



THE FINAL CONFRONTATION WIZARD OF SHADOWS

HUSSNAIN AHMAD

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DEDICATION

This book, *The Final Confrontation: Wizard Of Shadows*, is a work of fiction and a creative endeavor by Hussnain Ahmad, the author. It is important to note that this book is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or associated with the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling, or any entities related to the Harry Potter franchise.

The mention of certain fictional characters, locations, and magical elements that may resemble those found in the Harry Potter series is solely for the purpose of homage, inspiration, and imaginative storytelling.

This story is inspired by the great book series "Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling", which has captivated the hearts and minds of readers around the world. It pays tribute to the enchanting and magical world created by J.K. Rowling, and as such, some familiar elements have been incorporated into this narrative as a way of celebrating the fantastic realm of wizardry and the enduring influence of Harry Potter.

The characters, plot, and setting of *The Final Confrontation: Wizard Of Shadows* are unique and distinct from the Harry Potter series, with its own original storyline and characters. Any resemblance to characters, names, or magical concepts from the Harry Potter series is coincidental and is meant to serve as a nod to the beloved source of inspiration.

Readers are encouraged to approach this book as a separate and standalone work of fiction that explores its own narrative world and themes. It is our hope that you will enjoy the story for its own merits while appreciating the enchantment of the wizarding genre that has captivated readers for generations.

Thank you for embarking on this magical journey with us, and we hope you find *The Final Confrontation: Wizard Of Shadows* a delightful and engaging read.

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With immense gratitude,

Hussnain Ahmad

Chapter#1 – The Lost Soul

There lived a great witch named **Thomas** and his wife **Angela** in the enchanting village of **Charmora**(A land of magic and spells). Thomas was no ordinary wizard—his magic was powerful enough to shape the wind, command fire, and heal the gravest wounds with just a whisper. His knowledge of spells was unmatched, and even the oldest wizards sought his wisdom. Despite his strength, Thomas was known for his kindness. He believed magic was meant to **protect, not destroy**, and he used it to help the people of Charmora, healing the sick, guiding the lost, and shielding the village from harm.

Angela, on the other hand, was a vision of grace and beauty. Her **long, dark hair flowed like silk**, and her emerald-green eyes sparkled with warmth and wisdom. She carried herself with elegance, her presence as soothing as a gentle breeze. But beyond her beauty, she had a heart filled with **love and compassion**. She cared deeply for everyone around her, always ready to offer a helping hand or a comforting word. The village adored her, not just for her charm but for her **selflessness and unwavering kindness**.

Their happiness reached new heights when Angela gave birth to a son, **Albert**. From the moment he opened his eyes, something about him felt different—**as if magic itself had been woven into his soul**. His tiny hands would spark with energy, and his giggles carried a strange enchantment, making lights flicker and objects float for just a second. Thomas and Angela knew their son was special, destined for something greater than they could imagine.

Albert's childhood was filled with **laughter, love, and wonder**. For six beautiful years, he lived a life untouched by sorrow. He would wake to the sound of birds singing outside his window, run barefoot through the soft grass, and spend his afternoons by the river, watching the water shimmer under the golden sun. **Thomas would sit with him beneath the great oak tree, teaching him about the stars, the history of wizards, and the balance of magic**. Angela, ever watchful, would smile as she braided his hair or hummed lullabies that carried the warmth of a mother's love.

The people of Charmora adored Albert, calling him the "**Child of Light**" because of his joyful spirit and curious mind. He would watch in awe as his father performed spells, trying to mimic him by waving his tiny fingers, though nothing happened yet. His parents had **never rushed to teach him magic**, believing he should enjoy childhood first. "Magic is a gift," Thomas would say. "And a gift must be earned with patience and wisdom."

Albert spent his days exploring the world around him. He would chase glowing fireflies in the meadows at dusk, listen to stories of ancient wizards told by the elders, and sneak into his father's study, fascinated by the **towering bookshelves filled with ancient spells and forgotten knowledge**. He dreamed of the day he could cast his first spell, of becoming just like his father—**strong, wise, and kind**.

But fate had other plans.

On Albert's **seventh birthday**, the village was preparing for a grand celebration. Lanterns were being lit, gifts were wrapped, and laughter echoed through the air. That night, the sky was **heavy with storm clouds**, the wind whispering warnings no one could hear.

And then, everything changed.

Far away from home, in the **tower of RuneBridge**, Albert's father, **Thomas**, lay on the cold stone floor, struggling for his final breath. The tower, a place of **magical passage**, had been his sanctuary, a place where the greatest wizards studied magic beyond ordinary reach. But tonight, it had become his tomb.

Thomas had been secretly trying to **learn the magic of DARKHOLD**, a forbidden power that could only be mastered by the strongest sorcerers. He had no choice—there were witches stronger than him, ones who could threaten **his family, the people of Charmora, and everything he swore to protect**. He believed that if he could master DARKHOLD, he would stand against any enemy.

But he had been betrayed. Someone had exposed his plan, and before he could finish what he had started, **they came for him**.

However, **Thomas was no fool**. He had foreseen the possibility of failure. **Moments before his death**, he had cast a final, desperate spell—one that would ensure **DARKHOLD would never fall into the wrong hands**.

With the last of his strength, **he sealed DARKHOLD away—beyond the reach of this world, beyond time itself**. It was hidden in a place that no ordinary wizard could access.

And to guard it, **he created three beings of pure magic—creatures bound to protect that hidden realm for eternity**.

The only way to reach it?

A spell.

A spell only **they** could cast.

But before Thomas could ever use it—before he could claim the power that might have saved him—**he was struck down**.

His secret died with him.

Or so everyone believed.

The air in RuneBridge was thick with the scent of burning magic. The walls, once carved with ancient spells, were now tainted with **scorch marks and blood**. His hands trembled as he pressed them against his chest, feeling the deep wound that drained his strength. The very magic he had tried to learn had been used against him. His vision blurred, but his mind was clear on one thing—**Angela and Albert**.

"I have to... warn them..." he whispered, but the words barely left his lips.

A shadow loomed over him, a presence he could no longer fight. The last thing he saw was the moonlight streaming through the shattered window, and then—**darkness**.

Back in **Charmora**, Angela was unaware of her husband's fate—until the news arrived like a storm that shattered her soul. **Thomas was dead**. The words echoed in her mind, over and over again, but she refused to believe them.

She collapsed onto the floor of their home, her hands clutching her chest as if she could **hold back the pain, the unbearable weight of loss**. The world around her faded; the warmth of Charmora, the beauty of the hills, the soft glow of candlelight—it all turned cold.

Then came the whispers.

She wasn't safe. **Albert wasn't safe**.

The ones who killed Thomas would **come for her next**.

That night, **the witches came**.

Angela's mind had already shattered under the weight of her grief, and when she saw them—hooded figures moving like shadows outside her home—she knew there was no escape. Her husband had been one of the strongest wizards, and even he had fallen. What could she do? **What chance did Albert have?**

The walls of their home felt like they were closing in. The silence of the night was unbearable. She could hear her own heartbeat, fast and unsteady.

She **couldn't let them take her**. She **couldn't let them take Albert**.

With trembling hands, she picked up a silver dagger—one that Thomas had once gifted her, a blade enchanted to protect her from harm.

Tears streamed down her face as she whispered, **"I'm sorry, Albert... I love you."**

When the villagers found her the next morning, it looked like a **suicide**. A mother who had lost her mind after her husband's death. A woman who **couldn't bear the pain**. No one saw the witches come. No one knew the truth.

Albert **never knew the truth**.

Albert was only **seven years old** when his world shattered.

One night, his father didn't return home. The next morning, his mother was gone too. **Everything was taken from him in the span of a single day**.

He stood outside their home as people whispered around him, their voices blurred and distant.

"Poor child..."

"His mother lost her mind..."

"First Thomas, now Angela... how tragic..."

Albert didn't understand. **Why wouldn't anyone tell him what happened?** Why wouldn't anyone bring his parents back?

His tiny hands curled into fists. His heart pounded against his ribs, his mind **spinning in confusion and fear**. The warmth of Charmora now felt suffocating. The once-friendly faces of villagers seemed **strange and distant**. The home that once smelled of his mother's perfume and his father's magic now reeked of **death and emptiness**.

Then, he heard the whispers.

"He's cursed."

"His family is doomed."

At first, he didn't understand. He sat in his empty home, waiting for his mother to return, for his father to walk through the door, but **they never did**. Days passed, and the villagers pitied him. They whispered behind his back, calling him **cursed**, a child of misfortune.

Then, he learned he had **relatives**—distant ones. **People who didn't care for him, only for what they could take**.

They took him in, but not out of kindness. His relatives were **greedy, cruel, and selfish**. To them, Albert was nothing more than an **unwanted burden**, a mouth to feed in exchange for labor. They never spoke his parents' names, never treated him with love. Instead, they **exploited him**, forcing him to do chores from morning till night.

Whenever he asked questions about his father, they **silenced him with slaps and harsh words**. Whenever he cried for his mother, they locked him away in a dark room, saying, **"Tears won't bring back the dead."**

The physical **beatings** and **mental torment** became part of his daily life. No one in **Charmora** spoke against it. The once-friendly village turned its back on him.

But Albert **endured**.

By the time he turned **ten**, he had learned a valuable lesson: **No one was coming to save him**.

He realized that if he wanted to escape the cruelty of his life, he would have to **become stronger**. His father had been one of the most powerful wizards—Albert was his son.

So, in secret, he started **teaching himself magic**.

He would sneak into his relatives' study late at night, searching for any books on spells. He read old scrolls, memorized symbols, and practiced in the shadows, trying to harness the **power he had once admired in his father**. But learning alone was difficult.

And then, **he met Valken**.

One cold evening, while Albert was gathering firewood outside his relatives' house, he noticed a stranger watching him from the shadows of an alleyway. The man stepped forward, cloaked in a long, dark robe, his piercing eyes reflecting wisdom and mystery.

"You have your father's eyes," the man said, his voice smooth and calm.

Albert took a step back. "Who are you?"

The man **smiled**—a kind, reassuring smile. "**A friend of Thomas. And perhaps... your friend too.**"

Albert, hesitant but desperate for answers, listened. The man introduced himself as **Valken**, claiming to be an **old companion of Thomas, a fellow seeker of knowledge, and a survivor of the same darkness that had taken Albert's father.**

"I knew your father well," Valken continued. "He was a great wizard. And like him, you have potential—potential that will be wasted if you let these people break you."

For the first time in years, someone **spoke his father's name with respect.** For the first time, Albert felt like someone **saw him—not as a burden, but as something more.**

And so, when Valken offered to **teach him magic**, Albert agreed.

For the next three years, **Valken trained Albert in secret.** He taught him spells—not grand or world-breaking, but enough to **survive, to protect himself, to push back against those who sought to control him.**

At first, Valken seemed **like a true mentor.** He spoke wisely, never pushed Albert too far, and never revealed too much about himself. He acted as a **father figure**, filling the void Thomas had left.

But beneath his calm demeanor, **Valken was hiding something.**

But What it could be?

After three long, painful years of enduring the loss of his parents and the **unyielding cruelty of the world**, Albert began to hear **The Voices.**

They came in the **stillness of the night**, soft at first—**whispers curling through the darkness** like an unseen presence lurking just beyond his reach.

"They betrayed him..."

"Your father sought the truth... but they silenced him."

"Power will give you answers... power will give you justice."

At first, Albert ignored them. **Madness, that's what it was.** Nothing more than his broken mind playing cruel tricks on him. But the **whispers refused to be silenced.**

Each night, they grew **louder.** Stronger.

"Find it, Albert... Find the truth."

"They think you're weak... Prove them wrong."

"Magic is your birthright. Take it."

The villagers had already **feared him**, treating him like an outcast, a **cursed child**. But when Albert started **talking to the voices**, their fear turned into hatred.

"He's cursed, just like his father!"

"Darkness follows him—he should have died with his parents!"

Even his **relatives, who had once beaten and used him, now wanted nothing to do with him**. They called him **mad, possessed, a monster in the making**.

Albert sat alone in the corner of his cold room, gripping his hands into fists. **Was he truly going mad?**

Or was there something **the voices wanted him to know?**

By the time Albert turned thirteen, the Voices no longer whispered.

They **commanded**.

The nightmares worsened.

"You will suffer like they did."

"Or you will rise."

Albert **couldn't take it anymore**.

He had spent **six years in misery**, beaten, abandoned, and **hunted by ghosts only he could hear**. If power was what he needed to make the voices stop, then he would **take it**.

So, on a **fateful night**, Albert made his decision.

Under the cover of **dark clouds and a restless wind**, he crept out of his home. With only **his wand, the clothes on his back, and a stolen broom**, he set his sights on the **unknown**.

He didn't know where he was going.

He didn't know what awaited him.

The wind howled around him, cold and unforgiving. Below, the rolling hills and thick forests stretched endlessly into darkness. He had no destination, no plan—just the need to escape.

Then, through the **misty night**, he saw it.

A house.

It stood **alone in the forest**, far from any village or road. **Its roof sagged, the windows were cracked, and its walls were covered in ivy**, as if time itself had abandoned it. From above, it looked **lifeless, forgotten... cursed**.

Albert hesitated. **Something about it felt wrong.**

But he was **tired**. His body ached from the cold air, and his mind was heavy with exhaustion. **By foot, it would take days to reach this place from Charmora.** But from up here, it was **only moments away.**

"One night," he told himself. "I'll stay for one night... and leave by morning."

He guided his broom lower, feeling the chill intensify as he neared the broken house.

But he didn't know what fate had planned for him.

As his feet touched the ground, the wind stilled.

The forest fell silent.

And from the depths of the house, **something watched him.**

Albert stepped cautiously onto the overgrown path, the house towering before him like a forgotten relic of time. The **wooden door creaked** as he pushed it open, revealing a dimly lit space cloaked in dust and silence. The air was **heavy**, thick with the scent of old wood and something... unplaceable.

Then, **he saw it.**

At the far end of the room, **standing tall and unblemished amidst the decay**, was a **mirror.**

Its **frame was intricate—carved with twisting vines and symbols Albert didn't recognize.** But it was the glass itself that **drew him in.** Unlike the broken furniture and shattered windows around it, the surface of the mirror was **flawless... too perfect, too still.**

At the base, faint letters shimmered in the candlelight:

"The Desirescape."

Albert felt a chill crawl down his spine.

As if in a trance, he stepped forward.

The moment his reflection appeared, **the glass rippled—like a pond disturbed by an unseen force.** His breath caught as the **image shifted**—no longer his own, but the **faces of his parents.**

His heart **stopped.**

There they were. **Thomas and Angela.** Standing together, their expressions frozen between sadness and longing. Their eyes, hollow yet familiar, seemed to **plead for something.**

Then—a **shadow moved.**

A black, ghost-like figure flickered behind them, twisting and shifting, never fully revealing itself.

It slithered between their spectral forms, growing darker, denser—as if it were alive.

Albert's hands clenched into fists.

"What is this?"

The air around him **grew colder**. The **shadow loomed closer**, its presence pressing against the glass, its form shifting like black smoke, its very being whispering—calling—to him.

The whispers filled his head.

"Do you seek the truth, Albert?"

"Do you seek power?"

Albert **staggered back**, his heartbeat pounding in his ears. His parents' faces remained, **trapped within the mirror**, their silent mouths forming words he could not hear.

The shadow **lingered**. Watching. Waiting.

And in that moment, Albert knew—he **was not alone in this house**.

Albert's breath hitched as the air in the room grew **heavier**.

His eyes remained locked on the shifting shadows within *The Desirescape*, but his instincts screamed that **he was no longer alone**.

Then—**footsteps**.

Slow. Measured. Approaching.

A shiver crawled up Albert's spine. **Had his relatives followed him? Had the villagers sent someone to drag him back?**

Panic surged through him as he dove beneath a **dust-covered wardrobe**, pressing himself into the darkness, heart pounding against his ribs. The footsteps grew louder, stopping just beyond the threshold. **Whoever it was, they had entered the house**.

Silence.

Albert held his breath, willing himself to disappear.

Then—a **voice, rich with power yet eerily calm**.

"You can't hide from me, boy."

Before he could react, the wardrobe **lurched forward**, an unseen force **ripping him from his hiding place**. Albert tumbled onto the floor, his breath catching as his gaze snapped upward.

A woman stood before him.

She wasn't old, yet there was something **ancient** about her presence. Her black cloak seemed to shift like smoke, and her piercing silver eyes held a knowing gleam—the **gaze of someone who had seen far beyond the limits of time**.

Albert scrambled backward, his pulse roaring in his ears.

The woman took a step closer, unfazed by his fear.

"Tell me, child... what is your name?"

Albert swallowed hard, forcing himself to speak. "I... I'm Albert."

A slow, knowing smile played on the witch's lips. **"Albert... the son of Thomas."**

His stomach twisted. **She knew.**

"How do you—"

"I know many things," she interrupted smoothly, "but most importantly, I know why you're here."

Albert felt a chill creep into his bones.

"You've seen *The Desirescape*," she continued, tilting her head slightly. "You saw them, didn't you? Your parents."

Albert clenched his fists. "That mirror... it showed me something else. **A shadow.** It was there with them."

The witch's smile faded. "And tell me, Albert... what did the shadow say to you?"

His lips parted, but the words caught in his throat. The whispers were still in his mind. **Do you seek power? Do you seek the truth?**

The witch's silver eyes burned into his. "You seek answers," she said, **"but answers are never given freely. They must be earned.** Are you prepared to do what it takes?"

Albert hesitated.

This woman was powerful. Too powerful.

But for the first time, someone **wasn't pushing him away.** Someone **wasn't calling him cursed or mad.** She spoke to him **not as a boy, but as something more**—as someone with **potential.**

He forced himself to his feet, swallowing the fear clawing at his throat. "I... I just want to know the truth."

The witch studied him for a long moment before nodding.

"Then listen well, Albert. This world is cruel. **Magic is not given to the weak, nor is power handed to those who hesitate.** If you want to stand against those who wronged you, **if you want to be more than the boy everyone has cast aside—then you must be willing to step beyond the limits of fear.**"

Albert's breath quickened. Something about her words **ignited something deep inside him**—a fire that had long been smothered by grief, loneliness, and doubt.

The witch turned toward *The Desirescape*, her voice softer now.

"This mirror does not lie. It has shown you what you desire, but also what stands in your way." She glanced back at him. "**What will you do with that knowledge?**"

Albert's fingers curled into fists.

For years, **people had told him who he was**. A burden. A cursed child. A mistake.

But here, in this forgotten house, **he had a choice**.

And for the first time, **he would choose for himself**.

"I don't care about fear," Albert said, **his voice steady now**. "I want power. I want the truth."

A small smirk tugged at the witch's lips.

"Good."

She stepped forward, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Then let us begin, Albert... **for this is the first step toward your real destiny**."

Chapter#2 – The Truth

Albert's heart pounded in his chest as he stood at the **edge of his fate**, staring into the unknown.

Fear whispered caution.

Curiosity urged him forward.

Power... Power called his name.

The witch's words still lingered in his mind, curling around his thoughts like an enchantment he couldn't escape.

"Magic is not given to the weak. Power is not granted to those who hesitate."

Albert clenched his fists. **He had spent years being nothing—forgotten, beaten, discarded like he didn't matter.** But here, in this broken house, in the presence of a woman who saw more in him than anyone else ever had...

He mattered.

The choice was his.

The path before him was dark, uncertain, and dangerous.

But for the first time in his life, **he wasn't running.**

He lifted his chin, **his fear dissolving into something sharper, something unstoppable.** His voice was steady, laced with quiet defiance.

"I am willing to do whatever it takes."

The witch's eyes gleamed with something unreadable—satisfaction, perhaps, or something deeper. A slow, knowing smile spread across her lips.

"Then let us begin."

The **Witch** stood tall before *The Desirescape*, her dark robes shifting like smoke around her. She lifted a hand, fingers barely touching the mirror's edge, and the glass **rippled** as if it were alive.

"Look again, Albert," she said, her voice smooth yet commanding.

Albert hesitated before stepping forward. His reflection flickered, then twisted into **a vision of his parents**—Thomas and Angela, standing together, their faces trapped in an eerie, otherworldly glow.

His heart clenched. **They looked almost real.** Almost... alive.

But then—a **shadow moved behind them.**

Dark. Unformed. **Watching.**

It slithered between them like living smoke, its presence unnatural, **wrong.**

Albert's chest tightened. He turned to the witch, **his voice shaking but firm.**

"Tell me. What is that shadow? Why is it there? Why does it haunt them?"

The **witch smiled.** But it was not a kind smile—it was the kind that carried secrets, the kind that **hid more than it revealed.**

"The answer you seek," she murmured, **"lies within the very question you ask."**

Albert frowned, frustration bubbling inside him. **What did that mean?**

"I don't understand," he admitted, **his voice barely above a whisper.**

The witch exhaled softly, **as if she had expected this.** With a graceful motion, she gestured back toward the mirror.

"Look again, Albert. And this time—see."

The mirror **shifted once more,** the image twisting like a storm brewing beneath the surface. And then, as if some invisible force had pulled back a curtain—**the truth unraveled before him.**

Albert **staggered backward,** his breath coming in sharp gasps.

The shadow wasn't just a ghost. It wasn't just there.

It was **the reason.**

It was the thing that had taken his father. The thing that had stolen his mother. The thing that had **made him an orphan** and let him **suffer alone.**

The **witch's gaze darkened,** her tone heavier now, carrying the weight of knowledge far beyond his understanding.

"That shadow, Albert... is no ordinary ghost." Her voice was low, deliberate. **"It is a curse. A dark enchantment woven so perfectly that your parents' deaths seemed natural. But they were never meant to live. Their fate was sealed long before you were born."**

Albert's stomach twisted.

"You're saying..." His throat tightened, the words **struggling to leave his lips.**

"Your parents were murdered, Albert," the witch said softly.

The words **hit him like a blade to the chest.**

The air in the room **grew heavier,** pressing down on him like the weight of an entire world.

His entire life—**every moment of grief, every second of loneliness—was because someone had planned it.**

Someone had taken them.

Someone had made sure **he suffered.**

His fingers trembled as he clenched them into fists.

"Who?" His voice was barely human now, raw with fury and heartbreak.

The witch's silver eyes glowed under the dim light. **For the first time, there was something almost... sorrowful in them.**

"That, Albert," she whispered, **"is a question only power can answer."**

The **witch** lifted her hand, murmuring a string of **ancient incantations**, her voice weaving through the air like a delicate but unbreakable thread.

Beside *The Desirescape*, a **bowl of still water** sat atop a carved pedestal, its surface untouched—waiting.

Then, as if answering her call, the water **began to stir**.

Albert leaned in, his breath shallow.

The water rippled, then **swirled violently, shifting colors from silver to inky black**. The reflection within twisted, reshaping itself into something **far more sinister than his own face**.

And then—he **saw it**.

A force beyond comprehension.

It wasn't just a shadow. It wasn't just an illusion.

It was **a presence**, something dark, **intelligent, cruel**—the mastermind behind his parents' fate.

The scene changed rapidly. Albert's father, standing in **RuneBridge**, his hands raised in defense. His mother, her final moments **twisted into a tragedy disguised as choice**. And behind it all, that **same ominous force, unseen but controlling everything**.

Albert stumbled backward, his chest tightening.

"No... No, this isn't real."

The **witch** sighed, her silver eyes watching him carefully. "It is real, Albert. And it always has been."

A heavy silence fell between them. Albert's world, once already shattered, now crumbled beyond repair.

Nothing had been an accident. Nothing had been fate.

"They were murdered."

The words felt foreign in his mouth, but the moment he spoke them, something **shifted inside him**—something that had been buried deep beneath years of pain, grief, and silent suffering.

His hands trembled at his sides. **The weight of this truth pressed down on him like a curse of its own.** His entire life had been built on a lie—a lie that had cost him everything.

"Then why..." He swallowed hard, voice barely above a whisper. "Why do I hear them?"

The **witch's expression darkened.** She studied him carefully before answering.

"Because, Albert... they never truly left."

Albert's breath hitched.

"The voices you've heard all these years? They are not madness. They are not tricks of the mind." Her voice softened slightly, but there was an undeniable weight in her words. **"They are the souls of your parents—trapped. Bound to this world by the very magic that stole their lives."**

The room **seemed to close in around him.**

His parents weren't just gone.

They were **cursed.**

"Break it, Albert."

The **whispers in his mind returned, stronger now.** He could almost hear his mother's voice—**weakened, desperate, pleading.**

"Set us free."

His stomach twisted, rage igniting in his chest like an uncontrollable fire.

His entire life, he had been nothing. **A burden. A mistake. A forgotten orphan.**

But now?

Now, he had **purpose.**

He would find whoever had done this.

He would make them **pay.**

And he would tear apart anything standing in his way.

The witch **watched him closely,** a faint, unreadable smirk tugging at her lips. **She had seen this transformation before.** The birth of **power.** The moment when pain became fuel.

She had been waiting for it.

"Then, Albert," she said, **her voice smooth and knowing,** *"it is time you learned how to fight back."*

Albert didn't hesitate.

His grief had no place here anymore. **Only resolve.**

From that day forward, the witch **trained him relentlessly.**

She taught him spells—**not grand, destructive curses, but the precise, disciplined art of control.**

"A blade is dangerous only in the hands of one who knows when to wield it," she had said. "Magic is no different."

Albert **listened. He learned.**

By fifteen, Albert had mastered white magic.

His skill had grown at an **unnatural pace**, his mind once filled with doubt now consumed by **purpose.**

But something **else had changed too.**

His time with *The Desirescape*, his lessons under the **witch's watchful eyes**—they had started to **shape him in ways he didn't yet understand.**

The mirror revealed **his desires** but also **his fears.**

And the more he stared into its depths, the more the **lines between the two blurred.**

The path ahead was **not light, nor dark.**

It was something **in between.**

Something waiting to consume him.

*Albert stood in the clearing behind the witch's house, the wind **whispering through the trees** as the cool night air wrapped around him. The sky above was painted in deep shades of blue, with only the faintest glimmer of stars breaking through the clouds.*

Across from him, the **witch stood motionless**, her robes still, her expression unreadable.

"You've learned much," she said, her voice carrying through the silence. "But knowledge without experience is as useless as a dull blade."

Albert's grip on his wand tightened.

"I'm ready," he said firmly.

The witch raised an eyebrow, a small smirk forming at the corner of her lips.

"Are you?"

She **extended her hand**, and with a simple flick of her fingers, the air **shimmered with magic.** A faint golden glow surrounded the clearing, forming a protective barrier around them.

"This will ensure we don't burn the forest down," she mused.

Albert barely heard her. His pulse quickened with **anticipation.** This was it—a **real duel.**

A chance to **prove himself.**

"You will attack first," the witch instructed. **"Show me what you've learned."**

Albert took a deep breath, **his mind racing through every spell he had mastered.** He had trained for this. He had waited for this.

Now, he would not hold back.

With a sharp movement, he raised his wand—

And the battle began.

"Again."

Albert's breath was ragged, his chest rising and falling as sweat trickled down his brow. His **fingers ached** from casting spell after spell, but he refused to stop.

Across from him, the **witch stood calmly**, her robes untouched, her silver eyes filled with **amusement.**

She hadn't broken a sweat.

Albert gritted his teeth. He had trained relentlessly for **years**, yet she still held the upper hand as if this were nothing more than a game.

"You're holding back," Albert growled, raising his wand again.

The **witch chuckled**, twirling her fingers lazily, and in an instant, the air around her **crackled with unseen energy.**

"Holding back?" she echoed, tilting her head. **"You think I need to?"**

Albert didn't hesitate. He thrust his wand forward, **channeling raw magic into his attack.**

"Lux Incendia!"

A **blinding arc of golden light** surged from his wand, roaring like a wildfire as it shot toward her. The spell was precise, **deadly, unstoppable.**

Or so he thought.

The **witch didn't move.**

She simply lifted a single finger—**just one.**

And then, with a flick of her wrist, **his entire spell shattered like glass.**

Albert's **eyes widened in shock.**

Before he could react, she **raised her hand**, and with a whisper of a spell, **the air around him exploded.**

A powerful **gust of force slammed into his chest**, lifting him off the ground. He was thrown **backward like a ragdoll**, crashing into the stone walls of their training chamber.

Pain shot through his body as he collapsed onto the ground, gasping for breath. His wand slipped from his fingers, rolling across the floor.

The **witch slowly approached**, her steps deliberate, calculated.

Albert **struggled to move**, but before he could even attempt to rise, a wave of invisible force **pinned him down**.

"You fight with strength, Albert." The witch's voice was **calm**, almost gentle.

"But strength alone is nothing."

Albert gritted his teeth, **anger flaring in his chest**.

"Then what is?" he spat.

The **witch knelt beside him**, her silver eyes gleaming under the dim light.

"Control," she whispered. **"Precision. Patience."**

With a wave of her hand, the force pinning him vanished. Albert gasped, **his muscles burning as he forced himself upright**.

"Your magic is powerful, Albert," she continued, watching him carefully. **"But power without control is like a sword in the hands of a child. It cuts without thought, destroys without reason. You will never win a battle if you let your emotions drive you."**

Albert clenched his fists. He wanted to argue, to say that **power was all that mattered**.

But deep down, he knew she was right.

She had beaten him **too easily**.

And if he couldn't defeat **her**, how could he stand against **the ones who had killed his parents?**

Taking a deep breath, **Albert bowed his head**.

"Again."

The **witch smiled**.

"Good. Now you're ready to learn."

One **fateful night**, a long-buried memory surfaced in Albert's mind—**his father's tower**.

He had never been there. Never even seen it up close.

For years, it had stood untouched—a silent ruin where **his father had drawn his last breath**. But now, something inside him urged him toward it, a pull he couldn't ignore.

Was it fate? A whisper from the past? Or something darker, lurking within him?

With the witch fast asleep, Albert slipped away, his cloak wrapped tightly around him as he made his way through the cold, moonlit forest. **Every step toward RuneBridge felt heavier, as if unseen forces were watching.**

When he reached the entrance, his breath caught in his throat.

The **tower loomed before him, ancient and broken, yet somehow... alive.**

Its stone walls pulsed faintly, as if whispering forgotten secrets. Vines twisted unnaturally along its surface, and the air around it **hummed with magic long abandoned**.

Albert swallowed hard and reached for the rusted door handle—

And then, they appeared.

A brilliant **golden light** flared before him, and suddenly, figures emerged—**ethereal beings, glowing like celestial guardians**. Their forms flickered, shifting between light and solid matter.

Albert stumbled back, his instincts screaming to retreat. But before he could turn, **a massive shadow loomed behind him**.

A voice, **deep and resonant**, echoed through the air—

"Master... you have arrived."

Albert's vision blurred. His body felt **weightless**, the world spinning around him.

And then—**darkness**.

When Albert's eyes flickered open, he was no longer outside.

He was **inside the tower**.

The air was thick with magic, the very walls **humming with forgotten power**. Strange symbols glowed faintly along the stone, pulsing in rhythm with his own heartbeat.

And before him stood **three creatures**—unlike anything he had ever seen.

The first one, **tall and slender**, stepped forward. Its eyes gleamed like polished onyx, its voice carrying a reverence that sent chills down Albert's spine.

"Master... you have arrived."

Albert's pulse quickened. **Master?**

A second creature, **shorter but with piercing golden eyes**, echoed the words. **"Master, you're Master Albert."**

Albert's breath caught in his throat. **What was this? Some kind of trick? A test?**

"What do you mean?" he demanded, his voice edged with confusion.

The third creature stepped forward—**older, wiser**, its presence commanding.

"Your father, Master Thomas, was not just a wizard," it began, **its voice filled with something between pride and sorrow**.

"He was our protector. Our savior. He stood against the wizards of Charmora who sought to destroy us."

Albert felt the weight of the words sink into him.

"He was our master, our guide. And because of that... they took him from us."

The creature's voice **faltered**, the memory of that night still haunting.

A cold chill seeped into Albert's bones.

This wasn't **just revenge**.

This wasn't **just murder**.

This was **something bigger**.

Something he **was never meant to uncover**.

And yet... the puzzle was still incomplete.

"Who were they?" Albert pressed, his fists clenching. **"Why did they want my father dead?"**

The creature lowered its gaze.

"That... is a truth even we do not fully know."

Albert's mind **spun**. The darkness that had swallowed his parents—it **wasn't just fate or misfortune**. It was **deliberate. Planned. A war he hadn't even known existed**.

And now, he was standing at the edge of it.

The question was—**what would he do next?**

Albert returned to the witch's house before sunrise, **silent, but forever changed**.

He didn't tell her where he had been. He didn't mention the creatures, the tower, or the truths he had begun to uncover.

But the **fire in his eyes had changed**.

He was no longer a boy seeking revenge. **He was a hunter, searching for the truth**.

And so, he threw himself into his training.

With each spell he mastered, his anger sharpened into something **stronger, colder**. The witch taught him **the disciplined ways of magic**, unlocking his hidden potential.

Yet, **unknownst to Albert, she kept one final truth from him**.

His father had been more than just a powerful wizard.

Albert's **bloodline carried a legacy of immense magic**, one that could either **save the world... or destroy it**.

And with each day, **Albert was walking closer to the latter**.

By the time he turned **eighteen**, he had mastered **spells far beyond his years**—Sanguis Eruptio, Umbramanticus Ligarum, Pestilentia Morbis.

Each spell **darker, more potent than the last**.

His soul, once tethered to innocence, now balanced **dangerously between light and shadow**.

And then, one evening, he stood before the witch.

"I'm ready."

Her gaze softened—**not as a teacher, but as something more**.

For years, she had raised him, guided him, **cared for him like a mother**. And now, he wanted to walk into the fire she had tried to keep him from.

"Albert... I never wanted this for you," she admitted. **"You are like a son to me."**

For a moment, something inside him wavered.

But then he remembered **the lifeless bodies of his parents. The voices that had pleaded for justice. The shadow that had stolen everything from him**.

And just like that, his hesitation was gone.

"This is my choice," he said firmly.

The witch stared at him for a long moment.

Then, with a heavy sigh, she nodded.

"Then go, Albert. Find your truth."

And with that, he stepped into the unknown, **leaving behind the only person who had ever truly loved him**.

Albert stood at the edge of the forest, the moon casting **long shadows across the path ahead**. Behind him, the witch's house remained silent, its dim candlelight flickering through the window—**his home for the past years, the only place where he had ever been safe**.

But **safety meant nothing now**.

This was the start of something greater—something inevitable.

His past had been stolen from him. His future? **He would take it back with his own hands**.

As he tightened the strap of his satchel, filled only with essentials—his wand, a handful of enchanted scrolls, and the knowledge of spells he had mastered—**he felt the weight of his decision settle in**.

The witch stood a few steps behind him, watching him in silence.

For the first time in years, she looked **tired**.

"You don't have to do this," she said, her voice almost a whisper.

Albert turned to face her, his expression unreadable. **A part of him wished she would stop him. That she would tell him to stay.**

But she wouldn't.

She had known this day would come.

"I do," he answered firmly.

A moment of silence stretched between them, filled with **unspoken words and unshed tears.**

Then, she stepped forward and placed **a cold, delicate hand** on his shoulder.

"Remember, Albert..." she said softly, her silver eyes locking onto his. **"The truth is never what we expect. And once you find it, it will never let you go."**

Albert said nothing.

He simply turned away and took his first step toward Charmora.

The path ahead was long, dark, and dangerous.

But **he wasn't afraid anymore.**

Because this wasn't just a journey.

This was **the beginning of war.**

Chapter#3 – The Unforgiving Past

Albert's journey took a **darker turn** the moment he set foot in **Charmora**.

Here, he would **find answers**.

Here, he would **uncover the past**.

Here, he would **become something else entirely**.

What had started as a **search for truth** would soon become a path **of blood, power, and destruction**.

But he didn't know it yet.

He didn't know **this war wouldn't stop with his parents' killers**.

It would **never stop at all**.

The moment **Albert set foot in Charmora**, he felt a shift in the air—a **tension, a silent warning**.

He ignored it.

There was only one place he needed to go—**his father's tower**.

The last time he had been there, he had uncovered secrets that changed his life forever. **Now, he was back to find more**.

But something was wrong.

As he approached the entrance, **a sense of unease crawled up his spine**. The tower stood **untouched**, its magic-woven walls still intact, but the moment he stepped inside, **he knew he wasn't the only one who had been here**.

Someone had followed him last time.

And after he left... **someone had attacked**.

The invisible barriers around the tower had held strong, but **Creature-2—one of his father's loyal guardians—had been caught outside the shield**.

And he had suffered for it.

Lying on the cold stone floor, Creature-2 **wheezed weakly**, his dark fur matted with blood. The moment Albert saw him, something **cold and sharp twisted in his chest**.

"Who did this?" Albert demanded, kneeling beside him.

Creature-2 tried to speak, but only a weak groan escaped his lips.

His wounds were deep. **Too deep**.

Albert clenched his fists.

"Not again."

He wouldn't let someone he cared about die. **Not again**.

Without hesitation, he gripped his wand and pointed it toward the injured creature.

"Vitae Sanare!"

A faint blue light **glowed from his wand**, surrounding Creature-2's body. **His breathing steadied. His wounds began to close.** Within seconds, **he fell into a deep sleep, his body starting to heal.**

Albert exhaled. **He had saved him.**

But this attack wasn't random. **Someone knew he had returned.** And that meant—**they were watching.**

Pushing aside his anger, **Albert turned his focus to the tower itself.**

There was more to uncover. More **secrets buried in these walls.**

He searched through every corner—the **dusty chambers, the untouched shelves, the locked drawers.** And then, **he found it.**

A hidden passage, tucked behind an old tapestry.

Heart pounding, Albert pushed it aside and stepped through.

Inside, he found **a library unlike anything he had ever seen.**

Shelves **lined with ancient books**, scrolls **wrapped in protective enchantments**, and relics **that pulsed with dormant power.**

The moment he stepped inside, **a strange energy filled the air.** The books weren't just old—they **were alive, humming with the magic sealed within them.**

Albert's fingers trembled as he reached for the nearest tome.

He flipped it open, his breath hitching as **symbols and spells filled the pages—knowledge older than Charmora itself.**

"This is it," he whispered. **"The power my father left behind."**

Hours turned into days. Days into **weeks.**

Albert **barely slept**, consumed by the endless pages of forbidden spells. His hunger for knowledge was **insatiable**—every new spell he learned brought him closer to the truth, closer to **the strength he needed.**

But **he wasn't alone.**

The **witch watched him from afar**, her sharp silver eyes tracking his every move.

She had trained him, guided him, and **warned him of the dangers of the dark arts.** Yet, she never stopped him.

Not yet.

Because she knew.

Albert wasn't just learning magic. **He was changing.**

And soon, **he would reach a point where there was no turning back.**

For **four relentless weeks**, Albert drowned himself in **forbidden knowledge**, sharpening his magic like a blade, driven by a single purpose—**vengeance.**

The truth had always been out there, buried beneath layers of deception. But now, piece by piece, **Albert was uncovering it.**

The dark spell that had stolen his parents from him had **a source, a mastermind.** And when Albert finally traced it back, the revelation **hit him like a blade to the chest.**

It was Valken.

His **teacher. His mentor. The man he once trusted.**

The realization sent a **cold fury coursing through Albert's veins.**

Valken had been there **all along, watching, guiding, manipulating.** He had come into Albert's life not as a savior, but as **a hunter laying a trap.**

And Albert had walked right into it until he ran from Charmora.

Valken had always opposed **Thomas**, despising his compassion for magical creatures. He saw them as **a threat**, a stain upon the Charmora world that needed to be erased.

And so, when Thomas refused to turn against them, **Valken turned against Thomas.**

He planned **the attack on RuneBridge**, ensuring that Albert's father wouldn't live to defy him any longer.

But he hadn't stopped there.

Valken had wanted Albert too—not as an enemy, but as **a weapon.**

A boy born of a legendary bloodline. A perfect pawn in his master's grand design.

But when Albert vanished from Charmora as a child, **Valken's plans were shattered.**

He had waited. **Waited for Albert to return, to grow, to hunger for power.**

And now, **he had returned.**

But not as a servant. **Not as Valken's tool.**

As his executioner.

The weight of the truth **crushed him.**

Valken. **It had always been Valken.**

Not some nameless force. Not fate. **Not chance.**

Him.

The man Albert had once trusted, the man who had guided him, taught him, **fed him lies wrapped in kindness.**

And all along, Valken had been **the hand behind his suffering.**

Albert's breath came in **ragged gasps, his hands shaking at his sides.** The air around him **grew heavy**, magic swirling chaotically as the storm inside him raged.

His father's voice. His mother's cries. The endless whispers of their trapped souls, pleading for freedom.

It was **too much.**

His vision blurred with fury, with grief **so raw it felt like it was splitting him apart from the inside.** His fingers twitched, his body trembling—not from fear, but from **the sheer force of emotion threatening to consume him.**

"All those years..." His voice cracked, **barely a whisper.** *"You let me believe it was my fault. That I was just... unlucky. That my parents were gone because of fate."*

His breath hitched, **a broken laugh escaping him—one laced with anger, with agony.**

"But it was you."

His **head snapped up**, his eyes burning with something dark, something dangerous.

"You stole them from me!"

Something inside Albert **snapped.**

The magic inside him—**wild, uncontrolled, vengeful—erupted.** The ground beneath him **cracked**, the walls trembled, the very air **hissed with power.**

This wasn't magic.

This was **rage given form.**

The sky outside roared with **thunder**, lightning flashing in sync with the violent beat of his heart. The world itself seemed to **react to his pain.**

His hands clenched into **fists so tight his nails dug into his palms.**

"You took everything from me!" Albert screamed, **his voice raw, shaking, filled with the agony of years lost.**

His pulse **pounded, deafening in his ears.**

He had spent **years suffering, years alone, years clawing his way toward the truth—only to find the man who had held his hand through it all was the one who had put him through it.**

The betrayal burned **hotter than fire**.

"And now," Albert seethed, his wand pulsing with dark magic, **"I'm going to take everything from you."**

Albert's pulse pounded as he stormed through Charmora's streets, his wand gripped so tightly his knuckles turned white.

"Valken."

The name burned in his mind like a curse.

He had waited years for this moment.

And now, with his **dark spells at the ready**, he would finally bring an end to the man who had stolen everything from him.

He reached **Valken's home**, a towering fortress of stone and shadows.

Albert didn't hesitate.

He **kicked open the door**, the force of his magic sending it crashing inward.

Inside, the air was thick with power, charged like a brewing storm. The flickering candlelight barely cut through the darkness, and in the center of the room, standing as if he had been waiting for this very moment, was **Valken**.

He looked... **different**.

Stronger. **Darker**.

His eyes gleamed with something Albert had never seen before—**amusement**.

"Ah, Albert." Valken's voice was smooth, calm. **Unbothered**. *"You've come a long way."*

Albert's **rage ignited**.

"You killed them!" he snarled, his magic already pulsing at his fingertips.

Valken sighed, tilting his head. *"And here I thought you would've figured out the bigger picture by now."*

Albert didn't care.

His **hatred consumed him**.

Without another word, he **raised his wand and cast his first attack**.

"Vulnus Inflictus!"

A **dark energy shot toward Valken**, striking his chest. Instantly, **wounds tore across his skin, blood blooming through his robes**.

But Valken barely flinched.

And then, **he smiled.**

Before Albert could react, **Valken flicked his own wand.**

A **wave of power slammed into Albert**, hurling him backward. His body crashed against the stone wall, pain exploding through his ribs.

Valken stepped forward, shaking his head.

"You're strong, Albert. But not strong enough."

Albert gritted his teeth, forcing himself to his feet. **The fight was just beginning.**

And he **wasn't going to lose.**

The moment Albert **laid eyes on Valken**, rage ignited within him like an uncontrollable fire.

Here he was. **The man who had stolen everything from him.**

His heartbeat thundered in his ears, drowning out every rational thought. He didn't hesitate. **He couldn't.**

Albert **raised his wand, his magic crackling through the air like a storm.**

"Vulnus Inflictus!"

A **dark pulse of energy** shot toward Valken, hitting him dead in the chest. **Deep wounds tore through his robes, blood spilling onto the stone floor.**

Albert's breath was heavy. *This is it. This is where it ends.*

But then, **Valken smiled.**

"Is that all?"

Before Albert could react, Valken flicked his wand, his voice cutting through the tension like a blade.

"Vulnera Cruorosum!"

A **wave of dark energy** surged forward, slamming into Albert like a thousand knives. His body twisted in pain as deep **gashes tore through his arm**, burning with raw agony.

He barely had time to catch his breath before Valken raised his wand again.

"Mors Ultima!"

A **death curse** shot toward him, its dark tendrils hissing through the air. Albert's instincts screamed, and he barely dodged in time, rolling across the ground. The spell **shattered the stone behind him**, leaving behind a blackened scar where it landed.

His vision blurred from the pain, his breathing ragged. *He's too strong...*

But he **refused to give up.**

With all his remaining strength, he **forced himself to stand.**

"Tortura Obscura!" Albert roared, his wand surging with power. Lightning **erupted from his fingertips**, striking Valken square in the chest. The older wizard **staggered, his body convulsing under the raw, torturous energy**.

Albert's lips curled into a **savage grin**. *I've got him.*

But he had **underestimated his enemy**.

With a **snarl**, Valken **broke free from the spell**, his eyes burning with fury.

"Manus Vincula!" he commanded, his wand slicing through the air.

Albert's body **froze** as an invisible force yanked his wand from his hand. He **watched in horror** as it flew through the air, landing at Valken's feet.

"No—"

Before he could move, the ground beneath him **cracked open**.

From the darkness below, **sinister roots slithered out, twisting around his arms and legs, crushing his ribs, suffocating him**.

"Radix Morsus," Valken whispered, his voice dripping with malice.

The roots **tightened their grip, squeezing the breath from Albert's lungs**.

"You're just like your father," Valken sneered, stepping closer. *"Weak. Helpless. And now... you'll die like him."*

Albert's **vision darkened**. He struggled, but the roots **drained his energy**, their magic suffocating his own.

"I... can't..." His body **began to shut down**.

This was it.

This was how it would end.

And then—the skies roared.

A **violent gust of wind** howled through the battlefield, sending Valken staggering backward. **The temperature dropped. The air crackled with unearthly power.**

And then, **she appeared**.

The **Witch**.

She emerged from the shadows, her cloak billowing as she raised her wand toward Valken.

"Mortisomnium!"

A **flash of magic erupted**, and Valken **stumbled back, his vision turning black**.

Blinded. **Even if only for a few seconds.**

It was all she needed.

"Liberum Adeptus!" she chanted, and the roots constricting Albert **shattered into dust.**

Albert **collapsed**, gasping for air. His **vision spun**, but he could still see her standing before him—his only guardian, the woman who had raised him, **his mother in all but blood.**

All she said to Albert *"Magic isn't just strength, Albert. It's control. And if you don't control it, it will control you."*

"Run, Albert!" she ordered.

"No—" he started, but her eyes **burned with urgency.**

"RUN!"

Torn between rage and desperation, **Albert forced himself to his feet and ran.**

Albert turned back, **just in time to see Valken recover.**

His **wand moved faster than lightning.**

"Mors Ultima!"

Albert's heart **stopped.**

The spell **pierced straight through her chest.**

Blood spilled from her lips.

For a moment, **she stood still**, as if the world itself had frozen. Then, **her knees buckled.**

She fell.

Albert's breath caught in his throat.

"NO!"

He started to run back—he had to save her—he had to—

But **she lifted her gaze**, her fading silver eyes locking onto his.

Her lips moved. No voice came out.

But he knew.

"Albert... I am always with you. No one can hurt you. Albert... I am always with you."

And then—

She was gone.

Albert didn't remember how he got away.

His legs carried him toward the **Dark Forest**, but his mind was frozen.

His vision blurred. **His chest ached.** The **echo of her final words tore through him, over and over again.**

"I shouldn't have gone after Valken."

"She shouldn't have followed me."

"She's dead because of me."

The **Dark Forest swallowed him whole**, its twisted trees whispering secrets only he could hear.

But one thing was clear.

Valken had won.

Albert **was alone.**

And now... he was drowning in **vengeance.**

Albert's breath was heavy as he wandered through the forest, **his entire body aching.**

Then—he saw her.

A **silhouette** in the moonlight.

A girl.

She looked just as lost as he felt.

Albert raised his wand. **"Who are you?"**

She hesitated, her voice trembling. **"Don't hurt me. Please... I'm Jennifer."**

Albert's grip loosened slightly.

There was **something in her eyes**—fear, yes. But also **resilience.**

And just like that, in the depths of **his darkest night**, fate had sent him **a glimmer of light.**

Little did they know, **this meeting would change everything.**

Chapter#4 – Love’s Whisper

The **Dark Forest** had stood for centuries, watching over battles, betrayals, and bloodshed. Its twisted branches had seen **great wars and greater losses**. And tonight, **it would witness another story of pain**.

Albert **stumbled through the dense undergrowth**, his body battered, his once-elegant robes now **torn and soaked in blood—some his, some not**.

It had been **three days** since the Witch’s sanctuary had fallen.

Three days of **running, hiding, and feeling the weight of his own helplessness**.

"I'll protect you."

He had said those words once. But now, they **felt like a cruel joke**.

She was gone.

Isolde—his mentor, his guardian, the only family he had left—was gone.

She had found him **when no one else would**. When the village children had called him a **monster, a demon**. She had taken him in, taught him that **magic wasn’t a curse but a gift**. For seven years, **she had been his home**.

And **now she was nothing but a memory**.

Albert’s **legs finally gave out**, his body collapsing against the rough bark of an ancient oak. His breath was **ragged**, his hand trembling around his wand, knuckles white from the grip.

Then, the memory came crashing back—

Isolde’s **final moments**.

Her hands **raised in desperate defiance**.

Her **piercing gaze locking onto his**.

The last of her magic **surging through the air**, creating a portal—**forcing him through it**.

And behind her, **Valken’s dark shadow rising**.

"Run, Albert," she had whispered.

Her voice had been **soft yet unbreakable**.

"Live."

And then—she was **gone**.

A Meeting Under Moonlight

A twig snapped.

Albert was on his feet in an instant, **his wand aimed, his body tense**. The spell was already on his lips, **ready to strike**.

The clouds shifted, and **moonlight spilled through the trees**, revealing a **figure standing just a few steps away**.

A girl.

She looked no older than eighteen, her **dark hair tousled by the wind**, her **emerald eyes glowing softly under the silver light**.

She wasn't armed. **But she was ready to run**.

"Who are you?" Albert demanded, his voice sharp despite the exhaustion dragging at his limbs. **His training kept his hand steady, his heart locked in place**.

The girl flinched but didn't move closer.

"Don't hurt me," she whispered. Her voice **wavered like autumn leaves in a dying breeze**.
"I am Jennifer."

Albert hesitated.

Something about her **felt strange**.

Not in her words, not in her face—but in **the way magic pulsed around her**, faint but **undeniable**.

"Why are you here?" he asked, not lowering his wand.

Jennifer swallowed, her eyes flickering toward the shadows between the trees, **as if something—someone—was lurking nearby**.

"I'm running."

Just two words. But they carried **the weight of a lifetime**.

Albert's **grip tightened**.

"From what?"

Jennifer turned her gaze to him, and in that moment, **he saw it**.

That **same grief**. That **same hollow pain**.

It was **his reflection staring back at him**.

"From the same thing that took everything from you."

The air **grew colder**. The wind **stilled**.

And then—she said it.

"Valken."

The name fell from her lips **like a curse**.

Albert's heart **stopped**.

Days **bled into weeks**, the seasons shifting as **Albert and Jennifer carved out a fragile existence** in the depths of the **Dark Forest**.

They had found **an old hunter's cabin**, long abandoned and nearly swallowed by nature. It wasn't much—a **creaking wooden shack, a crumbling fireplace, and a leaking roof—but it was theirs**.

Together, they **wove protective wards**, concealing themselves from prying eyes. And within those four broken walls, **they shared more than just space**.

They shared **their stories**.

Their **grief**.

And, eventually... **their hope**.

One night, as the fire **flickered weakly**, Jennifer sat at the **rickety table**, tracing circles into the old wood with her fingertips.

"My parents... were part of the Arcane Order," she murmured.

Albert **lifted his gaze**.

"The Order?"

Jennifer **nodded**. *"Just like yours. They were hunted. Betrayed. Killed."*

Albert's breath **hitched**.

"When?"

"Sixteen years ago."

Albert's **stomach twisted**.

"That's the same night my parents were murdered."

The air between them **felt heavier**. A silent truth settled between them—**they had both been shaped by the same blade**.

Jennifer stared into the flames.

"I was raised by my aunt," she said softly. *"She changed our names, kept us hidden. She even taught me to suppress my magic."*

Albert watched as **her fingers clenched slightly against the table**.

"And then... three months ago, they found us."

A cold **shiver ran down Albert's spine**. *"Valken?"*

Jennifer **nodded**. *"He came with three of his Shadowblades. My aunt... she told me to run."*

Her voice **broke**.

"I heard her screams until I was miles away."

Albert **exhaled slowly**, his grip tightening on his wand.

"The Witch who raised me—Isolde—she was trying to reunite the Order's survivors. She believed Valken wasn't working alone."

Jennifer looked up, **her emerald eyes reflecting the firelight**.

"My parents thought the same," she whispered. "They kept journals... they wrote about a power rising in the east. Something ancient. Something hungry."

The cabin **creaked in the silence**.

"Valken wasn't working alone," Jennifer continued. "There's something darker behind him... a force that even he fears."

Albert clenched his free hand into a **tight fist**.

"Then we end him before he brings more pain." His voice was **low, steady, unwavering**.
"Before he unleashes whatever master he serves."

Jennifer hesitated.

Her fingers **tensed beneath his**.

"Albert... maybe we don't have to fight anymore."

Albert's breath **stilled**.

"Maybe," she whispered, "we can let it go."

Albert's chest tightened, **his pulse loud in his ears**.

"Forget the past?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Jennifer leaned in, **her presence warm despite the cold air around them**. *"No. But we don't have to let it destroy us."*

Her fingers curled around his, a silent promise.

"We could go north," she murmured. "Beyond the Misty Mountains. Start a new life."

For the **first time in years**, something **unfamiliar** bloomed inside Albert's chest.

Hope.

Maybe they could leave **this war, this pain, this endless cycle of vengeance behind**.

Maybe they could **find peace**.

Maybe—

A **chilling laugh** shattered the moment.

Albert and Jennifer **froze**.

The **fire in the hearth flickered, then dimmed**, as if it, too, had been seized by fear.

The **shadows along the cabin walls twisted and writhed**, moving unnaturally, **alive with something sinister**.

The air grew **thick with magic—dark, suffocating, familiar**.

Then, from the **blackness**, a figure **stepped forward**.

Valken.

His **silver-streaked black hair** framed a face that was both **handsome and cruel**.

His smirk was **infuriatingly calm**, his presence **oozing confidence, power, and something far worse—certainty**.

"Did you really think you could escape me, Albert?"

His voice was like silk—**smooth, effortless**. But beneath it, Albert could hear **the sharpness of steel, the promise of death**.

Albert's **blood ignited** the moment he saw him.

The man who had haunted his **nightmares since childhood**.

The man who had **slaughtered his parents**.

The man who had **taken Isolde**.

The man who had **terrorized Jennifer**.

"VALKEN!" Albert **sarled, fury burning away every thought**.

Jennifer stepped beside him, **her wand raised**, her emerald eyes **flaring with unyielding fire**.

"You took everything from us!" she hissed.

Valken **tilted his head**, amusement dancing in his **piercing gaze**.

"Oh, please." He sighed, rolling his wrist as if **bored**. *"I simply cleaned up the mistakes your parents made. They were blinded by their precious Order, meddling with forces they couldn't comprehend."*

Then, **his smirk sharpened**.

His gaze locked onto Albert.

"Just like that witch who hid you, Albert." His voice turned cold, mocking. *"What was her name again? Isolde? Ah, yes..."*

Valken's eyes **glowed like embers in the dark**.

"She screamed beautifully at the end."

Albert **snapped**.

"You—"

He didn't even think. **Didn't need to.**

His wand **was already up**, his magic **surging like a tidal wave breaking free from its chains**.

"VULNUS INFLICTUS!"

A **blast of dark energy** tore through the air, **ripping toward Valken** with a vengeance that Albert had never felt before.

But Valken... **just smiled**.

And with the flick of his wrist—**he caught the spell**.

Albert's eyes **widened in disbelief**.

Caught it.

Like it was nothing.

The **crackling magic twisted in his grasp**, bending, reshaping—and then, with a casual flick, **he sent it hurling back**.

Albert barely dodged in time.

The spell **exploded against the wooden walls of the cabin**, sending splinters and flames **in every direction**.

Jennifer fired next.

"Glaciem Lancea!"

Ice spears erupted from her wand, hurtling toward Valken **with lethal precision**.

But Valken didn't even raise his wand.

With **a mere step forward**, he **shattered the ice with pure force alone**.

Albert's breath **hitched**.

What kind of power is this?

Valken's smirk deepened.

"Is that all?"

And then—**he attacked**.

The **cabin exploded** in light and destruction.

Valken moved **like a ghost**, dodging spells, striking back with magic so **fast, so precise**, Albert barely had time to react.

"Mors Ultima!" Valken roared.

The **Death Curse** sliced through the air.

Albert and Jennifer **split apart**, barely escaping as the **spell obliterated the floor where they had been standing**.

Valken moved like he was **playing with them**. Effortless. Unstoppable.

Albert **gritted his teeth**, ignoring the pain in his body.

"Jennifer!" he called, his mind racing.

She **met his gaze**—and in that second, they knew.

They **had to fight together**.

Jennifer raised her wand—**summoning chains of pure ice**, wrapping them around Valken's legs.

Albert **lunged forward, gathering every ounce of power in his veins**.

"TORTURA OBSCURA!"

A surge of **black lightning** roared toward Valken—

For a second—just a second—**they had him**.

Valken **wincing as the electricity burned through his body**.

Albert **felt it**.

A shift. A crack in his armor.

He's not invincible.

Albert **pushed forward, ready to end it**—

But then—

Valken **laughed**.

"Not bad, Albert. But..."

He shattered Jennifer's chains.

He twisted the black lightning, redirecting it.

And then, with a smirk, he **raised his hand**—

"Let me show you what real magic looks like."

The **world exploded in fire and darkness**.

Albert's **chest tightened** at Jennifer's words.

"Let it go?"

Jennifer's fingers trembled beneath his own, but her gaze was steady—**hopeful**.

"We don't have to keep running. We don't have to keep fighting," she said softly. "We could go north. Beyond the Misty Mountains. Disappear. Start over."

For **the first time in years**, Albert felt something flicker inside him—**something fragile, something dangerous**.

Hope.

Maybe they could **leave this war behind**.

Maybe they could **build a life away from blood and vengeance**.

Maybe—

A **chilling laugh** echoed through the cabin.

The fire **guttered, its flames flickering weakly**, as if the very air had turned against them.

The **shadows stretched unnaturally**, twisting and writhing along the walls.

The temperature **dropped**.

Albert's fingers **tightened around his wand**.

Jennifer went **rigid, her breath caught in her throat**.

A presence **loomed in the darkness**.

And then—he **stepped forward**.

Valken.

His **silver-streaked black hair framed a face both sharp and cruel**, his piercing eyes glowing faintly in the dim light.

He moved **slowly, deliberately**, his every step **controlled, confident—like a predator savoring its prey**.

"Did you really think you could escape me, Albert?"

His voice was **smooth, casual**, but beneath it lurked **mockery, cruelty, a promise of pain**.

Albert's **blood boiled**.

"VALKEN!"

Jennifer **rose beside him**, her wand raised, her **emerald eyes ablaze with fury**.

"You took everything from us!" she spat.

Valken **chuckled**.

*"Oh, please." He **tilted his head**, his smirk growing. "I merely cleaned up the mess your parents left behind. They were fools, blinded by their precious Order, meddling with forces they never understood."*

Then, his **eyes locked onto Albert**.

"Just like that witch who hid you." His smirk sharpened. "What was her name? Isolde? Ah, yes..."

Valken's voice **dropped to a whisper**, as if savoring the words.

"She screamed beautifully at the end."

Albert **snapped**.

He didn't think.

Didn't need to.

His **wand was already raised**, his magic **crackling like wildfire**.

"VULNUS INFLICTUS!"

A **dark pulse of energy** erupted from his wand, surging toward Valken with **unstoppable fury**.

But Valken—**just smiled**.

With a **lazy flick of his wrist**, he **caught the spell midair**.

Albert's **stomach dropped**.

What—?!

The **magic twisted, bent**—and then Valken **redirected it**.

Albert barely had time to **dodge** before his own spell **slammed into the wooden walls behind him, tearing through the cabin**.

Splinters **rained down**, the floor **shaking from the impact**.

Jennifer fired next.

"Glaciem Lancea!"

A **spear of ice** shot toward Valken, aimed directly at his heart.

Valken **didn't even blink**.

He stepped forward, his **aura alone shattering the ice mid-flight**.

Albert's breath **hitched**.

"Is that all?" Valken mused.

Then—he **attacked**.

"MORS ULTIMA!"

A **wave of dark energy** exploded from his wand, **rushing toward them like a tidal wave of death**.

Albert and Jennifer **barely escaped, rolling to opposite sides of the room**.

But Valken was **already moving**.

His wand **glowed with malevolent energy**, his spells **unrelenting, merciless**.

Albert **fired back, spell after spell**, but **Valken was untouchable**.

"You're still weak, Albert," Valken taunted, effortlessly dodging each attack.

Albert **gritted his teeth**.

"Jennifer!" he called, his mind racing.

She **met his gaze—and in that second, they knew**.

They had to **fight together**.

Jennifer **summoned enchanted chains of ice**, lashing them toward Valken's legs.

Albert **unleashed a surge of black lightning—**

For a **brief moment, they had him**.

Valken **winc**ed, his body shuddering under the magical assault.

Albert **felt it**.

A shift.

A **crack** in his defenses.

He's not invincible.

Albert **pressed forward, ready to end it—**

But Valken **laughed**.

"Not bad, Albert. But..."

He shattered Jennifer's chains.

He twisted the black lightning, redirecting it.

Then, with a **single flick of his wrist, he raised his hand—**

"Let me show you what real magic looks like."

The **world exploded in fire and darkness**.

From the **shattered doorway**, a figure stepped forward—**tall, broad-shouldered, radiating an aura of sheer power**.

His eyes, **as cold as winter itself**, locked onto Albert.

"Orion...?"

The name **escaped Albert's lips in a rasp**, his chest tightening with disbelief.

Orion—the **prodigy, the legend, the one who vanished from the Academy five years ago**.

Rumors had whispered of his fate—that he had joined Valken. That he had been seduced by power. That he had become the enemy.

And yet, here he was.

Valken's smirk returned, **amusement flickering in his cruel gaze**.

"So, the great Orion finally shows himself." His tone was laced with mockery. *"Come to watch me finish this?"*

Orion **ignored him**, his gaze sharp, piercing, unreadable—**fixed solely on Albert**.

"Is it true?"

Albert struggled against the **constricting roots**, his breath ragged.

"What?"

"Did Valken kill your parents?" Orion's voice was **stone, emotionless—but something dangerous lurked beneath**.

Albert's **blood ran cold**.

The betrayal, the agony, the memories of that night—all of it crashed into him at once.

"Yes," he whispered.

Orion's **expression darkened**.

"And mine."

The world **stilled**.

Even the **roots binding Albert seemed to recoil**, as if the very magic in the air was startled by the revelation.

Orion slowly turned to **Valken, his grip on his wand tightening**.

"You lied to me," Orion said, his voice now dangerously calm. *"For five years, you told me the Order killed my family. That you saved me."*

Valken **laughed**.

"Lied? Oh, Orion, you really think you're different?" His smirk widened, his voice dripping with venom. *"You were always just another pawn in this game."*

A sudden **crack filled the air**—the sound of raw magic crackling **around Orion's body, sparking off his fingertips like living lightning**.

His next words came **as a growl**.

"Not anymore."

And then—**Orion lifted his wand and aimed it at Valken**.

"I fight for myself now."

The air **shifted**.

The battle **had changed**.

For the first time—**Valken looked displeased**. Worried, even.

"So be it," Valken hissed.

And then—the **battlefield exploded**.

Albert barely had time to react before Orion **sent a bolt of lightning roaring toward Valken**.

Valken dodged, but not **gracefully—not effortlessly**.

Albert **saw it**.

A **crack** in Valken's confidence.

"NOW!" Albert roared, his body already moving.

His wand ignited in **crimson flames, fire surging forward like a living beast**, crashing against Valken's shimmering shield.

Jennifer struck next—**ice spears erupted from her wand, slicing through the air**.

Valken **deflected one, dodged another, but the third grazed his shoulder**.

Albert **grinned viciously**.

"He's not invincible!"

Orion was **relentless**.

His lightning **crashed down like a violent storm**, striking Valken's defenses **over and over**, forcing him to **move—forced him to react instead of attack**.

Albert and Jennifer pressed the attack, **matching Orion's speed, their magic weaving together into a deadly assault**.

For the **first time**, Valken wasn't fighting like a **predator toying with his prey**.

He was **fighting to survive**.

The cabin was **gone**.

Torn apart by **magic, by fire, by ice and lightning**. The ground beneath them **was scarred**, the trees **burning and frozen at the same time**.

Albert **dashed forward, a final spell at the tip of his tongue—**

But then—**Valken's expression shifted**.

Not panic.

Not fear.

Calculation.

His smirk **returned**.

"Then I'll be back when you least expect it."

Before Albert could stop him, **Valken vanished into the shadows**.

The battlefield fell **silent**.

Their **enemy had fled**.

But the war was far from over.

Valken **vanished into the shadows**, his laughter lingering like a ghost in the air. **The battlefield lay in ruins**, the once-standing cabin now **a graveyard of shattered wood and scorched earth**.

For the first time in what felt like an eternity—**silence**.

The **cabin's broken remains creaked**, settling into stillness. The wind **howled through the trees**, as if whispering secrets only the forest could hear.

Albert **barely stood**, his **legs trembling**, his breath **ragged**. Blood **seeped from fresh wounds**, his magic **drained to its limits**.

Jennifer turned to **Orion**, her voice cautious but firm.

"Why did you help us?"

Orion's **jaw clenched**, his eyes distant—as if **staring at ghosts only he could see**.

"Because my whole life..." he murmured, his tone hollow. *"I was fighting for the wrong side. I was blinded by his lies. By my hunger for revenge against enemies that never even existed."*

Albert **stared at the ground**, his fists **tightened so hard his knuckles turned white**.

"This isn't over." Jennifer placed a **gentle hand on his shoulder**, grounding him, pulling him from the storm raging inside.

"Then we fight together."

Orion exhaled, his expression **hardening with resolve**.

"Agreed."

And just like that—a **new alliance was born.**

Not of trust.

Not of peace.

But of **vengeance.**

Because deep down, Albert **knew the truth.**

Valken was **merely a servant.**

A puppet.

There was **something worse waiting in the shadows.**

Something ancient. Something patient.

And next time...

Albert wouldn't show mercy.

The **forest around them whispered**, as if sensing what had just begun.

Secrets of the **past.**

Omens of **battles yet to come.**

And somewhere, **in the depths of the unseen**, a greater darkness **stirred.**

Chapter#5 – The Shadows Awakening

The **Dark Forest** had become both their **refuge and their cage**. For six weeks, **Albert, Jennifer, and Orion** had made their home among its towering trees, **training by day and keeping watch by night**.

Their **camp sat near a crystal-clear spring**, far from their last battle with Valken. Protective enchantments **glowed faintly in the moonlight**, forming an invisible barrier between them and whatever lurked beyond.

Each **morning, training began**.

Each **evening, they collapsed from exhaustion**.

Albert **lowered his wand**, his breath heavy, **sweat dripping from his brow despite the autumn chill**.

Across the clearing, **Orion stood calm, barely winded**, his face unreadable.

"Again," Orion commanded, his tone sharp, allowing no argument.

Albert **gritted his teeth**. *"We've been at this for hours."*

"And we'll be at it for hours more," Orion replied, twirling his wand between his fingers—a habit that always meant impatience. "You're still too predictable. I know what spell you're about to cast before you even move."

From **her perch on a fallen log**, Jennifer looked up from the **grimoire** she had been studying.

"He's exhausted, Orion. We all are."

Orion didn't look at her.

"Valken won't care if we're tired," he said flatly. "He won't give us time to rest or plan. He'll strike when we're weakest and finish what he started."

Albert **wiped his brow with his sleeve**. His muscles ached, his body screamed for a break—but his mind was focused on something else.

"You hesitated that night," Albert said, turning to Orion. "When you first saw the Witch—Isolde. Why?"

The question **hung in the air**, unexpected and **heavy**.

Orion's expression **hardened instantly**. *"That has nothing to do with your training."*

"It does if we're trusting each other with our lives," Albert countered, his voice steady.

The **only sound** was the **wind rustling the leaves**. Jennifer **closed her grimoire**, her emerald eyes moving between the two of them, watching.

Orion finally **exhaled, breaking the silence.**

"She saved my life once." His voice was quiet, distant. "Before Valken found me."

Albert's eyes **narrowed in confusion.** *"What?"*

Orion's **gaze drifted to the fire, lost in memory.**

*"I was seven. After my parents were killed—or so I thought—I wandered the forest for days. I was feverish. Starving." His jaw **tightened.** "I collapsed near a stream. She found me. She healed me."*

Albert **hadn't expected that.**

"Then Valken arrived," Orion continued. "He told me she had lured me in to sacrifice me to dark magic."

Jennifer's **breath hitched.** *"And you believed him?"*

Orion let out a **short, bitter laugh.**

"I was a child." His fingers tightened around his wand. "And Valken... he can be very convincing when he wants to be." His voice turned grim. "He told me she had placed a spell on me—that if I stayed any longer, I'd be bound to her forever. He said he'd been tracking me for days to save me."

Albert felt **disgust rise in his throat.**

"He used you."

Orion nodded, his **expression cold.**

*"For five years, I hunted the Order, believing I was avenging my parents." His voice was **hollow.** "I killed people who could have been allies. I tracked down artifacts that should have stayed buried." His hands **clenched into fists.** "I became his weapon."*

Jennifer **stood slowly,** approaching Orion as if sensing **the weight of his past pressing down on him.**

"It wasn't your fault."

Orion's **head snapped up,** his gaze sharp enough to cut.

*"Wasn't it?" His voice had an **edge** that made even Albert take a step back.*

"I chose to believe him."

"I chose to kill for him."

"I ignored the doubts—the inconsistencies in his stories."

His **blue eyes met Albert's, filled with something raw, something broken.**

"I chose not to question why he never let me see the bodies of the Order members who supposedly killed my parents."

A **heavy silence settled over them.**

Jennifer **swallowed, her throat tight.**

Orion turned back to Albert, his **expression unreadable, but his words unwavering.**

"That's why I push you so hard."

"Because hesitation, doubt, misplaced trust—those are luxuries we can't afford."

"Not against Valken."

Albert **studied him for a moment, seeing Orion in a new light.**

There was **no arrogance in his training. No cruelty.**

Only **a man who had learned the cost of trusting the wrong person.**

"Then let's continue," Albert said, lifting his wand.

Orion nodded.

Jennifer **exhaled softly, stepping back.**

The stars **emerged above, watching silently as they trained long into the night**—driven by grief, by regret, and by the knowledge that **Valken was still out there, waiting.**

Miles away, **hidden deep within the roots of an ancient mountain, Valken paced before a door forged of obsidian and bone.**

The corridor was **lit by cold blue flames, their flickering light casting long, twisting shadows that seemed to move on their own.** The walls were marked with **symbols so old, so forbidden,** that a weaker mind would break just from gazing at them.

Magic **older than humanity** pulsed through the stone.

Valken barely noticed.

His **midnight-blue robes** whispered against the cold floor as he moved, his **silver-streaked hair pulled back tight,** emphasizing the sharp, angular planes of his face.

A fresh **scar ran from his left temple to his jaw—a reminder of his last battle with Albert.**

The memory made **his blood burn.**

The **obsidian door swung open silently.**

Inside lay a chamber that seemed to exist **in eternal twilight.**

And at its center—

A throne.

Not of stone. Not of wood.

But of **thousands of wands**, taken from **fallen enemies**, fused together by **ancient magic.**

Upon this grotesque seat **reclined the Witch of the Witched Six.**

Morwen.

She was neither **young nor old**—her face **a flawless mask**, untouched by time yet holding the weight of **centuries of knowledge.**

Her **raven-black hair**, woven into **intricate braids**, trailed down to the floor, **threaded with bones and gemstones.**

But it was **her eyes** that unsettled even Valken.

They weren't unusual in color.

They were **empty.**

They **reflected nothing, absorbed everything.**

"Valken." Her voice was like silk over steel. "You come seeking my counsel again."

Valken **bowed—but only slightly.**

A gesture of respect, not submission.

"I come seeking what you promised, Morwen," he said, voice sharp. "The boy and his companions grow stronger. Orion has joined them."

A **slight smile** played at Morwen's lips.

"Ah, your prodigy," she murmured. "The one you shaped so carefully... now turned against you."

Valken's **jaw tightened.**

"A minor setback."

Morwen **rose from her throne**, moving with **unnatural grace** to a **basin of liquid darkness.**

She traced her **fingers over its surface**, and within its depths, **images began to form.**

"Albert Thorne," she whispered.

The **vision rippled**, showing a boy **wielding flames and shadow**, his eyes **burning with unrelenting fury**.

"Son of Marcus and Elaine Thorne," Morwen continued, **her empty gaze flicking to Valken**. *"Both murdered on your orders."*

The words **were not a question**.

Valken's **smile was cold**.

"He's just a boy."

Morwen **dipped her hand into the basin**, the **dark liquid clinging to her fingers like living shadow**.

"Is he?"

She lifted her hand, and **the shadows pulsed, whispering secrets only she could hear**.

"His bloodline traces back to the very founders of the Arcane Order," she mused. *"The magic in his veins is... potent."*

Valken **stepped forward**, his patience thinning.

"Which is why he must be destroyed," he pressed. *"The prophecy—"*

"Prophecies are tools," Morwen **interrupted smoothly**, **her voice laced with amusement**.

"Wielded by those with the wisdom to interpret them correctly."

She withdrew her **hand**, the **shadows dripping back into the basin like spilled ink**.

"But perhaps," she said, **her gaze piercing into him**, *"you are right to fear him. His potential is... considerable."*

Valken's **fingers twitched at his sides**.

"Will you help me destroy him or not?"

For the first time, Morwen **studied him in silence**.

Her **empty eyes saw far more than Valken was comfortable with**.

Finally—

"Yes," she said.

Valken's **smirk returned**.

"Name your price."

Morwen **smiled**.

A smile **ancient and terrible**.

"In due time," she whispered.

She turned back to the **basin, the shadows stirring restlessly.**

"For now," she purred, "let us discuss how we will break this boy before we kill him."

The night was **too quiet.**

Even the **nocturnal creatures** of the **Dark Forest**—the owls, the rustling leaves, the distant howls—had **fallen silent**, as if the world itself **was holding its breath.**

Albert **sat by the dying embers of their fire**, unable to sleep.

Across the camp, **Orion rested**, his breathing **deep and steady**—the kind of sleep only warriors knew, the kind that came from exhaustion rather than peace.

Jennifer had taken **first watch**, standing at the eastern edge of their camp, her **silhouette barely visible against the trees.**

Albert had grown to **respect Orion**, despite their **rocky beginning**. The man **carried his guilt like a sword**, sharpening it into something **useful, something driven**. They weren't friends—not yet—but they were **allies**, bound by **loss and a shared enemy.**

And Jennifer...

She had become **his anchor.**

A steady force **in the storm of grief and rage that threatened to consume him.**

Her unwavering belief that they could **one day find peace** gave him hope—even when **his own hope faltered.**

A Moment of Honesty

A **soft footstep** pulled Albert from his thoughts.

Jennifer **approached**, her outline **bathed in starlight.**

"You should rest," she said, lowering herself beside him. "I've got another hour before I wake Orion."

Albert **shook his head.** *"Can't sleep."*

"Nightmares again?"

He nodded.

They had been getting **worse**—visions of **Isolde's last breath**, of his **parents' deaths** that he had never actually seen but his mind **conjured in gruesome detail.**

Jennifer's **hand found his in the darkness**, warm and **steady**.

*"We'll stop him, Albert," she promised, her voice **fierce in its certainty**. "We'll make him pay for everything he's taken from us."*

Albert's grip **tightened around her fingers**.

"And then what?" he whispered. "After Valken is gone... what do we do with the rest of our lives?"

Jennifer was **quiet for a moment**.

Then, her voice **softened**, filled with something almost... **hopeful**.

"We heal."

"We build something new from the ashes he left us."

She hesitated, then added, **softer still**—

"Together... if you want."

Albert **turned to her**, his heart **pounding**.

In the faint **glow of the embers**, her **emerald eyes shimmered**—holding something **he recognized** but had always been **afraid to name**.

"Jennifer, I—"

The wards shattered.

A sound **like breaking glass** rang through the clearing.

Albert and Jennifer **leapt to their feet, wands raised in an instant**.

Orion was **already awake**, moving with **battle-hardened instinct**, placing himself at their side.

*"North side," he barked, forming a **defensive triangle**.*

A **cold laugh** echoed through the trees.

Low. Smooth. **Familiar**.

"How touching."

Valken's voice.

It seemed to come from **everywhere at once**, slithering **through the darkness** like a whisper **just behind their ears**.

"A little family of broken toys."

Albert **scanned the shadows**, his grip on his wand **so tight his knuckles ached**.

"Show yourself, coward!"

A ripple **shuddered through the air**—as if reality itself **was being torn apart**.

And then—he **stepped through**.

Valken.

But he **wasn't alone**.

Beside him **stood a woman of unspeakable beauty**, yet something about her was **so wrong that looking at her too long made Albert's head ache**.

The **air around her warped**, shifting like an **illusion barely holding together**.

Her robes **flickered between shadow and substance**, etched with **symbols that twisted and crawled when viewed directly**.

Albert's **stomach turned**.

He didn't need an introduction.

They had heard the whispers.

The Witch of the Witched Six.

Orion's breath **caught in his throat**.

"Morwen."

Jennifer's **entire body tensed**. *"The Witch of the Witched Six."*

Albert's **stomach twisted**.

He had heard **whispers** of them—a **council of the most powerful and dangerous witches**, each **mastering a different forbidden art**.

If **Valken** had **aligned with one of them**, then **this battle was already lost**.

Valken's **smile was razor-sharp, cruelly amused**.

"Miss me?"

Albert's grip on his **wand tightened**.

"Like a disease," he spat.

Morwen's **empty, hollow eyes** turned to him.

And suddenly, Albert felt **cold fingers wrap around his heart**.

It wasn't real.

But it **felt real**.

Like something **inside him was unraveling, thread by thread**.

*"So much anger," she murmured, her voice **soft, unnatural, almost hypnotic.** "So much potential in such a young vessel. How... delicious."*

Orion's **voice was urgent, sharp.**

"We need to leave. Now."

But **it was already too late.**

Valken **raised his wand, his smirk widening.**

"No escape this time."

The **forest erupted into chaos.**

Albert **struck first**, unleashing a **storm of fire**—each **flame burning hotter, brighter, wilder** than the last.

Jennifer **expanded a shield of ice**, pushing back the **first wave of Valken's attack.**

Orion's **lightning cracked through the night**, forcing Valken to **twist and dodge.**

But **Morwen?**

She **didn't move.**

She simply **watched**, her hands **folded before her**, her **expression unreadable.**

And then—**she smiled.**

"Enough games."

She lifted **one hand.**

The **world held its breath.**

And then—

Everything died.

A pulse of magic—**ancient, forbidden, unnatural**—rippled outward.

The **ground blackened, cracked**, as if the very **earth was rotting beneath them.**

The **trees twisted and withered**, their leaves **falling like dead embers.**

Even the **air itself turned foul**, thick with the **stench of decay.**

"Run!" Orion shouted.

He grabbed Albert's **arm, yanking him backward.**

But Albert **couldn't move.**

His eyes were locked on **the horror spreading before him.**

Morwen's magic **slithered across the ground like living oil**, searching, seeking, **consuming**.

Where it touched—**reality broke**.

Jennifer was **the first to react**.

She lifted her **wand high**, her voice **shaking with power**.

A **barrier of pure light** erupted from her, **holding back the creeping darkness**.

But barely.

"It won't hold long!" she gasped, her face pale with effort. *"We need to retreat!"*

Orion **grabbed Albert again**.

"She's right! We can't win this!"

Albert finally **broke free of his paralysis**, his mind racing.

They had to **fall back**.

They had to **regroup**.

They had to **find a way to fight back**.

"Fall back to the river!" he commanded.

"We can—"

A **sickening crack** split the night.

Jennifer's **barrier collapsed**.

Something **punched through it**.

A **spear of pure shadow**.

Moving **too fast to track**.

And it was **aimed at Albert's heart**.

Time slowed.

Albert saw it—

The **trajectory**.

The **unstoppable force**.

The **inevitable end**.

And then—

Jennifer **was there**.

Jennifer moved with **impossible speed**, her body a **blur of motion** as she **threw herself between Albert and death itself**.

The **spear of shadow** struck **directly into her chest**.

Albert's world **collapsed in an instant**.

"NO!"

His **scream ripped through the night**, raw, **primal**, shaking the very air around them.

Jennifer **stumbled backward**, her body **falling into his arms**.

Her **emerald eyes**—wide, shocked, disbelieving—met his.

The **shadow spear dissolved inside her**, but **its poison did not**.

It **spread like black veins beneath her skin**, twisting, consuming, turning the very **essence of her being to darkness**.

"Jennifer!"

Albert cradled her, **lowering her gently to the ground**, his hands **trembling violently**.

"No, no, no... stay with me."

Her **gaze softened**, even as **pain overtook her features**.

And that **broke what remained of his heart**.

"Run," she whispered, **blood trickling from the corner of her mouth**.

"I'm not leaving you!" Albert **clutched her closer**, tears **falling freely** now.

His head **snapped up** to Orion, **desperate**.

"Help her!"

Orion was **already kneeling beside them**, his wand **weaving in frantic, complex patterns**, casting spell after spell.

Nothing worked.

The **black veins spread further**, her skin **turning ashen**, the darkness **devouring her from the inside**.

"I can't stop it," Orion admitted, his voice **shaking with rare emotion**.

Albert **froze**.

"This magic is beyond me."

Jennifer's **hand found Albert's**.

Her grip was already **weakening**.

"It's okay," she murmured.

He **shook his head violently**.

"No, it's not okay! Don't say that!"

"This was... my choice."

Her **breath trembled**, her fingers **grasping his, holding on as long as she could**.

"We'll find a way," Albert whispered, voice breaking. "We'll fix this. We have to—"

But **they both knew it was a lie**.

Jennifer **exhaled sharply**, her **body shuddering**.

The **light in her eyes began to dim**.

"I wanted... to see what we could build... together," she whispered, voice barely audible.

And then—**she was gone**.

Albert **felt it**.

The **exact second her last breath left her lips**.

The **moment her hand slipped from his grasp**.

The **silence where her heartbeat should have been**.

Something **inside him broke**.

Something **that could never be fixed**.

A shadow **fell over them**.

"How touching," Valken's mocking voice cut through Albert's grief like a blade.

Albert's **body shook**—but not with sorrow.

With **rage**.

Morwen tilted her head, **watching the scene like a spectator at a play**.

"The girl had spirit," she mused, her voice void of emotion. "A pity."

Albert **barely heard her**.

His world **had narrowed down to a single moment**.

He gently **laid Jennifer's body on the ground, placing her hands over her heart**.

He **wiped the blood from her lips**, his touch **gentle, reverent**.

With **trembling fingers, he closed her eyes**.

And then—

He stood.

The **grief** that had nearly **crushed him moments before** had crystallized into something else.

Something **cold**.

Something **terrible**.

Something **absolute**.

Valken **smirked, unfazed**.

"What now, boy?" he sneered. "Are you going to cry? Are you going to beg?"

Albert lifted his wand.

His **hand no longer trembled**.

His **eyes no longer burned with tears**.

Now—

They **burned with something far, far worse**.

Pure rage.

It **boiled beneath Albert's skin**, searing through his **veins, mind, and soul**.

"Albert," Orion warned, his voice **low, urgent**. He could **feel the shift**, the crackling force **building in the air around them**.

"We need to leave. Now."

But Albert **didn't hear him**.

He **couldn't**.

The **storm inside him was too loud**.

The magic he had **always controlled, always feared**, was no longer **asking permission**.

It **burned through him, unstoppable, raw**.

And he welcomed it.

The **air twisted**, growing **darker, heavier**. The ground beneath his feet **split apart**, black energy **leaking from the fissures like poison**.

Albert's **warm brown eyes were gone**.

In their place—an **unnatural, glowing light**.

Valken's **smirk faltered**.

For the **first time**, Albert saw something **new** in his enemy's face.

Fear.

Morwen **stepped forward**, her unreadable expression shifting into something **closer to fascination**.

"Fascinating," she murmured, her **empty eyes widening**.

Albert lifted his wand—**but he didn't need it**.

The magic **wasn't flowing through the wand**.

It was **using it as a mere conduit**—a vessel for something far too vast, far too powerful for his **mortal body to contain alone**.

He took a **slow step forward**, his voice **quiet**, but carrying a **terrible weight**.

"You took her from me."

A whisper.

Yet **layered with voices that weren't his own**.

Valken's **breath caught**.

Albert's power was **bleeding into the world itself**.

Not even Morwen's corrupting magic had done this.

The **trees withered**.

The **animals fled**.

The ****very air seemed to suffocate under the pressure of his fury**.

Morwen's lips **parted slightly**.

"The prophecy," she breathed. *"It's him."*

Albert **didn't care**.

Didn't care about **prophecies, the Arcane Order, the Witched Six**.

Didn't care about **fate, destiny, or the cost**.

He **only cared about making Valken suffer**.

With a **wordless cry**, Albert **unleashed his power**.

It wasn't **controlled**.

It wasn't **refined**.

It was **primal**.

A **manifestation of grief, rage, and loss in its purest form**.

The world **split apart around him**.

Reality itself **ripped**, torn apart by **the sheer force of the magic he summoned**.

Valken **barely had time to react**.

He **threw up a shield**, but it **shattered like glass** the moment the **wave of power struck him**.

He was **blown back**, his body **slamming against a tree with enough force to splinter bark**.

Albert **moved forward**, ready to **end him**—

But **Morwen intervened**.

She **lifted both hands**, and **a wall of pure shadow erupted, slamming** against Albert's attack.

The impact **rippled outward**, a **shockwave leveling everything within a hundred yards**.

Albert **staggered back**, his **vision blurring**.

The **power inside him trembled**, retreating, leaving him **hollow and weak**.

Orion was **suddenly at his side**, **gripping his arm, keeping him steady**.

"We have to go," he urged, his voice **tight with urgency**. *"You can't fight both of them. Not like this."*

Through the haze of his **fury**, Albert **knew Orion was right**.

He **wasn't ready**.

The power he had tapped into was **too wild, too untamed**.

And Jennifer was **beyond saving**.

His **throat burned**.

His **body ached**.

His **soul screamed**.

"Take her." His voice came out **hoarse, broken**. He **nodded toward Jennifer's body**.

"We can't leave her here."

Orion **hesitated for only a second**.

Then he **moved to gather Jennifer's body**, his expression **set in stone**.

With a **sharp flick of his wand**, Orion **tore open a portal—a desperate move**, one that would **drain his magic dangerously low**.

But **they had no choice**.

Morwen and Valken were **already recovering**, their magic **coiling, preparing for another strike**.

"NOW!" Orion **shouted**.

Albert **took one last look at the battlefield**.

At the **monsters who had taken everything from him**.

At the **lifeless body of the girl he had loved**.

At the **war that was far from over**.

Then, without a word, **he stepped through the portal**.

The **last thing he saw** before the world disappeared—

Was **Morwen's empty gaze**, watching him **not with hatred**,

But with **newfound interest**.

And something almost resembling—

Respect.

They emerged deep in the forest, somewhere Albert had never seen before.

The **trees here were ancient**, their **twisted branches curling unnaturally**, reaching like **crooked fingers toward the sky**. The **leaves were not green**—they were a **deep, unnatural purple**, shifting slightly even **though there was no wind**.

This place **was different**.

And **it knew they were here**.

The **moment the portal closed**, **Orion collapsed**, his body **completely drained** from the magic he had used.

Jennifer's **body lay between them**, already **growing cold**.

Albert **barely registered Orion's ragged breathing**, his own mind a **hollow void**.

"Where are we?" His voice sounded **distant, not his own**.

Orion **forced himself up**, blinking against his exhaustion.

"The Heart of the Dark Forest." His breath came **in gasps**, his body shaking. *"The magic here is... different. Ancient. It should hide us from them. At least for a while."*

Albert barely **acknowledged the words**.

He **knelt beside Jennifer's still form**, his fingers **brushing over her pale face**, his rage momentarily **replaced by something worse**.

Crushing grief.

"She died because of me."

Orion, despite his own **exhaustion**, met Albert's gaze.

"She died protecting what she loved," he corrected, voice **quiet but firm**. *"There's no greater honor for a warrior."*

The words **offered no comfort**.

Albert **lifted Jennifer in his arms**, cradling her **like she was just sleeping**, his body rocking slightly **as silent tears ran down his face**.

"I'll make them pay," he whispered **against her hair**. *"I swear it."*

Orion **watched him**, his expression filled with **both concern and understanding**.

"The magic you called upon back there..." he hesitated, choosing his words carefully. *"I've never seen anything like it."*

Albert **stared at his own hands**.

They looked **the same**, yet he could **feel the change within himself**—as if a **door had opened**, one that **would never close again**.

"Neither have I," he admitted.

Orion's jaw **tightened**.

"It's forbidden magic," he said **cautiously**. *"The kind that consumes its wielder if not controlled."*

Albert's response was **immediate, cold, and final**.

"I don't care."

Orion's **expression darkened**.

"You should."

Albert **glanced up sharply**.

"Because if you let it consume you," Orion continued, **his voice hard as steel**, *"then Jennifer died for nothing."*

Albert **felt those words like a blade to his chest**.

For a long moment, **neither of them spoke**.

Around them, the **forest whispered**, its **unnatural leaves rustling without wind**, as if the trees themselves **were listening**.

Finally, Albert **lowered Jennifer's body**, his hands **steady**, his mind **clearer than it had been since the battle**.

"Teach me," he said, his voice no longer **shaking**.

Orion **studied him**, weighing his words **like a man deciding whether to place his faith in a loaded weapon**.

"It won't bring her back."

"I know."

Albert's eyes **burned with something else now**—not just grief.

Purpose.

"But it might keep others from sharing her fate."

For a long moment, **Orion said nothing**.

Then, finally—he **nodded**.

"We need to perform the burial rites first," he said. *"She deserves that much."*

Together, **they prepared Jennifer's body**, following the **ancient traditions of the Arcane Order**.

They **washed away the blood**.

They **dressed her wounds**.

They **wrapped her in a shroud**, conjured from **moonlight and memory**.

They found the **oldest tree in the forest**, its **roots forming a cradle beneath the earth**, and **laid her to rest**.

As the **first light of dawn** pierced the **twisted canopy**, Albert **stood over her grave**.

His **heart no longer broken**.

His **grief no longer hollow**.

His **rage no longer aimless**.

"I will master this power."

His words were **not a wish, not a hope**.

They were an **oath**.

"I will become stronger than Valken."

"Stronger than Morwen."

"Stronger than anyone who stands in my way."

His **fingers tightened around his wand.**

"And when I do—"

"I will tear down everything they've built."

"Everyone they've corrupted."

A **shadow passed through his voice**, something **unnatural**, something **powerful**.

Orion placed a hand on his shoulder.

Not in **comfort**.

But in **solidarity**.

"Then we begin now."

And so—

In the **Heart of the Dark Forest**, surrounded by **magic older than history itself**,

Albert embarked on a **new path**.

One **paved with forbidden knowledge**.

One **fueled by vengeance**.

The **shadows inside him had awakened**.

And the world—

Would tremble at what he would become.

Chapter#6 – Beneath the Dark Spell

The wind howled through the hillside battlefield, carrying whispers of vengeance, death, and destiny.

Albert and Orion stood at the **edge of a cliff**, their eyes locked onto the ruins ahead—**Valken's final stronghold.**

This was where it would end.

For **Thomas. Angela. The Witch. Jennifer.**

For **everyone Valken had murdered.**

Orion raised his wand.

"Locatium Visus!"

A beam of light shot skyward, pulsing like a beacon in the night.

It stretched across the **stormy skies**, leading them forward.

For a week, **they followed it**, resting only when exhaustion forced them to. Their magic **grew darker, sharper**, their bodies pushing beyond human limits.

And then—**they found him.**

The **hills rose before them**, jagged and lifeless. The air was **thick with tension**, the kind that settled before a **storm that would tear the sky apart.**

Albert **could feel it.**

Valken **was waiting.**

The moment they set foot on the battlefield, **he emerged.**

Valken stood **tall**, his long **silver-streaked hair whipping in the wind**, his **black cloak billowing like living shadow.**

But his eyes—**sharp, calculating**—widened when they landed on Orion.

"Orion?"

Valken's voice carried a note of **genuine surprise.**

"Yes, Valken," Orion replied, his tone **steady, resolute.**

"Finally, someone is here to challenge you—to dismantle the system of power and fear you've built."

Valken's **expression hardened**, his **wand twitching at his side.**

"You don't understand, boy," Valken said, his voice a **low growl.** *"This world needs fear to keep order. Power is the only truth."*

Albert **stepped forward**, his wand already **crackling with energy**.

"Then let's put an end to it."

*The sky above the battlefield **rumbled**, dark clouds rolling in like an omen of the chaos about to unfold. Lightning **flashed**, illuminating the hilly terrain where three figures stood locked in a moment of unbearable tension.*

Albert **felt the air tighten**, charged with raw magic. The weight of every loss, every moment of suffering, burned inside him, waiting to be unleashed.

Valken stood at the highest point of the battlefield, **his black cloak whipping in the wind**, his wand steady in his grasp. His eyes, usually filled with confidence, **betrayed a flicker of unease**.

Orion stood beside Albert, **shoulders squared, muscles tense**, a storm of his own brewing within him.

"This ends today, Valken!" Albert declared, his voice echoing through the valley.

Valken's lips curled into a smirk. *"Brave words, boy. But bravery alone won't save you."*

And then—**they moved**.

Albert **attacked first**.

"Draconis Ignis Fulgur!"

A **massive inferno** erupted from his wand, **a serpent of fire roaring toward Valken**, its heat so intense that the very ground beneath it scorched black.

Valken barely had time to react. He flicked his wand, casting **"Aqua Vortex!"** A swirling **torrent of water** burst forth, colliding with the flames in a deafening explosion of steam and force.

The battlefield **shook**.

Albert didn't hesitate. He sprinted forward, **whipping his wand downward**, the ground beneath Valken **splintering apart**.

"Terraemotum Malignus!"

The **earthquake struck**, tearing deep fissures through the rocky terrain, forcing Valken to **leap from stone to stone** as the land **collapsed beneath him**.

But Valken wasn't so easily caught.

He **threw his wand high**, a pulse of dark energy spiraling into the stormy sky.

"Umbra Annihilo!"

From the shadows, **black tendrils erupted**, writhing like living creatures. They **shot toward Albert and Orion**, their movements too fast to track.

"Protego Maxima!" Orion roared, his wand carving a protective sigil in the air.

A **golden shield** flared around them, but the shadow tendrils **pounded against it**, wrapping around Orion's defense like vipers, **cracking it with every strike**.

Albert **ducked and rolled**, barely avoiding a tendril that **sliced through the air where his head had been**.

"Enough of this!"

With a thrust of his wand, **he sent a shockwave outward, dispersing the dark tendrils** and launching himself forward **with terrifying speed**.

Valken **met him in midair**.

Their wands **clashed**, a **blast of magic igniting between them**. The force of their collision sent **shockwaves rippling outward**, flattening trees and sending debris flying in all directions.

Albert's **mind was a blur**—his magic moving **instinctively** now, fueled by **rage, vengeance, and loss**.

"You think power makes you invincible?" Albert snarled, twisting midair and landing on a rock. *"Let's see how you handle this—"*

"Ventus Spicula!"

A barrage of **razor-sharp wind blades** shot from Albert's wand, slicing through the air **like spectral daggers**.

Valken countered with a flick of his wrist, sending **a vortex of gravity magic** that **collapsed the air itself**, neutralizing the attack with a deep, echoing **BOOM**.

Then—**he vanished**.

Albert's eyes **darted around wildly**.

"He's using Shadow Step!" Orion shouted. *"He's moving between dimensions—"*

Before Orion could finish, **Valken reappeared directly behind him**, his wand aimed at Orion's back.

"Mortis Umbra!"

A **spear of pure darkness** formed in his palm, striking toward Orion **at lightning speed**.

But Albert **was faster**.

He **threw himself between them**, wand raised, magic **coiling around his body like armor**.

The **shadow spear struck his defenses**, detonating in a blast of dark energy that sent **both him and Orion flying backward**.

Albert **hit the ground hard**, rolling over jagged stones, his vision momentarily blurred.

Through the ringing in his ears, he heard **Valken laugh**.

"You're powerful, boy," Valken admitted, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth. "But you're still reckless. That'll get you killed."

Albert **gritted his teeth, pushing himself up**.

"Not today."

With a **whip of his wand**, he cast "**Astra Fulminis**"—a celestial lightning spell that called forth a **massive bolt of white-hot electricity from the sky**.

The air **crackled** as the **bolt struck down with blinding speed**.

But at the last second—**Valken disappeared again**.

Albert **swore under his breath**.

"Orion—"

Before he could finish, Valken **reappeared above them**, his wand pointed downward.

"Tenebris Dominus!"

The **sky turned black**, and for a split second, the world **ceased to exist**.

Then—**pure chaos**.

A **torrent of dark energy** exploded downward, engulfing **everything** in its path.

Albert and Orion **barely had time to react** before they were **thrown back, tumbling violently across the broken battlefield**.

Albert **hit the ground**, his body **screaming in pain**.

He forced himself to **his feet**, his vision **swimming**, his breath **ragged**.

Across from him, Valken **stood tall, unharmed**, the darkness **coiling around him like a living thing**.

"You can't win this," Valken said, his voice eerily calm. "You're playing with forces beyond your comprehension."

Albert **smirked**, despite the blood dripping from his lip.

"Then let's see how far I can push them."

He **thrust his wand forward**—

And the battle **raged on**.

Albert's **rage ignited.**

"Draconis Ignis Fulgur!"

A **torrent of dragon fire** burst from his wand, spiraling into a **furious inferno**. The flames **roared**, twisting into the **shape of a monstrous dragon**, its wings spreading wide.

Valken raised his wand **too late.**

The **flames tore through his barrier**, smashing into him with **devastating force.**

Valken **screamed**, his robes **blackening**, his **flesh searing.**

For the first time—**Albert saw fear in Valken's eyes.**

Valken **staggered back**, his breathing **ragged**, his **body broken.**

But **he wasn't done.**

With the last of his strength, he **turned and ran.**

Albert's **rage boiled over.**

"Agnitor Mentis!"

The spell **struck Valken's mind like a dagger**, flooding his thoughts with **pure, unbearable pain.**

Valken **howled**, falling to his knees.

Orion **was already moving.**

"Repulsio!"

Valken's **body was flung through the air**, smashing against **jagged stone**, bouncing like a ragdoll before landing **in the dirt.**

Albert **approached slowly.**

Valken—the man who had stolen everything from them—was on his hands and knees, **barely able to breathe.**

This was it.

The **end.**

Albert **raised his wand.**

"Venenum Vox."

Valken **gasped**, his body **convulsing** as a **curse unlike any other seeped into his veins.**

His own **screams echoed across the battlefield.**

Orion watched, his eyes **dark, haunted**.

"Albert," he whispered. "Enough."

But **Albert wasn't done**.

His rage **wasn't satisfied**.

"Excruciatu Mors!"

A **spell so dark, so twisted**, that even **Valken's own cruelty** paled in comparison.

Valken **clawed at his own skin**, his body **rotting from within**, his own **magic consuming him**.

And then—he **stopped**.

The **greatest villain of their time... was dead**.

Albert **breathed heavily, staring down at the lifeless corpse**.

It was over.

Or was it?

Albert should have felt **relief**.

But all he felt was **emptiness**.

It wasn't enough.

Power like **he had never known** surged within him.

And he **liked it**.

The **dark magic called to him**, whispering secrets **too tempting to ignore**.

Orion **felt the shift immediately**.

"Albert..." he warned.

Albert turned to him **slowly**.

His **wand still burned with power**.

"You feel it too, don't you?" Albert murmured.

Orion **stiffened**.

"What are you talking about?"

Albert **smiled**.

"We could be more than this."

Orion's **chest tightened**.

"Albert. Stop."

Albert **lifted his wand.**

"Mors Instantum."

The **spell struck Orion in an instant, pure death magic** piercing through his chest.

Orion's **eyes widened in shock.**

Albert watched as his **friend—the only person who had stood beside him—collapsed, blood pooling beneath him.**

Orion's **lips curled into a weak smile.**

"I trusted you."

And then—he **was gone.**

Albert's breathing hitched.

His vision **swam**, the world around him a **distorted blur of color and sound.**

He took **one shaky step forward**—then another—before his legs **gave out beneath him.**

He **collapsed to his knees** beside Orion's lifeless body, his fingers **trembling as they hovered over his fallen friend's chest**, afraid to touch, afraid to confirm the truth he already knew.

"No... no, no, no, no..."

His voice was **barely a whisper**, but the pain behind it **shattered the silence.**

Albert's hands **clawed at his own face**, gripping his hair, his body **rocking forward and back**, his breath **coming in short, ragged gasps.**

"What have I done?"

The words **fell from his lips like broken glass**, cutting through the air, through his very soul.

Orion's **face was peaceful**, his lips **frozen in that faint, trusting smile**—the same **smile he had worn in life**, the same **smile he had carried to his death.**

Albert **couldn't look away.**

He had fought for **justice.**

For **vengeance.**

For **his loved ones.**

And yet—

Here he was.

Alone.

Surrounded by **nothing but corpses and ruin.**

His breathing grew shallow.

He had **set out to destroy a monster.**

Instead, he had become one.

Tears **spilled from his eyes**, tracing down his cheeks, mixing with the **blood smeared across his skin**. His entire body **shook violently**, unable to contain the **weight of his own actions**.

But the power inside him—

It did not care.

It **didn't weep.**

It **didn't mourn.**

It **didn't hesitate.**

It **whispered.**

It **urged him forward.**

More.

Stronger.

His **fingers curled into fists**, his nails **digging into his palms**.

He could still **feel the magic inside him**, raging, **begging to be unleashed.**

The dark energy **coiled around his soul**, refusing to let go.

His heart **pounded in his ears**, drowning out everything else.

The ground beneath him **felt unsteady**, as though the world itself was **collapsing under the weight of his grief**.

Albert **staggered to his feet**.

His eyes **burned—not with sorrow, not with regret—**

But with something **far darker.**

"I will make them pay," he whispered, the words barely escaping his lips.

The storm inside him **raged.**

The shadows **pressed closer.**

The world **blurred.**

His body **swayed**, his magic **flickering wildly—**

And then, **everything went black.**

Albert's **body fell forward**, crashing to the ground in a heap.

His vision **faded completely**, swallowed by the **very darkness he had unleashed**.

And as the battlefield **fell into eerie silence**, the wind carried a single truth into the night—

Albert will RETURN... For Revenge...

— This was not the end. It was only the beginning...

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Author's Note

The Final Confrontation: Wizard of Shadows was a labor of love, crafted to bring forth a tale of power, loss, and redemption. While this chapter of Albert's journey comes to a close, his story is far from over. The path he has chosen will lead him to even darker truths, testing not only his strength but the very nature of his soul.

What comes next will define him.

Will he rise?

Or will the darkness claim him forever?

Find out in *The Song of Snow and Nightmares*, coming soon.

About the Author

Hussnain Ahmad is a passionate storyteller who weaves tales of magic, mystery, and adventure. Inspired by legendary fantasy sagas, he aims to create immersive worlds that transport readers into realms of wonder and danger. When he's not writing, he enjoys exploring new stories, refining his craft, and sharing his love for fantasy literature.

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