on the horizon. However, she had never seen buildings that looked like these ones before.

Ket smiled.

They were free.

Chapter 1

Luz Gets A Reality Check

Friday, May 7, 2021 | Gravesfield, Connecticut

Camila Noceda had had a relatively light day so far, working as the head of Happy Pets Clinic. Rudy, a feisty Jack Russell terrier, had to get 27 porcupine quills removed from his snout, while Theodore, an energetic Cocker Spaniel mix, needed a steroid injection for allergies, and that was much easier said than done. The rest of the day had been uneventful, however. Camila had just slumped down at her chair in the break room when her phone began to ring.

Digging her phone out of her purse, she instantly recognized the number, belonging to the front office of Gravesfield High School. Quickly tapping the *Accept Call* button, Camila brought the phone up to her ear.

“Hello, this is Camila Noceda.”

“Hi Dr. Noceda. Your daughter Luz has been sent to Principal Hal’s office for her disruptive behavior in her English class. Since this is past her second offense, we’re required to contact you and have you appear with her while appropriate disciplinary action is taken.”

“Thank you for letting me know. I’ll be on my way shortly. Have a good day.”

“Likewise, Dr. Noceda.”

Camila ended the call and then let out a long sigh. She loved Luz and her creativity, she really did, but it sometimes got out of hand. Luz would get

so engrossed in her latest art project or book report that she would forget to think about how others might react.

Taking a look at the schedule for the rest of the day, there wasn't much left to do, and nothing that Camila 100% needed to be there for, so she decided to take the rest of the day off to be with Luz.

Packing up her belongings, Camila realized she needed to let the rest of the staff know that she would be leaving early. Luckily, Carmen and Dianne were the only other people working this shift, so that would be pretty easy.

"Hey Carmen!"

"Yeah, Dr. N?"

"I need to go right now. Do you think you can cover the rest of my patients?"

"Totally. I'm finishing up with Cassie right now, so I won't have much more after that."

"Awesome. Thank you, Carmen. Can you let Dianne know I'll be gone, as well?"

"Yup. No worries, Dr. N."

"Great. Thanks, again."

As Camila pulled into the parking lot of Gravesfield High School, she steeled herself as she opened the doors to the building that had been the source of many nightmares. After checking in with the front desk and being given a small nametag declaring her a visitor, she made her way over to the office of Principal Hal.

Closing the office door, Camila saw her daughter with a forlorn look on her face, and Principal Hal with a disgruntled look on his.

"Hi, mom," Luz said quietly.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice, Dr. Noceda," Hal said.

Camila took a seat next to her daughter before turning to face the principal.

"So, what exactly is it that I was called here for? I know that Luz was 'disruptive' in class, but that's it. Would you care to enlighten me on the situation?"

“Well for starters, your daughter brought a live snake to class and used it as a prop in her book report.”

Camila’s eyes shot over to make contact with Luz’s.

“You brought Reggie with you to school? Luz, what have I told you, you have to keep Reggie at home and in his terrarium!”

“Sorry, *mamá*.”

“I know, *mija*, but you also have to be a responsible pet owner. Reggie could have hurt one of the other students, or even been hurt himself. Do you understand that?”

“Yes *mamá*. Look, he’s fine. He was never in danger.” Luz then pulled Reggie out from her backpack, and the snake coiled himself around his owner’s left arm.

“That’s good and all, but you still have to be careful, okay?”

“Okay, mom.”

Principal Hal then drew the attention back onto him by opening one of the drawers to the side of his desk. The loud *SKRRRRRT* was grating to everyone’s ears. Hal then pulled out a small pamphlet and placed it on his desk.

Luz and Camila both moved up closer to get a better look at the flyer. “Reality Check Summer Camp” was printed at the top in a garish font, and a picture of a boy being trapped inside a box made it even worse. The obviously fake smile on the kid’s face, along with the tagline of “Think inside the box!” didn’t help much either.

“In light of Luz’s recent incidents, I believe that this camp would be of great benefit to her, and it would also give her the chance to make friends with other children her own age. This is an optional activity, though. If you do take up the offer, it would last the entire summer break.”

The two Nocedas looked over the pamphlet as it proclaimed how Reality Check Summer Camp would teach campers about the “Wonders of Public Radio” and “Doing Your Taxes: The Fun Way!” The document looked like it hadn’t been updated in decades, with the “The Sharing Initiative © 2001” at the bottom of the last page being a dead giveaway.

“I’ll let you two talk this over amongst yourselves. If you could get back with a decision by next Monday, then we could start the signup process then.

There is no rush, however. Signing up only takes a few –” Hal was cut off by Reggie uncoiling himself from Luz’s arm and striking at the man.

“REGGIE, NO!” Luz yelled, as she quickly pulled her pet off the shocked principal. She hastily slipped Reggie into her backpack and zipped it mostly shut, leaving a small gap at the top. Reggie still needed to breathe, of course. Luz wasn’t a monster.

“I am so sorry, Principal Hal,” Luz stammered out. She noticed the vitiligo markings on her hands start to grow a little larger. That was probably just a trick of the light or stress messing with her brain.

“You should be. That *thing* nearly killed me,” Hal then composed himself before continuing, “Alright, Noceda. I was originally going to give you the choice of going to Reality Check Camp, but now you have forced my hand. You’ll be attending, whether you like it or not. Consider this extended academic action. Now, please go with your mother and leave this school before I have a resource officer escort you out.”

Chapter 2

Luz Races An Owl

Saturday, May 22, 2021 | 8:24 A.M. | The Noceda Household

Luz gave her luggage for camp one last look over.

The blue duffel bag had about 2 weeks' worth of clothes in it, mainly consisting of cargo/athletic shorts, t-shirts, hoodies, and a few pairs of jeans. Some leggings and an ill-fitting button-up shirt were also scrunched in there last minute just in case she needed something more formal. With some creative outfit combos, she could wear a new outfit every single day of camp if she wanted to. (Knowing Luz, though, she would probably just end up wearing her favorite blue-and-white cat hoodie most of the time.)

The black-and-green duffel bag held her larger items. Her personal laptop (Somehow, it was still chugging along even after all these years. "The AMV-inator", as Luz called it, ran really well, considering its age.), the laptop's power cable, her drawing tablet, the tablet's charger, her sketchpad, and a few charcoal pencils. She wanted to have every possible creative outlet at her disposal if an idea struck her.

Finally, there was her backpack, which contained her most important possessions: her phone, its charger, and Good Witch Azura books 1-5. She would only be taking the standard versions of the books though, as she didn't want to risk her Collector's Editions being ruined by some snobby bully with no taste for such literary masterpiece. She had saved up her allowance for nearly two months to buy that set from her local Applegrant Bookshop, and the books sat proudly on her shelf, surrounded on all sides by all the Azura and Hecate figurines she had collected over her years in the GWA fandom.

“Luz, are you almost ready to go?”

“*Sí, mamá.* Just making sure I have everything packed up.”

In his terrarium, Reggie had apparently been awoken by the sudden noise of conversation, as he began looking around, head swiveling to and fro. Noticing her pet, Luz walked over to the baby green tree python and squatted down to be level with him.

“Alright, Reggie. I’m gonna be gone for a while. That means that mom is going to be taking care of you. You have to promise to be good for mom, okay? Can you do that for me?” Reggie quickly flicked his tongue in and out, tasting the air in a gesture that Luz took to mean *Yes* in Snake-ese.

“Nice chat.” Reggie responded by slumping to the floor of the terrarium and doing his best impression of an over-cooked spaghetti noodle.

Swinging her backpack on and grabbing a duffel bag in each hand, Luz made her way downstairs to the main foyer. She then let her mom know she was ready for camp with a shout of, “How much time till the bus gets here?”

“It won’t be here for another 30 minutes, *cariño.*”

Sighing, Luz set down her bags and walked into the kitchen to get some last-minute breakfast before heading off to camp. Opening the fridge revealed a dearth of any appealing food options. Three-day-old Chinese food wasn’t exactly the most nutritional breakfast one could have.

Switching over to the pantry, she saw a lone package of instant oatmeal with a ginger and maple flavor. Deciding better this than nothing, Luz skimmed the instructions on the packaging and quickly prepared the meal.

The oatmeal was ok. A solid 6.5/10.

Looking at the clock on the wall, the bus was supposed to arrive in about 15 minutes. Picking up her bags and walking out the door with an “I’m gonna go wait outside!”, Luz readied herself for the worst and most boring three months of her life.

She waited for the bus to arrive.

And waited.

And waited some more.

Eventually, her shoulders began to ache, so she set her bags down. It had definitely been more than 15 minutes. It had to have been. Maybe the bus

was just running late? That could happen. So Luz waited even longer.

Luz gave up. She turned to walk back inside when she heard a *HOOT* sound. Turning to locate the noise, she saw a tiny owl with her backpack in its beak. The owl met eyes with her and it looked like it had gotten caught red-handed. (*Or would it be red-winged?* Luz thought to herself) The owl turned and started hopping away as fast as possible, backpack still in tow.

“Oh no you don’t!” Luz yelled, and the chase was on. Luz sprinted after the little owl, who was deceptively fast. Every time she thought she was going to catch the fleeing avian, the owl started hopping a little bit faster and was out of her reach again. The owl ended up hopping its way into an old, abandoned house through an open front door and disappearing from Luz’s line of sight.

Luz was normally against doing things like breaking the law, but in this one incredibly rare instance, she didn’t care. It was time for a little breaking and entering. Maybe. All Luz knew was that she wanted her bag back. So with a primal scream, Luz ran through the open door. Suddenly, the door behind her slammed shut and a bright yellow light filled her vision.

Camila looked out her bedroom window, expecting to see her daughter getting ready to hop on the bus to camp.

Luz was nowhere to be seen. Her bags were still there, but their owner wasn’t.

“*Mija*, you forgot your bags outside.”

No response.

“Luz? Hello? Are you here?”

Still nothing. It wasn’t like Luz to give the silent treatment. Something was off about this.

Camila ran down the stairs and outside. The realization slowly set in.

Luz was gone.

30 Minutes Later

A bus pulled up to the Noceda household. Traffic had been absolutely awful, and they were nearly a half hour late because of it. Nobody was there, and no cars were in the driveway. The driver simply shrugged and drove to the

next house on their list. They weren't paid enough to care about one kid being late.

Chapter 3

Luz Fraternizes With A Criminal

Kaufetag 2, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Bonesborough, B.I.

“Give me back my bag you —” Luz cut herself off when she opened her eyes after being flashbanged by the door closing. The old, dilapidated house with its torn up floorboards and tattered wallpaper had been replaced with a hodgepodge of seemingly random items stuffed into a giant tent of some kind.

She looked around. At her feet, a creature with the head of a baby doll and the body of a lizard had been impaled on a clothes hanger. Above her, a shovel hung from the rafters, while a cracked portable TV from the 90s (Probably? Luz wasn’t sure.) was turned on its side. On top of a refrigerator, a globe was balanced precariously, teetering on the edge. Alongside all the other miscellaneous items, there was also a vast assortment of clothes, ranging in style from those weird Tuxedo shirts Luz had seen people wear to prom all the way to what appeared to be a hand-knit sweater that looked like it had been stolen out of a nursing home.

“What the fizzlesitcks?” This place was weird.

Then, Luz took a sniff. The air smelled... odd. Like someone had managed to combine the scent of ozone and *maduros* into one smell. It was both sweet and off-putting at the same time. Luz didn’t even know a smell like that was

possible. The worst part was that that was the only thing Luz could smell, as if every other scent had been overpowered by the *madurozone* smell.

She also felt hungry for some reason. But that was silly, because she had just had that oatmeal about an hour ago. She pushed that thought aside. She had to focus on getting her backpack back from the Owl Thief.

“Finally, you’re back.” Luz did her best not to scream at the sudden noise and quickly hid behind a nearby overturned couch. She cautiously peeked her head over the couch to see who the new voice belonged to.

The first thing Luz noticed was the giant shock of gray hair the person had, falling all the way down their back. The person was wearing a bright red dress and had a green-and-white dotted bandana covering their ears. Their skin was an incredibly pale shade of white, and they were T A L L, towering over Luz, even while they were bending over.

Alongside Mystery Person was Owl Thief, backpack in talon. The owl dropped Luz’s bag on a table and then rested on Mystery Person’s staff before MP started *screwing the owl into the staff* and the owl *turned to wood*.

Luz’s jaw dropped to the floor so fast it nearly broke the laws of gravity.

“Now let’s see what you’ve brought back,” MP said, as if they didn’t just do something Luz thought impossible. MP opened Luz’s backpack and began rummaging around in it, pulling out items and seeming to appraise them, before eventually putting them all back in and zipping the bag shut.

“Really, Owlbert? I can’t even sell any of this. As far as I’m concerned, this is all just garbage or kindling,” MP said to the owl... staff... thingy. Luz wasn’t sure what to call it.

The Good Witch Azura is NOT kindling! Luz thought. She couldn’t stand it anymore. Luz ran out from her hiding spot behind the couch, quickly grabbed her backpack with a “That’s mine, thank you very much.”, and made a mad dash for the still open glowing white portal.

Only for it to close and fold up into a briefcase before disappearing.

“You’re not getting away that easy.” Luz turned around to see MP holding up a key. The key was wooden and had a button with an eye-shaped symbol on it. If Luz wasn’t currently panicking for her life, she probably would have remarked on the ornate designs and delicate craftsmanship of the key. But now was not the time for that.

Luz screamed before turning back around and escaping out the back of the tent by lifting up the canvas and scrambling under it and through to the outside world, finding herself on a cliff face overlooking a town.

And what a town it was. Giant hands were erupting from the ground, houses covering them like a bastardized skyscraper. Even larger bones, looking to be a rib cage of some kind, pierced the heavens like a protective border around the town. And the teeth. There were. So. Many. TEETH.

There was no way Luz was still on Earth.

A fairy approached her. She screamed, before lowering her defenses at the tiny creature.

“Oh. Hi there, little fairy. Are you here to tell me that this is all a magical dream and that I’m going to wake up in a few minutes?”

“GIVE ME YOUR SKIN!”

Luz screamed, louder this time, and slapped the fairy out of the sky. Catching a brief glance at her hands, her vitiligo markings were definitely larger than normal, and no amount of blinking made them shrink back to their normal size.

“What is this place? Is this the underworld?” Luz questioned herself.

“You wish.” MP said, clapping a hand on Luz’s shoulder, before effortlessly scooping Luz up and carrying her over their shoulder. They then carried Luz back through the tent and sat her down on a stool in front of their stand of “Human Collectibles”.

“I’m so sorry! I just wanted my bag back!” Luz slammed her eyes shut, dreading what would happen next, “If you’re going to eat my skin, just do it now!”

MP chuckled. “Eat you? Why would I eat a potential customer?”

Luz slowly opened her eyes. *What?*, she thought.

MP then began bombarding her with item after item, all from Earth, and all had their purpose horribly misconstrued. A floor lamp was a “close combat practice dummy”, a glowing blue box was a “paperweight that can hold anything down”, and a miniature radio missing its batteries was a “snail display device”.

Luz giggled at the last one.

“It can do more than just that. Watch this.” She grabbed some batteries from a bowl labeled *Human Candy!* (???) and quickly popped them in to the radio. Turning it on and tuning in to one of her favorite stations, Luz let the radio work its magic.

It worked immediately, drawing a large crowd to the stand, all of whom were vying for possession of the wonderous music making machine. An impromptu bidding war began amongst the shoppers, with one even inquiring if they would be able to “eat the tiny person trapped in the box.”

MP smiled at the sudden influx of popularity in their stand. “What did you say your name was?”

“Oh. I’m Luz. Luz Noceda.”

MP began grabbing all the money they could from anyone in arm’s reach. “Well, Luz. I have to say that that was very clever, especially for a human.”

Luz raised a eyebrow at that statement. “That’s pretty weird for a human to say.”

MP smirked. “Oh, dear child, I am not like you.” They ripped off their bandana to reveal long, pointed ears. Luz’s mind instantly went to the Elven race from *Creatures & Caverns*.

MP then climbed on top of the table and continued their introduction. “I’m Eda the Owl Lady.” *Huh, that’s a unique moniker.* “I am the most powerful witch on the Boiling Isles.” *Okay, not an elf, but a witch.*

“Woah.” That was all Luz could get out before Eda continued her spiel.

“I am respected across the lands, feared for my prowess in wild magic, and I am —”

“BUSTED!” A gloved fist smashed the radio mid-song, causing the crowd to scamper, with cries of “Run, it’s a guard!” echoing across the marketplace.

“Eda the Owl Lady, you are wanted for usage of wild magic and refusal to join a covenant.” The guard held up Eda’s wanted poster.

The poster proclaimed that “Eda the Owl Lady” was to be captured, and whoever brought her in would receive a reward of 1 trillion snails. Alongside Eda and Owlbert, a third figure was also shown. The creature looked like a dog with a skull on its head. *Maybe that’s another one of her pets?* Luz questioned.

“You are hereby ordered to come with me to the Conformatorium.” The guard grabbed Eda’s arm, but she yanked it away.

“Would you chumps quit stalking me? I haven’t done anything,” Eda retorted, crossing her arms in defiance.

“You’re coming too, for associating with a known criminal.” the guard said, yanking Luz into the air by her hood.

“What! I didn’t know!” Luz yelped.

“Alright, alright. You win. Just put the kid down and let me pack up my stuff.” Eda said, before grabbing Owlbert and whacking the guard in the temple. The guard collapsed to the ground with a grunt. Eda then tapped her staff against the table, and the entire stand wrapped itself up in to a neat little knapsack. She then pulled out the key from before and pressed its button, resulting in the briefcase disappearing into the ether.

Sticking the key into her hair, Eda grabbed Luz’s arm and dragged the girl behind her, running from the downed guard.

“Come on, human. Let’s ditch these fools.”

“This is insane! If I die here, my mom will become a mess.”

“Don’t worry, human. You’re much more valuable to me alive than dead.”

“Wait, what’s that supposed to —” Luz was cut off by Eda jumping up and pulling her onto Owlbert, the group taking flight.

Luz looked down at where she just was to see the guard chase after them, only to stop when they realized their target had escaped. They looked like they said something before hanging their head in shame and walking away defeated.

Luz then realized that she was flying. On a magic stick. With no safety measures. She rightfully let out a small scream and clamped on to the wood with a death grip that made her knuckles white.

Suddenly, a giant twelve-winged bird with a razor sharp beak flew by, the wingtips brushing against Luz’s back. Eda picked Luz up and righted her on the staff.

“¡Dios mío! What is this place?” This *definitely* ws not Earth, Luz concluded.

“Welcome to the Boiling Isles, where anything and everything can and will try to kill you,” Eda explained.

“What other monsters are there?”

“Well, you’ve already met the annoying buggers that are fairies, but there are also griffins, vampires, giraffes...” Eda listed off.

“Hold on, giraffes?” Luz looked dumbfounded.

“Yeah. Bunch of witch-eating freaks. Don’t worry, though. We banished ’em to the Human Realm.” Eda shuddered slightly. One of her old classmates, Perry, had lost his wife to a wild giraffe attack.

Eda landed the staff, and Luz quickly hopped off, happy to be back on solid ground. Eda dismounted as well, but her hand was left behind. Luz saw the detached hand wiggle, independent of its owner, and she screamed.

“Oops. Sorry about that kid. Forgot to tell you that that happens sometimes.” Eda said nonchalantly.

“Well, I’ve had enough of this isekai, and this realm is not the ages 6-11 TV show I expected. So, can you let me use your portal thingy and go back home?” Luz said, only for Eda to point Owlbert at her.

“Now hold on just a minute. I’ll let you go home if you help me first. Come on, human.” Eda began walking away, and Luz was quick to follow.

The two stopped in front of a cottage with an attached stone tower. The cottage section had a large stained-glass window in the shape of an eye over the front door. Speaking of that door, there was an incredibly realistic carving of the face of an owl. It kinda freaked Luz out.

Luz looked over her shoulder. “Aren’t you worried that those guards could have followed us?”

“Not in the slightest. My house has a cutting edge defense system.” Eda confidently said.

“Hoot hoot! What’s the password?” The owl face on the door was actually talking. This world never stopped surprising Luz.

Eda poked the owl... door... thing in the eyes. “Can it, Hooty. Just let us in.”

“All right, all right. Jeesh. Do you all hate having fun or something? Ow! Hoot!” Hooty then opened his maw, expanding to fill the entire doorframe. Luz and Eda stepped through the doorway, before Hooty returned to normal and let out a belch.

“Welcome to... the Owl House.”

10 Minutes Prior

Number Five was tired of running. She adjusted her cowl, tightening it up, and began to survey the marketplace. There weren't any unattended stands. Oh Titan, this wasn't going to be easy. Guards would be crawling all over the place.

Five noticed that an oddly large crowd was gathering around a stand. They walked over to investigate. Music, or something like it, was being emitted from an odd-looking box. A tall witch with a red dress was grabbing handfuls of snails from the onlookers vying for the box and a... Hold on. Was that a human standing next to the witch? How did one of those get here? Five looked around, and noticed that a portal was open inside the witch's tent. Ahh, that's how.

Suddenly, a guard smashed the music box. The guard was apparently trying to arrest the witch for some crime. Five didn't hear what for though, because she was too busy looking for a place to hide. Not finding anywhere that would work, Five snuck into the witch's tent, ditched her cloak, and went through the portal without a second thought. Wherever she ended up would be better than here.

Saturday, May 22, 2021 | 9:22 A.M. | The Woods of Gravesfield, Connecticut

Camila was running out of options. She had checked the entire house and had also asked the Berenson's if they had seen Luz. No luck. Then, an idea struck her. Camila had always told Luz to stay away from the old abandoned house in the woods. Luz had to be there. She just had to.

Beginning her trek into the woods, Camila tried to remember the exact path to the rundown building. Turning left after walking passed the large granite chunk embedded in a tree, and then following the stream, she found herself in front of the house.

And Luz was there.

“Hello, fellow human. Skin sure is weird.” Camila chuckled as Luz stretched the skin of her elbow.

“Oh *cariño*, you had me so worried. I’m just glad you’re okay.” Camila said, giving Luz a tight hug.

“Alright, since the bus is nowhere to be seen, how about we drive to camp instead of waiting? I’ll give you full control of the playlist once we hit the interstate. How does that sound?”

“That, uh, sounds great,” Luz said, even though she looked confused for some reason.

Camila smiled, and the two packed the car up and drove off to camp.

Chapter 4

Luz Goes Through Her Mid-Teens Crisis

Kaufetag 2, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz gasped. “This place is beautiful!”

The living room floor was mostly barren, save for two old (but comfy looking) couches and a wooden coffee table. The walls were much more lively, though. The wall behind the large, maroon couch was covered in random objects. Luz could make out an axe, foam finger, and a disembodied hand, all hanging on the wall, among countless other oddities. The main focal point for that wall, though, was a huge framed version of the wanted poster Luz had seen earlier. On the ceiling, a ginormous caricature of an owl could be seen, outlined in a yellow flame. A few chests laid sealed shut by the door, while an extravagant fireplace and numerous candles provided lighting for the room, casting a slight orange hue over everything.

Luz laid her backpack down, resting it against the coffee table and letting her shoulders relax.

“So, do you live here by yourself, or?” Luz questioned.

“Actually, I have a roommate. Last I checked, he was napping though.” Eda responded.

Suddenly, a loud **THUD** echoed through the building.

“Not anymore, it seems.”

“Who dares awaken the King of Demons from his slumber?” Luz turned to see the cutest thing she had ever seen. Even cuter than the Hecazura fanart that acted as her phone’s wallpaper, hard as that may be. Standing in the hallway was a creature Luz had never encountered before. His body was similar to that of a dog, with black fur, a gray underbelly, with his tail being tipped in a similar color. A red collar with a gold tag on it was wrapped around his neck. Instead of dog paws, he had claws that were bone white, and his head appeared to be a skull with two horns protruding from the top, one of them missing a sizable chunk off the top. The cutest part, though, was his outfit. He wore a small navy blue nightcap, complete with a tiny yellow tassel hanging off the edge, and he dragged a light blue blanket behind him, Luz couldn’t help but be reminded of that one character from *Legumes*. (*What was that character’s name? Lincoln?* Luz thought.) His pink eyes with yellow sclera met Luz’s hazel.

“*¡Eres tan lindo!*” Luz ran over and wrapped the small creature up in a tight hug and spun around, sending the nightcap and blanket flying. “Eda, he’s adorable! Who’s a little cutie? Who’s a little cutie? Is it you? Is it you?”

King gave a valiant effort to escape Luz’s grasp, but it failed. “No! I don’t know who your little cutie is! Eda, free me from this monster!”

Eda then snatched Luz, dragging her away from King. “‘This monster’ is Luz, a human. She’s here to help us with our... situation.”

“Really? Great!” King exclaimed.

Luz looked up at Eda, still stuck in the witch’s grasp. “Hold on. What do you mean by ‘situation’?”

Eda sighed and let Luz down. “How should I explain this? King here was once the mighty King of Demons, ruling over his subjects with an iron fist and defeating countless enemies in battle, squashing them if they ever challenged his throne. But one day, his Crown of Power was stolen, and he turned into what you see today.”

“You mean this little sweetie.” Luz interjected, giving King another tight hug.

“The Crown is held under lock and key by the notorious Warden Wrath, trapped behind a nigh-impenetrable force field that only a human can break through. A human like you.”

Eda looked at Luz, gauging her reaction. The girl had a mix of wonder and

intrigue painted on her face.

“I’ll make a deal with ya, kid. If you help us get King’s crown back, you’ll get a one-way ticket through the portal back to the Human Realm. Plus, who could say no to this little angel?” Eda picked up King and gently shook him to drive home the point.

“Ahh! Don’t encourage this!” King yelled, before Eda dropped him to the floor.

“Look, kid. We need you right now. If you want to go home, you’ll have to do us a favor first,” Eda stated.

“So I’m guessing this is my only option?” Luz said glumly.

“Yup, now come on. We have to hurry.” Eda said, picking Luz up and throwing her over her shoulder, quickly walking out the door.

“Don’t forget about me!” King said, chasing after them.

“Where exactly are we going to get King’s crown?” Luz thought aloud as the group mounted Owlbert.

“Don’t worry, kid. It’ll be a blast.” Eda said.

“Welcome to the Conformatorium, where the quote unquote ‘unsuitables of society’ are locked away. Or, as I call them, ‘like-minded individuals.’” Eda hopped off Owlbert, before the others followed suit. The flight over had been relatively quick, but the weather had decided to take a turn for the worse, with the sunny skies giving way to muggy, gray clouds and the occasional bolt of lightning and clap of thunder. Luckily, though, there was no accompanying boiling rains.

During the trip from the Owl House to the Conformatorium, Luz had noticed that the odd hunger in her stomach was back. She probably just needed a snack or something to soothe the rumblings, so she ignored it. Food could wait. They were on a mission!

“Woah, they’ve got your face plastered everywhere.” Luz observed, ripping one of Eda’s wanted posters off a wall. She haphazardly stuck the poster in her back pocket.

“Yup, but we still haven’t been caught cause we’re so slick,” Eda said with a grin.

“Try to catch me when I’m covered in grease. I’m a squirmy little fella.” King said from atop Luz’s head, before promptly falling off and landing on the dirt with an *oof*.

“So what exactly is our plan to get King his crown back?” Luz inquired.

“It’s pretty simple: you and King are going to sneak up to the top of the tower and get his crown from behind the force field, while I’ll keep the warden distracted.” Eda explained.

“Wait, does that mean we’ll need disguises?” Luz gasped, “I have the perfect idea then.” Pulling her hood up, and flicking the sewed-on cat ears up, she let out a “Meow, meow!”

“That’s disgusting.” King remarked.

“You look like a *bona fide* weirdo. Good thinkin’, kid.” Eda chimed in.

Eda then slammed the butt of her staff against the ground. A glowing circular platform appeared under Luz and King’s feet and it began to rise.

“Don’t fall off and I’ll meet you at the Contraband area.” Eda said before hopping on Owlbert and flying off to another part of the prison.

The platform quickly rose up the side of the tower until it reached an opening that both King and Luz could fit through.

Acting quickly, Luz jumped off the platform and scrambled to find purchase on the ledge. King, meanwhile, jumped onto Luz and climbed on and over her until he was inside the building, grunting the entire time. Luz then barely managed to pull herself over the ledge and in, only to fall face first onto the floor.

As she recomposed herself and brushed the dirt and cobwebs from her face and hair, King chuckled at her misfortune. “Haha. You’re not a real cat.”

Just before Luz was about to snark back at the dog-creature, a new voice interrupted the two. “Hey, cat lady, how did you escape?”

Luz turned to find where the voice was coming from and found herself face-to-face with a prisoner. The witch in question had their black hair tied up in a ponytail and were wearing a simple indigo dress and a gold band around their neck with a pair of black, heeled boots to finish the ensemble.

“I’m not a cat, and I’m not a criminal.” Luz pulled down her hood, revealing her actual ears.

“You’ll probably be one soon, though.” King said.

“We aren’t, either. The warden just locks up anyone who doesn’t agree with the emperor or does something he doesn’t like. Like, I write fanfics about food falling in love. Everyone likes food, and everyone likes love, so just combine the two. But no. The emperor doesn’t like lemons, so off to jail I go,” The witch proclaimed.

“I’m here because I eat my eyes.” Another prisoner said, and to emphasize their point, they ate one of their own eyes, only for it to reappear in its socket a second later.

“We are agents of chaos! We speak the twuth!” A third prisoner said.

“Ugh, don’t listen to her. She’s watched way too many conspiracy theories on the CB.” The first prisoner interjected.

“The world is actually a stowy, and we are but chawacters in it!” The other continued.

Luz paced back and forth, debating with herself, before finlly coming to a decision.

“None of these are actually crimes. Sure, they are a little... odd, but you aren’t hurting anyone. You especially haven’t done anything worth prison.”

Suddenly, loud footsteps began echoing through the chamber.

“Oh crud, it’s the warden. Quick, hide!”

Luz quickly ran into an empty cell, King in close pursuit, and slammed the gate shut. Outside the cell, Eda’s wanted poster had fallen out of Luz’s pocket and came to a rest on the floor.

A door that Luz hadn’t noticed previously opened, and out stepped the warden.

“Do you fools think I’m deaf?”

Luz whimpered, moving to make herself as small as possible in the back corner of the cell. Unbeknownst to her, her spots on her hands were larger than they had ever been, nearly covering her entire palm.

“What are you scum talking about?”

Warden Wrath stomped his way over to the cell Luz and King were in before grabbing the wanted poster off the ground.

“Ahh. The Owl Lady.”

The warden then morphed his hand into a hammer, completely encompassing the poster, before slamming it into the gate of the cell.

“She’ll be in a cell soon enough.”

The warden turned to look at Luz. She pressed herself even further into the corner, feeling the cold, rough bricks rubbing against her skin. Luz slammed her eyes shut, saying a silent prayer that the warden wouldn’t notice that she was an intruder. What Luz didn’t notice, however, was that the eyelids she had closed had done so horizontally, instead of vertically.

“Fwee us, you tywant. You can never siwence us. The twuth will be heard.”

Luz slowly opened her eyes to see the warden opening the cell belonging to the conspiracy theorist.

“Hooway, fweedom at wast!”

Only for the warden to wrap his hand around the prisoner’s entire body and squeeze tightly.

“If I ever hear a word from any of you ever again, expect solitary confinement for the rest of your miserable little lives.”

With that last warning, the warden stomped off, conspiracy theorist in hand, and closed the door.

Luz slowly crawled back to the front of the cell, and checked to make sure the warden was really gone. After confirming that, she slowly lifted the gate and crawled out, King following close behind.

Luz ran over to the witch prisoner’s cell.

“Don’t worry, I’ll get you guys out.” With all her might, Luz tried to lift the handle controlling the cell gate. It didn’t budge.

“Curse my weak noodle arms.” Luz said, defeated.

“Hey, kid. You’re free. Enjoy it, even if we can’t.” The prisoner said, retreating into the darkness of their cell and sliding to the ground.

Luz despondently walked away, picking King up and holding him under her arm.

Eventually, Luz found a long hallway that was deserted and sat down, stewing in the despair that she couldn’t help those poor prisoners.

Suddenly, Eda flew up to the two before getting off Owlbert.

“Hey. Just checked on Wrath, and he’s preoccupied torturing some tiny nose creature. He won’t bother us for a while. Let’s find King’s crown and skedaddle.”

Wordlessly, Luz got up and began walking down the hall, only to find herself in front of a gigantic door with the word “CONTRABAND” emblazoned on it.

“My crown. I can sense it. It has to be nearby.” King ran up to the door and began fiddling with the knob, trying to force the door open.

Eda chuckled. “He’s adorable when power gets to his head.”

Luz felt a small smile on her face. Yeah, that is pretty cute.

King grunted as he threw the doorknob behind him. Apparently, he had broken the entire lock. Forcing the door open, King made his way into the contraband holding area.

“Come on, let’s follow him before he blows something up.” With that, Eda and Luz followed the dog-demon.

The room wasn’t exactly what Luz expected. She thought the magical force field would be like an invisible wall, separating the items and everyone else. Instead, the force field was an opaque blue-ish white cylinder in the center of the room. Outside the cylinder, a small box was toppled over, spilling objects onto the floor.

“Give me my crown!” King yelled as he ran head first into the force field, only to be sent flying back.

“Hey genius, we have a human remember?” Eda said, prompting King’s memory.

“Oh, right.” King responded.

Approaching the cylinder, Luz took a deep breath and pressed her hand against it, expecting to feel some odd sensation as her hand passes straight through.

It didn’t.

Luz’s hand was planted firmly against the force field.

Trying again, Luz backed up and walked forward, only to walk into a wall of magic.

She tried again to no avail.

“Eda, are you sure humans can pass through?”

“Pretty sure, kid.”

“*Mierda.*” Luz hoped *mamá* wasn’t somehow listening in, or there would be a meeting between a bar of soap and her mouth when she got back home.

Luz tried a fourth time to pass through the barrier, and got pushed back all the same.

After that last failed attempt, Luz was beginning to freak out.

Maybe she had to say some password.

“Klaatu barada nikto.” Nothing.

“Open sesame.” No change.

“Please open.” Once again, no response.

Luz began fervently pacing back and forth.

She was human, right?

She had to be. She wasn’t a centaur. She didn’t have blue skin, or an extra set of eyes growing out of her forehead, or a tail.

She had to be human.

She had to.

“Hey Luz, do humans normally grow scales on their arms when they’re stressed?” King’s voice broke through.

“What.”

Luz stopped pacing and looked down at her right arm, only to see that her entire forearm was covered in brown and white scales. Rotating her arm slowly, they glistened in the soft torchlight that illuminated the room.

Luz blinked, trying to make the scales go away. As she did so, she noticed that her eyelids were moving left-right, instead of the normal up-down motion she was used to.

What was wrong with her?

She looked at her left arm, and the same brown and white scales were popping up there, too.

Then, Luz felt her ears change. Reaching up to where her ears used to be, she instead felt fur-like hair and leathery skin.

Entering full on panic mode, Luz tried to run over to Eda, only to find her that legs were fusing together, forming into a tail. Falling to the ground, Luz felt the panic overtake her as she felt even more changes wrack her body.

Her hair that was normally cut short grew long, extending down her back.

Her nose flattened and rounded out, looking more like it belonged on a pug than a person.

Her teeth sharpened, being replaced entirely with canines.

Her hands became unrecognizable, with her fingernails morphing into claws and the fingers themselves growing long and spindly.

Her insides weren't safe, either, as she felt what felt like a second stomach grow out of nothing, and her entire digestive system got completely messed up.

As fast as the changes had began, they stopped.

Luz began taking slow, shallow breaths.

What had just happened?

Luz peered up at Eda and King to see their faces staring back at hers with a look of horror.

"WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE TITAN?" Eda broke the silence.

"I don't know. I swear Miss Eda, I have no idea what's going on." Luz said, feeling lucky that she could still talk.

"Okay, okay. Let's just think this through. So, you've always been a human." Eda began.

"Yeah."

"But then you got spooked because you couldn't go through the humans-only force field, and turned into a... whatever you are right now."

"Uh huh."

"Has this ever happened before when you got scared or anxious?"

“Not that I can think of.”

“Can you think of any way to turn yourself back into a human? Maybe try picturing yourself that way. See what happens.”

Luz closed her eyes, and concentrated.

She wanted to be human again.

She wanted her two legs back.

She wanted her hair to be normal.

She wanted fingernails and short, stubby fingers.

She wanted a pointy nose and blocky teeth.

She wanted her body back.

Opening her eyes, Luz was still a demon.

“Dang it,” she whispered.

“Hmm. Well that ain’t good,” Eda said. She swore she had seen a creature that looked like Luz before, in one of her old cryptozoology books that she had studied as a kid. What was it, though?

Breaking the silence, both of Luz’s stomachs decided to loudly rumble.

“Miss Eda, I know this is an odd question, but do you have any food on you?” Luz asked.

“That’s it!” Eda shouted, seemingly ignoring Luz’s request, “You’re a basilisk! I knew I’d seen it somewhere.”

Her celebration was short-lived though, as Warden Wrath appeared behind her, and sliced off her head in one swift move. Her head rolled to a stop in front of Luz.

Luz screamed, thinking she had just witnessed a murder, only for Eda to keep on talking.

“What the hell. You can’t let me celebrate for five seconds?” She complained.

Wrath walked over and picked up Eda’s head, bringing it to eye level.

“Eda the Owl Lady. I’ve finally captured you.”

Luz scanned her surroundings. It was just the four of them, no guards in sight. Good. That would make this much easier.

“I knew your pet couldn’t live without his toy, and he brought you right to me.”

Luz tried lifting her tail, and found that it had some significant heft behind it. She was still hungry, too. And it wasn’t for food, she realised. It was for something else. A plan quickly formulated itself in her mind.

“But I’m not here to be your captor. I am here with a proposition.”

It was now or never.

“LET MISS EDA GO!”

Swinging her body around and using her tail like a baseball bat, Luz swatted at Eda’s head and sent it flying. With the warden distracted by the now flying head, Luz quickly righted herself and faced Wrath. Opening her jaw as far as it could go, she began to **CONSUME**. She wasn’t sure how she knew what to do, but she did. It was like second nature for her. She felt her stomachs begin to fill as she drained more and more magic from the warden. His magic had an interesting taste, she noted, like a mix of grape juice and honey, with the viscosity to match.

Wrath first wavered back and forth, before falling to one knee as he grew weaker, and then finally collapsed to the ground face-first, his skin now a pale shade of gray instead of its normal purple hue.

Luz slithered over (That was weird for her to say.) and pressed two long fingers against the warden’s neck. She hoped the warden’s anatomy was similar to that of a humans. She felt a pulse, albeit a weak one. Good. She may have been an unholy abomination, but at least she wasn’t a murderer.

She then went and picked Eda’s head up and handed it over to its owner’s wandering body.

After screwing her head back on, Eda gave Luz a smile.

“I don’t know what the hell you just did, but thanks kid. Now let’s get out of here before Warden Wartface wakes up.”

Luz reciprocated the smile as best she could, even though hers probably made it look like she wanted to eat someone’s baby. It was the thought that counts.

As the trio made their way out of the contraband room, King noticed something sticking out of the box that was laying outside the force field. Dashing over, he pulled out a stuffed rabbit with buttons for eyes. Letting out

a giggle, he tapped the rabbit on the shoulder three times while proclaiming, “I dub thee Francois, and you shall serve as the second-in-command in my Army of Darkness.”

Returning to the group with a shout of, “I have a minion now!”, King scampered his way up to rest on Eda’s shoulder.

The group then swiftly made their way back to the main holding cells. They encountered a few guards along the way, but it wasn’t anything a quick whack to the back of the head with Owlbert couldn’t solve. It was right then that Eda had a wonderful, devious idea.

As Luz and Eda combined to free all of the prisoners in the Conformatorium, they noticed that three of them were staying behind at the front door.

Flying down, the three staying behind were the three prisoners that Luz had met earlier.

The fanfic writer approached them first.

“Thanks, Owl Lady and co. If you ever need any help, don’t be afraid to ask. Oh, and my name’s Katya, by the way.”

Katya then left, flying away on her palisman.

The eye eater was next, walking away with a simple, “Thank you.”

Finally, there was the conspiracy theorist, who ran off quickly after saying, “May the authow show mawcy on your souw.”

Luz slithered through the front door of the Owl House, not even bothering to humor Hooty, and promptly collapsed onto the couch. While the flight to the Conformatorium had been easy as a human, the flight back was not as easy, as she had to wrap her tail around Owlbert multiple times and gripping tightly with both hands to keep herself from falling off, which was not a fun task.

As she felt herself sink into the worn-out cushions, Luz heard her phone’s text alert go off, with the specific chime indicating that it was from *Mamá*. Letting out a sigh, she dug through her bag to retrieve the guilty device, only to find that her scaley fingers weren’t working on the touchscreen. Cursing silently, she put her phone back down. This was a conundrum.

Eda decided to make her presence known by barging into the living room from the basement, an old book held high in the air with both hands.

“FOUND IT!” She yelled.

“Found what?” Luz asked.

“My old cryptozoology study book.” Eda answered.

“Oh yay.” Luz said, eyes closing slowly as she struggled to stay awake. “Can we read it in the morning though? I’m super tired.”

“Totally, kid. I’ll leave it on the kitchen table for when you wake up,” Eda said, placing the book right where she said she would, before going upstairs.

“Thanks...” Luz slurred out as Eda went up the steps. The couch was really comfortable, and would be a nice spot to sleep.

“No problem, kid. Have a good night.”

**Saturday, May 22, 2021, 10:19 PM | Reality Check Summer Camp
| Hoboken, New Jersey**

Number Five sighed and collapsed onto her bed. Today had been stressful. She’d had to go the entire day in the ~~Luz~~ Luz disguise, something she had never done before. Before today, the longest she’d kept a morph on was only about two hours, but now she’d had to do it for over twelve. It really tested her willpower, because if she was scared or surprised hard enough, then she could accidentally drop the disguise, outing her as a demon to everyone who saw. That could not happen.

Another thing that Five realised was that the Human Realm had no magic in it whatsoever, and that she was running dangerously low on magic as well, so she was essentially stuck in this form for the time being.

She stared at the bottom of the bed hanging a few feet above her. The frame was in clear need of some fixing, but she doubted the camp cared, based on the similar state of disrepair of the other buildings she had been in today.

This camp was not at all what Camila had described it as during the car ride over.

Five let out another long sigh, drawing the attention of Masha, who stuck their head down from the bunk bed above.

“You alright, Luz?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah I’m fine. Just... thinking, ya know?”

“Whatcha thinkin’ about?”

“I don’t know. Camp. Life. Stuff like that.”

“Wanna talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“Alright. If you ever do want to talk about it, though, I’ll always be open. Same probably goes for Jake and Marco, wherever they are.”

“Where are those two, anyway? Wasn’t lights out supposed to be at 10?”

“I dunno. They’re probably playing a prank on Counselor Chapman or something.”

“Yeah, probably. Well, I’m really tired, so I’m gonna go to sleep. Night, Masha.”

“Night, Luz.”

Chapter 5

Luz Reads A Book

Schlaftag 2, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz slowly opened her eyes. Her eyelids moved left-right. Looking down at her arm, she saw it was still covered in those cursed brown scales.

“So it wasn’t a dream. Great.”

Letting out a sigh, she wormed her way off the couch and onto the floor. Looking back at the cushions, she noticed that she had apparently shed a few scales while she was asleep. Hopefully Miss Eda wouldn’t be too mad Luz got her couch dirty.

Slithering into the kitchen, Luz let out a loud yawn.

She needed some food.

And coffee.

Lots of coffee.

Hopefully that existed here.

Opening the fridge, Luz then realized that she would have no idea how to cook anything here. It didn’t help that she didn’t recognize anything that looked edible. Eyeballs and a weird yellow goop were definitely not her first choice for breakfast. She did see a giant jug of something called “Apple Blood”, so maybe It was this realm’s version of apple juice. That might be palatable.

Grabbing the jug and uncorking it, Luz gave the drink a quick sniff.

It smelled like iron. And it was a S T R O N G smell.

Nope. Back in the fridge it goes.

Just as Luz was about to put the drink away, she heard a shout of “Hey! Hands off my apple blood!”

Quickly stuffing the jug back in the fridge and slamming the door shut, Luz turned to see Eda walking down the stairs with an angry look on her face.

“King, how many times do I have to tell. . . Wait. You aren’t King. Who are you again?” Eda said, picking at her ear and flicking away a stray spider.

For some reason, Luz really wanted to eat that spider. But she didn’t, because that would be rude and weird.

“I’m Luz. The weird human-basilisk thing. We staged a prison riot last night. Any of that ring a bell?”

“Look, kid. I’m just gonna need you to repeat all that after I’ve had my apple blood, okay?”

True to her word, Eda grabbed a mug from one of the overhead cupboards, filled it to the brim with apple blood, and drank it all in one fell swoop.

King then walked down the stairs. Not acknowledging the others, he simply opened the fridge, grabbed the eyeballs and that strange yellow goop, threw them together on a plate, and started stabbing at it with a fork.

“Is he okay?” Luz asked.

“Yeah he’s fine. Just isn’t very talkative right when he wakes up. Give him a few minutes and he’ll start shouting orders,” Eda replied before she grabbed a burlap sack and started placing potions and bottles in it.

After watching her gather supplies for a few minutes, Luz slithered over and tapped Eda on the back.

“So, Miss Eda, are we going to be doing anything today?” A blue potion went in the bag.

“Well, today is usually delivery day for me. You see, I run a small business in crafting potions and elixirs and the like for customers. Now, normally I would dump this all on you, but given your current. . . situation, that won’t work.” A red and orange flask then got placed in the bag.

“And why is that, exactly?” An opaque green bottle went in next.

Eda tied the bag up and slung it over her shoulder before turning around and looking Luz in the eye.

“Because anyone who sees you will either run away, soil their pants, or try to kill you. That would lose me a lot of precious customers.”

“Point taken. So what can I do instead?”

Eda simply shrugged.

“Well, while I’m out on delivery, you could read that book I found. See if that’ll help you out.”

“I think I can do that. Shouldn’t be too challenging.” Luz said hopefully.

“Good, good. Oh, and also be sure to watch over King while I’m gone. I don’t want him getting into my apple blood. Okay, byeeee.” With that, Eda stepped outside and slammed the door shut. Luz was pretty sure she heard a tiny “ouch” from Hooty.

Turning her attention back to the kitchen, Luz saw that King had finished his breakfast(?).

“So... Do you want to do anything, King?” Luz asked while slithering into the kitchen.

“Can I try some apple blood?”

“What? Eda just said no.”

“Then no.”

Looking around for inspiration, Luz’s eyes fell upon the large pile of plushies in the corner of the living room.

“Hey King.”

“Yeah?”

“I’ve just gotten word that Francois is plotting a rebellion in the Great Plushie Army.”

“What!? That’s preposterous! This mutiny must be squashed!”

“Well then, go defend your throne, King!”

At that, King grabbed a butter knife and charged into (the imaginary) battle.

“That should keep him occupied for a while.” Luz said, finally getting a chance to read the book Eda had left out.

After situating herself back on the couch, Luz got her first real look at what she was about to read.

Luz knew that it was cliché to judge a book by its cover, but this book didn’t appear that interesting based off first glance. The front cover simply read “Mythical Beasts: From Anati to Zebtronkeys” in a old timey font, with the author being one “M. C. Leech”. The back cover was completely blank, so that told Luz absolutely nothing about what she was getting into.

Turning the cover page revealed some publication information about the book. This was the first edition of the book, and it was published in 12 CE by KASU Printing House.

“Hey King, how many years ago was 12 CE?”

The diminutive demon took a few seconds to pause his imaginary battle before responding with, “Uhh. . . 38.”

“Cool, thanks.” After that sufficient response, King went back to protecting the Kingdom of Plushieland from the invading Francois-ites.

If Luz did her math right (and her assumption that Earth years and Boiling Isles years were roughly the same length was correct), then the current year was 50 CE, which meant that the Boiling Isles calendar started around 1971 in Earth time, and that this book was essentially published in 1983.

Hopefully the information was still accurate. If Luz had to read a textbook from 1983 back in school, she would have probably questioned the education she was receiving.

Flipping to the table of contents, Luz noticed that the entries in the table of contents were all in alphabetical order. That was convenient. Skimming ahead to the B section, Luz found Basilisks sandwiched between “Barmanou” and “Batibat”, and the dot leaders pointed towards page 53 as where she wanted to look.

Turning to that page, Luz began reading.

53 | Basilisks

Basilisks (*Basiliscus terrentis*) are a potentially extinct¹ species of beast demons known for their abilities to shapeshift and to drain magic from witches and demons.

Potentially extinct? Obviously, they don't know about me. Luz thought smugly.

Appearance

In their natural form, basilisks are snake-like in appearance, with their bodies being covered in scales. The upper half that contains the head and arms is usually held upright, in a similar posture to that of a witch or a bipedal demon, while the lower half is kept on the ground most of the time, used mainly for locomotion. Their teeth consist solely of cuspids on account of their carnivorous diet. (See Diet section for more details.) Their ears are large and leathery in texture, sometimes accompanied by small tufts of hair. They have two arms, located about halfway up their torso, which end in webbed hands with long, thin, finger-like claws. Basilisks are capable of growing hair, although this is mainly restricted to the top of the head and down the spine.

Giving herself a quick once over, Luz confirmed that the book was right about how she looked.

Shapeshifting

All basilisks have the ability to shapeshift, allowing them to change the appearance of their body to match whatever they wish. The innards of the body also change to accommodate for the new outward appearance. For example, a basilisk could gain a third stomach if the creature they are shapeshifting into has one, or a second pair of eyes, or whatever they so desire if they are skilled enough. Most young basilisks are only capable of copying the forms of others that they see, but more experienced basilisks could create an entirely new form of their own.

When a basilisk does shapeshift, whether it be from their natural form to another or vice versa, that process expends magic, though the exact amount used up varies from basilisk to basilisk. Some basilisks, known as *neertse* (or colloquially as “morph dancers”), are renowned for the grace and finesse in which they shift from form to form.

Closing her eyes tightly and picturing herself in her human body, Luz hoped to feel any sort of change that would indicate she was morphing.

No luck. She was still a glorified slug.

Magic Draining

To power their shapeshifting abilities, basilisks are required to drain magic from other creatures, as they have no bile sac of their own to draw from. Basilisks are capable of draining magic from both living and deceased creatures. Magic can be drained either directly from the witch or demon, or indirectly via consumption of a spell circle. Magic that hasn't been used for transformation by the basilisk is stored in both of its two stomachs. The upper stomach is used to digest both non-magic foods and magic, while the lower stomach is used more as a reserve for the unused magic. The magic that is digested by the upper stomach is mainly used to keep the basilisk alive and allows for small shifts in appearance to quickly be made, while the magic held in the lower stomach is saved for when large-scale changes need to be made. On that note, some basilisks have shown the ability to passively absorb "background magic" without draining any creature of its magic, though whether this is some form of defect is yet to be fully studied.

When a creature is drained of its magic, the afflicted individual is usually left sluggish and with a skin tone that is paler than normal. Basilisk's are capable of killing a person by draining them completely of magic, but this is a very rare occurrence and is usually only seen in cases of self defense.

While basilisks are naturally aggressive when it comes to magic draining, some have shown significant restraint. One notable example is Illim and Aftran Yrk, co-founders of the Basilisk Peace Movement, where members only siphoned the magic of deceased or near-death creatures. Unfortunately, the BPM only lasted for approximately 4 years, unofficially disbanding after Illim and Aftran were killed by rogue demon hunters.

Luz thought back to the night before. Draining the warden had come so easy to her, and yet she had never done it before. She wondered if those other basilisks had found it that easy, or if they had to go through some kind of magic draining boot camp. That was a funny visual.

Habitats

While they can be found all across the Isles, basilisks tend to prefer the hotter, wetter climates found in areas such as the Ribs and the swamps of the Toes due to their cold-blooded nature. Basilisk settlements could previously be found in places such as the Hips, though they have since been destroyed. Local records suggest that basilisk populations for the larger settlements reached as high as approximately 30,000.

Luz had always preferred the summertime over winter, so that seemed to add up. It was sad that the little basilisk cities had been destroyed, though.

She would have loved to visit one in its heyday.

Diet

Besides consuming magic, basilisks usually eat a carnivorous diet, consisting mainly of smaller rodents (echo mice, rats, chipmunks, etc.), fish, and insects. There have been claims of exceptionally hungry basilisks eating witches, but there is no evidence to support them.

Here, the book was flat out wrong, although some of it was probably due to Luz being a weird Basilisk-Human hybrid. Sure, she didn't love eating her vegetables, and fish wasn't her go to entrée of choice, but she could force them down whenever Mom gave her The Look™.

Courtship

Aside from their shapeshifting and ability to drain magic, basilisks are also well known for their elaborate courtship rituals. While the exact processes aren't well documented, it is known that courtship is usually made up of numerous "trials", where one partner has to prove themselves worthy of being mates with the other. In recent times, these practices have fallen out of favor.

Glad I won't have to do all that. Sounds kinda messed up, not gonna lie, Luz thought, letting out a mental sigh of relief.

Reproduction

Basilisks are oviparous, meaning that they lay eggs when they intend to reproduce. Fertilization of the eggs happens inside the mother basilisk, when the mother and father are engaging in intercourse. Over the course of the next 7-8 lunar disappearances, the embryo grows inside the egg, feeding off the nutrients inside the yolk, before eventually breaking through the shell and entering the outside world. It is theorized that basilisks are capable of reproducing with witches/demons, but as of publication there are no known instances of this happening.

Madre de Dios, that doesn't sound fun.

Known Subspecies of Basilisks

Ooh, this looks interesting. I wonder what type I am.

Common Basilisk (*B. t. vulgaris*)

The majority of basilisks fall into this category. When a creature is referred to as simply a “basilisk”, this is the subspecies that is implied.

Common basilisks account for approximately 85% of the total basilisk population.

Greater Basilisk (*B. t. dominis*)

The greater basilisk is similar to the common basilisk in appearance, except for the fact that a greater basilisk is typically 3-4x larger in size. This increase in size means that greater basilisk also need to consume much more magic if they want to transform, and they likewise consume magic in larger quantities than a common basilisk. It is rumored that common basilisks are able to sense the presence of a greater basilisk, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Greater basilisks account for approximately 10% of the total basilisk population.

Unless Luz was due for a massive growth spurt soon, she was pretty sure she wasn't a greater basilisk.

Twin-tailed Basilisk (*B. t. scindus*)

A two-tailed variety of basilisks is also known to exist, though in much smaller quantities than common or greater basilisks. The extra appendage has no known impact on the health or wellbeing of the basilisk, and the two tails is actually purported to help the basilisk maintain stability while in a more upright posture when compared to its single-tailed counterpart.

Twin-tailed basilisks account for approximately 5% of the total basilisk population.

Looking behind her, Luz all but confirmed that she was a common basilisk when she only saw one tail swinging back and forth.

Luz then noticed that there was only one more type of basilisk left.

Roko's Basilisk (*B. t. notia*)

Only one instance of *B. t. notia* has ever been confirmed, when a cave in the Left Foot was being explored by an amateur spelunker, identified only as “Roko”, who said they were a witch in the Beast Keeping Coven on a mission to discover new species of demons. They described the basilisk in the journal entry below:

Saw an odd-looking basilisk while exploring that new tunnel system today. Stands about 10 hands tall, with gray scales covering its entire body. Has no arms to speak of, and it was slithering around a large pile of bones. It was incredibly thin, and looked like it hadn't eaten in weeks. Would have taken a picture, but there wasn't enough light, and didn't want to risk scaring it with a flash photograph. The demon seemed to be feral and/or insane, only muttering to itself about "creation" and "the singularity". I'm going to go back tomorrow and offer it some leftover food. Doesn't feel right letting anything suffer when I can help it.

It is presumed that Roko died after approaching *B. t. notia*, as there were no further entries in their journal, and skeletal remains were found nearby. When other spelunkers explored the same cave system at a later date, evidence of *B. t. notia* could be found in a series of scratches carved into the rocks that would be consistent with Roko's observations when considering a basilisk of that size and the proportionate claw length and width.

*Okay, I am **definitely** not that*, was the only thing that Luz could glean from that subsection.

Notes

1. Due to their ability to shapeshift and maintain that shifted form for an indefinite amount of time, it is highly probable that basilisks are still alive today in disguise as a witch or demon. Therefore, they are classified as only being potentially extinct, and as such, they will be referred to in the present tense.

The book did bring up a good point with that footnote. There could actually be other basilisks out there! It was just a matter of finding them that would be the hard part.

Chapter 6

Luz Cries On The Living Room Floor

Schlaftag 2, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

With a renewed sense of optimism, Luz tucked the book under her arm and turned to check on King. The little guy was probably getting lonely defending his castle all by himself.

Apparently, while Luz was reading, King had gathered himself an entire army of plushies. Stuffed animals of all shapes and sizes were lined up in rows, all of them pointing at Francois. The bunny in question was currently seated on the armrest of the other couch, and he had a jagged knife taped to his stuffed arm. On the stuffed animal's head was a circlet of paper with the word "Crown" written on it in crayon.

Luz silently chuckled to herself. King was such an adorable little tyrant, and he looked ready to rip Francois' head off in the cutest possible way.

"Hey King, do you need any help with your little battle thing you have going on?"

"Ahh, basilisk Luz. Your assistance is direly needed. The Great Army has fallen to the Francois-ites, and I have lost power. Will you help me reclaim my throne?"

"Of course, my liege. I shall help you however I can," Luz said, playing along and putting on a posh accent. To add to the immersion, she also bowed

deeply to King. (She couldn't really take a knee to show respect, so this was the second best option.)

"So, where are my skills most needed? I do fancy myself to be a formidable opponent on the battlefield," Luz continued, adding a little braggadocious flair.

"While I am sure your combat skills are excellent, we already have more than enough soldiers. Would you consider acting as a spy? I believe your basilisk powers would be well-suited for the role."

"Well, my lord, you have seen my attempts to shapeshift. They have been less than successful."

"Hmm. That is correct. How is it that you normally go about trying to shapeshift?" King inquired, tapping at his jaw.

"I simply picture whomever I wish to morph into."

"Have you tried other ways?"

"Oh, uh, no I have not, my lord."

"Perhaps, instead of simply thinking of what you want to become, you have to think of the changes themselves? Maybe that would help you go through with the transformation."

"I can give it a try."

Closing her eyes, Luz pictured her current form in her mind's eye.

Once she had that solidified, she focused on her right hand and imagined it shifting from the scaly, clawed basilisk version into the fleshy human version. As she did that, Luz felt her hand begin to change. Scales melt away, being replaced with smooth skin. Claws rounded themselves down and became fingernails. Finally, she felt her fingers shorten themselves from the Marfan syndrome-length they were before to one more befitting a regular human.

Feeling the changes finish up, Luz opened her eyes to see an unequivocally human hand at the end of her basilisk arm.

"Oh my gosh, it actually worked! Thank you so much King!" Luz exclaimed, dropping the accent out of shock that she actually had a human hand now.

Luz tried to give King a hug, but he held her at bay with his butter knife.

"Luz, you have to stay in character!" King reminded her.

“Oh yeah. Right, right. Sorry,” she apologized.

Clearing her throat, Luz put the accent back on and continued the game.

“Well, my lord, you prove your genius once again.”

After a brief pause, Luz added on, “Am I permitted to finish the rest of my transformation?”

“But of course! What king would I be if I didn’t? A mockery of one, that’s what.” King responded.

“Thank you, my lord.”

Now with King’s blessing, Luz closed her eyes again and brought up the mental image from before. Focusing this time on her left hand, she went through the same process of imagining the appendage shifting from basilisk to human and felt her real life hand copy the changes.

Opening her eyes again, Luz now had two human hands attached to basilisk arms.

Repeating the procedure for her arms, Luz didn’t feel much of a change, mainly just the scales being replaced by skin.

Luz also learned something at this moment: she could morph clothes! Given, all she had right now was the sleeves of her precious cat hoodie, but that was better than having to morph in the buff.

Next, Luz morphed her torso. While there weren’t any radical changes to her outward appearance, she felt her insides get completely changed. Her two stomachs combined into one, and she felt her small and large intestines both reappear. She could also sense her heart move from the dead-center of her chest back to the left side. That was an odd sensation, feeling her heartbeat move locations.

She then moved on to morphing her legs and feet. The main change that accompanied this morph was her tail splitting in two (painlessly, thankfully) and the two ends shriveling up as they formed into her feet. Luz slipped up, both literally and figuratively, when she tried to stand while her feet were still morphing. Trying to stand on what are essentially flippers isn’t exactly the best idea, apparently, Luz learnt as she flopped to the ground.

Picking herself up off the floor, Luz was now a human with the head of a basilisk.

Only one step left, Luz thought.

For the *pièce de résistance*, Luz imagined her basilisk facial features giving way to her human visage. Her teeth filed down, her nose jutted out, and her pixie cut emerged from the scraggly mess atop her head. Her ears receded back and shrunk down, no longer the giant leathery flaps they were before.

Collapsing to the knees and burying her head in her hands, now fully human, Luz began to cry. But these were not tears of pain or agony, but of joy.

Luz finally had her body back.

It was at this exact moment that Edalyn Clawthorne kicked open the door to her house, empty burlap sack in hand.

“What’s good, dip—” Eda paused at the sight of Luz crying on the floor.

“Uhh, are you okay, kid?” Eda asked, dropping the bag off by the door and walking over to the downed teen.

Luz stopped crying, sniffled, and simply gave a thumbs up, not even bothering to sit up and face Eda.

“So I see you got the whole ‘shapeshifting’ thing figured out, right?”

“Yeah,” Luz responded, muffled by the floor.

“Well then, congrats kid.” Eda offered Luz her hand, to which Luz accepted and pulled herself to her (now two human!) feet.

“Thanks, Miss Eda.” Luz said, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“So, how did ya figure it out?”

“Well, it was actually King who gave me the idea. He basically said ‘What if you have to imagine yourself turning into something, not just imagine something,’ and it worked!”

“Yeah, that’s totally what I said! It was all me!” King interjected, the imaginary war with Francois forgotten by both him and Luz.

“Well, to whoever came up with it, good job,” Eda said.

Luz suddenly wrapped the two in a tight hug, squeezing with all her might.

“Ahh! Too tight!” King squeaked out.

“What. Is. This?” Eda questioned between gasps.

“Oh. Sorry, sorry,” Luz said, relinquishing the hug.

“Hey kid, do you want a snack?” Eda asked after catching her breath.

“Sure?” Luz said uncertainly.

“Great, here ya go,” Eda said, reaching into her pocket and tossing Luz what looked like a squirming tiny squid with giant eyes.

Luz screamed and dropped the miniature calamari.

Before the “snack” could even hit the ground, Hooty caught the creature in his mouth and promptly swallowed it.

“That was yummy, hoot hoot!”

Monday, May 23, 2021 | Reality Check Summer Camp | Hoboken, New Jersey

Day two of camp had gone much better for Number Five. She had grown much more confident in her ability to hold the Luz disguise after keeping it on for a full day.

Overall, the camp activities for that day had been a mixed bag of boring, confusing, and interesting, and that was perfectly fine by Five’s standards.

Day three started at 8:00 AM, when the members of Cabin 7 were awoken by the weird screaming box on a pole telling them that it was time to, “Rise and shine.”

The group was then directed to a large building with long wooden tables and benches. Five made sure to sit with the other members of Cabin 7. After all the campers were seated, they were each given a cup of white liquid that looked an awful lot like smilk, a bowl containing small round balls of grain, and a spoon. Apparently, the food was called “sear-yul”, and you were supposed to combine the two ingredients into a weird soup. After Five poured the balls of grain into the not-smilk, she got weird looks from the rest of Cabin 7, with Jake claiming that she was, “doing it backwards.” Masha just laughed quietly. Blushing at the embarrassing faux pas, Five quickly ate the entire bowl of “sear-yul.” She noted how much more flavorful the grain balls were than the “food” she had received while imprisoned by the Emperor.

After they had all finished their bowls, the group compared their schedules for the day. Five's day started with Math, followed by U.S. History, Home Economics, Art, and was finished off by Science at 2:00 PM. Each class was 45 minutes long, and there would be a 15 minute break between classes. Thankfully, there was also lunch from noon until 1:00, so nobody would starve. Five then noticed that she shared classes with all of her cabin-mates. She had Math class with Masha, U.S. History with Jake, and Science with Marco. Sadly, she'd be all by herself with complete strangers in home economics and art.

The math class hadn't been that interesting, with the majority of class time being taken up by the teacher (Ms. Cabrera) introducing herself to the class and the campers doing icebreakers to get to know each other. Luckily, the class was allowed to pick their own seating arrangements, so Five sat next to Masha for the class. The two ended up chatting throughout the entire class period, with Mr. Tidwell even calling them out for it when they got a little too loud.

Five understood absolutely nothing about the history class that followed. Mr. Fitzhenry barely gave any warning before launching into the lecture. Five would think that she was beginning to understand some of the concepts, like "the Declaration of Independence" and "the 13 Colonies", but then the teacher would launch into a whole different topic and Five would struggle to keep up. The worst part was that Five didn't even get to choose where she sat, being forced into a spot in the middle of the class, while Jake was seated up front and far away, so she couldn't even ask him what anything meant. She did see him diligently taking notes, though, so she resorted to asking him to explain the lecture after class was over. He gave a pretty quick overview that was much easier to understand than the incomprehensible mess that was the lecture. Five thanked him before going onto her next class.

The home economics course (Or, as Mr. Gustafson called it, "FCS") was similar to the math class, with the teacher introducing himself, and then the students would get to know each other through activities. This class was a nice reprieve from the mess that was History with Mr. Fitzhenry. Five even talked to a camper who wasn't from Cabin 7! Their name was Max, and they were really nice.

Next was lunch, where all the campers returned to the big building with tables from before. Once again, Five sat with her cabin-mates for the meal. Instead of "sear-yul", they were all getting "sand witches", which horrified Five. She thought that humans didn't know about the Demon Realm. Her

fears were quickly alleviated, though, when she discovered that “sand witches” were not actual witches and were just slices of bread with thin cuts of meat and cheese placed between. Alongside the entrée, they also received an apple (Finally, something Five could recognize!) and another glass of milk, except this one was supposed to be drunk straight from the cup and not poured over anything.

Humans were weird, Five decided.

After lunch was art class, which Five actually found to be quite therapeutic. The entire class period consisted of each camper sketching out an important memory. Ms. Sunny, as the instructor asked to be called, simply walked around the art studio, occasionally commenting on a camper’s work.

For her sketch, Five drew the old abandoned shack she had escaped to the human world through. She first focused on the outline of the house, making sure to get every detail exactly right. It was easy enough, though, as the image of the house was burned into her brain. Next, she colored in the doorway, filling it entirely with black. She then worked on the surroundings of the house, drawing the trees and the birds in the sky and the small stream that trickled by. She gave the trees (odd in coloration as they were) green leaves and brown trunks. She colored the grass around the house a putrid shade of yellow that gradually gave way to a healthier and more vibrant green as it moved further away. Finally, she colored the sky a pleasing blue. Sure, she still wasn’t used to a blue sky, but it was infinitely better than the oppressive purple that she had seen while on the run.

As Five finished up her sketch, Ms. Sunny walked by and took a look at Five’s work.

“Wow, Luz. This is very impressive! So, what memory is this associated with?”

“This is the place where I first felt... free. Yeah, that’s the right word. Free.”

“Well, if your work is consistently this high quality, you won’t struggle at all in this class. Keep up the good work!”

“Thank you, Ms. Sunny.”

“You are most certainly welcome, Luz.”

Five liked the art class. It was nice.

For her last class of the day, Five headed over to Science with Dr. Brown. As Five looked around the classroom, she saw a series of posters on the wall depicting the internals of the human body, each focusing on a different body system. Letting out a long exhale, she noticed the massive difference between her natural anatomy and that of a human. Humans had a *lot* more going on inside them then she realized.

After taking a seat next to Marco, Five waited for the teacher to show up.

After waiting for a solid ten minutes, the door to the classroom was yanked open, and in stepped an elderly man dressed in a dirty lab coat and slacks. The crazed look in his eyes, and his even crazier hair, did not give Five a good first impression of the man.

“I am very sorry for being late on your first day, class. Einstein had a negative reaction to a new blend of dog food I was trying out and suffered some gastrointestinal issues that had to be dealt with.”

Five buried her head in her hands and hoped the doctor never called on her to answer a question.

This was going to be a long 45 minutes.

Chapter 7

Luz Makes A Deal

Gehetag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz awoke to King poking her in the shoulder.

“What is it?” Luz grumbled out, still in the process of waking up.

“You’re human wonder rectangle started buzzing and made a weird noise when Eda sent Owlbert on a collection run,” King explained.

“You mean my phone? Wait, my phone! Oh schnitzel, I never replied to Mom’s text! Where’s my phone?”

“On the coffee table.”

Scrambling out of her sleeping bag as fast as she could, Luz yelled a quick “Thanks, King!” as she ran down the steps and over to the couch.

Picking up her phone and checking the notifications, Luz scrolled past all the junk and spam. Then she finally found what she was dreading: 6 missed messages and 19 unanswered calls, all from her mom.

Opening her text app first, Luz finally got to read what her mom had sent her days prior.

Mom: How was your first day of summer camp, mija? **Mom:** Luz, are you there? **Mom:** Luz? **Mom:** Please respond. **Mom:** ??? **Mom:** I’m going to call you. Please pick up.

As Luz fretted over what to send in reply, King scampered down the stairs and took a seat on the couch next to her. After stressing over what the

correct response would be in this scenario, Luz simply decided to break the ice and send “hey mom.”

It explained absolutely nothing, but at least it was something.

The message didn’t send.

Peeking at the top of her phone’s screen, Luz saw that she didn’t have any cell service.

There’s the culprit, she thought.

Then, Luz had an idea.

“You said my phone started buzzing and stuff after Eda opened the portal door, right?” Luz said, turning to King.

“Yeah, why?”

“I think that’s how my phone got a connection, because the signal made it through the portal. So if we have the door open, then my message should send, and Mom will have no idea that I’m in a completely different dimension!” Luz said excitedly, getting a little too loud at the end.

“Oi, what are you two yelling about? I’m trying to get my daily cat nap in over here!” Eda said, shuffling down the stairs, adorned in her bathrobe and bunny slippers.

“We’re trying to send a message to my mom, and we need the portal door to do it.”

“Ugh, fine. Just make it quick. I don’t want any actual humans stumbling through the door.”

With that, Eda fished the portal key out of her hair and pressed the eye. As soon as the door had fully opened, Luz tapped the Retry button, and the text went through.

“Wait, Miss Eda. Can we keep the portal open a bit longer? I want to see if my mom will respond. She sounds really worried.”

Eda let out a long exhale before answering, “Sure, kid. But if anything weird comes through that portal, it’ll be your fault, *capische?*”

“Got it.” Luz said with a nod.

And so the waiting game began. Luz knew her mom wasn't constantly checking her phone, so that meant she probably had a few minutes to come up with a reasonable excuse as to why she hadn't responded for over a day.

She could say that she had lost her phone in the woods or somewhere.

Hmm. That could work, but then Mom would want to know what I was doing in the woods, and that could lead to a whole web of lies.

Putting that idea on the backburner, Luz tried to think of other scenarios where she would be phone-less.

What if... camp took away all our electronics to force everyone to interact with each other? Wait, no that one is even worse. Mom would probably want to know who I made friends with, and that's just asking for trouble.

Before Luz could even think of any other potential excuses, her phone began ringing.

"Everybody, be quiet. I can't let Mom know you guys exist."

Not even bothering to check the caller ID, Luz answered.

"Hey, Mom."

"Oh Luz. You're okay! You had me so worried, cariño. Where have you been?"

"I've just been at camp, *mamá*. I lost my phone during a nature hike. I found it just this morning. And, before you ask, no, I wasn't in any danger or anything. My phone just slipped out of my pocket and I didn't notice until after the hike was over."

"That's such a relief, mija. I was worried sick when you didn't answer your texts. I thought that you had gotten kidnapped or something horrible like that."

"It's okay, *mamá*. I'm perfectly fine. I just made a stupid mistake, that's all."

"So how has camp been, then?"

"It's been ok. The activities have been really fun, but the classes have been hit or miss."

"How have your cabinmates treated you? Are they nice?"

"Yeah, *mamá*, they've been cool. I think I'm gonna like it here."

“That’s great to hear, mi Lucecita. Okay, I’ve got to head off to work. Be sure to take lots of pictures so I can hang them up.”

“Okay, mom. I’m gonna go get some breakfast. Te quiero.”

“Te quiero mucho, mija.”

Luz ended the call and motioned that it was okay for everyone else to start talking again.

“So that’s your mom, huh,” Eda said.

“Yeah, she’s the best. You guys would love her. She can just get a little... overprotective some times.” Luz responded, thinking back to all the times Mom had threatened someone with *La Chancla*.

“What was that language you were speaking with her, at the end? That certainly wasn’t Common,” Eda questioned.

“Oh, that. That was *español*. Err, Spanish. Sorry. I can teach you guys some if you want.”

“No, no. That’s fine. Was just curious, that’s all. Say, how about we celebrate you getting to talk to your mom with a slug run.”

“Sure. Wait, what’s a slug run?”

“Come along and you’ll find out.”

Before Luz laid a giant dead slug. Flies were abundant, flitting back and forth. The water surrounding the beached demon was tainted green, and the stench emanating from the rotting carcass was like nothing Luz had ever smelled. She wasn’t sure the smell would ever completely go away.

She should have known something was up when Eda said they were all going on a celebratory “slug run.” Now, for all Luz knew, a slug run could be an incredibly peaceful and fun event, but she was wary. Too many insane and dangerous things had already happened while she was on the Isles, and she wasn’t going to let her guard down so easily.

“So, what exactly am I looking at here, because this is not exactly what I had in mind.” Luz asked, already regretting the decision to come along.

“That, dear child, is the glorious trash slug. It’ll consume anything and everything given the opportunity, and the stuff it can’t digest it stores away.

And that stuff is why we are here.”

To emphasize her point, Eda stuck her hand in the slug’s mouth and rummaged around before pulling out an old portable TV.

“Now, to you this may look like any old hunk of metal, but to those schmucks back in town this could be a . . . black shadow box that tells you when you’re gonna die, or something like that.”

“This is gross. I don’t think I’m cut out for this.” Luz replied, slowly backing away.

“Ahh, come on Luz! This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. You get to wade through the remains of a giant living trash can!” King shouted whilst reclining on his beach towel, flicking his sunglasses up to peer at the two.

“Yeah, kid. This will be fun!” Eda then grabbed Luz by the hand and drug her next to a puddle of bile.

Eda forced Luz’s hand under the surface and wiggled it around until they found something. Eventually, Luz reluctantly closed her hands around something spherical. Quickly bringing her hand out of the goop, Luz examined what she’d found.

It was a tiny goop-covered ball.

Hooray.

“See, kid. Wasn’t that fun?”

“Yeah. . . Totally fun.”

Having no place better to put it, Luz stuffed the ball in her pocket and looked up at Eda.

“Look, Miss Eda, I’m not feeling the best. I think I’m gonna go on a walk or something to clear my head.”

“Alright kid, just come back before we head to the market or you won’t get a cut of the profits. I need your human knowhow to really sucker people in.”

Luz glared at the goop ball as she walked through the forest.

“Aggh! What am I supposed to do? It’s not like I can just waltz through the portal door back home. Mom thinks I’m at camp. I guess I’m just stuck here. For the next three months. Great.”

Pocketing the goop ball, she kept wading her way through the forest. The fresh air really did make her feel better. She could actually breathe without inhaling a stray fly.

Stumbling upon a small clearing, Luz heard another voice.

“It doesn’t matter what grade you get.”

Diving behind a fallen tree, Luz peeked her head over to investigate the newcomer, who was pacing back and forth, talking to herself. Luz also saw that the person was apparently the owner of giant cauldron that was placed on a wagon.

The girl was short and stocky, standing an inch or two shorter than Luz, with light skin and navy blue hair that hung to her shoulders. She had olive green eyes and gold-rimmed glasses, and Luz couldn’t help but notice the girl’s pointed ears, indicating she was a witch.

For clothing, she wore a gray tunic covered by a black cowl, with a gold pin keeping the hood secured around her neck, and a black belt wrapped around her waist. The girl also had a pair of matching sleeves and tights on, both being a pretty orchid color. If Luz didn’t know any better, she would assume that this was some kind of school uniform. Did that mean there was some kind of magic school here?

“Even if I fail the assignment, I can still do good on the final. My GPA isn’t a reflection of me as a witch. And Dad and Pops are right, this track has the most opportunities after graduation. Now, get to class!” That confirmed it. There was a magic school here! Luz *had* to see it!

Glasses Girl then strutted forward and pointed off into the distance, like some kind of power pose, only to step on a stray flower sprouting from the otherwise barren patch of dirt. Once noticing the fallen flora, she quickly knelt down and began tracing a spell circle. Luz watched on in wonder as the flower straightened itself and even began to bloom.

“I am so sorry, little buddy. I didn’t mean that, I promise,” the girl said to the now-healthy plant.

Luz then felt the ground beneath her rumbling. Suddenly, another wagon wheeled itself into view, and atop the cauldron sat another girl, reading a book called “Magic 101”.

This new girl looked a heck of a lot like Melissa Chapman, the cheerleader that rejected Luz’s invitation to prom. They both had the same facial

structure: pointy nose, small mouth, sharp chin, everything. The only real differences were the hair color and skin tones. Book Girl had emerald green hair compared to Melissa's light blonde with a pink streak, and Book Girl was extremely pale, while Melissa had a tan.

Closing her book and hopping off the wagon, Book Girl approached the other witch.

Luz then noticed that the two witches uniforms, while nearly identical, had one key difference. Book Girl's tunic sported a gold badge in the shape of a star, while Glasses Girl's uniform had no badge to speak of.

"Hey, Willow," Book Girl said.

"Hi, Amity," Willow responded.

And now we have their names, Luz thought.

"How's your abomination assignment coming along?" Amity asked.

"Look for yourself." Willow said, pointing over to her cauldron.

Amity walked over, and just as she was about to remove the lid, the cauldron rattled and tipped over, spilling a purple goop with eyeballs rolling around it. A mouth formed from the sludge, emitting a loud groan.

"Yikes. Hermonculus isn't going to like that. This can probably still be salvaged though, and you could get a B if everything goes right." Amity said, grimacing.

"Yeah, I know. I doubt that'll happen, though." Willow replied, dejected.

Off in the distance, a bell tolled three times.

"Whelp, that's my signal. Bye, Park." Amity then hopped back on her wagon and rode off down the trail.

"Bye, Amity," Willow said quietly.

After righting her cauldron, Willow started scooping up all the abomination goop she could, though most of it just fell through her fingers. Switching target to the rogue eyeballs, she tried to pick one up, only for it to fall to the ground and splat onto the grass.

"Augh!" Willow let out a scream, "I hate making abominations! I hate getting bad grades! I can't stand it anymore!" Her eyes flashed green as giant roots,

covered in thorns, burst from the ground and began writhing around like snakes.

One of the tendrils shot out and wrapped around Luz's ankle and tossed her into the air. Screaming, Luz felt herself lose control of her morph. When Luz finally landed on the ground, she was back in her basilisk form.

Oh no, was Luz's only thought when she realized she had scales again.

Suddenly, Willow snapped out of her rage trance and quickly dispelled the roots.

"Oh no, no, no, no, no! I am so sorry," Willow apologized.

"Don't worry. It's fine. I didn't even feel it," Luz replied.

"Ahh! You can talk?! Wait a minute, you're a basilisk! Don't hurt me, please!" Willow cried out, scrambling away from Luz and falling on her behind.

"No, no, no. I'm not gonna hurt you, I swear," Luz said, holding her hands up, trying to placate the witch's fears.

"You promise?" Willow said, looking up at the basilisk.

"Do you think we would be having this conversation if I *wanted* to hurt you?" Luz deadpanned.

"No." Willow answered, shaking her head.

"There's your answer. Now come on, up you go." Luz said, pulling Willow to her feet.

Another bell tolled, but only twice this time.

"Wait, I thought basilisks went extinct years ago. How are you... alive?"

"Well, that's because..." Luz paused to let the tension build up for the big reveal.

It was time for an experiment.

Closing her eyes and picturing her basilisk body, Luz imagined her entire body all morphing into her human form.

Scales melted away, forming into the spotted skin Luz knew so well. Her tail split in two, slowly changing into her legs. Her arms shrunk, and her human hands emerged from what used to be claws. Her internals went through

that weird gymnastics routine-like movement. Her teeth dulled and her skull restructured itself. Finally, her hair shortened and changed from a tangled mess into her classic pixie cut.

Willow simply stared at the now human girl, and Luz probably have the same reaction if she was in the plant witch's shoes.

"Ta da! I'm also a human," Luz said, doing jazz hands for emphasis, "I've lived my entire life in the Human Realm. As a human. I wasn't aware I was a basilisk until a few days ago. I was like an undercover agent for the Demon Realm that was so undercover I didn't even know I was undercover."

Willow chuckled at that.

"Heh, that's weird. So, besides human and basilisk, can you turn into anything else?" She asked.

"I mean, theoretically yeah, but right now I've just got human mode and slug mode. Haven't tried anything else, really." Luz answered, shrugging her shoulders.

A clump of abomination goop slid by, letting out another groan.

"Say, do you want some help on your little abomination project?"

"I guess so. I mean, I suck at abominations, but maybe if I get a good enough grade, then people will stop calling me 'Half-a-Witch'."

For the second time that day, Luz had a wonderful idea that was completely foolproof and was impossible for it to go wrong.

"Then have me morph into your abomination!"

"What."

"I mean, that thing is just a pile of goop that moans and groans, and I can morph into said pile of goop and then moan and groan when you're presenting. Plus, that means I'll get to be in a real life magic school." Luz couldn't help but squeal in excitement at the prospect.

"That is true," Willow said, chuckling.

The two shook hands.

"It's a deal."

Chapter 8

Luz Impersonates A Homework Assignment

Gehetag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

It turns out that having a body made entirely of a viscous fluid was weird, Luz quickly learned. Her movements were slow and sluggish. On the bright side, though, she could act like a liquid and conform to her surroundings. In this instance, her “surroundings” were contained to the inside of Willow’s cauldron.

Poking her head out, Luz saw the main entrance to Hexside School of Magic and Demonics. She could barely contain her enthusiasm at the thought of being in a real life magic school.

“Remember the plan, okay? No acting like a human if a teacher is around.”

Luz slowly nodded and made a grunt, not really being able to talk without vocal cords.

“Good,” Willow said, replacing the cauldron’s lid. Luz took that as her cue, and she sunk down to become one with the goo yet again.

Being in the cauldron was odd, to say the least. Luz couldn’t see, taste, or smell anything, but she could feel the vibrations as the cauldron moved from place to place, and she could also hear the student body as she passed by. The voices ranged from what sounded like children all the way up to teenagers her age and older, as well as the occasional teacher.

Feeling the cauldron come to a stop, Luz readied herself, gathering the surrounding abomination goop into a body.

“Willow, you won’t believe the things humans do,” a new voice said. Luz guessed the speaker to be about 11 or 12 based on the pitch.

“Really? What is it?” Willow replied.

“Did you know that humans intentionally inject themselves with diseases? But why would they do that? Maybe it’s for biological warfare.”

Peeking ever so slightly out the cauldron, Luz did a quick 360 check to make sure no teachers were nearby. Satisfied that there were none in the area, she ducked back down.

“Okay Augustus, I’m going to show you something, but you have to be calm.” Willow said, her voice muffled by the thick walls of the cauldron.

“I can be balm. I mean, calm.” Augustus said, his voice also dampened.

“Alright. Abomination, rise.”

That was Luz’s cue.

Rising from the pot, Luz let out a loud groan and waved her arms about.

Finally getting a good look at Augustus, she saw that he was wearing a similar uniform to Willow’s except his sleeves and leggings were a light blue color instead of orchid. Physically, the boy was significantly shorter than her and had a darker complexion. His hair was cut in a stylish fade, and his dark blue eyes were wide with a youthful wonder about them.

“Woah. Great job, Willow. That’s a really good abomination!”

“But that’s not all I have to show you, Augustus. Go ahead, Luz. The coast is clear.”

Nodding, Luz morphed human, even though she ended up still covered head to toe in abomination goop.

“Luz Noceda, at your service,” she said, standing up and bowing deeply.

“Luz, abominations don’t act like that,” Willow scolded.

“Yeah, yeah. I know. Just hamming it up for the reveal.”

“Impossible. There’s no way,” Augustus said, rubbing at his ears.

“Augustus here is the president of the Human Appreciation Society. Most witches couldn’t identify a human right away, but he’s an expert,” Willow explained.

“Where are your fins?”

“Humans, uh, don’t have fins. And also, those injections you were talking about are for creating an immunity to the disease being injected, not for warfare. No need to be worried, Gus,” Luz replied to the misinformed witch.

“Gus?” The newly dubbed witch questioned.

“You know, Augustus, Gus. It’s a pretty common nickname where I’m from.”

“Wait, you mean I just got a nickname? From a human? Wow. Gus. This is the best day ever,” Gus said.

Suddenly, a loud scream echoed through the halls. Luz frantically looked around, searching for the source.

“I’ve got to get to spelling class. See you at lunch, guys,” Gus said, grabbing a wand and a textbook from his locker before heading off.

Willow waved goodbye before turning to Luz. “Alright, back into the pit of despair you go.”

Luz simply hissed as she morphed back into an abomination and sunk into the cauldron.

Feeling the cart come to a stop, Luz presumed that she and Willow had reached their destination: Abominations 101, taught by Professor Hermonculus.

Based off the chatter that Luz could hear, the students in this class were a mixed bag on how they felt about the assignment.

Suddenly, all the talking died down. Luz guessed that that meant the professor had just shown up.

“Alright class, today we will be beginning your abomination presentations. I will pick the order in which you will be presenting. During your presentation, you will first order your abomination to rise from its cauldron before giving it two commands of your choosing. If your abomination incorrectly performs a command or is significantly deformed in appearance, your presentation will be cut short and you will fail the assignment. Is this understood?”

A chorus of “Yes, sir!” rung out from the class.

“Good. Up first will be Jerbo.”

“Ugh. Too many eyeballs. How do you mess up this egregiously? Fail.”

The student slowly wheeled their cauldron away.

That was the fourth student who barely even get a chance to present. Luz felt bad for them.

“These presentations have been pathetic. If the next one is a failure, then you’ll all receive extra homework for the rest of the semester.”

A collection of groans and shouts of protests followed the teacher’s proclamation.

After waiting for the cacophony to die down, the professor continued. “The next to present will be—”

“Excuse me, sir, but I’m ready to present my abomination,” Amity interrupted.

Hermonculus chuckled before continuing, “I know your abomination will be stellar, Miss Blight, but we have to save the best for last. How about... Willow.”

Luz heard another round of groans, this time intermixed with students complaining about “Half-a-Witch” dooming them to extra homework.

Then, Luz felt the cauldron start to move, so she started to collect the goop up into what would be her body.

“Abomination, rise.” Willow commanded after letting the goop come to a rest.

Slowly emerging from the cauldron, Luz let out a long moan. It was time for her to act like a mindless blob of goop.

“Abomination, bow.”

Bending at the waist, Luz did as she was told, being sure to keep her arms and back straight.

“Abomination, draw.”

Clambering out of the pot and slowly walking over to the blackboard, Luz picked up a piece of chalk and drew a stereotypical quaint little house with a chimney. After finishing her masterpiece, Luz awaited further instructions.

“This is a very impressive abomination, Miss Park. But does it speak?” The professor asked, marking something down on a piece of paper.

“No, sir, it does not. I couldn’t get the vocal cords to properly develop.” Willow answered. The professor then wrote something else down on the slip of paper.

“Hmm. In that case, you get an A minus. Please return to your seat, Miss Park.”

“Thank you, sir. Abomination, back in the cauldron.”

Luz took that as her sign, climbing back into the pot and melting down to become one with the goo yet again.

Willow then placed the lid back on the cauldron and wheeled it over to her desk before sitting back down.

Luz heard the bell scream and all the students quickly started packing up. Then, the professor’s voice broke through the noise.

“Alright students. We will continue your presentations tomorrow, and Miss Blight, you will be going first. Miss Park, I would like to talk with you after the room clears.”

Luz was pretty sure she could hear Willow gulp.

Gradually, the students filtered out of the room until it was just Willow, Luz, and Hermonculus.

“You wanted to talk with me, sir,” Willow said, walking to the front of the room.

“Yes, I do. Your presentation today was very good. I’ve rarely seen a student make such strides in such a short amount of time. Tell me, if you please, what led to this sudden improvement in your abomination skills?”

“Well, sir, would you believe me if I said that Amity was offering private tutoring sessions?” Willow said, lying through her teeth.

“Ahh, the young Blight, always striving for extra credit. I’ll have to ask her about that. Thank you, that’s all I needed. Head off to your next class, Miss Park.”

“Have a good day, sir,” Willow said, before retrieving her cauldron and wheeling it to the next class.

Willow’s next class was some kind of math or history course or something. Luz wasn’t exactly sure. The teacher, a salamander-like fellow, gave a very enthusiastic lecture about the “heximal system.” Luz didn’t have any idea what that was, and she could only understand about half of what the instructor was saying, but she listened nonetheless. A funny thing happened about halfway through the lecture, though. Luz was pretty sure she heard someone outside yell “NOOO! SCHOOL!” in a very dramatic fashion. She couldn’t tell who it was, sadly.

After that class was lunch, and Luz was glad to finally get some food in her stomach. After making sure the room was free of faculty members, Luz cautiously morphed human and struck up a conversation with Willow and Gus. She remained in the cauldron, though. She didn’t want to risk being an rogue abomination on the loose.

“I am famished. Can I have some of your food? I haven’t eaten all day.” Luz asked the two, leaning over the edge of the pot.

“Sure. Do you want some of my PB and J?” Gus offered.

“Yeah, I’ll take– Wait,” Luz cut herself off. “What does PB and J stand for?”

“Pain butter and jalapeño,” the boy answered.

“Never mind, then.”

“You can take half of my salad. Dad always packs way too much,” Willow said, holding out a partially eaten bowl.

“Oh, thank you so much,” Luz said, taking the bowl with her and retreating into the cauldron. Eating a few bites, she noticed the greens had an odd dressing on them that she couldn’t quite place.

“Let’s just hope nobody saw that,” Willow said.

“Why is that?” Luz asked.

“Because abominations don’t need to eat.”

“Huh. Interesting.”

Willow then looked around and saw that Amity Blight was approaching their table. Oh no, had she discovered that Willow was cheating?

“Amity is coming over, quick, turn into an abomination,” Willow yell-whispered to Luz, who was still hiding in the pot.

Letting out a tiny “Eep!” and stuffing the salad bowl into the goop, Luz quickly morphed, finishing just as Amity showed up.

“Hey Willow, Augustus. Just wanted to come over and congratulate you, Willow. You did really good on your presentation. I told you it could be salvaged. Heck, you did even better than I thought.”

“Thanks, Amity,” Willow responded.

Willow’s abomination was odd, Amity concluded. When she had finished her lunch, she had gone over to congratulate Park on her presentation, only to see the witch in question dropping a salad bowl into her cauldron. That was weird, mainly on account of abomination’s not needing to eat. Maybe Willow was rewarding it, or something along those lines? Though a salad was an odd choice of reward. Plus, Amity was pretty sure that she had seen something that was distinctly not an abomination in Willow’s cauldron before during the same lunch period. It looked to be a witch about her age. But Amity was probably just seeing things, though. She had stayed up all night perfecting her abomination, after all, so hallucinations weren’t exactly out of the question.

After the brief scare that was lunch, Luz continued accompanying Willow to her next class: spelling. While Luz had initially thought this was going to be some kind of class teaching the students how to properly spell words, she quickly realized that the course was actually about the science of casting magical spells, which was objectively way more cool. The lesson had been really interesting, as well. Apparently, witches all had this thing called a “bile sac” that grew out of their heart that allowed them to do magic, and the sac would naturally get replenished by the magic emanating from the decomposing body of the Titan. That was metal as heck.

After the class had finished up, it was just Willow, Gus, and Luz all alone in the room. Sensing the opportunity to stretch her legs, Luz morphed human and crawled out of the cauldron.

“Wow. Who knew being stuck in a pot all do could work up such a sweat? Thankfully, there’s only one more class. High five!”

The two witches stared at her, blank expressions on their faces.

“Slap my hand with yours. It’s a thing human friends do,” Luz explained.

Gus hesitantly placed his palm against Luz’s. After realizing that it didn’t hurt, he pulled his hand back and high fived her again, although with much more vigor this time.

“Humans do this all the time? How did I never know?” Gus said, amazed at the euphoric rush of the high five.

He then slapped palms with Luz three more times, only for Luz to catch his wrist on the next attempt.

“When people high five, its usually only once or twice.”

“Oh. Darn,” Gus said sadly.

A scream echoed through the halls, indicating the last class period was about to begin.

“Alright, off we go,” Luz said, reentering the pot and morphing back into an abomination.

Amity now knew that something was up. That witch she had seen during lunch had just climbed into Willow’s cauldron and then turned into an abomination! While there wasn’t anything in the school rulebook that explicitly stated that students weren’t allowed to turn into abominations, this had to be a violation of some kind. As Top Student of the Abomination Track, Amity had a reputation to uphold, and that came with certain responsibilities. Those responsibilities included reporting potential academic dishonesty. Shaking her head, Amity quickly walked over to Principal Bump’s office. “Oh Willow, what have you gotten yourself into.”

The final class of the day also turned out to be interesting, but for a very different reason.

Halfway through the class period, the PA system screeched to life.

“Willow Park, please report to Principal Bump’s office, and bring your school-issued cauldron and abomination fluid.”

The entire class turned to stare at the girl as she slowly made her way out of the room, cauldron in tow.

Once they were out of sight of everyone, Luz morphed human and stuck her head out of the pot.

“Who knows why you’re being sent to the principal’s office? Maybe he was really impressed by your magical prowess and wanted to see it for himself,” Luz joked, trying to break the tension.

“Yeah. That’s definitely why. Definitely,” Willow said. She didn’t even believe herself.

“Hey, if everything goes south, don’t worry, because I’ve got a plan.”

“And what plan is that?”

Not saying anything, Luz simply morphed back into an abomination.

Slowly nudging the door to Bump’s office open, Willow saw that it wasn’t just the principal who was there. Amity was present, too.

“Hello, Miss Park.”

“Hello, Principal Bump. Hi, Amity,” Willow said meekly.

“Principal Bump, can I say something before we begin?” Amity quickly said.

“Yes, you may.”

“Thank you. Look, Willow, whatever happens here, don’t think of it as a personal attack on you, or anything. I take my role as Top Student very seriously, and I would have done this if I saw anyone else I thought was cheating, not just you. Sorry, for all its worth,” Amity said, before backing away into the corner of the room.

“Miss Blight there told me that she believed you to be cheating in regard to your project for Abominations 101. While she wasn’t specific, she mentioned that she reportedly saw you placing ‘foreign materials’ in your abomination cauldron. Do you have anything you would like to say against these accusations?”

“No, sir, I do not.”

“Then I suppose you wouldn’t mind me performing an analysis of your abomination, would you?”

“Well, sir, I have the list of ingredients I used right here,” Willow said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a small slip of paper.

“The ingredients you used are why you are here, Miss Park. Now, will you allow me to perform an analysis of your abomination?”

“Yes, sir,” Willow replied quietly.

“Thank you. Abomination, rise,” Bump said.

Luz did exactly that, rising from the cauldron and remaining perfectly still afterwards.

“Abomination, lie,” Bump commanded, pointing towards his desk.

Slowly clambering over, Luz crawled atop the principal’s desk.

“Hmm. This is a near perfect abomination, Miss Park. Normally, this would be cause for celebration, but given the circumstance’s, we’ll have to wait and see,” Bump noted, lifting and dropping Luz’s arm, inspecting it closely.

“Miss Park, I think I’m going to need a closer look at your abomination,” the principal continued.

“What do you mean by that, sir?” Willow asked.

“Vivisection, Miss Park,” Bump replied, walking to the other side of the desk and pulling out an incredibly sharp-looking dagger.

“Given that this is your project, I’ll allow you the first incision,” he then said, handing the blade over to Willow.

Suddenly, Luz snapped upright and turned to face Bump. Before anyone could react, she opened her mouth and began to drain the principal. Once the witch was weakened enough to not be an immediate threat, Luz quickly morphed human.

Scrambling off the table and grabbing Willow by the arm, the two ran.

Chapter 9

Luz Tries To Eat A School's Defense System

Gehetag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

Hieronmyous Bump had encountered many a creature during his tenure at Hexside. That came with the territory of being principal for nearly 40 years. Though, Hieronmyous had never met a live basilisk before. In fact, he'd thought them to be extinct for the majority of his life. However, because he'd just had (what he thought to be) an abomination partially drain him of his magic and then subsequently shapeshift into a witch, he'd have to question whether or not they had been truly hunted out of existence.

If he was in any other situation than right now, Hieronmyous would probably have been questioning how Miss Park came in contact with the basilisk. The stories of old had painted basilisks as creatures of pure aggression, siphoning the magic of any creature that came close to them. Though, based off what he had just seen, maybe the stories weren't completely accurate. Somehow, by the grace of the Titan, Miss Park had convinced a basilisk to act as her abomination for a measly homework assignment.

But now was not the time for questions, now was the time for action.

He needed to protect his students.

"Miss Blight, could you please help me over to the wall by the door?" He asked.

The young Blight stood frozen temporarily before responding, “Of course, Principal Bump.” She then quickly walked over to the weakened principal and positioned the man to the side of the door.

Hoping he had enough magic left in him to activate the school’s lockdown defense system, Bump slammed his palms against the wall and said a silent prayer that the Titan would keep everyone safe, especially Willow.

When he saw the telltale red pattern start spreading on the wall, Bump collapsed to his knees in exhaustion.

“Miss Blight, go get Miss Park and get her away from that creature. Forcefully, if you have to,” he said through labored breathing.

“Of course I will, sir.”

Luz ran, dragging Willow behind her. Rounding a corner, the two slowed down, catching their breath.

“Luz, why did you just drain our principal?” Willow asked, slumping against a column and taking a seat on the floor.

“It was a reflex, okay. I was in danger and I couldn’t think of anything better to do. What was I supposed to do, let you cut me open?” Luz retorted, pacing nervously.

“Yes! Abomination’s can’t feel pain and are essentially immortal!” Willow said.

“Oh.” That stopped Luz dead in her tracks.

“Ugh, come on. Let’s get out of here.”

Suddenly, a red shield-like apparition encased the archway.

“And Bump just activated the defense system. Rats,” Willow said, slowly climbing to her feet.

“I’m guessing we’re stuck here, then.”

Willow paused, and thought for a second. If she remembered correctly, then the defense system should only work against intruders, and not against students.

“Wait, let me try something.” Willow then proceeded to walk through the shield as if it wasn’t there.

“Yes, it worked! Now you try, Luz,” Willow continued, motioning Luz to follow her through the archway.

Luz tried to walk through the red apparition, only for it to push her back.

“Of course. You’ve got to be kidding me,” Luz complained.

Luz then tried to drain the blockade of its magic. Maybe that would work.

Opening her mouth, Luz did her best to siphon the magic precluding her from being with her newfound friend, only for nothing to happen. Luz could feel her stomach filling up, but the shield remain unaffected.

“Willow! Willow, where are you?” Luz recognized that voice as belonging to Amity.

“Willow, stay away from that thing!” Amity ran and tackled Willow, the two sliding along the floor. Amity then scrambled back to her feet and turned to face Luz.

“You aren’t hurting anyone else, you monster,” Amity said, making sure to not cross the boundary and risk getting her magic drained.

Luz slowly backed away from the angry witch, eventually finding herself pressing up against another one of the blockades.

“I was scared, okay! I thought I was going to get dissected, and my survival instincts took over,” Luz said quietly.

“What did you just say?” Amity asked.

“I panicked. I didn’t want to hurt your principal, I swear. It just . . . happened. I had no control over it,” Luz said, louder this time.

“She’s telling the truth,” Willow said, standing back up, “In the few hours that I’ve known her, Luz has been nothing but a wonderful person, and I never felt threatened by her in the slightest.” To emphasize her point, Willow then crossed the boundary separating her and Luz and slung her arm across the basilisk’s shoulder.

“See?” Willow continued, “I’m not getting my magic drained. I’m fine, Amity.”

“Yeah, I’m not a danger to anyone. Except Warden Wrath. He acts like a creep whenever he sees Miss Eda,” Luz said defensively.

Amity paused at the name. “You don’t mean ‘Miss Eda’ as in ‘Eda the Owl Lady’, do you?”

“The one and only!” Luz said with a chipper smile.

Amity facepalmed. “Of course the Owl Lady would be harboring a basilisk, because why wouldn’t she be.”

“Yeah, Eda’s the best.”

Amity let out a long exhale. “Look, if I cross this barrier, do you promise not to drain me of my magic and leave me for dead?”

“I promise. Scout’s honor,” Luz said, holding up her right hand and touching her pinky and thumb, palm facing outward.

“You’re a member of the Emperor’s Coven?!” Amity said, shocked at the apparent revelation.

“What’s the Emperor’s Coven?” Luz asked, a puzzled look on her face.

“Nevermind then,” Amity said, “Okay, I’m coming over, but if you so much as make one false move, I’m going back to the other side.”

“You don’t have to worry,” Luz reassured her, “There won’t be any funny business.”

“Good.” With that, Amity cautiously stepped through the barrier and approached Luz.

“Hold on!” Willow said, jumping between the two, “How about you two formally introduce yourselves. To prove you aren’t a threat to each other and all that, ya know?”

“I think that is reasonable enough. Hello. I’m Amity Blight, Top Student of the Abominations track and heir apparent of Blight Industries,” Amity said, sticking out her hand.

“Nice to meet you, Amity Blight. My name is Luz Noceda, and I’m a human-basilisk hybrid from the Human Realm,” Luz responded, grabbing Amity’s hand and gave it a firm shake.

“I thought basilisks were extinct.”

“Yeah, I’ve been getting that a lot recently. Though, I kinda know next to nothing about my more slithery side. Like, Miss Eda has a book that had

some information on basilisks, but none of the stuff in it was really that useful to me.”

“Well, I work at the local public library, so maybe I could help you find a more advanced book on the subject.”

“Really? That would be super helpful.”

“Given how large the records are, we’d undoubtedly find something that’s useful. Just so you know, I’ll be working at the GPL over the weekend, so would either of those days work for you?”

“Probably? Unless Miss Eda ropes me into one of her schemes, of course.”

“Alright then, it’s a date. Just stop by anytime from 10 to 2 and I’ll be there. Also, you should probably come disguised as witch or demon. Human’s tend to stick out around Bonesborough. Look, I’ve really got to go. Mom is probably waiting by the door so she can lecture me about being late.”

“Okay, see you at the library!” Luz said, before adding on, “Wait, can you go get Bump to drop the shield thingies? Miss Eda’s probably getting worried.”

“Yeah, I can go explain what all just happened to him. I’m already late, so what’s five more minutes? Let’s just hope Bump’s in a forgiving mood.” Amity then jogged off in the direction of Bump’s office.

“Thank you!” Luz yelled to the departing witch.

Luz then walked over to a flat section of the wall and slid down to the floor, with Willow joining her soon after.

“So, how do you like Hexside?” Willow asked.

“I really liked it, to be honest. All the classes were really fun and they were all *way* better than the stuff that’s taught at human schools. I’d take spelling class over physics any day of the week. It did get a little boring staying in the cauldron most of the day, though, but I couldn’t blow my cover and all that.”

“Yeah, I enjoy being at Hexside, too. I just wish I didn’t have to be on the Abominations track.”

“Have you ever considered switching tracks? I think you’d do great in the Plant track.”

“That’s the problem: nobody has ever switched tracks. There’s this precedent where once you pick a track, that’s your track for your entire school career,

and I doubt Bump will just let me swap tracks at a moments notice.”

“Well maybe you just have to prove to him that you’ll do better on the Plant track. Something that will make him go, ‘Wow, I completely misjudged you Willow. Here, you’re on the plant track now.’ ”

“Do you really think that would work?”

“I mean, it wouldn’t hurt to try, would it?”

“I suppose not.”

Suddenly, the red barricades surrounding the two disappeared with an audible *WOOSH*.

Luz rose to her feet and looked around the corner to see Principal Bump slowly approaching, with no Amity to be seen. Luz noticed that the elderly witch was using a staff as a walking stick, though it looked as though the staff was missing some kind of topper.

Luz stood as still as possible, staring down at her shoes.

“So, you’re the basilisk that posed as Miss Park’s abomination. Luz Noceda, was it?” Bump asked.

“Yes, sir, I am, and I am very sorry about—” Luz said quietly, before being cut off.

“No need for apologies, Miss Noceda. You were afraid and acted accordingly, and it just so happens that your response to fear happens to be...”

“To nearly kill you?”

“I was going to say using your Titan-given abilities, but that works to, I suppose,” Bump paused for a bit before continuing, “Look, Miss Noceda. I’ve learned in my years here at Hexside that holding grudges only leads to a bottomless pit of despair, and I don’t want that for either of us.”

“So, then what are we going to do?” Luz asked.

“I take it that you enjoyed your day here, correct?” Bump asked in response after thinking for a few seconds.

“Yeah, it was awesome,” Luz said quickly.

“And are you currently receiving any form of education?”

“Not really, no.”

“Then I have a solution where we both benefit: you become a student here at Hexside. Think about it. You could come here as a sort of exchange student, offering new perspectives for all your classes and getting a proper education, and the student body at large would benefit from you attending as well.”

“I’ll do it on one condition.”

“And what is that?”

“Let Willow switch to the Plant Magic track.”

“Miss Noceda, that would be breaking decades worth of precedent, so unless you have indipsutable proof that Willow is better suited in the Plant track, then I will have to deny your request. I can’t have students switching tracks whenever they fancy.”

“Well then, we’ll just have to show you. Hey Willow! Get over here and show Bump how awesome of a plant witch you are!”

“While I would love to do that, plant magic sorta requires, ya know, plants, of which there are none nearby,” Willow said, walking over to join the two.

Reaching into her pocket and scrounging around, Luz eventually pulled out a handful of coins and that goop-covered ball from the trash slug.

“Would any of these help?” Luz said hopefully.

“Hmm. The strange looking coins, no, but I could definitely use that seed.” Willow replied, picking up the seed and examining it.

“That’s a seed?” Luz asked, dumbfounded.

Willow simply stared at the basilisk, a dissapointed look on her face.

Taking a deep breath, Willow spun a spell circle around the seed, and with a shout of, “GROW!”, gigantic vines, similar to the ones that had ensnared Luz’s ankle hours prior, sprouted from the seed. The vines spread all over the place, racing around corners, wrapping around columns, and a few even broke through some windows and escaped to the outside world. Small pink flowers even began to bloom from some of the vines.

“Incredible,” was all Bump could say in response to the sheer display of power he’d just witnessed. “Willow Park, effective immediately, you will no longer study on the Abominations track, but will instead be on the Plant Magic track.” Casting a small spell circle, Willow’s sleeves and leggings switched from the orchid color of Abominations track to the green of the Plant track.

“Thank you, Principal Bump,” Willow said.

“Yay, congrats Willow!” Luz said, running and giving the witch a hug, spinning the two of them around in a circle.

“Now I just have to figure out how to tell my dads,” Willow said, picking at the newly-green sleeves of her tunic.

Bump then cleared his throat, pausing the celebration.

“Miss Noceda, there is one caveat preventing you from joining Hexisde right this instant. We have a policy where students who wish to attend any higher-level courses have to know at least two spells. Do you happen to know any spells?”

“Does shapeshifting count as a spell?” Luz asked hopefully.

“Does your shapeshifting require the usage of a spell circle?” Bump inquired.

“Not really, no.”

“Then in the eyes of the school it does not count as a spell.”

“Rats,” Luz said in a dissappointed tone.

“Hmm. . . Miss Blight told me that you said you were currently living with Edalyn Clawthorne. Is that right?”

“Yup. I’ve even got my own room and everything,” Luz said proudly.

“Then ask Edalyn to teach you some spells. While she might have had a knack for causing a ruckus, she was also an incredible student, and I’m sure she could pass some of her knowledge on down to you.”

“Well, there’s one problem with that: I don’t exactly have a bile sac to be able to do magic.”

“That is quite the conundrum. However, I do recall that witches of old used a different method of casting spells prior to the development of the bile sac, though the exact details have been muddled by time. That could be worth researching into.”

“So what you’re saying is that, if I want to attend this school, then I’ll basically have to completely rediscover a lost method of casting spells.”

“Essentially, yes. Either that, or you could attempt to shapeshift yourself a bile sac and pray to the Titan that it doesn’t kill you outright.”

“Alright, rediscovering lost magic it is. Do you know any, like, ancient scrolls or tomes I could read from that could tell me more?”

“Based on the subject matter, they would most likely be kept in the restricted section of the Bonesborough Public Library, so I wish you the best of luck in finding a way to access them without proper clearance.”

“Thank you, future-Principal Bump.”

“Yes, yes. Now please, leave me be, because I have some paperwork that needs attended to.”

“Is it paperwork for me to officially go here?”

“No, it’s to report all the damage that Miss Park just caused to the centuries old stained glass windows. Now both of you leave before you destroy something else.”

Luz didn’t need to be told a third time, so she and Willow both went outside to the main courtyard of the school, only to find Gus standing there, all by himself, apparently waiting for them.

Noticing the two, Gus ran up to them.

“I just had the best idea in the history of ideas. What if you could high five *yourself*?”

“Gus, that’s called clapping,” Luz deadpanned.

“Oh. Darn.”

Chapter 10

Luz Applies Her First Aid Training

Kriegstag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

“Hey, King, I need your opinion on something.”

“What is it?”

“So, for my little library research trip thing with Amity, do you think I should disguise myself as a scary-looking demon, or should I go as a cute little innocent-looking demon?”

“You do realize you could just shapeshift yourself witch ears, right?”

“Yeah, I know I can do that, but I want to try and stretch my abilities, you know? I wanna see what I’m capable of.”

“Well, in that case, then do the spooky demon disguise. Looking cute and cuddly is just asking for someone to try and eat you as.”

“Alright. Do you think this is appropriately scary, King?” Luz then handed the pint-sized creature a sketch she had been working on for a while.

The creature Luz had drawn, which she called Kraugh, was a bipedal, two-armed demon. Standing around 7 feet tall, it was covered in dark green skin that was rough and scaly. The head of the creature, which Luz had spent more time on than she wanted to admit, was very snakelike, being flat and triangular, with a sharp beak and beady little eyes. From each of the major joints, a long curved blade protruded. The feet and hands of the demon both

ended in three short claws that were also curved, albeit to a lesser extent. Each hand also had an opposable thumb, though it was sans blade. (Luz added that to the design solely so she could pick up things without slicing them in half.) The Kraugh also featured a large tail hanging behind the legs, tipped with even more blades, that also doubled for stabilizing the tall demon.

Overall, Luz thought the design would fit right in with all the other nightmare-inducing creatures she had seen during her time on the Isles.

“Oh yeah, this would go great in my army of terrors,” King said, giving the drawing back to Luz.

“Do you think I should give it a test run? Make sure it looks right and all that?” Luz asked.

“Why not?” King responded, shrugging his shoulders.

“I like you’re thinking,” Luz said, giving a smile.

Closing her eyes, Luz first pictured her human form. Then, she imagined her body turning into Kraugh.

The first change she felt was a tail shooting out from her the bottom of her spine. Looking behind her, Luz saw a weird fleshy material spread down the new appendage, completely coating it. After her tail was covered by the foreign material, a trio of spikes erupted from the tip.

Before Luz could even get a chance to give the tail a practice *SWISH* back and forth, the next stage of changes came. Her middle and ringer fingers melded together, and she could feel something similar happening to her toes. Her spine lengthened, rocketing her up to nearly touching the ceiling with her head. *Maybe I can finally be good at basketball now*, Luz joked mentally.

Next, Luz’s face deformed. Her nose withered away, only leaving behind the nostrils. Her eyes that were normally wide and constantly examining the strange new world shrunk down to mere dots. Her ears pinned themselves flat to her head, barely visible to the naked eye. Her lips eroded into nothing while the rest of her mouth jutted outwards and hardened, becoming a beak. As a slight reprieve, her tongue was saved from being mangled by the transformation. To finish off the restructuring of her cranium, Luz’s skull tapered down and became significantly more pointed.

For the final round of changes, Luz witnessed something that nearly made her toss cookies. From her knees, elbows, and wrists, sharp-looking curved

blades made of pure bone erupted. Then, the transformation completed by covering her entire body in scales, starting from her head and spreading down the spine, finishing at the tip of her tail.

Luz was incredibly grateful that the shapeshifting process didn't come with any pain.

"So, how do I look?" Luz asked.

"Absolutely terrifying," King answered, giving a thumbs up.

"Sweet! Nobody's gonna mess with me," Luz proclaimed, imitating those poses she saw bodybuilders do on TV.

"Luz, why exactly are you a giant bladed snake creature?" Eda said, coming in from the kitchen.

"I'm coming up with a scary demon disguise so I can go to the library with Amity sometime over the weekend," Luz explained.

"Huh, alright. You do you, kid. Look, I just checked the weather report on the CB, and it's gonna rain soon, so no going outside unless you have a death-wish. Oh, and Luz?"

"Yeah, Miss Eda?"

"Can you turn back into a human for me? I don't want your claws scratching the floor."

"Sure thing, Miss Eda," Luz said, morphing back into her human form.

"Hey, Luz, I wanna show you something," King said, tugging at Luz's now human arm.

"What is it?" Luz asked.

"Follow me," King replied, letting go of her arm and scampering up the steps all the way up to the attic, opening the door and quickly shutting it before Luz could see what was inside.

Luz chuckled as she followed along. She wondered what exactly she was gonna see when she went in. Would it be a giant plushie fort? Or maybe King wanted to show her his latest drawing. The diminutive demon did occasionally refer to himself as the "King of Artists".

Pushing the door open, Luz was completely thrown off by what she saw. This was the last thing she would have expected.

The attic had been transformed into some kind of makeshift classroom. A corkboard covered with a tarp sat on an easel, while a tiny school desk was placed in front. Strung up on the walls was a diagram showing the inner workings of Hooty. Luz was pretty sure that she could even see a smaller, shorter Hooty inside the body of the main one, along with rows of teeth lining the house demons insides. Luz shuddered at the thought of there being multiple of Hooty. One was already more than enough, but if there were even more? That would be a living nightmare.

Making an educated guess, Luz crammed her way into the desk and faced towards the tarp-covered board.

“So, what are we doing up here?” Luz asked.

“Basilisk Luz, you spent so much time yesterday learning about witches and magic that you didn’t spend anytime learning about your own kind. That is why you are here for...” King ripped the tarp off the corkboard, revealing it to be packed with pictures of demons of all shapes and sizes, “Demons 101!”

“Ooh, this sounds fun,” Luz said to herself.

“Demons like us are grim creatures of the night, living to spread fear and anguish across the Isles. Our only weaknesses are purified water and passive-aggressive remarks,” King continued.

“Aww, you guys have a soft side. Although, I’ve touched holy water before, when I was baptized, and I didn’t get hurt by it.”

“Wait, really?”

“Yeah. Papa and I got baptized on the same day, actually.”

“One second.” King then pulled out a book that Luz hadn’t noticed and began quickly scribbling in it. Crossing out the *All demons*, he replaced it with *Most demons*. “There we go, now it’s accurate.”

“Okay, *most* demons are susceptible to purified water and passive-aggressive comments,” King said, resuming his lesson. “While you and I are both fearsome warriors not to be trifled with, there are still some demons we should be wary of. The most dangerous, though, is the Snaggleback. Protected from the rains by its spiny shell, the Snaggleback feeds on those who couldn’t find shelter. It especially enjoys eating tourists who got trapped outside.” King flipped the pages of his book and showed Luz a sketch of the Snaggleback.

“Ooh, that guy looks very spooky,” Luz said, admiring King’s fearsome drawing of the creature.

Suddenly, lightning flashed in the distance and the resulting thunder shook the house.

“Whelp, the rain’s here. I think we should call the lesson,” King said, taking down the corkboard and folding up the easel, stuffing the two in the corner of the room.

“I love the rain!” Luz exclaimed, running down the stairs and out the door, but not before Eda yelled at her. “Hey, I said no going outside! Do you want to be cooked alive?”

Luz obviously didn’t hear that last part. Kneeling down next to a flower, Luz admired the plant. “I bet you’ll like the rain too, little fella.”

The flower did not like the rain, apparently, getting struck by a rogue raindrop, instantly withering and collapsing into dust.

“What the?” Luz cried out, scrambling away from the fallen plant.

“I told you to stay inside!” Eda yelled, dragging Luz back in the house.

After ensuring everyone was inside, Eda let go of Luz’s arm.

“You didn’t get hurt, did you?” Eda asked, searching Luz for any burn marks.

“I’m fine, Miss Eda,” Luz said, brushing away the witch’s hand.

“Good. You better not pull that stunt again, cause I might not be there to save your hide,” Eda chastised the teen, crossing her arms and giving a stern look.

“Sorry, Miss Eda. It won’t happen again, I promise.”

“Alright. Now that everyone is inside, I’m gonna go put up the shields.” With that, Eda went back outside to brave the storm.

“Do it quick! The rain is getting close to my precious stucco!” Hooty screeched.

Running over to a window, Luz peeked outside to get a look at Eda working her magic (quite literally, in this case). The witch in question first cast a small spell, giving her a sort of magical umbrelaa, protecting her from the rains. Eda then walked forward a few paces before turning to face the house and casting a much larger spell. A giant orange bubble appeared around

the house before shrinking down and conforming to the exterior. Walking back through the force field, Eda strutted confidently back to the house.

“Man, that took a lot out of me. That should keep us safe until the storm blows over, though,” the witch said, entering the house.

“The weather here is so fun and interesting,” Luz said with a smile on her face.

“Oh you haven’t seen anything yet, kiddo. We’ve got gorenadoes, shale hail, painbows, fun stuff like that,” Eda said, counting on her fingers.

“I’m gonna regret asking this, but what’s a painbow?” Luz said squeamishly.

“It’s like a Human Realm rainbow, except looking at it turns your body inside out!” King answered with a giggle.

Luz regretted asking.

She did *not* need that mental image.

“So, do we have any plans to wait out the storm, Miss Eda?” Luz asked.

“Not really. We can do whatever, pretty much,” Eda responded.

“Hmm... Can we do some magic lessons? Mr. Bump at Hexside said that you could probably teach me.”

Eda let out a groan. “Of course Bumpykins would put that idea in your head. Alright, kid, we’ll do one lesson, okay? That’s it.”

“Got it,” Luz said, nodding.

“You said you learned about bile sacs and stuff while posing as that kid’s homework, right?”

“Yup. Learned about ’em in all their gory glory.”

“Well then, that will make this easier. Alright, let’s start with an example. This is a light spell.” Eda then drew a large circle in the air, which condensed into a ball of pure light upon completion. “The larger you draw the circle, the more powerful the spell, and the more magic it’ll take to complete the spell.” To emphasize this, Eda then drew a much smaller circle, with the resulting tiny light ball flickering out of existence after a few seconds.

“Woah. That is so cool. Can you do that again? I wanna record it this time,” Luz said, reaching into her pocket and opening the *Camera* app on her phone.

“Sure, kid. So ya see, the spell works by—” Eda suddenly collapsed to the ground unconscious, not even getting a chance to finish the spell circle.

“Oh no, Miss Eda!” Eda ran over to her fallen teacher and quickly checked the witch’s pulse. It was still there, though it was going way faster than what Luz considered normal.

Thankful for Mamá giving her some first aid training, Luz dragged Eda’s body (which was way heavier than Luz expected) over to the couch and situated the unconscious witch so that her legs were elevated about a foot above her head. Checking for anything that could be constricting blood flow, Luz luckily found nothing.

“Alright, hopefully that helps,” Luz said, taking a step back. “Now, we just have to wait for her to wake up. I’m so sorry this happened, Miss Eda,” Luz apologized.

“Has this ever happened before, King?” Luz asked.

“Never,” he responded.

“Okay, so that probably means that Miss Eda is running low on magic. She did say that putting up the force fields took a lot out of her, after all. Is there any, like, magic drink we can give her?”

“I’m not sure, but I’ve noticed that Eda always drinks this one orange elixir every day that seems to give her a boost of energy in the morning. Maybe we should give her some of that?”

“Hmm. . . That could work. Do you know where Eda keeps them?”

“I’m pretty sure she stores ’em in her room.”

“Let’s go find some, then.”

After one last look at the Owl Lady, Luz ran up the stairs and made her way into Eda’s room. King followed behind quickly, shutting the door and turning on the light.

“Alright, where could it— Oh, there it is.” Luz’s eyes scanned the room before quickly falling on the bright orange elixir laying on Eda’s nestside table. (Luz thought it was a little odd to have a nest instead of a traditional bed, but Eda was odd herself, so Luz just wrote it off as Eda being Eda.)

A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder shook the house.

Grabbing the elixir, Luz examined it, seeing if there were any instructions printed on the glass. There was nothing.

“Okay, magic in a bottle secured, now let’s—” Luz was cut off by the lights suddenly going dark.

King ran over and gave the light switch a few flicks up and down, only for nothing to happen.

“It’s fine. Hooty controls the house lights. He probably just fell asleep or something,” the tiny demon said.

“HOOT! OW! HOOT!” the house demon screamed.

“That does *not* sound like he’s asleep,” Luz said, dropping the elixir and running down the stairs. In the back of her mind, Luz heard the sound of shattering glass.

Upon entering the living room, Luz saw that the front door had been knocked off its hinges and was laying on the floor. A creature stood in the doorway, dragging a pair of claws along the door, leaving deep gouges in the wood. Suddenly, there was another flash of lightning, and by the time Luz could see again, the creature was gone.

Chapter 11

Luz Accidentally KO's A Crusty Old Woman

Kriegstag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Running over to the downed bird tube, Luz knelt down and checked how Hooty was doing. His eyes were closed, but peeling back an eyelid revealed the eye itself to be shooting all around, in short random movements. That was a good sign. Hooty wasn't dead, just asleep.

Letting out a small sigh of relief, Luz took stock of her current situation. Right now, the force field surrounding the house was still intact, which meant that the mystery demon that attacked Hooty had either passed through the shield without breaking it (Unlikely, Luz thought, but she had to consider all the possibilities.) or the creature was already inside when the shield was put up, which was an infinitely scarier thought.

The demon that had just knocked out Hooty was *inside the house* when the shield was put up.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, Luz turned to King.

"King, random question, but has this house ever had a . . . demon infestation?"

"No."

"Then how do we explain the thing that just KO'd Hooty?"

Suddenly, a mirror flew through the eye-shaped window that was in Eda's room, and a loud screech could be heard from the freshly-broken hole in the

wall. Falling to the ground, Luz and King barely scrambled out of the way before the mirror smashed into a thousand tiny pieces on the ground.

“Well, now we know where the intruder is,” King quipped.

Ducking inside the house and pulling King along with, Luz finally got a chance to get a good look at the current state of the living room.

To say it was a total mess would be a gross understatement. The couch that Luz had propped Eda’s feet up on had been torn to shreds, presumably by the intruding demon, and Eda herself was nowhere to be seen. A variety of feathers and other things that were used as stuffing for the couch’s upholstery were scattered all around the room. Some of the feathers looked interesting, though. Luz knew that the down feathers that were in the couch were pure white, but some of the feathers on the ground were a much darker grey color and were also significantly larger.

Luz quietly walked over and picked up one of the gray feathers. It looked like it more belonged on an eagle or a hawk than in a couch. This had to have been dropped by the demon that was currently in Eda’s room.

Motioning King to come over, Luz crouched down and started discussing her findings.

“Alright, so this feather probably came from the demon upstairs. Do you know about any feathery demons that would kidnap people?”

King thought for a second before responding. “No, but there might be something that could help in my demon book... which is upstairs, where the thing that took Eda is.”

“Okay, so the demon book is a bust. Let me think,” Luz said, trying to remember those little factoids that Mami had told her while she was working on birds at the clinic.

“See how his eyes are so close to each other, mija? That indicates that he’s a predator. If his eyes were spaced out really far, then that would mean he was more used to being prey for other larger birds.” Camila had said to the then 8-year-old Luz, who was more focused on petting the red-tailed hawk than.

Luz was about 99% sure that the demon that attacked Hooty was a predator.

“Ok, so this thing is about a foot taller than me, a quadraped, has giant black eyes, and is probably some kind of bird-demon.”

“It has black eyes?” King asked.

“Yeah, why?” Luz asked back, trying to see where King was going with this.

“If I remember right, demons with big black eyes are usually really susceptible to sudden bright lights.”

All of the sudden, a roar could be heard coming from Eda’s room, and heavy footsteps stomped along the floor, sending dust and cobwebs falling to the ground on the level below.

“Well,” Luz said, “If you can’t tell, we don’t have any lights at our disposal.”

“What about that spell Eda was showing you?”

“I don’t have a bile sac, remember? Plus, if I tried to morph one, I’d probably, like, catch on fire or something.”

Luz got out her phone and pulled up the video of Eda casting the spell, pausing it right when she completed the spell circle. Mimicking the witch’s actions, Luz spun her finger around to no effect.

“See? Nothing,” Luz said for emphasis, sliding her phone in her back pocket and taking a seat on the hard wooden floor.

A *CRUNCH* could be heard emanating from where Luz just sat down.

Closing her eyes tightly, Luz let out a small, “Dang it,” and pulled her phone back out to inspect the damage she had just caused in her foolishness.

While the glass no had a large crack going down the center, Luz was grateful for her screen protector doing its job and keeping the phone still operable. Although, the picture Luz saw on her screen now was different than the one she had seen just a few seconds prior.

Now, in the middle of Eda’s circle, there was a pattern. Luz blinked, making sure the design was still there and she wasn’t imagining things again.

Yup. It was real.

Right in the middle of Eda’s spell circle was what looked like some kind of alchemy rune or something. It was composed of a circle inscribed with a triangle that was bisected by a line emanating from the top of the triangle that connected straight down to the circle. The bisecting line had two small slashes on it, both of them going up and to the right. Atop the triangle, but still within the circle, was a small circle that was topped by an even smaller triangle.

It looks like a weird bow and arrow in a circle, Luz thought.

Suddenly, Luz remembered what Bump had said about witches of yesteryear using a different method to cast spells.

Careful to not damage her phone anymore, Luz quickly but gently placed her phone on the ground.

Scrambling into the kitchen, Luz tried to find a pen and something she could write on. She found a pen in a drawer by the sink, but she couldn't find a real piece of paper, so she opted to grab a napkin instead. That would be a good substitute for what she was about to try.

Running back into the living room and taking her place in front of her phone, Luz laid the napkin on top of the screen and began tracing the design, thankful that she could see it through the napkin.

Starting with the outer circle, Luz made sure to get her recreation as close to the original as she could. After wishing she had a compass, she moved onto the big triangle and the bisecting line with its two little friends. Finally, Luz finished by drawing the small circle and the triangle it wore for a hat.

Confident in her drawing skills (Thanks, years of creating Hecazura fanart!), Luz put the pen down and admired her handiwork.

Taking a deep breath and closing her eyes, Luz waited for the magic to happen. When nothing happened, she took a peek and saw the napkin still sitting there, being incredibly non-magical.

Giving the napkin a small defeated tap, it suddenly crumpled into a ball and turned into a floating ball of light.

Luz had just done magic.

She had just done magic *that didn't involve hurting people!*

Gazing at the floating light, Luz's eyes were filled with wonder.

"King, I've got an idea on how to stop that demon from hurting Eda."

"Ooh, what is it?"

"I'm gonna fight it."

"Are you kidding? That thing'll kill you! How are you gonna put up a fight with that little light ball?"

"Who said that the light ball would be little? Also, how fast can you run?"

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Luz had no idea if the plan would work. She'd been lucky to find a thick marker that she could use to draw on the wall, but it was a little bit harder to find a place to hide her hulking Kraugh body.

"AHH!" King screamed, peeling down the hallway at top speed, the demon that took Eda hot on his tail.

The demon ran right past Luz, somehow not noticing the giant serpentine monster she was.

Coming out of hiding, Luz stood a few paces behind the intruder. She would need a running start if she wanted to take this thing down to the ground.

Luz watched King dive, paw outstretched, barely grazing the glyph drawn onto the wall. But that was all that was needed for it to activate.

A giant bright light filled the hallway, and Luz finally got a good look at the demon. It wasn't the raptor-like appearance she had expected, looking more like an owl-bear from *Creatures & Caverns*. The creature let out a loud screech and reared back onto its hind feet, inadvertently turning to face Luz.

Luz took that as her signal and bullrushed the owl-thing, slamming it to the ground in a vicious tackle, the beast's head slamming against the ground with a loud *THUD*. Waiting for a potential response, Luz rose a clawed fist and was fully prepared to begin trading blows with the demon.

When the demon didn't move for a solid five seconds, Luz cautiously climbed off its stomach. Quickly demorphing back into her human form, Luz waved her hand in front of the unconscious intruder's face.

"Woah, it's out cold. Wait, we forgot about Eda!"

Running into Eda's room, Luz looked for any sign of the witch. Scanning the room, Eda was nowhere to be seen. Luz felt her eyes once again drawn to the nestside table. It had been toppled over, and a drawer that Luz hadn't noticed before had fallen open, spilling its contents on the ground. The contents: more of those glowing orange elixirs, although a few of them had small tags attached to them.

Carefully stepping over the fallen debris and general pandemonious that had occurred, Luz picked up one of the tagged elixirs and looked at the tiny slip of paper.

An elixir a day keeps the curse at bay, it read, accompanied by a small pictogram of a red demon skull.

Luz slowly put two and two together. Eda drank these elixirs every day. The elixirs that were made to stop one from succumbing to a curse and, presumably, turning into a beast. The only way the “intruder” could have been inside the house was if it could get through the shield. Eda had walked through the shield after she put it up.

Luz had just knocked out Eda.

Holding onto the elixir, Luz ran back into the hallway and knelt down next to ~~the demon~~ Eda’s head and gently opened her mouth.

“Luz, what are you doing?”

“This is Eda, King,” was all Luz said, as she pulled the cork out of the elixir and slightly raised Eda’s head, slowly pouring the liquid down the witch’s throat.

As more and more of the elixir entered Eda’s system, the feathers began to recede and her body slowly shrunk from that of the Owl Beast to the Owl Lady. Luz was finally not the one on the receiving end of a magical transformation, she realised, with a small laugh.

Once the elixir was all out and Eda was back to normal, Luz and King teamed up to carry Eda’s still-unconscious downstairs and lay her as comfortably as possible on the destroyed-but-still-pretty-comfy couch.

As the night progressed, Luz and King waited for Eda to finally awaken. While doing so, though, Luz found an old little sketchpad and began drawing copy after copy of that symbol she had seen on her phone. With each drawing, tap, and subsequent ball of light, Luz’s eyes grew wider and wider. This had to be the magic casting method that Bump was talking about. Luz knew that this wasn’t all there was though. There had to be more glyphs out there. Yeah, that was a good word for these things. *Glyphs*.

“Ugh, my head is killing me,” Eda procalimed, rolling off the couch and faceplanting onto the floor.

“What time is it?” She asked, slowly getting up to her feet.

“That doesn’t matter, look!” King said, pulling at the Owl Lady’s pant leg and pointing at Luz.

“How is she doing that?” Eda asked, amazed at the sight.

“No idea, she just draws thes symbols on the paper and taps it and boom, magic!” King exclaimed.

“Incredible. Hey kid, come over here!” Eda called out to Luz.

Luz quickly got up and ran over and wrapped Eda into a hug.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Eda. I had no idea it was you, I swear. I would never mean to hurt you. Please don’t be m—”

“Kid, kid, it’s fine. I’m okay. Just have a lil headache, that’s all.”

“That’s such a relief. You’re head banged against the floor pretty hard.”

“I. Am. Fine.” Eda disengaged from the hug before continuing, “Look, I haven’t exactly been honest with the two of you. Back when I was a teen, I got cursed. I’ve got no idea who did it, but I don’t care anymore. I’ve got my elixir system, and as long as nobody messes with it, we’ll all be fine and dandy. If someone does jank it up, though, well... I guess you guys can tell why they call me the Owl Lady.”

Luz pulled Eda back into another hug, but this time, Eda begrudgingly reciprocated the gesture.

“What! I don’t get a hug? This is blasphemy of the highest order!” King said.

Luz quickly scooped King into the hug as well, squeezing tight. King tried to squirm back out, but failed and accepted defeat.

“HOOT HOOT! I’M STILL OUT HERE! IT’S COLD, HOOT HOOT!”

Chapter 12

Luz Reads A Different Book

Kaufetag 3, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Bonesborough, B.I.

Luz slowly walked down the streets of Bonesborough. The claws on her feet, courtesy of her current Kaugh morph, scraped against the rocky sidewalks in a rhytymic fashion. Turning her head this way and that, she finally got a chance to take in the sights and sounds and smells of the town for the first time.

Her current destination was the Bonesborough Public Library, and she still had a few minutes before she was going to meet up with Amity, so Luz decided to do some sightseeing to pass the time. Luz could have made a beeline to the library, but she didn't want to show up at 10 on the dot. That would make her look a little too eager to be there. Luz wanted to look cool and stuff, so she was more than willing to show up a few minutes late.

Today was market day, which meant Eda was probably hawking some random items she stole from the Human Realm to whoever was buying. In fact, Eda had asked Luz if she would be able to help her out at the stand, but after Luz brought up that she already had plans, Eda relented and dragged King along instead.

Checking a nearby crystal ball for the time, Luz saw that it was 9:57, meaning she still had some time to kill before heading to meet up with Amity.

Slowing her pace, Luz took in all the things that were being sold around her. To her left, a stand calling itself "Sir Chuck's Fine Die-ning" sold what

appeared to be a combination of deep fried... orbs and slabs of meat ranging in size from normal to outright gargantuan. On her right, across the street, a cart advertised Not Dogs (Luz did *not* want to know what was in those things.) for a snail a piece. Further down, Luz could see other stands, with a few of them in particular standing out amongst the rest. "Bread, Bats, and Beyond" had an... interesting selection, to say the least, while "Ax's Axes" sold what one would expect.

Luz walked past all the stands, regretting not bringing any snails with her. She would have loved to see what a Sin-A-Bun tasted like.

Checking the time once again, Luz found that it was now 10:04. Approaching the steps that led up to the Bonesborough Public Library, Luz took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. Grabbing the (surprisingly light) door handle, Luz did her best to quietly enter the library, not daring to disturb the sacred tranquility.

Making her way to the front desk, Luz walked up to the witch staffing the area. The witch looked haf asleep and had a look on their face that said "If you ask anything stupid I will throw you out myself." Cautiously approaching the librarian, Luz gave a small wave and said, "Hi, I'm here to see Amity Blight. Do you know where she is?" in the most friendly voice she could muster. Given her current form, she probably looked like she wanted to eat a baby, but it was the thought that counts.

The librarian didn't even bother looking up from their desk, simply responding with, "Kid's Section," and pointing to the left with their thumb.

"Thank you," Luz replied, wakling off and looking to see if there were any banners or signs indicating where the kid's books would be. Luckily, there were, with the banner Luz was searching for indicating that Amity would likely be somewhere between the Romance and the Reference sections.

Entering the area designated the "Kid's Corner", Luz looked around, comparing this library to the one she frequented back home. Tacky posters encouraging reading appeared to be universal across dimensions, though this realm's version had a much more morbid twist. The poster showed a cartoony depiction of a witch (complete with green skin, wart, and pointed black hat) being burned alive, with the caption reading, "Get learned at the stake!" Aside from the strangely dark posters, the décor of the area wsa generally very bright and cheery. A giant rug in the shape of a cat's head greeted Luz, with the fake feline sticking its bright pink tongue out. A toy

chest filled to the brim was open, with even more toys strown to and fro across the floor. Oddly, there were no actual kids playing with the toys.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Luz recognized Amity’s voice, though it had an odd cadence to it. Following the noise and rounding a corner, Luz found Amity surrounded by children. A mixture of witches and demons all sat around the emerald-haired witch as she read them all a book, showing them the pages as the story progressed.

Not wanting to interrupt story time, Luz simply leaned her back against a nearby bookshelf and waited for Amity to finish.

“We’re your friends and we want to help,” said the Tin Boy, with a yelp. Otabin smiled and paced the floor. “I’ve never had real friends before,” Amity continued, seemingly unaware of Luz’s presence, being too *in the zone*, Luz assumed.

She’s reading to kids. That’s nice of her, Luz thought, smiling as Amity kept reading.

“Then we’ll be your first,” the Chicken Witch clucked. Otabin couldn’t believe his luck. So, Bookmaker Otabin surrounded by friends, bound a book of friendship and that’s the end.” On that final note, Amity stood up and tucked the book under her arm. The children surrounding her applauded the performance, a few of them thanking her and saying good-bye.

One child in particular caught Luz’s attention. They looked like a shrunken down version of Warden Wrath. As the child gave Amity a hug, a demonic sounding voice came out of their mouth. “Thank you, Miss Amity.”

“Thank you, Braxas. Have an awesome day!” Amity replied in an upbeat tone, waving goodbye to the demon.

Amity looked up and finally made eye contact with Luz. Walking over, the witch asked, “Hi there. Can I help you with anything?”

Luz let out an exaggerated gasp. “What? You don’t recognize me? I thought we were so close, Amity,” Luz said sarcastically.

“I’m sorry, am I supposed to know who you are?” Amity asked, a look of confusion on her face.

“It’s me, Luz. I pretended to be Willow’s abomination, remember?” the basilisk responded.

“Oh, right. You know, when I told you to come in a disguise, I didn’t mean that you had to be completely unrecognizable. Just giving yourself witch ears or something would have sufficed.”

“Yeah, I know, but I wanted to have fun with it.”

“Alright, well now that you’re here, let’s get down to business. So, are there any specific topics you want to research regarding your kind, like culture, biology, and stuff like that, or are you looking for more general information?” Amity asked, leading Luz away from the kid’s section and back towards the entrance of the library.

Luz pondered the question for a bit before responding, “I would say to start with general and then maybe switch to more specific stuff if we find anything interesting.”

Amity stopped in front of a wall that had rows of little faces on it, each face belonging to a demon that was cube shaped and only had a mouth and a single eyeball. Amity then stooped down to be level with the faces.

“Where can I find information about basilisks?” Amity asked to one of the faces. The face responded by lolling its tongue out, a small slip of paper hanging off the end.

Amity grabbed the slip and read off its contents. “597: Cold-blooded beast demons. I think I know where that is. Follow me.”

Doing as she was told, the two researchers soon found themselves standing before a ginormous bookshelf that reached up to the ceiling. There appeared to be no order to the entries, with every book seemingly placed in at random.

That would make this much harder, Luz realized. She’d have to get super lucky if she could even find one book about basilisks in this jumbled mess.

“Let’s hope we can find something quick,” Luz said, reaching out blindly and grabbing a book. Looking at the cover, Luz was pretty sure that *How To Train Your Yrch* wasn’t exactly what she was looking for. Although, the slug on the cover that was slithering into a witch’s ear looked slightly like Luz in her basilisk form if you squinted really hard.

Putting the book back, Luz went to the next one in line. *The Ins and Outs of the Selkidomus* was similarly of no help.

Luz kept moving down the row. *Jörmungandr – Fact or Fiction* and *The Beauty of the Butterknife*fly also offered nothing of use.

The next book Luz saw caught her attention, but not because it had anything to do with basilisks.

“Hey Amity, I think this book might be in the wrong section,” Luz said, holding out the copy of *Lady Wanda and the Missing Witch’s Wool*.

Amity grabbed the book and stared at the front cover, letting out a frustrated sigh. “Ugh, I swear I’m gonna dump a cauldron full of the stickiest abomination goop I can find on the twins.”

“The twins?” Luz asked.

“My older siblings, Edric and Emira, think it’s the funniest prank in the world to mess with the books here knowing full well I’ll get blamed for it. Knowing them, they’ve probably messed with dozens of books.”

“That doesn’t sound like a prank, that sounds like just being mean and making you do lots of extra work.”

“Yeah, well that’s their idea of hilarious.”

“Well forget them, then. By the way, have you found anything yet? So far I’ve got nothing,” Luz said, trying to steer the conversation away from the sore topic.

“Nope,” Amity replied.

“Darn. Guess we just have to keep looking and we’ll find something eventually.”

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“Hey Amity, I found something,” Luz said, tapping the witch on the back and showing her *On the Origin and Situation of Basilisks*.

“Great! Do you want to keep looking, or is just this one fine?” Amity asked, motioning to all the remaining books that were yet to be looked at.

“Based off the title, this one will probably be enough,” Luz said, before quickly adding on, “So, if I wanted to read this here, do I have to check it out or anything, or can I just sit down at a table and open it up?”

“If you’re going to read it here then you’re fine, but if you wanted to take it back to the Owl Shack then you’ll have to get a library card and check the book out for 2 weeks.”

“So it’s just like back home, sweet. I’ll stay here and read, then.” With that, Luz sauntered over to an empty table and sat down in one of the unoccupied chairs, Amity soon joining her, sitting beside the basilisk.

Examining the book cover, it was very similar to Eda’s cryptozoology book, with the front of the book only bearing the title and the name of the author. Based off the author’s name (Esplin the Lesser) and how yellowed the pages were, this book had to be ancient.

Slowly opening the book up, Luz and Amity noticed that all of the pages were handwritten and bound by needle and thread. Careful not to damage the fragile pages, the two began reading.

Let it be known that I, Yosephus Esplinius Fenestra, younger sibling to the famed Allorinius Esplinus Corrass, have compiled these records, documenting the likely origins of basilisks here in the Boiling Isles. During my research, I have also found numerous other points of interest regarding the basilisk population, of which many have been archived in these pages.

Luz let out a long exhale. While *Good Witch Azura* would occasionally become flowery in its prose, it was usually limited to the dialogue of certain characters. This, however, seemed to be page after page of nonstop pretentious writing.

Luz skimmed through the pages, most of the content being things she already knew or had experience with, though she stopped when she reached a section labelled *The Grand Registry*.

During my travels through the basilisk settlement of Pemal, I heard whisperings of parents taking their newborns to a place referred to as the Grand Registry. When I asked a local about what exactly the registry was, they responded that it was where an infant child would be taken to have a small sample of their blood collected, as well as have the child’s names, both Dralag and common, recorded. When I inquired about why the registry required the blood of the newborn, the civilian refused to speak with me anymore.

My intrigue piqued, I questioned another passerby, seeing if they knew where exactly one could find the registry. They told me that it lay near the heart of the Titan. Based on my estimations, that would be at least three days of travelling by foot, though if I could gain possession of one of those new “palismans”, then the trip would be much quicker.

Unfortunately, I could not come into possession of a palisman, so I had to make the journey on foot. After travelling without much incident, I managed

to stumble, by pure happenstance, upon a roving band of basilisks who were also going to the registry. Luckily, they allowed me to join their party.

The Hamee family, as they were called, were taking their youngest child, Jara (n.b.: I believe that to be the child's name, though the thick accent the family spoke with means the child could have a name counter to what I have recorded) to have him entered into the registry. During our travels together, I asked the family about why the Grand Registry had been established, and they informed me

Luz's eyes flicked over, ready to read the next page, though the page her eyes landed on was completely different from what she expected, talking about something called *the Escafil Process*. Looking closer, Luz realized that at least a dozen pages had been removed from the book, with the small slivers of paper still bound to the book being the only evidence. The cuts were very smooth, like someone had taken a pair of scissors or some other blade to the book to eliminate the offending pages.

"Huh, weird," was all Luz could say to the tampering.

"Well, that isn't good. I'm going to have to report this to Malphas and see if he can do anything about this," Amity added.

"I'm guessing Malphas is your boss?" Luz said.

"Yeah, and he is not going to be happy that someone damaged one of the books. He treats them like they're his children."

"My librarian back home was like that too. He was the best," Luz thought back to when she first met Mister Grine. He was one of the nicest people Luz had ever met, always encouraging her to follow her passions. He even contributed to her Good Witch Azura addiction, letting her know when the newest book was in stock so she could check it out ASAP. "Do you think it would be okay if we kept reading? I want to see if there's anything else that's interesting," Luz asked after waiting a beat.

"As long as we don't damage the book any more then it already has been, then I think we should be in the clear," Amity replied.

"Sweet!" Luz said, diving back into the faded yellow pages.

The Escafil Process

While staying in a small village near the head of the Titan, I met a member of a local healer's guild who was kind enough to offer me one of their books

regarding the thaumaturgical process in which basilisks shapeshift. As I am no thief and don't want to steal the credit for other's work, if one would like a more thorough explanation than I can provide here, then seek out Seerow of Fangor and you shall not be disappointed.

In short, though, the shapeshifting process (Seerow also referred to it as the Escafil process, so that name may also be used in certain circles) works by taking the magic that basilisks have stored in their stomachs and absorbing it into the bloodstream of the demon through small cilia-like appendages that line the inner walls of both stomachs. This magic-rich blood is then pumped throughout the body, where a spell similar to that of a corporeal full-body illusion is then cast, altering both the outside appearance of the basilisk, as well as the innards, to match whatever form the basilisk chooses.

I guess you learn something new every day, Luz thought.

Turning the page to see what crazy fact was next, Luz found the majority of the ink to be smudged, rendering the text illegible. She could make out a few words, though “kindness” and “reprobate” weren’t that much to go off of. Checking the remaining pages, Luz only found smears of ink more suited to a Rorschach test than a book.

“Whelp, I guess the universe just doesn’t want me to learn more about my species.” Luz said, admitting defeat and closing the book. She then cupped her chin with her hands and let out a long sigh.

Getting up from her chair and grabbing the book off the table, Amity shook Luz by the shoulder. “Come on, we should get this over to Malphas. He’ll know what to do with it.”

“Alright, let’s go then.” Luz said, slowly rising to her feet.

The two then maneuvered their way to a large wooden door with the words *Master Librarian* emblazoned on it. Knocking thrice, Amity waited for her boss to emerge from his study.

With a shout of “I’m almost there, give me a second,” Malphas opened the door, garbed in a large cloak and a pair of comfy-looking slippers.

“Oh, hey Amity. How are ya doing? Also, who’s your buddy?” The bird-like demon said, looking over at Luz, who stood behind and to the side of Amity, trying her best to be inconspicuous.

“I’m doing well, Mal. This here is Luz, and I’m helping her out with some research. The thing is, while doing so we found out that this book,” Amity

held out the damaged item, “has been tampered with and is falling into disrepair.”

Malphas took the book and gave it a look over, slowly flipping through the pages. “Well, this has certainly seen better days. Thanks for letting me know, Amity. I’ll be sure to see what can be done with this poor soul.”

“Thanks, Mal.”

“No worries, Amity. Now, I’d love to keep chatting, but I’ve got some work that I have to attend to, so I’m going to have to cut our talk short.”

“Alright, Malphas. Have a good day!”

“You too, Blight.” At that, Malphas retreated back into his study and shut the door.

“That guy seemed pretty chill. I can see why you like working for him,” Luz said.

“Yeah, he’s a great boss. He treats everyone fairly and with respect, which is better than I can say for some people,” Amity replied.

“Have you had experience with cruddy bosses?”

“Oh, you don’t even wanna know.”

Chapter 13

Luz Learns About The Magic Of Camaraderie

Kaufetag 4, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

“Your reign of terror is over, Gildersnake!’ Azura proclaimed, pointing her magic staff at the beast. The Spell of Exile was her last hope to defeat the wretched creature. With a shout of ‘*Vertreibe!*’ and a blast of magic, the Gildersnake was vanquished, never to harm the citizens of Hruthin ever again.”

Luz closed her copy of *The Good Witch Azura: The Darkness Strikes Back* and looked down at King, eyes staring up at her with a look of wonder.

“So, what do you think?” Luz asked, gauging the demon’s reaction to the ending of the novel.

“It was so filled to the brim with mushy fantasy drivel that it was actually good,” King replied, climbing to his feet amongst his collection of plushies.

“I’m guessing you liked it, then? Oh, and look at the little flipbook I drew.” Luz opened the book back up and showed King the tiny drawings she had made in the margins. As she flipped the last few pages back and forth, a drawing of Azura fired a blast of magic from her staff, striking the Gildersnake, and causing it to explode into dozens of tiny pieces.

King laughed at the drawings. “Hah! I can do better than that. You know, as the King of Artists, I was renowned for my unmatched skill when it came to drawing things exploding. I was the best!”

Suddenly, the portal door appeared, opening to reveal Eda and Owlbert walking through the divide between realms. Behind him, Owlbert dragged a giant burlap sack stuffed to the brim with random items from Luz's neighborhood.

"All right freeloaders, it's market day. That means we've got to set up shop early before someone steals my spot," Eda said, grabbing the sack from Owlbert and slinging the human goods over her shoulder. Reaching down, she then scooped King up with her free arm. "Come on, let's go!"

The streets of Bonesborough were quieter than normal for this time of day. Usually, there would be a constant droning in the background of hundreds of voices screaming, all trying to get passersby to buy whatever item they were peddling. Luz didn't mind the quiet, though, as it allowed her to re-read *The Good Witch Azura: Revenge of the Gildersnake* without constantly being interrupted by something trying to eat her.

As Luz turned the pages, she couldn't help but occasionally run her fingers over her now-pointed ears. Sure, she could have gone out as the Kaugh, but that transformation took a lot of magic to pull off. Magic that, while overly abundant given her being in a realm full of magic-filled witches and demons, she didn't feel right taking from others.

Except for Warden Wrath. He could step on a colorful interlocking plastic brick for all she cared.

So pointed ears on an otherwise human Luz it was. Heck, she looked like an actual witch now! (Even if she didn't have the awesome outfit that Azura always wore.)

"Where is everybody?" Luz asked, looking up from her book. *Human Collectibles* was the only stand around. "Are they all playing hide and seek or something?"

"I have no idea, kiddo," Eda answered, shrugging her shoulders.

Just as Luz was about to return to her book, two sets of footsteps could be heard running up to the stand. Looking up, Luz saw that it was Willow and Gus who were the guilty party.

"Hey, Willow! Hi, Gus!" Luz greeted the two, closing her book and hopping over the table.

“Luz, where have you been? We’ve been looking for you all day,” Gus said.

“I’ve been at the Owl House, and then we came here at 9. Like we do every market day,” Luz replied matter-of-factly.

“Oh. Right,” Gus said.

“See? I told you she wasn’t at the all-you-can-beat buffet,” Willow interjected.

“So, why were you guys looking for me?” Luz said, wondering what could get the two of them so excited.

“Well, we wanted to invite you to come to the Covention with us,” Willow answered. “There’s even going to be a mystery guest this year.”

“Ooh, that sounds fun. But, what’s a Covention?”

“It’s where students from all the magic academies go to look at every coven there are before they get placed into one after graduation.”

“So it’s like a magical career fair? That’s awesome!” Luz said, elated at the prospect that she could see all the different types of magic. “Eda, can we go?”

“What? Absolutely not! Coventions are where fun goes to die and all the happiness gets squashed out of you while you get turned into a stooge for the Emperor.” Eda responded flatly, crossing her arms and standing her ground.

“Please, Miss Eda? It will be so cool and magic-y,” Luz said, doing her best puppy-dog eyes and batting her eyelashes. She held the look for a few seconds before Eda finally relented.

Eda let out a long groan. “Fine, we’ll go to the Covention. Just stop doing that face. Its cuteness is making me sick.” She paused for a bit before continuing. “Besides, I might as well see how the Emperor is brainwashing you fools nowadays. Haven’t been to one since we were kids.”

Luz perked up. “‘We’? Who’s ‘we’?”

Before Luz could question her anymore, Eda cut her off by saying, “That doesn’t matter. It happened a long time ago and isn’t important. Let’s just get this over with.”

Grabbing Owlbert and magicking away everything non-essential, Eda stomped off towards the Covention hall, with the kids following quickly behind.

The gang of witches, Luz, and King stood huddled in a dark corner outside the Covention. Eda wrestled with a cowl, trying to force her mountain of hair to fit into the hood. Luz did her best to help, stuffing the remaining locks into the hood with a little assistance from King.

“Why do we have to do this, again?” Luz asked after Eda managed to tuck the last strand into the cowl.

“To keep a low profile. Do you think I’m wanted just for pick-pocketing bozos on the street?” Right as Eda said that, a cascade of small trinkets and accessories fell out of her hair, clattering to the floor. “Mostly.” Scooping up some of the fallen objects and placing them back in her hair, she continued. “But the thing that has really got the Emperor’s knickers in a twist is that I refuse to join a coven. So that’s why I need the cowl. I need a disguise. I don’t want to go to jail.” She stopped to count on her fingers. “For the fourth time.”

“Well, maybe seeing all the wonders of the coven system could persuade you to join one,” Willow said hopefully.

Eda laughed and let out a snort. “Hah! Fat chance that’ll happen, kid.”

Now donning a completely fool-proof disguise, Eda and the others entered the Covention.

As the group walked through the main foyer of the hall, Luz could barely keep her jaw from plummeting through the floor. *This place looks amazing!* she thought, taking in all the sights. Rows upon rows of booths filled the hall, all of them advertising one coven or another. Above her head, student witches flew by on broomsticks. She also couldn’t help but notice the giant banners hanging from the ceiling. She counted 9 in total, each of them with its own distinct color and logo.

Gus noticed Luz looking towards the banners and jumped in with an explanation. “Those are for each of the nine main covens: Healing, Plant, Beast Keeping, Oracle, Construction, Bard, Illusionist, Abomination, and Potions. There are hundreds more to choose from, though. You just have to find which one suits you best.”

“Woah,” was all Luz could respond with.

Picking a row at random, the group walked past all the booths that had been set up. As they did so, Willow named off even more covens that a witch

could join. “There’s Scrying Coven, Baker’s Coven, Acting Coven, Debate Coven, Tiny Cat Coven—”

Eda groaned from the back of the group.

“And how could I forget the Grumpy Coven?” Willow continued without missing a beat.

“You wanna repeat that?” Eda said, disgruntled at the remark.

Willow let out a yelp as she ran away from the annoyed Owl Lady, with Luz, Gus, and King following close behind.

As the gang neared the end of the row, they turned back around, just in time to see Eda throw a small blue bag in some random witch’s face before yanking their hood over their head. As the Owl Lady ran over to meet back up with the kids, Luz saw the *cutest* little fox creature she’d ever seen.

The fox-like demon was seated on a stool, postured in a very proper manner. It stood at roughly the same height as a child, and it was dressed in a sleeveless gray tunic, torn-up brown shorts, and dark brown boots. Luz could also see that the demon had a mess of auburn hair and burnt orange fur.

Luz couldn’t help herself. She ran over as fast as her legs could go and began petting the absolutely adorable demon. While it was initially hesitant to the sudden contact, it relented, giving in to the affection. The demon’s fur was surprisingly smooth and silky, Luz realized. Switching tactics after a few seconds and rubbing her finger under the demon’s chin, it let out a small yawn.

“Luz, stop that! That’s Eberwolf. He’s the head of the Beast Keeping Coven,” Willow said, chastising Luz for her behavior.

“But he’s so cute!” Luz rebutted, now giving Eberwolf head rubs.

“Yes, and he can also have you thrown in the Conformatorium. Let’s check out the other covens.”

“Fine. Bye Mr. Eberwolf!” Luz said, waving goodbye, which the demon enthusiastically matched.

Suddenly, a light-blue clone of Luz popped into existence behind her, peeking over her shoulder. “Bye Mr. Eberwolf!” the clone repeated, before running over to another booth and vanishing into a nonexistent wind.

“Woah, what was that?” Luz asked, astounded.

“Ahh. I see you’ve been drawn in by the wonders of the Illusionist Coven,” Gus said, “We enjoy magic with a hint. . .” He disappeared in a puff of smoke, only to reappear a few steps away, “of pizzazz.” He finished with a bow as two other coven members poofed behind him, each flanking a side.

“Acceptance? Camaraderie? A sense of belonging and not feeling like an alien?” Luz couldn’t believe what she was seeing. “Covens sound like a dream come true! Why haven’t you ever joined one, Eda?”

“Are ya sure about that, kid? Watch closely,” Eda said, motioning towards another teenage witch who had been swooned by the flashiness of the Illusionist Coven.

“When you fall for the bait and join a coven, all your other magic gets locked away.” A blue sigil appeared on the pimply-faced witch’s wrist as a light blue color spread through their veins. “Now, all that kid can do is illusions. Nothing more, nothing less,” Eda explained.

She then summoned a fireball in one hand and an orb of water in the other. “And that is why Emperor Boo-los has me as Public Enemy #1, and why I’m also *the* most powerful witch on all of the Boiling Isles.” She dispelled the two spheres with a wave of her hand.

As the group walked away from the Illusionist Coven, Willow and Gus listed off coven after coven, each of them getting progressively more specific. At some point, King had been lured away from the group and he was currently AWOL. He was probably being promised dark deeds done in his name or something silly like that.

“Of course, the People-Who-Look-Like-Doppelgängers Coven is a very rare coven to get in to,” Willow said.

“Yeah, but it’s even harder to qualify for the Dross-Detecting Coven,” Gus countered.

The gang, sans King, approached a doorway flanked on both sides by guards. Above the door, a banner hung depicting two pairs of wings and a sword on top of a triangular shield. Luz couldn’t help but think she had seen a design similar to that back in Gravesfield. She was pretty sure she had seen something similar on the town welcome sign. Coincidences happened all the time, though, and this was probably no different. It was a relatively simple design, after all.

Gus gasped. “I can’t believe the Emperor’s Coven is actually here this time!

Do you think I can get an autograph?"

"I guess we'll have to go and find out," Willow replied, and the two young witches ran into the theatre.

Luz moved to follow after her friends, but slowed up when she noticed that Eda hadn't moved from her spot.

"Aren't you going to join us, Eda?" Luz asked.

"Absolutely not. The Emperor's Coven is just a bunch of yes-witches for Bonehead. They're the worst of all the covens. I'm fine waiting out here," Eda replied.

"I get it. Conformity: bad. Self-reliance: good. But, I'm also still learning all the ins and outs of this world, so I'm going to be making my own choices and that includes whether or not I join a coven. I'm going inside, alright?" Luz then turned and walked into the theatre.

After Luz found a good seat in one of the upper bowls and had sat down, Eda rushed over and plopped down in the seat next to the basilisk.

"Hey kid. Changed my mind. I want to see this hot mess go down."

Just as she finished saying that, the lights surrounding the theatre dimmed.

It was time for the show to begin.

Chapter 14

Luz Gets Forced Into A Death Battle

Kaufetag 4, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Covention Hall

Luz could barely contain her excitement, doing everything she could to not just jump out of her seat and yell for the show to begin. Practically vibrating from all the pent up energy, she resorted to bouncing her knee up and down and tapping her feet.

“You good, kiddo?” Eda asked, turning to the teenager.

“Oh, sorry. I’ll stop. I’m just excited, that’s all.” Luz responded, stopping her foot mid-tap.

“Well, that makes one of us.” The Owl Lady said with a grumble.

Luz looked around the theatre, trying to find Willow and Gus, but she couldn’t see them anywhere. Hopefully they had gotten better seats than her. She was in the mother of all nosebleed seats, positioned in one of the highest rows, barely able to see the stage at the center of the theatre.

Suddenly, a huge cloud of smoke appeared on the stage, and out of the pyrotechnics emerged Hieronymous Bump. Summoning a microphone, the principal began speaking.

“As a principal, I’ve seen many witches and demons walk the halls of my school. While some students may have gone the ordinary route of joining

one of the main nine covens, or even specializing in a smaller coven, there are a few outliers. There are a few students who go above and beyond what is expected. Through academic excellence and an upstanding character, a select few of my students have been accepted into the Emperor's Coven. Tasked with enforcing the will of our great Emperor, members of his coven act as the stabdardbearers of society. There are quite a few perks that come with being a member of the Emperor's Coven, as well."

A collection of Emperor's Coven scouts emerged from the floor, adorned in cloaks and their signature beaked masks. Each scout then drew a spell circle, causing balls of fire, water, abomination goop, and rock to appear.

"When you become a member of the Emperor's Coven, you have access to all, and I do mean *all*, types of magic, with no restrictions whatsoever. But, I don't think you all came here to listen to an old witch talk about his job, so now, for the moment you have all been waiting for. The mystery guest for this year's Covention is the head witch of the Emperor's Coven herself, Lilith!"

A giant white illusion of a raven swooped down to the stage from out of nowhere, before dissapating and revealing a tall witch dressed in a simple black dress with similarly long black hair. Luz couldn't help but notice the similarities this Lilith lady had with Eda. Both of them shared a lot of features, most noticeably being the pale white skin. Lilith stepped forward and Bump moved to the side, allowing her command of the stage.

"Greetings, witches and demons. Although Hieronymous has given an adequate description of the prerequisites for joining the Emperor's Coven, he has forgotten to mention one thing. Prospective members of the Emperor's Coven must also prove themselves to be knowledgable in all aspets of spellcasting while also being powerful enough to cast exceptionally taxing spells."

"Does this count as powerful?" A member of the audience yelled, before drawing a spell circle. Luz didn't know what to expect, but she certainly didn't expect for the student's head to enlarge to a size more fitting of a giant, only to topple over and crush the other student next to them. A sickening *CRACK* echoed throughout the theatre.

"No. Will someone contact a member of the Healing Coven for this poor witch?" Lilith stated flatly. "As I was saying beofre I was interrupted, the final requirement for joining this prestigious coven is to showcase a mastery of numerous types of magic, both in theory and in practice.

“If you don’t show the mastery right away, but have the potential and are simply in need of training, then that training shall be provided to you while you work for the coven. I will leave you with this: joining the Emperor’s Coven, while challenging, is more than worth it. So, be more! The Emperor’s Coven awaits you!”

With a spread of her arms, Lilith summoned the white raven and looked over the crowd. Her eyes moved from student to student, until she locked her gaze onto the Owl Lady. A mix of anger and sadness shown on the coven head’s face as she stared at her sister.

Luz noticed Eda’s surprised look. “Do you know her, Eda?” Luz asked, turning to the witch.

“I guess you could say that.” Eda replied, eyes still locked on her sister.

Eda stormed out of the theatre, going as fast as she could without drawing too much attention to herself. Luz ran up to the witch.

“Eda, where are you going?”

“I’m getting out of this Titan-forsaken building. I need to go back to the house and wash the smell of Emperor bootlicking off.”

“What? That’s insane! We haven’t even gotten a chance to check out all of the covens yet.”

Eda simply grunted and started walking even faster. Shrugging her shoulders, Luz turned around, only to walk straight into Amity, knocking both of them to the ground.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I should’ve watched where I was going,” Luz said, climbing to her feet and offering her hand to the fallen Blight.

“No worries. I’m fine.” Amity replied, grabbing the hand and pulling herself up. The lavender-haired witch found her eyes drawn to the basilisk’s ears, which were noticeably pointed, not unlike her own.

“Good idea giving yourself witch ears. A human walking around the Convention would have definitely drawn some unwanted attention,” Amity continued.

“Thanks. This is way easier than doing a giant, bladed snake-monster. Plus, it’s not as taxing on my magic reservoirs.”

“I’ve been wondering: how exactly do your... magic reservoirs work? Do you have to, like, drain a witch every other day or you go crazy?”

“To be honest? I’m not 100% sure. The only people I’ve ever drained are Warden Wrath and Principal Bump, and I haven’t had, like, a hunger attack or anything, so I think as long as I have had some magic in the past few weeks, then I should be good.”

“Hmm. That’s interesting.”

“Amity, I’ve been looking for you.” Amity and Luz turned to see Lilith approaching them quickly.

“Oh, hello Miss Clawthorne. I thought you would still be busy with coven business.” Amity said, bowing her head slightly.

“Today’s the Covention, so I used my one day off to allow myself some leisure time today. Plus, I knew you’d be here, so I thought I’d check up on my protégé and see how her studies were doing.”

“My studies are going well, Miss Clawthorne. Top Student, as per normal, with the highest marks in every class.”

“I expected onthing less, Amity. Keep up your grades an you’ll undoubtedly become a member of the Emperor’s Coven one day.”

“Thank you, Miss Clawthorne.”

“And who might you be?” Lilith turned to Luz. “I don’t think I’ve seen you before.”

“Luz Noceda, Miss. Nice to meet you.” Luz offered a handshake, being sure to follow those lessons she had learned from cotillion.

“I see that manners aren’t a completely foreign concept to witches your age. Thak the Titan.” Lilith replied, giving Luz a solid handshake.

“This might be a weird question, but are you related to Eda the Owl Lady?” Luz asked, hoping to answer the question that had been bouncing around in the back of her mind.

“Yes, Edalyn is my sister, ironic as that may seem. May I ask why you want to know?”

“Well, Eda has been my sort of landlord, sort of teacher for the past few weeks.”

“I’m sorry, are you telling me that Edalyn has taken you on as her apprentice?” Lilith’s face grew worried.

“Pretty much, yeah.” Luz responded.

Lilith squatted down to be at eye-level with Luz and grabbed her shoulder lightly. “Child, take this advice to heart: stay far, far away from Edalyn. She is incredibly dangerous, both to herself, and to others.”

“Luz, there you are!” The trio of Luz, Amity, and Lilith turned to see Eda walking over, King hoisted upon her shoulder, smearings of what looked like cupcake frosting covering his mouth, with dozens of trinkets and accessories draped over his person.

“Hello, Lilith.” Eda said, her normally snarky demeanor replaced with a cold, exact one.

“Hello, Edalyn. I see you’ve still taken to dressing in garbage.” Lilith looked Eda’s outfit up and down.

“The only garbage here is the propaganda you’re spewing to these kids.”

“I’m helping the people of the Isles follow the will of the Emperor, and by extension, the Titan itself. Are you telling me that I shouldn’t be following what the Titan wants. In fact, I’m even training the next generation of witches, and what are you doing? You’re probably teaching her how to rob a witch blind or some heinous activity like that.”

“I’ll have you know that Luz here could absolutely destroy any of your stuck-up little mini-mes.”

“Are you saying that you are a better teacher than me? Fine. Let’s put that to the test.” With a spin of her finger, Lilith destroyed all of the WANTED posters that had Eda’s face on them. “For the rest of the day, your bounty is voided. In an hour’s time, your apprentice will face my protégé in a Witch’s Duel. Use that time to prepare however you see fit. Shall we set the conditions?”

“Sure,” Eda responded. “If Luz wins, you have to... buy me a lifetime’s supply of apple blood and get rid of my bounty forever.”

Lilith laughed at Eda’s requests. “Of course, and if Amity wins, then you’ll have to join the Emperor’s Coven immediately.”

Eda grimaced at what would happen if Amity won, but stuck her hand out. “Let’s make it official then. Everlasting Oath and all that.”

“Gladly,” Lilith replied, drawing a spell circle around Eda’s wrist before shaking hands. “The Everlasting Oath is sealed.”

Luz and Eda sequestered themselves into a derelict corner of the Covention hall, with the closest booth being far out of earshot. King had once again ran off, but they both knew he would be alright. He was too cute to be seriously injured.

“So, how does this ‘Witch’s Duel’ thing even work? I doubt it’s like how they are in *The Good Witch Azura*.” Luz asked, wringing her hands nervously.

“Well, a traditional Witch’s Duel is between two witches and ends when one of them beefs it. Pretty much all magic is allowed, with the sole exception of autonecromancy. That one defeats the whole ‘to the death’ part. Everything else is fair game, though. Oh, and getting help fom outside sources is also not allowed. But everything that you have naturally at your disposal can be used.”

“So that means...” Luz started.

“That you could drain the Blight kid of all her magic and it would be totally legal? Yup!” Eda said cheerfully.

“What? No! Why would I want to do that? I don’t want to have to kill anyone!” Luz yelled.

“Oh, well why didn’t you just say that.” Eda deadpanned.

“That’s what I was trying to—” Luz let out a groan. “Ugh. How do we get out of this duel thing wihtout anyone dying?”

“The only way a Witch’s Duel ends before one a combatant’s death is when one or both of the parties are found to be cheating while the Duel is in progress,” Eda answered.

“And since I can’t exactly resurrect myself, I’m guessing the only way I can cheat is through outside interference?” Luz said dourly.

“Ya got it in one, kiddo,” Eda replied with a grin.

Luz jogged in place at on edge of the theatre floor, stationing herself opposite Amity and Lilith. Stopping every so often to stretch out her muscles, she

hoped everything went to plan. If not, well, Luz didn't want to think about what would happen if the plan failed.

"So all I have to do is to avoid Amity for a while and then get her to step on one of these little mounds of dirt? Then I'll get DQed and Amity will win with nobody dying?" Luz asked, making sure she knew exactly what to do.

"Pretty much, yeah. And be sure to sell you being surprised by the trap. That'll make it super obvious that you're getting help," Eda said.

"Alright." Luz let out a deep breath and readied herself. Across the floor, she saw Lilith and Amity having a brief discussion, with Lilith being oddly touchy with the young witch, especially around the back of her neck. Amity looked nervous, and rightfully so.

Lilith stopped talking to Amity and walked to the center of the floor, where Eda soon joined her.

"Citizens of the Isles, you are here to stand witness to a Witch's Duel. The conflicting parties are myself, Lilith Clawthorne, and my sister, Edalyn Clawthorne. We shall not be fighting directly, and will instead be represented in the Duel. My representative will be Amity Blight, heir apparent to Blight Industries. Edalyn's representative will be Luz Noceda, some witch she probably kidnapped. Other than that, standard Duel rules apply. No help from non-combatants, and no self-resurrection. This Duel will end when one of the combatants is killed. The only way this Duel will end early is if one of the combatants is found to be cheating. If so, the Duel will be immediately stopped, and the cheating party will be ruled the loser. The wagers are as follows: if Amity wins, Edalyn will be immediately inducted into the Emperor's Coven, and if Luz wins, then Edalyn will receive a lifetime's supply of apple blood and have her bounty permanently voided."

Luz did her best to ignore the chanting of the crowd, trying to block out the noise and focus on the duel.

Across the floor, Amity gave a small wave and a smile.

Taking one final breath, Luz steeled herself.

Lilith raised her hand, palm open, and held it for a second before slicing downwards.

"Let the Duel commence!"

Chapter 15

Luz Nearly Curses Out A Coven Head

Kaufetag 4, Fifth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Covention Hall

Lilith Clawthorne, despite what her sister would claim, was not a fool.

Just an hour before, she had walked on the ground that her protégé was now fighting on. Before her and Hieronymous' presentation, the Construction Coven had been entrusted with making sure that the stage was in perfect condition, and that included a perfectly level flooring. Now, though, small mounds were scattered along the ground. Mounds that Lilith knew were there for a purpose.

Lilith shook her head and clicked her tongue. Of course Edalyn would resort to such blatant cheating. Though her sister's mockery of the ancient rules was undoubtedly in character for the younger Clawthorne, Lilith was still astounded she would go about it in such an obvious manner.

Lilith was cheating as well, though. The two competitors had to be on a level playing field, after all, so if Edalyn was going to bend the rules, then Lilith would begrudgingly follow suit. Given, she was cheating in a more elegant manner, if that was even possible. Before the duel had begun, Lilith had stealthily placed a power glyph from the Construction Coven on the back of Miss Blight's neck. This would allow the young prodigy to cast far more powerful spells than normal, but it came at the cost of using up her magic much faster as well.

Well, that wasn't the only reason Lilith was also cheating in this Duel. She had let her competitive fire get the best of her when she had coerced Edalyn into the Duel. Ever since the two of them had been children, they had always been competing, either with each other or as a team against a common opponent. On the Grudgby field they had formed a formidable duo, leading Hexside on a winning streak that still had yet to be matched. When they weren't teammates, though, they were still fierce competitors, even over the most trivial aspects of life. Lilith still fondly remembered the day that she had finally bested Edalyn in a game of Hexes Hold 'em. There was nothing on the line that game. There were no stakes, yet the joy she felt when she played the winning hand was second-to-none.

Of course, there were also some moments where Lilith regretted having such a drive to win. There were some things that she wished she had never sought out, decisions she wished she had never made. Decisions that had ruined Edalyn's life.

That was why Lilith was cheating. She knew what would happen if Edalyn was inducted into the Emperor's Coven. Yes, she would be cured of her curse, just as Emperor Belos had promised, but she would also be trapped. The Owl Lady would never submit to being locked in the cage that is the Emperor's Coven. Edalyn's free spirit and need to cause chaos wherever she went would never fit in among the ranks.

Lilith loved her sister. Yes, she may have gone against every law on the books by refusing to join a coven, but Lilith would rather fruitlessly chase after Edalyn until the end of days than see her in the cloak of a scout.

So, as Luz Noceda and Amity Blight prepared to face each other, Lilith prayed to the Titan that this vacuously-conceived Duel would end with no victors and only a pair of cheaters.

Luz had no idea what to do.

Sure she had been in a few fights before, but she was exclusively on the receiving end of the attacks, never the offensive. Mamá had always told her that violence was never the answer to your problems, so Luz would always weather the minute or two the fight would last, doing her best to dodge the attacks. Eventually, the fight would be broken up by a teacher and both Luz and whoever was on the other end would get punished.

This fight was different though. If things didn't go exactly as planned, somebody was going to end up on a one-way trip to the nearest morgue.

That wouldn't happen. That *couldn't* happen. Luz would make sure of it.

Old habits die hard, though, so as Amity summoned an absolutely *massive* abomination, Luz stood frozen in place. She would let the emerald-haired witch attack first and then do her best to lure her onto one of the (hopefully obvious enough) traps.

The giant abomination suddenly ripped its head off and tossed it at Luz. Thankfully, the head seemed to travel in slow motion as Luz's fight-or-flight instincts kicked in. Diving out of the way of the flying projectile, Luz tried to scheme up a way to get out of this fight with nobody dying.

Amity threw attack after attack at the basilisk. Luz ducked under a punch from the abomination and threw one of her own. Her fist went directly through the abomination's stomach, leaving a hole in the goop monster's abdomen.

Then Luz got an idea. She remembered how Willow had said that abominations were essentially immortal and impervious to being hurt. That meant that if she got one of Amity's abominations to step on one of the traps, then it would be set off and then the duel would be over because Eda cheated and everyone could go back home and forget this ever happened. That was a good plan, right? Well, at least it was a plan.

Noticing a nearby trap, Luz made a beeline to put the mound between herself and the abomination. As the magical construct slowly ambled towards her, it made the mistake of stepping directly on top of the trap. A blast of fire sprouted from the ground, setting the abomination aflame. Unfortunately, though, the abomination was still alive, and it was now a flaming abomination trying to kill Luz.

The flaming abomination pressed Luz back up against the wall. Seemingly out of good options, Luz did the only thing she could think of. Diving between the abomination's legs and scrambling away as fast as possible, Luz tried to put as much distance as she could between herself and the mindless killing machine.

Quickly getting back to her feet, Luz stole a glance to see how Amity was doing. The witch looked shockingly pale, and she was sweating profusely. Still though, she kept the spell circle holding the abomination together active, although the circle was warping and shifting, as if Amity was struggling to hold it.

Turning back to the abomination, Luz saw that it was still dead set on

sending her to an early grave. The abomination was still on fire, but it was moving slower now, its steps sluggish, arms dangling at its side.

Then the abomination stepped on a trap and exploded.

The explosion rocked the room, the *Ka-BOOM* echoing off the high ceiling of the theatre. Bits of abomination goop was flung everywhere, most of it still on fire. Crowd members scattered, dodging the flaming balls of goop as it rained from the sky.

Luz was thrown on her rear-end as a result of the trap going off. As she waited for her ears to stop ringing and the giant clouds of dust to settle, Luz saw Amity on the other side of the floor. The witch was barely able to stay on her feet. She staggered forward a few steps before collapsing to the ground face-first.

“Oh my God, Amity!”

Luz ran over to the fallen witch, careful to avoid setting off any of the traps. As Luz got closer, Amity seemed to regain a little strength, having enough energy to push herself up to be resting on one knee, though she did so through labored breathing.

“Amity, are you okay?” Luz asked, hoping she would get some kind of answer. She offered Amity her hand, which the witch took.

“I’m exhausted. I didn’t know I could pull off a spell that big,” Amity said between breaths as she got back on her feet.

“CALL OFF THE FIGHT!” Luz yelled to Lilith.

“This Duel will continue until only one of you is alive.” Lilith said coldly, but the wavering in her voice betrayed her.

“You said this could end if one of us cheats though, right? Well then, I cheated! Is that what you wanted to hear? All of this was from Eda’s traps. I’m a filthy, no-good cheater. Are you happy now? The Duel is *over*. You win, congrats.” Luz threw her arms up in desperation as she ranted.

Lilith took a slow and controlled breath. It was time for her to reveal that she was also guilty.

“Actually. I cheated as well,” she said simply.

“What? Oh there is a certain four-letter word that I really want to call you right now.” Luz interjected.

“Miss Blight, please examine the back of your neck.”

Amity slowly felt around, moving her ponytail out of the way. Suddenly, her fingers ran over a section that didn’t feel anything at all like her skin. Finding the edge of the section, she pulled at it, feeling a sort of adhesive tugging as she removed the offending object. As the magic holding it to her neck gave way, Amity looked at what she held in her hand.

“That is a power glyph from the Construction Coven. I placed it during our talk just before the Duel began. I am so, so sorry, Amity. I let my emotions get the best of me, and I apologize. I never meant for you to get hurt.” Lilith bowed her head, staring down at the ground.

Amity could barely respond. She stared at the thin piece of paper in her hand. She had cheated. Amity Blight, the best witch in all of the Abomination Track, former star of the Hexside Banshees, and overall perfect student, had cheated.

She dropped the glyph and ran.

“Amity!” Luz ran after the fleeing witch.

Luz threw open the doors of the theatre, looking around to see if she could see a trace of emerald hair. She saw a flash of it turn a corner off in the distance, so she followed and hoped Amity didn’t have some secret body double.

Luz found Amity seated on the cold, linoleum floor and sat down next to her.

“Hey,” Luz started.

“What? Have you come here to gloat or something?” Amity replied, her voice breaking.

“No, I swear. It’s just... I’m sorry. I know that probably doesn’t mean much, though.”

“Yeah, well is that apology going to restore my chances of getting into the Emperor’s Coven? I cheated. They don’t take cheaters.”

“Well, I don’t know if you noticed, but we both cheated in the Duel, which means we both lost. We can be, like, Loser Buddies or something.”

That last remark got a small giggle out of Amity.

“That sounds like a comic that Ed would buy,” the witch said with a laugh.

“We’d be the worst superheroes ever. ‘How will the Snakeshifter and Emerald Enchantress battle their way out of this sticky situation? Find out in the next issue of *Loser Buddies!*’ ” Luz did her best impression of one of those cartoon narrators, putting on a crazy accent for extra effect.

Amity guffawed. “I’m sorry, ‘Emerald Enchantress’? That’s an awful name.”

“What, can you think of anything better?” Luz questioned.

“I . . . err . . . uh . . . no,” Amity stuttered out.

“Then Emerald Enchantress it is,” Luz said.

“Fine,” Amity replied begrudgingly.

The two sat silently for a moment before Luz remembered something.

“Say, Amity, do you want to see some magic?”

“Sure? But don’t you not have a bile sac?”

“Nope,” Luz replied simply, pulling out her notepad and pencil. “I don’t need one.”

She quickly sketched out the light glyph, having the design already memorized thanks to countless repetitions over the past few days. She tapped the glyph with the eraser-end of her pencil and watched the paper crumble up into a ball, before turning into a sphere of pure light.

Amity looked at the floating light with amazement in her eyes.

“Incredible. I’ve never seen a spell cast like that before. How did you figure that out?”

“It’s a long story,” Luz explained, drawing out the ‘o’. “There was a storm, and Eda turned into the Owl Beast, and I cracked my phone, and . . . Let’s just say that I’m really happy I can draw a perfect circle.”

“Are there any other spells you can cast with your little drawing thing?”

“Nope, the light spell is the only one I’ve found so far. There’s got to be others, though.”

Suddenly, a bell chimed three times, loud enough to echo through the entire Covention Hall.

“Oh crud, I need to get going,” Amity said, quickly climbing to her feet. “I have to prep for one of Mother’s presentations, and I can’t be late this time.

Bye Luz!”

As Amity ran off, Luz waved goodbye, even though the youngest Blight wouldn’t see it.

“Bye, Amity,” Luz said quietly.

“Hey, kiddo. Whatcha doin’ back here?” Eda asked. Luz looked up and met eyes with the Owl Lady.

“Amity and I, we were, uh, chatting.”

“Sure, kid. Well, let’s find King and bounce.”

The two did eventually find King. When they finally caught him, the tiny demon was in the middle of huge group of Covention-goers, all of them fawning over the demon.

“Yeah, that’s right. If you join the King Coven, you get to give me an hour of tummy scratches each day for the low cost of 5 thousand billion snails,” King proclaimed.

“King! What are you doing?” Eda shouted, forcing her way through the crowd.

“I’m being a good business-demon, like you,” he replied, clambering his way on top of a nearby table to get away from the crowd.

“Everybody scram!” Eda yelled.

The crowd scrambled.

“Really King, you think they’re all gonna give you 5 trillion snails a day? That’s more than my bounty, you goofball. If you’re gonna scam ’em, don’t do it so blatantly.”

“So you’re saying I should give them a discount of 5 thousand snails?” King asked hopefully, hopping down from the table.

Eda chuckled. “Yeah, that’s totally what I’m saying. Now let’s go. This place reeks of conformity.”

As the trio walked out of the Covention Hall, Eda pondered the idea of having her own coven.

“Ya know, the Eda Coven does have a nice ring to it. Wait, no, even better, I’ve got it. How do you two want to be inaugural members of the *Bad Girl Coven*?”

Chapter 16

Luz Throws A Mediocre Three-Person Party

Kaufetag 1, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

“Pay attention, kiddo. Hexes Hold'em is one of the most complex games on all of the Isles, but it's also one of the most popular. Any creature worth their weight in Selkigris knows how to play,” Eda explained, setting her deck on the table. Owlbert, who was perched across from her, did the same.

“So how do you play?” Luz asked from her spot on the couch.

“Well, the long and short of it is that you've got two main types of cards: lands and spells. Land card give you bile for certain Humors, which can then be used to cast spell cards. Each player gets a certain amount of health, usually 20 bits, and whoever drops to 0 health first wins.”

“Oh, so it's just like *Hocus-Pocus: The Get Together*.” Luz said excitedly. Back in the Human Realm, she was the founding member of Gravsefield High's *Hocus* club. She was also the only member.

“I have no idea what that is, but sure.” Eda replied flatly. “Now, let's see what my hand is.” Eda drew 7 cards at random from her deck. A mischevious smile grew on her face. “Ooh, momma likes this.”

Owlbert then drew his 7 cards and let out a satisfied trill.

Eda went first, placing down *Titan's Knee* and casting *Raging Fairy*.

Owlbert countered, putting down *Hidden Waterfall* as his land card and attacking with *Gore-nado*.

The game was afoot.

Luz watched on, enraptured, as the two battled it out on the coffee table. Eventually, Owlbert's forces had nearly overtaken Eda's, leaving the Owl Lady with only three health left. The palisman had a smug look on his face as Eda's attack opportunity rolled around.

"Now, kid, when your opponent thinks their victory is assured, that's when you pull out your wild card." Eda pulled a card from her hand and slammed it down onto the table and all of Owlbert's cards were instantly incinerated. The fire then coalesced above the table, turning into a message that read "WINNER: EDA".

"Haha, yes! In your cute little face!" Eda gloated, jabbing a finger at her palisman. Owlbert responded with an annoyed hoot and flared his wings, hopping off the coffee table.

"I love the feeling of victory. Say, have you guys seen any voles recently?" Eda said, collapsing onto the couch and draping her arms over Luz and King.

Suddenly, feathers sprouted from the Owl Lady's arms, with more popping up from the neckline of her dress. Distressed, Luz jumped to her feet and yanked King into her arms.

"Eda, you're a little more... feathery than normal," King said.

"What do you mean? I took my elixir this morning. At least, I think I did." Eda summoned a mirror and looked for herself.

"Oh this isn't good." Eda said, getting off the couch and running into the kitchen. She began throwing all the cabinets and drawers open, looking for the golden liquid that would placate her curse. There were none to be found. Running up the stairs and looking in her nest-side chest had similar results. Luz and King entered the room as she closed the chest.

"Well shi-" Eda's eyes flew to King. "-itake mushrooms, I'm all out of elixir. Let's hope Morton's stocked up. Come on, kids, we're going to the market!"

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Eda banged on the grate to the *Mr. Elixir* stand. "MORTON! I know you're in there! Open up before I get hungry for *Langue de Nerd*!"

“Just a minute, Eda.” A voice weakly called through the grate.

Luz, once again donning pointed ears, and King took a seat at a nearby bench, with Luz taking in all the wonderful oddities that lived on the Isles.

Luz let out a content sigh. “Ahh, is there anything better than people watching, King?”

“Hmm.” King tapped his claw against his skull, thinking long and hard about the question. “Conquering my enemies and bathing in their blood? But beside that, no.”

Luz looked across the street, where she saw three witches waiting at what looked like a bus stop. Suddenly, a massive egg fell from the sky and cracked open upon smashing against the ground. From the remains of the shell, a cavalcade of demons and witches emerged, hopping out and walking away as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Given, this was the Boiling Isles, so it was ordinary. The three witches who were waiting carefully climbed into the shattered egg, only for it to magically reconstruct itself and start rolling away.

“Wait for me!” A shrill voice cried out. Luz turned to see the conspiracy theorist from the Conformatorium running towards the egg, only to accept defeat and slow to a walk.

“Oh the curse of tiny legs.” Luz said, shaking her head.

“Yeah, being tiny sucks.” King added.

“But if you weren’t so tiny and adorabl, I wouldn’t be able to do this.” Luz said, wrapping King up in a surprise hug.

“Ahh! Let me go you heathen!” King cried out.

A long, loud screeching sound assaulted Luz’s eardrums. She turned around to see that the *Mr. Elixir* stand was now open for business, and the namesake Mr. Morton Elixir was barely out of his teenage years.

“Sorry for the hold up. I was up all night testing a new Liquid Courage potion, and I’m not feeling the best.” The apothecary apologized.

“Well sorry to break it to you, but I’m all out of elixir. I need a fresh batch ASAP,” Eda said.

“I’ll see what I can do.” Morton said, retreating into the back of his stand. The sound of bottles clanging together could be heard seconds later.

Luz took the opportunity to do some more people watching. As she scanned the pedestrians that walked around, her eyes landed on two very familiar faces.

Running from the stand and over to her friends, Luz greeted Willow and Gus.

“Hey, guys! How’s it going?” When the two didn’t reply, Luz noticed the dour looks on their faces. “Wait a minute, what’s wrong? Who do I have to go defend your honor against?”

“Them,” Willow said, jerking her thumb towards a group of young witches that Luz didn’t recognize.

“Boscha’s having a moonlight conjuring, and she’s invited everyone but us,” Willow explained with a frown.

“Plus, she keeps posting about it on her Penstagram account,” Gus added, summoning his scroll and showing the announcement post to Luz.

“‘Conjuring Night 2nite! No dweebs, dorks, or half-witches allowed!’” Luz read. “What a jerk!” She paused when she realised she had no idea what the event actually was. “Hold, on what *is* a moonlight conjuring?”

“Well, you spend the night at someone’s house, and you tell stories, you play games, stuff like that.” Willow replied.

“So it’s like a slumber party! We have those back in the Human Realm. I never got invited to one though.” Luz responded.

“And then there’s the main event: bringing something to life with the power of the moon!” Willow said excitedly.

“And there’s the twist. Should have seen that coming, honestly,” Luz replied.

“Willow and I have never been to one. You need at least three people-” Gus said.

Luz gasped. “I can be the third person. We’ll definitely have more fun than them. They probably hate having fun.”

“Hey Half-A-Witch! Are you still looking for an invite? Too bad you’ve got no talent, then you might have gotten one,” the triclops bully said.

Willow growled and small vines burst through the ground. Luz yelped and batted at one of them. “Hey, don’t take your repressed anger out on them.

Take it out on, like, a punching bag or something. You know what? Let's stick it to those snobs by having our own moonlight conjuring," Luz said.

"Really? That means I'll finally be able to cross off something on my bucket list!" Gus said, his face lighting up.

"What else is on your bucket list, Gus?" Luz asked.

"Owning a genuine human bucket. I want to store all my human treasures in it."

"Well, I can probably find one in this week's haul. You can have it for free."

"Awesome!"

"Alright, I'm gonna go check with Eda and see if she'll okay us doing the conjuring at the Owl House."

Luz ran back to the Mr. Elixir stand to find Morton, Eda, and King talking about the night market.

"Hey Eda!"

"Yeah, kid?"

"Willow, Gus, and I want to do a moonlight conjuring tonight and we want to do it at the Owl House. Can we do it, please?" Luz made sure to look as cute as possible while asking, batting her eyelashes and folding her hands in front of her.

Eda contemplated for a moment. She knew the kid was pretty trustworthy, and it wasn't like she and her buddies would be able to animate the entire house or something. Eh, what was the worst that could happen?

"Sure kid, just don't do anything that I would do at a conjuring. Besides, I'm gonna be doing some very not safe stuff tonight and I need you to watch the house, so your pals can tag along as long as they don't break anything important."

"Yes! Thank you so much, Eda. I won't let you down, promise."

Willow and Gus ran up to Luz, hoping to hear good news.

"So is the conjuring gonna happen at the Owl House?" Gus asked.

"Yup! Eda gave us the go ahead as long as we don't break anything," Luz answered with a grin.

“Sweet!” Willow said.

“We’re gonna do a conjuring! We’re gonna do a conjuring! Conjuring! Conjuring!” Willow and Gus chanted in a sing-songy voice.

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As night rolled around at the Owl House, Luz glanced nervously at the moon. She had played far too much *The Legend of Grizel: Borrindo of Space* last year, and this moon looked eerily similar to the one in the game. Hopefully this moon wouldn’t crash into the Isles and end life as she knew it. That would kinda suck. A sudden voice snapped her out of the trance.

“Luz, I’m heading out. Let your friends in when they show up, don’t destroy the house while I’m away, and please, for the love of the Titan, don’t let Hooty eat anything he’s not supposed to.”

“You’ve got it.” Luz replied, giving the Owl Lady a salute. “Hey, uh, where’s King?”

“He’s right here.” Eda said, opening her cloak to reveal a sleeping King strapped to her in a bright pink baby carrier. King let out a small snore. “His body just shuts down when he’s like this. Watch this.”

Eda move from side to side and King didn’t even make a noise as his body flopped around like a ragdoll.

“Aww, he’s like the world’s cutest little puppet.” Luz said, lifting and dropping one of his feet.

“Alright, we’ve really got to get going. Remember, kid, you can have fun with your friends, just don’t do anything crazy, *capisce?*” Eda said, opening the door and stepping outside, with Luz following suit.

“Mmhmm. Loud and clear. Have fun breaking the law!”

“You know it. Ok, byeee!” With that Eda flew off to the night market. Luz waved goodbye for a few seconds before turning to head back inside.

Suddenly, two bushes that Luz hadn’t noticed exploded, only to turn into Willow and Gus, both of whom were now dressed in regular clothing.

“Holy mother of Titan!” Luz screamed at the loud noise. “Oh, its just you two. You couldn’t have given me a warning? I think I’m deaf now, thanks.”

“Blame Gus. It was his idea,” Willow said immediately.

“What, you think I wasn’t going to do a super cool dramatic reveal?” The illusionist replied.

“Yeah, well I would have thought it was cooler if my ears weren’t ringing,” Luz said, shaking her head.

“Sorry.” Gus said, looking down at the ground.

“It’s fine,” Luz assured him. “Let’s just go inside and set up the conjuring stuff.”

Luz escorted the two into the living room.

“So, we’ve got all your moonlight conjuring needs handled. We’ve got snacks, we’ve got items from the Human Realm, we’ve got-”

Gus gasped. “A BUCKET!” The young witch ran over to the pile that was the week’s haul from the Human Realm and yanked out a plastic bucket.

“And the best part is is that we actually have enough people to do a conjuring!” Willow added. “I just know this is gonna be great.”

“I never asked, how does this conjuring stuff actually work?”

“Well, you first have to figure out what you want to animate,” Willow explained. “Since this is our first one ever, I think we should animate something important. Do you have any super meaningful things from the Human Realm?”

“I’ve got a picture of me and my mom. Would that count?”

“Yeah, that’d be perfect. Go get it. Be fast, though. The moon will be in position any second now.”

Nodding, Luz ran up the stairs, two at a time. Opening the door to her room, she spotted the framed picture atop her dresser. Grabbing the photo, she turned to head back down the stairs.

As she did so, though, the moon shifted into position. Rays of moonlight, imbued with the magic that only a celestial alignment could provide, shone through the window.

One of those rays struck Luz. As if she had been shot, the basilisk collapsed to the ground, the picture flying from her hand and the glass shattering.

A bloodcurdling scream echoed through the halls of the Owl House.

Chapter 17

Luz Discovers A New Hatred For The Moon

Kaufetag 1, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz's body was on fire. At least, that's what it felt like. She had never been on fire before, but this was probably really close. Scratch that, actually. Her history teacher, Mr. West, had set a few strands of her hair on fire to wake her up during a lesson before, but that didn't hurt that much. Given, it was her first class of the day and she had fallen asleep because she had stayed up all night watching Good Witch Azura AMVs instead of doing her homework, so it was a tiny bit warranted so that Mr. West could lecture without her snoring like a foghorn.

This hurt even worse than the threat of *la chancleta*, though, so Luz screamed, slamming her eyes shut and curling into the fetal position.

The pain was unbearable. It was if every cell in her body had been dunked in hot sauce and then thrown in an oven at 350 degrees. Luz tried to crawl her way out of the moonlight that was causing this torture, but she could barely find the energy to do so. As Luz forced her eyes open so she could see, she noticed that her arms had gone from human to basilisk. Reaching a hand out, she sunk her claws into the floorboards and pulled with all her might, managing to drag herself a few inches before trying again.

Just as she was about to do that, though, Willow and Gus had run up the stairs to help out their distressed friend.

“Oh my Titan, what happened?” Gus asked.

“Moon,” Luz forced through gritted teeth. She was doing her best not to swear up a storm.

Springing into action, Willow ran over to the window and drew the curtains closed, casting the room into near-total darkness, the only light coming from the fairy lights Luz had “stolen” from a collection run and strung up with Eda’s help.

Slowly, the pain subsided. Luz propped herself up on her elbows and breathing heavily. Gus knelt down next to her.

“Hey, copy what I’m doing,” he said, before taking in a long breath. As he did so, he raised a finger for each second he was inhaling. Then, he exhaled at the same rate, lowering the same fingers.

He then did it again, Luz mimicking his actions this time. As she slowly exhaled, she felt way more calm than she had seconds prior.

“Woah, where did you learn that?” Luz asked as her breathing levelled out.

“It was a little trick Willow taught me when we first met,” the illusionist responded.

“And I learned it from my dads,” Willow chimed in as she tied the window curtain closed.

“Huh, that’s neat,” Luz responded, orienting herself in a more comfortable position given her current basilisk form.

“So, what exactly happened? We just heard you scream really loud,” Willow asked.

“I’m, uhh, not exactly sure. Like, I was getting the picture, and then the moon shined through the window, and I felt like I got stabbed with a super hot fire poker or something,” Luz explained.

“Do you think it has anything to do with the celestial alignment?” Gus followed up with.

“I dunno, probably?” Luz said, shrugging her shoulders. She then remembered the reason she was up here to begin with. Clambering over, she slowly picked up the picture of her and her mom.

The glass in the frame had completely shattered, with the largest crack going straight down the middle, right between Luz and Camila. Luz frowned at

the state of the frame. She remembered when that picture was taken. That was the day that Mamá had been promoted to Head Veterinarian at the Happy Pets Clinic. Luz had known that that day was a big one for her mom, so Luz had tried to bake some celebratory *maduros* in the oven, but they just ended up getting burnt. Mamá didn't care about the mess, though, and she helped Luz make another batch with some expert guidance this time around. They turned out perfect.

"Sorry about the picture, Luz," Willow said from behind her.

"Thanks," was all the basilisk could respond with. She moved to wipe away a tear that was threatening to roll down her cheek. As she did so, she realized that she still had claw hands. She quickly and discreetly morphed her hands back into their human shape. For some reason, the morph actually hurt, which was weird. Eh, it was probably just some side-effect of the moon beam. She clenched and relaxed her fists. That was better. Now she could wipe the tear away.

"So I'm guessing no moonlight conjuring?" Gus asked.

"Yeah, I think we should call it off. Even that little sliver of moonlight hurt like a mother trucker," Luz said, forcing a laugh.

"Although, while you're here, how about I give you guys a tour of the Owl House? As long as we block out all the windows, that is," she continued.

"That's not a bad idea," Willow said.

"Sure!" Gus replied enthusiastically, hoping that meant he could touch more things from the Human Realm.

"Alrighty then. In that case: Hello, my name is Luz Noceda, and I'll be your tour guide this evening," Luz said, acting like one of those college recruiters she had seen when she, Mamí, and Papa had visited the UConn campus.

Luz cautiously peeked out the doorframe, checking to see if there were any stray pain beams streaming in through the window, of which there were none. Letting out a breath she didn't know she was holding, Luz motioned for the others to follow behind.

"This house was constructed by the... wait. Hold on. HOOTY!" Luz shouted, dropping the act. She had no clue who actually built the house. She doubted that it was Eda's doing. The house seemed too ancient.

Hearing his name called, the house demon snaked his way up the stairs.

“Who dares awaken me from my slumber? Oh, hi Luz.”

“Quick question, Hooty: Who built the Owl House?” Luz asked.

“My mom!” Hooty replied cheerfully.

“You have a mom?” Luz knew that had to be a lie.

“Uh huh! Momma told me that when a Mother House Demon and a Father House Demon want to have a kid, they contract a stork to deliver all the supplies, and then the parents spend years constructing the house, and then they spend a night together having fun and the next day the baby house demon shows up inside the door to the house. Except, Momma told me that Papa had to go buy some milk and then he disappeared forever, so she had to build me all alone. I’m a big boy house, though, so I have definitely never cried about the fact.”

“That can’t be real. That has to be made up, right?” Luz turned to her friends to see if they believed the clearly deranged bird worm. Both Willow and Gus silently shook their heads and mouthed the word “No.”

“Alright, well, thank you, Hooty. Oh, and can you, like, cover all the windows please?” Luz asked, hoping that was in the realm of possibility.

“Sure thing! Are we doing a summoning ritual?” The house demon gasped. “I can go get some blood from the night market!”

“No, Hooty! We’re not doing that. It’s just that the moonlight is hurting me for some reason.”

“Oh, okay!” The bird tube said. Suddenly, solid metal grates covered all the windows, a kuh-CHUNK sound echoing through the house.

“Thanks, Hooty. Now, can you go outside and take a nap or something?” Luz asked. She loved the house demon, truly, but he could get on your nerves really quickly.

“You’ve got it, hoot hoot!” Hooty said before slithering back down the stairs and closing the front door.

“Sorry about that,” Luz said as she entered the now safe hallway. “Alright, back to the tour. So, uhm, that was Hooty. He pretty much controls everything around here. The pipes, the ventiation, the lights.”

As if on cue, all the lights in the house blacked out, shrouding the entire building in shadow.

“And when he falls asleep, everything shuts off.” Luz finished, just now remembering that fact.

Then, Luz had an idea.

“Should I cast a light spell, or do you guys secretly have night vision?” Luz asked. She hadn’t shown off the light glyph to her friends yet!

“That would be nice, but don’t you not have a bile sac?” Willow questioned.

“Who says I need one? Observe.” Luz then pulled out her pad of sticky notes and carefully traced out the light glyph with her pencil. Tapping the glyph, it crumpled up into a small ball of light, illuminating the three friends.

“Woah, that’s awesome!” Gus said.

“Can you show me how you did that?” Willow asked.

“Sure. It’s really just drawing a few overlapping shapes, then tapping it and presto, you’ve got a portable sun!” Luz drew out another light glyph, this time showing Willow each step along the way.

“Wait, so if there’s a light one, is there a darkness one too?” Gus questioned.

Luz thought about that for a second. If there were other glyphs out there, would they follow some kind of theme? “I have no idea,” she answered.

“Well, how about we look for some?” Willow suggested.

“Yeah, let’s do it!” Gus agreed.

Luz slumped down onto the couch and sighed. They had tried for the past hour and a half to discover any other glyphs that could exist. Well, they did that after waking Hooty up first. The Owl House had its fair share of not exactly “child-safe” accoutrements, and walking into a sword hanging on the wall was not on Luz or Gus’ bucket list. (The two of them promised to make Willow a bucket list some day.)

Now it was searching time!

Since her first glyph had come from when her phone had been cracked back when Eda’s curse had flared up, the group had reasoned that it was probably due to the fact that Luz’s phone was somehow able to decipher the glyphs inherent in spell circles.

So that's what they tried. Luz would pull up her camera and start recording, and either Willow or Gus would cast a small spell. Then, they would go and check the footage. Their efforts didn't bear any fruit, though. Try as they might, all they could see were the spell circles and the result of said spell. No triangles or inscribed circles or anything. But they did get some cool shots of Gus doing some super realistic illusions and Willow being an absolute powerhouse in regard to plant magic, whatever that was worth. Which wasn't really much for what they were looking for.

Glumly, Willow joined Luz on the couch and spun up a small stunflower. Picking it from the crack in the floorboards, Willow rolled it around in her fingers, the flower eventually bumping into Luz's face.

"Nyeh, stop th-" Luz went to bat the flower out of her face when she noticed something weird about it.

"Hold on. Can I see that, Willow?" Luz asked. She might have just been seeing something that wasn't there, but she was pretty sure she saw a small marking in the center of the flower.

"Oh, sure." Willow handed the flower over to Luz, who pulled out her phone and once again opened up the camera.

Luz swiped over from Video to Picture mode and focused the lens directly on the center of the flower. Then, she zoomed in.

"Oh my Titan, there's a glyph in the flower!" Luz couldn't stop herself from shouting in her excitement.

"Really?!" Gus said, running in from the kitchen, a bucket full of human items clutched in his hand.

"Yeah, look!" Luz handed the flower and phone over to the youngest witch.

"Woah, that's super cool." Gus spun the flower like a top, looking at the glyph from every possible angle.

Gus handed the phone and flower back to the basilisk. Luz quickly took a photo of the glyph for safekeeping.

The basilisk then quickly went to work on tracing out the new glyph. It looked somewhat like a flower, fittingly. Contained inside a circle, much like the light glyph, this new one had a small circle with a dot in the center at the bottom, with the upper portion being a wide V shape that had a line

with a triangle splitting it down the middle. The triangle was then split up into an upper and lower portion, a horizontal line running from side to side.

Luz copied the design down meticulously, making sure she got each detail exactly right.

Now, for the moment of truth. Luz tapped the glyph with her finger.

Instead of crumpling into a ball of light, the sticky note sprouted a small vine, not unlike the ones that Willow had used to ensnare Luz when the two had first met.

Luz jumped to her feet and did a fist pump. “Yes! Glyph number two, let’s go! Heck yeah!”

If Luz had been paying attention, she would have noticed that she had suddenly grown an extra appendage. Behind her, her tail wagged back and forth like a dog who just got promised a treat.

Willow and Gus both looked towards each other after they noticed the new addition to their friend’s backside. Willow gave a thumbs up and Gus nodded.

“Hey, uh, Luz?” Gus said quietly.

“Yeah? What’s up Gustaban?” Luz asked, completely oblivious to her new body part.

“Look behind you,” was all he answered with.

The girl did a complete 180, turning to face the wall, her tail whipping around, causing Willow to duck out of the way. “What? Did you see a spider or something?”

“No, I mean just turn your head around.”

“Oh that’s what you... meant.” Luz turned to stare at her tail. It slowly stopped wagging.

“Well, this is embarrassing.”

While her tail *SCHLORPED* its way back into nothingness, Luz let out a wry chuckle. For some reason, the morphing still caused a small smidge of pain. Dang moonlight weirdness.

“Heh, sorry about that.”

Chapter 18

Luz Meets Twin One and Twin Two

Schlaftag 1, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

“Breakfast is ready! Come get something before I give it all to Hooty!” Eda yelled from the kitchen, the smell of sizzling... something wafting up the stairs and into Luz’s room.

Luz shuffled her way out of her sleeping bag and loosed a massive yawn. She was *not* a morning person. She quickly shifted herself into some sweatpants and one of her favorite *Good Witch Azura* t-shirts. A nice, comfy outfit.

Uh oh, bad decision, Luz! She had forgotten about the whole moonlight fiasco from last night. As her pajamas were replaced with her chosen attire, Luz doubled over in pain, clutching at her stomach. She felt like she had just taken a left hook directly to the kidney.

“Sweet mother of Titan, that hurt,” Luz said through gritted teeth. She took in a sharp breath and blinked a few times. Composing herself, the basilisk slowly walked down the stairs, rubbing at her side to try and alleviate the pain.

“You alright, kid? You aren’t lookin’ too hot,” Eda said as Luz entered the room. The Owl Lady was busy frying up some bacon, but stopped once she saw the state her apprentice was in.

“I’ve been better. Do you have any, like, magical painkillers?” Luz replied, taking a seat at the table.

“Is this about that moon thing that happened last night?”

“Yeah. Whenever I try to shapeshift it hurts.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve got a potion or two somewhere that can fix that. Shouldn’t take it on an empty stomach, though, so get some food in you first,” Eda instructed while scouring through the cabinets.

Not wanting to know what horrible thing would probably happen to her if she took the painkiller on an empty stomach, Luz grabbed a freshly-washed apple and bit into it. As she chewed, she pondered over how weird it was that so many things from the Human Realm had a one-to-one analogue here in the Demon Realm. Given, eating apples from the Human Realm that had spoiled didn’t get you intoxicated and stuck on the roof. Luz had discovered that nifty fact when she had found Eda atop the Owl House, surrounded by a bevy of rotten apple cores. That night had been a struggle.

“Found it!” Eda called out, holding up a glowing blue potion. The witch handed the medicine over to her ailing housemate. “Here ya go, kiddo.”

“Thanks, Eda. How long should this last?” Luz asked, weighing the bottle in her hand.

The Owl Lady did some quick mental math. “I’d say it should hold for about 12 hours, give or take.”

“Alright. Down the hatch!” Luz proclaimed before chugging the potion. It tasted oddly sweet, like someone had mixed an energy drink and a cappuccino together. The potion kicked in almost immediately, and Luz let out a sigh of relief as she felt the pain subside.

To further test if the potion was working, Luz morphed into her basilisk form, waited a few seconds to see if it hurt, and then back to human., all with no pain whatsoever!

“Now that that’s settled, you want some breakfast kid?” Eda asked.

“Yes please, I am starving.” Luz responded, her stomach grumbling, clearly not satisfied with just an apple.

“Then feel free to help yourself to some-”

“HOOT HOOT SPEEDY DELIVERY!” Hooty burst his head through the window, sending shards of glass flying into the meal that Eda had just laid down. The house demon then lightly placed down a basket covered in a blanket.

“Hooty! Why did you just-” Luz let out a groan, not even bothering to finish the sentence.

“Is it some kind of gift basket?” Luz asked, examining the package.

“It’s probably someone trying to sacrifice their firstborn to me, even though I keep telling people to stop doing that,” Eda supplied.

Eda slowly pulled back the blanket, revealing a snoring bat creature. “And I was right. Dang it.”

Luz noticed a small slip of paper stuck to the underside of the blanket. She removed it and began reading. “*Owl Lady, I am to go away from home for the night. I entrust you to keep child safe.*”

Eda flapped her hand dismissively, cutting Luz off. “Psh. Like that’ll ever happen.”

“*If child stay safe, you shall be handsomely rewarded.* And then it’s signed by someone named Yi Yi.”

Eda ripped the paper out of Luz’s hand, reading it herself to make sure she didn’t just imagine what Luz had just said.

“Luz, do you know who Yi Yi is?” Eda asked.

“Not necessarily. Should I?” Luz responded.

“Should you? *Should you?! Yi Yi is only the wealthiest demon on all of the Boiling Isles. If you get in her good graces, you’ll be swimming in snails for the rest of your life!*” Eda would’ve been dumbfounded that someone didn’t know of the legendary Bat Queen, but then again Luz had only been on the Isles for a little under a month.

“So all we’ve gotta do is keep a baby alive for a few hours and then we can practice diving into our pools of snails. How hard could that be?” Eda said.

“This’ll be so fun!” Luz exclaimed. “What games should we play to keep the little sweetie occupied?”

“‘We’? There is no ‘we’ here,” Eda said pointedly.

“What? Why?” Luz asked.

“Because I have lots of overdue books that need to be returned to the BPL.” To emphasize her point, Eda cast a spell circle, causing a giant stack of books

to fall in front of Luz, who quickly caught them before they could tumble to the ground.

“Aww, but the baby is so cute!” Luz argued.

As if to spite Luz, the baby decided to wake up. Having no idea where it was, it became agitated and flew up to the ceiling, breathing fire to try and scare away the strangers.

“Never mind. I’ve got to go. Have fun babysitting, Eda!” Luz said, slamming the door shut and running off with the pile of books.

As Luz entered the main foyer of the BPL, she regretted not getting a wagon or something to carry all the books in. They were *heavy*. Like her prayer had been answered, the books suddenly began levitating, flying off to the main desk, which was still being run by the same witch from before.

One by one, each book flew through a spell circle, and one by one each was marked as *LATE*. The librarian then took particular offense to a grimoire that Luz had seen Eda reading late at night a few days prior. They opened the book and grimaced at the quality it was in.

“Apple blood, dirt, *and* potion residue. These were Eda’s weren’t they?”

“Hehe,” Luz nervously chuckled. “Got it in one.”

The librarian sighed. “I’ll just put these on her tab. Which she still hasn’t paid in over 13 years. Oh, and we’ll be closing early for tonight’s Wailing Star meteor shower.”

“Ooh, what’s that?” Luz asked.

“Something that a young witch like you shouldn’t mess with,” the librarian responded flatly.

“Well that just makes me want to know even more!” Luz exclaimed.

“Fine, go. I’m not paid enough to care, anyways,” the librarian replied.

Luz made her way over to the Demon Decimal System. “Do any of you know where I can find a book about the Wailing Star?” she asked. One of the heads lolled out its tongue, and Luz grabbed the strip of paper. 523: *Celestial bodies and phenomena* was her destination. With a quick thank you, Luz set off, steadfast on her quest.

Until she got distracted by a certain emerald-haired witch who was currently reading to kids.

“’And so the Opossum used the thorn to stab at the Wolf’s paw. Believing the Opossum to be the Snake, the Wolf ran off, leaving the Opossum in its hole.’” Amity finished reading and closed the book to a round of applause from the gathered witches and demons.

After the crowd had dispersed, Amity walked over to greet Luz.

“Hey, Luz!”

“Hi, Amity.”

“So, uhm, about the... thing... that happened at the Covention. I’m sorry for snapping at you,” Amity apologized nervously.

“No problem,” Luz replied, brushing it off. “It’s all water under the bridge.”

“I have no idea what that means,” Amity said candidly, confused at the odd turn of phrase.

“Oh right, human expression. What that basically means is that what happened in the past can’t be changed, so should just accept that it happened and go on with our life.”

“Hmm. The Human Realm has a lot of weird phrases,” Amity posited.

“Oh you have no idea,” Luz said with a laugh.

“Hey, Mittens!” A voice called out. Amity’s face instantly grew a shade of bright red.

Luz and Amity both turned to see who had called out to them. Just outside the entrance to the Kid’s Section, two witches, both looking to be about 16 years old, stood waiting. The two appeared to both be members of the Illusion track at Hexside, donning the powder blue variation of the school uniform. The girl on the left had her long, forest green hair braided, trailing down her back. Alongside her uniform, she also wore a white pearl necklace and had on a pair of small gold earrings. Her face was blemish free, save for a small beauty mark under her left eye. The boy, who stood to the right, also had the same color of hair, though his was short and messy. He had a mirrored version of the girl’s beauty mark, with his being under his right eye. His attire seemed to be more simplistic, lacking the accessories that the girl had on.

“Ugh, what do you two want?” Amity questioned the new-comers.

“Mom says that you forgot your lunch. Again.” The boy then held up a bright pink lunch-bag with a rabbit face sewn onto it. He then walked over, the girl trailing behind him, and tossed the bag at Amity, who begrudgingly caught it.

“Do you know these people, Amity?” Luz asked.

“Unfortunately, I do,” Amity responded. “Luz, these are Edric and Emira, my older siblings and perpetual thorns in my side.”

“So you’re the witch who bested our baby sister in the duel at the Covention? Mittens would not stop talking about you,” Emira said.

“Stop calling me that!” Amity yelled.

“Which one? Mittens or baby sister?” Edric chimed in.

“Both, thank you,” Amity said, clearly annoyed.

“Hmm. Nah. Teasing you is too much fun.” Edric said after tapping his chin, miming being deep in thought.

“You two can leave any second now.”

Emira gasped. “Are you implying you don’t like our company? Oh how you wound us so, Mittens!”

“Leave. Now,” Amity growled.

“Fine, Mittens. We’ll go,” Edric said, dragging out the goodbye.

“Thank you,” Amity replied with a huff.

The twins then jauntily walked away, leaving Luz and Amity alone in the Kid’s Corner.

“I’m guessing those were the twins you told me about?” Luz replied.

“Yeah. Sorry you had to meet them like that. Ed and Em can be *really* annoying when they try,” Amity apologized.

“So typical sibling behavior?” Luz asked.

“Pretty much. How about you? Do you have any siblings back in the Human Realm?”

“Nope. It’s just me and my mom. I’ve always wanted to have a younger sibling, though.” Luz said with a small frown.

“Well if that ever happens, promise not to turn into Ed or Em, alright?” Amity asked.

Luz laughed. “Yeah, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, why did you come here? I doubt it was to see me,” Amity said.

“Well, originally I was just here to return some overdue books for Eda, but then the librarian said that they were closing down early tonight for this thing called the Wailing Star. Obviously, me being me, I wanted to see what that was but then I got distracted by you reading to kids and I just realized that sounds kinda weird. Sorry, I’ll shut up,” Luz said quickly, silently cursing her tendency to motormouth.

That earned a chuckle from Amity. “No, no. That’s fine. You said you wanted to know more about the Wailing Star?”

“Uh huh.” Luz replied with a nod.

“I’m no expert on celestial happenings, but I’m pretty sure that the Wailing Star is supposed to cast some sort of spell on the books in this library. It apparently has something to do with the stained glass window over the front entrance and the way the light from the meteor shines through it, but that’s about all I know.” Amity had been given a brief rundown by Malphas about the Wailing Star before, but she was only half paying attention when he began talking about the intricacies of the event.

“Woah, that sounds awesome! Why would they close down the library when super cool magic stuff happens?” Luz asked.

“I’m not really sure, but I guess they could be concerned about safety or something,” Amity replied with a shrug.

“Well, if it was up to me, I would be throwing an epic party whenever the Wailing Star was nearby,” Luz said.

“And what would be at the party?” Amity inquired.

“I dunno, Wailing Star cupcakes and a piñata?” Luz supplied.

“Do you mean a pain-yata?” Amity was confused by the basilisk’s pronunciation.

“No, I mean a . . . oh this is another one of those weird Boiling Isles analogues. Sure, a pain-yata,” Luz said after realizing what Amity meant.

“Well, I would definitely go to that party, then.”

“I’ll be sure to invite you.”

Chapter 19

Luz Embraces Her Inner Horse Girl

Schlaftag 1, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz opened the door to the Owl House, revealing Eda and King on the couch. The two of them were both wearing ear protection, with Eda having removed her hands and stuck them in her ears, while King had pillows strapped to his skull. In Eda's arms, she softly cradled the bat baby creature thing as best she could without hands, gently rocking it back and forth. King, meanwhile, was curled up and relaxing comfortably on the arm of the couch, using the pillows both as ear muffs and actual pillows.

"Hey, guys." Luz said, making her presence known. "Got your books returned, Eda."

"Thanks for doing that, kid. We've still got our hands full, as you can see," Eda said, still rocking the baby.

"Well, I'll have you know that you look very motherly," Luz replied.

"Call me that word again and I take away your bed." Eda glared at the basilisk to drive home the threat.

"What? How could you say that around this little cutie patootie?" Luz walked over and gave the baby a scratch on the tummy.

"No, don't do that!" Eda warned, but it was too late. As if reflexively, the baby awoke from its nap and proceeded to vomit out a duplicate of itself,

and the duplicate in turn barfed out another clone. Now with three baby bat demons, the triplets began crying after being rudely awoken and/or brought into existence, their wails assaulting Luz's eardrums.

"I knew babies could be loud, but this seems like a bit much," Luz said, covering her ears with her hands.

The babies flew all around the living room, trashing everything that wasn't nailed down to the floor. Potions were thrown willy-nilly, and Luz was pretty sure that one of them was now wearing a pair of Eda's boots.

Wait, Luz could shapeshift. That means she didn't have to have ears!

While it was a little weird feeling her ears disappear (and a little bit painful), the incessant crying from the babies did eventually give way to a peaceful silence. Except now she couldn't hear anything, including Eda trying to talk to her. She could see the Owl Lady's lips moving, but she had no idea what the witch was saying.

"I can't hear you," Luz said, pointing to where her right ear used to be. She hoped she said it loud enough for the others to hear, but it could have been as quiet as a whisper for all she knew.

Eda got the message, though. She thought for a moment before pointing to the kitchen. She then mimed biting into something spherical, and then mimed cutting something.

"Do you want me to get an apple and a knife?" Luz asked. Eda nodded in confirmation.

Running into the kitchen, Luz quickly grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter, a large knife from the collection on the wall, and a cutting board from below the stove top.

Luz returned to the living room and handed the items to Eda, who promptly propped her ankle up on her knee and laid the cutting board down on the makeshift table. Popping her hands back into place, Eda placed the apple on the cutting board and steadied it. Once everything was settled, Eda began to cut the apple into thin slices.

The second the knife made contact with the apple, the babies immediately stopped causing a ruckus, flying down from the ceiling to sit in a row in front of Eda, patiently waiting for their treat.

Now that the coast was clear, Luz morphed her ears back into existence.

The sounds of the world rushed back to her. The slight creaking of the floorboards. The occasional breathing within the walls that Luz still didn't know the cause of. The random screaming outside. It all returned. As Luz got her bearings, she heard Eda say something, but she wasn't sure what.

"Sorry, could you repeat that?" Luz asked.

"I said, 'Thanks,'" Eda replied.

As Eda was giving Baby #2 its third slice, her scroll buzzed. Retrieving it from her pocket, Eda looked at the notification before handing it to Luz.

Conversation with: WitchChick128

WitchChick128: Hello, Ms. Clawthorne. I need to talk with Luz, and since she doesn't have a scroll, I figured you would be the second best option. Could you let me talk to her?

BADGIRLCOVEN: yo this is Luz

BADGIRLCOVEN: whats up

WitchChick128: Ed and Em just snuck out of the manor, and they were talking about the Wailing Star.

WitchChick128: I'm pretty sure they headed in the direction of the library.

BADGIRLCOVEN: and you need me for what? backup in case things go south?

WitchChick128: Yes. Can you get to the library quickly?

BADGIRLCOVEN: yeah, especially if I morph something fast

WitchChick128: Great! Thank you, Luz.

BADGIRLCOVEN: no prob :)

Handing Eda her scroll back, Luz explained the situation. "I've got to head to the library. Amity needs backup for fending off Ed and Em's pranks. Or something like that. Anyways, I gotta go. Bye!"

With that parting, Luz ran out the front door of the Owl House. She needed something fast, and nothing was more apt for this situation than a horse. While cheetahs were faster, they could only keep that speed up for a short

distance, and the library was a few miles away, so she needed consistent high speed, and that was what the horse offered.

As Luz pictured the morph, she felt a stabbing pain as her fingers and toes melded together to become hooves of thick keratin. Pushing through the pain, her a wave of brown fur began spreading across her body, emanating from her wrists before going down to her ankles. Sensing that she was about to fall forward, Luz got on all fours before she was forced to by gravity. As the morph continued, she felt her nose elongate and shift into a snout, jutting out in front of her. Her mouth had been dragged along for the ride, as well. However, her eyes decided to shift towards the side of her head, making it harder to concentrate on her giant snout. Finally, a tail sprouted behind her, topped off with a thick tuft of fur.

With the morph complete, Luz cautiously took her first few steps in her new body. She quickly developed a strategy. Left hind leg forward. Then right hind leg. Then left foreleg. Then right foreleg. Repeat until you get to where you need to go.

As she got more used to the odd movements, Luz gradually picked up speed until she was going at full blast. The wind that she could barely feel before now flowed through her mane, whipping it around behind her like she was in one of those commercials for a super expensive perfume.

As her hooves pounded against the cobblestone, Luz weaved around the witches and demons walking the streets. She passed by shopkeepers of the Night Market, citizens out for walks, and she was pretty sure she galloped past a group of kids who were undoubtedly breaking curfew. As she ran by, most stopped to turn and stare at her. To them, some foreign beast had just emerged from nowhere and was streaking down the main road at an incredibly fast speed.

In what felt like no time at all, Luz stood before the entrance to the library. Amity was waiting at the top of the steps, looking around for her backup.

Sensing an opportunity, Luz trotted over to the young Blight and neighed to get the witch's attention.

"Hey, Luz," Amity said, before pausing. "Wait, you are Luz, right? I'm not just talking to some random creature?"

Luz let out an offended snort. Who else could rock a mane like this? She tossed her head back, letting it fall gracefully onto her back.

She quickly morphed back into her Luz-but-with-Witch-ears form, once again noticing the sharp pain that accompanied it. The potion from earlier must have worn off, she surmised.

“Really, Amity? Do you think anyone else could look so stylish while being a horse? I’m appalled, honestly,” Luz said sarcastically.

Amity chuckled. “No, I guess not.”

“Alright, then what’s the plan?” Luz said, putting on a serious face.

“Oh... um...” Amity stalled and grew flustered, not ready for the question. “I guess go in there and fix whatever Ed and Em have broken.”

Luz smiled at the girl. “Good plan! Let’s go!”

Without waiting, Luz loosed a battle cry and charged at the door, throwing a leaping kick at it. The door offered no resistance whatsoever, and Luz practically sailed into the library before crashing down onto the floor, letting out an *OOOF* as the wind was knocked out of her. That drew a loud laugh from Amity, who cautiously stepped through the now open door and offered the embarrassed Luz a hand up, which was accepted.

Making their way through the main foyer, which seemed relatively unchanged, the two entered the main hall of the library, which looked... different, to say the least.

“Yup, Ed and Em have been through here,” Amity concluded.

To their left, a veritable mountain of snow covered numerous bookshelves, complete with a few small snowmen placed at the base. On the right, a mix of froufrou dresses and tuxedos and Dragon Claw Z-esque jumpsuits were strewn about on the floor. Above them, birds that Luz thought to be extinct circled her head, occasionally screeching.

There was one constant amongst all this chaos, though: books. Wherever there was something weird, an open book would be nearby.

“Hmm... I wonder...” Luz thought aloud. She walked over to one of the books that was close to an expensive-looking dress. She closed the book, and the dressed poofed out of existence, as if it was never there in the first place. Walking over to another book, she closed it, leading to the Dragon Claw Z getup vanishing in a similar manner to the dress.

On the other side of the library, Amity had made the same discovery, with the mountains of snow disappearing before Luz’s eyes as Amity closed both

Snowballs, a History and *Winter for Dummies*.

Suddenly, the sound of distressed quacking pierced through the relative silence, which was soon followed by a pair laughing. Luz and Amity sprinted towards the source of the troubled duck, only to find that the twins were long gone by the time they arrived. The only evidence was *Quacks Wants Snacks* laying atop a bookshelf.

Amity opened the book, and Quacks appeared, though the duck had a horrifyingly human pair of legs. Quacks began screaming again, so Luz tried to calm it down by softly stroking its fur. As Amity investigated the book, she saw that Quacks normal legs had been drawn over with a pencil, leading to its odd appearance. Amity quickly closed the book to stop Quacks' suffering.

"The poor little guy had no idea what was going on," Luz lamented.

"We've got to make Ed and Em come to their senses before they get themselves hurt," Amity said.

"At least they weren't being sneaky," Luz replied, pointing towards the books that had been scattered on the floor, creating a trail the two could follow.

After following the path of books (and putting them back in their rightful spot), Luz and Amity had reached an apparent dead end at the Romance section. Luz looked around to see if there were any other books that could indicate where the twins had gone, but her searching was fruitless.

After watching the other girl putter about, Amity let out a sigh.

"I think I know where they are," she said quietly. She then reached up and pulled down *The Lone Witch and the Secret Room*. A bookshelf in front of Luz slowly moved to the side revealing Amity's hidden study, and inside that study stood Edric and Emira Blight.

The twins were busy looking through all the books in their sister's private room, with a large pile gathered on the desk.

"Hey Mittens, glad you could join us," Edric said, as if this was nothing out of the ordinary.

"What are you – Why – How did you even get in here?" Amity forced out.

"We're searching for your diary so we can post the pages all over Penstagram. Why? Payback for you tattling about us cutting class. How? We pulled the book down, just like you did. You should also probably chose a more

inconspicuous book, by the way. That one's too easy to figure out," Emira calmly explained as she dumped another book on the pile.

"Get. Out," Amity growled.

"What? But we haven't even found your diary yet!" Ed complained.

"I said GET OUT!" his younger sister yelled, pointing towards the door.

"Ugh. Have it your way, Mittens. We'll get out of your hair," Em said, throwing one last book onto the pile before leaving.

"Yeah, we were just having fun. Way to kill the vibe, Mittens," Ed added as he joined his twin.

The twins forced their way past Amity and began walking away. Amity immediately began putting the books back in their shelves, but Luz trailed after the twins.

"Hey!" she shouted.

Ed groaned and turned to face her, with Emira following suit. "Ugh, what do you want?"

"Don't think I didn't see how you guys treated Amity back there. That's not how a family is supposed to act," Luz said.

"Really, because that's just how us Blights show tough love," Em responded.

"'Tough love'? That's bat guano and you know it. Family members are supposed to love and care for each other, not leak a person's private journal for everyone to see."

"Look, kid. As Blights, we have a reputation to uphold. If we don't, then Mom gets royally pissy, and you don't like her when she's pissy. That's why we had to get back at Amity. She was making us, and by extension our whole family, look bad. Now we can't let that happen, can we?" Ed explained.

"I'm just saying, have you guys considered standing up to your mom?" Luz asked.

"Oh we've tried plenty of times, but nothing gets through to her," Em said.

"Well, can you at least be nicer to Amity?" Luz tried again.

The twins paused. "We'll think on that," they said in unison. With that, the two left the library having made it to the foyer.

Luz quickly made her way back to Amity's secret hideout. The emerald-haired witch had already gotten a majority of the books back in place, so Luz took the time to check out the witch's personal collection.

A strikingly familiar book spine caught her attention.

"No way! You have the Good Witch Azura books!?" Luz didn't even know that they existed in this realm. Well, except for the copies she had brought over, but still!

"Oh, you've heard of them?" Amity asked, surprised by the other girl's excitement.

"Have I heard of them? I only have every book in the series, 1-5 in both regular and Collector's Edition versions," Luz bragged.

"Wait, there's a fifth one? I didn't know that." Amity guessed that the she bought her collection from store (which had just gotten a new manager, for some reason) hadn't picked up the rights to sell the book yet, but Luz had a copy somehow.

"Do you wanna have mine?" Luz said, rifling around in her backpack. After a few seconds of searching, she pulled out *The Good Witch Azura: Fall of Zargothrax* and offered it out to Amity.

Amity took the book and examined the front and back cover. Something looked just a little bit off, but she couldn't quite place her finger on what exactly.

"Thank you. So when will you want this back?" she asked.

"You can keep it. I can't let you have an incomplete set of the greatest fiction series ever written," Luz answered.

"Oh. Thank you."

"No problem. I hope you like it as much as I did."

As Luz walked back from the library, she took a deep breath, enjoying the crisp chill air. Today had been a good day. She still needed to retake that potion from before. Being able to shapeshift without feeling like she had just been stabbed was nice. She looked up at the moon. To think that a rock floating in space could have such a lasting impact was incredible, but also incredibly annoying.

Now that she thought about it, she had done some pretty big morphs today, and she was feeling pretty hungry. It wasn't a hunger for food, though. Luz ignored the hunger and kept walking.

Just as she was about to cross the property line of The Owl House, Luz collapsed.

Chapter 20

Luz Finds Out She Isn't Alone

Schlaftag 1, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Hooty was a good house demon, and as a good house demon, he was responsible with making sure that everyone who lived in his walls was kept safe, which also meant he had to know how everyone was doing at all times. So when he felt someone suddenly fall to the ground, he knew something was amiss.

Rocketing over to Luz's unconscious body, he wrapped the basilisk up and shot back to the house. He carefully maneuvered her body through the front door before depositing her on the couch, laying her down gently to make sure he didn't startle her awake.

Eda and King walked in from the kitchen, where they had just put the bat babies down for a nap.

"Hooty, what are you – Wait, Luz?!" Eda was confused by the bird worm's actions before she realized who he had just brought in. Eda was now very glad that the babies were asleep.

"What happened?" King asked.

"She was walking over here, but then her body said it wanted to take a nap!" Hooty replied cheerfully.

Eda groaned before dragging her hand down her face.

“Hooty, do me a favor and leave,” she said.

“Okay!” the house demon said, complying to the order and shutting the front door.

Eda then knelt down in front of Luz’s unconscious body and waved a hand in front of the girl’s face.

No reaction.

Eda snapped her fingers a few time.

Still nothing.

“Hello, Isles to Luz. Anybody in there?”

No luck.

King poked her side with one of his claws.

Eda gently shook Luz’s shoulders. “Come on, kid. Wake up. Please.”

The witch shook harder. “Dang it, Luz. What’s gotten into you?”

Luz showed no signs of feeling any of what just happened.

Owlbert emerged from his witch’s hair. Her distress was obvious. He hopped onto Eda’s shoulder before fluttering down to rest on Luz’s chest. The palisman trilled softly and rubbed his head against Luz’s neck. This finally drew a reaction from the basilisk, as she sniffed at the air and then began drooling ever so slightly. She then moved to roll over, except this action sent her careening off the edge of the couch.

“Oh no you don’t!” Eda said, scooping up her apprentice before she could face-plant on the hard wooden floor.

That is what finally got Luz to wake up.

“Huh? Wah? Wuzgoinon?” the girl slurred out, not quite sure what was happening and how she had ended up back at the house.

Eda set Luz down on her feet before wrapping her up in a hug. “Oh thank Titan, never do that to us again.”

“Yeah, Eda was super scared! Not me, though. I knew you’d wake up,” King boasted. Nonetheless, he joined the hug, wrapping his arms around Luz’s legs.

“What, what happened? I remember walking back from the library and I was feeling hungry, but not much after that,” Luz scratched at the back of her neck. It felt itchy for some reason.

“Well, Hooty said that you were just about to make it here when you collapsed. He wrapped you up and then dropped you off on the couch. We tried to wake you up, but nothing worked, and then Owlbert nuzzled you and ya nearly ate floor,” Eda explained.

Luz scratched at her arm. She also noticed that her vision was a little blurry, which was odd.

“You sure your alright, kid?” Eda questioned, eying the girl suspiciously.

“Yes, Eda, I’m fine. I’m just a little hungry, that’s all.” Luz used her right foot to scratch her left calf.

“Really? Then when’s the last time you ate?” Eda crossed her arms.

“Today at lunch. We had those tasty burgers, remember?” the basilisk answered, rubbing her thumb across the back of her other hand.

“I know that kid, I was there. I’m talking about *magic*. When’s the last time you had any magic?” Eda asked pointedly.

“Oh, that...” Luz realized. She thought about it for a moment before responding, “I think the last time was when I drained Principal Bump.” She said the last part slowly, still ashamed about the incident.

“And how long ago was that?” Eda raised an eyebrow.

“About three weeks ago?” Luz replied sheepishly.

“Kid?” Eda said.

“Yes, Miss Eda?” Luz knew where this was going.

“Are you telling me that you haven’t had any magic in *three weeks*?” Eda couldn’t believe it.

“Yes,” Luz replied quietly, looking down at the floor.

Eda facepalmed, and then took a deep breath before slowly releasing it. “Dang it, Luz. You are a basilisk, and basilisks eat magic. Did you think you could just not eat magic and everything would be all hunky-dory?”

“Kinda,” Luz said, still in a staring contest with a hole in the floorboard.

Eda sighed. “Hey, kiddo, look up here.” Luz slowly raised her head to make eye contact with the witch.

The Owl Lady grabbed her apprentice’s shoulders. “As long as you’re living under this roof, within these four walls, I’m gonna make sure that you’re well fed, okay? No matter what you want or need, I’ll get it for you, even if it’s the most illegal or dangerous thing ever. I’m not having you starving when I can do anything about it, *capisce?*”

Luz simply nodded, and Eda pulled the girl back into another hug.

“You don’t have to worry, kiddo,” Eda said.

“Thank you,” Luz responded.

As the two disengaged the hug, Eda cleared her throat. “Alright, mushy feelings time is over. Okay kid, open up.”

The Owl Lady spun up a spell circle, but stopped just before the magic was cast.

“Wait, what? No way. I’m not going to drain you of your magic! That’s insane!” Luz argued.

Eda cancelled the spell. “Look, kid. You need some magic in your system real bad, and I’ve got plenty to offer.”

“But what if I go overboard? What if I can’t control myself?” Luz replied.

“I’ll be fine. Besides, if you do try and take too much, King or Hooty can just distract you so you stop,” Eda replied calmly.

“But-” Luz began.

“No buts,” Eda interrupted. “Now come on, I’m getting hungry as well, and we could all use some dinner.” With that, Eda cast another spell circle, forming a large ball of light that floated its way in front of Luz.

“Fine,” Luz said begrudgingly. She opened her mouth and sucked in the light, feeling her stomach fill up. Luz instantly felt way better than before now that she actually had magic in her. As the basilisk drained the ball of light, Eda showed no signs of even noticing that her magic had been slightly depleted, standing with arms crossed and a smile on her face.

“Feeling better now, kid?” Eda asked.

“Totally!” Luz replied cheerfully.

“Good, now let’s get some dinner,” Eda said, bending down to ruffle Luz’s hair. As she did, though, she noticed that the girl’s eyes looked weird, almost like they had been clouded over.

“Is your vision good, kid? Your eyes look a little... hazy,” Eda noted.

“It’s fine,” Luz said, brushing it off. “Probably just allergies or something. No need to worry.”

“Alright, but if it sticks around, let me know, alright?” Eda said.

“Got it.” Luz gave a thumbs up.

“Good. So what do you two want-” Eda began to say before she was cut off by a knock at the door.

Luz went to open the door, careful to make sure she was in witch ear mode. She grabbed the handle and pulled to reveal a ginormous pale face filling her vision.

“Holy mother of-” Luz jumped backwards at the surprise. The giant face forced itself through the doorway and into the living room. Before Luz stood a giant head with bat wings and long black hair draped down the back, though a rebellious forelock dangled in front.

Then Luz made the connection. “Woah, you must be Yi Yi.”

The giant head nodded. “Yes. Yi Yi is I, and I is the Bat Queen. You have babies, yes?”

“Yup. They’re taking a nap right now,” Luz affirmed.

“Good, good.” Yi Yi said, before letting out a sharp whistle. From the other room, the babies awoke, and they quickly flew back to their mom. They all nuzzled against Yi Yi before disappearing into her hair.

The Bat Queen vomited out a chest and spat out a whistle. “Reward, for keep babies safe. Many thanks. Whistle is for troubles. You are all owed one.” Eda opened the chest to see it replete with snails. Luz swore she could see money signs in Eda’s eyes.

Yi Yi then turned to force her way through the door, but stopped and sniffed the air. She turned to Luz and sniffed again. The Bat Queen put her face right up against Luz and inhaled one more time to confirm her suspicions.

“You not witch,” Yi Yi stated.

“What? That’s bologna! I’m totally a witch! Look, I’ve even got witch ears! Tell her I’m a witch, Eda,” Luz tried to plead. It was at times like this she wished she wasn’t a horrible liar.

“She’s not a witch, BQ,” Eda said, betraying Luz.

“I thought. You smell like basilisk. Unique smell,” Yi Yi said.

Something wasn’t adding up for Luz. “Wait, how do you know what basilisk smells like?”

The Bat Queen laughed. “Live with me. Wash smell off very hard.”

Luz’s eyes widened as she realized what Yi Yi had just said. “Wait, are you telling me that there are other basilisks, and they are *living with you?*”

Yi Yi just nodded. “I protect all lost. They lost, I find, I keep safe.”

Luz was floored. She had always had that inkling in the back of her mind that hoped that she wasn’t the last of her kind, but to have it *confirmed*. She was at a loss for words.

The Bat Queen noticed the girl’s silence. “You like meet them?” she offered.

“Yes!” Luz answered, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically.

“Good. Tomorrow, come to den. You meet Tre, Ivy.” With that final note, the Bat Queen squeezed through the front door and flew away from the Owl House.

Luz ran out the door to thank Yi Yi, but by the time she was outside, the Bat Queen had vanished into the night.

“Thank you!” Luz shouted to nobody.

She slowly went back inside, finding Eda and King back on the couch, playing with all the snails that Yi Yi had rewarded them with.

“So, kid, you ready to dine like royalty?” Eda tossed a handful of snails Luz’s way.

“Please,” Luz begged. “I am *starving!*”

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz slowly awoke to the sound of her alarm screaming. She fumbled around for a few seconds before bopping it on the head to make it shut up.

Today was the big day. She was finally going to meet other basilisks!

Just as Luz was about to shift into her cat hoodie, she paused. If she was going to be meeting other basilisks, it would probably be best if she was in her basilisk form when she met them. She hadn't been in that form for a while, mainly sticking in either human mode or witch-ears mode.

Luz pictured her basilisk form and quickly morphed. Now that she actually had magic in her stomach, it didn't hurt to shapeshift! Though, she did feel a little bit weird for some reason. She couldn't quite describe it.

Back in her "natural" state, Luz slithered out her bedroom door and across the hall to the bathroom. It was a tad bit harder to grab her toothbrush, mainly on account of her suddenly having a different hand structure. If she wanted to make a good first impression, though, then having minty fresh breath was a good start.

Exiting the bathroom, Luz turned to head down to the kitchen when she realized she had forgotten about something: stairs. In this form, she had no idea how to get downstairs in a way that didn't devolve into her body-slamming each stair as she dropped down each one. After not being able to come up with a way to go downstairs without hurting her stomach, Luz resolved to just morph human, walk down the stairs like a normal person, and then morph back into basilisk.

From the kitchen, Luz grabbed an apple to serve as an early-morning snack. Slithering into the living room, she found King curled up on one of the chests, soaking in the rays of the sun. Looking around, Eda was nowhere to be found.

Luz gently shook King awake. The bone creature yawned before looking to see who disturbed his beauty sleep.

"Whadya want?" he said in between yawns.

"Do you know where Eda is?" Luz asked.

King let out another long yawn before responding, "Off in the forest. Getting plants or something, I dunno. 'm tired." He moved to curl back up, scooching to the right to follow the sun.

Eda kicked the front door open, a large burlap sack hanging over her shoulder.

"Well, speak of the devil. Hi, Eda," Luz greeted the witch with a wave.

“Hey, kid. Have you had breakfast yet?” the Owl Lady inquired.

“Oh, uh, not really. Just an apple,” Luz supplied, holding up the half-eaten fruit.

“Good. Try this.” Eda reached into the sack and withdrew a small black object, which she then tossed to Luz.

Luz grabbed the projectile and examined it, turning it over in her hand. “What exactly is this?” she asked.

“That, dear child, is a bloodberry. It’s a cousin to the goreberry, and it’s reported to grow only where the Titan’s magic is particularly strong,” Eda explained, before adding on, “Found that bad boy near a weird lake. Go on, give it a taste!”

Luz cautiously bit into the berry, only to find a pleasant sweet taste. She quickly swallowed it. “Woah, that was actually pretty good!”

“Glad to hear it,” Eda said. “I’ve got a boatload of ’em in here. Well, that and some more normal fruits and veggies” She motioned with the bag.

“Nice. Thanks, Eda!” Luz replied.

“Eh, don’t worry about it, kiddo. I said I’d keep you fed, and I don’t intend to go back on my word.”

Eda collapsed into the couch, splaying her arms and legs out as she got comfortable.

“So, kid, you ready to meet other basilisks?”

“Yup! I can’t wait!”

“That’s what I like to hear.”

Chapter 21

Luz Journeys Into Bat Country

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Outside The Den of the Bat Queen

Luz uncurled her tail from around Owlbert as she dismounted the palisman before she set King down on the ground. Eda hopped off quickly after. Owlbert crawled into his witch's hair and disappeared into whatever pocket dimension the Owl Lady's hair held.

Before the trio stood what could only be described as a glitch in reality. Even though there was a giant opening in the trees right in front of her, Luz felt like her eyes were being forced to look off to the right. If she focused hard, she could see the gap in the treeline, but the second her focus was broken, the gap was filled as if it wasn't even there.

"This the spot?" Luz asked, doing her best to keep the gap visible.

"Yup," Eda confirmed, placing her hands on her hips. "BQ should be here any second."

"This feels so weird," King commented, constantly whipping his head around, making the gap appear and disappear before his eyes.

"That's the point. It helps keep prying eyes away from her territory, but if you know what you're looking for it also helps you find it," Eda explained.

"So are we just gonna wait around —" King started to say, but was cut off by

a shadow descending from the sky.

Yi Yi gracefully landed in front of the group, fluttering her wings as she touched down.

“You here. Good. Tre, Ivy not know,” the Bat Queen said in her everpresent thick accent.

“Wait, why didn’t you tell them?” Luz asked. If she was in Tre or Ivy’s position, she would want to know everyone coming in and out of the den.

“Ivy sad recently. Say she bored. You be fun surprise. Come, follow.” Turning around, Yi Yi motioned with a wing for the others to follow her.

Not wanting to let her chance to meet other basilisks slip through her fingers (or, as she was now, claws), Luz quickly slithered after the Bat Queen. Eda scooped King up in her arms and trailed behind the basilisk. As they entered the forest, the trees towered over them, the canopy blotting out nearly all light, casting the path into near total darkness. Thinking on her feet (even though she didn’t have any), Luz quickly cast a light glyph, holding the ball so she could see what was just in front of her. Eda had a similar idea, casting her own light ball and illuminating the surrounding area.

As they walked, Luz began to feel itchy again. Every so often she would stop to scratch at whatever the offending body part was. Unfortunately, her vision was starting to blur as well, and there wasn’t anything she could do about that.

The group made their way further into the forest. Every so often, they would see a stray palisman that the Bat Queen had taken in. Each time this would happen, Yi Yi would stop to briefly chat with the creature, greeting them all by name. “Hello, Diane.” That was a little pink... something. Luz couldn’t tell what exactly Diane was on account of it bouncing around them so quickly, never giving her a clear view. “Greetings, Tobias,” she said to a red-tailed hawk with a broken wing, who chirped back cheerfully. “Morning, Jeremiah.” A bullfrog missing its right fore leg ribbited in response.

As they all made their way closer to the den, the sunlight began peeking through the canopy, gradually revealing more palismen as they delved deeper into the forest, all of whom were living amongst the trees. A snake with ginormous fangs, a three-headed monkey, a dragonfly, and countless more roamed the vicinity. Luz couldn’t help but notice that all of the palismen had oddly-shaped holes, as if they were meant to be joined with something bigger.

“What’s with all the hole thingies in the palismen, Eda?” Luz asked, turning to face the witch.

“Those are their interlocks,” the Owl Lady responded. “They exist so that each palismen can only fit onto one staff.”

“So each of these precious little babies once belonged to someone?” Luz reached out and pet a red cardinal who had been following after the group. The bird leaned into Luz’s hand, basking in the attention it was receiving. The cardinal chirped a few times before flying over to Eda, who brushed it off with a hand.

“Yup, and since BQ took ’em in, that means their witch either abandoned them or went to meet the Titan.” Luz hoped most of them were here because of the latter. She couldn’t believe that anyone would willingly want to part ways with any of these angels.

The group continued to trek in relative silence for the next few minutes before the Bat Queen suddenly stopped at the base of a hill and held out her wing, motioning for the others to halt.

“Past hill my den,” she explained. She looked at Luz. “You ready meet Tre, Ivy?”

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” Luz replied, scratching behind her ear.

“Good.” With that, Yi Yi turned and crested the hill, Luz following right behind her.

In front of Luz stood an animal lover’s paradise. Hundreds, if not thousands, of palismen, coming in all shapes and sizes, milled about. The winged ones flitted to and fro, chirping and singing happily as they conversed in their own language. The ones on the ground were similarly exuberant, chasing each other in games of tag, hide and seek, or just relaxing under a tree or by any of the numerous streams that cut through the meadow. A dog-like creature sporting six legs and three tails broke away from a game of tag it was playing and ran up to Yi Yi.

The Bat Queen squatted down and pet the creature with one of her wings. “Hello, Chee. You get Tre, Ivy? Have surprise for them.”

The palisman nodded and let out a mix between a bark and a chirp before running off back down the hill and disappearing in the mass of palismen.

“Tre, Ivy here soon. Chee good tracker,” Yi Yi explained.

As the quartet waited for Chee to return with the Tre and Ivy, numerous other palismen would come over to check out who the newcomers were. A goose-like palisman with a bell piercing its beak was the first to come investigate, though Eda eventually shooed it away once she realized it was trying to steal her wallet. The next to visit was a manticore, who flew over and began to buzz around King, trying to get him to join in on some type of game, but King declined the offer. The final palisman to visit was a white cat who had taken a liking to Luz, brushing against her and batting at her tail. Luz had to admit the feeling of the cat toying with her tail was a little funny. She began playing with the cat by raising her tail and watching the cat jump up and paw at it, only for Luz to move her tail just out of reach. Eventually, Luz let the cat bat her tail one more time before scooping it up and rubbing its stomach. After a few seconds, though, the cat leapt out of Luz's arms and returned to its friends.

"Hey, Yi Yi," a new voice said. "Chee said you wanted to – Holy Titan, Five is that you?!" Luz turned to see a pair of basilisks following after Chee, who was practically sprinting up to the Bat Queen. The basilisk on the left had light brown scales, not dissimilar to Luz's, with splotches of lighter-toned scales on their underbelly. Their long ginger hair flowed down their back and was done up in a complicated braid. The other basilisk had more of a red tone to their scales, but also had a white underbelly, all of which was complimented nicely by their mop of curly brown hair.

The light brown basilisk slithered up the hill at a speed that Luz didn't think was possible and wrapped her up in a tight hug. Luz was caught off guard by the sudden embrace, but cautiously reciprocated the gesture. The other basilisk's tears leaked onto Luz's shoulder.

"We – We thought you were dead!" they said through sobs.

Luz slowly pulled herself out of the hug. This would be a little hard to explain. "I hate to burst your bubble, but I think you have me confused for someone else. My name is Luz, not Five. I've never met either of you. Sorry."

The teary-eyed basilisk sniffled and wiped away more tears that were forming. "What? But, but you look just like her."

Luz nervously laughed and rubbed at her neck. "Well, I guess I've got a doppelgänger I didn't know about." She then added on, "Can I, uh, get your names? I know you two are Tre and Ivy, but I don't know who's who."

The basilisk with braided hair wiped at their eyes once again before introducing themselves. “I’m Ivy. Sorry about what just happened. I got so excited thinking that Five was back.”

“No, no, that’s fine,” Luz said. “If I was in your situation I would probably react the same.”

The third basilisk finally spoke up. “Hi, I’m Tre,” he said with a wave.

“I would say my name’s Luz,” the girl began, “but you guys already know that. Anyways, these two are Eda, my mentor, and King, my roommate.” Eda gave a two-finger salute to Tre and Ivy, while King just picked at a flea that was annoying him, not even tuned into the conversation.

Tre’s face lit up in recognition. “No way, you’re the Owl Lady!”

Eda chuckled and struck a pose for imaginary cameras. “I see that my legend precedes me. Hope you’ve only heard good things.”

“Only the best!” Tre responded. “Especially the way you stick it to Belos.”

“Yeah. You may not know it, but seeing your posters everywhere reminds us that we can survive on the run, no matter the circumstance.” Ivy chimed in, finally having recomposed herself.

“Well hot dang,” Eda said. “Didn’t know I meant that much to ya.”

“So how did you and Luz meet? She said she’s your apprentice or whatever, so how did that happen?” Ivy asked, looking back and forth between the two.

“Do you want to explain or should I?” Eda asked Luz.

“You go ahead. I would probably have a bajillion tangents if I tried.” Luz scratched at her arm. She knew her own tendency to ramble, and she didn’t want to make herself look like a fool in front of the only two other basilisks on the Isles. Well, unless Five was out there somewhere, whoever they were.

“Alright,” Eda began. “It all started ’bout a month ago. I’d just sent Owlbert out on a collection run when he came back early, and chasing after him was a human, Luz.”

“Wait, why were you in the Human Realm?” Tre asked.

“That’s because I’m kinda sorta a human-basilisk hybrid?” Luz nervously smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

“What.” Tre deadpanned.

“My working theory is that either my mom or my dad is a basilisk, but I’ve got no clue which. I grew up thinking both were human until I came here to the Demon Realm,” Luz explained.

Ivy sighed. “Whelp, there goes the chances of any of us having a normal childhood.”

“What do you mean by that?” Luz inquired. She felt like she’d had a pretty normal childhood. Given, she didn’t have as many friends as other kids her age, but it wasn’t like she had grown up living in a cage.

“Think about it,” Ivy said. “Since you grew up thinking you were human, that meant that whichever one of your parents was one of us lied to you about what you are your entire life.”

“Well, they probably had a good reason for doing it. I don’t care if one of them was lying to me. Both Mamá and Papá loved me, and I know that as a fact,” Luz fired back.

Ivy sighed again. “Whatever helps you sleep at night,” she mumbled.

Luz thought back to what Ivy said. “Wait, what do *you* mean when you guys say you didn’t have a normal childhood?”

Ivy opened her mouth to answer, but Tre beat her to the punch. “So, you know how we’re supposed to be extinct as a species?”

Luz nodded. “Yeah, I’ve heard that fact a few too many times.”

“How do you think we became not extinct?” Tre asked.

Luz wracked her brain, trying to think of a way that a species could come back from the dead. The closest thing she could come up with was some mad scientist pulling a *Paleozoic Park*, but that was just a movie. There was no way that would actually happen, right?

“Mad science?” Luz supplied, hoping she was wrong.

Tre laughed at the response. “Sure, that’s a way you could describe it.”

“Tre and I, along with Five and the others, were all born in a lab,” Ivy explained. “Belos wanted to know how our kind drained magic, so he had us made through some necromancy-type magic on a basilisk corpse he’d found in the forest. If ya think about it, that corpse is kinda like our common

parent linking us test tube babies together. Well, except for Five. She sprung up from the corpse of a Titan-damned child they'd exhumed from a grave."

"Hey, Luz?" Eda said, finally speaking up.

"Yeah, Eda?" Luz responded.

"Cover your ears for the next five seconds," the Owl Lady instructed.

Luz complied, sticking her fingers in her ears, making her nearly deaf.

"SHUT THE DUCK!" Eda yelled. Or, at least, that is what Luz hoped she said. Knowing Eda, though, that sentence was probably a lot spicier.

"Feeling better now?" Luz asked Eda, cautiously withdrawing her fingers, lest the Owl Lady let out another barrage of swears. Luz scratched at her cheeks, as the itch had decided to reappear in full force.

"Barely," Eda grumbled. "I knew Belos was a deplorable excuse for a witch, but I didn't think he would go so low as defiling a child's grave."

"If you think that's the worst thing he's done, you are sorely mistaken," Ivy said.

Eda massaged her temple. "Oh Titan, what else has he done? Wait, no. Don't answer that. I don't want to go to the Conformatorium on regicide charges."

Luz scratched at her throat. Titan, this itching was bugging her to no end.

"Hey, uh, are you okay?" Tre asked, noticing Luz's odd behavior.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just itchy, that's all." Tre didn't buy the excuse. He got up close to Luz and inspected her eyes, noting their cloudiness.

"When's the last time you shed?" he asked.

It took Luz a solid three seconds to comprehend that question. Why would she need to shed? It wasn't like she's a rept – Wait a minute, she *is* a reptile! Luz facepalmed. She had seen Reggie go through the same things she was going through at least a half dozen times. How had she not realized it until now? The weird itching, the cloudy eyes, the decreased vision. It all made sense!

Luz nervously laughed before answering. "Never?"

Tre sighed.

“Well then, kid. Are you ready for the weirdest half hour of your life?”

Chapter 22

Luz Peels Her Face Open Like A Banana

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Den of the Bat Queen

“Alright, Luz, are ya ready for your first molt?”

Tre and Luz had left the main park-like area of the den, now standing in a secluded spot full of rocks and fallen trees. Eda and Ivy had similarly gone off to talk about... something, and King had tagged along with the Owl Lady so that manticore couldn't bother him anymore.

“Do I have much of a choice?” Luz responded with a question of her own.

“Eh, not really,” Tre replied. “If it makes you feel any better, you're lucky we can do this now before the lubricant starts to dry up. I've had a few bad molts in my time, and they suck big time.”

Luz took a deep breath and exhaled. “Whelp, no time like the present, I guess. So, what's step one in basilisk molting? Whenever Reggie would shed, he would always start by rubbing his cute little snout against his favorite log.”

Tre looked puzzled at the name. “Who is Reggie?”

“My adorable pet python back home in the Human Realm. He's only the cutest baby green tree python in the whole wide world,” Luz answered.

“Yeah, well we're not doing this the Reggie way,” Tre said.

“What? Why not?” Luz asked.

“Think about it. Do you want to spend 10 minutes rubbing your head against a log hoping to open up a large enough hole that you can start shimmying out of?” Tre asked, rubbing his hand across his cheek, mimicking the action he described.

“Not really, no,” Luz responded, shaking her head.

Tre slithered over to one of the nearby fallen trees and reached his hand inside a large hole that had been carved. He withdrew a small fabric bag, and then from that bag he pulled out an incredibly sharp looking wood-carving knife. He made his way back over to Luz before holding out the blade.

“That’s why we have this bad boy.” Tre handed the knife to Luz.

“Woah,” was all Luz could respond with as she received the knife. She turned it over in her hand, examining it. The handle of the knife had a smooth finish, and it was engraved with the initials CW. The blade itself seemed to be made of steel or something similar. Ever so gently poking the blade into her finger, the sensation Luz felt was odd. It was like she could feel the blade pressing against her fingertip, but it was a dull pressure, like she was wearing those special gloves from woodshop or something.

“When it comes time for Ivy or I to shed, we use this to jumpstart the process,” Tre explained. “It lets us make sure that we get a clean separation between the skin we’re shedding and the new one underneath. It ain’t the prettiest, but it works.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“So, I just take this and cut a slit in my face? And then I, what, peel it open like a banana, or something?” Luz wasn’t exactly sure if this was the safest way. This felt like something out of horror movie from the 70s.

“No idea what a banana is, but sure let’s go with that,” Tre said with a smile.

“Titan, my life has taken a turn for the bizarre. If Mamá saw me right now, she’d probably have a conniption.” Luz steadied the knife in her claws. She just had to make one small little cut that would only pierce the dead layer of skin that was hanging off her body. Nice and easy. She could totally do this.

“Nope! I can’t do this!” Luz held the knife out as far from her as possible.

Tre gently took the handle from her outstretched hand. “And that is totally fine. When I first shed using this method, I nearly took my eye out with how much my hand was shaking. Do you want me to make the incision for you?”

Luz gulped. “Yes, please.” She could do this. She could totally do this. It was just like going to the doctor to get a shot. Except this was a person she had just met an hour ago slicing her face open, not poking her in the arm with a needle.

Luz took another deep breath. “Alright, I’m ready. Let’s do it.”

“Good to hear,” Tre said, slithering forward to close the gap between the two. “Now, fair warning: this is probably going to feel pretty weird since this is your first time. Just know that if everything goes smoothly, then you shouldn’t feel any pain whatsoever, maybe a little pressure at the most. Are you positive and 100% sure that you are ready?”

Luz nodded.

“Alright. If it will make this any easier, you can close your eyes so you don’t see the blade. That helped me through my first few sheds,” Tre said in a calm voice.

“Okay, I can do that,” Luz said, shutting her eyes. She did her best to remain completely still, but her left hand betrayed her by fidgeting, her claws tapping against the dead skin she was soon to be rid of.

“Remember, this should only feel like a little pressure,” Luz heard Tre say. “I’m going to start the incision in 3... 2... 1...”

The blade made contact with Luz’s forehead, being pushed in the slightest bit. *Oh, Titan this feels weird.* Tre was true to his word, though, as Luz wasn’t in any pain. The closest thing she could compare it to was someone pushing their finger lightly against her forehead.

Tre slowly moved the knife down until it reached Luz’s nose, lengthening the cut. He adjusted the blade before continuing the incision, being especially careful to not give Luz a sudden nose piercing. Then, he was even more delicate around Luz’s mouth, barely putting any pressure behind the cut as the blade grazed against her lips. Finally, Tre maneuvered the blade down Luz’s chin before pulling back to admire his handiwork.

“And we are done. I’d have to say that was some of my finest work. How was it?” Luz slowly opened her eyes to see Tre smiling, casually tossing the knife into the air and catching it by the handle.

“You were right,” Luz said. “That was definitely... an experience. I thought it was gonna be worse, honestly.” She felt around her face, able to clearly tell where the knife had been.

“Well, congrats on making it through step one,” Tre replied. “However, that was the easy part.”

Luz groaned. “Oh Titan, that was the *easy* part? What’s next?” She then thought about what she’d seen Reggie do, and she groaned even louder. “Don’t tell me. . .”

Tre laughed. “Yup, this next part is more embarrassing than challenging or painful.”

Luz sighed. “Yeah, well I’ve been embarrassed enough already at Gravesfield High. What’s the most, I dunno, dignified way to do this stage of the process?”

Tre exhaled sharply. “There isn’t really a ‘dignified’ way to shed. If it helps you feel better, know that Ivy and I have both accepted we look silly doing it. That allows us to just laugh about it after the fact. Titan, I’m pretty sure Ivy recorded me during a particularly bad molt and has it listed under ‘Blackmail’ on her scroll.”

“At least that means I won’t be alone in feeling stupid,” Luz said, letting out a sigh of relief.

“The sooner you accept it looks stupid, the better, honestly,” Tre added.

The two stood in silence for a few seconds before Luz spoke up. “Alright, let’s just get this over with. What do I have to do to finish molting?”

Tre pointed at a set of extremely long logs placed parallel to each other, laying about three feet apart. “See those logs over there? That’s what we use to finish the process. All you gotta do is get down on your belly and slither between those two extremely slowly. If all goes well, your molt should catch on to the logs and come right off. You might have to make a couple passes, though, as sometimes your shed might not feel like coming off in one piece.”

Luz was somewhat surprised. “Really, that’s all I have to do?”

Tre shrugged. “Pretty much, yeah. Molting isn’t as scary as it first may seem.”

The duo slithered over to the pair of logs, and Luz examined the setup. She could probably fit though that with room to spare.

“Are you sure that will be squeeze-y enough?” Luz asked.

Tre tapped a claw on his chin. “You are a bit smaller than us. Good thing we can just do this.” Tre grabbed one of the logs and rolled it over, moving it closer to the other.

“Think that’ll work better?” he asked.

Luz did her best to imagine herself slithering through the gap. “Probably? I dunno, you’re the expert here.”

“I guess the only way to know is to just go for it,” Tre supplied.

Luz positioned herself in front of the two logs. She then went prone, laying on her belly and giving her the appearance of an oddly proportioned snake. Her hands stuck out in front of her, like she was trying to swim on land.

“So I go through like this?” she asked, turning her head to face Tre.

“Close, but you’ll actually want to tuck your arms to your side like this, not have them stick out.” Tre pinned his arms to his side to show Luz how it should look. “You want your head to go through first so the molt can start sliding off and then everything else will follow after. Does that make sense?”

“Ahh, okay. I get it.” Luz copied the other basilisk’s stance. “Like this?”

“Yup. Now just start slithering through the gap *really* slowly,” Tre instructed.

Luz nodded, and began slowly inching her way between the logs. As her face brushed against the logs, she didn’t feel anything at first. However, as she moved further down the tunnel, she felt what could only be described as having her skin slowly detach from the rest of her body.

It was like that classic trick she would do back in elementary school. She would get one of those glue bottles and splurt it out all over hand hand and spread it around. Then, when the glue dried, she would pick at it until it came off and then she would show her glue skin to the other kids. That was one of Luz’s favorites! (Mrs. Brandy didn’t like that, though.)

This time around, though, it was her actual skin that was being peeled off. Thank the Titan it didn’t hurt. Nevertheless, Luz soldiered on, slowly slithering forward, with more and more dead skin pooling up on her back.

After a few minutes of slow progress, Luz noticed that the skin over her eyes was starting to move. As she slithered forward, the dead eye caps peeled back, giving Luz a firsthand experience of going from shoddy, not very good, and annoyingly cloudy vision, back to her normal vision as the caps peeled away. She didn’t realize how bright and vibrant the trees were this deep into

the forest! The auburn leaves stood in stark contrast to the brown wood, with small flowers peeking through the foliage to spruce up the scenery. Luz nearly let out an audible gasp at how pretty it all was.

But now wasn't the time to stop and smell the roses, she had a mission to do, and she had some skin to shed!

Refocusing herself, Luz resumed slowly making her way down the log tunnel. More and more of her old skin gathering behind her as she gradually escaped its confines. From what she could see, Luz guessed she was about halfway done, and there looked to be plenty of log tunnel left to go to help her out.

With one last wriggle, Luz was free. Slithering forward a few more feet, she then turned around. There, sandwiched between two logs in the middle of a forest, lay Luz's first shed.

"So," Tre broke the silence, "how do you feel now that you've gone through your first molt?"

Luz took a deep breath and slowly exhaled before answering. "I feel like a whole new person." She then chuckled as she looked at her own dead skin, laying there haphazardly bunched together on the dirt, still all in one piece. She gently scooped it up and cradled it in her arms.

"Look, Mom. I finally shed my pajamas."

Interlude: Number Five Gets A New Name

Monday, June 14, 2021 | Reality Check Summer Camp | Hoboken, New Jersey

Number Five awoke with a groan as Masha's 7:30 alarm blared at full volume. The song it played was apparently an "absolute classic" from some band called Ram Stone, or something like that, and Masha had set it to wake themselves (and everyone else in Cabin 7) up on Mondays. Five thought that the mix of the whistling and the heavy guitars was an interesting concept, but it worked well. Given, she couldn't understand any of the lyrics, with them being in some foreign language, but the overall sound was pleasing to her ears.

Marco, however, was not a fan of the song. As he rolled out of bed, he chucked a small pillow at Masha, who was still asleep somehow. That was what finally got the goth to awaken and silence the alarm. After fighting with their blanket for a few seconds, Masha dropped down to the cabin floor, still donning their typical sleep attire of an oversized tee-shirt with skulls on it and a pair of baggy sweatpants.

"Can you believe it, Luz? I guess it takes to combined power of trashy metal *and* a pillow to wake the dead," Marco quipped.

"Oh shut it, Marco. You just don't have good taste," Masha retorted sarcastically.

Marco raised his hands defensively. "I'm just saying, would it kill you to play some Jimmy Money from time to time?"

"Yes, it would. His stuff is too depressing," Masha fired back.

Marco was in disbelief. “Too depressing? Everything you listen to is about death and war and –”

“Alright, children, let’s calm down,” Jake interrupted from atop his bunk, looking out over the side at the offending parties. “We’ve got breakfast in 30 minutes, so let’s get moving. You can debate which music genre is the best and which is the evil virus of Satan later.”

“Fine,” Marco grumbled, grabbing his bag after throwing on a tank top and a pair of shorts.

“Thank you,” Jake replied. The bespectacled boy slowly climbed down from his bunk and slung his backpack over his shoulder, already being dressed for the day on account of him being an early riser. He and Marco then left, heading off to the mess hall.

“Are ya coming with, Luz?” Masha asked.

“I’ll be just a minute. You all can go on without me,” Five said.

“Alright, suit yourself. Just don’t get lost and end up locked in a broom closet,” Masha replied.

Five blushed. “That was one time, okay! It wasn’t my fault the doors were labelled weird.”

Masha laughed. “I know, I’m just messing with ya. Well, I’m gonna head out. There are some waffles that have my name on ’em.” With that parting message, Masha left leaving Number Five alone in the cabin.

Finally deciding it was time to get out of bed, Five scooted over to the side of the bed and stood up. However, she hadn’t scooted out far enough, as her head collided with the metal bar holding up Masha’s mattress.

“Oh sweet mother of Titan!” Five exclaimed, breathing in sharply through gritted teeth. She rubbed at her head as the pain began to slowly subside. Thankfully, pulling her hand away revealed that she wasn’t bleeding, so at least she didn’t need to stop by the nurse’s office. Closing her eyes tightly and massaging her scalp a little more, Five slowly exhaled. That was the fourth time (at least) that she’d banged her head against that stupid metal bar.

Recomposing herself, Five saw that the sudden meeting between her skull and the bottom of Masha’s bed had knocked one of the goth’s books onto

the floor. Five bent down so that she could place the book back on the bed of its owner, but the cover caught her attention.

V for Vengeance the title proclaimed in bright red coloring, featuring a close-up illustration of a masked figure sporting a black fedora. The mask the person on the cover was wearing was highly detailed, with pale, rosy cheeks contrasting against the ominous smile the mask had permanently on display. The mask also sported thick, arching eyebrows and a quite odd choice of facial hair, in Five's opinion. A handlebar mustache and an incredibly thin goatee was certainly a look, but not a good one.

Turning over to see if there was anything on the back cover, Five found a short blurb of text in large white print, standing on a solid black background. *He was once called The Man from Room Five, but now he is called... V!*

V, huh? Five thought back to the time before. Back when she was in the Demon Realm, she had never been given a name. she was always just "Basilisk Number Five", "Number Five", or "Experiment Five". But now, though? She had a name. Well, she had actually taken someone else's name, but that was a train of thought for another day. When someone would call for Luz Noceda, she would be who they were looking for. Having an actual name was nice. Five liked it. She placed the book back on Masha's bed before an idea struck her. Maybe she didn't have to be Number Five *or* Luz Noceda!

She quickly scrounged around in her backpack before pulling out a piece of paper and a pencil. Laying the page down on Marco's mini-fridge, she used it as a makeshift desk and began to write.

My name is Number

She couldn't even finish writing that sentence before she scribbled it out with the pencil. No. Number Five was dead for all she cared.

~~*My name is Number*~~ *My name is Luz*

That was a lie, though. She wasn't Luz Noceda. The real Luz Noceda was somewhere in the Demon Realm, not here at camp. The basilisk struck through that line as well.

~~*My name is Number*~~ ~~*My name is Luz*~~ *My name is V*

That looked... okay, but she didn't want to just blatantly copy the name from that book character. She had to make it her own. But the name sounded so right to her! After staring at the only unscribbled line on the

page, she decided to make a small adjustment. She wanted the pronunciation to stay the same, but she wanted to give the name a more unique spelling then just one letter. So, she tacked two “e”s on to the end.

My name is Number My name is Luz My name is Vee

Perfect.

Chapter 23

Luz Makes A Truly Magical Lunch

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Den of the Bat Queen

Luz and Tre slowly made their way back to the main section of the Bat Queen's den, with Luz still carrying her molt in her arms. It needed to be commemorated, and she wasn't going to let her very first shed be eaten up by the local wildlife. Maybe she could hang it up on the wall next to Eda's giant wanted poster? It could be kind of like how Mamá kept that Garter snake skin in a frame on her nightstand. Yeah, that would be awesome! It would totally match the whole "absolute chaos and randomness" aesthetic Eda had.

As the pair entered the main park, Luz could see Eda and Ivy talking about something, with Eda holding a few sheets of paper and Ivy occasionally pointing to specific things on those pages. King, who was a fair distance away, looked to be taking a nap under one of the numerous trees, his tail curled up under him, and his paws acting as a makeshift pillow.

"Hey, Eda! Look what I have!" Luz called out to the Owl Lady, holding up her shed skin for all to see. The witch turned at the call of her name to see her apprentice practically speed-slithering over to her, dead skin in hand.

"Look at it! It's so cool!" Luz could barely contain her excitement as she handed the molt over to Eda. The Owl Lady gingerly inspected the skin, careful to not damage it in the slightest. The skin itself was nearly see-

through, but Eda could make out the general imprint of Luz's scales. Eda handed the skin back to Luz after giving it one last look.

Eda chuckled and ruffled Luz's hair, which earned a smile from the girl. "I knew you had it in ya, kid. So how was it?"

"It was so weird, but so awesome at the same time!" Luz exclaimed. "Like, Tre had this knife that we used to cut my face open, and there was this log tunnel that I went through that would catch onto my molt, and then I would slither out of it super slowly, and it felt so odd, but when I finished I felt all better."

"Dang kid, remember to breathe, won't ya." Eda said once her apprentice finished rambling.

"Hehe, sorry," Luz apologized. "It was just so cool!"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it," Eda said. "Well, while you and your buddy were off playing with knives, Ivy and I had a very productive conversation about how I can keep you from not passing out because you forget to eat. Hooty won't always be there to save you, ya know?"

"I know," Luz replied. "and, uh, sorry about that, by the way."

"What is there to be sorry for?" Eda asked rhetorically. "You screwed up and made a mistake, but now you're learning from it. Look, kid. You're a basilisk, so that means you gotta have some magic in ya. I said it before, and I'll say it again: you aren't gonna be eating me out of the house just because I have to cook up something with a little extra magic in it. We've got bloodberries, fairies, and way more that you can use to fill your gut with morphing juice."

Luz suddenly wrapped Eda up in a hug, which the Owl Lady reciprocated, giving the basilisk a few pats on the back.

"Thank you, Eda," Luz said before breaking off the embrace.

"Eh, don't mention it, kid. Titan, you're making me all soft and mushy with so many of these parallel arm things," Eda replied, only partially in jest.

"Hey, Eda, is it okay if we put my molt in your hair pocket dimension thing?" Luz asked. She wanted to keep it safe and her mentor's hair was probably the best bet.

"Hmm? Oh, yeah sure. Hand it over." Luz complied, and the Owl Lady rummaged around in her hair a bit before withdrawing her hand.

“Alright, your shed is safe and sound. Do you wanna keep it or something?” Eda asked in kind.

“Pretty much, yeah,” Luz replied. “Since it’s my first one, I feel like it’s special. I don’t wanna just throw it away and let some random fairy eat it.”

An alarm went off on Eda’s scroll. Eda summoned the device to see what the cause of the disturbance was. *Potion for M. Rasmodius Ready*, the screen read. Oh yeah, she had potions to make. The Owl Lady let out a groan.

Eda turned to Ivy. “While I would love to stay and keep chatting, I’ve got some work I gotta finish up.” She then looked towards Luz. “Can you go wake up King, kid? We’re heading home.”

Luz opened her mouth to object to them going home so soon (She had just met other basilisks! Couldn’t she have another hour?), but shut her mouth and complied with Eda’s request. The young girl slithered over to the sleeping demon and gently shook his shoulder, rousing him from his slumber.

“Come on, buddy, you gotta get up. Eda says we’re going home.” To that, King slowly go to his feet and slowly yawned.

“I’m tired...” the King of Demons (and Luz’s heart) said.

“I know,” Luz replied. Then, an idea struck her. “Would a piggyback ride make you feel better?”

King’s eyes lit up instantly at the offer. “Yeah!”

Luz smiled. “Alright, hop on!”

King scrambled up onto Luz’s back before hooking his arms around her neck like the world’s fluffiest cape. “Away, fair chariot!” he proclaimed, which earned a laugh from Luz.

As the pair returned back to the others, Ivy stopped Luz. “I know we didn’t get to talk much, and I know this is kinda a long shot, but if you ever see Five, can you tell her that Tre and I are okay and with the Bat Queen?”

“And that we miss her!” Tre added.

“Yeah, that too,” Ivy said.

“Totally!” Luz replied. “I’ll be sure to keep a lookout.” Luz gave the other two basilisks a salute

“Hey Tiny One, Tiny Two, are ya ready to go?” Eda called out. “My potions aren’t gonna bottle themselves, and unless one of you is gonna sprout a pair of wings in the next five minutes, I’m your only ticket home.”

“Calm down, Eda, we’re coming.”

As Owlbert descended from the sky and slowly touched down, Eda and Luz (with King still riding on her back) quickly hopped off the Palisman. It was only when the three went through the front door of the Owl House that King finally ended what felt like the world’s longest piggyback ride, clambering down to the floor before just as quickly climbing up onto the couch.

“Alright, I’m gonna be in the kitchen finishing up Rasmodius’ order,” Eda announced. “That means you two get to pick what we do for lunch. No burgers, though. I’m getting sick of having to fend off Hooty from eating the patties every ten seconds.”

“BUT THEY’RE SO DELICIOUS, HOOT HOOT!”

Luz joined King on the couch, draping her tail over the armrest. The two sat in relative silence for a few seconds before Luz spoke up.

“So, what do you want for lunch?” she asked the diminutive demon.

“Hmm...” King tapped a claw against his chin. “Spaghetti and heatballs?”

“Eh, I feel like we just had that, though,” Luz replied, shooting down the offer. Plus, the heatballs weren’t the kindest to her stomach when she tried them the way King liked them: absolutely drenched in hot sauce to the point of being more of a stew than a pasta dish.

Wait... stew. That gave Luz an idea. “I know, we can make some *sancocho*!” the basilisk proclaimed.

“What’s ‘san-co-cho’?” King asked, sounding out each syllable of the foreign word.

Luz gasped. “*Sancocho* is only one of the best foods in all of existence! It’s a stew you cook up with chunks of beef and chicken, along with some yuca, plantain, auyama, and a ton of downright heavenly spices. Mami and I would always make some together on rainy days back home, and it always turned out incredible.” Her mouth was watering at the mere thought of the dish., but then she thought some more and realized that they weren’t any cows or chickens on the Boiling Isles. “We’ll probably have to make a few substitutions, though,” the basilisk added quickly after.

“Mmm... sounds yummy. Let’s do it!” King said.

“Cool,” Luz replied, before calling into the kitchen. “Eda, we know what we wanna do for lunch!”

“Alright, but I’ll still need about half an hour to finish up this last order,” Eda responded.

Luz slithered into the kitchen, with King following close behind. Eda stood next to a bubbling cauldron filled to the brim with a light green liquid. Dozens of potion bottles were strewn about on the counter, with some filled, but most were empty.

“So what’s the plan?” Eda asked, dipping a bottle into the cauldron.

“We’re gonna make a really good stew called *sancocho*. It’s got chunks of meat, fruits, veggies, and lots of spices,” Luz explained. While she did so, she scoured the cabinets, pulling out a mixing bowl that was large enough to marinate the meat in, as well as grabbing a pot that could hold all the ingredients once everything was cooking.

Now it was time to actually prepare the ingredients. First, though, Luz thoroughly washed her hands. She didn’t want to risk contaminating anything, after all. Opening some more cabinets, Luz set out a bottle of lime juice, a few sprigs of cilantro, some oregano, a clove of garlic, and a salt shaker. There was a problem, though, as Luz had no idea what substitutes they had readily available as a beef stand-in.

“Hey, Eda, do we have any meats by chance?” Luz asked.

“Yeah, we’ve got some griffin flank in the fridge,” Eda replied, motioning with her ladle.

Luz pondered that for a second. She knew griffins laid eggs (which were quite tasty in her opinion), so maybe griffin flank would taste like chicken? It was worth a shot. Luz opened the fridge and looked around before spotting a wrapped package with “GRIFFIN” written on it in marker. Jackpot. Luz took out the flank and unwrapped it, untying the string and drawing back the brown paper. *Ooh, this looks fantastic!* Luz thought.

Reaching under the stove-top, Luz grabbed a cutting board and chef’s knife. Setting the flank in the center of the board, Luz began to slice the meat into small chunks. If she was back home, mamá would be the one doing the knife-work, but here Eda was busy, and she didn’t trust King to not hurt himself, so that left Luz. Like she had hoped, the griffin flank had about the

same consistency as a chicken's, which allowed the knife to effortlessly glide through as she made her cuts. When Luz finally put the knife down, she had around 3 dozen chunks of griffin on her cutting board, which meant there was plenty to go around for her, Eda, and King.

After placing the used knife in the sink and depositing the now-sliced griffin flank in the mixing bowl, Luz began preparing the marinade. First into the concoction went the cilantro and the oregano. Then she added a few shakes of salt. Luz always liked her chicken (or, in this case, griffin) on the saltier side, so she hoped the other's wouldn't mind. She still had to prepare the garlic, though, so Luz got out a smaller knife and trimmed the ends of the the clove before crushing it and removing the skin. Once the garlic was finely smushed, she added it to the mixing bowl. For the final touch on the marinade, about a lime's worth of juice was added to the mix.

Now that the marinade was ready, Luz began working the mixture together with her hands, making sure that every chunk of griffin got properly coated. Once the meat was seasoned to Luz's liking, she set the bowl in the fridge to let all the flavors seep into the griffin chunks. After another quick hand wash to clean off the germs and juices, Luz took a moment to appreciate her work so far. *Ooh, this is gonna be SO GOOD!* she thought.

Since she had some free time while waiting for the griffin to marinate, Luz slithered over to check on Eda, who was busy filling the last of the potion bottles.

"So do most people usually order this many potions?" Luz asked, eyeing the large quantity of bottles crowding the table.

"Not really," Eda answered. "Ras always likes to do one giant bulk order every few years. It may take a long while to fulfill the order, but once its delivered he doesn't bother me until he needs to re-up. Pays top snail, too, so I make sure to get his done with high quality stuff."

"Huh, that's cool," Luz replied. "Well, the griffin's marinating in the fridge," she continued, pointing her thumb over shoulder in the direction of the fridge. "It should be ready for cooking in about an hour, so I'm just gonna reread some *Azura* for the time being."

After slithering into the living room and crawling up onto the couch, Luz looked into her backpack and pondered which one she should start reading. *The Field of Deadly Fates* was pretty good, but Luz was on a time crunch, and *Deadly Fates* was notorious for how long it took to get into the main

plot. She wasn't really feeling *The Darkness Strikes Back*, so that one was out as well. Luz would have opted for *The Fall of Zargothrax*, but then she remembered that she had given her copy to Amity. Luz hoped that the emerald-haired witch was finding as much enjoyment in the book as Luz had when she had initially read it. Luz especially liked *The Fall of Zargothrax* since that was the book where Hecate and Azura had officially become a couple. (Maybe Luz would someday find someone to be the Hecate to her Azura? That was a foolish thought, though.) Deciding to let fate decide, Luz stared up at the ceiling and grabbed a book at random. *Revenge of the Gildersnake*. Could have been worse, honestly.

Setting a 45 minute timer on her phone, Luz curled up, resting her head on her tail, and began reading.

Azura was beginning to question her title as a truly Good Witch.

"Your reign of terror ends now, Gildersnake!" Azura shouted. She leveled her staff to her shoulder and

The alarm Luz had set went off, the incessant beeping drawing her attention away from the book. That meant the griffin should be ready for cooking.

Slithering into the kitchen, Luz found that Eda had cleared the table in preparation for lunch and was now absentmindedly looking at posts on her Penstagram. After going over to the sink and washing her hands, Luz opened the fridge and pulled out the griffin. It looked perfectly done. Luz surmised that all the times she had hovered Mamá while she cooked had paid off.

Now it was time to start cooking with gas!

Grabbing the large pot from before, Luz added a few tablespoons of vegetable oil and turned the heat on to high. After the pot got to the right temperature, she added the griffin chunks in, grabbed a ladle, and began stirring. She was being careful with her stirring, though, as she had seen Mamá get splashed by hot oil a few times before, and those looked like they hurt big time.

As the minutes passed, the griffin began to brown nicely, which meant it was time to add the water in. Lowering the heat to medium and grabbing a measuring cup, Luz added 4 cups worth of water to the pot and waited for it to start boiling.

"Hey, Eda, do we have any yuca or squash?" Luz asked.

"Hmm?" Eda looked up from her scroll before comprehending the questino. "Oh, yeah we've got some. Yuca's in the bottom left cabinet by the stove,

and there should be some squash in the top drawer of the fridge.”

Luz looked in those locations and did indeed find the ingredients she needed. Grabbing another clean cutting board and a knife, she then went to work slicing the two into inch-long pieces, making them big enough so that King (who was notoriously stingy about his food) could pick them out if he so chooses.

Once the pot came to a boil, Luz slid all the chopped yuca and squash in with the scrape of a knife. Fishing out a properly-sized lid, she then covered the pot and turned the heat down to low. After another few minutes of waiting around, the broth had finally began to take shape. Now was Luz’s favorite part: taste testing!

“Eda, come over here and tell me how this tastes.” The Owl Lady obliged, making her way over to the pot of *sancocho*. Luz took the lid off so Eda could get a spoonful of broth.

As Eda mulled over the flavor profile, she clicked her tongue three times. “Hot dang, kid that is some good stuff. But do you know what will make it even better?”

“What?” Luz replied. She had tried to follow Mamaá’s recipe as faithfully as she could given the circumstance.

“A little bit of heat,” the Owl Lady said. She then searched around in her hair before pulling out a tiny bottle. Uncapping it, she let a few drops fall into the stew.

After stirring the pot to spread the hot sauce around, Luz took her own spoonful and tried the updated broth. It was incredible!

“This tastes great, Mamá!” Luz exclaimed.

And then she realized what she said.

Morphing human and running up the stairs, Luz slammed the door to her room.

Mierda.

Chapter 24

Luz Contemplates The Possibility of Having Two Moms

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz threw herself onto her bed and buried her face into a pillow. After a few seconds of muffled screaming, she flipped over and stared at the ceiling.

Titan, why did I just do that?

In all her time at school, she had never once called a teacher “Mom”. She had always made sure to call her teachers by their title, and she wouldn’t be caught dead calling any of them the title that was reserved solely for Camila Noceda. If that had ever happened and word got out, it would have been a social death sentence. Plus, it would have just given more ammunition to Taylor and her cronies. It was already bad enough that they had decided that banding her with the moniker of “Luz-er” was the funniest thing ever, and they would probably think that “Momma’s girl” was even more of a knee-slapper. So, yeah, Luz would wade through the guts of every trash slug on the Isles before she would ever call any of her teachers “Mom.”

Yet she had just called Eda “Mamá.”

I mean, it’s not like Eda isn’t motherly. Even if it is in her own Eda way.

Luz thought back to all the fun things that she, Eda, and King had done

together. There were the big things they had done, like the prison break at the Conformatorium, not to mention the whole ordeal she had just gone through just hours earlier with Tre, Ivy, and the Bat Queen. But there were also the smaller things that Luz had enjoyed as well, like watching trashy soap operas on the CB or pulling pranks on unsuspecting Emperor's Coven scouts. Luz wasn't exactly watching *Wheel of Misfortune* with Mr. Berenson on the reg back in Gravesfield. Those weren't things you did with someone who was just your teacher. Those were things you did with a parent.

But that brought up a whole new quandary for Luz to deal with. If she was beginning to see Eda as a mother figure (and that was a giant if), what did that mean she saw Camila as? It wasn't like she could have two moms, right?

Right?

A knock at her bedroom door snapped Luz out of whatever silly funk she was in. The voice of the Owl Lady could be heard through the wood.

"Hey, Luz. You up for a talk?" Eda asked, making sure to stay in the doorway and not intrude on the basilisk's space.

Luz propped herself up on her elbows and took a deep breath to compose herself before answering. "Sure, come on in."

Eda slowly opened the door, carrying a bowl of sancocho in her free arm. After placing the bowl down on Luz's bedside table, she took a seat on the foot of Luz's bed. "Look, kid. I may not speak Spain-ish, or whatever that language is, but I'm pretty sure you called me Mom back there. Is that right?"

Luz nodded. "Yeah," she responded quietly.

Eda let out a long exhale. "Well dang, kid. Didn't know you thought so highly of me," she said with a smirk, before growing serious. "Look, Luz. If you want to call me Mom, Mamá, whatever, I'm cool with that. Call me whatever you're comfortable with, whether that be 'Eda', 'Owl Lady', or anything in between. Well, except 'Edalyn'. Only my parents and Lily get to call me that and live. Anything else is fair game, though. That sound good to you?"

Luz sat up. "Yeah, that sounds okay. I think I'm going to stick with 'Eda' though, if that's alright."

Eda got off the bed and onto her feet. “It is. Well, King and I are going to be in the kitchen munching on the rest of the san-co-cho, and if you want seconds you’re more than free to come on down.” With a grin and a flash of her signature gold fang, Eda quietly closed the door to Luz’s room, leaving the basilisk alone with her thoughts yet again.

Draping her legs over the side of the bed and grabbing the bowl of sancocho that Eda had left, Luz took a test bite. The broth had somehow gotten even better now that the hot sauce that Eda supplied had mixed fully with the existing elements, and the spice had taken the flavor to another level. The griffin chunks were also exquisite, having just the right mix of tenderness and chewiness. Taking another spoonful, Luz tried the yuca and squash, both of which were excellent as well. She had to admit that this was some of the best sancocho she had ever had. Given, it wasn’t as good as Camila’s, but that was an impossibly high bar to surpass.

Before Luz could realize what was happening, she finished the bowl in record time. Deciding it was finally time to rejoin society, Luz returned to the kitchen and placed the empty bowl and spoon in the sink. Eda and King had apparently found the sancocho as good as she did, as the pot that once held the meal was in the sink as well. It was empty, save for a few stray chunks of squash.

Moving into the living room, Luz found Eda and King on the couch, both enraptured by a show on the crystal ball. Making her presence known to the two, Luz plopped down in front of the couch and took a seat with her legs crossed.

“What show is this?” Luz didn’t recognize the character onscreen. Currently, a witch (like, the stereotypical Earth version of a witch, green skin and all) had a lit firework situated in a bucket of paint inside what was presumably their house. Luz had no idea what they were trying to do, but Eda apparently found it hilarious.

“*Mr. Legume*,” Eda answered between fits of laughter.

“Yeah, this guy’s super funny!” King added, barely able to stop himself from laughing alongside the Owl Lady.

On the CB, Mr. Legume sat nestled in a corner, ears plugged, waiting for the firework to go off. Unbeknownst to him, though, his palisman (a snorse) had decided it was hungry for a snack and had flown into the kitchen. Unfortunately, that was where the paint bucket and firework was, so when

Mr. Legume heard the firework go off and returned to his kitchen, he found it completely covered except for a snorse-shaped section that was free of paint.

Luz had to admit that, even though there wasn't much dialogue to the show, the facial expressions and slapstick comedy more than made up for it. As she watched episode after episode with Eda and King, Luz slowly grew tired. Grabbing her tail behind her (*When did you show up?* Luz thought) and using it as a pillow, the human-basilisk hybrid decided it was a good time to take a nap.

Some time later, Luz awoke to now find herself on the couch, swaddled up in blankets like some kind of Luz burrito. Sunlight was streaming through the window of the living room, so she at least knew it was still daytime. *Mr. Legume* was still playing, and now the titular character was up to his wacky hijinks at a healer's ward. Emerging from her blanket cocoon, Luz let out a yawn and rubbed at her eyes. She grabbed the CB remote and turned off the device.

How long had she been out?

Shuffling into the kitchen, her tail laying limp behind her, Luz grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter and took a bite. Taking a seat at the table so she could finish her snack, Luz saw a note that had been left out for her. Shifting the apple to her left hand, she picked up the slip of paper and began to read it.

King and I are out shopping, and we probably won't be back until midnight, so you're home alone for the time being. (The bird worm doesn't count.) That means you are responsible for feeding yourself dinner and whatever snacks you may want. If you don't feel up to cooking for yourself, I've left you twenty snails to have some Taco Hell or whatever delivered. (Or you could be like King and blow it on Sin-A-Bun.) The money is in the top left cabinet. Didn't want the little gremlin to swipe it for himself when my back was turned, so I had to put it up high. Anyways, be sure to stay safe, make good choices, yada yada yada.

- Eda

Taking another bite of her apple, Luz flipped over the note to see if there was anything on the other side, but there wasn't. Rising from her seat and checking the indicated cabinet, she indeed found a twenty-snail bill. Pocketing the money, she turned to look at the clock hanging above the

stove. It was nearing dinner time. Dang, she must have been out for at least six hours. Her body must have really needed that nap.

Luz's stomach rumbled. Okay, it was time for dinner. However, she didn't really feel up to the task of cooking for herself, so ordering off the CB it was. Walking back into the living room, Luz took another large bite of the apple to tide herself over. Grabbing the CB remote and turning the device back on, she toggled over to the search function.

Hmm... what would be a good dinner for cheap? She wasn't feeling Taco Hell, as the Hell it put her through was in the bathroom. She also doubted there was a Boiling Isles equivalent to McDonald's, so that was off the menu as well. Maybe there was a pizza joint that would deliver to the Owl House? It was worth a shot.

Typing "pizza" into the search bar, Luz waited to see if there were any results. Surprisingly, there were. There weren't many good ones, though. Uncle Jim's Pizza had five stars, but that was only based on twelve reviews, so Luz was wary. Tiny Tyrant Pizza was on the other side of the spectrum, with a lot of reviews, but most of them being negative or mediocre. The only place that Luz could find with a substantial amount of reviews that leaned toward the positive side was Hellfire Pies, so that was the one she chose.

Navigating to the company's page, Luz scrolled around until she found the "Order Now!" button. Once she pressed that, she was taken to another page where she crafted her order. It was a little disorienting when she was picking what she wanted on her pie, since there would be something so normal to her, like a tomato sauce for the base, but right next to that would be the alternative option of abomination goop. Luz didn't even think that stuff was edible! Nevertheless, the basilisk eventually settled on a small thin-crust pizza with tomato sauce, griffin cheese (Thank Titan she didn't inherit her mother's lactose intolerance.), and toppings of ratworm chunks, griffin slices, pepperoncini, plus a sprinkling of onion for good measure. While it might not have been the traditional pepperoni or plain cheese that Luz was used to, she might as well expand her palette while in another realm. After finalizing the order, Luz flipped the CB back over to broadcast mode to see what was playing.

"PIZZA'S HERE HOOT HOOT!"

Muting the episode of *Reptilia* and slowly walking over to the, Luz fished the

twenty snails out of her pocket and opened the front door. On the doorstep of the Owl House stood a younger witch who barely looked to be out of their teenage years, a pizza box in one hand and a snail collection jar in the other. (How the Isles hadn't figured out the concept of a credit card yet, Luz would never know.)

"I've got a small build-your-own pie for Liz Nokayda," the witch said, reading off the receipt.

"Luz Noceda," the girl replied, correcting the pronunciation, "but, yeah, that's me."

The delivery witch handed Luz her pizza, and she could already smell the cheesy goodness inside. "Your total is thirteen snails."

Luz handed over the twenty-snail bill, which the delivery witch took before looking in the collection jar to fetch the basilisk her change. As the witch moved to hand the girl back her seven snails, they noticed that she had human ears.

"Wait a second, are you a –"

Oh crud, Luz thought, I forgot to morph witch ears!

"I'll let you keep the change if you don't mention me to anyone, ever," Luz interrupted before the witch could finish their question.

The witch just stared at Luz before slowly depositing the seven snails in their own pocket. "Alright, deal. I need the cash, anyway."

"Okay, thank you, bye!" Luz said quickly before slamming the door in their face.

Phew! Crisis averted!

Setting the pizza on the coffee table in front of the CB and cranking the volume back up, Luz grabbed a paper plate from the kitchen before resuming her spot on the couch. Taking a slice from the pizza box, the pie had come out perfect. Today might have been wild and crazy, but right now she had pizza, a funny animated show on the CB, and life was good.

Chapter 25

“Alex” Instantly Blows Her Cover

Gehetag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Eda cracked open the front door to her home before peeking her head inside. Yup, just as she had expected. Luz was passed out, laying horizontal on the couch. In the background, the CB droned on with some conspiracy theory about mind-controlling slugs while the basilisk dreamt about *Good Witch Azura* or whatever. An occasional snore forced its way out, breaking the look of serenity on the girl’s face. As Eda quietly got closer, she noticed that the kid was hugging her own tail like some kind of stuffed animal, and the faintest of smiles could be seen on her face as she slept.

Aww, she looks so cute with her – NO! Stop it, Edalyn! You can’t get so attached to the kid.

Eda shook her head to clear the intrusive thought.

Not yet, anyway.

Now was not the time to be all lovey-dovey.

King scampered over to the coffee table and grabbed something from a box that Eda hadn’t noticed. Pulling out a slice of pizza (*Oh, so that’s what the kid bought.*), the tiny tyrant went to wolf down the pie before he caught Eda’s gaze, the Owl Lady shaking her head to tell him no. The little gremlin had eaten his fair share (and then some) of the chocolate-covered coffee beans that Eda had bought from O’Malley’s. He didn’t need more food to keep

him up into the early hours of the next day. With big, sad puppy-dog eyes, King slowly put the pizza back in the box.

Stealing a glance at the CB, Eda saw that it was nearing midnight, which meant it was time for everyone to go to sleep. (Well, Luz was already asleep so it was time for her to get in bed.) As such, Eda first closed the pizza box before storing it in the fridge. Maybe they could have some for lunch? Then, she switched off the CB. Luz's brain was probably rotting from all that conspiracy junk that was playing.

Squatting down, Eda hooked her arms under Luz and scooped the basilisk up bridal-style. At this sudden jostling from her sleeping position, Luz buried her head in the crook of Eda's arm, as if this was no different from her spot on the couch. Slowly, Eda carried the girl across the living room and into the kitchen before she began to climb the stairs. Suddenly, when the two were halfway up the stairs, Luz, still asleep and unaware of her surroundings, said something.

"Gracias mamá. Te amo," she mumbled.

Eda froze. There was that word again. And some other stuff she didn't quite understand, but she got the message anyway. She stood still for what felt like forever. No, she was not going to cry. She was not! She was the Owl Lady, dang it! Steeling herself, Eda completed the trek up the stairs and deposited Luz in her bed before drawing the blankets over her now-sleeping-again body. From seemingly out of nowhere, King hopped up onto Luz's bed and plopped down after getting comfy. Within seconds, Eda was the only one awake in the house.

After collapsing into her nest, Eda thought about what had happened today. And then she ugly cried. Hard.

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Kriegstag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz's eyes fluttered open as the light of the morning sun streamed through her window. Wait, she's in her bed. Hadn't she passed out on the couch? The last thing she rememberd was laughing at the demon on the TV who was ranting about some stupid conspiracy theory involving giraffes. Maybe Eda had carried her up when she and King had returned from the store? That was probably it. Eda was nice like that, even though she put up a grumpy façade.

Deciding it was time to face the day, Luz rolled out of bed, her tail falling to the floor with a loud *THWAP* after a few steps. Oh, she still had that. After questioning whether or not to morph it away, she decided to keep it. She may be half human, but the other half of her is basilisk, so it was only right that she got to show off both sides of her heritage, just like how Mamí had both Puerto Rican and Dominican flags in the house.

Now Luz was faced with an even bigger question: what to wear. The weather report had said that it was supposed to be insanely hot out, so any shirts with long sleeves or pants with long legs were instantly a no go. She eventually decided that a tank top and athletic shorts were probably her best outfit to beat the heat.

As Luz gave her outfit for the day a once over, a thought struck her. What exactly did happen when she morphed? That book in the library had said it was like a full-body, corporeal illusion, but that didn't explain everything. Like, when she morphed something larger than her natural state, like a horse or the Kraugh, where did all that new body mass come from? Was there some sort of anti-reality dimension thingy that just stored blobs of mass for any random basilisk to use when they needed to gain a few pounds to complete a disguise or something? That was probably something she would have to ask to Tre or Ivy whenever she saw them again.

After a quick stop in the bathroom to brush her teeth, Luz descended the stairs to see what everyone else in the house was up to.

King was on the couch, the portal door open next to him, and he had stolen her phone so he could videos of kittens fighting each other. Given, her phone's reception kinda sucked out here in a different realm (*Thanks a lot, Horizon*, Luz thought sarcastically.), so the best video quality she could get was around 480p on a good day. Nevertheless, the cat videos brought King joy, so she would let him stealing her phone slide.

"AH HAH! YES! DEATH IS YOUR GOD!" King shouted as the orange tabby lightly batted the maltese on the nose and rolled over. Luz chuckled at the tiny demon's reaction.

A sudden knock at the door drew Luz's attention. Going over and opening it revealed one Gus Porter.

"Hey, Gustanamo. What brings you to *La Casa Búho*?" Luz greeted, resting her arm against the doorframe.

"I need your help," the illusionist explained.

Luz raised an eyebrow before stepping aside. “Alright, come on in.”

As Gus took a seat on the couch, Luz wanted to learn more about the situation at hand. “So, what do you need my help with?”

“You know how I’m the president of the Human Appreciation Society at Hexside?” Gus began. Luz nodded in affirmation. “Well, today we had a new member show up, Mattholomule, and everything was normal until he started doubting the authenticity of my Human Realm artifacts. And then, he dumped his own ‘artifacts’ on the table and said that people at his old school were able to touch them all they wanted, which goes against rule number one of the H.A.S. Obviously, I couldn’t let this stand, so I said that I would get a genuine human to come in and verify the authenticity of both of our artifacts to see which were real.”

Luz blinked a few times while her brain caught up to what she just heard. “So, let me get this straight. A new guy shows up, calls your artifacts fakes, and then pulls out his own artifacts and lets people get all handsy with ‘em, so you say you’re gonna have a human come in and say whether they are real or not?”

“Yeah, that about sums it up,” Gus said cheerfully. “So, can you come with me to the H.A.S. meeting and prove Mattholomule wrong?”

“Totally!” Luz responded without a second thought. But then that second thought reared its head. “Though, if I want to not out myself as a basilisk, I’ll have to come in disguise as another human.”

“Why’s that?” Gus asked.

“Well, think about it,” Luz said. “If I come in looking like myself, then when I start going to Hexside, I’d have to do it as human-me, not witch ears-me, and I really don’t want to be the center of attention for having round ears. But if the human you bring in looks nothing like witch ears-me, then I can attend Hexside as a normal student.”

Gus nodded. “Hmm, that is a good point. Though, how will you cover up your lack of a bile sac when you enroll as a student?”

“I could just say I’m a magic-less witch,” Luz supplied. “Those exist, right?”

“A witch can be born with a deformed or missing bile sac, yeah, but it’s extremely rare,” Gus answered.

“Then that means I’ve got a cover story for enrolling,” Luz said, before

clapping her hands together and cracking her knuckles. “Alright, Operation Prove-Mattholomule-Wrong is a go.”

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Luz, or rather, “Alex Zura”, examined herself in the mirror, turning every which way to see her disguise in all its glory. What used to be a dark brown pixie cut was now a chaotic mess of red and orange, falling just past her shoulders. Her eyebrows had thickened, while her nose had become more pointed. Her eyes, usually brown, were now a vibrant green. A leather jacket (which Luz would never wear normally in this type of weather) and an orange undershirt were complemented by a yellow pleated skirt and a pair of black boots. All in all, nobody would be able to confuse “Alex” and Luz.

After firing a pair of finger guns at the mirror and giving a smirk to an imaginary camera, Luz ran down the stairs to show Gus her disguise.

“Hey, Gus! How do I look?” Luz asked, entering the living room.

The illusionist gasped and chuckled. “Woah, that looks great!”

“Oh, stop it,” Luz said sarcastically, brushing the compliment off with a hand wave. “So, you ready to laugh in Mattholomule’s face once we debunk his phony artifacts?”

“I wouldn’t go that far, but yeah I’m ready,” Gus replied.

“Alrighty then. Let’s get this show on the road!” Luz replied enthusiastically, raising a fist to the sky and charging out the front door.

—

Though Principal Bump knew that someone would come busting through his office door unannounced at some point in the day (it was practically guaranteed), he would have never expected it to be Augustus Porter and some fiery-haired human at such an early hour in the morning. Before the Porter child could even open his mouth to begin talking, though, Hieronymous raised a finger to silence the young prodigy. Only after taking a long sip of his apple blood and mentally preparing himself for whatever chaos was undoubtedly going to occur did he allow Mr. Porter to explain his sudden entrance with the unknown human.

“Principal Bump,” Augustus began.

“Yes, Mr. Porter?” he answered.

“I was wondering if I could get my friend Alex here a visitor’s badge. I want to give her a tour of Hexside and have her sit in on a meeting of the Human Appreciation Society. She might also help verify the authenticity of some artifacts,” Augustus explained.

Principal Bump mulled over whether he should allow Mr. Porter’s friend access or not. Against his better judgement, Bump decided it would be fine to allow the human entry into the halls of Hexside for the day. Spinning up a spell circle, Bump summoned a visitor’s badge.

“What is your full name, Miss?” Bump asked the human.

She hesitated for a split-second before answering, “I’m Alex Zura, sir. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Bump swore he recognized that voice, but he couldn’t quite place it. Nevertheless, he filled out the badge. Handing it over to the human, she pinned it on her jacket. Whether it was some human fashion to wear long sleeves in sweltering heat, or if he was just behind the times, Bump wasn’t sure.

“Thank you, Mr. Bump.” That was the moment it finally clicked, and Bump realized who he was talking to.

“Now hold on just one second, Miss Noceda.” The human let out a groan of frustration.

“Aww, come on! How did you find out? This looks nothing like me!” Luz couldn’t believe her disguise had already been seen through so quickly.

“Your voice,” Bump explained. “You kept it the same.”

Luz facepalmed. “I didn’t even think of that. Do I still get to keep the badge, though?”

“I’m a witch of my word,” the principal replied, “so you may keep the visitor’s badge. Though, please try to not cause massive damage to the school again. I don’t think I can handle another meeting with the Construction Coven just yet.”

“Awesome!” Luz said, giving a celebratory fist pump. “Thank you, Mr. Bump.”

“Yes, yes. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go feed the Choosy Hat.” With that final goodbye, Luz and Gus exited the principal’s office and braved the halls of Hexside School of Magic and Demonics.

“Well, Miss Zura, are you ready for your firsty officially sanctioned tour of Hexside?” Gus asked in an exaggerated manner.

“Of course I am, Mister Porter. I can’t wait to see all the wonders this school has to offer.” Luz re[plied in a similarly overt-the-top voice.

The two stood in silence for a few seconds before bursting into peals of laughter.

Chapter 26

Luz Breaks Detention

Kriegstag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Peace and quiet was a rarity in the Owl House, but with King dozing off on the couch and her daughter her apprentice off running around with Goops at Hexside, Eda finally had some time to herself. Claiming the kitchen table as her work station, the Owl Lady reached into her hair and withdrew one of her purchases from last night: a large picture frame. She then reached in again and brought out Luz's shed, carefully laying it out on the table. Flipping the frame over, Eda took the back cover off and slid the stock photo out after turning the little tabs holding it in place. Looking at the photo, she saw a witch laughing happily with her two children. Eda stared at the picture a few seconds too long before she crumpled it up and set it ablaze with a quick spell circle.

Yeah, right. Like that'll ever happen. Luz was her apprentice and King was her roommate, and that was all they would ever be. But, then again, the basilisk had called her "Mamá" on multiple occasions now, and she had practically raised King for the last 8 years or so. Even though they were as close as could be, when Eda was doing her potions apprenticeship and training with Ms. Sarraresi, Titan rest her soul, she had never once slipped up and called "Mom". As for King, well, Eda was pretty sure that there weren't many 8 year olds living with a 43 year old unless they were... family. Whether she liked it or not, Eda had to admit that she cared deeply about both of those kids.

Titan, this is all so confusing. The Owl Lady let out a groan and buried her

face in her hands.

After a few seconds of silence, Eda recomposed herself up and focused back on the task at hand. She first smoothed the skin as best she could, gently squeezing out the folds and wrinkles until it all laid flat on the table. She then laid the skin over the picture frame. The frame itself was smaller than the skin, so there would need to be some folding for it all to fit. Once the skin was neatly folded and completely inside the frame, Eda replaced the back panel of the frame and turned the notches so that it would all stay put.

Luz was going to love this.

Eda grabbed the picture frame and carried it into the living room. Where should she hang it? After some careful deliberation (read: finding the only place where the frame would fit), she decided that the best spot for it was right next to her own framed wanted poster. After roughly jamming a nail into the wall, she balanced the frame on the nail so that the shed was perfectly upright.

As Eda looked at her apprentice's molten skin hanging on the wall, though, she came to a realization. While the Owl Lady was all that and then some when it came to being the most powerful witch on the Boiling Isles, she knew diddly squat about actually teaching the finer points of spell-casting and magic in general.

Letting out a begrudging sigh, Edalyn Clawthorne finally accepted that it was time to enroll her daughter/student at Hexside School of Magic and Demonics.

As Gus showed Luz around campus, the basilisk couldn't help but notice the strange figures patrolling the hall. Every so often, she would see them dragging students off to some unknown location with a hook. Finally, as the two sat down for lunch, her curiosity got the best of her and she needed to know what was going on.

"Hey, Gus?" Luz asked between bites of her sandwich. She was still was getting used to the new raspier voice that came out of her mouth.

"Yeah, Alex?" Gus was adamant about keeping Luz's cover, so he never referred to her by her actual name.

"What's with the weird eyeless guys who keep smelling students?" One of said weird figures had gotten awfully close to Luz when she and Gus were

heading to the cafeteria.

“Oh, those are just the trouble guards, don’t mind them,” Gus explained. “Bump always brings them in when the Emperor’s Coven is going to inspect the school soon. He’s usually pretty lax with the rules, and he’ll let stuff slide if it isn’t too serious. Like, yeah, if you try and fight someone you’ll get in trouble, but if your uniform isn’t following dress code or whatever, he’ll typically turn a blind eye.”

“So, Bump brings these guys in to crack down on fights and stuff?” Luz wished Gravesfield High was like that. The teachers and the singular resource officer they staffed were apparently blind when it came to a student being in distress.

“Pretty much. Fights, rule breaking, stuff like that,” Gus replied.

Another question popped into Luz’s head. “Wait, would they be... activated, or whatever, if *I* broke a rule? Like, I’m not a student.”

“Eh, I’d rather not find out,” Gus responded.

“That’s probably a good idea,” Luz agreed.

The next few minutes of their lunch were of peaceful silence, until a new voice grated against Luz’s eardrums.

“Hello, Augustus,” Mattholomule introduced himself, practically slamming his lunch tray down onto the table.

“Hi, Matt,” Gus replied, not even bothering to turn his head and look the new arrival in the eye.

“So, this is the ‘human’ you’re bringing in to verify my 100% genuine artifacts?” Matt looked Luz up and down with a smirk on his face.

“Yes. Her name is Alex, and she has very kindly —” Gus began.

“The illusion isn’t even that good,” Matt interrupted. “You know, for being a so-called expert, you got a lot of things wrong. For starters, human hair doesn’t come in that color, and the irises are far too bright. Oh, and don’t even get me started on that outfit.”

Luz took a deep breath and calmed herself down. Man, she wanted to punch this kid in the face so hard. Nobody talks bad about her friends.

“Oh my god, do you ever shut up?” she asked rhetorically. This kid obviously loved hearing the sound of his own voice.

Matt gasped. “So the illusion can speak. Well, at least you got one thing right, Augustus.”

“*Gus*,” she said, emphasizing her friend’s preferred name, “is an awesome illusionist, and he didn’t do anything wrong. Do you want to know why? Because I’m not an illusion! I’m a human!”

“You sure don’t look like one,” Matt responded flatly.

Under the table, Luz balled her fists, clenching and unclenching them so they weren’t being planted in this bozo’s face. “It’s called hair dye and contact lenses, ever heard of ’em? God forbid I want to express myself.”

“Still doesn’t explain the ears. You could just be some random witch Augustus paid off to pose as a human. Those round ears could just be an illusion. I’m not convinced.” Matt crossed his arms in defiance.

Luz slowly exhaled. *I will not punch this kid in the face. I will not punch this kid in the face. I will NOT punch this kid in the face.* “Alright, that’s fine,” she said, forcing a smile and putting on a faux cheery voice. “You can go on believing whatever lie you’re telling yourself. When I prove your artifacts are junk, maybe you’ll think otherwise, though.”

With a grunt, Matt picked up his lunch tray and went to go sit at another table, leaving Gus and Luz to eat their lunch in peace. Pushing her own tray over to the side, Luz folded her arms on the table and rested her chin on her forearms.

“Sorry about that,” Luz apologized. “I think I went a little overboard. I just *really* hate bullies.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Gus said. “We’ll all feel better once we show up to the meeting and prove Matt wrong in front of everybody.”

For the second time that day, someone came barging into Principal Bump’s office. Though he initially assumed it was going to be Miss Noceda, it was actually her mentor that came through his doors unannounced. Without even saying a word, Edalyn flipped the chair in front of her around and then straddled it, crossing her arms over the back of the chair and looking Bump in the face.

“Let me talk to ya, Bumpykins,” she started.

“Don’t call me that,” the principal replied instinctively. “Also, why are you even here?”

Edalyn grabbed his nameplate and began tossing it from hand to hand. “What, no chit chat?”

“I’d rather not, thank you. I am quite busy today,” Bump explained. Spinning a quick spell circle, he righted the chair and returned his nameplate back to his desk.

“Psh, you’re no fun,” the Owl Lady responded after she had flipped back around to face the principal. She took a deep breath and blew a strand of hair out of her face before continuing. “I’m here to enroll my... apprentice Luz at Hexside. Now, before you start acting all defensive –”

“Took you long enough,” Bump interrupted.

“You son of a – Wait, what?” Edalyn was shocked that the principal had apparently been waiting for this to happen.

Bump rose from his seat and walked over to a file cabinet, unlocking it and pulling out a stack of files. “I’ve seen how Miss Noceda acts with members of our student body,” he said. “She would fit in perfectly as a student here. You know, if you didn’t barge in just now, I would have most likely offered Miss Noceda a spot here by the end of the day regardless.”

“Hold up, really?” The Owl Lady had a look of amazement on her face.

“Yes, really,” Bump replied as he returned to his seat. He then slammed the files down on his desk. “Though, since you’re here, I have something I’ll need you to do first before I consider handing over the application.”

Eda stared at the files. She recognized each and every one of them. Though, she couldn’t help but feel that something was off.

“Huh, I thought there’d be more,” she said with a smirk.

“Thank you all for coming on such short notice to this emergency meeting,” Gus began. “Given this morning’s, ehem, ‘incident’, I’ve pulled a few strings and I would like to introduce you to...”

“Alex” sprinted into the room and started running laps around the HAS members, the theme from *Ricky* blaring from her phone, which she held aloft like a torch.

“Alex Zura, a real human!” Gus finished.

“Alex” paused the song and stopped to catch her breath. Man, she thought that running for her life on the daily would give her better cardio, but, alas, that was not the case. She held up a finger, taking in deep breaths. Once she had fully recouped her energy, she introduced herself to the club members.

“Hey, everyone! I’m Alex, and Gus here has brought me in to help verify the authenticity of some artifacts. Is that right?” She turned to Gus to make sure everything was going to plan, to which he slightly nodded.

“That’s right, Alex,” Gus confirmed. “We don’t want to waste any more of your time, as I know you have a very busy schedule, so would you be willing to start doing the verification now?”

“I would love to, Mr. Porter.” “Alex” moved to approach the table, which contained both artifacts brought forth by Gus and by Matt. Luz could instantly tell that the “artifacts” that Matt had provided were a bunch of fakes. It was nearly comical how phony they looked. She had to ham it up for the crowd, though, so “Alex” first examined one of Gus’ artifacts.

Picking up an empty bag of potato chips (which had been mistakenly labelled as a “pillow case”), “Alex” scrutinized the bag, looking at it from every which angle, sniffing the contents, and even wiping a speck of salt from the bottom of the bag and tasting it.

“After a cursory analysis, I have confirmed that this article did, indeed, come from my realm,” she proclaimed.

“Score 1 for Augustus!” Bo shouted. Gus gave a fist pump in celebration, and Matt let out a small growl that Gus’ objects were actually real.

Moving to the next artifact on the table, “Alex” picked up a “gulf ball” and looked it over. Luz had to admit that this one at least was somewhat correct. It was a roughly spherical rock that had been painted white and had a few small holes drilled into it. If she was being completely honest, this looked like something she could find in the garbage.

“Hmm... This artifact is significantly harder, as it lacks any distinctive Human realm-only features,” she began. “As such, I can not rightly state whether this is from the Human Realm or not.”

“That’s snorse dung you [CENSORED]!” Matt shouted, rising to his feet and pointing a finger at “Alex”. “That is a real human artifact! Titan, are you

even an actual human? Go ahead, Augustus, drop her illusion. Show us who she really is!”

“You want me to show who I really am? Fine. How’s this?” Luz didn’t care about keepig up the act anymore. She was pissed at this kid. All at once, the years of bullying and torment that she had went through came flooding back to her. Every snide comment, every backhanded insult, every little quip. They all came back. “*Esto es una roca, idiota. Te han estafado. No es una ‘pelota de gulf’.* *Esa ni siquiera es la palabra correcta. El deporte es ‘golf’, con una ‘o’!*” [“This is a rock, you idiot. You’ve been scammed. It isn’t a ‘gulf ball’. That’s not even the right word. The sport is ‘golf’, with an ‘o’!”] As she finished her rant, Luz cocked her arm back and threw the rock as hard as she could at the room’s window. The glass instantly shattered, and the “gulf ball” sailed through the air before rolling to a stop a solid twenty paces away.

The room was silent, save for Luz’s heavy breathing.

Suddenly, the trouble guards burst into the room, grabbing both Luz and Matt in their hooks before dragging them away. As the two troublemakers were being sent off to the detention pit, Matt kept trying to plead innocence. His pleading wasn’t working well though.

“Let me go, you [CENSORED]! I didn’t do anything wrong! It’s all Augustus’ and that [CENSORED] fault! He should be the one going to the detention pit, not me! Hey! Are you even listening to me, [CENSORED]-for-brains?”

Needless to say, if Matt didn’t have a one-way trip to the detention pit then, he sure did now.

Eda groaned as she wheeled over the mop and bucket. Bump now had her cleaning off all the hexed graffiti she’d tagged the lockers with over the years. While they were some of the finest works of her younger years, she hated to see all that effort get washed away.

This is for Luz. I’m doing this all for Luz. It’ll be worth it when this is all over. The Owl Lady repeated that mantra over and over in her head as she made up for all the chaos she had caused.

As the door to the detention pit slammed shut, Matt instantly tried prying it back open for an easy escape. The door didn’t budge. After kicking the

door in frustration, Matt let out another string of curses before slumping to the ground in defeat.

“Do you kiss your momma with that mouth?” Luz asked sarcastically. While Luz wasn’t quite sure what they meant, Eda was particularly fond of dropping some very spicy Boiling Isles swear words when something went wrong with a potion, and it looks like Matt had a similar potty mouth.

“Buzz off,” the Construction track witch replied. Ignoring the command, Luz walked over to stand in front of Matt and offered him a hand up, but he didn’t take it, leaving her hanging.

After the rejection, Luz crossed her arms and looked down at the witch. “Look, man. I’m just trying to help you out, okay? We’re both in detention, and that sucks. Can we at least work together so we can get out of here in one piece?” She offered her hand once again.

Matt stared at the offered help up before exhaling sharply. “Fine, but I take the lead.” He pulled himself to his feet, looking annoyed the whole time at the prospect of getting help from someone posing as a human.

A rumble shook the entire detention pit as the ground in front of the two began to separate, revealing a massive hole lined with a fleshy pink material and row upon row of eyes and teeth. Deep into the pit, Luz could see various students, all trapped in weird blue cocoons made out of an odd jelly.

“Starting already? Wow, they don’t mess around here,” Matt said. He then turned to Luz and added, “Now would be a really good time to drop your disguise.”

The basilisk laughed. She couldn’t believe it. “You’re still telling yourself that? Newsflash, buddy, I don’t have a disguise to drop. I don’t have pointy ears. I can’t cast magic spells by drawing a circle with my finger. I. Am. A. HUMAN!”

Matt froze. “Wait, really?”

“YES!” Luz screamed in frustration.

All the witch could respond with was a short “Huh.”

Suddenly, a giant snake creature with a human-like face reared up from the pit. The face itself was a sickly gray color, but the body of the snake thing was olive green and had rings of black going down the length it.

“Oh yeah, the *Gehirnwäscheschlangen*. Forgot about those,” Matt said as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

“I’m sorry, the what?” Luz had no idea what the witch had just said.

The creature opened its mouth, and a long, slimy tongue shot out, wrapping around Matt’s ankle before dragging him down to the bottom of the pit at a speed which Luz could barely even comprehend.

“Oh my god, Matt!” Luz shouted. Another one of the snake monsters rose from the pit and turned to face Luz, but before it could trap her as well, she punched it on the snout, causing it to retreat. Cursing her mother for instilling such good values in her, Luz jumped into the pit after Matt.

Bouncing off a stray eyeball and landing on her feet, Luz looked for the pod that held Matt. As it floated by over head, she quickly tore it down and set it on the ground. She needed to get him out of this thing.

YOU WILL BE A GOOD STUDENT, a disembodied voice said.

“I will be a good student,” Matt repeated.

Letting out a growl, Luz tried to rip the pod open with her bare hands, but she couldn’t find purchase. She needed something sharp, and Luz knew just the morph for the job. Quickly shapeshifting into the Kraugh, she used her wrist blade to slice open Matt’s pod. Draping the boy over her shoulder, she was surprised at how light he was. She felt like he barely weighed more than a duck! Or maybe she was just strong. That was probably it.

Nevertheless, Luz began quickly scaling the walls of the detention pit, using her wrist blades like pitons, slamming them into the side of the pit as she ascended. As a bonus, each time she drove a wrist blade into the pit, the *Gehirnwäscheschlangen* would slink away, further and further from the giant bladed monster the higher she climbed. Once she reached the top of the pit, she dragged herself over the edge and clambered to her feet. She took a few deep breaths. Man, that climb had taken a lot out of her.

There was no way she was going to stay trapped in this room, so she had to find a way to bust down that door. The Kraugh, while good for fighting off the brain-washing snake things and climbing and such, wasn’t exactly built for causing massive property damage. Running through a list of animals in her mind, Luz eventually settled on one: the rhinoceros. Though she was tired, Luz powered through it and eventually finished the morph, though it

was a slow process. Adjusting Matt so that he was on her back, Luz backed up a few paces before charging, full speed, at the door to the outside world.

The door flew off its hinges as Luz barreled through. Now that the two of them were free, Luz finally laid down. As she did so, her body decided that it was time to take a quick nap. As Matt rolled off her back and faceplanted on the tiled floor, Luz blissfully entered the realm of Sunshine Sleepy Fun Time.

“Edalyn?”

“What is it now, Bumperoni?”

“Would you care to explain why there is an unconscious student next to an obese gray unicorn just outside the detention pit with the door broken on the other side of the hallway?”

Steve rapped three times on the door to Matt’s bedroom. He had taken his annual day off today so he could surprise his younger brother with a visit. Ma had said on a CB call that Matty was finally switching over to Hexside, and that today was his first day. Steve would be a fool if he was gonna miss that.

“Go away, I don’t wanna talk,” came Matt’s voice from the other side of the door.

Well, that doesn’t sound right, Steve thought. What could have Matty in such a bad mood?

Steve waited a few seconds to let the tension build before replying. “Really? Not even to me?”

Steve heard a loud *THUMP*, presumably from Matty falling out of bed, followed by the sound of his younger sibling running to open the door. The coven scout chuckled at his sibling’s enthusiasm.

“Hey, dude,” Steve greeted casually with a wave, as if nothing was out of the ordinary and this wasn’t the first time he’d seen Matty in-person in over a year.

Matt quickly wrapped his older brother up in a hug. “Steve!”

Steve laughed, reciprocating the embrace. “That’s my name, so don’t wear it out!”

Breaking off the hug, Matt had a million questions. “How... how are you here? *Why* are you here? Did you sneak out of Emperor Belos’ castle? Are you gonna get in trouble?”

“Relax, Matt. I just took my day off,” Steve explained.

“Oh.” Matt realized that that made a lot more sense than Steve sneaking out of the castle.

“So, how’ve ya been? How’d your first day at Hexside go? Did anyone beat my record for most healing ward visits yet?” Steve replied, asking his own volley of questions.

Matt groaned. “Ugh, today was awful. You know how Hexside has a Human Appreciation Society?”

Steve nodded. While he wasn’t as gung-ho about humans as Matty was, he would always be willing to listen to his younger brother ramble on about some human artifact he had found on the beach or had bought at the market.

“Well, I attended their meeting today and wanted to show off all the cool artifacts I’ve collected, but then Augustus got all hot and bothered when I didn’t think his so-called ‘artifacts’ were the real-deal. His stuff looked so fake! But then he brought in this human, and she called all of my artifacts fakes, and then started talking in this weird language, and we got thrown in detention, and –” Matt rambled.

The coven scout held up a hand to stop Matt. “Hold on, there was a human at Hexside? Tell me *everything*.”

Chapter 27

Luz Catches A Thermal

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

As Luz plodded down the stairs and into the kitchen, she loosed a massive yawn, alerting the Owl Lady and King to her presence. She was dressed in an oversized t-shirt and a pair of *Good Witch Azura*-branded pajama bottoms, and her tail hung limp behind her, poking out from a hole in the back of her pants. Taking a seat at the table, the basilisk let out a smaller yawn and stretched her arms out wide, feeling her shoulders *POP* as she did so. *Ahh, that feels better*, she thought. Turning to Eda, Luz started the morning off with a question. “Got any big plans today?”

“I’m gonna take over the world!” King shouted gleefully, raising a paw to the sky.

Luz chuckled at the remark and rubbed King’s skull, which was the closest she could get to giving the tiny demon an affectionate noogie. “Sure you are, buddy. You’re gonna be the best tyrannical overlord ever. What about you, Eda?”

“Not much really,” the Owl Lady answered. “I’ve got some potions brewing, but they won’t be done for a couple days, so today’s gonna be nice ’n relaxing. Hopefully.” Speaking of potions, she needed to take hers. She didn’t want to find herself in a feathery situation if she could help it. Opening a cabinet, she withdrew one of her elixirs. Uncorking it, she forced down the bitter concoction, feeling the magic work its, well, magic. That should keep Bird Brain from pestering her for a while. After wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, Eda placed the now-empty bottle back in the cabinet.

She then clapped her hands together to get the other two's attention. "Alright, breakfast. What are we thinking?"

In response, Luz's stomach growled loudly. "I'm fine with whatever, but could I... um... have some magic, please? I did a lot of morphing yesterday."

"Hmm? Oh, sure thing. Here ya go, kid." Eda then spun up a giant ball of light and it floated over to Luz.

The basilisk gleefully drained it. "Thanks, Eda," she said with a smile, feeling her stomach nearly fill to the brim with all that magic.

"Eh, no worries," Eda responded. "So, back to the task at hand: food. What do you want, King?"

The demon in question thought about his options before answering. "Can we make some more of that sancocho stuff? It was really good!"

"Yeah, we're not doing that," the Owl Lady replied, shutting down the plan instantly.

"Plus, sancocho is more of a lunch or dinner meal," Luz added. "It's not exactly breakfast material."

King let out a huff before offering up another meal idea. "How about griffin eggs and toast, instead?"

Eda smiled. "Now you're talking my language."

Luz hummed a little ditty to herself as she scraped everyone's plates free of crumbs and leftovers, offering the tiny morsels up to whatever demon resided in their trash can. What demon it was exactly, she did not know. Maybe it was Hooty? That made some sort of sense. He *was* the house, after all. . .

Saving that thought for a later date, Luz was impressed with how the meal had turned out. Eda sure knew her way around the kitchen, as evidenced by her ability to make even the most mundane meals taste great. The eggs had been perfectly cooked and seasoned, and the bloodberry jelly that she'd added to the toast was not only scrumptious, but it also gave her a little more magic to work with, which was a nice bonus.

Depositing the dirty plates in the sink, Luz turned to head up to her room to relax, but the Owl Lady stopped her. "Hold on one second, kid. I've got something I want to show you." Not waiting for the girl's reply, Eda turned

and walked into the living room. Shrugging her shoulders, Luz followed after, wondering what surprise the witch had up her sleeve.

Coming to a stop in the middle of the living room, Eda turned to Luz. “Notice anything different?” The basilisk looked around the room, trying to spot what might have changed. The giant wanted poster looked like it hadn’t been touched, and she couldn’t find anything wrong with any of the random memorabilia hanging from the walls. The giant sword was still there. That one pineapple grenade was still precariously hanging from its pin. What could’ve been changed?

Then Luz saw it.

Hanging right next to Eda’s wanted poster was a picture frame, and inside that frame was something that Luz had almost forgotten about.

“My shed!” Luz exclaimed. “You kept it!” She wrapped the Owl Lady up in a bone crushing hug. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love it!”

Eda chuckled as Luz slowly disengaged from the embrace. “That’s not the only thing I wanted to show you, though. You know how you were running around with Goops at Hexside yesterday?”

“Yeah, that was a blast!” Luz replied eagerly, before she remembered how the visit had ended. “Except for the whole getting thrown in detention thing. That kinda sucked.”

“Well, how would you like to see Goops and Plant Girl every day?” Eda asked.

“I mean, that would be totally awesome, but I’m not a student at Hexside,” Luz responded.

“Yeah, about that. . .” Eda reached into her hair and pulled out the enrollment papers that Bump had given her. “I had Bumpypoo pull some strings, and you’ll be starting next week at Hexside School of Magic and Demonics. That is, if you want to go. This is completely up to you.” The Owl Lady made sure to emphasize that last part. While Hexside hadn’t exactly been Eda’s cup of tea back in the day (Thanks a lot, Fausty, you old fart.), she knew that Luz would love it there. The whole “Friendship and camaraderie is the *real* magic!” schtick they had was right up the basilisk’s alley.

Luz couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She was actually going to be attending Hexside! She had thought that it was just some pipe dream, but the papers Eda held in her hand said otherwise. Luz slowly reached her hand

out, and the Owl Lady handed over the papers so that Luz could look them over to make sure they were real and that she wasn't imagining everything.

Basic Information Student Name: Luz Noceda Date of Birth: Ka. 2, 5 LD, 36 CE Species: Witch Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

Contact Information Scroll Account: — Postal Address: 1 Owl House Way, Bonesborough, B.I.

Special Accommodations This student needs special accommodations: X Yes _ No If so, please explain why: Deformed bile sac, incapable of spell circles.

Emergency Contact Contact Name: Edalyn Clawthorne Relationship to the student: Guardian Scroll Account: THEOWLLADY (primary), BAD-GIRLCOVEN (secondary)

"Had to make some assumptions 'bout your birthday, so I just put the day you and I first met, if that's fine by you. You are 14, right?" Eda explained.

"Yeah, I am, and that's fine," Luz replied. "So, we're going with the 'I don't have a working bile sac' cover story so I can attend as a witch?"

"Yup. I heard you and Goops talking about that, so I ran the idea by Bump, and he gave it the okay," Eda said.

Luz wrapped Eda up in another hug. "Thank you, Eda," she whispered.

Eda reciprocated the gesture, giving her apprentice/daughter a squeeze. "No worries, kid."

A sudden knock at the door drew the attention of Eda and Luz. The basilisk was the first to move, going over to open the door and revealing Willow and Gus standing in the doorway. Motioning for them to come inside, she greeted them. "Hey, Gus. Hi, Willow." The two students weren't in their normal uniforms, instead being decked out with Hexside branded merchandise. Willow had on a yellow and blue jersey with the school logo on it and a ballcap, while Gus was wearing a similarly colored sweater.

"Hi, Luz, Miss Eda," Gus said as he stepped into the Owl House. He then noticed the papers Luz held in her hand. "Ooh, what's that?"

Quickly hiding the papers behind her back, Luz gave a cheeky smile. "Guess."

"Is it... your tax return?" Willow asked, unsure of her answer, which drew a laugh from the basilisk.

“Not even close. Good try though,” she turned to the illusionist. “What do you think it is, Gus?”

“Hmm. . .” Gus tapped a finger against his chin. “Is it a wanted poster?”

“No, but that *would* be really cool.” Luz held the papers back out in front of her. “This is my application to Hexside. I’m going to be starting next week!”

“No way! That’s awesome!” Gus could barely hide his excitement at the prospect of Luz attending Hexside.

“Woah, really? What track are you going to join?” Willow asked.

The question caught Luz off guard. She hadn’t actually thought about what track she would end up joining. They all seemed so cool! She would pick all of them if she could, but it looked like she was limited to a single option. Her top three would have to be Beast Keeping, Healing, and Potions. Beast Keeping was a pretty obvious choice, given that she was technically a beast demon. (The fact that the Beast Keeping coven head was also an absolute cutey-patootie totally did not factor into that decision.) Healing also made sense, mainly due to the fact that Luz had practically shadowed her mom at work, and those skills she had picked up probably translated over pretty nicely. Finally, Potions would probably go well since Eda was practically a genius when it came to whipping up any kind of elixir or brew and she could help Luz out whenever she ran into a spot of trouble with her schoolwork.

“I’d join all of them if I could, but I would say Beast Keeping as my first pick,” Luz finally said after deliberating for a few seconds.

“Ooh, I’ve heard good things from students in that track,” Willow said. “Plant track and Beast Keeping track share a few classes and they say it’s really fun!”

“That’s nice,” Luz responded, before switching the topic. “So, uhh. . . why are you guys here exactly? Shouldn’t you be in class?”

“There’s no classes today,” Gus explained.

“Really? Why’s that?” Luz had to admit she was a little confused.

“It’s the Second Schlimmtag of the Sixth Lunar Disappearance,” Willow said, as if that was supposed to explain why they weren’t at Hexside.

Luz simply blinked. What did today’s date have to do with anything?

“Y’know, the traditional date for the annual Grudgby match between Hexside and Glandus?” Gus added.

“Oh, that’s cool,” Luz replied.

“‘Cool’?” Gus was astounded at the basilisk’s seeming indifference to such an important match. “It’s only the most anticipated match of the year between the two most storied teams of all the Isles! It’s way more than just ‘cool’!”

“What Gus is trying to say is that we got you a ticket and would love it if you came with us to the match,” Willow explained.

“Then I’ll definitely go!” Luz said, excited at the prospect of seeing what the Isles had in terms of sports. She then remembered who her acting guardian was and turned to the Owl Lady to ask for permission. “Can I go to the game, Eda?”

“Yeah, of course,” the grey-haired witch replied. “I was actually the star player for the Banshees back in the day. Nobody could stop us when we were on top of our game.” She reached into her hair and pulled out a folded-up photo, showing a much younger Owl Lady. The Eda in the picture had bright orange hair and a cocky smile on her face, her neck draped with numerous medals, a trophy held up in one hand.

Willow, Luz, and Gus crowded around the picture. The illusionist was the first to comment. “Wow, that’s a lot of awards.”

“Well, I would love to regale you all with tales from my youth, but if you want to catch the match, you’ll probably want to head out soon. In the meantime, I’m taking a nap, so nobody disturb me. Mama needs her beauty sleep.” Eda tucked the photo back in her hair and left, going up to her room to catch some much-needed Zs.

“When does the game start?” Luz asked.

Gus looked down at his watch before answering. “45 minutes.”

“Wait, when does the bus leave, then?” Luz followed up with.

The question sparked Gus’ memory. “Oh crud, the bus! We need to go now if we want to catch it!”

The two students and one soon-to-be student bolted in the direction of Hexside, hoping they could make it in time to catch the transportation.

As the three finally made it to Hexside, they could see a winged demon carrying all their fellow students off to the match. A banner trailed behind the bus, identifying it as belonging to the Hexside Banshees. The trio came to a stop, looking on as their schoolmates slowly disappeared from view.

“Aww, dang it. I can’t believe we missed the bus!” Gus exclaimed.

“How are we going to get to Glandus now?” Willow asked. “Dad and Papa are both working, so they can’t give us a ride.”

“So is my dad, and we can’t just steal Owlbert from Miss Eda,” Gus added.

As that exchange was going on, Luz was busy thinking. She had no idea if this plan was going to work, and she especially had no idea if she had enough magic to pull this off, but it was worth a shot. “Hey, guys, I’ve got an idea.”

Willow and Gus turned to face the basilisk. “What’s your idea?” the plant witch asked.

“Well, we obviously can’t walk to Glandus, and we don’t have a palisman at our disposal, so what if I just, like, morph a dragon or something and fly us to the match,” Luz said, explaining the basics of her plan.

“Are you sure you have enough magic to do that?” Gus questioned.

“I’m pretty sure,” Luz replied. “Eda gave me some of her magic earlier, so I’m basically operating at 100% magic capacity.”

“I say it’s worth a shot,” Willow said, with Gus nodding in agreement.

“Alright, then can you two step back?” Luz requested. “I need some space to do this properly.” Willow and Gus abided, moving back to give Luz about a ten-foot radius.

“Thanks,” Luz said, before closing her eyes and focusing on the morph she was about to do. For what felt like the billionth time, Luz was thankful for being a bookworm. She was basing this morph off an old novel from the 90s she had read a few years back, called *Dragon Master*. For a kid’s book, it had gone into a surprising amount of detail about how a dragon’s body worked, and Luz was now eternally grateful to the author of that book.

The first change that took place was her back, where two sets of bones erupted from her spine before splaying out to their full size. Thankfully, the bones didn’t stay naked for long, as red, leathery skin soon spread across the bones, eventually taking shape into a pair of wings. While it would be cool to

look like a witch with a tail and wings, Luz needed to keep the morph going. She couldn't exactly carry her friends in her arms all the way to Glandus.

The next stage of the morph focused on her head and neck. Her mouth and nose slowly grew closer together, all the while elongating to form a snout. Her nose eventually flattened into the snout, leaving just two nostrils. Her neck elongated as well, making it look like someone had stretched Luz's neck like a putty. Then, her skin began to change, going from smooth to scaley, growing redder until it eventually matched the tone of her wings. Her eyes spread apart, moving to the sides of her head, much like they did when she morphed into a horse, giving her a much wider field of vision. Her ears also moved, sliding further back and growing longer and pointier. To top it all off, a pair of horns sprouted from her head. Did they serve any real purpose? No. Did they look cool as heck? Totally.

Then, her arms and legs changed. Her fingers and toes shifted from stubby, round digits to sharp claws as Luz fell to all fours, not being able to stand upright anymore. Scales emanated from her shoulders and hips, eventually moving to cover her entire body, save for her tail, which still had the basilisk-type scales. Finally, her tail elongated, dragon scales spreading from base to tip and a few tiny spikes protruding from the tip, giving Luz a makeshift mace. With that last change, her morph was complete.

Taking a few test steps, Luz inched closer to Willow and Gus. Given that she couldn't effectively talk right now, she instead gave a toothy smile and attempted to flash a thumbs up, hoping to get across the message that she was a-okay and ready to take flight. Once she figured out how to fly, that is. She hadn't really thought about that part when she came up with the plan. Hopefully it was just pointing in a direction and flapping your wings.

"Are you still in there, Luz?" Willow asked, to which the dragon nodded. Luz repositioned herself and got down on her belly, allowing the two witches easier access to hop up onto her back.

"This is gonna be awesome!" Gus shouted, quickly clambering up onto Luz and getting comfy. Willow followed suit, but she had a little bit of trouble getting her footing before she eventually made it onto her friend's back, placing herself between Luz's wings.

Now that both her buddies were in position, Luz scratched at the ground three times to get their attention. "You ready, Luz?" Gus asked, to which she nodded again.

Slowly backing until her tail was brushing up against the stairs of the school, Luz gave herself a runway for takeoff. Scratching the ground twice to ready the others, Luz waited a few seconds before taking off, running as fast as she could before reaching the tree line. Just before she crashed into the forest, though, she squatted down and leapt with all the strength she could muster and flapped her wings, sending the trio up into the air.

As Luz flew to Glandus, Willow and Gus would occasionally give directions so that the dragon didn't end up going the wrong way. Flying was actually a lot easier than she thought it would be. It wasn't tons of constant flapping like she expected but was more of just making small adjustments with her wings to keep herself on course as the air flowed over her wings while she glided. Every so often, she would hit a big bubble of warm air that would lift her up, rising under her wings as she floated higher. Eventually, Luz caught sight of a giant building jutting out of the middle of nowhere.

"That's Glandus!" Willow announced. Luz looked for a safe place to land out of sight of anyone else, settling on a clearing just outside the school grounds. Making more small adjustments to how her wings were oriented, Luz slowly glided down, circling around the clearing until the group finally touched down.

Gus was the first to hop off, a huge smile on his face. "That was so cool! We have to do that again some time."

Willow slowly dismounted, voicing her agreement as she did so. "Yeah, that was way more fun than I thought it would be."

As Luz quickly demorphed back into her witch-ears form (sans tail, sadly), she copied Gus' smile. "That was an absolute blast!"

Checking his watch once again, Gus let the others know how much time they had. "The match starts in 10 minutes. If we hurry, we should be able to find some seats."

Willow turned to Luz. "So, are you ready to experience your first Grudgby game?"

In response, Luz morphed herself into her own set of Hexside merchandise. "Let's do it!"

Chapter 28

Luz Experiences Her First Grudgby Game

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Terror Vortex Field at Glandus High

As Luz settled down into her seat, she could barely contain her energy, doing her best to make sure that her tail didn't decide to make a surprise appearance. Willow and Gus were similarly hyped for the match, with Willow even starting a few call-and-response chants with other Hexside students.

"1-oh, 2-oh, 3-oh, 4!" she would yell. While the plant witch did this, Gus pulled out a pair of small blue flags and acted like he was conducting an orchestra.

"We're gonna run up the score!" they would respond.

"5-oh, 6-oh, 7-oh, 8!" she'd continue.

"Banshees, we're gonna dominate!" they would scream, even louder than before.

After the chant had been repeated a few times, Luz found herself joining in, screaming at the top of her lungs about how they were going to destroy Glandus. As Luz participated in the chant, she eventually realized that she had no idea what the rules of Grudgby even were. Since Willow was currently preoccupied with being a yell leader, she resorted to seeing if Gus was willing to enlighten her on the game she was about to watch.

“Psst, Gus.” He didn’t respond.

“Gus!” she tried again, louder this time. The boy turned to look at Luz.

“Yeah?” he asked, still doing his little conductor movements with the flags.

“What are the rules?” she asked. Gus pocketed his flags before scooting over so he was closer to the basilisk.

“Ok, do you see that circle in the middle of the field?” Gus pointed, and Luz followed with her eyes. There was, in fact, a painted white circle about 10 feet in diameter smack dab in the center of the field.

“Uh huh.” Luz nodded in the affirmative.

“That’s where the players start, and they all have to be touching the circle for the game to begin. When everyone is ready, the grudgball is launched into the air and the game is officially under way when someone from either team catches it.” Gus spun up a small illusion depicting the field with tiny players standing on the circle. An even tinier ball was then shot out of the ground, and multiple players leapt up to grab it.

“And what’s with those big pole things with the hoops?” Luz doubted they were just there for decoration.

“Those are the goals. You have to get the grudgball to pass through one of those to score for your team.” The illusion of a player then threw the grudgball through the hoop on the opposite end of the field and jumped for joy before disappearing as Gus dispelled the illusion.

“I’m guessing whoever has the most points at the end wins?” Luz wanted to make sure that there wasn’t some super convoluted rule that would eliminate all the work that a team might do over the course of a game.

“Yeah, that’s how you would win a game. However, since Grudgby is so fast paced because of the 10-minute time limit, you typically see teams play a best of 5 series, which is what we’re doing today. That’s only how a typical game goes though,” Gus responded, (Luz sensed there was a “but” coming.) “but sometimes a game will be played under Smidge rules, where you forego the points system and just see whoever can catch this little guy first and whichever team does that wins.” Gus conjured up another illusion, this time of a winged metal beetle covered in rust.

Luz let out a sigh. “Of course, there’s an instant-win version of the game, because why wouldn’t there be.”

Gus gave the basilisk a pat on the shoulder. “If it makes you feel better, most people think that Smidge rules Grudgby is stupid and defeats the purpose of the game.”

Luz laughed. “Well, I’m not disagreeing with that. So, the game is basically just passing the grudgball around until someone throws it through the hoop?”

Gus wavered his hand in a so-so motion. “Well, that and you have to be wary of all the traps that are on the field. Though, everyone can use their magic, so you also have to worry about your opponents attacking you directly.”

At the mention of being able to use one’s own magic, Luz had an idea. “Wait, does that mean that I could use my shapeshifting if I was playing?”

Gus thought about it for a second before answering. “I mean, there’s nothing saying you can’t do that, so I guess it would be legal.”

Luz smiled. “Ahh, the *Air Pal* argument. Got it.”

“What’s an ‘*Air Pal* argument’?” Gus asked.

Oh right, this was the Boiling Isles. “*Air Pal* is a movie about a dog that plays basketball, and it’s allowed since there isn’t a rule about dogs not being allowed to play basketball,” Luz explained.

Gus nodded along like he understood, even though he really didn’t. What was basketball, and why would a dog want to play it?

Suddenly, the crowd around them grew exponentially louder. Looking for the cause of the uproar, Luz saw that the timer on the scoreboard said that there was only 1 minute until the players took the field. Seeing that everyone around her was on their feet (or other various appendages, depending on the species), Luz copied them and rose from her seat.

“Witches and demons, ARE YOU READY FOR SOME GRUDG-BYYYYYYYYY?!” the public announcer yelled, drawing a massive cheer from both sides. From the tunnels on both sides of the stadium, four witches emerged, all of whom were dressed in protective equipment so that they didn’t die after stumbling on the very first trap.

“Introducing your home team. Dusty Everhart! Senna Wales! S’reee! Captained by Loca, they are the Glandus High Gorgons!” The Glandus student section erupted into cheers, a few of them even throwing purple and white streamers onto the field. The four witches on the far side of the field stepped up to the circle and took their places, evenly spacing themselves

out. Luz had to admit that they looked pretty fierce, most of them sporting scowls. The illusion was broken, though, when Loca cracked a joke, causing her teammates to smile for a split second before resuming their death glares at the Banshees.

“And for the away team. Cat DeLisle! Skara Brooks! Amelia! Captained by Boscha Riegel, they are the Hexside Banshees!” This time it was the Hexside student section to erupt, throwing out their own streamers, though these ones were blue and gold colored. As Boscha and her crew took their places on the circle, Luz felt a twinge of indecision over whether she should actually be cheering for the triclops given how she treated Willow and Amity. Eventually, Luz decided that she would cheer for everyone on Hexside’s team *except* for Boscha. That would work for now.

As the players readied themselves on the starting circle, Luz waited with bated breath as the timer on the scoreboard counted down. Even though it was only 10 seconds, it felt like an eternity to the energetic basilisk.

10...

Boscha adjusted her left kneepad, tightening the strap to make sure it was secure.

9...

Skara wiped the sweat from her brow, flinging it aside.

8...

Cat rolled her shoulders and snuck in a quick calf stretch.

7...

Amelia cracked her knuckles and wrung her hands thrice.

6...

Loca reached into her pocket and took out a small bottle. Uncapping the drink, she downed it in one go before tossing the bottle behind her.

5...

Senna squatted down, slapping the ground with both hands before throwing some dirt over her shoulder.

4...

Dusty took off her headband and turned it inside out before putting it back on.

3...

S'reee closed her eyes and bowed her head, muttering something under her breath.

2...

All 10 players prepared themselves, knees bent, ready to jump.

1...

The grudgball shot out of the ground, and the game was on.

Every player on the field leapt for the ball, hoping to gain the first possession of the game. By the slimmest margin, Dusty was the first to leave her feet, but the Banshees had prepared for this. Before Dusty could even reach for the ball, Skara had already launched herself into the other girl's stomach, before the two of them slammed into the dirt, effectively downing Dusty for the opening possession. (Luz sucked in a sharp breath. *Oof, that had to hurt.*)

If the Gorgons did what the Banshees thought they were going to do, then they would be aggressive and have Loca grab the ball and fight to maintain control of it while she landed. They didn't. As Loca reached for the ball, instead of grabbing hold of the ball, she instead tapped it behind her head, where S'reee was waiting patiently. Landing gracefully with the ball now in her hands, S'reee took off running toward the Hexside goalhoop. As the remaining members of the Banshees landed, they realized that they'd been duped. Of course the Gorgons would wait for their biggest rivalry game to do something so un-Gorgons to start off.

As S'reee tore down field, she made the mistake of looking behind her to see if anyone was tailing her. As her head was turned, she ran straight into a wall of abomination goop that had shot up, forming a massive wall. Bouncing off the sudden obstacle, she landed on her backside, the ball flying out of her hands as her arms flew back to catch her fall.

Boscha could have quickly scooped up the ball and ran with it, but she couldn't stop herself from gloating. Flicking the ball up and catching it in both hands, she turned to her fallen opponent. "Rookie mistake," she said in a faux-cheery voice before laughing and sticking her tongue out. Shifting the ball to be in a more defensive position, she turned to advance in the

other direction. Her possession of the grudgball was short lived, though. Boscha only made it a few steps before she was sent flying backwards from a blast of bard magic courtesy of Senna. The captain of the Banshees tumbled backward, landing right next to S'reee, who took the moment to laugh in the other girl's face. Thanks to Boscha's impromptu gymnastics routine, the ball had slipped out of her hands and was now rolling ever closer to the Hexside goalhoop.

Coming from out of nowhere, Loca ran in and quickly picked up the ball before launching it into the hoop that Boscha was supposed to be defending.

“GOAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL!” the public announcer screamed.

Gorgons 1 – Banshees 0 | 9:22 Remaining | Game 1

Boscha let out a swear from her spot on the ground. She had cost them the opening score. Now her team was playing from behind, and she was to blame. Slapping herself on the cheek to wake herself up, she got up and began slowly walking to the starting circle, trying to catch her breath.

“NOT DOG!” she screamed, communicating the play for this possession to her other teammates, though the noise from the crowd was making it difficult. If the Gorgons played this like Boscha expected, then this should be a quick answer. “NOT DOG!”

Amelia, Cat, and Skara all nodded. Good, they had heard her.

Taking her spot on the circle, Boscha took one last deep breath before readying for the ball to shoot.

As the grudgball launched into the air, the Banshees, save for Skara, all took off, running straight for the Gorgons' goal. As the ball reached its apex, Skara looked directly at the ball and put her fingers to her lips and whistled, sending out her own wave of bard magic. As the wave travelled, it caught both the grudgball and the Gorgons, all of whom were midjump. In one fell swoop, the ball was sent rocketing across the field towards the Glandus goalhoop, and all of the Gorgons were knocked out of the air like fairies that had just been swatted. “Sorry, I'm just doing what the play says.” Skara quickly apologized to the students from the rival school before running to join her teammates.

Cat was the first to receive the ball as it fell from the sky, positioning herself so it landed right in her breadbasket. Turning to run with it, she made a

point to not turn around and run face first into a trap. When a battle axe emerged from the ground and started falling, she was ready for it, diving out of the way so she didn't get cleaved in two. From the ground, she turned to see that the Gorgons were getting up from Skara's attack. Seeing an opening, Cat called out Amelia's name before heaving the ball in her direction.

As Amelia received the ball, she was almost immediately when thorny vines sprouted all around her, trapping her on a little island of dirt. Turning herself in a circle, she saw no way out. She couldn't jump far enough to get out, and she definitely didn't want to risk getting all cut up this early in the game. Help was on the way, though, as Boscha waved for the ball, and Amelia punted the ball towards the captain of the Banshees.

Smiling at the chance to make up for her mistake just moments prior, Boscha ran towards the Glandus goalhoop. Surprisingly, no traps had sprouted from the ground, so she had a clean shot. Looking behind her, the only person even close to her was Skara, who had expertly weaved through all the obstacles. Making a split-second decision, Boscha yelled out Skara's name and lobbed the grudgball into the air as hard as she could. Nodding, Skara sprinted over to the goalhoop and leapt into the air. As the ball reached the top of its arc, Skara cocked back her hand and spiked the ball with an open palm, sending it flying through the hoop.

"Hexside scores," the public announcer said flatly.

Gorgons 1 – Banshees 1 | 8:46 Remaining | Game 1

As Skara landed, she had a giant grin on her face. "Thanks, Bosch!"

Boscha brushed off the compliment. "That's my way of saying sorry. We still need to obliterate those fools from Glandus."

While the two rejoined their teammates at the starting circle, Boscha was already cooking up a plan for this possession. She'd studied the tape and done her homework. (Well, not her *homework* homework. She couldn't care less about the "proper stirring technique for potion crafting during a waning crescent.") Whenever Glandus let up a goal, they would always try to return with a score of their own by playing hyper-aggressive, bringing all their players on the offensive and leaving nobody back deep to defend, relying on the traps and obstacles to get the ball back. This strategy was risky, obviously, and would leave them highly susceptible to a quick counterattack by the Banshees if they could steal away the ball and get a player out in front. As Boscha took her spot at the starting circle, the perfect play came

to mind.

Luz wasn't quite sure why Boscha was yelling about spiders (or not dogs, for that matter), but she was sure of one thing: Grudgby was awesome! After Skara's shot had tied the game up for Hexside, the basilisk had screamed so hard that her throat hurt, and Gus and Willow had been similarly enthusiastic about the bard track student scoring. If both teams kept racking up points like this for the rest of the series, Luz would undoubtedly lose her voice by the time the third or fourth match rolled around.

She watched with anticipation as the grudgball rose from the ground once more, signaling the start of a new possession. While Luz had expected for the team from Glandus to immediately go for the ball (she had clocked them to be really attacking-oriented), the Banshees' response to play resuming was definitely not what she thought was going to happen. Boscha and her crew *backed away* from the ball, fanning out to cover as much of the field as possible. Though Luz recognized the defensive strategy when she saw it, she was a little confused as to why they were doing it now, when the game was tied, and not when they actually had the lead. Maybe they were trying to conserve their stamina for the next possession? That might be it. Nevertheless, Luz was excited to see how this possession would turn out. Hopefully it would end in another Hexside goal, preferably by someone not named Boscha.

As Luz focused back on the game, she saw that Glandus was trying to take advantage of the Banshees' passive approach to the possession. Key word: trying. Currently, Senna was carrying the ball up the field, trying to maneuver herself so that a teammate could cut for a closer shot on the hoop. However, both the Banshees and the field itself were working against her. Whenever she would try to line up a shot, either an obstacle would appear to deny the opportunity, or a Banshee would position themselves between her and the goal. Similarly, if she tried to pass the ball off to another Gorgon, one of the Banshees would threaten to either knock the pass out of the air with a blast of magic or jump and grab it with their bare hands. (Well not, bare. They had gloves on, after all.) Eventually, and most likely out of frustration, Senna resorted to blindly throwing the ball as hard as she could at the hoop. Though the ball managed to avoid Amelia trying to swat it out of the air, as well as other magical blasts from the other Banshees, the goalhoop had other ideas.

DOINK, DOINK.

The ball bounced off the left side of the hoop, and then again off the bottom before falling backwards, never crossing the barrier to score. The grudgball landed directly in the arms of Boscha, who couldn't hold herself back from laughing at the Gorgons' rotten luck.

From her spot in the stands, Luz cheered even louder than before. If they kept playing like this, there was no way the Gorgons were gonna win!

Chapter 29

Luz Takes a Leap of Faith

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Terror Vortex Field at Glandus High

“GORGONS WIN! GORGONS WIN!” the PA demon screamed. The clock read all zeroes on the fifth and final game of the series. While Luz was sad that Hexside lost the series, it was still super close the entire way through. After the double doink in game one, the Banshees had taken control for the remaining 8 minutes and change. Game two also went to the Banshees in a much more convincing win than the previous one, with Skara and Amelia alone putting up more points than all of the Gorgons combined. The Gorgons bounced back in game three, though, and kept the Banshees from sweeping them. Then the Gorgons won again to tie the series at 2 wins a piece.

When the final game had started, Luz’s voice was already gone, having screamed herself until she was sore in the throat. All eight players looked exhausted when the ball launched to kick off the final game, being powered solely by their spite for the other team. As such, neither team could muster the energy to score (or play defense, for that matter), with the final minutes looking more like a brawl than an actual sport. As the clock was winding down, though, Senna punted the ball through the Banshees goalhoop, earning Glandus a 1-0 victory, as well as winning them the series. Luz actually felt happy for Senna, believe it or not. The girl had rallied her team back from a 2 game deficit, and that was commendable, even if Luz was cheering for Hexside and not Glandus. Of course, she would have liked the game more if her team had won, but she still thought that it was overall really fun.

As Luz, Willow and Gus slowly descended the steps of the Terror Dome, the basilisk rubbed at her throat. Man, she was probably going to have to gargle some salt for a couple hours once she got back to the Owl House. Luz sighed. That wasn't gonna be fun. But then, an idea struck her. She was a basilisk, which meant she could shapeshift any part of her body. What if she just... shapeshifted her throat to not be sore? Pondering that thought, she stopped in her tracks. Back when she was helping Eda and King deal with the Bat Queen's babies, she had morphed her ears away, so maybe it wasn't too much of a stretch that she could morph her throat to not feel like sandpaper? It was worth a shot, but whether it would work was yet to be seen. Scrunching her face up, Luz closed her eyes and focused.

If Luz had to be completely honest, it was super weird feeling her throat heal itself, but that meant it was actually working, so she wasn't going to complain. Then, the implications of Luz's newfound healing ability struck her. How far did her powers extend? Could she regrow a severed limb if she had enough magic in her system? Shaking her head, Luz dispelled that thought. She did *not* want to test that out, not even risking thinking it into existence.

Running to catch up with Willow and Gus, Luz joined the line to hop on the bus. Though Luz was a little sad that riding the bus meant she wasn't going to get a chance to catch any of those sweet, sweet thermal updrafts as a dragon, it also meant that she could conserve both magic and energy, which was probably a good idea. Stepping onto the bus, Luz instinctively headed towards the back, hoping to get a seat by herself, only snapping out of autopilot when Willow and Gus squeezed into the bench with her.

"So, what did you think of your first grudgby game?" Gus asked, turning to Luz.

"Hmm?" Luz asked, caught off guard by the question. "Oh, that was awesome! Are all the grudgby games that intense?"

"Yeah, they can get pretty vicious," Willow responded. "That's why I prefer flyer derby, honestly. Less of a chance to get flattened, sliced in half, or set on fire."

Luz nodded. "That's reasonable."

Suddenly, the bus jerked into motion, and they were off.

As Luz opened the door to the Owl House, she was surprised to find the house empty. Well, Hooty was still there, but he was deep in conversation with a fly that Luz didn't want to interrupt. After checking Eda's room, the roof, and even the basement, Luz determined that it really was just her, Hooty, and the fly. (Never mind, Hooty just swallowed the fly.) Deciding she could use this rare opportunity to relax, Luz reclined on the couch, kicking her feet up on the coffee table and flipping on the CB.

As she perused her options of channels, she came to the conclusion that there was nothing good on.

A shopping channel? No thank you. Next channel.

Emperor's Coven propaganda? Double no. Next channel.

A static shot of a bag of sticks? Could be worse. Next channel.

A news story about the Owl Beast terrorizing a slayground? Boring. Nex – Wait what.

Going back to the previous channel, Luz yanked her feet off the coffee table and leaned forward so she could get a closer look at the screen.

Yup, that was Eda in her Owl Beast form, and it looked like King was riding on her back like he was at a rodeo. Eda had something hanging from her mouth, but the camera was too far away for Luz to see what exactly it was. According to the chyron scrolling across the screen, King had shown up with the Owl Beast and had essentially taken the slayground hostage, and they were currently in a standoff with animal control, the leader of the group trying to talk King into giving up his "throne" and letting the other kids go.

Groaning, Luz knew what she had to do. She was pretty sure that she knew where that particular slayground was, based on the surrounding buildings she could see. Dashing out the front door, she needed to get to the slayground fast, which meant she would have to take to the air once again. Running through her mental catalogue of animals, Luz needed something that could fly but also wouldn't draw too much attention to herself. Finally, she decided on the common red-tailed hawk. Good ole *Buteo jamaicensis*. (Why Luz knew the scientific name, she wasn't quite sure. It had just stuck in her mind from all those years back when Mamí had taken in a red-tailed hawk at the vet clinic.)

Speeding through the morph, Luz finished in record time and took to the air as soon as she could. Now that she had a birds-eye view (literally, in

this case), she could make a beeline straight to the playground. As the wind flowed over her wings, Luz realized how lucky she had been when she had been a dragon flying to Glandus. That path had mainly been over the Boiling Sea, which offered plenty of updrafts to allow for easy gliding, but now she was flying over the city, where the thermals were few and far between in comparison. Translation: her wings were getting tired.

Luz didn't have time to worry about thermals, though. She had a tiny demon to talk down from a power trip and an Owl Beast that needed an elixir like she needed air to breathe. Spotting the playground was pretty easy, thanks to all the giant eyeball-camera demons that were floating in a ring around the perimeter.

Circling down and landing on a very convenient flat roof, Luz quickly demorphed back into witch-ears mode. From up here, she could clearly see Eda, King, and all the other children in the playground. Then Luz realized her blunder. The roof she had landed on had no way down to ground level. Unless, of course, she wanted to risk jumping down and praying that she didn't break her leg on landing, but Luz wasn't that stupid.

Rats, she thought. Looking around, the basilisk tried to see if there was another way down other than jumping, but nothing turned up. Whelp, if this was her only option, then she was going to need to do it as something non-human. As Luz remorphed into a red-tailed hawk, she concocted a plan to get down to the ground that didn't involve breaking any bones.

Hopping over to the edge of the roof on her talons, Luz looked down at the *long* drop before her and did the sign of the cross as best she could with her wings. *Geronimo!* Luz thought to herself before jumping over the edge. Keeping her wings folded to her side, she fell like a rock, only flaring her wings out at the last second so that she didn't go splat, slowly floating the last few feet until she softly touched down.

Now that she was on the ground, Luz demorphed (for real this time) and ran over to the playground, where King and Eda were still in a standoff with animal control. Forcing her way through the crowd that had gathered, Luz approached the leader of the animal control, tapping him on the shoulder.

"What do you want, girly? Can't you see I'm busy here?" the demon asked in a gruff voice.

Crossing her arms, Luz gave him a disappointing stare. "Let me through."

The demon laughed. "Fat chance of that happening, kid. Now scram. Us

adults have work to do.”

While he did that, Luz just walked past him, stopping him mid-laugh as he tried to grab her and pull her back to safety. “King, what the *fudge* are you doing?!” she admonished the tiny demon, clambering up the jungle gym to be face to face with the wannabe tyrant.

“I’m having fun!” King answered with a happy look on his face.

“Well, you may be, but are any of the other kids having fun? Is *Eda* having any fun? Look at her!” Luz motioned to the young children who were currently huddled in the corner of the little tower, quivering in their boots at the scary owl thing that was eating the playground equipment. As if to hammer home Luz’s point, Eda barfed up a swing and whimpered sadly.

Looking around at his so-called “kingdom”, King frowned. “No,” he said softly.

“So, are you gonna let the other kids go?” Luz asked.

“I guess so,” King replied. Slowly, he and Eda descended the playground tower as Luz hopped down to the ground.

“Ready to head home?” Luz asked.

“Uh huh!” King said. Eda apparently agreed, as she nodded so aggressively that King started bouncing up and down on her back like he was riding a bucking bronco.

“Oi, don’t think you’re getting off that easy!” the leader of the animal control shouted. “That’s a wild demon that damaged public property, so it’s going to the pound!”

“Eda is *not* a wild demon!” Luz yelled back.

“Yeah, look!” King added, reaching into his fanny pack and pulling out an elixir. Uncorking it, he offered it out to Eda, who grabbed it in her teeth and flipped her head up to chug the potion.

Nothing happened.

“Well, that ain’t good,” Luz commented.

The doors to Emperor Belos’ throne room slowly creaked open, and in walked the Head Witch of the Healing Coven, Hettie Cutburn. Coming to a stop

before her great emperor, she knelt down in genuflection to the Titan's Blessed Leader.

“Rise, Head Witch,” came the Emperor's voice, filling the hall, causing Hettie's stomach to twist itself into knots. As she got to her feet, her eyes flitted over to the Golden Guard, who it seemed was also affected by the Emperor's proclamation, his so-called “Right Hand” shaking at the sound of his all-encompassing voice. Once Hettie was standing, Lord Belos continued. **“Lilith informed me that you bring news of grave importance. What is it?”**

Swallowing the ball that had formed in her throat, Hettie took a cautious step forward, noting out of the corner of her eye the Golden Guard's hand drifting ever closer to his stave. “My Lord, the Warden has finally recovered from that heinous attack a few weeks back.”

Belos slowly nodded. **“Ahh, yes. Wrath. His presence has been sorely missed at the Conformatorium. Did he manage to identify who or what attacked him?”**

“That's where there are some... questions, my Lord. Wrath said that the creature that attacked him was a basilisk, but they are supposed to be an extinct species, are they not?” Hettie asked.

From behind his mask, Philip Wittebane raised an eyebrow. It looked as if one of those miserable creatures had tried to finish the job they started when they had initially broken out of the Conformatorium. **“Whether the Warden's assailant is supposed to be extinct or not is of little importance, Head Witch. There are far more pressing matters to be dealt with.”**

“Yes, I – I agree, my Lord,” Hettie replied, slowly shifting from foot to foot as the Emperor's eyes stared at her.

“Beyond its species, did the Warden describe his attacker in any further detail? Were there any distinctive markings or disfigurements?” Belos inquired. He wondered which of those miscreants thought it a good idea to assault a member of his coven in such a brash manner.

“Wrath said that the creature had brown scales with a white spotted underbelly,” Hettie answered. “That was all he could make out before he succumbed to hypothaumosis, unfortunately.”

Only one basilisk matched that description. *Number Five, you foolish child,*

Philip thought. **“Thank you, Head Witch. Was there anything else the Warden told you that could be of use?”**

“There is, my Lord,” Hettie responded. “If what Wrath has said is to be trusted, then the basilisk wasn’t working alone.”

“Who would be so bold as to ally themselves with a basilisk?” Belos asked. Whoever it was that would willingly travel alongside one of those infernal beasts must not be right in the head.

“If Wrath’s memory serves him correctly,” Hettie said, “then the witch working with the basilisk was none other than the Owl Lady, Edalyn Clawthorne.”

Chapter 30

Luz Visits a Boiling Isles Book Fair

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Slamming the door shut, Luz turned her back to it before slumping to the floor, not even bothering to shift her tail out of the way. Taking in deep breaths, she did her best to recoup her energy. She had just spent the past few minutes in a dead sprint, trying to get to the house as fast as possible. After one more deep inhale, she slowly exhaled. They'd made it. Outside, she could hear the sounds of Hooty obliterating the animal control demons who were after Eda.

Eda nervously tapped her back paw. When she had gulped down the elixir, it didn't turn her back into her normal form, but it did give her control over the Owl Beast, whatever good that did her. In fact, this was probably worse than not having control over the Beast. She couldn't draw a spell circle, couldn't talk, couldn't do anything useful thanks to Bird Brain not having opposable thumbs. At least when the Beast was in control she didn't have to deal with those frustrations.

"Don't worry, Eda," Luz reassured her mentor (and herself). "I'll get you an elixir lickety split." Scrambling up off the floor, Luz ran into the kitchen, with the Owl Lady moseying in behind her. As Luz scaled the kitchen counter, Eda's maternal instincts kicked in. *Kid, you better not do anything stupid*, she thought to herself.

As Luz teetered precariously on the counter, she reached above her head

and undid the lock on the cabinet. Yanking the door open, Luz stood up on the tips of her toes so she could see into the cabinet. Scooching a few miscellaneous potions out of the way, Luz saw her prize. Grabbing the elixir, she spun on her heel so that she could hop down. Except her foot slipped.

Time seemed to slow down as Luz fell. Before she could even realize what she was doing, Eda was running to catch the basilisk before she could impact the ground. It was only when Luz looked into Eda's eyes from being cradled in her arms that Eda realized what had happened. Firstly, she was somehow back in her regular body again. Secondly, she had just snatched Luz out of mid-air when she was all the way across the kitchen just a second before. Deciding to not look a gift snorse in the mouth, Eda gently set Luz back on her feet. The basilisk dusted herself off, a goofy smile on her face as she offered the elixir to her mentor.

"Here you go, Eda!" Luz said, only to realize that Eda looked very not Owl Beast-y. "Oh, never mind."

"Thanks, kiddo," Eda replied, ruffling Luz's hair. "But I'm good... somehow."

"How did you get your body back?" Luz asked.

Eda shrugged her shoulders in response. "Beats me. All I knew was that you could get hurt, and I wasn't gonna let that happen. Guess the Owl Beast agreed."

Luz smiled. "Aww, you care about me. Maybe it was you going all Mama Bear that turned you back. You know, a strong emotions kinda thing?"

Eda scrunched her face up. Magic could be influenced when a witch was in a particularly emotional state, so that wasn't an entirely unfounded idea.

Suddenly, Hooty snaked his head into the kitchen. "GUESS WHAT JUST ARRIVED, HOOT HOOT! IT'S THE MAIL!" Luz watched as a ball of what she assumed to be letters traveled up Hooty's esophagus, only to get caught in his throat. The bird... tube... thing hacked a few times before finally expelling the ball of letters onto the kitchen floor, all of them coated in a thin layer of mucus. Scooping up the letters, Eda dumped them on the table before beginning to sort through them.

"Taxes." Eda crumpled that one up and threw it behind her, landing directly in the trash can.

"Scam." Another letter joined the taxes in the trash.

“Death hex.” Another letter in the trash. After a few seconds, though, a miniature black hole formed and sucked in the trash can before disappearing.

Looking behind her, Eda saw that the trash can was no more and pouted. “Dang.” Turning back to the mail, she continued sorting it through.

“Book fair reminder.” Eda began to crumple up the letter, but an audible *SQUEE* drew her attention. The noise had somehow come from Luz, who was staring at her with giant puppy dog eyes.

The Owl Lady sighed. “Let me guess, you want to go to the book fair.” Luz couldn’t even verbalize her excitement, instead responding by fervently nodding her head.

Eda groaned. “Fine.” Turning upstairs, she shouted to get the attention of a certain skull-headed demon. “Oi, King! We’re going to the book fair, so get down here unless you wanna walk.”

Lilith let out a ground of frustration. Her sister was housing a basilisk, and who knew how much longer Edalyn had until the rabid creature decided that she was its next meal. When Wrath had awoken from his coma, she had initially dismissed his rambling about a “giant, snake-ish demon” draining him of nearly all of his magic as mere hallucinations. It was only when Lilith met with Head Witch Cutburn and discussed what a basilisk attack actually looked like did she actually consider Wrath’s statements. But how could Edalyn have allied herself with a demon from a supposedly extinct species? Considering that basilisks had the ability to shapeshift, though, Lilith posited that the demon could have been hiding in plain sight under a disguise.

But how could Edalyn have found out about the basilisk if it was concealing its true nature?

Thinking back to her presentation at the Covention, she remembered that Edalyn had recently taken on an apprentice. What was the witchlet’s name? Liz? Lice? It was something like that. Regardless of what Edalyn’s apprentice’s name was, that brought up another question: who did Lilith meet at the Covention? If that was the actual Liz (or whatever her name was), then both she and Edalyn were in danger of the basilisk turning on them at a moment’s notice. If Lilith had met the basilisk, though, then she didn’t even want to think about what that entailed. The head of the

Emperor's Coven had a million questions, and only one person could answer them. Donning her cloak, Lilith silently closed the door to her office.

Only to turn around and run directly into Steve.

"Hey, Lils! Whatcha doin?" her bodyguard/assistant/friend asked.

"Oh, hello Steve," Lilith replied awkwardly. "What are you doing here?"

"My job," he said slowly. "You know, protecting you from attacks, scaring away rabid fans, stuff like that."

"Right, right. That was a stupid question, my apologies," Lilith responded, pulling on her signature raven mask that distinguished her as the leader of the EC.

"So, where are we heading?" Steve asked as he traveled beside his boss.

"Wherever my sister is," Lilith answered.

Steve nodded. "This going to be an official thing or is it off the books?"

"Unofficial," Lilith said quickly. "Edalyn is rubbing elbows with dangerous company, and I intend to set her straight before she gets herself hurt or worse."

"Ahh, family stuff. Got it," Steve replied, nodding.

"Do you have any clue where Edalyn might be, Steve? I know that you are far more of a... social butterknifely than I am." While Lilith prided herself on being the leader of the Emperor's Coven, all that responsibility left her with little time to go "out on the town" as it were.

"If I had to guess, I'd probably say the book fair at the Bonesborough Public Library," Steve answered. "It's going on this week, and I doubt the Owl Lady would pass up an opportunity to sell her finds from the Human Realm when the market isn't open."

Lilith hadn't even thought of the annual BPL book fair. "I guess that's a better start than nothing. Let's go."

Luz was having the time of her life at the book fair. It was everything a bookworm like her could have asked for and then some. There was a zine-making workshop that she had attended, the leaflet she had constructed

tucked away safely in the pocket of her hoodie. There were also a few meet-and-greets she had watched from afar. No Mildred Featherwhyle, obviously, but there was a guy named Volo who had gathered a considerable crowd as he blabbered about his supposed feats of daring-do. Luz had to admit that this guy knew how to really ham it up for an audience. Leaping from table to table, miming out sword fights, it was a pretty entertaining show, even though it was obviously hyperbolized.

One thing, or rather, one *person* that Luz didn't expect to see was Amity Blight wandering through the shelves.

"Hey, Amity!" Luz called out to get the emerald-haired witch's attention.

Amity turned to see who had called her name and smiled when she realized who it was. "Hi, Luz. Found any books you want to buy?"

"Not yet," Luz replied. "I'm sure I'll find one, though. There's like a billion books here."

Amity laughed. "This place is big, but it's not *that* big, okay." Reaching into her bag, she then withdrew *The Good Witch Azura: Fall of Zargothrax* and offered it to Luz. "And before I forget, here's your book back."

Luz waved her hand in dismissal. "No, I told you that you could keep it, and I meant it. That's yours now."

"Oh, thanks then." As Amity placed the book back in her bag, a slip of paper between the pages caught her eye. Oh crud, that was the drawing she had made of herself and Malingale the Mysterious Soothsayer. Amity was really thankful that she got to keep the book now. If Luz had seen the drawing, she probably would have never let the young Blight live it down.

"So, what did you think of the book?" Luz asked.

"It was... good," Amity responded.

Luz gasped. "'It was good'? That's all you have to say about Hecate's incredible friends-to-lovers arc with Azura as they travel together through the Desert of Despair to find the Amulet of Amore?"

"Okay, yeah, I was happy to see them finally get together. At least Featherwhyle didn't force them into a 'will they, won't they' thing and stretch it out over a couple books." Amity admitted

"Yeah, that would have been not cool," Luz agreed.

“Lily, what are you doing?!” Eda’s voice broke through the background noise of the fair.

“Amity, get away from that creature right now,” Lilith shouted.

Luz and Amity turned to see both of the Clawthorne sisters approaching them, Lilith storming ahead while Eda was trying to talk her down from whatever it was she was trying to do. The elder sister then placed herself between Luz and Amity before drawing a spell circle and leveling it at Luz.

“Uhm, what are you doing, Ms. Clawthorne?” Amity asked her old mentor.

“I’m protecting you from this dangerous creature,” Lilith responded.

“Lily, be rational for one second,” Eda pleaded after catching up to the group.

“I am,” Lilith replied coldly. “This vermin has replaced your apprentice, and I intend to deliver it back to where it belongs.”

“‘Replaced’? Lily, what are you talking about?” Eda asked, feigning confusion about what her sister meant.

“Your so-called apprentice is actually a basilisk,” Lilith said, pointing a finger at Luz.

“Yeah, I know,” the Owl Lady replied with a smirk.

Lilith froze as her brain tried to comprehend what she just heard. Edalyn knew and she didn’t care. That confirmed it for Lilith. The curse had messed with Edalyn’s brain so much that she was somehow fine with living with what was essentially an apex predator.

“You realize that means that that creature could drain you of all your magic at any second, right?” Lilith was dumbfounded at her sister’s apathy to the revelation.

“Yeah, but she’d never do that,” Eda retorted. “Would you ever do that, kiddo?”

“Nope, never in a million years!” Luz responded with a smile.

“Sorry to butt in, but I have to agree,” Amity said from behind Lilith. “I’ve never felt in danger when around Luz. Well, except for when we met at Hexside, but that doesn’t count.”

“Aww, thanks Amity,” Luz said.

“If you’re not evil, then why did you assault Warden Wrath at the Confor-matorium?” Lilith asked.

“Because he cut off Eda’s head,” Luz said as if it was the most obvious thing ever.

Lilith raised a finger to object before considering what she would have done if she was in that situation. “Alright, I’ll give you that.”

“Thank you,” the basilisk replied.

Eda clapped to get everyone’s attention. “Well, that’s great. Now that we’re all friends, how about we do something more productive than threatening my student, hmm?” Turning around, the Owl Lady started walking away.

“I suppose that would do us good,” Lilith said.

Bending down, the witch then whispered into Luz’s ear. “Listen, creature, and listen well. You may have fooled Edalyn, but I am not so easily convinced. You say you mean her no harm, and I implore you to keep your word. If I find that you have harmed my sister in any way, I will have your head on a platter before Lord Belos by nightfall. That is not a threat, that is a promise. Do you understand?”

Luz nodded. She understood perfectly.

Chapter 31

Luz Starts Her Writing Career

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Bonesborough Public Library

As Luz skimmed through the offerings at the book fair, dragging a finger along the spines of the books, Lilith's words echoed in the back of her mind. *"If I find that you have harmed my sister in any way, I will have your head on a platter before Lord Belos by nightfall."*

If Luz had to be completely honest with herself, she was at least a little scared by what the leader of the Emperor's Coven had said. Dying was something that seemed very not fun, and she hoped she didn't experience it until she was like 90 years old and senile.

Deciding that none of the books looked that appealing, Luz turned elsewhere to see if there was some booth or event that she had missed. That was when she saw it: ***Short Story Writing Competition*** . How had she missed that? It even had a giant banner and everything!

Back before Luz's life had gotten flipped-turned upside down by learning that she wasn't exactly a human, she had dreamt of being an author and having her stories sitting alongside Mildred Featherwhyle's on a child's bookshelf. Given that Luz was in a completely different realm, though, that put a small kink in her plan. Nevertheless, a writing competition seemed like a great way to kick start her professional literary career.

Speed-walking over to the booth - running would have looked quite uncouth - Luz positioned herself in front of the triclops running the table, she waited for them to notice her. After the demon came to a stopping point in their book, they bookmarked their page before setting the book aside. Looking up at Luz, they smiled. "Are you looking to join the short story competition?"

"Yup!" Luz replied with a smile of her own.

"That's great to hear," the triclops replied. "There's a few rules that your story has to follow, though. Since this competition is for *short* stories, there's a word limit of 7500 words. The topic of the story and the format it's presented in can be whatever you like, so it could be a traditional story, a fake obituary, anything. Besides that, go wild with your story. Submissions have to be turned in by the end of the week, and the best story will get a prize of 250 snails. Still want to sign up?"

"Yes, please," Luz said, nodding her head. She couldn't believe that she was actually going to be competing against other writers. This was going to be so fun! Well, there was also that 250 snail prize, but that was just an afterthought for the basilisk.

Reaching below the table, the triclops produced a sheet of paper with tons of signatures on it as well as a pen. "In that case, just add your name here and you'll be in the running."

Taking the pen, Luz was just about to add her name when an idea struck her. "Hold on, can I team up with another person for my story?"

After thinking on it for a few seconds, the triclops responded. "I don't see why not."

Putting the pen down, Luz held up her index finger. "Give me just one second, then." The basilisk already had the perfect idea for who she wanted her co-author to be. Turning around and scanning the fair-goers, she looked for a certain green-haired witch that she knew was in attendance.

When she finally spotted Amity, she saw that the witch was talking with King, a book held above her head and out of reach of the tiny demon. Walking over, Luz caught the backend of the two's conversation.

"For the last time, I'm not letting you summon Crayak the Destroyer, King," Amity said. As Luz got closer to the two, she saw that the book Amity held was called *Summoning Minions for Dummies* .

“But I really wanna!” King replied, stamping his foot. (Luz thought that King looked absolutely *adorable* when he was trying to be intimidating.)

“King, just listen to Amity,” Luz interjected herself into the conversation. “I doubt summoning a dude nicknamed ‘The Destroyer’ will lead to anything good.”

Recognizing that he was now getting outvoted 2-1, King relented. “Okay, but can I still see the book?” He then tried to pull a cute face by folding his hands and batting his eyelashes, but Amity was immune.

“No,” she responded flatly. Placing the book back in its spot on the shelf, the witch then looked down at the diminutive demon. “But, there are other fun things you can do here.”

King harrumphed and crossed his arms. “Like what?”

“Well, I know that there’s going to be a book reading with Jon de Plume and the book is going to be super gory and disgusting.” Amity explained.

King gasped. “Really?”

“Really,” the witch replied.

“Where is it?” King asked.

“All the way on the other side of the library,” Amity answered. “I’d hurry, though, because it starts in just a few minutes. You don’t want to miss it, do you?”

“Never!” King shouted, running off to the (fictional) book reading.

“Woah, that’s the first time I’ve ever seen King listen to someone besides me and Eda,” Luz said. “How’d you do it?”

“I’ve been working with kids for years. Sometimes you’ve just got to speak their language for them to do what you want,” Amity replied. “How do you live with King 24/7?”

Luz shrugged her shoulders. “Eh, you get used to his antics after a while. All his talk of death and mayhem is for show. Usually.” The basilisk still vividly remembered when King had come back to the Owl House absolutely soaked in blood. He’d said he was just playing a game with a “weird-looking tube demon with a ton of teeth” that “went kablooeey” after King bonked it with a stick and the demon started eating itself. It had taken nearly an hour to wash all the blood off of the skull-faced demon.

"I guess that makes sense," Amity said. "Sorry about what Ms. Lilith did back there, by the way. I've never seen her act like that."

"She wasn't like that when we met at the Covention." Then, something clicked in Luz's mind. "I guess her learning that I attacked one of her coworkers would sour her opinion of me."

"Yeah, I would probably act the same if I saw someone who attacked you," Amity said.

"Well, thanks for having my back, then," Luz replied, drawing the girl into a side hug.

"So what is it you came here to talk about?" Amity asked.

Luz paused as she tried to actually remember why she was over here. Oh yeah, the competition! "There's a short story competition being held, and I was wondering if you would want to team up with me so that we could work on a story together. If we win we'll get 250 snails."

Amity looked intrigued. "Hmm, that does sound pretty fun. Count me in!"

"Great!" Luz responded. "Let's go sign up!"

Leading the way, Luz weaved through the crowds of people as she made her way back to the booth promoting the competition. As the two got closer, the triclops from before noticed their approach.

"I see you've found your co-author," they said.

"Yup!" Luz replied. "We're gonna come up with something that will blow the Titan's socks off!"

"I wouldn't be that ambitious, but I think we've got a good shot at winning," Amity said confidently, draping her arm over Luz's shoulder.

"I like the enthusiasm," the triclops said with a laugh. Handing over the sign-up sheet and a pen, Luz signed her name with a flourish before handing the sheet and pen over to Amity, who added her signature below Luz's. As Luz returned the sheet and writing utensil to the triclops, she noticed Amity's handwriting. It was very pretty and refined, each letter evenly spaced and the same size, as if she had practiced it a thousand times over.

"Alright, with that you're officially in the running for the contest," the triclops said. "Be sure to have your submission in by the end of the week."

"We will, thank you," Amity said.

“Let’s go to the Owl House and get started writing! We don’t have any time to lose!” Luz suggested, anxiously grabbing Amity’s hand to pull her towards the exit of the library.

“Wait, I need to let Malphas know I’m leaving early then,” Amity said, slowly pulling her hand free from Luz’s grip.

“Oh, okay then,” Luz responded. “You know, I should probably find Eda and let her know as well. Don’t want her to think I’ve gone missing.”

“Sounds like a plan. Meet up back here then walk over to the Owl House?” Amity suggested.

“Yeah that’ll work,” Luz agreed.

Carrying the corkboard in from the attic, Luz propped it up on the easel that she had situated in her bedroom. Grabbing a pair of notecards, she wrote the words “Act I”, “Act II”, and “Act III” on them before pinning each up on the board. Now the hard part: coming up with the actual story.

Hopping down from Luz’s bed, Amity walked over to stand beside the basilisk.

“Hmm. . .” Luz tapped a finger to her chin in contemplation. “What kind of story should we do?”

“Maybe a romance?” Amity suggested. “Like, have the characters meet at a cafe or something.”

“Eh, I think that’s just a smidge overdone though. Seems a little fanfic trope-y to me,” Luz replied.

“Yeah, okay, I see where you’re coming from,” Amity said.

“How about we do something more like an action or an adventure?” Luz was always a sucker for a good *Lord of the Chains* type of story. Characters traveling together and building a sense of trust and camaraderie with one another was right up Luz’s alley. (Plus, the characters spending so much time alone together on the road meant that her shipper heart could go wild.)

“I would say yes to that,” Amity replied, “but we’ve got to keep the story short, and I don’t think we could do a full action story justice in just a few thousand words.”

“Darn, you’re right,” Luz admitted. “Okay, what about. . . a slice of life story? That one we could definitely fit in like 5-kay words.”

Amity thought about the suggestion. “Yeah, that’d probably work.”

“Alright, so we’ve got the genre down,” Luz said. Scribbling “Slice of Life” on a notecard, it was soon added to the Corkboard of Great Story Ideas.

“Next up, characters,” Luz continued. An idea immediately sprung to mind. Grabbing a marker, Luz quickly drew a caricature of herself in Azura’s signature robe and hat, even wielding the Magic Staff of Awesomeness that was totally canon and definitely not something the Latina had made up for her self-insert fanfic that she’d written a few years back.

Tacking the drawing up on the corkboard Luz announced the name of the main character. “Luzura. Boom, main character done.”

Amity laughed. “Oh my Titan, you have a cringey OC too?”

The basilisk gasped. “Luzura is *not* cringey, thank you very much.” She then actually processed what the witch had said. “Wait, you have an OC? What’s their name?”

“Do you promise not to laugh?” Amity asked, blushing at the thought of sharing such an embarrassing part of herself.

“What could be worse than Luzura?” Luz replied. “It’s not even that creative!”

“My original character is called... Oraios,” Amity finally admitted. “It means ‘beautiful’ in some Human Realm tongue.”

“Oh, that is just absolutely precious,” Luz said. Grabbing another notecard, she began to write down Amity’s OC when she realized that she had no idea how to spell the character’s name.

“Wait, how do you spell that?” she asked.

“You’re actually going to include her?” Amity asked, dumbfounded.

“Well, if we’re going to be including cringey OCs, we’re going to be including cringey OCs together,” Luz replied. “How do you spell her name?”

“O-r-a-i-o-s.” Amity spelled the name letter by letter, with Luz meticulously copying it down.

Pinning Amity’s OC next to her own, Luz soon added another notecard above the two: ***Our Protagonists*** .

“Alright, characters are set, let’s hammer out the plot,” Luz announced. “Got any ideas, Ams?”

“Ams?” Amity was caught off guard by the nickname.

“Oh, sorry. I can call you Amity if you want,” Luz replied.

“No, it’s not that I don’t like it,” the witch clarified. “It just surprised me. I don’t think anyone has ever called me ‘Ams’ before.”

“Well, the question still stands,” Luz said, pointing at Amity with her pen. “Got any ideas for the plot besides a ton of fluffy, slice of life goodness?”

Amity tapped her finger against her chin in a thinking motion before smiling. “Yeah, I’ve got some ideas.”

Now with a corkboard bursting packed full of plot threads and snippets of conversation, it was time to actually start the writing. There was a small issue, though: they didn’t have anything to write with, and there was no way they would handwrite the entire story if it was going to be as long as they expected. So, Luz turned to rummaging around in the nooks and crannies of the house to see if she could find something to write with that wouldn’t leave her with carpal tunnel syndrome or something.

After rooting around in one of the many closets, Luz found an old, dusty typewriter hidden away behind a rack of jackets. It wasn’t a typewriter like Luz was used to. (Given, she’d never actually used a typewriter, but she knew what one looked like from those British TV shows Mami watched occasionally.) This typewriter looked pretty normal except for the fact that it had a pair of eyes, teeth and a tongue where the back of the machine should be. Grabbing the machine, Luz held it at arm’s reach, waiting to see if anything would happen.

Eventually, the typewriter opened its eyes and looked up at Luz. “You’re not the Owl Lady,” it said.

“Nope, I’m her apprentice,” Luz clarified. “Is it okay if I, like, use you to write a short story?”

“That’s what I was made for, wasn’t I?” the typewriter responded.

“Alright, thank you,” Luz said.

Returning to her room, the basilisk set the typewriter down on her desk. After taking a deep breath and cracking her knuckles, Luz, with Amity looking over her shoulder, began typing out their literary masterpiece.

Chapter 32

Luz Embraces the Elements

Schlimmtag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Leaning back from the typewriter, Luz flexed her fingers to get some feeling back in them. She really wished that she had packed her laptop in her backpack when she'd crossed over into the Isles. Why? Because whenever she'd make a typo, she'd have to grab some White-Out, paint over the mistake, and then wait for it to dry before spelling the word correctly. In her opinion, that took way too much time when she could have been spending it making the story even better. Still, though, it was super fun to actually get into the groove while writing about Luzura and Oraios dressing up in all sorts of cute outfits and traveling together, visiting tons of cool places that definitely weren't modeled after places in Gravesfield.

All told, the story - tentatively titled "Chasing Rainbows" - stood 9 pages long, and it had taken shape through the combined power of Luz and Amity's incessant nerd-dom. Luz could count at least 17 different Good Witch Azura references that she had snuck into the manuscript. Ranging from surface level nods, like mentioning The Sandwich, to deeper cuts, such as a suspiciously named side character running over trash cans with a truck, anybody who was as obsessed with GWA as Luz was would pick them up easily.

The story wasn't all Luz, though, as she and Amity would switch off on who was writing every time there was a new scene or a change in the point of view. It was a pretty good system in Luz's opinion, giving both of them a chance to read over what was being typed out. It was especially helpful to make sure that everything was getting explained in enough detail. From

Luz's experience of writing GWA fanfics, she knew how important it was to have someone else check over your work to make sure there wasn't anything missing.

Removing the final page from the mouth of the typewriter, Luz stacked the paper together and tapped them on her desk to straighten them out. "And we... are... done!" Laying back in her chair, the basilisk took in a few deep breaths.

Hopping off Luz's bed, Amity picked up the stack of papers and slowly flipped through them. "Wow, I can't believe we got the entire thing finished in one sitting."

"Yeah," Luz replied. "And my fingers only hurt a little bit!"

Pulling out her scroll, Amity checked the time. Yup, just as she had suspected: the library had already been locked up for over an hour by now. "Dang, they've already closed up for the night."

Luz pouted at the news. "Well, drat. We can turn it in tomorrow, though. Plus, it'll give us more time to look it over and make sure it's the best story it can be."

"That's a good way to look at it," Amity said before a buzz from her scroll drew her attention. Checking the notification, she saw that Edric had sent her a few messages in quick succession.

bestBlight: yo have you packed for the trip to the Knee tomorrow

bestBlight: em and I already got our stuff together

bestBlight: mom says you gotta do good on the presentation "or else"

bestBlight: also dad isn't coming

Amity groaned. She'd completely forgotten that she was supposed to go to the Knee with Ed and Em to train for her part in the presentation. Each of the nine tracks had picked a representative to show off their skills for an inspector from the Emperor's Coven, and Amity had been chosen and the representative from the Abomination track. What made the trip to the Knee worse than normal was that dad wasn't even going to be there. Since he was on par with Head Witch Deamonne in terms of knowledge about Abomination magic, her father would probably have given her some highly-detailed lecture about how to make the Abomination bend to her will. Given, that would only happen if he could find the time to actually care

about his children more than his inventions, and Amity knew that was rarer than finding a fairy that didn't have a taste for flesh.

Noticing Amity's dour look, Luz frowned. "What's got you down in the dumps all of a sudden?"

The witch sighed before fully responding. "I've got to go to the Knee tomorrow to train with Ed and Em. I was chosen to represent the Abomination track for Hexside's annual Emperor's Coven inspection next week, and Mother will be... not happy if the presentation goes poorly."

Luz inhaled sharply. "Dang, that sucks."

"Tell me about it," Amity responded, flopping onto Luz's bed and spreading her arms out, draping them over the bed frame.

"Well, would it be less sucky if I was there, training with you?" Luz offered.

"Yeah, that'd make it more bearable," Amity responded, "but you'd probably get bored just watching me do the same spells over and over. What would you even be training for?"

"The placement exam at Hexside," Luz said. "Eda told me about the two spell requirement, and we're pretty sure glyphs will count for it."

Propping herself up on her elbows, Amity met Luz's eyes. "Wait... You're going to Hexside?!"

"Yep," the basilisk answered. "Did I not tell you?"

"No! That's awesome, Luz!" Amity was amazed that Luz had kept this great news from her. "Do you know what track you're going to join?"

"Right now, I'm leaning towards Beast Keeping," Luz responded.

"Oh, really? I thought you would take after Eda and go down the Potions track," Amity said.

"I've considered Potions," Luz started, "but I feel like Beast Keeping would be a better fit for me. My mom is a veterinarian, after all, so I'd be sorta following in her footsteps."

"What's a 'veterinarian'?" Amity asked.

"Oh, right, that's a Human Realm thing," Luz said. "A veterinarian is kinda like a mix of Beast Keeping and Healing. Mami specializes in pets, so dogs, cats, snakes, things like that."

“Huh, that’s interesting,” Amity replied. “I’ve never considered mixing types of magic like that.”

“Yeah, well us humans don’t have magic, so we make do with technology,” Luz explained.

“I’ve heard Gus talk about human technology a lot,” Amity said. “Is it true that you guys actually have giant metal birds that can fly you around?”

“Ahh, those are airplanes,” Luz recognized what Amity was talking about after a second. “Yeah those are pretty common in the Human Realm because of how spread out we all are.”

“Wait, ‘spread out’?” Amity was confused. “Do humans not all share the same Titan?”

“No. . .” Luz replied slowly. “We’ve got continents, though, and I guess those are kinda like Titans. Well, except for the fact that they’re just giant chunks of Earth’s crust floating on the mantle.”

“The Human Realm sounds weird,” Amity said. “Nice, but weird.”

“Well maybe it won’t be so weird once I show you around,” Luz responded. “I know some cool hangout spots.” (That was a lie, but Amity didn’t need to know that Luz was a friendless loser back in the Human Realm.)

“I’d like that” Amity mentioned.

“I think I would, too.”

Slamming the door to her office shut, Lilith threw off her cloak, letting it pool up on the floor. Burying her head in her hands, she let out a muffled scream. How her sister was turning a blind eye to the fact that she was living with an indubitably blood-thirsty (and most likely magic-hungry) monster, Lilith wasn’t sure. The beast had somehow convinced Edalyn and her former protégé that it meant them no harm.

But what if they were telling the truth? When Lilith had been training under Flora D’splora in her early days of the Emperor’s Coven, Ms. D’splora had drilled into the impressionable young Lilith that the historical record can never be blindly trusted. Falsities and half-truths could easily be passed off as gospel if it was backed well enough, so perhaps she was wrong about basilisks.

That was a train of thought for another time, though. Right now, all Lilith wanted to do was to retire for the night. After she had changed out of her uniform and into more casual attire, Lilith began mindlessly flipping through channels on the CB. After a few minutes of a whole lot of nothing, she gave up on that plan and decided that she might as well put a dent into the mountain of paperwork clogging her desk that she'd been ignoring for the past few days.

The monotony of filing papers was one that Lilith enjoyed. The repetitive actions allowed her to turn her mind off for a few hours as she sorted everything into its proper category and signed the occasional document. After she'd gotten through the first few papers, Lilith slowly got more into the zone, tuning out the outside world as she worked. That was until she was staring at a report that numerous students and faculty at St. Epiderm had been attacked by an unknown assailant and left without magic. Maybe the historical record surrounding basilisks was accurate after all, because Lilith had an idea of who she thought the culprit was.

A knock at the door drew the witch's attention. Barely picking her feet up off the ground, she shuffled over to the door to see who was willing to pester her at such a late hour. If they were willing to bother the leader of the Emperor's Coven when it was nearing midnight, then they were clearly also willing to part ways with their post in the coven. Opening the door revealed that it was Kikimora who was standing on the other side. Great, one of the two people Lilith couldn't fire. (The other being that obnoxious Golden Brat, and Lilith was about 90% sure the current Golden Guard had gotten their position solely on the fact that they were related to the previous Guard.)

"What do you want?" Lilith snapped, hoping to get this interaction over with as quickly as possible.

"Emperor Belos has requested an audience with you. I suggest you not keep him waiting," the demon said in that grating voice of hers.

Throwing on her cloak, Lilith forced her way past Kikimora and began walking to Lord Belos' chamber.

"Oh, and one more thing," Kikimora called out.

"What?" Lilith turned around, an annoyed look on her face.

"Don't think that your little escapade off to the library didn't go unnoticed. Now hurry along. The Emperor is not a patient man."

Zorntag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Knee

Luz shivered and wrapped her arms around herself in a sort of self-hug, doing her best to conserve warmth. This coat was *not* helping. Blowing into her hands, she tried to warm them up to no avail. She was starting to doubt whether she was really warm-blooded, because this place was capital C Cold.

The trek up the mountainous terrain had not been kind to the basilisk. She really wished she had a thick layer of fur like that giant Abominable Snowman looking thing she'd passed by on the way up. What had Eda called it? "Slitherbeast" or something along those lines? Luz wasn't really paying attention to Eda's impromptu lesson at the time, instead being more focused on not freezing to death.

"Are you sure that you're good, kiddo?" Eda asked. She had tagged along with Luz, claiming that she "didn't want to see her kid get turned into a Popsicle" and that the basilisk needed adult supervision.

"Never better!" Luz said with a fake smile, giving a weak thumbs up.

"We can set up a fire if you want," Amity supplied. "That is one of the spells I'm learning, after all."

"Yeah, that'd be nice," Luz replied through chattering teeth.

"We can go get some firewood," Ed and Em said at the time.

"You can give that fire spell a shot while we're out," Edric mentioned to Amity before he and his twin disappeared off into the woods.

Once the two were out of earshot, Luz turned to the remaining Blight sibling. "Do they... know?"

"Know what, exactly?" Amity replied, a look of confusion on her face.

"About me being, ya know, scaly?" Luz explained, hoping the emerald-haired witch would get the implied message.

"Oh, uh, no. I haven't told them," Amity said. "Unless you want me to, that is."

"I'd rather you not," Luz responded. The less people who knew about her true nature, the better. "I wanna keep it on a need to know basis. Guess I'll have to keep the witch disguise for the next few hours, then."

“That’s reasonable,” Amity stated before changing the topic away from Luz’s heritage. “So, what spells are you going to be performing for your placement exam? I know you’ve got that light spell, but you need at least two to get out of the baby classes.”

Luz gasped. “I never showed you the plant glyph!” Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out her notepad and a tiny pencil. Quickly sketching out the glyph, Luz tapped it, and out of the piece of paper sprung a small gardenia flower. Plucking it by the stem, Luz offered the flower out to Amity.

“Boom, plant spell!” the basilisk said with a smile.

Taking the flower, Amity examined it. “That’s amazing. Thank you, Luz.” Tucking the flower behind her ear, the witch brushed her hair back so that the gardenia was more clearly visible.

“How do I look?” Amity then asked, striking a pose for the basilisk.

Luz laughed. “You look like you just stepped out of a magazine that sells winter gear.”

“I hope that’s a good thing,” Amity replied.

“Hey, we didn’t come here for a fashion show, you two!” Eda interjected. “We’re here to train, not galavant around in the snow.”

“I guess we probably should start training,” Amity admitted. “Don’t want to be out here in the cold for nothing.”

“What spell did you say you wanted to work on, Blight? A fireball or somethin’?” Eda asked.

“Fireball, yeah. I can’t even summon one with a training wand, though,” Amity replied, clearly exasperated.

“Well that can’t be right,” Eda said. “Any witch your age should be able to cast a basic elemental spell. Lemme see the wand.”

Reaching into her back pocket, Amity pulled out a smooth wooden stick with what looked like a power gauge attached to it. Handing the wand over to Eda, the Owl Lady examined it.

“This thing’s in perfect condition,” Eda stated before handing the wand back to its owner. “It is charged, right?”

“Of course. I made sure to charge it all night,” Amity replied.

“Hmm...” Eda tapped at her chin, thinking. “Well, if the wand ain’t the issue, then I’m pretty sure how you’re using it is the problem. How do you try to cast spells with it?”

“I try to cast them like I would an actual spell circle,” Amity said slowly. “Is that not how you’re supposed to do it?”

“No,” Eda responded flatly, “and that’s where your issue comes from. When you cast magic with a spell circle, you have to focus that magic from your bile sac to your finger and out. Training wands, on the other hand, already have the magic primed and ready to go, so you just have to point it in the right direction and hope you don’t blow anything up.”

“So I’m basically asking the wand to do too much and then it doesn’t know what to do?” Amity hoped for clarification.

“Basically,” Eda said. “Now try to cast a fireball spell, but don’t overthink it this time.”

“Alright,” Amity said hopefully. “I can do this.” Taking a deep breath, the youngest Blight aimed her wand at a patch of snow. With a quick flick of the wrist, a small fireball formed at the edge of the wand and waited to be released.

Staring at the fireball, Amity cracked a smile. “Yes! Wooh!” Jabbing the wand forward, she sent the fireball screaming towards the snow bank, where it melted a hole straight through the pile, only to be filled in when the pile collapsed in on itself.

“Yeah! Go Amity!” Luz cheered, happy to see her friend happy.

“Good job, Blight,” Eda congratulated the other witch. “Now how hard was that?”

“What’s all the yelling about?” Edric asked as he and Emira returned. Ed had his arms full of chopped up logs, while Emira carried a bundle of kindling in one hand with a bag of tinder in the other.

“I got the fire spell to work!” Amity said proudly.

“Oh, nice. Good job, Mittens,” Emira congratulated her sister on the accomplishment.

“Alright, let’s get this fire started, then,” Eda said. “I’m freezing my tail feathers off over here.”

“You have tail feathers?” Edric asked, confused by the expression.

“Yes, I really do have tail feathers,” Eda replied in a deadpan voice. “No, I’m just cold. Did any of you richy-riches bring a fire pit?”

“No,” Emira said. “Mom said they were a waste of money.”

Eda sighed and rubbed at her forehead. “Of course she did. Looks like we’re doing this the hard way, then. Ready for a survival lesson?”

Clapping her hands together and rubbing them, the Owl Lady then started scooping out the snow with her hands. Eventually, the hole began to take on a square shape, and when it was completed, Eda patted the remaining snow down so that it was level.

“Tinder,” she proclaimed, motioning for Emira to add it to the box, who complied. Eda bunched the small sticks and leaves until they were in a roughly circular shape.

“Kindling.” The larger sticks were smushed together into a roughly cylindrical shape sticking out of the square. Holding the kindling in place, Eda moved onto the final step of constructing the fire.

“Logs.” The first log was squished into the square and was soon joined by its companion on the other side of the kindling cylinder. Finally, the two other logs were placed atop the first two, laying criss-cross, acting as a sort of outline of the square.

“That wasn’t hard, was it?” Eda said as she got to her feet.

“Where’d you learn to do that?” Luz asked her mentor.

“Human realm,” Eda replied concisely.

“You gonna elaborate on that?” Luz followed up with.

“Nope,” Eda said, popping the “p” emphatically.

“Now come on, let’s light this sucker up,” Eda proclaimed. “Hey, Baby Blight, how bout you do the honors?”

Stepping aside, Eda gave Amity the floor. Kneeling down in the snow, Amity pulled out her training wand and pointed it at a section of the tinder in the center of the pit. Summoning a tiny flame at the end of the wand, Amity attempted to light the tinder, but nothing happened.

“Hmm, looks like the wood is still wet from the snow,” Eda noted, “Put some more magic into the flame and see if it’ll catch.”

“You got it,” Amity replied. Willing the flame to grow bigger, she put it to the tinder once more, but the sticks still refused to light.

“Come on, work with me here,” Amity said to the wand. The wand seemed to listen, as the flame grew far bigger, instantly lighting both the tinder and a chunk of the kindling.

“Nice work, kid,” Eda praised the young witch. “Wanna see if you can get the logs going too? Speed up the process a lil’ bit, ya know?”

“I guess I can give it a shot,” Amity replied. Pouring even more magic into the flame, it grew bigger still, now nearing the “that’s way too big to be safe” size, and Amity reacted accordingly. Falling on her behind in surprise, Amity launched the fireball off in a random direction so that she didn’t turn himself into roast witch.

Luz watched as Amity’s fireball arced across the sky before dipping below the treeline and disappearing.

“Think you might have put too much power into that one, Mittens,” Emira said, clapping a hand on her sister’s shoulder.

“Well, uh, let’s hope that I didn’t hit anything,” Amity said, forcing a laugh.

Suddenly, a roar echoed through the whole of the Knee, and a shadow fell across the camping party. Looking up, Luz saw a giant mass of white fur flying through the air, and it was headed right towards them.

Landing with a loud *THUD* in front of the Blights, the slitherbeast roared, droplets of goo flying from its mouth and landing on their faces.

“Oh Titan,” Amity squeaked.

“Everyone scatter!” Eda yelled. Grabbing Luz’s hand and dragging the basilisk along, Eda dove to take cover behind a boulder.

As Edric and Emira ran for the woods, Ed noticed that his younger sister wasn’t following. “Amity, come on!” he yelled.

Amity stood frozen as the slitherbeast got closer. The smoking wand in her hand was a dead giveaway that she was the one who had woken the beast from its slumber. She wanted to run and join her siblings, but her legs refused to cooperate, keeping her rooted in place.

I wonder what they'll write on my tombstone, Amity thought as she felt the slitherbeast wrap its paw around her waist. (The grip was lighter than she expected. Maybe the beast wanted to play with its food before eating her?)

“HEY UGLY! LET HER GO!” Luz shouted, running from her place behind the boulder.

“Luz, what are you doing?” Eda hissed.

The slitherbeast slowly turned around as it faced the weird two-legged creature yelling at it.

“YOU HEARD ME! LET GO OF MY FRIEND YOU BIG OAF!” Luz continued. She just needed to draw the slitherbeast a little bit closer and it’d be in range.

The slitherbeast took slow, lumbering steps as it stomped towards the two-legged. Once the tiny creature was within arm’s reach, the slitherbeast swiped to grab at the annoying pest, only for it to dive out of the way and open its mouth.

As Luz drained the slitherbeast of its magic, she hoped that it wouldn’t have enough energy to fight back, because if it did then she was as good as squashed. Fortunately, luck was on her side, and the slitherbeast fell to its knees before eventually face-planting in the snow. Unfortunately, Amity also ended up with a faceful of snow as a result, but Luz hoped that the snow would also cushion the witch’s fall. After a few seconds of waiting to see if the slitherbeast was truly unconscious, Luz dashed over to her fallen friend.

“Amity! Amity, are you okay?” Luz asked as she helped the girl get to her feet.

“I’m. . . I’m fine,” Amity replied after a pause to gather her bearings. “Just a little shaken up, that’s all.”

As Luz checked her friend for any injuries, she couldn’t help but feel that something was off, but she couldn’t quite place what exactly. When Amity whipped her head back and forth to shake the snow free from her hair, only then did Luz realize what was missing: Amity’s flower.

Luz gasped. “Where did the flower go?!”

Amity was confused. “Luz, it’s fine. I don’t –”

“I’m finding that flower!” Luz proclaimed.

Scouring the surroundings, the basilisk searched for the gardenia, cursing the fact that it was a white flower hidden on a backdrop of white snow.

“Hey, uh, Mittens?” Emira slowly approached her sister. “Were you ever gonna tell us that your friend can... do whatever that was?”

“Not really,” Amity said, fidgeting, trying to figure out how much she should divulge about Luz’s true nature. “That’s more for Luz to decide.”

“Yeah,” Eda chimed in. “Luz’s powers are none of your beeswax. If she wants you to know, she’ll tell you.”

“Oh my Titan, I found it!” Luz called out. Running up to Amity, the basilisk held the gardenia gently in her hand. Amity couldn’t help but notice that Luz was coated head to toe in snow, and Amity doubted that that could feel good.

“Luz, you didn’t have to go through the trouble of finding me a silly flower,” Amity said.

“But I wanted to,” Luz retorted. “You deserve the flower.”

Getting closer to Amity, Luz brushed back the witch’s emerald locks and gently placed the flower back behind her ear.

“See?” Luz gestured to nobody in particular. “Now the outfit’s perfect! The flower ties the whole thing together.”

Off to the side, Eda saw how Amity looked when Luz got close to the young Blight, the subtle blush not slipping past the Owl Lady’s watchful eye.

Oh, that kid’s got it bad.

Deciding that it was time to run intervention before Amity melted into a puddle, Eda got everyone’s attention with a shout. “Anybody know what we should do with Big Ugly over here?” Summoning Owlbert, Eda poked at the sleeping (Well, *hopefully* sleeping.) slitherbeast with the butt of her staff to see if the thing was still alive. When the demon weakly batted at the staff, Eda let out a sigh of relief.

“I vote that we just leave it be,” Luz offered.

“I agree,” Amity said. “Just because it gave me a spook doesn’t mean we should... kill it.”

“Alright, half the ballots have been cast,” Eda said. “Dweebus One, Dweebus Two? What do you guys think?”

“Can I keep him?” Edric asked with a childlike expression.

Everyone turned to stare at the teen.

“What? He’s cute, and I want a pet!” Ed said, trying to argue his case.

In response, Emira grabbed her brother by both shoulders and stared him in the eye. “Ed, I love you, but that is the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard.”

Edric frowned. “Fine, no slitherbeast. How about a bat instead?”

“No!”

Chapter 33

Luz Experiences the Epic Highs and Lows of Hexside

Spasstag 2, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

“Okay, kiddo, are you ready for your placement exam?” Eda asked. She and Luz were currently hiding in the left wing of the stage of the Paranormatorium at Hexside. On the other side of the curtain, Principal Bump sat at the ready, waiting for Luz to begin.

“Yup!” Luz replied. “I’ve got my glyphs, my backup glyphs, my backup backup glyphs, my backup backup backup –”

Eda laughed and snorted. “Alright, alright. I get it.” She then took on a more serious tone. “You’re gonna do great, kid. I just know that you’re gonna blow Bumpy-poo’s socks off. Now, are ya ready?”

“Yeah!” Luz replied excitedly.

“That’s what I like to hear. Go knock ’em dead, kiddo!” Eda said, giving Luz a quick hug of encouragement.

Approaching the curtains, Luz took a deep breath. “Let’s do this,” she said to herself, before running through the curtains and onto the stage.

“Hi, Principal Bump,” the basilisk said meekly.

“Hello, Miss Noceda,” Bump replied. “Now, are you going to show me the spells you know, or are you going to keep me waiting like you have for the

past quarter-hour. I do have a school to run, you know.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Luz apologized. Reaching into her fanny pack, she pulled out a plant glyph. “So, umm, this is my plant glyph.”

Tapping the glyph, a sunflower emerged from the note card, going from shoot to a fully-fledged flower in seconds. Bump nodded his head and made a quick scribble on his sheet.

“Well, that’s one spell. What’s the other?” the principal asked.

“Right. Umm, well... I’ve also got a handy-dandy light glyph,” Luz said. Pulling out a light glyph, the girl tapped it, only for the spell to be way more powerful than she expected.

“Oh sweet Titan!” Luz covered her eyes and stumbled away from the surprise flash-bang. If she was better coordinated, she most likely would not have tripped over her own two feet, but that was not the case. As Luz fell, she watched in slow motion as the backup glyphs (and backup backup glyphs and backup backup backup glyphs) tumbled out of her fanny pack and landed on the stage, all of them right where she was about to land.

Landing on the stage with an audible *OOOF*, Luz felt all of the glyphs activate. As the surrounding area momentarily turned into the world’s brightest and blandest light show, dozens of vines sprouted from the glyphs and covered the fallen girl. Crawling out of the garden of vines, Luz tore herself free. Slowly getting to her feet, she cracked her neck before dusting a few stray flowers off her shirt and picking more of the stragglers out from her fanny pack.

“I still pass, right?” the basilisk asked Principal Bump, hopeful that the mess she caused didn’t disqualify her outright.

“Yes, you do,” Bump answered, walking over and handing her a pamphlet describing all the great tracks she could join. “Luz Noceda, I now welcome you as a member of the student body of Hexside School of Magic and Demonics.”

Gehetag 3, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

As Eda Luz flew to Hexside for Luz’s first day of school, the Owl Lady was busy giving some last-minute advice to the basilisk. Some of it was good:

“Your locker will eat you if given the chance.”

“Trouble guards won’t always be there to save you, so you might have to fight other students.”

“That said, don’t drain a student of their magic just because they called you names.”

Some of it was questionable at best, though:

“The quickest way to get out of an assignment you forgot to do is to say that your palisman ate it.”

“The detention pit’s favorite flavor of gelatin is spicy eyeballs.”

“To assert dominance, punch the first kid you see right in the schnoz.”

As Owlbert touched down at Hexside, Luz quickly hopped off the palisman, but Eda stopped her before she could head off to school. “One last thing, kid. Do you remember how to get to my shortcut room?”

Luz nodded. “Uh huh, I draw that keyhole thingy and push it in to get in the room.”

Eda smiled and ruffled the girl’s hair. “Good. If you ever get lost, overwhelmed, just want some alone time, whatever, go there.”

“Got it,” Luz nodded once and gave a thumbs up. As she turned to head off (for real this time), Eda stopped her once more.

“What, no goodbye?” the Owl Lady said.

Rolling her eyes, Luz ran up to the old witch and gave her a side hug, before the Owl Lady turned it into a full one. “You’re gonna do great, kid. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise, and if they do then I want you to kick their butt.”

“Thanks, Eda,” Luz said softly before breaking free from her mentor’s embrace and finally walking off to officially join Hexside.

While the basilisk moseyed down the path towards her new school, she pondered what classes she would be taking on the Beast Keeping track. Would she be getting up close and personal with all sorts of cute and creepy creatures, or would it be more like a ton of lectures with no actual animals? Those thoughts went by the wayside when she saw her friends lounging around the front steps of the school.

“Hi, Gus! Hey, Willow!” Luz called out to the two witches, running to catch up with them.

“Hello there, fellow classmate,” Willow said with a knowing wink.

“Congrats, Luz!” Gus added. Spinning up a spell circle, ***YOU’LL GET IT NEXT TIME*** appeared in shimmering blue text. Upon noticing his mistake, the illusionist quickly dispelled the message, not missing the glare that Willow was giving him. “Whoops, sorry. Wanted to make sure I had all my bases covered.”

“So,” Willow started, hoping to distract Luz, “are you ready to become a full-fledged student here at Hexside?”

“I can’t wait,” Luz replied, barely holding back a squeal of excitement. “It’s gonna be so awesome!” Pausing to steel herself, the basilisk then walked towards the large double doors that opened to Hexside proper. “Whelp, I’ve gotta go confront the big boss man about picking a track, so catch you guys on the flip side!”

“Good luck!” Willow encouraged her friend.

“You’ve got this!” Gus said, and he spun up another message, this time reading ***WE’RE CROW-CALLING ABOUT YOUR RATWORM’S EXTENDED WARRANTY***. As Willow leveled another glare at the boy, he quickly got rid of the illusion. “I’ll just... uh.. stop doing that.”

Stepping into Principal Bump’s office, Luz saw that the headmaster of Hexside was busy watching some news report on a crystal ball. The CB showed numerous witches, all of them in various states of consciousness strewn about on the ground, with most sharing unhealthily palid skin. Noticing the arrival of his newest student, Bump quickly shut the CB off before storing it away on the shelf to his side.

“Ahh, Miss Noceda, just the student I was looking for,” Bump started, his tone a bit too cheery for Luz’s liking.

“Heya, Princy B. Is it cool if I call you that?” Luz asked in a similarly upbeat manner, firing finger guns in his direction.

“No,” Bump responded flatly. “Now, on to the matter at hand. Or, really, two matters.”

Luz cocked an eyebrow before responding slowly. “Okay?”

“Firstly,” Bump started before clearing his throat and leaning over his desk, taking on a hushed voice. “Were you the one who attacked Glandus?”

“What.” Luz gave the older witch a blank stare. Was that Glandus that she’d seen on the CB? She probably didn’t recognize it given that she’d only been there once before.

“I won’t rat you out to the Emperor’s Coven, if that’s what scares you,” Bump continued.

“I think there’s been a misunderstanding,” Luz replied. “The last time I was at Glandus was for the grudgby game. I don’t have a grudge or anything against them.”

It was Bump’s turn to raise an eyebrow in confusion. “Oh, really? Well, that is certainly a development. I thought you had attacked them as revenge for losing the grudgby game.”

“Mr. Bump, I don’t even remember where Glandus is,” Luz said.

After leaning back in his chair, Bump spoke again. “Well, in that case my apologies for levying such an accusation against you. So, have you determined what track you would like to join?”

“Yup!” Luz responded. “I want to join the Beast Keeping track.”

Nodding in approval, Bump spun a quick spell circle, and Luz watched as the white sleeves and leggings of her uniform shifted to match the burnt orange of the Beast Keeping track. Reaching into a cabinet under his desk, Bump pulled out a sheet of paper and handed it to Luz. “Here is your class schedule. I suggest you hurry along, as your first class starts in. . .” Bump looked at his CB to check the time, “15 minutes.”

“That’s cool and all,” Luz said as she still had a question that she wanted answered, “but what are we gonna do about my cover story of a messed up bile sac?”

“I’ll have that taken care of,” Bump replied. “You’ll get all the accommodations that you need. I won’t have you failing a class just because you can’t cast a spell circle.”

Luz nodded. “Awesome. Thanks, Princy B!”

Bump opened his mouth to tell the basilisk not to call him that. However, by the time that he thought to do that, the girl had already run off. Sighing, the principal decided that now was a better time than ever to ensure that

the entire school was in tip-top shape for the Inspector from the Emperor's Coven.

Looking down at her schedule, Luz saw that the courses she would be taking were an interesting selection, to say the least.

Beastly Biology – Room 205 – Ms. Cassie Nascimento – 9:00-9:45

Caring for Mythical Creatures – Hexside Fields – Mr. Reb Livingstone – 10:00-10:45 – Class shared w/ Healing Track

Boiling Isles Fauna – Hexside Fields – Mr. Skullcrusher, Jr. – 11:00-11:45 – Class shared w/ Plant Track

Lunch – 12:00-12:45

Demon Wrangling 101 – Room 207 – Ms. D.D. Yearling – 1:00-1:45

Undead Beasts and You – Room 314 – Mx. Callum Tierheiler – 2:00-2:45

Dead Beasts and You – Room 315 – Mr. Acheron Bestatter – 3:00-3:45

Well, at least she knew when lunch was. Now she just needed to figure out where all the other classes were. Looking to see if there were any signs to point her in the right direction, she saw none. Darn. Whelp, time to see how friendly a random student is.

Approaching another student dressed in the orange of the Beast Keeping track, Luz introduced herself. “Hi. Umm, so I’m a new student here, and I’m looking for room 205. Where is that, exactly?”

“205 is down the north-east wing, past the second bank of lockers,” the student responded, pointing in the direction of the mentioned wing of the school. “Are you going there for Beastly Bio?”

“Yeah. I’ve got it with Ms. Nascimento first thing,” Luz said.

The other student whistled. “Dang, you’re lucky. I’m stuck with Bestatter, and he can’t teach bio to save his life.”

Luz recognized the name. “I’ve got Bestatter for Dead Beasts and You. Is he good in that class?”

The other student just shrugged. “I dunno, pretty sure it’s his first semester teaching the class.”

Luz sucked in a sharp breath. “That’s . . . great.” (It was not, in fact, great.) “Well, thanks for the directions.”

“No problem,” the other student replied.

Rounding the atrium, Luz walked over to the wing that the student had mentioned and past the first two sets of lockers. Yup, that was room 205, all right. Just in case Luz wasn’t sure she was at the right place, a plaque next to the classroom door said 205 on it.

Entering the room, Luz saw that about half of the seats had already been filled. Was there assigned seating in this class? She should probably ask, as she didn’t want to accidentally sit in someone else’s spot. Approaching Ms. Nascimento’s desk, she waited for the teacher to acknowledge her.

Looking up, Ms. Nascimento met Luz’s gaze and smiled. “Well, I haven’t seen you before. Are you Luz Noceda by chance?”

“Yup, that’s me,” the basilisk said in affirmation.

“Great. This class is very much theory-based,” Ms. Nascimento explained, “so your bile sac . . . situation won’t present much of an issue.”

“Oh, sweet!” Luz replied, before remembering why she came up here in the first place. “By the way, is there a seating chart or anything that I have to follow?”

“Nope, you can sit wherever. Just try not to be too disruptive, please,” the teacher answered.

“You’ve got it, teach,” Luz responded before going to claim a seat. Eventually settling on an open chair in the middle of the room, the basilisk readied herself for class.

In Luz’s opinion, her first class period had gone well. Ms. Nascimento’s “lecture” was mainly just ice-breakers and introductions for all the new students. There wasn’t much real content about the biology of beast demons, which kinda bummed Luz out. It seemed like a cool topic. However, Ms. Nascimento did let everyone leave class a few minutes early, so that was nice. Currently, Luz was trying to figure out where “Hexside Fields” was, but to no avail.

And then the bell screamed. In seconds, the relative quiet of the halls turned to pandemonium. As a mass of students filled the halls, Luz felt herself get swept up in the wave of witches and demons moving from one class to another. Nope, there were way too many people! Everything was so loud, and Luz couldn't even hear herself think. She needed to get out of here!

Breaking free from the crowd of students, Luz scrambled into an empty classroom. Grabbing a stray piece of chalk, the basilisk quickly sketched out the keyhole symbol that would lead to Eda's room of shortcuts. Pushing the square symbol, the chalkboard folded in on itself, opening a hole in the board that Luz could just barely fit through.

Grabbing onto the lower edge of the hole, Luz hoisted herself into the hallway that led to the room. Once she was fully in the hall, she turned around to see if there was a handle or anything that she had to pull to close the room off to the outside world, but there wasn't anything. Letting out a sigh of relief that she was free from the chaos of the halls, she turned back around to explore the room of shortcuts. That was, until she found herself face-to-face with a spell circle aimed right at her.

"You've got ten seconds to explain how you found this place, or this is the last room you'll ever see alive."

Chapter 34

Luz Makes Some Trouble

Gehetag 3, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

As Luz stared at the spell circle pointed in her face, she fought the urge to consume the spell. (Blowing her cover on her first day of school would *not* be cool.) Thankfully, the student dispelled the circle before Luz could gobble it up.

“Nah, I’m just kidding. I’m Viney!” The newly dubbed Viney offered a handshake, which Luz slowly accepted. As Viney withdrew her hand, Luz noticed that her sleeves were a shade of gray that Luz hadn’t seen before.

“Nice to meet you,” Luz responded. “If you don’t mind me asking, what’s with the gray sleeves?”

“Oh, these things?” Viney said, turning her arms this way and that, showing them off to Luz. “They mean that I’m stuck in the Detention Track.”

“The Detention... Track?” That was certainly new to Luz.

“Bump created it because the Detention Pit is still getting repaired. He wanted to keep all of us troublemakers wrangled in one spot so he stuck us all in an old classroom and called it the Detention Track,” Viney explained.

Rubbing at the back of her neck, Luz knew why the Pit was under repair. “I might have had something to do with the Pit breaking.”

Viney gasped. “No way! That was you?!”

“Yeah,” the basilisk responded, sucking in a breath through clenched teeth. “There was a Human Appreciation Society meeting, a rock going through a window, lots of stuff. It was this whole ordeal.”

“Well, I don’t know how you did it,” Viney said with a smile, “but thanks for breaking the Pit. It’s made detention way more fun.”

“You’re welcome?” Luz replied slowly, more of a question than a statement. Viney was *happy* to be in detention? Why was that?

“Follow me, I want you to meet the rest of the crew,” Viney said, grabbing Luz’s arm and dragging the basilisk along before she could argue. Eventually, the two stopped at the end of the hallway, the corridor opening to a spiral that led all the way up to the ceiling. Doors and platforms of all sorts of styles were scattered about randomly along the... tower? Where was this place, actually? Was it some kind of pocket dimension inside Hexside? That was probably a question to ask Eda when Luz got back to the Owl House after the school day ended.

As Luz admired the architecture, Viney called out to her fellow Detention Track students. “Oi! Jerbo, Barcus! Come on out!”

From behind a door above Luz, two figures appeared: one being a lanky male witch with pale skin and short, unkempt brown hair, the other being a... dog wearing a Hexside uniform?

“How do we know she won’t rat us out to Bump?” the lanky student said. (Luz was pretty sure that was Jerbo, because the dog student being named Barcus made way too much sense based on everything she had learned about the Isles.)

“She’s cool, Jerbo,” Viney responded. “Luz here is actually the one who broke the Detention Pit in the first place.”

Jerbo’s eyes grew wide. “Woah, really? In that case, there’s no doubt you belong with us troublemakers. Welcome to the Detention Track, Luz.”

“Slow your roll, Jerbo,” Viney interjected, holding up a hand to tell him to pause. “We need a total consensus before we let her in. What do you say, Barcus?”

<If she has already proven herself a troublemaker, then I say we let her stay,> Barcus woofed. Luz swore that she could actually hear actual intelligible sound underneath the growls and yips. The best way she could describe how it sounded was that it was like she was listening to music

and had two songs going at once, the audio overlapping, but still being able to pick out the lyrics from both songs.

“She’s in,” Jerbo translated for Viney.

<Plus, her aura is interesting. Strong, yet also silly, like a baby’s laughter,> the dog demon added.

“Aww, thanks. Strong and silly is totally my kind of vibe,” Luz said before Jerbo could translate.

Viney slowly turned to Luz, a shocked expression on her face. “Hold up, you can understand Barcus?”

“Yeah. Can you not?” Luz hoped that she hadn’t just accidentally something a little too basilisk-y.

“No,” Viney answered, drawing out the syllable. “Jerbo can, though, but that’s only because his great-great-great grandpa was a centaur. You sure you don’t have any demon blood in ya by chance?”

“Maybe? I’m not a huge genealogy buff,” Luz offered as an answer. She wasn’t necessarily lying, as she was part demon, after all.

“Well aren’t you full of mysteries, then,” Viney said in a chipper tone. “I would say ‘Welcome to the Detention Track,’ but given that you’re not actually in detention that won’t work. In that case, welcome to the... uhh... Troublemaker Troupe.”

Luz laughed. “That’s got a nice ring to it. Say, how did you guys get in detention anyway? I doubt they’d throw you in here for, like, liking school too much.”

“No, that’s pretty much exactly what happened,” Viney responded with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Wait, what? How does that make any sense?” Luz was confused to say the least.

“We all got busted for trying to mix different tracks of magic,” Viney explained with a harrumph.

That came as a surprise to Luz. “I mean, I know that there’s the whole ‘One witch, one coven’ thing, but I didn’t think Bump would actually enforce it so harshly at Hexside. What tracks were you combining to piss him off so much, anyway?”

“Well, I thought that mixing Beast Keeping and Healing would be a good idea,” Viney started. “I had Puddles, my pet griffin, help out with injured students in the Healing track. He’d help calm people down, offer treats to the younger kids, that kinda stuff. When Bump caught wind of that, though, he threw me in here and said that ‘wild animals cause more harm than good’. Except Puddles isn’t even wild! He’s only clawed my face four times in the past month, which is super low for him.”

That last statement concerned Luz. “How many times does Puddles normally claw your face?”

Viney thought about it for a while before responding. “Usually like... 9 or 10 times a month. He’s an absolute angel, though.”

“Sure...” Luz said slowly. “What about you, Jerbo? How’d you end up trapped here?”

“I wanted to combine Abominations and Plant magic,” Jerbo said. “Bump didn’t like that either. Apparently it’s fine for a regular Abomination to leave goopy footprints all over the place, but the second a plant-based Abomination starts tracking mud in the classroom, everyone loses their minds. It’s a double standard, I’m telling you!”

Barcus was the last of the crew to explain how he’d ended up in detention. *<I faced similar backlash to Jerbo when trying to blend Potions and Oracle magic together. Everything was going well until I made a teacher resign and that was when Bump had to step in. I had concocted a brew that was supposed to tell the winning lotto numbers, but what it actually ended up doing was predicting that the teacher would die within the week. Given, she did look at a painbow and have her body turned inside out, so at least my prediction was accurate.>*

Luz hoped that last part was a joke, but knowing the Isles it probably wasn’t.

“When we first found this place, we didn’t know what exactly to make of it,” Viney started, walking over to a door. “But when we realized that all these doors could take us anywhere in the school, we knew what we had to do.”

“And what’s that?” Luz asked, not entirely sure where Viney was going with this.

“Well, Bump didn’t like it when we studied multiple tracks of magic, right? So what if we used this room to study *all* the tracks?” Viney explained.

“So, you feel up for exploring beyond just Beast Keeping magic?” Viney asked with a grin.

“Heck yeah, let’s do it!” Luz responded with a fist pump.

Peeking through the door closest to her, Luz saw into a classroom. This door gave her a birds-eye view of the room, and based on all the cauldrons and alchemical ingredients, this was most likely where a potions track class was held. Most of the seats were already filled in, and the teacher was standing at the front of the room, a potion held in each hand.

As Luz watched on, the teacher began to speak. “Alright, everyone’s here, so I think we can start a few minutes early. Today we will be working on...” The teacher then threw down the potions, causing a cloud of smoke to appear and surround them. “Smoke bombs!”

<Mrs. Lulamoon always has a flair for the dramatic,> Barcus told Luz.

“I’ll always appreciate a teacher who knows how to have fun with what they teach,” Luz replied, nodding in approval.

Another door caught Luz’s attention. “Ooh, hello. Where does this one lead?” She thought aloud. Not waiting for an answer from the other troublemakers, Luz opened the door and peeked in.

Amity paced back and forth in the halls of Hexside. Sure, class was starting in a few minutes and her next class was on the other side of the school, but that wasn’t important right now. What *was* important right now was Amity figuring out how to deal with The Luz Problem.

The two had only known each other for what? A month, if that? Despite that, Luz was willing to face down a fully grown slitherbeast to protect Amity, and Luz *won the fight*. Yet the second the dust (or rather, the snow) had settled, she had just gone back to her normal, peppy self like she hadn’t just saved Amity’s life. Seeing Luz, brave, stupid, ~~cute~~ Luz, stand up for her made her feel... things. Things that Amity had never felt before. What really solidified those weird new feelings, though, was when Luz had gone searching through the giant snowbank just to find that silly little flower. Something about seeing the girl running around, covered head to toe in snow with the stupidest, cutest, most determined smile on her face really did something for Amity.

There was no way Luz hadn't noticed how Amity had practically turned red as a bloodfruit back on the Knee, and now the young Blight had no idea how to deal with that fact. When Luz had arrived earlier today, Amity had just run off before the basilisk could see her. Unfortunately, bolting whenever Luz got near her wasn't a very feasible plan, so she'd need to come up with something better.

Maybe she could just play it off like nothing happened? Then again, gaslighting her friend/crush/acquaintance seemed like a cruel thing to do, so that was off the table as well. Besides, from how the two had interacted before, it wasn't like Luz was completely oblivious to everything that happened around her. The girl was smarter than people gave her credit for, and if Amity started lying straight to her face then she'd probably end up getting immediately called out on her chicanery.

Unbeknownst to the young Blight, a door had opened in the ceiling above her.

Placing her back against a locker and sliding down until she was seated on the stone floor, Amity had no idea what to do. Burying her head in her hands, she let out a muffled groan. "Gah, this is all so confusing!"

The door closed quietly, leaving Amity alone to her thoughts.

Luz probably wasn't supposed to see that, but she couldn't help but wonder what Amity was looking so down in the dumps about. Plus, wasn't she supposed to be in class by now?

Wait...

Luz was also supposed to be in class, yet here she was messing around in Eda's shortcut room. Checking her phone, Luz saw that class was going to start in just five minutes! Picking a door at random, Luz threw it open and started running as fast as her legs could carry her.

As she sprinted through the halls, Luz hoped that she'd only be a few minutes late to class. Why did her classroom have to be all the way out in the fields of all places? Even though there was pretty much no way she was actually going to make it on time, the less late she was to class, the better.

Rounding a corner, Luz plowed straight into Principal Bump, knocking the both of them to the floor. Scrambling to get to her feet, she began apologizing profusely. "Oh my Titan. I am so sorry, Principal Bump."

Grabbing onto a nearby locker to pull himself up, Bump dusted his robe off before looking down at the young basilisk. “What are you in such a rush for, Miss Noceda?”

Quick, make up a cover story! Luz’s brain shouted at her. “Would you believe me if I said I got lost?”

“Normally, I would. One can easily get caught up in the twists and turns of these halls.” Bump waited a bit before continuing. “However, given that the class you should be in right now is *outside* the school, I feel it would be much harder to miss the giant gaggle of students crowded together.”

“Rats, I thought that would work,” Luz said to herself.

“I wasn’t born yesterday, Miss Noceda,” the principal replied. “Now, hurry along, but no running.”

Nodding in affirmation, Luz speedwalked to her next class.

Bump waited for the Inspector to show. She was supposed to be here at 10:00 sharp, yet it was 10:06 and there was no sign of her. For all the previous inspections, she had been prompt in her arrival, so the sudden tardiness was more than a little suspect. Tapping his foot impatiently, Bump decided to give the Inspector a few more minutes to show. Perhaps she was dealing with more pressing issues? That would make sense. Bump doubted that he could be on time for 20 years straight though, so he supposed that some slack was warranted. On the other hand, though, if he had set up the Paranatorium just for the Inspector to never show, then he would be mighty peeved.

After even more waiting, the principal moved to re-enter his school, only for the Inspector to finally make their grand entrance just as Bump’s hand grazed the door handle. As she stepped out of the swirling mass of blue magic, the Inspector bowed.

“Welcome to Hexside, Inspector,” Bump greeted the official, walking back down the steps to accompany her inside his school.

“Greetings, Headmaster,” the Inspector replied. Bump thought that was . . . odd. She had always referred to him by his given name before, so why the sudden change?

“If your school is up to standards,” the Inspector continued, “then the Emperor’s Coven will graciously continue its funding. If you don’t meet our

standard, though...”

Bump noticed the implied threat. Forcing a smile, he held the door for the Inspector as they both entered the school proper. Once he was behind her, though, Bump’s smile fell. Strange things were afoot at Hexside.

Number One found Hexside quite intriguing. Not because of any of the tasty morsels running about, though. Those things were a snail-bit a dozen, and she’d already had her fill at Glandus just a few hours prior. There was something else, or rather, *someone* else. A familiar scent clung to the walls of this school. The scent of her kind. One of the students here was not who they claimed to be, and based on how strong the scent was, they were likely still here in the school.

“Pardon the abruptness, Headmaster, but would it be okay if I was to sit in on a class before we go through with the presentation?” Number One inquired.

“I don’t see why not,” the principal responded, though Number One sensed the hesitation in his voice.

“Splendid,” Number One said.

Closing her eyes, she stilled her mind and focused on sensing if any of her kin were close. She’d had the ability to track the location of other nearby basilisks as far back as she could remember. Three and Four had said that it was some type of mutation and that it “invaded their privacy” whenever she used it. Two, conversely, claimed her ability was a gift from the Titan so that she could always find her family.

Oh, Two, you naive fool. He was far too trusting of the witches that had kept him in shackles. The second they put on a veneer of actually caring for him, he latched onto the idea that there was some good in those despicable creatures. What a surprise he was in for when the same witches he thought to be his friends would render him nothing more than a charred corpse when he tried to escape.

When Number One felt a mind respond to her search, she opened her eyes and smiled. “I think I’ll join one of the classes out in the fields. I feel some fresh air would do me some good.”

“Do you need directions, Inspector?” Number One didn’t miss how the principal was shifting on his heels.

“No, thank you. I can find my way by myself. You can return to your duties for now,” Number One said, shooing the man away. It was high time she finally met up with another one of her kind after all this time. With a determined gait, she set off for the fields.

So far, Caring for Mythical Creatures had been way more interesting than the one with Ms. Nascimento. If Mr. Livingstone had noticed that Luz had arrived late, he didn’t make a big fuss about it, so that was a win in Luz’s book. Just when the lesson was getting good, though, Principal Bump came over to the students and cleared his throat to get everyone’s attention.

“One second, class,” Mr. Livingstone said, before he and Bump walked off to talk in private.

Luz wasn’t quite sure what Bump would have to talk with the teacher for, but based on the way that Bump was repeatedly pointing at Luz, it was probably about her. Eventually, the conversation came to an end. Mr. Livingstone returned to his students, resuming his lesson on how to identify and treat different types of necrotic infections, while Bump pulled Luz away from the group.

“Follow me,” he said, and Luz followed. As the two got further and further from Hexside, Luz was starting to question why Bump had taken her out of class. Was she in trouble for something? Had he figured out about her meeting the kids from the Detention Track, or was it something else?

“So, are you gonna tell me why we’re walking into the middle of nowhere?” Luz finally settled on asking, breaking the silence.

Bump surveyed the area around the two of them. Deciding that they were now sufficiently far away from everyone else, the principal motioned for Luz to stop. Then, the principal suddenly wrapped Luz in a hug, causing the young girl to falter as she tried to figure out what was going on.

“Five, I can’t believe I finally found you,” Not-Bump said, releasing the hug. “How long have you been hiding as a student here? Have you seen Three or Four since the breakout? Last I saw, they were busy dragging Two to safety.”

“Today is literally my first day here, and no, I haven’t found Three or Four yet.” The lie slipped off Luz’s tongue smoothly. She had a feeling that it would be better if the other basilisk, Number One, presumably, didn’t know about Tre and Ivy staying with the Bat Queen.

“Well, at least we’ve found each other,” Number One said. “Tell me, when was the last time you’ve fed?”

“Just the other day, actually. I’ve worked my way into the family of a powerful witch and have slowly been siphoning magic from her,” Luz replied, further entrenching herself in a web of lies.

The other basilisk nodded and smiled. “Well aren’t you a fiendish little creature. I knew you would come to reason eventually. Those vermin touting themselves as the chosen of the Titan deserve nothing more than to have their very essence drained from them as they writhe in agony.”

That solidified it for Luz: Number One was off her rocker in the worst kind of way.

“Before I found you, I was going to raze this institution by myself,” Number One continued, “but now that I know you are here as well, we can divide and conquer. Return to your class and act as if nothing is out of the ordinary. When those snotty little witchlings have finished their presentation, I will strike out at the headmaster. Once those miscreants start running about, that is when you shall shed your disguise and join me. Together, we shall have our revenge!”

Before Luz could even respond to Number One’s mad ramblings, the greater basilisk had already assumed the form of the Inspector. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have a presentation to sit through.”

“Principal Bump! Principal Bump! Principal Bump!” Luz yelled as she ran into the witch’s office..

Bump looked up from his desk. “Yes, Miss Noceda?”

Not stopping to catch her breath, Luz began relaying her message as fast as she could. “The inspector lady! She’s actually the basilisk that attacked Glandus, and she’s gonna —”

“Attack Hexside as well. Yes, I’ve already figured that out,” Bump finished for her.

“Oh,” Luz said bluntly.

“I’m not stupid, Miss Noceda,” her principal said. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to finish locking down the school before the impostor realizes that the Paranatorium is completely empty.”

Walking over to a blank section on the wall, Bump cast a spell circle before slamming his palms against the wall. A series of runes and symbols emanated from his hands as the school's defense system activated, causing familiar red wards to appear from every archway and cover every door.

"There," Bump said with finality. "The intruder is now locked inside the Paranatorium and she can't hurt anyone."

Luz was a little apprehensive to start celebrating, though. "Okay, but now what are we gonna do? It's not like we can just leave her in there so that she'll slowly starve to death! That would be inhumane!"

Bump paused to think about that. "Yes, I suppose we are in quite the predicament." He then turned the question on Luz. "Given that we are dealing with one of your kind, what do you suggest we do?"

"Well, we're definitely not going to *Stanley Galaxy* her," Luz responded. "Trying to reform a bad guy through the power of love and forgiveness doesn't work when the bad guy is hell bent on consuming everyone's magic. I doubt the promise of 'good vibes and friendship' can make her change her mind. Although, there are other ways we can solve this problem. More... physical ways."

"Are you suggesting that we try to fight the intruder head on?" Bump asked.

"Not exactly," Luz replied with a mischievous grin, "but trust me. I've got a plan."

Chapter 35

Luz Communes With The Dead

Gehetag 3, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

Principal Bump watched on as Luz traced out the sigil to gain access to Edalyn's "Room of Shortcuts", as she called it. Of course the Owl Lady would teach her apprentice how to get into some sort of hidden pocket dimension inside the school. Back when he was Vice Principal of Hexside, Bump would routinely get tasked by Principal Faust with catching Edalyn in the act of one of her numerous pranks, but she would always manage to disappear just in the nick of time. Now, though, Bump knew how she managed to pull off so many of those escapes.

"Wait, wait, wait! Hold on!" Bump paused at Miss Noceda's sudden outburst. "I need to make sure there's... no wild animals loose in the room."

Bump gave Luz a flat stare. "What do you not want me to see?"

"There may or may not be a secret collection of students who are using the room to study all the tracks at once," Luz said, looking down at the floor. She really should have taken Eda up on that Lying to Authority Figures 101 lesson.

The principal sighed and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. "Of course there is. We'll deal with that once we've got our current... situation under control. One problem at a time."

“Cool,” Luz said. “In that case, let me go warn the others so they don’t try to do something stupid.”

Crawling through the hole, Luz entered the shortcut room. Making her way into the tower section, she saw Viney, Jerbo, and Barcus lounging about on a couch that had almost definitely been stolen from some sort of teacher’s lounge. “Hey, guys. Can I talk to you for a second?”

Getting up from her spot, Viney walked over to the young basilisk. “Yeah, what’s up?”

“Do you promise not to freak out?” Luz asked, deciding to try and not sugarcoat the situation.

“That depends,” Viney answered slowly. “What do you not want us to freak out about?”

Luz stumbled through her explanation. “Well, y’see, umm... There’s a greater basilisk inside the school who wants to kill everybody, but Bump managed to trap her inside the Paranatorium. And, well, we can’t exactly walk through the main doors because then she’d just kill us, so we kinda need to use the Room of Shortcuts to surprise her. Also, I had to tell Bump about this place, but I’m pretty sure he’s cool with it since we’re not using it for pranks.”

“A basilisk?” Viney questioned. “Huh, I guess my cousin wasn’t lying when they said a basilisk was running around St. Epiderm a few days back.”

“Yeah, and I’m pretty sure the one who attacked Glandus and the one Bump trapped are one and the same. So, do you guys feel up to the challenge of saving Hexside from near certain destruction?” Luz asked, hoping she’d made a compelling enough case. If a single one of the Detention trackers didn’t join in then Luz’s planning would be all for naught.

“Let’s do it!” Jerbo said excitedly. “This will definitely beat sitting around doing nothing.”

<I agree with Jerbo, so count me in as well,> Barcus said.

“Viney?” Luz asked hopefully.

“There’s no way I’m letting some giant slug ruin my education,” Viney responded. “What do you need us to do?”

Luz held up her index finger. “I’ll get to that, but I need to talk with Bump about something first.”

“Hey, Princy B. So, uhh, when I use my glyphs, where does the magic come from?” Luz inquired. “It’s not like there’s an invisible bile sac or anything to draw from, is there?”

“No, there is not,” the principal answered. “While I’m not certain, my best hypothesis would be that your glyphs draw power from the Titan itself.”

“Right, okay. Unrelated question: are greater basilisks able to eat raw Titan magic?” Luz asked as a follow up. While was pretty sure that she already knew what the answer would be, she didn’t want the Detention Trackers getting suspicious.

“I don’t like where you are going with this, Miss Noceda,” Bump intoned. “But to answer your question, I would assume not. None of the admittedly few texts I’ve read on the matter have ever mentioned a basilisk consuming something as dangerous as raw magic.”

“Hmmm, alright,” Luz said. “Viney, how many doors are there from here into the Paranatorium?”

“There’s four, I’m pretty sure. Three on ground level, and then one opens up from the ceiling over the stage,” Viney answered.

Luz nodded. “I can work with that.” Rubbing her hands together, she then made an announcement. “I think I’ve come up with a plan to save Hexside from the basilisk.”

“Yo,” Luz made her presence known to Number One, taking a seat on the edge of the stage, her legs dangling over the edge.

“Five? How did you get in here?” One asked, shocked at the sudden appearance. Slithering closer to the stage, she looked left and right, trying to see where her fellow basilisk could have come from.

“Don’t worry about that,” Luz replied. “I’m here to bust you out.”

One took on a snarky tone. “Ahh, yes. Please enlighten me on how you plan to do that. If you haven’t noticed, the only way out is blocked by an *impenetrable barrier*.”

“Really? Let me give it a shot.” Hopping off the stage, Luz walked over to the shimmering red ward over the double doors. After looking it up and down, she then mimicked trying to push the doors open.

Walking back to One, Luz crawled back up onto the stage. “Welp, I gave it all I got. That thing is not budging.”

“We’re going to die here,” One intoned after a few seconds of awkward silence.

“Well, if we are gonna die, then can I at least show you something cool I found?” Luz asked, batting her eyelashes to up the cuteness.

One rolled her eyes and grumbled. “Fine, what is it?”

“Watch this.” Pulling out her notepad of glyphs, Luz ripped a tiny light glyph off the first page. Activating the glyph, it crumbled into a small ball of light. Closing her mouth around the light ball, Luz pretended to drain its magic, but in actuality she just let it dissipate into nothingness.

“Ooh, that one was a lil bit spicy,” she said, hoping to add to the illusion. “Do you want one?”

“I’m not hungry,” One replied bluntly.

“Oh come on, at least try one!” Luz pleaded. “Please? For me?”

“Alright,” One relented, “but just the one.”

“Sweet!” Luz gave a celebratory fist pump. Tearing off the next glyph from her notepad, this one contained a much larger light glyph. Tapping it, a ball of light as big as Luz’s head formed. “Here ya go!”

One gobbled up the light ball, draining it of all its magic in under a second. Then, she started screaming. “IT BURNS! IT BURNS!”

“Viney, now!” Luz yelled, kicking off the next step of the plan.

As the greater basilisk thrashed about, she was suddenly blindsided by a griffin charging full speed in her direction. While Puddles still had all his momentum, he leapt through a door that Jerbo had opened, dragging One into the Room of Shortcuts. Luz watched as a pair of vines then grabbed One and yanked her through yet another door, though this door opened from the ceiling of the Paranatorium.

When Number One eventually crashed down onto the stage below, Jerbo then summoned a trio of abominations to hold her down. Walking over, Luz decided now was better than ever to apologize for what was about to go down. How much that apology would be worth was yet to be seen though.

“Hey there, One,” Luz started, kneeling down to be at eye-level. “So you know that whole thing you told me about killing Bump and then razing the

school? Change of plans, that's not gonna happen. Sorry. Barcus, you're up!"

As the abominations held One in place, Barcus uncorked a potion containing ground up sleeping nettles. Pouring the brew into Number One's mouth, Viney jumped in and wrapped her arms around the basilisk's jaw, holding it shut so she couldn't spit out the potion. Though One tried to fight back, Viney held fast, and One was eventually forced into swallowing the potion. Releasing her hold, Viney dashed away from the basilisk, making sure to stay out of magic draining range.

"You conniving, traitorous, no-good..." One directed at Luz, though her speech slurred as the sleeping nettles took effect. The greater basilisk was fighting a losing battle against both the abominations restraining her and the sleeping nettles working through her system. After a few seconds, she finally succumbed to the potion, entering a deep slumber that she would never wake from.

With One down for the count, it was up to Puddles to enact the last step of the plan. Biting through the rope that held up a cavalcade of sandbags, the payload was sent tumbling to the ground below, all of them on a collision course with the body of Number One. As the sandbags made contact, Luz turned away, not wanting to see the immediate aftermath. That didn't stop Luz from *hearing* what happened, though. That squishing sound would probably stick with her for the rest of life.

"I think I've just been scarred for life," Viney said plainly.

"Uh huh," Jerbo added, nodding along.

Barcus didn't say anything, but based on the 1000-yard stare he was sporting, he seemed to be handling it about as well as the rest of them.

Bump was somehow unfazed by what happened, though, as he nonchalantly brushed... something off his cloak. "Well, that was enough excitement for today. Miss Noceda, I want you to return to your scheduled class, and the rest of you should head back to the Detention track homeroom."

Luz was astounded at how little Bump seemed to care about what had transpired. "Dude, we just saved *the entire school* and you just expect us to act like nothing happened?!"

"Preferably, yes. I don't want to have to write up a report for the Emperor's Coven about all the damages. I'd like to keep this under wraps, as it were,"

Bump explained.

Luz groaned. “Let me reiterate: we just killed a greater basilisk who was threatening to kill everyone in the school. Don’t you think that’s deserving of something as thanks?”

Bump took a deep breath and sighed. “I suppose that’s fair. Name your reward.”

“Maybe you could, I don’t know, allow us to study multiple tracks of magic?” Luz suggested, shrugging her shoulders.

“Of course you’d suggest that,” Bump said with a wry smile. “This goes against every rule in the book, but I doubt that would stop any of you regardless. What tracks would you like to be in?”

“Woah, you’re actually doing this?” Viney asked, to which Bump nodded. “Then sign me up for Beast Keeping and Healing!”

“I’d like to join the Plant and Abomination tracks,” Jerbo added.

<Oracle and Potions, please,> Barcus said, his tail wagging happily at the prospect.

“I would have never guessed,” Bump said with a wry smile. Snapping his fingers, the three Detention Trackers watched as their uniforms shifted from drab gray over to the colors of their newly selected tracks.

“And you, Miss Noceda?” Bump asked, turning to face the basilisk. “Call it a hunch, but I get the feeling that you want to be a part of multiple tracks as well.”

“I do, Principal Bump,” Luz confirmed. “I want to be a study on the Beast Keeping, Healing, and Potions tracks.”

“Three tracks?” Bump wanted to make sure he hadn’t misheard her. “That’d be an awful lot of extra work that you’d be taking on. Are you sure about that?”

“I think I’m up for the task,” Luz said confidently.

“If you say so,” Bump replied. Spinning a quick spell circle, Luz’s uniform changed to reflect her new tracks. Her leggings shifted to the dark blue of the Healing track while her left sleeve turned to the shade of yellow representative of the Potions track. Only her right sleeve was untouched, remaining the orange indicative of her status on the Beast Keeping track.

“You will all start your new tracks next week,” Bump explained, before turning to face the Detention Trackers. “You three will spend the rest of this week in detention. Consider it your punishment for going behind my back and eavesdropping on classes. After the week is up, though, you’ll rejoin your classmates. Is that fair?”

“Fine by me,” Viney said with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Could’ve been worse, so I’ll take it,” Jerbo agreed. “I can’t wait to see the look on everyone’s face when we’re back in class.”

<Your terms are agreeable,> Barcus yipped.

“And as for you, Miss Noceda,” Bump continued, turning to face the young basilisk. “I do believe you should be in class right now, so I suggest you see to that sooner rather than later. I doubt your teachers would like it very much if you skipped the first day of class.”

Luz took that as her cue to see herself out of the Paranatorium. “Got it. Thanks, Princy B!”

Bump didn’t even bother to try and tell her to not use that nickname. Turning back to the Detention trackers, the principal shooed them away. “Go back to your homeroom, please. I’ve got a body to dispose of and it won’t be pretty.”

Gehetag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

“Ooh, ooh, just got an idea!” Luz exclaimed. “How about... this!” Concentrating on her morph, Luz felt a third eye sprout from the center of her forehead while her hair turned a dark shade of pink and worked itself into a bun.

“Hello, peasants,” Luz said, doing her best imitation of Boscha’s voice, though she cranked up the snooty-ness to an 11. “It is I, Boscha Riegel. I enjoy eating garbage and being a horrible person for no reason.” On the CB, Willow and Gus were barely able to contain their laughter at Luz making a mockery of the most annoying bully in all of Hexside.

While the three were supposed to be using the video call to work on homework together, it had slowly devolved into Luz morphing into various teachers and students and doing impressions of them. Unfortunately, an alarm on the CB went off, warning Luz that there was only 10 minutes until school started.

“Well, that’s my cue. See you at school, guys!” Luz bade her friends farewell, waving goodbye.

“Bye Luz!” Willow and Gus said at the same time as Luz left the call.

After quickly putting on her school uniform, Luz gathered her backpack and made sure she had all of her school supplies for all three tracks.

“I can still barely comprehend that Bumpykins is allowing you kids to take multiple tracks,” Eda commented from her spot on the couch. “Pretty sure Faust would have burst a blood vessel at the mere thought.”

“Faust?” Luz asked, not familiar with the name.

“The old principal of Hexside before Bump took over,” Eda explained, taking a swig of her apple blood. “The old coot was a huge stickler about rules and had a perpetual stick up his you-know-where. Bump was only the vice-principal back then, but he tried his darnedest to give the quote unquote ‘troublemakers’ a second chance that Faust didn’t.”

“Dang, that guy sounds like a pain,” Luz said. “I’m suddenly much more appreciative of Bump being principal.”

“Yeah, you’ve got it pretty good, kid. Don’t take it for granted. Wanna hitch a ride on Air Owlbert to get to school?” Eda offered, giving the palisman a chin rub with her index finger.

“Nah, I think I’m just gonna fly over by myself,” Luz responded.

Eda shrugged. “Your loss, kiddo.”

“I’ll be fine, Eda. It’s a three minute flight, if that,” Luz said.

Eda laughed. “I know. Just giving ya a hard time. Have a good day at school, kid.”

Looking through the window, Eda saw a red-tailed hawk take off in the direction of Hexside.

As the minutes ticked past, King tried distracting himself by setting up a battlefield of plushies, while Eda mindlessly scrolled Penstagram to pass the time. “I already feel the sadness setting in,” the tiny demon said from his post atop the couch.

“You’ll be fine, King. Luz will be back in a few hours,” Eda said, hoping to placate his fears about his ~~sister~~ friend not returning from school.

“Hey, party people!” Luz called out as she opened up the front door.

“I stand corrected,” Eda grumbled.

King gasped. “Luz!” Leaping down from the couch, he bolted over to the basilisk and climbed until he was on her shoulder. “I didn’t miss you one bit, but also never leave me again!”

“You’re back early,” Eda commented. “What’s with that?”

“There was a pixie outbreak in the North wing, so Bump canceled school for the day,” Luz explained.

“You youngins have got it so easy,” Eda said. “Back in my day, they didn’t cancel class. Even when –”

“MAIL’S HERE, HOOT HOOT!” Hooty screeched, snaking his way into the living room before barfing up the mail onto the rug. Eda shot the bird tube a death glare for getting the floor dirty.

As she pieced through the letters, sacrifices, offerings, and other miscellany, one advert stuck out to the Owl Lady. “**Bonesborough Carnival, 1 day only,**” she read aloud.

“Ooh, that sounds fun! Can we go to the carnival, Eda?” Luz said, putting on her best puppy dog eyes. “Please? School is canceled and King and I both have nothing to do. We can make memories that will last us a lifetime and that we can look back on fondly when we’re old and senile.”

Eda did her best to keep her expression nonplussed, but she eventually relented. “Fine, we can go to the carnival. I’m coming with you, though. You rascals need adult supervision.”

“You just wanna set up a scam stand and pickpocket people, don’t you?” Luz responded, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, yeah, but that’s besides the point,” Eda said, giving Luz an affectionate hair ruffle. “Alright. Adult responsibilities are taking a back seat today because we are heading to the carnival!”

As Luz explored the carnival grounds, she looked around, scouting all the potential rides she could go on, games she could play, and zany foods she could eat (and then undoubtedly regret eating later). She and King were currently all by their lonesome, as Eda had said that she “had a scam stand

to run” and that “you dang kids will get in the way of me hustling fools.” She did give the two of them 20 snails, though, so at least they had some cash in case they wanted to buy anything. In the midst of her exploration with King, Luz ran into a pair of familiar faces in Willow and Gus.

“Hey, guys! Fancy seeing you here,” Luz said, running over to them, with King trailing not far behind.

“Hi, Luz. Hey, King,” Willow said. “Can you believe our luck? The one day the carnival is in town and school gets canceled!”

“I know, right?” Gus added. “It’s almost like the universe knew we needed a break from all the traumatizing events that have happened recently.”

“Well, now that the quartet of coolness has reformed, where should we go?” Gus asked.

In response, Luz’s stomach rumbled, probably due to the fact that she actually hadn’t eaten anything for breakfast. “How about we get something to snack on while we wander?” the basilisk suggested. Eventually, the group found a stand selling fried orbs. What was in the orb? Luz wasn’t sure, but she did know that it was very tasty.

“King, you can pick where we go next,” Luz said. “Though no scarris wheel, please. I think riding that might make me toss my cookies.”

“You have cookies? Why didn’t I get any, then?” King complained.

“It’s an expression. It means that I’d throw up,” Luz explained.

After thinking about his choices, King came to a conclusion. “Let’s do the bumper carcasses!”

Luz smiled. “Yeah, that’s more my speed. To the bumper carcasses!”

After paying the entry fee, the group split into teams of two, and it would be Luz and King against Willow and Gus. Well, there were other people riding the carcasses as well, but that didn’t matter to the group of friends.

Mounting their carcass, Luz and King quickly familiarized themselves with the controls. The cadaver was piloted by leaning in whichever way the duo wanted the carcass to walk, and they could make the cadaver swing its arms around by bopping it on the head.

Leaning forward, Luz sent her team’s cadaver toward her opponents. “Prepare to feel the sting of defeat!” she announced boldly.

“You’ll be the one going down, Noceda!” Willow countered. “Face our wrath. WRAHHH!!!”

As her team’s carcass got within range of the other reanimated corpse, King began spamming the arm swinging action. Unfortunately, this sent the corpse’s arms flying around so fast that they actually detached from the corpse, landing on the other side of the combat arena.

Luz looked down at King. “Bruh.”

“Whoops?” King tried to play it off as an accident.

“The enemy is weakened!” Gus proclaimed. “Strike with a fury never before seen!” Marching the corpse forward, Willow sent its arms swinging in a slow, menacing pace.

“King, it’s been an honor to fight alongside you,” Luz said, accepting the inevitable defeat.

“What – what are you doing?” King was more than a little confused about what Luz was doing.

Luz shushed the tiny demon. “Shh. Let me be dramatic.” Releasing her grip on the cadaver, Luz spread her arms out, accepting Willow and Gus’ ferocious attack. As the corpse’s arms struck her side, Luz tumbled backwards and onto the hay below.

Looking down at the fallen basilisk, King hopped off the cadaver and helped Luz get back to her feet. “Sorry about breaking the corpse.”

Luz brushed it off. “Eh, it’s fine. Zombies can’t feel pain. At least, I think.”

“We are the cambions,” Gus sang as he dismounted his team’s corpse. Luz was pretty sure the young witch was trying to do a Freddie Aurum impression, but he was very much off key. “We are the cambions! No time to lose, ‘cause we are the cambions!”

“Gus, that’s not how the song goes,” Luz interrupted his musical number.

The illusionist faltered. “What do you mean ‘that’s not how the song goes’? What other lyrics would even make sense?”

Luz just blinked.

“Not going to answer that question, we should get moving along. Where should we head next?” Luz asked.

“Hmm... How about the Hall of Mirrors?” Willow suggested. “It depicts what alternate versions of you would look like.”

“Ooh, that does sound fun,” Luz commented. “Lead the way!”

Weaving their way through the crowds, Luz saw that the entrance to the Hall had been chained off. *Closed for reapers*, a placard hanging off the chain read. “‘Reapers’? Shouldn’t that say ‘repairs’?” Luz questioned.

“No, that sign just means that an army of mirror reapers has infested the hall,” Willow explained. When Luz looked even more confused than before, Willow took that as her cue to elaborate. “Mirror reapers are interdimensional beings that live in the reflections of our reality. If you touch a mirror possessed by a reaper then it will take over your body and trap you in the mirror in its place.”

“The Boiling Isles never fails to surprise me,” Luz said. “I always think I’ve seen the craziest thing the Demon Realm has to offer, but then it gets one upped by something even more insane.”

“That’s part of the fun!” King said gleefully.

Luz giggled and gave the demon a noogie. “Sure thing, buddy.” Rubbing her hands together, she looked around, seeing if any of the nearby stands caught her eye. “The Hall of Mirrors is a bust, so let’s see what else this place has in store.” Heading off in a random direction, Luz let her next stop be decided by the fates.

That was until Gus saw someone he recognized running one of the stands. “No way, is that Miss Luceritus! Miss Luceritus! Hi!”

“Well hello to you too, Gus,” Luceritus said as the boy ran up to her. She then saw who was following behind him. “And Willow, as well? I swear, you two are inseparable.”

Catching up to her friends, Luz saw that this stand was called *Resurrections R Us*. Since the basilisk had no idea who Willow and Gus were actually talking to, she let them lead the conversation.

“Hello, Miss Luceritus,” Willow greeted the elderly witch with a wave.

“Hello to you too, dear. Though, I don’t think I’ve seen you two in this neck of the Isles before,” Luceritus continued, looking past Willow and Gus and focusing on Luz and King. “Who might you be?”

Stepping up next to Willow and Gus, Luz introduced herself and her favorite partner-in-crime. “Hi, miss. I’m Luz, and the goofball back there is King.”

Luceritus nodded. “Nice to meet you two.”

Clearing her throat, the carny then put on an exaggerated accent that Luz thought was a little over the top for her liking. “I am The Great Luceritus. I am a master in the art of divination, a necromancer extraordinaire, and also your local weather forecaster on the weekdays for BNN.”

She then dropped the accent and resumed talking like a normal person. “Alright, kids, who do you want me to bring back? Given, I don’t want to use up all my magic before lunchtime, so you’re all getting 5 minutes with a single resurrection of your choosing.”

“I’d like to talk with my mom, please,” Gus requested.

“Creature of habit, aren’t ya?” Luceritus said with a laugh, before spinning up a spell circle. “One Siobhan Porter, coming up.”

Luz watched as a ghastly apparition rose from the ground in front of the booth. Initially a formless blob, it twisted and morphed until it settled on the form of a witch.

“Hi, Mom,” Gus greeted the ghost. (*I wonder what the right term is? Luz thought. Ghoul? Spirit? Something else entirely?*)

“Really? We haven’t chatted in months, and all you can muster up is a measly ‘Hi’,” Siobhan said with a scowl. Eventually, the grumpy facade fell, and the two burst into fits of laughter before walking off to carry on their conversation in private.

“Alright, Park, which grandparent do you want me to bring up?” the necromancer asked Willow.

“Hmm. . .” Willow tapped at her chin as she contemplated her options. “How about Grandpa Fabian this time around?”

“Spicing it up a little bit, I see,” Luceritus commented before casting another spell circle and causing another apparition to form.

Once Fabian had fully taken shape, the first thing he did was give his regards to his summoner. “Thank you kindly, Luceritus. How much time do I have with my Petal before I have to go back?”

Luceritus brushed off the compliment. “Eh, it’s no skin off my back. As for time? You’ve got a little under 5 minutes now.”

Fabian looked flabbergasted at how little time he had with his granddaughter. “Five minutes? Then we’ve got no time for dilly-dallying! Come along, Petal. I’ve got some burning questions that need answering. First: has Gilbert tried out that recipe I left for him in my will? If he hasn’t, then I want you to give him a proper tongue lashing. Tell him to stop being a coward and to make my Seven-Layer Bean Dip of Hell.”

Luceritus looked at the last two kids remaining. “Which one of you wants to go next?”

“You can go, King,” Luz said, sweeping her hand towards the booth.

With a grunt of effort (*Aww, cute*, Luz thought), King clambered up onto the counter. “The King of Demons is ready to meet his newest undead minion,” he proclaimed.

“Yeah, that’s not how this works,” Luceritus explained. “I’m not gonna resurrect some random dead witch just so you can boss ’em around for 5 minutes. A friend who met an early demise, a deceased parent, an ancestor from generations back, those I’ll do. I’ll ask again: who do you want to talk to?”

Now that the rules had been clarified for him, King thought for a few seconds. Maybe the reason he’d never heard from his parents was because they’d both beefed it before he could meet either of them. While it was a grisly thought, this could at least offer some sort of answer.

“I want to talk to one of my parents,” King said with finality.

“That’s more like it. Got a name for either of ’em?” the necromancer asked.

“Oh, uhh... no,” the tiny demon replied sheepishly.

Luceritus exhaled sharply. “Well, that’ll throw a spanner in the works.” Then, an idea struck her. “Would you mind if I take a look at your Soul Mark, then? That should have some information about your parents. It will make the search easier if I at least have something to go off.”

“I’ve got no idea what that is, but the King of Demons isn’t scared so bring it on.” King put his paws on his hips and took on a brave face.

Spinning up a spell circle, Luceritus looked deep into King’s eyes. The elderly witch stayed motionless, seemingly transfixed by whatever she was seeing.

Suddenly, she seemed to snap back to reality, jerking away and blinking rapidly.

“Kid,” Luceritus started, “I’m not sure how to break this too ya, but . . . your soul is messed up.”

The statement drew an audible “weh!” from King. “Whaddya mean, ‘messed up’?”

“All I saw was just a bunch of circles and triangles and such. Nothing I could actually translate,” the necromancer explained. “Even if your mom and pops really are in the Below, I wouldn’t be able to find ’em. Sorry, kid.”

“Don’t think of it like a bad thing, King,” Luz chimed in. “Think of it like a mystery we’re gonna solve together.”

“Yeah,” King replied. “I like that. Thanks, Luz!”

“And then there was one,” Luceritus said in a faux-ominous voice, looking over in Luz’s direction. “Who do you want me to call up?”

Luz rocked ever so slightly on her heels. “Actually, uh, I have a quick question, if you don’t mind. When you’re looking for a person’s soul, can you only find souls from the Demon Realm, or do souls from, like, the Human Realm show up as well?”

“Only souls from the Demon Realm. Souls from the Human Realm don’t stick around in the Below long enough to be catalogued,” Luceritus answered nonchalantly. “Why do you wanna know, anyway?”

“I was just curious, that’s all,” Luz said quickly.

Luceritus gave Luz a skeptical look. “Right. So, name?”

“I know this might be a long shot, but could you find my dad? His name is Manny. Manny Noceda.” If this all worked out, then Luz would at least one question about her life answered within the next five minutes.

The necromancer cocked an eyebrow. “Noceda, huh? That name ain’t too common ’round these parts, so the search should be pretty quick. Give me a minute, I’ll see if I can find your old man.” Luz waited with bated breath as Luceritus worked her (literal) magic. Then, before her very eyes, the ghost of her father took form.

Luz couldn’t control herself. “Papi!” Running forward, she tried to hug her father, only for her entire body to pass through like he wasn’t there at all.

Stumbling to catch herself from eating dirt, she watched as Manny slowly turned to face her. While Luz would have expected him to be happy about being able to see his daughter, the look on his face dashed those hopes. Though he was trying to put on a brave face, Luz could see that he was sad and afraid.

“Luz? Oh God no.” Manny said, slowly walking towards his daughter. “What are you doing here?”

“Uh, having fun at a carnival?” Luz replied, though it was more a question than a statement.

“No, no, no, no, no. I mean the Isles,” Manny clarified. “What are you doing on the Boiling Isles?” He tried to grab Luz’s shoulders, but his hands just phased through. “You need to go back home. Right now.”

Luz was shocked by his statement. “What? No! I’m not gonna abandon Eda. I’m not gonna abandon King. I’m not gonna abandon Willow or Gus or Amity. For the first time in my life, I actually have friends. Heck, I’m learning magic! I can’t just leave that all behind and act like it never happened. I’m not leaving, and there’s nothing you can do to convince me otherwise.”

“God, I wish you never inherited my stubbornness sometimes. Does Camila even know you’re here?” Manny asked pointedly.

“No,” Luz replied slowly, taking a step back to put more space between the two of them. “She thinks I’m off at some summer camp.”

Manny sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Of course she does.”

Raising his head, he looked Luz in the eyes. “Do you want to know why I never told you about the Isles? Because I just wanted you to have a normal, safe, *human* life. When you were born, I prayed to God, the Titan, whoever was listening, that you would never know what you really were. I prayed that you would always think you were just another human with nothing weird or magical about you and that we were just a normal, non-magical family. It was selfish of me to think that, though. I let all the horror stories Mom would tell me distort how I saw this place. I tricked myself into thinking that if you ever found a way to the Isles that it would be the twisted version that I had in my head and not how it really is. I guess what I’m trying to say is this. I’m sorry, Luz. I am so, so sorry. I lied to you. I lied to Camila. Hell, I lied to myself. I just hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”

Manny slowly exhaled, looking at the forest that surrounded him. While it wasn't like the picturesque fairy tales that he had read to Luz back in her younger years, the forests of the Isles still had their own unique charm. "You know, I forgot how pretty this place could be. Thank you for letting me see it one last time, Luz."

With that final goodbye, the ghost of Manny Noceda vanished.

Chapter 36

Amity Commits Mind Arson

Gehetag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Bonesborough Carnival

Luz stared at the spot where her father's ghost had been. She didn't even get a chance to really say goodbye to him. There was so much more that she wanted to tell him about, but that five minute timer had ran down too fast for her liking, and now her dad was gone. Again.

Taking in a slow, shaky breath, Luz scooped up King in her arms and gave him a tight hug. While the tiny demon initially retaliated against the move, he eventually gave in, wrapping a paw around Luz's back.

Returning to the Resurrections R' Us stand, Luz found that Willow and Gus were there waiting patiently, though Luceritus was nowhere to be found. Noticing Luz's somber look, Willow pulled the girl aside. "Are you good? You aren't looking the best."

Luz took a deep breath, trying to figure out how best to explain that her entire childhood had just been flipped on its head. "I, uh, talked with my dad, and he told me about.. everything." She forced a smile. "But hey, at least I know who I got my basilisk side from. Woohoo." Her fake enthusiasm didn't even convince herself.

The basilisk licked her lips, as they'd gone unusually dry. "Is it okay with you guys if I head home? I've got a lot on my mind. I don't think I'm really up for more carnival fun."

"What? Of course that's fine, Luz," Willow responded.

“Yeah,” Gus agreed. “I know that if my life got a bombshell dropped on it then I’d spend at least the next three days cooped up in the house eating eye scream and watching cringe-worthy CB shows.”

Luz laughed. A real one, this time. “Thanks for that, guys.” She then turned to the demon who stood beside her. “Come on, King. Let’s go find Eda and free her from whatever carnival jail she got caught in.”

Miraculously, Eda had avoided getting sent to carnival jail and was still running her scam stand. Once the Owl Lady saw the two approaching, she shooed away all her customers, threatening the last few stragglers with a whack from Owlbert.

“So, how was your day at the carnival?” Eda asked, propping her elbow up on the table.

“It was. . . fun,” Luz answered slowly. “King and I met up with Willow and Gus and had fun with the bumper carcasses and stuff, but then we went to the necromancer lady.”

“Necromancer lady?” Eda questioned, not familiar with who Luz was talking about.

“Yeah,” King answered in Luz’s stead. “Miss Lucy-tus or something. She said that my soul looks funny!”

“Right,” Eda responded. “That’s definitely normal. What about you, kiddo?”

“Oh, y’know, I just talked with my old man,” Luz said in a nonchalant tone, doing her best to hide her true emotions. “He told me that he had kept the fact that he was a basilisk from both me and my mom our entire lives, so I’m doing just peachy!”

Eda could tell that her kid was definitely *not* peachy. “Say, how about we blow this Popsicle stand and head home? There’s probably some trashy CB shows we can watch.”

“Yeah,” Luz replied. “Yeah, I’d like that. Thanks, Eda.”

“Eh, don’t sweat it kiddo.”

Kriegstag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

“1, 2, 3, 4, I declare a thumb war!” Luz and Willow chanted at the same time before starting the battle proper. Both contestants had smiley faces drawn on their thumbs, though the ink was smudged from the numerous battles. While the two thumbs grappled, Gus kept close watch on the contest, as he had been appointed referee and was tasked with counting the pins.

As the battle wore on, Luz found herself slowly being backed into a corner, with Willow managing to pin the basilisk’s thumb every time she tried to escape. Then, though, Luz got a sneaky idea. As Willow pinned Luz’s thumb yet again, Gus started the three count, only to stop when he realized something was off: Luz’s thumb was gone. Since her thumb was no longer being pinned on account of it not existing, Gus called a ceasefire between the two parties and called the match in Willow’s favor.

“What! That’s such bologna! She never got the three count!” Luz protested when Gus announced the decision.

“Yeah, but using your abilities to cheat means you lose,” Gus countered.

“How was it cheating, though?,” Luz said, trying to plead her case. “There’s nothing in the rule book that says you can’t morph your thumb out of existence.”

“There is no rule book, and since I’m the ref I get to decide what’s cheating, so you cheated and Willow wins,” Gus explained.

“Fine,” Luz pouted, before turning to her opponent and offering a handshake, her thumb having magically reappeared. “Good match, Willow.”

“Yeah, that was fun!” the plant witch said with a smile. “Just the right amount of stupid, if you ask me.”

“Well would you look at that, it’s Half-A-Witch and Half-A-Sac,” an annoyingly familiar voice said. “Maybe if you two merged together you could form a competent witch that can actually do magic.”

Luz turned to face Boscha. “I’m sorry, do you want to repeat that? What is it that you just called Willow?”

Boscha laughed, haughty and high pitched. “Please, I’m pretty sure my magical abilities are weakening just by being near you two.”

“I can show you weakened,” Luz threatened, taking a step towards the bully, only to find that Gus and Willow had grabbed a hold of her to stop her from doing something incredibly stupid.

“Oh no, I’m so scared,” Boscha mocked, before laughing again and walking off. “If you’ll excuse me, I need to go be around actually talented witches, not you gutter dwellers.”

Once Boscha had rounded the corner and been gone for nearly half a minute, Willow and Gus finally let Luz go. “I wanna punch her right in her stupid face,” Luz commented.

“We all do,” Gus replied, “but her moms are some of the biggest private funders of the school, so they could probably get us expelled in minutes.”

“Well, if it’ll make you feel better, at least you and I have got photo class today,” Willow said.

That certainly piqued Luz’s interest. “Ooh, are we going to be taking pictures of cool things we can find around the Isles?”

“Not necessarily,” Willow said. “Bump only pulls out photo classes when a teacher goes down and nobody can cover for them. Since Mr. Skullcrusher is still recovering from the pixie attack yesterday, Bump said we’d have photo class instead.”

Luz nodded. “Alright, alright, I’m picking up what you’re putting down. So, what do we actually do in photo class, then?”

Willow smirked. “You’ll just have to wait and find out. I don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

“I’ll have to admit, this was not what I had in mind,” Luz said as she prepared for Willow to extract a memory from her head.

“What did you have in mind?” Willow asked as she cleaned off the memory tweezers.

Luz just shrugged. “To be honest, I’m not really sure. So, are ya ready to pull out a nice juicy memory?”

“Yep,” Willow said. “Alright, Luz’s brain, prepare to be picked.”

As the tweezers entered Luz’s ear canal, she fought down the urge to shudder as the cold metal pressed against the inside of her ear. Suddenly, though, she felt an oddly warm sensation.

“I got one!” Willow said happily.

Was this the physical manifestation of a memory that Luz was feeling? Heh, it felt weird. When Willow fully removed the tweezers from Luz's ear canal, the two watched as the viscous blob of magic formed into the shape of a photograph. Unfortunately, neither of the two could make out what was actually in the photo, as it was just a mess of different shades of whites and grays.

"Well, phooey. I wanted to see a cool shot of myself looking like an action hero or something," Luz lamented.

Willow called over the teacher, intent on finding out why the memory was so odd looking. "Excuse me, Ms. Daguerre? Why does the memory look... fuzzy?"

The triclops scuttled over to the pair's table and eyed the photograph. "Well, that'd be because the memory is very influential. Since it is more detailed, it'll take longer to develop than a less significant memory. I'd suggest you try again, but go for something less... impactful. Oh, and just as a warning: when you extract a memory, be very careful as to not damage the photograph. Damaging the photo will damage the memory itself, which could cause nigh irreparable damage."

Luz nodded and gave a thumbs up to show that she understood to not tamper with any of the pics. "Got it. Thanks, teach!"

As the minutes passed, more and more memories were extracted from Luz's brain and turned into photographs drying on the line. There were a few that Willow recognized from their adventures together, such as the moonlight conjuring debacle and the time that Luz snuck into Hexside as her abomination. Then, there were the memories that Willow hadn't personally been a part of but Luz still had a fond recollection of, such as one where she had gone through her first shed.

However, as more memories were extracted from Luz's brain, a worrying trend started to appear. Most of the memories that took place on the Isles were positive ones, but memories related to the Human Realm were almost all negative.

Overdoing it with the practical effects for a play. Grossing out the others during her attempt at joining the cheer squad. Getting banned from art class for having an anatomically accurate griffin taxidermy. Being rejected after asking a girl out to some weird version of Grom.

As the class drew to an end, there was room on the drying line for one final

photograph.

“Alrighty, let’s see what we’re gonna end with,” Luz said, rubbing her hands together in anticipation. When Willow inserted the memory tweezers into Luz’s ear, the basilisk had a weird feeling wash over her. It was like the tweezers were going deeper than normal. Extracting the memory, the two watched as it formed into a photograph, though this was one was another blurry mess.

Luz didn’t need to wait for this one to finish developing for her to know what it was from. “Oh.”

Willow paused as she moved to hang the photo. “What do you mean ‘oh’?”

“That’s from –” Luz swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat. “That’s from my dad’s funeral. It was a few years back and, that was the first time I really understood when Mami said that Papi was gone.”

She then put on a happy facade. “I’m totally fine, though. Like, it was years ago, so it doesn’t affect me anymore. Besides, I talked to Papi’s ghost yesterday and he revealed that he’d been lying to me my entire life about what I am, so I’m definitely not going through a mental health crisis right now.”

“Right.” Willow responded, not fooled at all by her friend. “How about we go get some lunch? I’m pretty sure the lunch ghouls are serving ratworm today.”

Luz forced a smile. “Sure. I could go for one of those bad boys.”

When Amity was walking to the lunchroom, she would have never expected to see a picture of herself and Luz hanging in a classroom, yet that was what she saw right in front of her. Looking around, she made sure that no one saw her before she stepped into the room.

Approaching the picture, Amity gently pulled it down from the line. The picture was of that trip the two had taken up to the Knee. Specifically, the photo showed the moment when Luz had found that silly little flower and tucked it behind Amity’s ear.

(The fact that the flower was a gift from Luz had absolutely no bearing on the fact that Amity had saved it.)

Still, there was no way that Luz actually reciprocated the feelings that Amity had for her. The two were friends, and that's all they would ever be. Amity knew what she had to do: destroy the evidence that suggested otherwise.

Summoning a flame at the tip of her finger, Amity held it up to the picture. As the photo caught fire, the witch lamented that she would be burning one of Luz's memories. It was for the better, though. If Luz never knew that Amity had feelings for her, then the two could go on just being friends and there would never be anything that would challenge the status quo of their relationship.

Once the photo had been sufficiently torched, Amity blew on the picture to put out the last remaining flames. While the borders of the photograph had remained intact, Amity's blushing face had been burnt from existence. Her dirty deed complete, Amity turned to leave. After all, lunch waited for no witch.

Amity sniffed at the air. Was something burning? Turning around, she saw a horrific sight: the Knee memory had somehow reignited, and now the rest of the memories hanging on the line were at risk of catching fire as well.

"Oh no."

For some inexplicable reason, Luz was very hot. She also had no idea where she was, but that was a problem for later. It was like her insides were on fire, but also not at the same time. It was a weird feeling.

Ooh, there was a glass of water in front of her. Maybe that would help. Sending out a mental apology to whoever's water this was (Maybe it was hers?) she downed it in one gulp. While the agua did help a little bit, she could still feel the heat, and it was *spreading*.

"Luz, are you, uh, okay?" Someone in front of her said.

"Huh?" Luz oh so eloquently replied.

Blinking fervently to make her eyes focus, Luz eventually saw that there were two people across the table from her. One of them was a shorter kid, while the other had a pair of glasses on. Also, both of them were elves.

"I said, 'Are you okay?'" Glasses repeated.

"I mean, I'm a lil hot, but nothing too bad." Luz responded, brushing it off like she couldn't feel the fire inside of her spreading. "Is this some kind of

dream, Miss Elf Lady?”

Glasses looked over at Shorty, a worried expression on her face. Glasses then asked Luz another question. “Luz, what’s my name?”

Well dang that was a curveball that Luz wasn’t expecting. “Uhh... Tatiana?”

Glasses scowled. “No. That’s – that’s not even close. My name is Willow.”

Shorty then decided that it was his turn to ask Luz weird questions. “Ooh, ooh, Luz guess what *my* name is.”

Before Luz could answer, Glasses Willow had elbowed Shorty in the side. “Now is not the time to be messing around, Gus! Luz’s memory is all... Wait a minute! *Luz’s memory is all messed up!*”

“Your name is Gus?” Luz questioned, her brain not yet having processed what Willow just said. “I pegged you as more of an Isaac.”

Willow waved her hand in front of Luz’s face drawing no reaction from the basilisk. “Yeah she’s not in the right state of mind, and I think I have an idea why.”

Grabbing Luz’s arm, Willow then dragged the very confused human with her out of the lunch room and down the hallway. Gus, not wanting to be left out of the fun, ran after the two.

Stopping in front of some random door, Willow then threw it open. A billow of smoke poured out from the top of the door frame. *Inside is a weird place for a campfire*, Luz thought. Willow then pulled Luz into the room. There were two things that stuck out to Luz inside the room: one was a set of pictures that were burning (*Huh, so that’s where the fire is coming from*, she thought.) and the other was the girl that was busy trying to put out the fires.

Cute elf hehe. Luz was pretty sure that she had never seen someone so absolutely adorable. The human was transfixed by the sight of the emerald-haired elf.

“Amity?!” Willow gasped, snapping Luz out of her daydreaming session.

Cute name for a cute girl, Luz added mentally.

Amity, as the green-haired elf was apparently called, yelped in surprise at being caught. “It’s not what it looks like!”

“Really?” Willow snarked. “Because it sure looks like you set Luz’s mind on fire.”

“Well when you say it like that it makes it sound bad,” Amity said.

“That’s because it is!” Willow shouted. “Did you not think even for a second before you decided to set Luz’s memory ablaze?”

“HEXSIDE FREE PRESS! Everyone put your hands where I can see ’em!” Gus yelled, leaping into the room with a dramatic flourish.

Amity complied, raising her arms above her head and dropping the photo she held in her hand. As the memory fluttered to the ground, a stray ember landed on the photo, burning it into a pile of ash.

“Why do memories have to be so flammable,” Amity lamented.

“Don’t worry, cutie.” Luz said, slinging an arm over Amity’s shoulder. “The only thing burning more than my memories is my heart.”

“Ok, we need to get you to the Owl House right now.” Willow said, dragging Luz out of the room.

As Willow, Amity, and Gus carried Luz to the front of the Owl House, they were stopped when Hooty snaked his face (Or was it his neck?) over to the group. “What are you four rascals doing outside of school?”

“Hooty, let us in. Luz needs help,” Amity pleaded.

“Woah. Am I a mermaid? Hehe splish splash.” Looking down, Amity saw that Luz’s legs had fused together into a tail, forcing Gus to adjust his grip on the basilisk’s lower half.

“Please, Hooty,” Amity added.

“Hmm... Okay!” Hooty said cheerfully. The front door swung open, and the trio carried Luz into the Owl House proper.

“Hooty, what have I told you about letting people –” Eda called out as she went to see what thief the bird tube had just let into her house. When she saw who was standing in her living room, though, she rushed over. “What the - Luz?! What’s going on?”

As the kids deposited Luz onto the couch, Amity took it upon herself to explain what had transpired. “I... umm... so you see... I may have

burned up most of Luz's memories. By accident. Mostly."

Eda blinked as she processed what she had just heard. Then, she grew angry. "Mostly? You mean to tell me that you set my daughter's *mind on fire on purpose.*"

"I'm your daughter?" Luz questioned. "Does that mean I have two moms?"

"Ah muck, you weren't supposed to hear that. That's a question for later, kid. Sleep spell!" Eda said hurriedly before casting the mentioned spell on Luz, causing her to collapse back onto the couch face first.

Eda then turned to the remaining conscious kids. "If any of you mention that I referred to Luz as my daughter I will skin you alive, got it?"

Three heads quickly nodded.

Eda took a deep breath, then exhaled. "Alright. You three are going to be doing something that is incredibly dangerous and also highly illegal: I'm going to send you into Luz's mind and you're going to repair the damage."

"All three of us?" Gus questioned.

"Well I'm sending in Blight to make sure she fixes all the chaos she caused, but you and Park are going to be there as well to make sure nothing goes haywire," Eda explained.

"I'm not getting out of this, am I?" Amity said softly.

"No," Eda deadpanned. She then summoned a bell and handed it to Willow. "Once you three have sorted everything out, give that bell a ring or two and I'll pull you out."

Then, Eda remembered one final piece of advice. "Oh, and be on the lookout for the Inner Luz. She's the gatekeeper of Luz's memories, so she might be able to help you out. Alright, that's everything. Good luck and try not to die!"

With that final warning, Eda drew a spell circle that encased the three kids before it shrank down and floated into Luz's brain.

Kneeling down, Eda put her forehead against Luz's. "You better make it out of this thing in one piece, kid."

Chapter 37

The Gang Explores the Insides of Luz's Brain

Kriegstag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

King slowly crept down the stairs from his bedroom and down to the main floor. He had just awoken from a nap to find the house eerily quiet except for the sound of footsteps coming from the floor below. There were no obnoxious commercials blaring on the CB, no telltale bubbling sounds of Eda working on her latest potion order, no chatter of Luz talking with her friends about what happened at school. There was nothing. Just footsteps.

Finding the kitchen empty, King turned to enter the living room, only to see Eda pacing back and forth, wringing her hands and muttering to herself. And then he saw Luz, face down on the couch, seemingly unconscious.

"Eda?" King opened with, breaking the silence.

The sudden noise seemed to jolt Eda out of whatever trance she was in. "King? Mother of Titan, you nearly scared the bile out of me."

"What's going on?" King asked, to which Eda let out a long sigh.

The Owl Lady did her best to explain the situation at hand. "The long and short of it is that Luz's brain is really, *really*, messed up right now. The Blight kid was messing around with some memory photos taken from Luz, and she quote 'burned them up accidentally, mostly' unquote. Right now, baby Blight, as well as Glasses and Goops, are rooting around in Luz's mind

trying to fix everything. Us, though? We'll just have to play the waiting game until one of those kids rings a bell I gave them."

King nervously twiddled his claws, his tail curling around his leg. "Is - Is Luz going to be okay?"

Eda knelt down and wrapped King in a hug. "Luz will be just fine, King. She's a fighter, and a tough one at that, so I doubt a little memory burning will keep her down for too long."

Late June (maybe? Early July?), 2021 | The Mindscape of Luz Noceda

As the trio of Willow, Gus, and Amity gathered their bearings, they found themselves in a black void, seemingly floating in a giant blob of... nothing. Then, ground rushed up to meet them, and the three collapsed onto soft grass. Grass that was green, Amity noticed, not the normal red that she was used to. The young Blight was the first to get to her feet, while Willow helped Gus up.

Around them was what looked to be a forest of some kind. There were trees of a species that Amity couldn't place, but there was something even more intriguing about the trees: every tree had a painting or photograph inset into the trunk.

Willow ran a hand down the trunk of a nearby tree. "So, this is the inside of Luz's mind? It's much more floral than I expected. I like it."

Amity nodded in agreement. "I think all these pictures are Luz's memories. None of them have been burned yet, thankfully."

Gus, meanwhile, was apparently transfixed by one painting in particular. "No way! Is that what a human house actually looks like on the inside?" The boy rushed over to a tree that held a memory of Luz and her mother, Camila. The painting showed a snapshot of the two cooking together. Behind them, Luz's magic rectangle (What was it called? A phoon? Phun? Amity still wasn't sure, but it was something like that.) was plugged into a speaker system. As the illusionist ran towards the memory, he tripped on a root that was sticking out of the ground, sending him tumbling into the memory headfirst.

"Gus!" Willow called out in alarm, hurrying over to her friend, Amity following quickly behind. Just as Willow was about to dive into the painting after her

fallen friend, Gus stuck his head out.

“You guys need to see this!” He said excitedly, motioning for the two to follow him into the memory.

Willow hopped over the edge of the painting and into the memory nearly immediately, crossing the divide with a reply of “Adventure, here I come!”

Amity paused before she followed her friends into the memory. She’d already done so much damage to Luz’s mind. What if she managed to damage the ones that hadn’t been ravaged by the fires yet? Before she could think about that any longer, Willow called out to her. “Amity! Are you coming or not?”

“Coming,” Amity replied, before cautiously stepping into the memory.

All at once, her entire surroundings shifted. Grass was replaced with wood panel flooring, trees were replaced with the four walls of the Noceda family kitchen room, and the quiet of the forest was overtaken by the energetic music coming from the speaker system. The music was what caught Amity most off guard, as it was like nothing she’d ever heard before. The vocalist seemed to be singing in that language that Luz would occasionally bring out whenever she got particularly frustrated, though the singer was considerably less angry than when Luz used it. The backing instrumental was also intriguing, as if someone had taken a gui-scar and replaced the screams with less ear-grating noises.

Memory Luz and Memory Camila showed no inclination that they noticed the three intruders, as they kept cooking as if nothing was out of the ordinary and that there weren’t three witches now occupying their kitchen.

Gus waved a hand in Memory Luz’s face. “Hello, Isles to Luz. Anybody home?”

This drew no reaction from the younger version of the basilisk.

Gus then grew a little bolder, and booped Memory Luz on the nose.

Again, no reaction.

Shrugging, Gus shared his thoughts on what was going on. “So, we can touch things, but they don’t react to us. Heh, weird.”

To test out Gus’ hypothesis, Willow grabbed a mixing bowl filled with dough and tried to move it around, but the bowl held fast, not moving no matter how hard the plant witch pulled or pushed. Amity similarly tried to pick up a baking tray to no avail.

“It’s like everything has been glued down,” Willow commented as she gave a yank on the door of the refrigerator, only for it to remain stuck.

The group then went silent, simply observing as the memory played out. The younger version of Luz (Gus guesstimated that she was about 8 or 9 at the time) craned her neck over the kitchen counter as her mother was busy chopping a strange yellow fruit into slices.

“What are these called again, *Mami*?” Memory Luz asked, snatching one from the cutting board and examining it closer.

“These are plantains,” her mother responded, “and we are going to use them to make *maduros*. We had them when *Abuela* visited a few weeks ago, remember?”

“Oh yeah!” Luz said, her eyes sparking in recognition. “Can I help, *Mami* ?”

Camila smiled. “Sure you can, *lucécita*. Wash your hands first, though. We don’t want anyone getting sick do we?”

“Nope,” Luz replied as she ran over to the sink to scrub up.

Suddenly, the memory seemed to get reset, with Luz now back at her mother’s side and the plantain now unchopped.

Willow looked to her friends. “Did either of you guys do that?”

“No, I think the memory just did that on its own,” Gus said, before adding, “somehow.”

“I think we should probably move on,” Amity suggested. “This memory isn’t damaged it looks like, so we should focus on the ones that are instead.”

“Yeah, I agree,” Willow concurred. “Let’s get moving.”

Exiting the memory, the trio were back in the forest section of Luz’s brain.

“While I would love to look into all of these memories, we’ve got a mission to do,” Willow said to the others.

“Really, not even one more for fun?” Gus pleaded, giving his best puppy dog eyes like Luz had taught him.

They didn’t work, though, as Willow replied with a simple, “No.” She then added, “Now come on, we don’t want to waste time.”

And so, the group began their search, looking for any damaged memories. Hopefully they would be obvious to spot.

As it turns out, they were obvious to spot.

“Hey, guys? Come check this out,” Willow called out to the other two. Before the plant witch was a memory tree, but this one was damaged. All forms of color had seemed to have vanished, leaving it a drab mix of blacks, grays, and whites instead of the color-filled trees surrounding it. The painting was also damaged, with nearly the entire painting having been burnt to ash.

“Is it safe?” Amity questioned.

Taking initiative, Willow stuck her arm through the painting, and then withdrew it without a scratch. She then shrugged. “Probably?”

“We’ll never know if we never try though, right?” Amity replied, coming up to stand next to Willow.

“Yeah! Let’s see what’s on the other side of the weird, creepy, burn out tree!” Gus cheered from behind the two.

Inhaling and exhaling sharply, Willow said, “Alright, let’s do this!” before diving into the memory without a second thought.

Coming out on the other side, this new memory took place in a human hospital. Three people occupied this memory: Luz, her mom, and her dad. Luz’s father was resting in a bed, while Luz and Camila stood next to the bed on the side nearest the window.

Similar to the tree in the forest, everything in this memory seemed to have lost all of its color, only existing in various shades of black and white and gray. The trio searched for what could need to be fixed in the memory. All the medical equipment seemed to be in its proper place, so that wasn’t it. Gus picked up a remote and pressed a few buttons to no avail. Willow tried opening and closing the curtains to let light into the room. Then, Amity spotted something peeking out from under the bed. It was some kind of gift, wrapped in cheery packaging with smiling suns and flowers on it. Reaching down, Amity picked up the gift. The weight of the gift, along with its proportions, felt oddly familiar.

Looking around, Amity noticed that Manny’s hands were positioned in such a way that it looked like he was holding the gift in his hands. Slotting the package into his hands, color flooded back into the memory.

August 22, 2015 | Gravesfield Research Hospital | Gravesfield, CT

Luz wasn't stupid, despite what those mean kids at school would say. She was just distracted and couldn't make her brain focus on doing school stuff, and this was the cause of those distractions. As Papi laid in his hospital bed, he tried to make things not so bad by telling jokes and saying that everything was going to be okay, but Luz knew better. She might not have understood all the big fancy adult words that Mami and Dr. Martinez were using whenever they had those long talks, but she got the idea of what was going on.

For some reason that the smart doctor people couldn't figure out, Papi's body was slowly eating itself alive. That idea terrified Luz. Even worse, nothing the doctors were trying could make it stop. They had tried all sorts of treatments with long, complicated names that Luz couldn't remember. Some of them had seemed to help a little, like that one that made Papi go bald. Other treatments that the doctor people tried seemed to not do anything. Eventually, though, Papi had said that he didn't want to try any more treatments. He told Luz that he was going to "tough it out."

Now, though, Papi was stuck in the hospital, and the doctors had stuck him with all sorts of needles and tubes that made Luz's skin crawl at the sight.

"I saw this book at the old bookstore you always visit, and I thought you'd like it," Papi said as he held out the gift. His voice, normally a little too loud and energetic, was raspy and quiet.

Luz took the book from her father's outstretched hand and slowly unwrapped the packaging. The wrapping paper had tons of smiling suns and rainbows on it, drawing a small smile from the young girl.

The Good Witch Azura, the cover read, written by somebody called Mildred Featherwhyle. The cover art depicted a woman decked out in stereotypical witch attire. Robe, pointed hat, magic staff, the works. It wasn't a drab brown or black, though, but a white and purple color combo with specks of gold thrown in. The witch was flanked on both sides by an elderly woman with pale, wrinkly skin and a red robe on one side, and a dog-like creature with black fur on the other.

"I know you're more into fantasy and magic than sci-fi and space travel," Papi explained with a small smile as he repositioned himself in the hospital bed, propping himself up on his elbows. "I hope you like it."

Luz hugged the book close to her chest. Leaning over, she wrapped her free

arm around Papi's neck. "I can't wait to read it with you when you get out of the hospital."

Papi slowly withdrew from the hug. "About that. *Mi lucecita*, I don't think I'll be leaving the hospital any time soon."

Luz frowned, the book in her hands all but forgotten. "What do you mean?"

Mami came to the rescue with the answer. "Luz, *bebe* . I know that you know that your father is sick, but Dr. Martinez and the others, they're saying. . . they're saying that –"

Manny finished for her. "My body isn't strong enough to keep fighting against whatever it is that's wrong."

Luz blinked, her mind refusing to process what she was hearing. "But, but you're my dad! You're invincible!"

Manny lightly chuckled. "I wish I was *lucecita* , I really wish I was. Hey, I want you to believe in me though. Remember that silly quote you love? What is it? 'If I believe in dinosaurs, then somewhere out there, dinosaurs believe in me' . . ."

"And if they believe in me, then I can believe in me," Luz said, completing the quote. She wasn't quite sure where exactly she had first heard it, but it had stuck with her. (Maybe it had been from one of those old baseball players *Papi* rooted for? Now wasn't the time for thinking about that, though.)

Fully sitting up, Manny motioned for Luz to come closer. When she was in range, he wrapped his arms around her in a hug. "Luz, *mija* , I want you to know that whatever you do, wherever you go, I want you to remember this: you are brave. You are strong. You are good. You matter. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise, alright? Can you promise me that?"

Breaking away from the hug, Luz slowly nodded, tears threatening to start streaming down her face at a moment's notice.

"I promise, dad."

Late June (maybe? Early July?), 2021 | The Mindscape of Luz Noceda

Willow stood motionless, doing her best to take in what she just saw. Looking at the other's she saw that Gus was nearly on the verge of tears. She knew

that he had lost his mother at a young age, so this was probably bringing up some unpleasant memories. Amity, meanwhile, was simply frozen, having barely moved or said anything after leaving the memory.

Taking a shaky breath, Willow tried to compose herself. She was the brave one, after all. “I think we should get going. We’ve still got more memories to fix.”

Gus sniffled and dabbed at his eyes with his undershirt. “Yeah, let’s keep moving.”

Amity still didn’t respond, simply following after the two as they walked on.

Exiting the memory and traveling further into the forest, Willow scanned her surroundings, searching for the next memory for the group to repair. What she didn’t expect to see was... something to be looking right back at her from the other side of the clearing. Noticing Willow and the others, the thing rushed over to the group. As it got closer, Willow could make out that it was Luz. Or, at least something that was trying to look like Luz. This was none other than the Inner Luz.

Oddly, Inner Luz seemed to be having an identity crisis. It was like she couldn’t decide what form she wanted to be in. Her appearance was continually shifting, arms going from human to basilisk, legs merging into a tail and then separating, face twisting and morphing at a moment’s notice.

Inner Luz didn’t seem to notice the predicament, she was in though, as she approached the group. “Oh my gosh, I finally found you guys! I’ve been looking all over for you. What memory did you guys just... come... from.” Her tone dropped as she noticed the dour look on everyone’s face.

“The hospital one,” Willow replied succinctly.

“Oh.” Inner Luz forced a smile. “That is not a fun one to start off with, no siree.”

“Are you... okay?” Amity slowly asked, finally speaking up.

“I’m fine. What would make you think I’m not fine?” Inner Luz replied quickly.

“Well, the real Luz has been acting weird lately,” Willow answered, “so it seemed like the next logical step, ya know?”

The Inner Luz just blinked.

“How are you not falling over?” Gus asked suddenly.

The out of the blue question seemed to jar the Inner Luz out of whatever funk she was in. Her eyes flitted from person to person as she tried to come up with an explanation “I... uh... mind magic? I don’t know. But, before we go any further, first thing’s first: formal introductions!”

After clearing her throat, the Inner Luz composed herself by straightening her posture and then began a miniature speech. “Welcome to the mindscape of Luz Noceda. My name is Inner Luz, and I’ll be helping you out on your little mission today. As you can probably guess, a few of the memories here have been... damaged, and as such will need some repairs. So, you guys are going to pitch in and help me fix this place up, right?”

“That sounds about right,” Gus replied.

“Awesome!” Inner Luz replied. “Just a quick FYI, though: no touching memories that have a big lock and chain over them. I’m going to be dealing with those ones myself.”

“Okay?” Willow said, though it was more of a question than a definitive statement.

“Sweet. Any other questions before I send you guys on your way to repairing these here memories?” Inner Luz asked as one final question, to which three heads shook no.

“How about we split up?” Gus suggested. “If we work in pairs instead of all together, we’ll be able to cover twice as much ground.”

“Good thinking, Gus,” Amity commented. “How about... I work with Willow and you work with Inner Luz? Does that sound good to you all?”

“Fine by me,” Willow replied.

“I’m cool with that,” Gus said.

Inner Luz seemed to hesitate a second before responding. “Sure.”

“Well, if we’re going to be splitting up, how about Amity and I take the Demon Realm memories, while you two take the Human Realm ones?” Willow suggested to the group.

“If that means more exploring human culture, then count me in,” Gus said.

“Amity?” Willow looked to the emerald haired witch. “Are you okay with that?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea,” she replied.

“If everything’s decided, then I say we start now. We don’t know how long Luz has before something really bad happens,” Inner Luz said.

Splitting from the other two, Willow and Amity now were solely focused on being the repairwitches for Luz’s Demon Realm memories only. Looking around, Amity spotted the first damaged memory for them to fix.

“Over there,” she said, pointing in the direction of the monochrome tree.

Jogging over to it, with Willow close behind, Amity looked at the damaged painting. It depicted Luz and King huddled together somewhere, but the rest of the painting had been damaged beyond recognition.

Stepping into the memory, Willow and Amity found themselves in the Owl House, though it looked like a gorenado had just run through the place. The living room couch had been torn to shreds and then flipped over for good measure, and the feathers that had been stuffed into the cushions were now strewn about on the floor.

“Do you have any idea what we have to fix here?” Amity asked hopefully.

Willow shook her head. “Nope, no idea. It sure doesn’t help that so much stuff is just broken.”

“Yeah. Well, we might as well start looking. Something is bound to stand out,” Amity replied.

Willow nodded. “Yup, let’s get this fixed.”

Looking around, Willow tried her best to find what was out of the ordinary for this memory. The particular snapshot of time this memory started with seemed to be during a conversation between Luz and King as they huddled around the remnants of the couch. Letting out a deep exhale, Willow studied the scene before her intently. Everything that was broken looked like it was broken realistically. Neither Luz nor King had “dropped” anything. For the life of her, Willow couldn’t spot what was wrong here.

And then she noticed what was wrong here. It was so obvious that she had completely glossed over it: Luz was wearing King’s collar. Laughing at how obvious it was, Willow motioned Amity over and pointed out the fix. Unclasping the collar, the plant witch placed it around King’s neck and reconnected the red straps.

Color rushed in, signifying a successful memory repair, but the overall palette remained drab and cold. Outside, thunder roared and lightning flashed. The two watched as Memory Luz traced out the light glyph and then tapped it, the paper crumpling into a ball of light. When Memory Luz then celebrated her first spell, the two couldn't help but smile at seeing their friend so happy.

Once the memory started looping, Willow and Amity took it as their sign to head over to the next memory that needed repairing. After hopping out of the Storm memory, they passed numerous memories that were still intact. One that stood out to the two was a memory of Luz, in her basilisk form, slithering between two logs in the middle of some forest. Another that caught their attention was that of Luz, Eda, and King watching a show on the CB. *Mr. Legume*, Amity was pretty sure the show was based on the single frame she could see. (Of course, Mother would never have allowed Amity to watch such "unfettered rubbish" on the family CB, so she'd resorted to watching clips of it that people would post on Penstagram.)

Arriving at the next damaged memory, the duo stood before a painting of Willow, Luz, and Gus crowded around a plant glyph that was mid-sprout. Climbing into the memory, Willow offered her hand out to Amity to help her in. The young Blight accepted, hoisting herself inside.

Willow looked at the memory version of herself. It was odd, to say the least. Seeing her, but also not her, frozen in time gave her a weird feeling she couldn't quite describe. As she searched for what needed to be fixed, something else stuck out to her. The memory was wrong. Not in the fixing way, but it wasn't accurate to what Willow had actually experienced. The memory version of her was holding some sort of red-petaled flower, and Willow knew for a fact that that plant didn't exist on the Isles.

A look of confusion evident on her face, Willow carefully removed the red flower from her mirror copies' hand. The unknown flower had seven petals by her count, and the stem of the plant was covered in small thorns that pricked at her fingers as she rotated it.

"Whatcha got there?" Amity asked, motioning towards the mysterious flower.

"Something that shouldn't exist. Not here on the Isles, anyway," Willow replied.

"What? That doesn't make any sense," Amity commented.

Willow nodded in agreement. "That's what I'm thinking. The only way this thing could end up in Luz's memory is if Luz's actual memory of the event

is wrong or distorted.”

Amity’s mind was racing with that revelation. If this memory of Luz’s was incorrect, then what was to say that other memories weren’t likewise altered. Doing her best to keep her cool, Amity simply replied with, “Huh, that’s interesting.”

“”That still doesn’t fix the memory, though,” Willow stated. Searching for clues, the two looked for anything out of place in this memory.

Eventually, Willow spotted what was wrong with the memory, strange flower notwithstanding: one of the windows was open and not covered by those metal grates that Hooty had dropped down to protect Luz from the moonlight. Walking over, Willow yanked the grate down until it was flush with the bottom of the window frame.

Just as it had before, color returned to the memory, and it began playing out in front of Willow and Amity. Once the scene had run its course and looped back to the beginning, the two exited the memory. As the two touched back to the grass floor of the forest, Amity stopped Willow with a question.

“So, does Luz just... sprout a tail often? Or is that rare?” the abomination witch asked.

“I’m pretty sure that’s the only time I’ve seen her do it by accident.” Willow replied.

As the two searched for the next memory in need of fixing, they passed others that looked interesting, but all they could afford was a passing glance. Amity thought it was a shame, though, since she would have loved to see what happened in the memory of Luz holding a wooden bat. Or the memory of Luz and her parents dancing together in the living room of the Noceda house. Or the one where Luz and her father were doing... something with sausage links and a dress. They all looked so interesting! Nevertheless, the hunt for memories to fix took precedence.

As the two navigated through the maze of trees, they eventually found a memory that needed fixing. Unfortunately for Amity, this memory was one she herself was a part of, and that she could recall in perfect detail. She hoped Luz’s recollection of the memory wasn’t perfect, though. This memory was none other than the one detailing the trip to the Knee.

Standing next to the memory that had started it all, Amity felt a lump grow in her throat. She hoped that the replay would stop before the memory

version of her turned into a blushing mess, but that was probably just wishful thinking on her part. There was probably no way she could convince Willow that this memory wasn't worth fixing, though, so it was time to set the record straight.

"This was the memory I was trying to get rid of," Amity said softly, ashamed of her actions and the absolute disaster they had led to.

"Look, Amity," Willow started, having noticed her friend's discomfort. "I don't care if this memory is embarrassing or makes you look stupid or anything like that, but whatever goes down in that memory, I won't judge. I promise."

"Really?" Amity replied hopefully, a look of disbelief on her face.

"Really," Willow emphasized. "Now, come one, let's fix one last memory."

With a shared look and a nod, the two dove into the painting.

Chapter 38

Gus Proves That Freud Isn't Totally Wrong

Kriegstag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Eda nervously drummed her fingers against her kneecap. Amity, Goops, and Plant Girl had been in Luz's mind for nearly half an hour now, and the Owl Lady was starting to get anxious. She took a small sip of her apple blood. Maybe that would help with her nerves.

It didn't.

Sighing, Eda walked over to Luz and adjusted the blanket, pulling it to cover up to the basilisk's shoulders. Hopefully Luz being comfy would help with the brain fires. (It probably didn't work like that, but Eda was running out of ways to keep herself busy that didn't involve mindlessly scrolling Penstagram or nervously detaching and reattaching her limbs.)

King was similarly not doing the best. He had situated himself on the floor near where Luz's tail draped off the couch. The King of Demons was trying to keep himself occupied. Scratching at his neck probably wasn't the healthiest coping mechanism, but he couldn't stop himself. His best friend's brain was on fire, and here he was just sitting around.

"Are we sure Luz is going to be alright?" King asked.

"She's going to be just fine, King. Her friends aren't going to let anything bad happen in there. We just need to have a little faith in them, alright?" While she was mainly trying to calm King down, Eda had to admit that it

was also partly for her own sanity. She needed Luz to make it through this. She didn't know what she would do if Luz didn't make it out alright.

"We just need to have a little faith," she repeated. Until the bell rang, that was all they could do.

Tuesday, June 29, 2021 | The Mindscape of Luz Noceda

As Amity entered into the dreaded Knee memory, she fully prepared herself to be face to face with her own blushing visage. If that happened, she was going to turn right around and walk out of the memory. Then she would probably go torch her own memories, just to make doubly sure that neither she nor Luz ever had any recollection of The Blush.

Okay maybe that was a stupid plan, but she didn't have any better ideas.

Looking around, Amity saw the memory's version of her. Thankfully, it was blush free. Letting out a sigh of relief, Amity relaxed slightly.

"Since you were actually here for this, you'll probably know more of what to look for. Anything look out of place?" Willow said, looking around at the scenic view from atop the Knee. It was a very pretty sight, all things considered.

The moment the memory had paused one was one that Amity could vividly remember. Luz had just gotten out of that giant snowbank after searching for that stupid, cute flower. The basilisk was absolutely covered in snow, but she had a giant smile on her face in spite of the cold. Amity couldn't deny it: Luz looked cute in that moment. (And lots of other moments, but that was irrelevant.) The memory's version of Amity was standing by Eda, Edric, and Emira, watching on as Luz held aloft the fruits of her search.

However, Luz's hands were noticeably empty.

Amity groaned. Of course it was that darn flower. Why wouldn't it be the thing that needed to be fixed? Maybe the fates had it out for her. Just inflict even more torture on her, why don't they?

Trudging through the snowbank where Luz had been searching, Amity saw the flower sticking out of the side of the bank. Gently picking up the flower, careful not to damage it, she cradled it against her chest. Slowly, she walked over to the memory version of Luz.

Titan, this feels weird, she thought. This memory needed to be fixed, though, as much as it pained Amity to admit. Even if it meant Willow would bear witness to The Blush.

Inserting the flower into Memory Luz's waiting hand, Amity watched as color returned to the moment. There was no going back now.

The memory began playing, and Memory Luz ran over, flower in hand.

"Luz, you didn't need to go through all of that trouble just to get that silly little flower," Memory Amity said as the snow-covered basilisk approached.

"But I wanted to! You deserve the flower," Luz replied as she came to a stop. Brushing Memory Amity's hair out of the way, Luz gently tucked the flower behind the witch's ear.

"See? You look perfect now! The flower really ties the whole outfit together," Luz said with a smile.

The real Amity did her best to not turn and run. Right there, for Willow to see, was Memory Amity's giant blushing face.

When the memory began looping, Amity tried to hightail it out of there. "Alright, we did it. The memory's fixed. Let's get out of here."

Willow held out an arm, grabbing Amity's wrist. "Not so fast."

Amity tried to force her way out of Willow's grasp, but the plant witch held tight. "Let me go!"

"I'll let you go if you answer my question," Willow said.

Amity drooped. "What is it?"

"Do you like Luz?" Willow asked plainly.

"I mean, of course I like Luz. She's my friend," Amity responded, doing her best to dodge the question.

Willow rolled her eyes and scoffed. "Don't play coy with me, Amity. You know what I mean."

Amity exhaled sharply and stared down at the floor. "Yeah, I like Luz."

"In the 'more than friends' way?" Willow continued.

Amity just nodded.

Willow released her grip on the abomination witch's arm. "That's what I thought. Do you have any idea if Luz feels the same way?"

Amity threw her arms up in defeat. "I don't know. Maybe? She was being all weird and... flirty back in photo class. You saw what she was like. All mushy and sweet. Does having your memories burned up change your personality or something?"

Willow tried her best to remember what the teacher had said about memory magic. "I don't think it would. It might make the feelings more exaggerated, though."

"So do you think that means Luz might actually 'like' like me?" Amity said hopefully.

"Maybe," Willow replied. "Grom is coming up pretty soon, ya know."

"Do you think Luz would even want to go to Grom with me?" Amity questioned.

"You'll never know if you never try," Willow replied.

Amity sighed. "You're right. I'll give it a try. Maybe. No guarantees."

"Good. Now that that's been handled, I think we should get going," Willow suggested. "I don't think there's any more memories for us to repair. Do you think we should try to meet up with Gus and Inner Luz?"

Amity nodded. "Yeah. Let's just hope that Gus hasn't been sidetracked by human stuff too much."

Willow laughed and gave Amity a look. "This is Gus we're talking about here. Would he ever pass up an opportunity to learn about humans? Now come on, let's go."

Taking one last look back at the memory of The Blush, Amity took Willow's offered hand and hoisted herself out of the memory. With all of the Demon Realm memories fixed up, it was time to check up on the other team.

Gus was having the time of his life fixing up Luz's memories from the Human Realm. Sure, the whole "Luz might never be herself again if we don't fix all the memories" thing was a harrowing thought, but still. Inner Luz had been a great help, which was nice. She always had a good idea of what needed to be fixed.

(There was one odd thing that stood out to Gus about the Inner Luz's form, though. Whenever he and the Inner Luz would be inside of a Human Realm memory, Inner Luz would always end up taking on Luz's human form, and it would stay that way the entire time they were in the memory. However, the second they left the memory Inner Luz would return to her identity crisis-fueled random shapeshifting. Gus didn't want to bring it up. It seemed like something that Luz would want to keep private.)

Through the two's exploration of the mindscape, Gus had learned that a lot of his ideas about human culture were... misguided. Apparently, a "microwave" had nothing to do with the ocean, but was actually a device used to heat food. (Why it was called a microwave, then, Gus wasn't sure. Inner Luz had mentioned electric magnets or something as the reason behind the name.)

Climbing out of a memory that had featured Luz and her father playing a game called "baseball", Gus set his sights on the next memory in need of repairs. Looking around, most of the memories he saw were either ones that had already been fixed or weren't touched by the fires in the first place. Approaching a fork in the path, the illusionist looked to the Inner Luz.

"Should we split for a bit? I take one path, you take the other. We'd find broken memories faster," Gus suggested.

"That's fine by me," the Inner Luz responded. "Let me know if you find any locked up memories though. I have to deal with those ones myself."

"You got it," Gus said with a nod. "So which path do you wanna take?"

Inner Luz shrugged her shoulders, "Left one, I guess."

"Got it. I'll let you know if I find anything," Gus said as he began walking down the right-hand branch.

Clicking his tongue thrice, the illusionist looked for any memories that needed fixing. It looked as if most of the memories were safe from the fires, though, so this was probably going to be a quick search. In that case, it probably wouldn't hurt if he did a little recreational memory watching.

Finding an interesting looking memory to spectate on wasn't too hard, since all of them were interesting! Picking a painting that showed Luz sitting in a classroom, Gus popped in to see what human schools were like.

September 27, 2018 | Terrace Middle School | Hirsch, Maryland

“Can anybody tell me what the difference between an animal with an endoskeleton and an exoskeleton is?” Mr. Stevenson asked, looking out over the classroom of middle schoolers who were bored out of their minds. Well, all except for one.

Luz’s hand shot up into the air. She knew this one. She knew this one! She waved her arm back and forth, hoping to draw the teacher’s attention.

“Luz, what do you think?” Mr. Stevenson eventually called her name.

“An animal with an endoskeleton has all its bones on the inside of their body, but an animal with an exoskeleton has its bones on the outside like a suit of armor,” she answered confidently.

“Correct,” the teacher replied, to which Luz gave a small victory fist pump. “And can you name an example of each type?”

That was another easy one, Luz thought. “Well, us humans have our skeletons on the inside, so we have endoskeletons. For exoskeleton? Uhh... spiders?”

From behind her, somebody faked a cough. “*Nerd!*” they said through clenched fist.

“Would you like to repeat that for the class, Michelle?” Mr. Stevenson asked, looking at the brunette seated behind Luz.

“No, Mr. Stephenson.” Michelle responded in her normal voice.

“Good, because I don’t want to hear that kind of disparaging talk in this classroom. Now, let’s continue with the lesson. Animals with exoskeletons can be divided into a few main categories. First we have the...”

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Gus’ feelings on that last memory were conflicted to say the least. While it was good that the teacher had stood up for his student, the fact that the other students had been mean to Luz was disheartening. Luz was awesome! How anyone could want to be mean to her was a mystery.

Looking around for another memory to adventure into before returning to fixing the broken ones, Gus saw another one of Luz in a human school, as evidenced by the lockers he could spot in the background of the painting. This one showed her in the library, though, which made Gus pause. Did

human schools actually have libraries built into them? That was a novel concept to the witch. Hopping into the painting, Gus watched the next memory as it played out before him.

October 29, 2020 | Gravesfield Middle School | Gravesfield, Connecticut

Luz slowly nudged the door to the GMS library open. While she was supposed to be eating her lunch in the school cafeteria, that place was always too loud and hectic for her. The library, on the other hand, was a quiet, relaxing place where she could eat her lunch in peace. It especially helped that Mr. Grine, the librarian, was willing to turn a blind eye to Luz's skirting of the lunchtime rules.

After waving to Mr. Grine and offering a quick "Hello!", she found her normal spot for eating lunch. Between the science fiction and the fantasy sections, there was a gap in the bookshelves that was the perfect size for Luz to sit in. Placing her backpack down on the ground, she popped a squat in her little nook. Pulling her lunch out, she slowly began eating the sandwich that Mama had packed for her.

(Mr. Grine was willing to let Luz eat her lunch here as long as she didn't make a mess, so she was always careful to not spill any crumbs. Early on she learned that a paper bag that had been ripped open down the side and flattened out could serve as a great crumb catcher.)

If she was being honest with herself, this was probably her favorite spot in the entire school. The serenity she felt when she could just relax here and skim the book catalog was unmatched. Everywhere else either had too many people, was too loud, or was both.

When she finished her lunch, she crumpled up the paper bag and tossed it in a nearby trash can. Now was time for the main event: picking out all the books she was gonna check out!

Starting in the fantasy section, she looked over her choices. Ooh, was that a new *Changelings* book? She snatched that one up. A *Werewolves of Wimbledon* novel adaptation? Added. A copy of *Slaying Dragons in Three Easy Steps*? That one looks fun.

Moving on to the sci-fi section, she picked out a few books that looked mildly interesting. They were just going to be backup reading material if she ran out

of the good stuff over the weekend. (Knowing herself, that would probably end up happening.)

Her reading selections for the next fortnight ready, Luz approached the checkout desk.

“What are ya drawing today?” Luz asked as she placed her stack of books on the desk. Mr. Grine was always fond of doodling the craziest things when he had spare time.

The librarian turned his sketch pad around so that Luz could see the masterpiece in progress. “It’s a grizzly bear, in the middle of the White House, and she’s mopping the carpet with the help of her little hawk buddy,” Grine described the scene.

Luz giggled. “That’s a cute grizzly. Very ferocious looking.”

Mr. Grine did a mock bow. “Why thank you.” He then looked at the books that Luz had placed on the counter. “So, are these all for the next two weeks?”

“Yup!” Luz replied with a nod.

Grine frowned and ran his pointer finger down the stack of books. “Hmm. It seems like there’s something missing.”

“What do you mean?” Luz was more than a little confused.

Reaching under his desk, the librarian pulled a book out and placed it on top of the stack. “There we go. Now you’re ready to check out.”

Grabbing the new book, Luz looked at the cover. She couldn’t believe her eyes. “*The Good Witch Azura: The Sunken City!* No way!”

Grine smiled. “We got that in stock just yesterday. I knew that somebody would want to read it, so I held a copy for you.”

Luz beamed. “Thank you!”

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Gus couldn’t help but smile. That was a fun memory. Rolling his shoulders and cracking his knuckles, he put on his serious face. That was enough fun Luz memory shenanigans. He had to keep looking for memories to repair.

(Even if he wanted to just stay in here for a few more hours while he explored all the memories, needing repairs or otherwise.)

Continuing on down the path, he passed memory after memory, all of them calling out to him. *Come explore, Gus!* they were saying, but he resisted the urge. Eventually, he stumbled across a memory that was very much not like the others. This one didn't just have a burnt up painting, but the tree itself seemed to be dying.

Approaching the dilapidated memory, Gus noticed that the painting had been chained up. Key word: had. Now, though, the molten remains of the chains lay pooled up on the ground in front of the memory tree. Now with the memory unobscured, Gus could clearly see that it depicted a younger Luz who looked to be hiding in a bathroom stall. Looking around, Gus saw no sign of the Inner Luz. She did say that she wanted to be the one to deal with the locked up memories. However, she'd done so much that Gus thought he could probably fix this one by himself. How hard could it be?

Stepping into the memory, Gus took in his surroundings. The "freeze frame" that the memory had paused on wasn't a pretty one. Memory Luz was sitting on the toilet, legs pulled up to her chest while her head was buried into her knee. The scene felt all too familiar to Gus. Taking a deep breath, the illusionist looked for what was wrong with the memory.

Hmm. . . Maybe there was something wrong with the – "Hey! What are you doing in here? I told you to leave these to me!" Inner Luz shouted at Gus.

The witch jolted back in surprise, ramming his shoulder into the toilet paper holder. Hissing in pain, he turned around to see a very angry looking Inner Luz glaring daggers at him.

"Get out right now," Inner Luz said in a low voice. "This memory is off limits."

"What? Why? This one seems like an easy fix," Gus argued in his defense, trying to work some feeling back into his shoulder.

"'Why?' I'll tell you why: if this memory ever sees the light of day, then Luz will never be the same," the Inner Luz explained. "I locked this memory up for Luz's own safety."

"What could be so bad about this memory?" Gus inquired. "I can remember at least three, no, four separate occasions of me crying in the bathroom."

"Take a closer look at her eyes," Inner Luz instructed.

Getting down on one knee, Gus positioned himself so that he could see Luz's face, even though the majority of it was obscured by her hair draping over her features. Looking up, the young girl's eyes were very clearly not human. The normally white sclera were now black, and her irises were yellow instead of their usual golden brown.

"That's why I had to lock down this memory," Inner Luz said as Gus got back to his feet. "How would she explain it to herself if she remembered her eyes looking like that?"

Gus struggled to find the proper words to express how he was feeling. "But – You can't – That's just – Gah! You realize how stupid that is, right?"

Inner Luz blinked, confused by what Gus was trying to get at. "What do you mean?"

Gus exhaled sharply. "How would you stop Luz from remembering this protect her? She knows she's a basilisk now, so you blanking out her memory won't do her any good. Heck, it would probably do her more harm than good to have her not remember a memory like this."

"Oh. I didn't think about that," the Inner Luz admitted.

"Does that mean you'll leave this memory unlocked or whatever?" Gus asked.

"I will," Inner Luz said with a curt nod.

"In that case, would you help me fix this memory? I can't tell what's wrong," Gus said hopefully.

The Inner Luz looked around the scene before her. Then she spotted the flaw. "See that lock on the stall door? Flip it so the door is locked. Young me wanted her privacy."

With a flip of the dial, color rushed back into the memory.

The younger Luz then began sniffing. Pulling out her phone, the girl then opened the front-facing camera. When the screen loaded and it showed her face, she let out a small scream and dropped the phone onto the tiled floor below.

Slowly reaching down, she picked her phone back up. Taking another look at her face, she blinked fervently, as if blinking enough would suddenly make her eyes go back to normal.

Nothing had changed, to the young girl's dismay. Her eyes were still those demonic yellow and black.

Slamming her eyes shut, she started whispering to herself. "When I count to 10 I'll be a normal girl. When I count to 10 I'll be a normal girl. When I count to 10 I'll be a normal girl."

Taking a deep breath, she slowly started counting to herself. "1... 2... 3... 4... 5...6... 7... 8... 9... 10."

Opening her eyes, she found that they had finally returned to their normal golden brown. Letting out a sigh of relief, Luz sat motionless on the closed toilet seat for a few seconds. Then, she wiped the tears from her eyes and blew her nose on a wad of toilet paper. Putting on a brave face, she was finally ready to face the outside world.

When the scene began looping, Gus and the Inner Luz took that as their cue to investigate other memories. Try as they might, though, they couldn't find any other memories that needed to be repaired. Maybe they had actually gotten all of them? After a third loop of walking by the same memory of Luz competing in a pie-eating contest, the two decided that they were ready to call it.

"You know, it would be really helpful if you had some sort of magical mind tracking ability so we knew where the others are," Gus said. "Can you do that?"

"Nope," Inner Luz replied, popping the p.

"Really?" Gus was taken by surprise by that. "You're the Guardian of Luz's Minscape, and you don't have the ability to track whoever is in here? I find that hard to believe."

"Yeah, well believe it. We've gotta find Amity and Willow the old fashioned way." Inner Luz looked at the memories around here. "Okay, based on the state fair memory being to our right, then that would mean Willow and Amity are probably somewhere in that direction." She pointed forward and to the left. The pair headed that way for the next few minutes, and then they heard it.

"Gus! Hey! Gus! Over here!" Looking around, the illusionist finally located where the voice was coming from. About a dozen or so trees away, Amity and Willow were waving their arms to catch the other group's attention.

Jogging over to his friends, Gus reconvened with the duo. Behind him, the Inner Luz slowly meandered in the same direction, deliberately taking her time and stopping to look in random memories.

“So, how was it fixing the Demon Realm memories?” Gus inquired once he caught up with the others.

Amity was the first to answer. “It was. . . okay, I guess. Most of the memories were pretty easy to fix since we’d been there for them to happen.”

Willow then added her piece. “Yeah, I thought it wasn’t that bad. Though, some of Luz’s memories were just flat out wrong. Like, when we tried to do the moonlight conjuring, she remembered me summoning the wrong type of flower.”

Gus raised an eyebrow. “Huh, that’s weird. I don’t think there were any wrong memories for the Human Realm side of things. None that Inner Luz pointed out, anyway. I did help her with some repressed memories, though, so that was a fun bonus to fixing the regular damaged memories. Plus, ya know, learning about humans!”

Amity laughed at her friend’s enthusiasm. “Of course you found a way to make this about humans. How many memories did you look at even though they didn’t need fixing?”

“I just took the opportunity when it presented itself,” Gus defended his “learning about humans” detours. “And it was only seven memories, for your information.”

“Dang it,” Amity hissed. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out her wallet and handed a 10 snail bill over to Willow. The plant witch pocketed the cash with a smirk.

“Hey, Gus?” the Inner Luz said, pulling him aside for a private conversation, finally having made it over to the trio.

“Yeah, what’s up?” the illusionist responded.

“I just want to say thank you. I got so caught up in protecting Luz from the memories of her accidentally using her powers that I forgot that she knows about them now. It felt good to unlock the memories. Plus that means I don’t have to worry about the locks falling off anymore,” she said with a laugh.

“Eh it’s no biggie,” Gus replied, brushing off the thanks with a hand wave. “I’m sure Luz would’ve done the same for me if I had any repressed memories.”

Then he thought about what he said. “Well, I don’t think I have any repressed memories, anyway.”

(Sure, he did have the constant fear in the back of his mind of losing control of his magic like he’d done years prior, or meeting a similar fate to his mother and leaving his father all alone, but those totally didn’t bother him. Totally.)

With their brief sidebar finished, Gus and Inner Luz returned to the rest of the group. “So, are you guys ready to head back to the realm of the living?” Inner Luz asked.

Amity looked to Willow and Gus. Willow gave a nod, while Gus flashed a thumbs up. “We’re ready. Thanks for all your help.”

Inner Luz smiled and fired finger guns at the trio. “Right back at ya.”

Pulling out the bell that Eda had given her, Amity gave it a few loud rings. Hopefully Eda was within earshot. (Maybe the bell was magic and Eda would hear it no matter where she was? That was always a possibility.)

After a few seconds of waiting, a bubble of light encircled the trio and started to collapse in on itself. Before Amity was fully shrunk down by the bubble, though, she saw Inner Luz waving goodbye to them.

Kriegstag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Eda concentrated on the spell. To her immense relief, the bubble drifted out of Luz’s ear and popped, dropping the three kids inside of it unceremoniously on the ground.

Walking over, Eda helped the kids get back to their feet. “You better tell me that you fixed every single damaged memory in Luz’s brain.”

“Each and every one of them,” Willow said happily.

“I even helped her unlock some repressed ones from her childhood!” Gus added.

That caught Eda by surprise. It was a good surprise, though. “Huh. Well thanks for that, Goops.”

“My name is Gus,” the illusionist corrected.

“I know,” the Owl Lady replied. “Just giving ya a hard time.”

Groaning, Luz rubbed at her forehead. It felt like somebody had just taken a sledgehammer to the inside of her skull and was wailing on it full force. Rubbing at her eyes, she saw that she was in the living room of the Owl House, laying down on the couch. A hand was laid down on her shoulder.

“Hey there, sleepyhead. How are ya feeling?” Eda asked her.

Weakly lifting her head to make eye contact with the Owl Lady, Luz gave a noncommittal, “I’ve certainly been better.”

King rushed over and jumped onto Luz’s stomach, wrapping his paws around her as best he could. “You’re alright! I mean - I knew you’d make it. Never had a doubt about it for a second. Totally didn’t worry at all.”

Luz softly laughed and rubbed at the tiny demon’s skull. “Thanks, buddy.”

Yawning, Luz stretched her arms out. “Man, how long was I out for?”

Eda looked down at her watch. “22 minutes and 39 seconds. Not that I was counting or anything.”

That drew a small laugh from Luz. “You don’t have to be that specific. It’s almost like... you care about me. But that’s a silly idea. You’re the grouchy old Owl Lady.”

“I see you’re doing well enough to sass me,” Eda said.

Luz simply smiled. Sitting up, she did a few small stretches to work some feeling back into her, well, back.

“Do you remember my name?” another voice asked Luz.

Looking at the other occupants in the room, Luz saw an elf-looking person standing off to the side. “Uhh... Tatiana?” Then after a beat she gave her real answer. “Nah, I’m just messing. How could I forget you, Willow?”

“Yes! Luz is back, everybody!” Willow gave a cheer and wrapped Luz in a hug.

The hug was too tight, though, based on Luz’s pained expression. “NEED. TO. BREATHE.”

“Oh, hehe. Sorry. Just got a little excited,” Willow apologized, breaking off the hug.

“Man, that was a heck of an adventure,” Gus said. “I wanna do that again. Without the memory burning, of course.”

Luz chuckled at her friend’s enthusiasm. “I’m feeling like I missed out on a fun moment. What did the insides of my brain look like, by the way?”

Willow was the one to answer. “It was like a giant forest, but all of the trees had paintings inside the bark. You could actually enter into the memory through the painting. That’s how we fixed the damaged memories, too.”

Luz nodded. “Huh, sounds fun.”

Luz noticed that one person had remained suspiciously silent during the conversation. A certain emerald-haired witch was trying to sneak out of the house unnoticed. “What about you, Amity? Any wacky crazy shenanigans go down in my brain?”

Amity stopped dead in her tracks and slowly turned to face the basilisk. “Nope, not really.”

Luz took a deep breath. “Hmm... okay. Oh! Wait, before you go! Look, I’m not sure why exactly you torched my brain, but thanks for doing that. I learned some things about myself that my brain had been hiding from me.”

That seemed to catch Amity off guard. “You’re welcome?” The abomination witch then summoned her scroll and looked at something. “Well, I’m gonna have to go. Mother needs me for our latest shareholder presentation, and I can’t risk being late again.”

Luz smiled. “Alright, have fun!”

Amity matched with a smile in return, albeit weaker. “I’ll try.”

Willow was the next to speak. “I should probably head out, too. Have some botany homework I need to work on.”

Luz fired finger guns in Willow’s direction. “Cool beans.” Turning to the last of her Hexside friend group, she looked to Gus. “I’m guessing you’ve got to leave as well?”

Gus nodded. “Yeah. Dad’s probably wondering where I am since school ended hours ago.”

Luz nodded. “Alrighty. See you tomorrow!”

“You know it. Meet up by your locker?” Gus asked.

“Sounds good,” the basilisk replied, waving goodbye to the illusionist as he closed the front door.

With that, the only people left in the house were Eda, King, and Luz. (Hooty was technically outside, so he wasn’t counted.)

Collapsing back into the couch, Luz took a few deep breaths. She still had a pounding headache, and she only needed one guess to figure out why. Readjusting the pillow that had been tucked under her head minutes before, Luz kicked her feet up onto the armrest at the other end of the couch and laid her hands across her stomach. She probably wasn’t going to move from this spot for a while.

One question lingered in the back of Luz’s mind as she relaxed on the couch. “Hey, Eda?”

The Owl Lady perked up at the mention of her name. “Yeah, kiddo?”

“I’m not sure if this is something my brain made up because it was on fire or whatever, but did you call me your daughter earlier?” Luz asked. There were a couple things that the basilisk thought she remembered happening, but she wasn’t totally sure. (Another memory that Luz could recall was her flirting with Amity, but that one was definitely fake.)

Nearly on instinct, Eda started to cast a sleep spell on Luz, but she canceled it before it was completed. She couldn’t just put ~~her daughter her apprentice~~ Luz to sleep every time the question of “What exactly is our relationship?” came up. Eventually she would have to tackle the issue head on, and now was probably a better time than ever. Letting it fester would probably just lead to more weirdness between the two.

Exhaling sharply, Eda nodded. “Yeah, I did. I care about you, kiddo. I care about you a lot. When your buddies carried you in here, I damn near lost it.”

Luz sat up on the couch. She had a feeling this was going somewhere.

Eda shuddered. “I don’t want to get all mopey and sad on you, but when I first started living on my own, I didn’t have anybody. It was just me and the curse. Lily was constantly trying to arrest me. Mom was trying whatever scammy cure she’d concocted for the week. And my dad, he... uh... I don’t think he’ll ever wanna see me again.”

Then, the Owl Lady smiled. “But then I found King, and eventually you, and I guess my brain just decided to label you as Kid One and Kid Two.

Then you called me Mama when we were cooking that *sancocho*, and I think that was what made my brain latch onto the idea that you were now really my kid.”

“Oh, wow,” Luz was caught off guard by Eda’s admission. “I didn’t know you thought about me like that.”

Eda laughed. “Well I didn’t either, really. It just sorta happened.” Then, the Owl Lady sighed. “But, and this is a big but, so pay attention. If you want to just maintain the status quo with me as the teacher and you as the apprentice, no mother-daughter stuff, I can live with that.”

Luz paused, fidgeting back and forth on her tail. “I . . . uhm . . . I’m not really sure what to say. Is it okay if I think about it for a bit?”

The Owl Lady nodded. “Sure thing ki- Luz. Take as much time as you need. I know this is kind of a big deal.”

Luz shakily nodded her head. “Yeah, I agree.” Then, she wrapped Eda in a hug. “Thank you, Eda.”

Eda reciprocated the gesture. “Aw, don’t worry about it. Whatever you eventually decide on, I’ll respect that.”

Breaking from the hug, Luz jerked her thumb in the direction of the stairs. “I think I’m gonna go stay in my room for a bit. Gotta think about things.”

Eda smiled. “I’ll be down here waiting with bated breath.” She ruffled Luz’s hair. “Now scram, I’ve got some crying to do.”

Luz chuckled. “Aww, you big softie.”

Eda gently shoved Luz towards the stairs. “Don’t you have some life contemplating to do or whatever? Shoo.”

Taking her sweet time, Luz slowly climbed the stairs and entered her room. Laying down on her bed, she stared up at the ceiling.

So, Eda thought of her as a daughter. Huh. Interesting. It wasn’t like Luz was against the idea in a vacuum, but she had a few reservations. First and foremost, what would Mama think if Luz showed up back home and started talking about how she picked up a second mom? How would she react? Luz wasn’t sure.

Then, of course, how would having two moms impact Luz herself? Who would she stay with? Would she spend half of her time on the Isles and half

on Earth? How would she even differentiate them? Would she call Camila “Earth Mom” and Eda “Isles Mom” or something? Nah that one wasn’t it. Mama and Mom, maybe? Willow referred to her dads as Dad and Poppa, so it wasn’t exactly a crazy idea.

Groaning, Luz rubbed at her forehead, trying to massage her brain into working more clearly. A billion thoughts were swirling around in her mind and it was confusing the basilisk.

A knock at the door pulled Luz out of her funk. Poking his head in, King revealed himself as the visitor. “Can I come in?”

Sitting up, Luz patted the spot on the bed next to her. “Yeah, sure. Hop up.”

Fully entering the room, King leapt onto the bed. Fluffing up the blanket with his claws, the King of Demons made himself comfortable.

“Hey, do that on your own bed,” Luz ribbed, tickling King’s side.

“I am,” he tried to maintain his composure while Luz tickled him. “I am the K- Stop that! - King of Demons, so your bed falls under my domain.”

Luz made an exaggerated show of her thinking. “Hmm... Fine I’ll stop.”

As King composed himself, Luz smiled. “So, what do you wanna talk about?”

“Revenge,” King said pointedly.

“Revenge on... who exactly?” Luz wasn’t following.

“Amity, duh,” King said, like it was the most obvious thing in the history of obviousness. “She set your brain on fire, so we need to get back at her. We should... replace all of her Abomination goop with mud so that she fails her classes. And - and burn all of her homework! And trash her locker for good measure!”

Luz laid a hand on King to calm him down. “King, buddy, we’re not getting revenge on Amity.”

“What? But we’ve gotta! We have to make sure she doesn’t mess with you ever again,” King said.

“She never messed with me in the first place,” Luz replied. “Well, there was when she tried to get me dissected when I posed as Willow’s abomination, but that doesn’t count.”

“But she burned up all your memories!” King threw his arms out for emphasis.

Luz sighed. “That was just a stupid mistake she made. Amity’s my friend, King, just like you are. Would you try to get revenge on me if I accidentally ripped a hole in François and then sewed him up right after?”

“No,” King replied softly.

“My point stands. We aren’t getting revenge on Amity,” Luz said. Then, she wrapped King in a side hug. “Eda told me that she had some crying to do. Is she actually crying?”

King nodded. “Really hard. Pretty sure she’s eating some ice scream as a coping mechanism.”

Luz chuckled. “I thought she was joking. I think we should give her some time by herself. Say, King. Have you ever played a game called Hangman?”

King lit up upon hearing the name of the game. “Ooh, is it about executing people? I already love it! Do you have to design a knot for maximum neck snapage, or is it more about how excruciating and painful you can make it? I need to know!”

Luz frowned. “You concern me sometimes, King. You really do.”

Chapter 39

Luz Has Nothing Bad Happen Happen To Her For Once

Kriegstag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz cautiously peeked her head around the corner of the stairs. Yup, Eda was true to her word. There, on the couch, the Owl Lady was busy shoveling ice cream into her face.

“Eda? Are we okay to come down?” Luz asked.

Stopping mid-bite, Eda dumped the spoon into the pint of dessert and placed it on the coffee table in front of her. “I’m ready as I’ll ever be.”

Luz descended the rest of the way down the stairs and entered into the living room. As she got closer to the Owl Lady, she shifted over on the couch so that Luz could sit down and chat.

After a few seconds of awkward silence, Eda took initiative and started talking. “Titan, I never thought I would be having a talk like this. But I guess we’ve gotta do it.”

Luz slowly nodded. “Yeah, I think that’s for the best. So... should we give it a test run?”

“We can try,” Eda replied slowly. She then got to her feet and dusted off her dress. Clearing her throat, she stuck out her hand as if she was meeting Luz

for the very first time. “Nice to meet ya, Luz. I’m your mom, Eda.”

Luz met the handshake. “Hi, Eda. I’m Luz, your... your...”

The basilisk froze up, which Eda frowned at. “Are you okay, Luz?”

Luz’s mouth felt dry. “I’m... not sure. Like, I feel like if I finish that sentence then I’ll be... replacing my mom, err, Camila, with you.”

Eda slowly retracted her hand and sat back down on the couch, plopping down next to Luz “Look, Luz,” Eda started. “I know this might be scary or daunting or whatever, but I want you to know that I truly do care about you like a mother. You get that, right?”

Luz quietly nodded. “I do.”

“And, well, I’ve been thinking about your friends,” Eda continued. “Willow specifically. She’s got two dads, yeah? Well, if you say that you’re afraid of me ‘replacing’ Camila, then I don’t want to do that. What if instead of ‘replacing’ your mom, I can be your... second mom or whatever? Camila gets to be your mom, and I get to be your mom, and neither of us replaces the other. We both co-exist as your moms plural. What do you think of that?”

Luz thought about it. Then she thought about it some more. Finally, she came to a decision. “I... I think I like that idea. Is it okay if I still call you Eda, though?”

“You can call me whatever you want, kid,” Eda replied with a smile. Reaching over to the coffee table, Eda scooped up a pint of ice scream that was half eaten and currently melting. “I think I’ve had enough mushy feelings for today, though, so I’m done with that kinda stuff for today. You wanna steal some of my emotional support ice scream?”

Luz giggled and grabbed the spoon that Eda offered out. “Yeah, I’ll steal it.”

Zorntag 4, Sixth Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

As Luz hopped off Owlbert and gave Eda a goodbye hug, the basilisk turned to face the school. She was looking for a certain set of familiar faces. She easily spotted Willow and Gus near the steps, but Amity was nowhere to be seen. Jogging over to her friends, Luz greeted them.

“Hey, guys!” Luz adjusted her backpack so it was more snug on her shoulders. “So, did I miss anything wild while Bump had me sidelined?”

Gus was the first to answer. “Eh, not really. Just the same old, same old.”

“Well, except for all of the Grom posters going up,” Willow added.

“Grom? What’s that? It sounds fun.” Luz was unfamiliar with the name, but since people were apparently putting up posters for it, it had to be some big event. Was it a carnival? A big game? A *dance*? She had to know.

“Grom is a celebration that Bump puts on every year,” Willow explained. “There’s dancing, snacks, a live band, fun things like that.”

Luz gasped. “It’s a dance?!”

Willow shrugged. “Kinda? The dance part isn’t the main event, though. That honor would go to when the year’s Grom Royalty enters the arena and fights Grometheus.”

Luz raised her hand. “Quick question: what’s a Grometheus?”

“Grometheus is the name of a monster that lives under the school,” Gus answered. “It uses a mix of Oracle and Illusion magic to transform itself into the fears of whoever it’s fighting against. If we don’t defeat it, though, then it will go on to terrorize the whole Isles and make everyone suffer their worst nightmares until the end of time. Nothing too bad, really.”

Luz’s mouth hung open. She couldn’t believe it. Principal Bump was going to have a student fight against a literal fear monster?! “And this is allowed... how, exactly?”

“I dunno, actually,” Willow said. “I’m pretty sure the Parent-Creature Association strong-armed Bump into mandating it.”

Then, a question that Luz had been wondering finally got put into words. “So how does Grom Royalty get named? Back on Earth there would be a vote between a few popular guys and girls to see who was Prom King and Queen. Is it the same ‘popular rich kid wins by default’ thing here?”

“Thankfully, no. Grom Royalty gets hand picked by Bump,” Gus answered. “He always ends up choosing a top student from one of the tracks, though, so sometimes kids will intentionally bomb an exam or assignment near Grom so they don’t have the chance of getting picked.”

“Wait. Isn’t Amity the top student of the Abomination track? Doesn’t that mean she could get picked?” Luz worried about her friend’s safety if that was to happen.

“Well, yeah, but she’s a strong witch. She could probably beat Grom with one arm tied behind her back,” Willow said.

Luz wasn’t going to argue with that. “Where is Amity, anyways? Haven’t seen her yet.”

“We were just ta—” Gus started to say, but Willow quickly elbowed him in the side to get him to shut up.

“We haven’t seen her either,” the plant witch said. “She probably just wanted to get to class extra early.”

“Huh. Okay then!” Luz said cheerfully. Amity was always studious, and the basilisk thought that was admirable. (And there were some other qualities about her that Luz liked, like her smile and the way she laughed and how she was always so confident in herself and a lot of other things that were cute.)

Suddenly, a bell tolled, signifying that classes were about to begin. “Welp, I’ve gotta head to class. Bye, guys!”

Luz tickled her locker so that Juanito (the name she had settled on for him) would spit out her Beast Keeping textbook. Her locker was apparently in an extra good mood today, as he didn’t even spit her book at her like a projectile weapon. Instead, he lolled his tongue out with the textbook sitting on it.

“Thank you,” Luz said quickly as she grabbed her book. Giving him a goodbye scratch on the place where his chin would be, Luz took a deep breath.

Today she was going to try to get back into the school groove after missing the entirety of yesterday. The basilisk had wanted to not miss a day if she had any say in the matter, but Bump had stood firm and forced her to stay home for “her own safety.” That was a load of hogwash if she’d ever heard it. She was totally fine!

As she headed to Beastly Biology, Luz just hoped that she hadn’t missed something super cool. Or a pop quiz. While her grades were pretty good - she was rocking a mid-to-high 80s in all of her classes - if she had missed a pop quiz or some big event then that would have been really unfortunate.

Entering into the classroom, Luz took her normal seat beside Viney near the middle of the classroom. The middle of the room was the perfect spot for Luz to sit. She was far enough away that she wouldn't like a tryhard or some kind of teacher's pet, but she was also still close enough that Ms. Nascimento would still call on her when she raised her hand.

Once Luz settled into her chair, Viney leaned over. "Where were you yesterday? I had to do the live testing portion of Demon Wrangling all by myself. Lemme tell you, trying to corral an angry snorse is *not* fun. Pretty sure Wildfire bit me like ten times while trying to get her reigns on."

"Couldn't you have found another person to be your partner?" Luz asked.

"Do you really think that anyone would willingly partner with a crazy witch like me?" Viney said flatly.

"Right, stupid of me to ask," Luz replied. "But to, uh, answer your question. I missed everything after lunch because my brain was... on... fire."

Viney took on a quizzical look. "What do you mean your brain was 'on fire'?"

"Well, I had photo class with Mrs. Daguerre," Luz explained, "and we extracted some memory photos from my brain, but then somebody set a few of them on fire. We got everything sorted out, though, so I'm fine and dandy and ready for candy."

Viney didn't look like she was convinced. "Huh, okay. You're still good to do class stuff, right?"

"Yup, I'm totally good," Luz replied quickly.

"Well, if you feel like your brain is on fire, just lemme know," Viney said.

"Understood." Luz nodded.

As Ms. Nascimento's lesson started up, the two friends began their typical idle banter, Luz's brain mishap being the last thing on their minds.

For her next class of the day, Luz had Potions with Mrs. Lulamoon. After navigating her way to the classroom, the basilisk settled down in her usual spot next to Barcus. Since Luz was one of the few students who could actually understand the canid-like demon, she acted as his unofficial translator. Scrounging around in her backpack, Luz pulled out her recipe book.

As Luz got ready for her first class of the day, Mrs. Lulamoon slowly shuffled into the room. Soot and ash covered her face, and numerous holes burnt into her clothing. Walking over to her desk, she collapsed into her chair.

“Are you —” a student began to ask, but the teacher cut him off.

“Mrs. Lulamoon does not want to talk about it,” she said before he had even finished his question. “Give her a minute.”

Summoning a cup of coffee, Mrs. Lulamoon down the entire mug in one gulp before wiping at her mouth with her sleeve.

“There. Mrs. Lulamoon feels better. Now, for today’s lesson we’re going to. . .” she squinted as she looked at the lesson plan written down. She then scoffed and crumpled the lesson plan into a ball and threw it into the trash can. “Today we were going to brew a potion of power, but those things don’t work in the slightest so there’s been a change of plans. What we are actually going to brew today is a potion of rejuvenation. If you open your recipe books to page. . . 314 or so, you’ll find the instructions and necessary ingredients.”

After trying to find the recipe, Luz noticed something was off. Raising her hand, she let the teacher know about the mistake. “There isn’t a page 314 in our book, Mrs. Lulamoon.”

“What?” she replied.

“Hate to admit it, but Noceda is right,” Boscha added. “Our recipe book only goes up to 240 pages.”

Mrs. Lulamoon grumbled in annoyance. “Ugh. I must have been thinking about the book from last semester before they replaced it with a new ‘better’ version. I’ll just give you the instructions myself.” Getting up out of her chair, she slowly walked over to the chalkboard and started writing out everything the students would need and what they would have to do to brew the potion.

As the list of steps required to make the potion grew, so did Luz’s anxiety about messing something up along the way. Like, was she seriously expected to somehow do exactly 3 and 5/8 stirs when combining the ratworm bile with crushed bitterroot seeds? Luz had signed up for this track, though, and she was a fool if she was going to let something like having to follow incredibly precise instructions get in her way.

Before Mrs. Lulamoon returned to her desk, she had another thing she wanted to say to the class. “Fair warning, if you mess up any of the steps

after mixing the ratwork bile and the bitterroot seeds, you'll probably cause a massive explosion that could kill us all. Good luck!"

Letting out a long exhale, Luz looked over at Barcus. "We're not gonna blow up, right?"

Barcus gave a yip of approval. <*We'll be fine.*>

Luz began to slowly, carefully, measure out all of the ingredients she was going to need for this potion. "Yeah, let's hope. I don't want to go to the infirmary again."

Thankfully, Mrs. Lulamoon's class was explosion free, which was surprising to Luz. She could usually bet on at least one student leaving without eyebrows or singing their hair, but today was a pleasant surprise. As she walked through the halls, Luz spotted a familiar face. "Hey Jerbo!"

The lanky teen looked surprised at someone having called his name, but he relaxed after realizing that it was just Luz. "What's up?"

"I know this may sound like a weird question," Luz began, causing Jerbo to raise an eyebrow, "but has Amity been acting... odd in the classes you have with her?"

"I guess you could say that," Jerbo replied. "She's definitely been... distracted. Yeah, distracted's a good word for it. She's not as quick to respond to Professor Hermonculus asking her questions, and I'm pretty sure I've caught her daydreaming or something in the middle of class."

"Huh," Luz responded. "That's certainly somethin'. Well, thanks for the help!"

Jerbo brushed it off. "Any time. Say, are you still down to help us put up flyers over the weekend?"

Luz nodded. "Uh huh. The whole school is going to be covered top to bottom with posters talking all about how awesome multi-tracking is."

Jerbo nodded. "Alright. See ya then!"

"You know it!" Luz said as she walked off to her next class.

After a few minutes of navigating the halls, Luz arrived at Beastly Biology with Mr. Medner. Unfortunately, Luz didn't have any of her buddies in this class. It was still an interesting one, though, so there was something to

look forward to at least. Waving hello to the teacher, Luz got a small wave back in response before Mr. Medner had to return to prepping his lecture. Plopping down in her usual spot, Luz pulled out her pencil and notebooks, ready to start taking notes. From what Luz could see on the teacher's desk, she spotted a lot of different types of bones. Hmmmm. . . . That was intriguing.

Sitting up in her chair, Luz watched as Mr. Medner finally started his lesson. Grabbing some chalk, the wizened witch sketched out cross-sections of numerous bones, similar to the ones that sat on his desk. The drawings were quite detailed, showing all the different sections of the bones' structural composition. Once he finished his drawings, he turned to the class.

"Let's see how many of you actually did your readings. Which of these three bones belongs to a witch?" Medner slowly looked left to right, seeing if any of his students was brave enough to answer.

Luz slowly raised her hand. She didn't get the chance to do the reading since she didn't know the reading existed given that it was assigned when her brain was *en fuego*, but she had a pretty good idea what Medner was doing with this.

"Luz?" Medner said, looking in her direction.

"Is it none of them?" she responded, though she was unsure if she was right.

"That's correct." Medner said with a smile. "Care to explain why that is?"

"Well," Luz took a breath. "I noticed that you left out the *caeli maculae*. Since they aren't present, then that indicates those are all demon bones. Well, just not witch bones."

Mr. Medner nodded. "You've a keen eye, Mrs. Noceda. Good job. With our mini-pop quiz out of the way, let's get started. Alongside the presence, or lack thereof, of the *caeli maculae*, witch and demon bones can be differentiated in a variety of ways. . . ."

Surprisingly, the rest of Luz's school day was uneventful. Sure, some of her teachers had questioned why she had been absent the day prior, but that wasn't anything a quick explanation couldn't solve. As Eda picked the basilisk up from the front steps, the witch asked her normal slew of questions. "So, anything wild go down that I would've loved to see?"

“Nope!” Luz replied. “It was pretty chill. I hope the rest of the semester is, too.”

“I hope so, too, kiddo,” Eda said, leaning back and giving Luz a hair ruffle. “I don’t think I can handle your brain getting torched again.”

Kaufetag 1, Seventh Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Bonesborough Market

Luz stretched the glove in her hand, making sure that it fit snug. Tossing the baseball into the glove a few times, Luz was suddenly hit with a wave of nostalgia. Back when Papi was still around, he would always take Luz out to the local baseball diamond in Gravesfield and they would practice hitting, fielding, even a little pitching. Of course, Luz didn’t have the best hand-eye coordination way back when, so her baseball skills weren’t exactly going to earn her any accolades. Still, though, it was always a fun day when she and Papi could just go out and spend a few hours messing around and having fun.

Now, though, Luz was hoping to have a similar experience with King. Given, the market wasn’t exactly a good place to start swinging for home runs, so playing catch would have to suffice.

“So, baseball is just throwing a ball back and forth? That’s kinda boring,” King said. “Where’s the excitement, the guts, the brawling?”

Luz scoffed and slowly shook her head. “Games don’t have to end in someone dying, ya know? Catch is just a fun little thing people play. There’s no points, no winners, no losers, just people enjoying the moment.”

“Hmmm. . . I’ll try it.” King picked up another one of the gloves that Owlbert had “found” (read: stolen from the trash). Slipping it on, he waved his paw about. Thankfully, the glove remained on and didn’t go flying off.

“Here, catch.” Luz gave the baseball a soft underhanded toss in King’s direction.

The King of Demons moved his paw to snatch the ball, but it slipped out of his glove when he didn’t close around it in time. The ball fell to the ground and rolled in the dirt. Scrambling over, King picked the ball up in his non-gloved paw. “Caught it!”

“Toss it over!” Luz said, waving her glove.

King complied, cocking his arm back and throwing the ball with as much force as he could muster. Luz, for her part, swiftly snatched the ball out of the air. “Good throw, buddy.”

The basilisk then gave a small laugh. “Next time you want to catch it, try to squeeze the glove around it like this.” She then tossed the ball straight up into the air before showing the technique that her father had taught her all those years ago.

King nodded. “Got it. Lemme try again!”

“That’s the enthusiasm I like to see,” Luz said. She gave him another underhand toss, though this time she put a little more speed on it.

This time, King actually caught the ball, scooping it up and holding it tightly in his glove. When he realized that he’d actually maintained his grip on the baseball, he let out a victorious “Yeah! I’m the best!” and held up the ball like a trophy.

Luz couldn’t stop herself from smiling. Man, that felt good.

Suddenly, though, Luz felt something hot splash onto her face. Was it... rain?

Eda let out a swear as she quickly packed up shop. “What good is there in watching the weather report if the oracles are gonna get it wrong. They said that it was gonna be clear skies all day.”

Luz had only experienced the boiling rains once before, and the last time it happened, she’d learned her first glyph (and had to knock out Eda while she was trapped in her Owl Beast form but that was secondary). Hopefully something equally fun would happen this time around!

As the raindrops fell, Luz watched as all of the commotion and hubbub around her died down while everyone sought out shelter.

“Come on, kid!” Eda yelled as she grabbed at Luz’s arm to pull her onto Owlbert.

Luz resisted, though. Maybe it was her body just being late to register what was undoubtedly intense pain, but she didn’t feel anything when the drops of boiling water landed on her skin. In fact, it almost felt kind of *nice*.

“Eda, I’m... fine,” Luz could barely believe what she was saying. This was the Boiling Isles, and she was standing in the middle of the boiling rain, and

yet she felt like she was just taking a nice warm shower. Her skin wasn't melting off or anything!

"Eda?" King spoke up from his spot on Owlbert. "I, uhh, don't think the rain affects me, either."

The Owl Lady turned to the tiny demon, a look of disbelief on her face. "Are you two pulling some kind of prank on me?"

"Nope, no pranks!" Luz responded gleefully as she leapt feet first into a big puddle.

"Well at least that means I only need the shield for me, then," Eda muttered to herself, rolling with the weirdness of her two kids apparently being rain-proof. "Now come on, we gotta head home. You two can do your little dance routine outside the house while I stay inside."

"Fine," Luz said in an exaggerated manner, being sure to draw out the "i". Hopping onto Owlbert, she helped King up and let him ride on her back.

The actual flight back to the house was thankfully uneventful. Luz and King got to feel the raindrops against their skin and fur respectively, while Eda maneuvered Owlbert to take the quickest flight path back to the Owl House.

As Owlber touched down, Eda was quick to make the short trip back into the house. Luz and King, however, stayed outside in the rain. It wasn't often that they were going to be able to experience something like this, and they weren't going to let the opportunity pass them by.

Luz simply spread her arms out and spun around like she was some movie actor. Running around, jumping onto rocks, doing her best to click her heels in midair (she failed), she was having a blast. King was similarly having fun messing around in the boiling rains. The small demon was busy trying to get as messy as he could, rolling around in all of the mud puddles that were forming.

As the rain picked up in intensity, the enjoyment for the two kids playing outside only increased, and Luz was about to try something that would either be super fun or super painful. "Hey, King!" she yelled, hoping she was loud enough to be heard over the storm.

"What?" he shouted back.

"Watch this!" she replied.

The dirt path that connected the Owl House to the rest of civilization had turned to mud, and Luz was ready to take advantage of that fact. Running full steam ahead towards the impromptu mudslide, Luz leapt into the air. While she was mid-flight, she quickly morphed into her full basilisk form. Landing on the straightaway, the girl slid and slid, screaming in joy all the way. When she neared the end of the path, she tried to turn to slow down, but she only ended up causing a big wipeout, tumbling end over end because of how slippery her underbelly was. Finally coming to a stop in a patch of grass that hadn't turned fully into a sopping mess, Luz righted herself and raised her arms in victory.

“WOOHOO!” she screamed before bursting into laughter.

King wasn't going to let her have all the fun, though. Sprinting forward on all fours, he approached the same mud patch that Luz had just traveled down. Jumping into the air, he stuck his forepaws out in front of him, while his hind paws were similarly spread out. As the King of Having Fun landed in the makeshift mudslide, he aimed towards Luz. Rocketing towards her, he couldn't help but smile.

“Catch me!” he shouted once he was about halfway down the path.

“Let's do it! Luz replied, holding her arms out to catch the speeding demon.

Apparently, though, King was going too fast for Luz to handle. As he raced towards the end of the mudslide, he tried to do a small jump so that he could land in Luz's arms. When the basilisk tried to haul him in, though, he ended up just knocking her over. As the both of them were sent tumbling further down the path, neither could stop from laughing.

As the two trudged back up the hill, Eda stuck her head out the front door and yelled to get their attention. “Hey! Get in the house so I can put up the shield!”

Sad that their fun had been cut short, Luz sighed and morphed back into her human form. Thankfully, the mud that was previously stuck to her underbelly slid off her while she changed shape, so at least she didn't have to try and wipe it off. King wasn't as lucky, though, as his fur was matted down and had large globs of mud and dirt and grass in it. He was probably going to have to take a shower before doing anything else, if just so that Eda wouldn't be cross with him for getting the floors dirty.

When Luz walked through the front door, Eda stopped her by sticking her arm out. “Pick up the furball.”

“I’m fine!” King quickly replied. “I don’t need a shower!” He tried to sneak under the two, but Luz scooped him up in her arms before he could get past them.

Luz held him up so that she was looking him eye-to-eye. “Not so fast, buckaroo.”

King frowned (Well, the closest he could get to a frown). “I don’t want to do this.”

“Yeah, and I don’t want to have to shower you by force,” Luz replied with a flat expression. “You’re nearly as hard to clean as Hooty. Look, buddy, we’re at a crossroads here. Either you willingly go take a shower, or Eda and I force you.” Her voice then dropped to a whisper. “And if I get to shower you then that means I might get to try out all my fancy and *incredibly girly* shampoos on you.”

“No! Not the girly shampoos!” King squeezed himself out of Luz’s arms and bolted up the stairs in record time.

When the two downstairs heard the bathroom door slam shut and the water start running, Eda slowly shook her head and smiled. “Man, I didn’t know you had that in you. Do you even have ‘girly shampoos’?”

“Nope,” Luz replied, popping the “p” emphatically. “I’m just glad he didn’t call my bluff.”

“I guess I’m rubbing off on ya, aren’t I,” Eda said, ruffling Luz’s hair in an affectionate manner. “Now don’t bother me because I’m going to need to focus on dinner.”

“Okay!” Luz replied chipperly, giving the witch a nod of acknowledgement. “Can I use the CB to call my buddies?”

“Sure thing,” Eda responded. “It’d distract me from cooking, anyways.”

“Yeah!” Luz gave a cheer. After doing a celebratory happy dance, Luz scooped the CB up in her arms and sprinted up to her room. Setting the ball down on her desk, she made sure that everything was properly oriented. She didn’t want to show up upside down on the call if the ball had been flipped, after all.

Getting comfy in her bean bag that Eda had undoubtedly stolen from the Human Realm, Luz swiped over to the video call app on the CB. Right at the top of the list of contacts was “Best Friend Squad”, which was the name

that Gus had given the group of himself, Luz, Willow, and Amity. Pressing the *Call* button, Luz just hoped that she wouldn't be interrupting anything important that her friends were doing.

Amity was the first to respond to the invite. When the witch looked up and saw Luz's face looking back at her, though, she let out a yelp in surprise and quickly left the call.

"Huh, that was weird," Luz commented, thinking out loud.

Gus was the second person to join the call, accepting the invite not even 10 seconds after Amity had made her sudden exit. As the Illusionist's face filled up the screen, Luz waved to the witch. "Hey!"

In response, Gus smiled. "Hi. So, what's up?"

Luz wavered her hand in a "so-so" motion. "Ehh, not much. Just looking to kill time while Eda makes dinner."

"Ahhh, okay," Gus replied. "Any idea what Eda's making?"

"Not a clue, Augustabeth," the basilisk said. "I'm just hoping it's not something where I actually have to fight the food. Fairy night isn't exactly fun."

Gus sucked in a breath. "Yeah, fairies aren't exactly an easy meal." He paused before continuing. "Oh, just had a thought."

"Oh, what's your thought?" Luz asked.

The illusionist held up a stack of papers, but the video quality wasn't great, so Luz couldn't make out what was on them. "Okay, so I was doing some research on human's earlier, and I wanted to run it by you to see if the stuff I was reading was actually telling the truth."

"That sounds fun," Luz said, leaning forward in her bean bag so she could see Gus' papers better. "Hit me with your human facts."

Before Gus could start, though, another person joined the call. Luz watched as Gus's box shifted over, and Willow's face filled the right half of the screen.

"Wazzzuuuppp?" Luz said, comically slurring a normal "What's up?" and drawing out the greeting.

"What?" Willow asked, a confused look on her face.

Luz's mouth fell open. "You don't know Wazzzuuuppp? That's sad."

Willow frowned. "I... don't get it."

Luz sighed and slowly shook her head. "Kids these days don't appreciate classic marketing campaigns."

"We're the same age," Willow said.

"Shhh," Luz held up her index finger to shush the witch, "I'm doing a bit."

"I still don't get it," Willow commented.

"I thought Wazzzuuppp would have transcended dimensional barriers." Luz let out an exaggerated sigh. "I guess I was wrong."

"So are you going to fact check my human research?" Gus inquired, shaking his notes.

"Oh, right, sorry." Luz said quickly. "Gimme yo facts."

Gus tapped the papers against his desk to straighten them out. Then, he began reading off the supposed human facts. "Alright. Is it true that humans have been to their moon?"

"Yup," Luz confirmed. "The first time we did that was back in... uh... 1968, I think? History was never my strong suit."

Gus smiled and drew a check next to that Certified Human Fact. "Ok, follow up: when was 1968? Like, I don't know when that is in comparison to the calendar system on the Isles."

Luz stuck her tongue out as she did the mental math. "1968 was... 52 years ago."

Gus looked amazed. "Humans have been living on their moon for over 50 years?!"

After Luz took a second to comprehend what Gus had said, she responded with a clarification. "No. Humans don't live on the moon. We've only ever visited it like... 6 times or something."

Willow was the next to comment. "Gus, that doesn't even make sense. Don't you think Eda would have something from the human moon if there were actually people living there?"

"I don't exactly follow that logic, Willow, but thanks for backing me up," Luz said.

Willow smiled. “Like, I’m just saying. If humans *were* living on their moon, then there would have to be commemorative merchandise. Something like those shirts that Eda sells from time to time. You know, the ones that say ‘I went to Salem and all I got was burned at the stake’ or whatever. There’d be a moon version of that.”

Luz tried to stifle her laughter by covering her mouth, but failed. “Dang it, that got me. Now I’m thinking about Eda scavenging through trash cans on the moon and just jumping around in low gravity with a giant sack of goodies over her shoulder like a weird Santa.”

That caught Gus’ attention. “Ooh, who’s Santa?”

“Santa is...” Luz paused as she tried to figure out how to best explain Jolly Old Saint Nick. “Santa is a fictional, *fictional*, man who dresses in a fancy red-and-white suit and once a year he delivers toys and gifts to all the kids who were good that year.”

“Huh,” was all Gus replied with. “Are you sure he isn’t real? What if he is actually a witch using his magic to teleport all over the place?”

“I’m pretty sure Santa isn’t real, Gus,” Luz said. “Nobody can live off a diet of only milk and cookies. Believe me, I’ve tried.”

That earned a laugh from Willow. “That couldn’t have been healthy. Like, at all. So, changing topics away from Santa, have you thought about anyone you might want to invite to Grom?”

Luz let out an exasperated sigh. Crossing her arms, she rested her chin in the little nook she’d created. “Not really. Last time there was a dance at school back in the Human Realm, I made this big grand gesture to ask out this girl that I really liked. She shot me down, though, and said I was trying too hard. Even if I did have the courage to ask somebody out, who would even say yes to the weird kid who can’t do magic the ‘right’ way?”

“Well, I can think of somebody,” Willow said. She cleared her throat, trying to alert Gus to her plan, but he didn’t seem to get the memo based on the blank look on his face.

“Really? Who?” Luz grabbed the crystal ball and pulled it closer to her. The fact that somebody could potentially like Luz enough to actually want to be her date to ~~From~~ Grom was a miracle.

“Ohh, I don’t know,” Willow said coyly. “Maybe I’ll tell you, maybe you’ll figure it out on your own.”

“Tell me!” Luz shook the crystal ball viciously. “Who?”

“Hmmm...” Willow tapped her chin with her index finger. “I won’t say.”

“Oh come on. At least give me a hint!” Luz pleaded with the plant witch.

Willow giggled. “Fine, you’ll get one hint. You talked with her yesterday.”

Luz stared at the CB. Willow couldn’t be serious. *That* was the hint she got?! “Wow, thanks Willow. That only narrows it down to like 30 people.”

“That’s the only hint you’re getting,” the plant witch replied. “I can’t just tell you outright. That’d ruin the fun!”

“You are devious, Willow Park. Devious.” Luz jabbed her finger at the crystal ball for extra effect.

Suddenly, a shout from the kitchen drew Luz’s attention. “Dinner’s ready!”

Luz took one last look at her friends’ faces. “Welp, I think that’s my sign to log off. Bye, guys!”

“Bye!” the two witches replied in unison.

Dropping off the call, Luz Scooped up the CB and hurried down the stairs. After placing the ball back on its normal stand, she walked back into the kitchen. There, Eda and King were already situated with their spaghetti and heatballs dished up and waiting, and there was a third plate set out with food in front of Luz’s normal spot at the table. Sliding into her seat, Luz put her napkin in her lap and grabbed her fork and spoon.

Luz looked at the plate that Eda had set before her. Spaghetti and heatballs was a common meal at the Owl House. Eda wasn’t exactly known for long, intricate meals. The easier it was for her to throw together in a pot, the better for the older witch. That didn’t mean it wasn’t good, though, and Luz wasn’t one to turn down a yummy meal.

Grabbing her fork, Luz swirled the noodles around, making sure that the sauce covered all of the noodles.

When a timer dinged, though, Luz looked up from her meal, spaghetti strands hanging from her fork. “What’s that?”

“That,” Eda said as she got up from her chair and walked over to the oven, “is the roast spider. I think they’ll add a nice crunch factor to the food.”

“Roast... spider?” Luz questioned.

“Right, you grew up in the Human Realm,” Eda said as she deposited the tray of spiders in the middle of the kitchen table. “Don’t worry, kiddo. Since you’ve got a demonic heritage – well, half-demonic – you should be able to digest these bad boys with no problems at all.”

Luz looked down nervously at the tray of cooked spiders. She wasn’t exactly jumping for joy at the prospect. However, Eda had spent time cooking these, and it would be rude to turn down the witch’s offer.

After slurping down the pasta that was still on her fork, Luz hesitantly stabbed one of the spiders with the fork tines. When the roast spider was sufficiently stuck on her fork, Luz pulled it down onto her plate and used the side of her fork to cut the arthropod in two, revealing the weird spider meat insides. Was it even meat? Luz wasn’t sure, and it didn’t seem the place to ask.

Now with a more palatable spider chunk, Luz scooped it up and quickly popped it in her mouth so that she couldn’t think twice about the decision. As the spider hit her tongue, Luz was surprised by how it tasted. It was actually good? The warm and chewy insides contrasted nicely with the crispy exterior, and Luz found herself actually enjoying the flavor.

Reaching out with her fork, Luz shoveled a few more spiders onto her plate. After splitting those ones up into chunks, she then combined them with her pasta, making sure to get a few of the spider chunks coated in the magical sauce that Eda used. Twisting her fork round, Luz managed to get spider, noodles, and sauce all in one bite, and it tasted like heaven. (Luz was also pretty sure that she had just sprouted her tail and it was now wagging back and forth behind her chair, but that could be dealt with later.)

“This is so yummy!” Luz said after swallowing her bite.

“I’m glad ya like it, kid,” Eda said. “It’s the old Clawthorne family recipe that I stole from my mom. Maybe I could teach it to you one day.”

“Ooh, I think that’d be fun.” Luz smiled.

The next few minutes passed without much talking, the only sounds being the scratches of cutlery on plates and the occasional sips from beverages. Eventually, though, everyone had finished their meal and were busy cleaning their plates and silverware. Luz was on drying duty tonight, while King was doing the actual washing, and Eda was responsible for putting everything back in its proper spot.

When everything had been cleaned, dried, and put away, the trio retreated to the living room so that they could all relax and wind down for the night. Flopping down onto the couch, Luz kicked her feet up on the coffee table. “So, what are we going to watch tonight?”

“Well, I doubt either of you would want to watch *The Duchess Approves*,” Eda replied. “So I was just thinking that we could just throw on Sinsney channel or something like that.”

“Ooh, I wonder if they’ll be showing any bloodsports,” King said as he perched himself on Luz’s shoulder. “I haven’t seen a chump getting guillotined on the CB in awhile.”

“Yeah, that’s not exactly age appropriate for a TV-Y channel, King,” Luz said, looking up at the small demon. “Or at least, I think.”

“All right, well I’m too tired to think anymore, so we’re watching Sinsney,” Eda said. Grabbing the CB remote, she punched in the channel number. The little box that flicked up on screen said that the current program was *Reptilia*. Luz had a vague recollection of watching the show before. When was that? Oh, yeah! She had watched this back when King and Eda had gone shopping at the Night Market or whatever and she had ordered a pizza. That was a fun night.

Focusing back on the show, Luz snuggled close with Eda and King. While Eda tried to play it off like she was indifferent, Luz knew she was putting on a front. As the opening theme, Luz watched as Anna (a witch) and Weed (a salamander) sunbathed on rocks, ran from evil robot-looking things, and endeared themselves to the townsfolk with wacky antics.

As the episode started, Luz found herself being sucked into the drama of the plotline. Weed and his friend/maybe-girlfriend/tertiary-partner-in-crime Hedera had somehow spun up a full-blown civil war in the town of Rockville over which generic hot witch from a show on Anna’s scroll was the better character. Personally, Luz would have picked the emerald haired witch since she had a way more compelling backstory. It wasn’t Luz’s fault that Amelia was such a well written fictional character, even if she only got like three lines of dialogue. (Plus Luz thought her character design was pretty, but that was neither here nor there.)

Looking to her side, Luz saw that Eda was completely enraptured by the show. “So much for a silly kids show, right?” Luz said with a small laugh.

“Shush, you’re gonna make me miss something important,” Eda replied,

not even turning to look at Luz. The basilisk sharply exhaled in a sort of half-laugh before she returned to watching the show as well.

As the hours ticked past, Luz felt herself slowly grow tired. Rising from the couch, the basilisk stretched her arms to work some feeling back into them. “I’m gonna head to bed. G’night!”

“Night, kiddo,” Eda replied. The Owl Lady then reached her arm and pulled Luz into a hug. “Love ya, kiddo.”

“Oh.” Luz was caught by surprise by the witch’s sudden embrace. “Love ya too, Eda.”

Once Eda broke off the hug, Luz scampered up the stairs to her room. Taking a deep breath, Luz morphed into a pair of comfy pajamas. Flicking off the lights, she crawled into bed.

Today was a good day.

Willow Park slowly climbed the steps to the front door of Blight Manor. She hadn’t been here in years. Both everything and nothing about the house had changed. She could still vividly remember her and Amity kicking around a Grudgball and accidentally breaking a window. Maybe that was the moment that Odalia Blight had decided that Willow was to never be seen around her daughter again. She would probably never know, though. Regardless of her thoughts about Amity’s mom, that wasn’t who Willow came here to see. After taking a deep breath, she balled her fist and knocked.

Chapter 40

Willow Plays Matchmaker

Kaufetag 1, Seventh Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Blight Manor

A knock at the door drew Odalia's attention. Letting out a groan of annoyance, she signaled for one of the Abomaton prototypes to go answer the door. As the construct marched over to fulfill its task, Odalia wondered what dullard thought it was a smart idea to intrude upon her property. Perhaps it was some prospective business partner or investor? Though showing up at such a late hour was queer. As the Abomaton slowly pulled the door open, Odalia was shocked to see Half-a-Witch standing in her doorway.

"I'm here to see Amity," Half-a-Witch said bluntly, not looking Odalia in the face, her eyes trained on something off in the distance.

"And why should I allow that?" Odalia inquired, placing a hand on her hip and letting out a snort.

"Because she's my friend," Half-a-Witch answered, sticking her hands behind her back.

Odalia scoffed. "You expect me to actually believe that? That's an excellent joke, little Half-a-Witch. You should work on the delivery, though. You almost sound like you really mean what you say. But, to answer your question: no, Amity will not see you."

Half-a-Witch paused. "I don't know if Amity's told you, but I'm not even on the Abomination track anymore. Principal Bump switched me over to the Plant track after I showed him how skilled I am in it."

“Wow, that must be so challenging, going from something you have no skill in whatsoever to something you’re slightly passable at. Even if you’re going from something as renowned as abominations to... plant magic, congratulations are in order! I’ll throw a bash to celebrate. It will be a momentous day – Wait... wait, I just remembered something,” Odalia mocked. “I don’t care about you. Goodbye, Half-a-Witch”

Half-a-Witch sighed and slowly walked towards the door. “Right, fine. I’ll leave.”

The plant witch then slowly turned around and waited. “You know what, Mrs. Blight?”

“That doesn’t sound like the door closing behind you, so speak quickly before I have an Abomaton force you out of my house,” Odalia said.

“I don’t care about you, either.” Willow then sprinted past Odalia.

Odalia reached out to grab the insolent child as Willow ran past, but she tripped and fell, her legs suddenly encased in thick, thorn-ridden vines.

“Damn it,” Odalia hissed. She looked at one of the Abomaton prototypes that was just milling about in the kitchen. “Are you going to free me?”

The Abomaton prototype didn’t respond.

Odalia grumbled as she feebly tried to escape. Maybe the Park child wasn’t “Half-a-Witch” after all.

Willow gently rapped on Amity’s bedroom door.

“I already told you, Ed. I’m not interested in... Willow?” Amity was caught off guard as she opened her door.

“You and I need to talk,” Willow replied.

“About... what?” Amity replied slowly, blocking off the doorway with her body.

“Grom,” Willow said succinctly.

“That still doesn’t help me out. What about Grom, specifically?” Amity inquired, raising an eyebrow.

“About you and Luz going together,” Willow responded.

Amity slammed her eyes shut and exhaled sharply through clenched teeth. After a few seconds of deliberation, she stepped aside and allowed Willow to enter her room. “Fine, come in.”

“I remember what you said back in that memory on the Knee.” Willow said.

“Dang, I thought you would have forgotten about that,” Amity said, slumping against her bed. “So you still remember how I’m some weirdo.”

“Why would you be a weirdo?” Willow asked.

“Because I like Luz?” Amity said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“I’m serious, Amity.” Willow grabbed the chair from Amity’s desk and flipped it around before taking a seat and facing the abomination witch. “Luz likes you. And not in the friend way, in the ‘I want you to be my girlfriend’ way.”

The plant witch paused to take a breath before continuing. “Look, the way I see it, you have two options. You can either let Grom come and go whilst you just sit on your hands never letting Luz know how you feel and be stuck in this weird relationship limbo, or you can just suck it up and ask her out to the dance. Luz likes you, Amity. She really, truly does.”

“How are you so sure?” Amity asked cautiously, readjusting herself to sit more upright.

Willow let out a small laugh, somewhat in disbelief that Amity was still fighting her on this. “Do you remember how Luz was acting when her brain got torched and she saw you? She was full on flirting, Blight. ‘The only thing burning more than my memories is my heart?’ I’m pretty sure that can only be interpreted as flirting.”

Amity groaned, finally giving in. “Fine, so I like Luz, and she might – might! – like me. Even if I did ask her out to Grom, how would I know if she’ll like my Gromposal? Ed and Em say that’s the most important part. If you mess up your Gromposal, you get ridiculed and made fun of for the rest of your life!”

Willow snorted. “This is Luz we’re talking about here, Amity. I don’t think there’s anything that you could do to not make Luz like your Gromposal. Besides, who gives a hoot about what other people think about your Gromposal?”

Amity let out a deep exhale. “Right.” She reached over and grabbed a

notepad and quill from her desk. Dipping the quill in the ink pot, she tapped off the excess before flipping the notepad to a blank page and writing “GROMPOSAL IDEAS” at the top in thick letters.

Suddenly, Willow rose from her seat. “And my work here is done. Good luck, Blight.”

That caught Amity by surprise. “What? You’re just gonna leave? I thought you were gonna help me come up with a Luz-worthy Gromposal.”

“And I am,” Willow replied. “If you want your Gromposal to be ‘Luz-worthy’, as you put it, then it has to be something entirely of your own. It can be a simple card, or it can be a grand spectacle with dancers and a marching band, whatever you can come up with. What matters, though, is that the idea is entirely from your brain and no one else’s. Now, if you’ll excuse me, my dads are probably wondering where I am, so I need to head back home. Good luck, Amity.”

Amity groaned as she crumpled up yet another sheet of paper. Tossing it to the floor, it joined the dozens of other attempts that she had drafted up. How was she going to ask Luz out to Grom? Willow had said that the Gromposal had to be “entirely from her own brain”, but that wasn’t much help when the only thing going through her brain was how impossible this was.

The first question Amity had was what kind of Gromposal it should be. She wanted the Gromposal to be simple and straightforward. Nothing flashy or over the top, thank you very much. After some deliberation that had lasted all of 10 seconds, she had decided that a small handwritten note asking Luz out would fit the bill just fine. It was small, discreet, and if Luz rejected her then could easily destroy the evidence by setting it on fire.

Though, the last time she had set something on fire, she’d had to go into Luz’s brain and fix everything, and she did not want to repeat that. Okay, maybe setting it on fire wasn’t the best plan. She could just throw it away, yeah that’d work. Though someone could go snooping in the trash. . .

“Hey, Mittens,” Emira stuck her head into her younger sister’s room. “What are ya working on?”

Amity yelped in surprise at the sudden disturbance. When she realized it was just her sister, though, she calmed down. Slumping over her desk, she

banged her forehead against the wood. “I’ve been trying to come up with a good Gromposal.”

“You’re coming up with a Gromposal? Wow, and I thought you just had a cold rock instead of a heart,” Em joked.

“Shut up,” Amity responded in a similar tone.

Em fully entered the room and stood by her sister so that she was hovering over Amity’s shoulder. “So, who’s got your heart aflutter, Mittens? Some cute gal caught your eye and you just can’t stop thinking about her? Every time you see her, your breath catches in your throat and you have to remind yourself to breathe because dying doesn’t look cool in front of your crush? Who is it?”

Amity blushed and covered her face with her hands. “It’s. . .” she started, but she couldn’t work up the courage to say it aloud. “Just look for yourself.” To emphasize her point, she batted one of the crumpled balls of parchment with her foot, sending it in Em’s direction.

Emira bent over and picked up the ball of parchment. Unraveling it, she saw that it consisted of Amity inviting Luz to be her date to Grom. She could barely believe what she was reading. “Holy Titan, you have a crush on Luz?!”

Amity shot up from her seat and covered Em’s mouth with her hand. “Say it louder, why don’t you? Do you want everyone on the Isles to know as well?” she hissed.

Emira simply licked Amity’s hand in response, causing the emerald-haired witch to pull back. “Ewww. Dang it, Emira, this isn’t a joke!”

“You know,” Emira started, crossing her arms over her chest. “I could be running around the house screaming about how you have a crush on Luz, but I’m not that childish. That’s Ed’s schtick. But seriously: Luz? The same Luz that you’ve been avoiding for like the past few days?”

“Yes,” Amity said quietly, looking down at the floor and avoiding eye contact with her older sister.

“You see the problem here, right?” Emira asked after a few seconds of silence.

Amity raised her head. “Uh. . . no?”

“If you want to ask Luz out, that’s going to require you to, ya know, *talk with her*, right?” Emira probed.

The younger witch sighed. “I know. I just... I just don’t know how to do it.”

Emira propped her head up on her fist. “What do you mean? Does this have something to do with whatever’s been eating at ya recently?”

Amity exhaled slowly. “I guess you could say that.” She shifted in her chair as she thought of how to explain what all had happened without sounding like she was crazy. “Do you remember when we went on that trip to the Knee with Eda and Luz?”

Em nodded. “Yeah. That was when the Owl Lady helped you get a handle on a fire spell before you tested it on that slitherbeast. Wait... is that when you figured out you had a crush on Luz? Was it because Luz did that magic sucking thing and KO’d the slitherbeast to save the damsel in distress?”

“Shut up,” Amity said lightheartedly, giving Em a playful punch on the shoulder. “But, yeah, that was when I realized I liked her.”

“So what does that have to do with you avoiding Luz recently?” Emira inquired. “I don’t see the connection between you realizing you like her and now avoiding her like she’s got the mold.”

Amity sucked in a breath. “Well, I might have kinda accidentally, kinda on purpose burned up a ton of Luz’s memories while I was trying to destroy that particular memory. But then Ms. Eda sent me and Willow and Gus into Luz’s brain to fix it all up, and I think she’s okay now.”

Em scoffed. “No way!” She gave a small laugh. “Titan, that’s a twist. No wonder you’ve been avoiding her.”

Amity slumped. “Yeah, I doubt she’d even want to talk to me though.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Emira said with a smile. “Gus tends to blabbermouth when he’s bored in class, and one of his favorite topics is about how Luz is always wondering why you’re never around to hang out. From how Gus talks about her, I don’t think the kid has a single grudge-holding bone in her body. She cares about you, Mittens. You get that, yeah?”

The emerald-haired witch gave a small nod. “Yeah. So you think I actually have a chance of Luz saying yes?”

Em leaned back and folded her hands behind her head. “You’ll definitely have a better chance than Ed. He might not look it, but he’s been a nervous wreck trying to work up the courage to ask Jerbo out to Grom. If you

actually ask Luz out, regardless of what she says, then you can rest easy knowing you're doing better than our dork supreme of a brother."

Amity smiled and laughed. "Thanks, Em. And I mean that, really."

"I'm your older sister. Being a fount of knowledge and relationship advice is kinda part of the job description. Well, that and annoying you." Emira smirked at that last part. "Right, well, have fun writing the same note over and over again. You'll get it eventually."

Amity simply stuck her tongue out and blew a raspberry.

Emira just rolled her eyes as she headed for the door. When she was about to shut it, though, she stopped. "By the way, do you have any idea why Odalia has like a billion vines wrapped around her in the kitchen?"

It took Amity a few seconds to respond as her mind put together the pieces. "Ohhhhh... That's how Willow got up here."

Em nodded. "Ah, should have guessed that was the work of one of your pals. You know, I would go help out Mother dearest, but I just remembered that I have something in my room that will distract me for a long, long time and that means I won't be able to hear Odalia's shouts. It's such a shame, really."

Amity giggled. "Titan, don't let mom hear you talk about that. Or actually do, I want to see her reaction."

With part one of her plan done, Willow made the trek back to the Park house. Slipping in through the back door, she flicked on the light to the kitchen. She wasn't alone, though.

Seated at the kitchen table, Gilbert Park was nursing a mug of bitterbean brew. "Don't worry, Flower," Willow's father said. "I'll keep your little rendezvous with the Blight girl a secret."

"How did you know I was meeting with Amity?" Willow asked. She hadn't told anyone about the meeting. Well, except for Gus, and he'd promised to keep it a secret.

Gilbert took a swig of his bitterbean. "Augustus sent one of his armies of little illusion messages to your room, and they were all walking around the house asking where you were and if you'd talked with Amity yet."

“Dang it, Gus,” Willow said softly, dragging her hand down her face.

Gil chuckled. “The Porter clan isn’t exactly known for their subtlety. I guess that comes with the territory of being Illusionists and Oracles.”

“Are any of the IMs still around?” Willow asked. “I don’t want Gus to be wasting bile just for me to not tell him anything.”

“I’m pretty sure one of the lot is going in circles on the rug downstairs in the den,” Gilbert answered, jerking his head in the direction of the stairs.

“Thanks,” Willow replied. “You promise to not tell Papa about me staying out past curfew, right?”

Gilbert nodded. “About what?” he said jokingly. “I’ve already forgotten the past three minutes. Hmm, I might have to go to a healer to get my brain checked.”

Willow laughed. “Okay, I get it.”

Heading down the stairs, Willow found a miniature version of Gus marching around in circles. “Where’s Willow? Has she talked to Amity yet? Where’s Willow? Has she talked to Amity yet?”

Willow knelt down on the rug and waved her hand in front of the tiny illusion, hoping to break it out of whatever loop it was stuck in. The hand wave seemed to do the trick, as the illusion immediately jumped in place and turned to face Willow.

“Willow!” Mini-Gus said. “Have you talked with Amity yet?”

Willow nodded. “Yeah, I talked with her, and I’m pretty sure I’ve convinced her to ask Luz out to Grom.”

Mini-Gus pulled out a miniature notepad and began scribbling notes. “That’s awesome! Any other findings to report?”

Willow hemmed and hawed before eventually responding with, “Nope, nothing else really.”

Mini-Gus nodded and made another small scribble on his notesheet. “Alright, I can definitely work with this. *Hasta la pasta*, Willow!”

Willow waved goodbye before watching the Mini-Gus fade away in a non-existent wind.

Checking her scroll for the time, the plant witch saw that it was well past her normal waking hours. Quietly ascending the stairs, she snuck into her room and switched into comfy pajamas before promptly collapsing into bed and falling unconscious in seconds.

Part two of her plan would have to wait for the next day.

Schlaftag 1, Seventh Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | The Owl House

Luz's tail swished back and forth as she watched King and Eda playfully squabble about what prank they should play on an Emperor's Coven guard this week. The three were lounging around in the living room, enjoying a nice lazy day to end off the week.

"I'm just saying, if we go with your plan of spray painting an owl on their mask while they sleep, then it'll be easy to track it back to us," King argued.

"And why would that be?" Eda questioned, putting a hand on her hip.

"Because owls are literally your whole thing," King replied. "You are the *Owl* Lady. This is the *Owl* House. You'd be the first suspect because duh, why wouldn't you be?"

Eda sighed. "Dang, got me there. Fine, we'll go with your prank."

King gave a victorious fist pump and received a high five from Luz. "Haha, yes! Operation 'Summon Xarhtograz, Warlock Ruler, Master of Night Terrors and Chaos Personified', is a go!"

"You think we can, like, cut down the name to something that isn't a mouthful? Maybe make it an acronym or something?" Luz suggested.

"No, we gotta say the full title or else he might smite us for not giving him his due respect," King replied.

Luz gave an exaggerated sigh. "Fine, we can call it Operation Summon Zar—"

Hooty suddenly shot from his post and wrapped around Luz's mouth, muffling her speech. "Never say that name unless you want to summon him!"

When the bird worm finally relinquished his death grip around Luz's face, she gave a confused look. "What? But King just said his name?"

“No he didn’t,” Hooty replied. “He said Xarhtograz. You were about to say Zar... hto... graz.”

“I cannot hear a difference between those two names. Like, at all,” Luz said. “Can you hear a difference, Eda?”

“How can you not hear the difference?” Eda responded with a question of her own. “Zar and Xar sound nothing alike. You got wax in your ears or something, kid?”

Luz still had no idea what the difference could possibly be. “Alright. Umm, to avoid accidentally summoning someone who shall not be mentioned, I think I’ll just call it ‘the prank plan’ from now on. So, how are we going to actually go about, y’know, summoning the big fella?”

Before anyone could answer, they were interrupted by the sound of a knock at the door. “I’ll get it!” Luz called out quickly, hopping up to her feet and dashing over to the door.

Opening the door revealed the visitor to be a very familiar face. “Heya Willow!” Luz said with a smile and wave. “Come on in.”

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything important,” Willow said.

“Eh, it was nothing super crazy,” Luz answered. “We were just discussing our plans to hold a summoning ritual to summon a chaos deity and play some epic pranks on some EC guards.”

“Huh, sounds fun,” Willow nodded before looking up hopefully at the Owl Lady. “Is it okay if Luz and I talk in private, Miss Eda?”

“Sure, go ahead. I won’t pry,” Eda responded.

“Thanks,” Willow replied earnestly. She then lightly grabbed Luz by the arm and dragged the two of them upstairs and into Luz’s room.

The basilisk was still confused as to what was so important to Willow that they couldn’t involve Eda or King in the conversation. After closing the door, Willow turned to the basilisk. “What do you remember about the time when your brain was on fire?” the plant witch asked. “Not when Amity, Gus, and I were in there, but like when we were at school,” she clarified.

“Uhhh...” Luz thought back. Some of her memories were a little fuzzy, and she had a pretty good idea why, but others were more clear. “I remember thinking that you and Gus were, like, weird elf creatures. And that I thought your name was Tatiana and Gus’ name was Isaac.”

“Is there anything more that you can think of? Maybe like when we were in photo class and found the burning memories, for example?” Willow continued.

Luz screwed her face up into a thinking face. “I’m not totally sure, but I think I remember Gus, like, jumping into the room like he was a cop on a TV drama. All ‘Freeze, put your hands up!’ kinda thing.”

“Yeah, that happened,” Willow confirmed. “Anything else? Anything you might have done or said, in particular?”

Luz sucked in a breath. “I... uh... Well, I’m not totally sure if this happened, but... I have no idea if this memory is accurate, but I think I kind of remember... flirting with Amity? Kinda? Sorta? I dunno. I’m probably just making things up to fill in the blanks caused by the fire.”

That made Willow pause. “We fixed all of your memories, though. There shouldn’t be any blanks to fill in.”

Willow felt like she was watching the gears in Luz’s mind turn as she comprehended what the plant witch had said. “Wait... are you saying that I actually flirted with Amity?!”

“I’m not saying you didn’t,” Willow said with a cheeky grin.

Luz grabbed a pillow and buried it into her face. “I HAMT MELIF I TID HAT!”

Willow gave a short chuckle. “Can you say that without the pillow filter?”

Luz sighed and dropped the pillow, letting it fall to the floor. “I can’t believe I did that. Are you 100% sure that I really, actually flirted with Amity?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure,” Willow replied.

Luz slowly exhaled. “Ahhh, fudge nuggets. Is that why Amity’s been acting all weird recently? I know Jerbo said she was distracted recently. Maybe she thinks I’m really weird for flirting and she’s been trying to think of ways to let me down easy about how she doesn’t like me that way.”

Willow nearly burst out laughing, but managed to contain herself. “I wouldn’t say that.”

Luz sat up, suddenly paying much more attention. “What do you mean? What do you mean by that, Willow?”

“Well...” the plant witch started. “Do you remember our CB call we had a few days ago? And how I said that there was someone who liked you?”

Someone who liked you enough that they would take you out to Grom?”

Luz paled. “No. This has to be some kind of prank. Where’s the camera? When’s Gus gonna pop out and go ‘You just got bamboozled!’?”

“No, this isn’t a prank,” Willow responded.

“So Amity actually... likes me? Like, she ‘likes me’ likes me?” Luz was still in disbelief.

“Yeah, she does,” Willow said simply.

Luz collapsed back into her bed. Double facepalming, the basilisk let out a slow, shaky breath. “*Dios mío. Le gusto mucho. Esto no puede ser real, pero lo es. Mierda.*”

Willow clapped a hand on Luz’s shoulder. “So, Amity likes you. That’s only one half of the equation, though. Do *you* like Amity?”

Luz gave a deep exhale. “I... I don’t know. I mean... Gah, this is so confusing.”

“Well, what do you like about Amity?” Willow asked.

“Lots of things,” the basilisk responded. “I like her laugh and her smile and how kind she is to kids and she always gives everything her all and how whenever I see her I get these weird feelings in my stomach...” Luz trailed off. “Ah shiitake mushrooms, I ‘like’ like Amity, don’t I?”

“Sure looks it,” Willow responded with a small laugh. “So, do you think you’re up to taking her out to Grom?”

Luz let out a slow breath. “Maybe? I don’t know. I guess I’m... scared or afraid or whatever. The last time I tried to make a big flashy spectacle thing to ask someone out to a school dance, I got rejected. What if Amity doesn’t like that kinda stuff as well? Should I try to turn down my Luz-ness, Willow? Maybe that will go better...”

Willow clapped a hand on the basilisk’s shoulder to get her attention. “Luz, look at me.”

Luz slowly raised her head to meet Willow’s eyes. “Yeah?”

“I don’t know a better way to word this, but Amity likes you... because you are you,” Willow said emphatically. “And if it turns out that the most ‘you’ thing you could do to ask her out to Grom is to serenade her with a gui-scar

solo or have a barbershop quartet parade around school singing about how cute you two would be together, then *do it*.”

“So, do you have any ideas for how you’re going to ask Amity out?” Willow questioned.

Luz thought about it for a few seconds, before a smile grew on her face. She just had an idea. A wonderful, crazy, 100% guaranteed to work, foolproof, impossible to mess up idea. It was going to be the best Gromposal ever.

“Yeah, I’ve got something in mind.”

Chapter 41

Luz Faces Her Fears

Gehetag 2, Seventh Lunar Disappearance, 50 CE | Hexside School of Magic and Demonics

Luz took a deep breath as she put her textbooks away in her locker. If she wanted to even have a chance of Amity saying yes, she would have to pull off everything perfectly. She only had one chance to pull this off, and if anything went even the slightest bit awry then it would all be for naught. Steeling herself, the basilisk closed her locker and headed off to the classroom that Willow and Gus had stationed themselves in.

“Are 100% sure that you’ll have enough bile?” Luz asked, looking in Gus’ direction.

The Illusionist shrugged. “It’ll only be what? 30 seconds max? Not to toot my own horn, but I can do that in my sleep.”

Luz gave a playful scoff. “Okay mister, you don’t have to brag about your grandioso.”

It was now or never. Taking one last breath to ready herself, Luz nodded. “Let’s do this.”

Nodding in kind, Willow exited the room, heading off to find a certain Abomination witch. While Willow was out searching for her “victim”, Luz and Gus got to work preparing their portions of the Gromposal. Reaching into her backpack, Luz pulled out two things: first was *The Good Witch Azura: Battle For The Welttree* with a very specific page bookmarked via a sticky note. Tossing the book over to Gus, the boy got to reading the

frankly overly-detailed description of the scene. Next, Luz withdrew a sketch that she'd made of her personal adaptation of Azura. Sure, she was going to be taking a few creative liberties, but it was still easily recognizable as the Good Witch herself. Concentrating on her morph, Luz felt herself grow taller and her hair lengthen as it began to trail down her back. Those were just the ones she could feel, though. Keeping focused on the morph, Luz willed her hair to turn the signature Azura green.

Grabbing her phone and navigating to the camera app, she examined the changes. Everything looked pretty much perfect, physically wise. Now was the hard part, though: the outfit. Azura's outfit had so many minute details that Luz had to get exactly right. From the trim pattern at the end of the cape to the shine of the gem inlaid into the hat, Luz had to match it all.

(Okay, well she didn't have to 100% be a carbon copy according to what Eda had said when she ran the idea by the Owl Lady, but Luz was also too much of a perfectionist to let even the slightest blemish go unfixed.)

Slowly, Luz's Hexside uniform shifted and changed just like her body had. The arm sleeves and leggings specifying her chosen magic tracks all turned to match the white-and-mauve color scheme, while her tunic melded into the sleeves so that it was a single piece of cloth. At the same time, her typical Hexside- approved sneakers morphed into the stylish boots Azura used to kick the butt of evil all across the universe. Finally, there was the piece de resistance: the hat. Reaching into her backpack yet again, Luz grabbed the old baseball cap that Eda had yinked from the Human Realm. Placing the hat snug on her head, the basilisk completed the final changes of the morph from weird and nerdy Luz to the cool and awesome Azura.

Patting her hands against her cheeks, Luz remembered something. She had almost forgotten it in the rush to get ready: she needed to change her voice! The last time she had tried to impersonate a made up person, Bump had called her bluff in like 10 seconds, and Amity would probably be able to tell it was Luz even faster. Letting out a small "Dang it!", Luz got to work on shifting her vocal cords so that she sounded more like the Azura from the movie.

(The first movie, specifically, since that was the objectively better and more accurate to the source material Azura adaptation. She was still salty that the movie studio wouldn't pony up the big bucks to bring back the original actor for the second movie.)

As her vocal cords warped and changed, Luz was just making random noises,

trying to get a good gauge of what she should change. Eventually, she settled on a voice that was a fair bit deeper than her own and was just a touch gravelly. That would be good enough for now.

Luz let out a slow breath. “Alright. I think I’m ready. You ready, Gustanamo?”

“Yup!” he replied. “This shouldn’t be too bad, all things considered. Not lots of moving parts, which is nice.”

“Well then, shall we get in our places?” Luz asked.

“I’ll go hide in the corner,” Gus said.

“Hey, you’re the most important part, man,” Luz said, giving him a side hug. “You’re bringing this whole thing to life, so give yourself some credit.”

“I guess,” he said reluctantly. Looking down at his watch, he checked the time. “Willow and Amity will probably be here soon, so I need to hide. What’s the human saying? ‘Break an egg’?”

Luz laughed at the boy’s malapropism. “Break a *leg*, I think you mean.”

Gus gasped and leaned back, a look of disgust on his face. “Eww, what?! Why would you want someone to get hurt? How is that a good thing?”

“Actors are weird,” Luz simply replied. “And beyond that, uhh... I dunno why they say it, actually.” Shaking her head, she refocused on the task at hand. “Regardless, we need to get in position.”

Nodding, Gus hid himself behind a collection of cauldrons and started spinning up the illusion. Luz, for her part, just had to be out of direct eyesight of the door which wasn’t too hard to do, just taking a few steps to the side and posing herself to be all magical and graceful like how the real Azura would carry herself.

As the door to the classroom slowly opened, Luz said a silent prayer to whoever was listening that this would go off without a hitch.

Amity was getting a little tired of following Willow through the maze that was Hexside’s hallways. The Plant witch had shown up out of nowhere and just grabbed her by the arm and told her to follow, and it wasn’t like Amity had a good reason to retaliate. Classes weren’t for another 20 minutes, and Amity could count on Professor Hermonculus to spend the first 10 minutes

of class so busy degrading the students that he wouldn't notice her absence, so that meant Amity had plenty of time for... whatever this was.

"Just one more turn and we'll be there," Willow said.

"Seriously, Willow, why are we going so out of the way?" Amity asked.

"You'll see," Willow stopped in front of a random door and smiled. "Head on in."

Sighing and rolling her eyes, Amity slowly pushed the door open.

There was a lot of things that Amity was thinking this could have been. Maybe it was Willow trying to get back into Abominations and she wanted Amity to give her a few pointers. Maybe there was some grave world-ending danger on the loose and they needed to fight it off. There was a lot of possibilities going through Amity's mind about what could be on the other side of the door.

Whatever they were, though, was nothing compared to what she actually saw. It was if someone had taken the Garden of Grand Reveals and brought it to life inside the classroom. Trees of all colors and varieties stood tall, reaching up into the sky, far beyond what should've been possible. Stumblebees flitted to and fro, pollinating the many flowers that sprouted from the earth below their feet. Amity could even hear the rapids of the Raging Red River far off in the distance.

Beyond all that, though, was one thing that caught Amity's eye. Standing in the middle of the Garden was the Good Witch Azura, letting the gentle breeze flow through her hair and ruffle her cape in a scene that looked straight out of a storybook.

"Azura?!" Amity couldn't believe her eyes at who stood before her.

"Greetings and salutations, traveler," Azura said, turning to face the newcomer and bowing low.

"You're... you're real!" Amity was trying her best to hold back her excitement, but she was talking with freaking *Azura*!

"Yes, I do believe I am," Azura said with a small smile.

"How -" Amity stumbled over her words. "How are you here? Why are you here?"

Azura let out a sigh. “Well, it is quite a story, I must say. Would you be willing to listen?”

Amity nodded fervently. “Uh huh, yeah, tell me!” She answered maybe a tad too eagerly.

Azura nodded stoically. “It all started around a month ago. I was just about to finally defeat the nefarious Gildersnake and banish it for all eternity, when I felt an odd force. It was like I was being separated from reality. When I finally awoke, I was here in the Boiling Isles. I was originally going to try to return to my own reality as quick as I could, but something compelled me to stay here. To explore. And through that exploration, I’ve discovered something. While I’ve had enough adventures to last me a dozen lifetimes, this world offered me one even greater than all of my previous escapades combined.”

“Really, what is it?” Amity was on the edge of her proverbial seat.

“I’m not quite sure what I would call it,” Azura admitted. “But I think you would be a great companion for me on this adventure. I only have one question for you, though.”

Suddenly, Azura stood up straight and removed her hat. Looking Amity in the eye, her face began to shift and change, her hair becoming shorter and darker, her eyes changing in a flash from green to golden brown. After what felt like an eternity, but was realistically only a few seconds, the face of Luz Noceda was looking back at her.

“Amity Blight, will you go to Grom with me?”

Amity fainted.

Luz rushed to catch the falling Amity, scooping her up before there was unfortunate meeting between her head and the floor. Thinking quickly, the basilisk dragged the unconscious witch over to one of the desks that they’d moved over to the wall and sat Amity down in it.

Willow and Gus quickly joined Luz in checking up on their friend.

“Well... she didn’t say no?” Luz said with a shaky laugh.

Willow shot her a look. “Now isn’t the time.”

