

Draconian Heart

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Hermione had known the bitter end was coming, but it still took her by surprise as their cottage was crumbling from the force of the DeathEaters' assault. There really wasn't any hope left, but she would fight none the less. The dark side had won and there was no place left in the world for the remnants of her side, so this is how it ends. Very DARK - contains non consentual.

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Chapter 1

A/N So, new story, new Draco. Draco is very dark and really doesn't have many redeeming qualities, if you want your stories light and fluffy, this is not the one for you. You have been warned. I don't own anything.

Chapter 1

Hermione desperately tried to add wards to the door of the cottage she had been living in for the last fortnight. They had been found. She couldn't see them, but she knew they were there. George's body was lying outside, struck by a killing curse when they hadn't been expecting it. Somehow their perimeter wards had been breached without any alarm.

Now it was just her and Dean left in the cottage and they were doing their best to strengthen their defences, but she suspected that it was hopeless. The Deatheaters would have brought numbers, eager for the last of the resistance to be swept away. Just the two of them left now, everyone else was dead.

"They've put up some anti-apparition charm." Dean said. "We're going to have to fight."

"There's only two of us Dean, we'd last as many minutes if we're lucky." Hermione said.

"I think this might be it, Mione. The end of the line." He said and grabbed her hand. "We'll fight to the end, we always said we would. Guess its time to deliver."

Hermione nodded and drew him in for a hug, wrapping her arms around his waist and lowering her head into the crook of his neck. It was time, she'd known it'd been coming for a while. She wished she had a bit more time with him, he'd been her lover for four months

now. A union of desperation and relentless cold nights. She did care for him, although she wasn't sure if they'd ever be a couple if it hadn't been for the fact that they were pretty much the only ones left in this awful war that they were losing.

Now George was dead, dead to join the rest of his family wherever it was they'd all gone.

"Promise me Mione, if you see a gap, take it and run, and don't look back. Promise me."

"I promise, you too."

"I am going to kill as many of these bastards as I possibly can." He said and smiled. Hexes were hitting the stone structure of the cottage and it was starting to crumble.

He kissed her and stood up. "It time. Lets do it."

They both rushed out of the cottage throwing hexes as they went. They weren't too badly outnumbered, but there must have been at least four of them. They weren't all revealed but from the different directions they were coming from, she counted at least four.

Hermione managed to make it to a tree. A hex had graced her arm and it stung like anything, but she didn't have time for pain right now. She took a second to examine the wound. It wasn't fatal, her skin was singed and black. Pretty lightweight for a Death Eater.

Moment over, she started throwing hexes again, leaving the safety of the tree and freeing her arm. She heard Dean cry out as well as one of the Deatheaters.

"Now Mione!" Dean screamed.

Hermione took off away from the noise. She ran as fast as she possibly could, letting the panic take over her, away from thoughts of leaving Dean behind. Survival was the only thing for her to focus on, it had to be otherwise she'd fall apart. She couldn't think of leaving

Dean to be killed if he wasn't dead already, there was no chance of saving him and trying would only doom herself.

Branches tore at her face and shirt. She hurtled through the forest as fast as her legs could carry her. Her legs were straining with exertion and her lungs were screaming for oxygen. She heard yells behind her and she could hear that someone was chasing her, which only made her run faster. She was surprised she could hear anything as her own breath was so loud.

She kept running, jumping fallen branches and dodging tree trucks. She could still hear the heavy footsteps behind her and he was gaining. She tried to push herself more, but there was nothing left to increase her speed with.

She felt a hex slam into her back, knocking her off her feet and knocking her wand out of her hand. She tumbled through some bushes and tried to get up again, but her leg wasn't taking her weight. Something slammed into her knocking her over again. She had to blink as the overcast winter sun shone into her eyes. It wasn't bright by any means, but lying on the ground looking up on it was harsh on her eyes used to a dark dingy cottage.

She heard a person walk around her, but the pain was also coming through from her back and her leg, and maybe her eye. She could still see but her eye hurt. The pain just seemed to take her over, coming from every direction.

"I've been looking for you," a vaguely familiar voice said. She didn't care who it was, she wasn't even curious, it didn't matter, he was one of them. She turned to crawl because she had to find her wand again if she were to have any chance, but the pain in her leg make her cry out.

"Looks like you've broken your leg, Granger," he said with false sympathy. "Guess you won't be running anymore, which is just as well because it's more fun this way." He grabbed her leg and pulled her by it, making her scream out in pain. He twisted her around until

she was on her back and then he kneeled down with his knees on the sides of her waist, straddling her.

Hermione hadn't seen Draco in a long time, but his reputation preceded him. He was one of the inner circle now, powerful, cruel and brutal. Whatever humanity had been in him was gone now. He was Voldemort's enforcer and he had been looking for them. They had managed to escape by constantly moving, but he was always on their trail.

He placed the tip of his wand to her eye. "And here you are, I knew this day would come eventually. It was only a matter of time after all."

Hermione tried to focus on his face, but the sun was behind him making it hard to focus. He was certainly older, taller, bigger. The scrawniness of a teenager was gone and his face had broadened a little. His eyes still have the same gleam of malice, and he was clearly happy with his trophy.

"Now let's have fun, shall we," he shot a hex at Hermione snapping her mouth shut through magic. He sat back placing some of his weight on her stomach, studying her. "We won't be needed that mouth of yours because let's face it, there is no one for you to give up. No one left now." He watched her for a while, tracing the tip of his wand across her cheek. "I didn't think you would be the last one standing, but you were always too clever for your own good."

Hermione tried to mumble a 'fuck you' through her shut jaws. It didn't come out, but the meaning of it was still decipherable.

"So eloquent," he said. "It's all over now Granger, you've lost and there is nothing left but to die. And I have to say that I am kind of glad the honor has fallen to me."

She stared into his cold eyes for a moment then tried to buck him off.

"Don't be bothersome, Granger," he said. "It is such an annoying trait." He reached back and squeezed her broken leg, which made

her scream in pain through her shut mouth. "See, you're not going anywhere and really, where is there to go?"

Hermione calmed for a moment, she had to think. Her brain power was her strength and she needed it now. She knew he wasn't stupid, he hadn't risen in the ranks because he was dumb unlike some. She had straight outsmarted some of the more dimwitted Death Eaters, because some of them were thick as pig shit frankly. Draco was regarding her as well but she couldn't judge what was in his eyes, but there was a level of excitement there.

"The years haven't been kind to you," he said. Hermione didn't react, she didn't care what he thought. So it had been a while since she'd been to the hairdresser and makeup was a foreign concept, luxuries that had been lost a while ago. "So scrawny," he said feeling along her arms. It was true, she was skin and bones, they'd eaten when they could.

"No Potter here to save you now," he said teasingly. She only stared at him wishing he would just get on with it. She had no doubt he was going to kill her. "Looking at you now, it's an act of kindness really."

She mumbled another 'fuck you' and he raised his eyebrows.

Hermione felt rain falling on her face and she could hear the surrounding chorus of rain falling on leaves and on the ground. Draco looked up and Hermione took the chance to actually look at him. He still looked very similar, but just older. She knew he was going to kill her and it would likely happen very soon as she doubted he wanted to hang around in the rain telling her how crap she looked for overly long.

He grabbed her by the neck and Hermione instinctively went to pull his hands off, which were surprisingly warm for such a cold blooded creature. His strong fingers were like a vice and she couldn't budge them. They had all heard stories of what he'd turned into. Voldemort had formed him into the perfect soldier, the perfect Death Eater, strong and vicious. Maybe he had only amplified traits that were

always there, but now he killed with no regards and she was pretty sure very little conscience.

Draco flicked his wand and Hermione felt herself being tugged, he was taking her somewhere. She felt the nausea what went with unexpected apparition and it tugged on every painful part of her body as well, stretching her out, then returning them both to the same position with his hand firmly on her throat cutting off much of her air.

Thoughts ran through her head, something she heard about attackers taking people to the second location where the murder usually took place. This was the second location. She looked around and noted that she was in a cave somewhere. From the sounds coming from the entrance, she was still in the forest and this is where he was going to kill her. She had no wand and she couldn't even walk, there was no hope. She was kind of glad it was someone she knew rather than a nameless, faceless figure.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Hermione looked back and Draco was gone. She found him further up just standing there. He wore all black as he always had. His robes were more functional now, made for running, fighting and whatever else he did.

The pain in her leg was intense, it must be lying in an awkward position. She tried to readjust her leg when heavy footsteps came around her. He crouched down next to her, his wand firmly in his hand. His pants were grey, set in black boots under the robe.

"Look at you, all covered in filth." She only stared at him. She must look awful having run through the forest, been dragged through the mud and probably bloody too. He on the other hand looked clean even though he had participated in most of those things. She flinched at the unfairness of it.

He placed his wand to her throat and she froze. He was seeking her eyes, but she wouldn't connect with him. Whatever he was in there, she didn't want to see it. He reached his hand down, but she slapped it away.

"You going to fight me, Granger?" he said with amusement. He reached for her again and she slapped him away. He forcefully grabbed her by her hair at the back of her head and yanked her up to him. "Don't give up do you? Don't you get that it's over?" His grip was tight making her eyes water. She could see it in his eyes now, he was thinking about killing her. Micro expressions stole through his face, but none that she could discern. "What? Cat got your tongue?" He slapped her and she stared all her hate into him. Obviously he had made a decision that he wasn't done with whatever this was. "Perhaps if you plead with me, I will show you mercy." He flicked his

wrist and she felt the charm lift off her mouth, releasing the tension in her clenched jaws.

"Just get on with it, Malfoy," she croaked. He released her head and stepped back.

"And forgo all the fun?" He looked her up and down. She drew her arms up around her, not even wanting to know what he was going to do. The idea that he would rape her entered her mind, almost making her gag.

He whipped his leg across her sitting on her stomach again. She moved her face away.

"Oh, you're not under the impression that I would touch you?" he said with grim amusement. "Like I would lower myself to touch you. Are you really stupid enough to think you're revolting flesh would ever tempt me. You disgust me." She realised that he actually believed it, all the things he'd been spewing throughout the years. She'd never actually believed it until now. He really did think her fundamentally less than him. He leaned over, his head resting over hers as she eyed him suspiciously. He spit on her, slowly and she felt it land on her cheek.

Then he crucioed her. She felt the pain rip through her, a thousand daggers ripping into her body and she moved fruitlessly to try to escape the inescapable pain. She didn't know how long it went on for, it seemed like an eternity, but eventually blackness claimed her, finally letting her escape.

She woke some time later. The cave was empty and there was no sight of Draco.

"You fuck," she said and it echoed through the walls. Her whole body was stiff with cold. She tried to sit up but her leg shot agony through her. She screamed out the pain, hearing it back again.

She had to escape-find her wand. But then where was there to go? Everyone was gone now and there was nothing left to fight for. He should have just killed her. Maybe that is why he left her alive, to exist in her own misery, maybe thirst to death here in the forest. She had no idea where this cave was, or where her wand was in relation to it. Yet, she had to escape.

Her mouth was dry with thirst and if she lay completely still the pain would abate somewhat. She heard the patter of rain on the trees in the forest. She had to make it outside, she needed to get to that rain-water would relieve some of the weakness in her body.

She turned over and was rewarded with agony. It couldn't be helped, she would just have to bear it. She dragged herself along feeling every pebble grate under her broken leg. She wasn't sure she could hold onto her consciousness, but she had nothing left to lose. Pain was just her constant companion now as she slowly dragged her body out of the cave.

When she got to the entrance, it was darkening. She struggled to turn over, but finally managed, laying there, letting the rain slowly fall into her mouth. She slept.

It was dark when she woke, her leg had turned into a constant dull ache. She tried moving it and pain flared through her leg. It was still raining as she turned and dragged herself further out of the cave. She had to just keep going, taking the pain, letting it crescendo then settle with every movement. She kept going inching her way forward. She just had to keep going. What choice did she have? She could lie here and just die, or she could try. She had nothing to lose either way. She was soaking wet and maybe she would just die of exposure.

She lost track of time, her consciousness was coming and going at points.

"Aw, Granger, commendable effort. You made it all of thirty feet," Draco said behind her. She was shocked at hearing his voice and

tried to move faster, but had to concede she was making all the progress of a small turtle. There was no escaping him, so she turned over and looked back on him. "Now, let's resume, shall we?" he said with a raise eyebrow.

He stepped across her and grabbed her wrist, pulling her up and then over his shoulder. He lifted her up easily and walked her back to the cave. She was too tired to fight, he had undone the progress that had taken her all night in mere seconds. She felt the warmth of his body which only told her how cold she was.

He lay her down on the ground, pretty much in the same spot she had been before.

"Can you just get on with it?" she asked. She wasn't going to plead with him, she suspected that was what he wanted. He wanted something-it obviously wasn't fucking her, but he wanted something.

"You in a hurry, Granger?"

"You know, places to go, people to see."

"Always so lippy. Don't worry, you will be reunited with your sappy loved ones soon enough."

"At least I won't wake up tomorrow seeing you."

He cocked his head. "Maybe you will. I do so love to oblige."

"Fuck you, Malfoy."

"So crass, just like a muggle, but then that is what you are, aren't you?"

"Is that why you're keeping me here, so we can rehash this old conversations. I know what your view are, Malfoy, you have taken great pains letting them be known."

"See, that has always been your problem, Granger, you never knew when you should shut up and show respect to your superiors."

She just sighed, it was too late and too much rehash to even bother getting upset about it.

"Whatever Malfoy," she said.

He crouched down next to her. She didn't react this time, didn't bother trying to get away from him. He put his hand down on her leg and pressed. She couldn't keep the scream of agony down.

"Want me to fix your leg, Granger?" he said sweetly.

Hermione refused to look at him.

"Say, please, Malfoy, fix my leg," he said and she knew he was grinning. "No actually, say, please, Master, fix my leg."

"Go fuck yourself."

He yanked her hair again, bending her head back towards him. She could feel his breath on the side of her face. His eyes were studying her face and she felt awkward with the intimacy of their closeness.

"If I fix your leg, Granger, you have a chance to fight me. Isn't that what you want? Might even have an infinitesimal chance to get away."

"Is that what you want, Malfoy, you want me to fight you?"

He chuckled, "You could try."

She pressed her lips together in protest.

"No fun, you are? Just tedious." He moved his wrist and she felt her bone knitting together. He did it with wordless magic-she couldn't help but be impressed. He was a much more powerful wizard than the one she had known at school. He had been trained, probably by

Voldemort himself. The pain in her leg slowly faded. Over her dead body would she thank him.

He stepped away from her and she stayed sitting where she was. He moved over to the wall of the cave and unhurriedly took off his cloak. He folded it neatly and placed it over a natural outcropping on the wall.

She had no idea what she was in for when he turned around. He wanted something from her, something that wasn't sex, or her death, well not yet anyway. She scrambled up from her position and stood at the other side of the wall.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

"What do you want Malfoy?"

"I want to see how good you are," he said when he turned around. He threw her wand at her. "Come on, Granger, you get past me and you have freedom."

She knew he was messing with her head, and she knew he was good. Still, he was right, she did have the smallest chance. She shot him a hex, which he deflected expertly.

"Why are you doing this Malfoy? Are you so unhappy with your life you have to tempt fate by engaging unnecessarily?"

He shot her a hex and she had to step back with the power of it. He really was strong.

"Now, from your perspective, I would have thought this was highly necessary."

He shot one she tried to reflect, then another which cut into her leg making her cry out with the pain. She clamped her jaws shut to keep herself from screaming.

"Oh, that would have hurt." His typical smirk spread across his lips.

"There is seriously something wrong with you."

He shot her a hex that knocked her into the wall behind her, making her hit her head. She was dazed but she managed to block it. He hit her again and again, relentlessly, and she was barely holding her own.

"It's amazing you are the last one to survive-you're not that good."

She shot a hex she had perfected a while ago. He deflected most of it, but it cut into his cheek. He reached up and tested the injury, seeing the blood. She gave him a pointed look.

He hit her with a cruciatus that she couldn't block. She fell to her knees with the pain of it and he wasn't letting up. It felt like an eternity of excruciating pain. She lost track of herself and even who she was at the relentless waves of pain hit her. She could hear screaming, but didn't connect it as her own.

Finally it let up. She tried to raise her wand but she had been exhausted by it.

"Pointless as I thought," she heard him say.

He moved forward and kneeled down. The point of his wand pressed into the soft skin under her jaw. She could only look at him, unable to make out what he was thinking. His grey eyes held nothing in them, just cold consideration. But he was thinking something over and she didn't know what. Why wasn't he killing her already? She felt the tip press painfully into her skin. She knew he was done with her and expected that her end was here. But the moment pressed on and she could see muscles of his jaw working.

After an indeterminable period, he grabbed her roughly by the neck and apparated them. They arrived somewhere equally gray, but much colder.

"Welcome to Banchory, Granger. You'll love it." He forced her roughly along by his rough hold of the hair at the back of her neck. He didn't say anything further, just kept a relentless pace as he forced her along. "Oh and so you don't get any ideas," he said and brought out her wand in his other hand, which he snapped through the force of his grip. "You won't be needing that anymore."

He spent a short moment watching her reaction, before dragging her along as well. She refused to react, just stared at him defiantly. She

wanted to fight, but she didn't have any strength in her at the moment. He snorted before forcing her to move again.

She knew that she was in the middle of enemy territory. This was the village that Voldemort had commandeered and the centre of his power structure. From what they had gathered, Voldemort liked the cold and they had all moved north, taking over most of Scotland-clearing out the muggle population through murder or fear.

There had been great fear in the Order of the Phoenix that they would move south, but the push hadn't come and Voldemort seemed content with Scotland for the time being. Although everyone knew it was just a matter of time.

The influx of magical people into Scotland had been surprising and distressing. Wizards and witches from all over the world had moved in, wanting a magical nation where they weren't living amongst muggles, hiding what they were. It had been a bitter pill for her and Harry to realise that there was a large portion of people who were welcoming Voldemort. He was building his Utopia and people were supporting him, buying into it. Apparently tyranny was a price they were willing to pay-well, the purebloods did, no one else fared well under this new structure.

The village was alive with people seemingly going about their business. The women were dressed in finery the likes Hermione had never seen before. They were wearing dresses adorned with precious metals and stones, including intricate sewing work.

He dragged her past a statue of Voldemort, standing at least twenty feet tall with his wand up high, looking extremely arrogant. Hermione knew that he required complete obedience and that worshipping him was a requirement for everyone living here. She was astounded that people willingly agreed to it. Surely people were stupid enough not to see through the self serving needs of a raging, lunatic narcissist. But no, it seemed.

She also knew that he didn't engage with the fighting like he'd used to, now he was amusing himself with the rampant intrigue and politics around the bestowing of his favour. Draco had taken over the unpleasant business of dealing with the floundering and disintegrating resistance. And apparently he was out of work now. Hermione fought the lump in her throat. She absolutely refused to cry in front of him.

They got to a door and Draco kicked it open, pulling her into a room with a low ceiling and a man sitting behind a rough wooden desk.

"Another to serve," Draco said and pushed her sharply forward until she lost her balance. He looked down at her for a moment without any expression on his face, then turned and left without looking back.

The portly man behind the desk stood up and walked around the desk. "What have we here, a feral one?" he said tucking his thumb into his waist. "Muggle or mudblood?"

"I am a witch," Hermione said defiantly.

"Oh ho, spunk in you, isn't there. Won't be for long. It won't serve you here. You're nothing and the sooner you realise that, the better. If you outlive your usefulness, that will be rectified quickly and trust me when I say they find creative means of doing it. Good entertainment and all," he said nastily. Hermione hated the man. He was the worst kind of wizard. Ugly in mind and body, and everything in between.

"Well then," the awful man said. "Let's get you out of those clothes."

"What? No." Over her dead body, she thought.

"No muggle clothes here, mudblood. You can either change or you can go naked, I don't really care which, but I will inform you that it gets very cold here at night." He sneered at her maliciously. "And no one here would really care if you froze to death. This way," he said sharply.

He cast a hex that whipped across her back when she didn't move. She wondered if she was bleeding from it, it felt like it. He stopped by a cupboard and grabbed something before continuing to walk.

"There is no hope for you here," he said facing away from her. "There is no where to go and no one will help you. You're the last of the resistance or so I hear. Not sure why he brought you here, I have a feeling you will be more trouble than you're worth."

He walked down a set of stairs into a basement, but he turned back to her before opening the door. "You'll never leave here and the sooner you readjust to that the better, it will be beaten out of you if you don't. There is no where to go and things are as they should be. Don't forget that."

He opened the door to a large grey room and grabbed her arm, pushing her in, then pushing her down the further stairs with his foot.

"Burn those clothes before I come back, or I will whip you all," he roared before slamming the door shut.

Hermione's knees ached from landing on the frigid stone floor. She looked around and there were people staring at her.

"Hurry girl," one of them said. Hermione only stared at them, until one of them stepped forward.

"You have to take those clothes off and put that on," she said pointing at the floor where a piece of material looking exactly like a sack lay. She raised her eyebrows in surprise and looked back on the people, who were all wearing similar sacks. "You must, now." The woman looked fearfully at the door. They all were.

Hermione stood up and started to undress. She felt a bit self conscious, but by the look of fear on these people's faces, she knew she had to comply. She considered not doing it, stubbornly refusing, but she also knew it wouldn't be just her that were punished for her

defiance, all these people would be and that made it a lot more difficult.

The sack barely fit her, it only came to mid thigh and the material was very uncomfortable as it roughly covered her skin. It actually had 'grain' written on the side of it.

"I'm Mary," the woman said as she took Hermione's muddy and torn clothes and shoved them in the fire.

"Hermione."

"This is Stephen," the woman said pointing to an older man, "and Samarah," indicating a young girl of around twelve. "We're mudbloods too."

Hermione stood up and introduced herself to the others.

"We serve," Mary said.

"Serve?"

"Fetch, carry ,serve... whatever is asked. We take orders from everyone, even the elves."

Hermione looked around the room, there was a big table in the middle and a stove over on one side. This was some kind of kitchen.

"We sleep here," she said. "We sleep near the stove where it's warm. There is a spot for you. It used to be occupied by someone else, but they..." the woman drifted off. "Never mind. Your blood status is important here."

Hermione knew as much. They had heard things about Banchory, but over time they had lost contact. Their informants had dried up as the regime did their best to root out all supporters of the resistance.

Mary returned to the stove and was frantically preparing food, while Samarah polished silver cutlery.

"We must serve lunch," Stephen said.

"Are there more of us?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, scattered all over the village. A few muggles too."

Hermione looked around and sighed. This is not what she had expected, or the fate she had foreseen for herself. She had fully expected that she would die in the fight and she had no idea why Draco didn't kill her. He probably wanted this final humiliation, she recognised.

Chapter 4

"Get up you lazy morons," the awful fat man yelled. A hex snapped across Hermione's arm shooting pain down her side. "You think we are here to cater to you, do you?" Another hex shot out. "Cook me some breakfast," he said pointing his wand at Mary. Mary nodded and kept her head down until the man huffed and turned. "Useless," he muttered.

Hermione felt her own anger rise, along with a powerful urge to throw something at him, preferably a cast iron pot. She didn't think she could take this. Draco might have been right; she would suffer more here than a quick death. She hated him that little bit more.

She spent the morning kneading bread, a task she didn't actually mind. It left her to gather her own thoughts. Hermione wondered yet again if death was better than this; although she needed to give herself time to fully process the situation she was in. She recognised that her situation was likely hopeless, but she wasn't ready to give up hope just yet as she still hadn't confirmed it in her mind.

"You are required to run Mistress Rose her bath," Mary said after a few hours. "She is the second room to the left on the third floor." Mary pointed to the stairs.

"She can't run her own bath?"

"They like to be served."

She walked up the stairs and knocked on the door that had been indicated to her.

"Must I be kept waiting all day?" a woman demanded tartly. Hermione opened the door to a sumptuously decorated room in a Chinese motif with yellow and green walls and carpets. The woman was sitting next to her dressing table and a girl Hermione didn't know

was brushing her hair. "I swear, you lot don't have enough brain matter to form a cohesive thought."

Hermione raised an eyebrow, but she kept herself from displaying it to the woman she recognised as Rose Parkinson.

"It is bad enough that we are kept in these awful rooms, but to have to be served by such imbeciles-it is intolerable." The girl combing the woman's hair seemed to be completely unaffected by the woman's tirade.

Hermione decided that she would just get on with what was required of her. She didn't want to spend a moment more in the company of this woman. Hermione preferred the grey surroundings of the kitchen to this.

Hermione ran the bath until it was ready and Mrs. Parkinson came into the bathroom in her silk dressing gown holding a champagne glass.

"Stand aside girl," she said tartly and dropped her dressing gown to the floor leaving her completely nude. Hermione suppressed a gasp. She wasn't a prude, but for someone to just strip down like that was extraordinary.

The woman stepped into the bath and told Hermione to hold her drink. The woman sunk into the bath and groaned with comfort.

"Give me the glass you silly creature."

"Mother," someone called from outside the bathroom. Hermione groaned herself as Pansy stepped into the bathroom. She did a double take when she saw Hermione then laughed. "Oh my pippersnips, look what the cat dragged in," Pansy said with amused disdain.

Hermione wanted to disappear. The embarrassment was unbearable.

"You know this girl?"

"She was unfortunately one of the mudbloods we were subjected to," Pansy said. "But I see she has finally taken her proper place. It was just a matter of time. How did you end up here?" Pansy demanded.

Hermione didn't answer and ignored the question. Pansy whipped out her wand and crucioed her without warning. Hermione crumpled to the ground with the pain.

"You obviously need to learn your place," Pansy said snarkily. "Now! How did you end up here!" Pansy yelled.

"Malfoy brought me," Hermione answered.

Pansy huffed disbelievingly then narrowed her eyes as she considered. Hermione got the feeling that Pansy didn't appreciate the news.

"Malfoy brought the creature? How extraordinary," Mrs. Parkinson said.

Pansy's serious look turned into a grin. "He must have plans for you," she said maliciously. "He does like games. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes."

Pansy wore a dark robe set that accentuated her figure and matched her dark hair. Pansy waved casually with her hand. "Merlin, they smell don't they." Pansy turned her attention to her mother. "I don't know how you can bare to have them around."

Hermione didn't need to be told twice, she shot out of there as quickly as she could carry herself. Hermione hadn't seen Pansy in years. She had never met her on the battlefield, then the purebloods rarely included their women in such activities.

Hermione leaned on the wall in the hall outside. She was trying to get a grip on the situation she had landed in and it was turned from

bad to worse. Having to serve the Parkinson's would be sheer torture. But maybe it could be worse. Pansy was an arrogant bitch who preferred mental torture to anything physical-so maybe that was a small mercy. Truth be told, she would probably prefer Pansy's snide remarks and disdain than having to deal with other situations.

Pansy's assumption that Malfoy had spared her for some nefarious plan was a bit disturbing. Hermione couldn't get her mind around it. Malfoy'd had his chance to torture her and he'd certainly taken advantage. She hoped Pansy was wrong, but then again, Pansy likely knew him a lot better than her.

It turned out that she was not to serve the Parkinson's exclusively. Mary told her to go wake Master Malfoy the next day. Hermione remembered Pansy's warning from the day before.

"I would prefer not to," Hermione said as Mary was frantically cooking breakfast.

"You must, I can't do it. I have to get this meal together or we will all suffer for it. Samarah is..." Mary turned to the girl who had frozen still, "unable to deal with him."

He had to be dealt with? Hermione said silently. Of course he did, she continued her internal cursing. He had tortured her for his own amusement.

"Just don't anger him," Mary said with warning in her eyes. Hermione sighed at the impossible task put to her. Angering Malfoy had been an achievement of a lifetime, there was absolutely no possibility that she could not. Her mere existence annoyed him.

"Maybe I should cook," Hermione said hopefully.

"It has to be just right and you don't know how," Mary said her voice cracking with tension. "Or they... Please just take care of Master Malfoy. It isn't difficult, set the fire, pull the curtains and wake him. Keep your head down and don't make eye contact. That is all that's

required." Hermione could hear the desperation in Mary's voice and felt awful for causing grief and distress to the woman.

Hermione took the direction to his quarters and dragged her feet up the stairs. The completion of her humiliation was about to happen. It wasn't really something she could have avoided.

She knocked lightly on the door and turned the knob which gave as she turned it. The door opened to a dark room with a large bed and a sofa set on the other side. It was completely different from Mrs. Parkinson's room and Hermione guessed that they all decorated their rooms as they wished.

Hermione had never seen anything of Malfoy's private surroundings before. She'd never even seen the Slytherin common room at Hogwarts. Her eyes drew to the pale form lying on the bed. His pale chest was exposed as he slept on his back. There was someone next to him, which Hermione hadn't expected. She couldn't see the girl, but she kind of hoped it wasn't Pansy Parkinson. She wasn't sure why she hoped that-maybe because Pansy had seemed so keen on it and Hermione spitefully wished that it never worked out for her. The idea of Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson always had a gag quality that had never abated.

Malfoy and Pansy could be married for all she knew. For some reason it was a disturbing thought. Everything about this whole scene was disturbing. Hermione quietly padded into the room, the thick carpet hiding her steps. She moved to the fire and set some logs and kindling in a stack. It would be so easy to light it with a wand, but she didn't have one. She looked around and saw Draco's wand lying on the table next to his head. She knew full well she was not allowed to touch it, so she scrunched up some paper and shoved it into the pile, striking a match and hoped it would take.

She stepped over to the window, walking closer to the bed. He hadn't moved. She could see scars on his chest. He really wasn't a scrawny boy anymore, it seemed.

"What are you staring at mudblood?" he said without opening his eyes.

Hermione didn't answer, instead turned and whipped the curtains open sending stark daylight into the room.

Malfoy moved to cover his eyes and swore. Then he glared at her maliciously.

"Watch yourself, mudblood," he said coldly.

Hermione turned her attention back to the fire to rearrange the logs, then she turned to the door.

"I didn't tell you that you could leave," he said. He turned and smack the girl next to him on the bottom startling her awake. "Get out," he said and Hermione turned to leave again. She knew the order wasn't for her, but she took advantage of the possible misunderstanding. A stinging hex ripped into Hermione's back and she froze.

"I think we are going to have to establish some understanding. I thought we'd done that, but I recognise that you are a slow learner."

The woman snuck out of the bed and gathered her clothes from the floor and ran out the door without bothering to put them on.

Obviously not a wife, Hermione thought to herself. Hermione vague recalled the girl, but she couldn't place her.

"Halfbloods," Malfoy said as if reading her thoughts. He leaned back on the bed with his arm around her head. "They serve their purpose," he finished lasciviously. Hermione got the feeling that he was trying to shock her. Disgust worked. "I suppose that serves you well, Granger," he said after a while. "No one will touch your putrid carcass here."

"And no one is more grateful than I," she said. She turned her face away from him again, but she could hear him rising out of the bed and stepping closer to her. Her breath hitched as she anticipated

whatever pain would come her way. He yanked hard on her hair forcing her head back.

"You're nothing, Granger." He didn't let go of her hair, just pulled until she couldn't hold herself upright any more. "You will learn. You are good for nothing other than to hold a towel and light fires. You have no value whatsoever and the only reason you are here is because it amuses me to watch you come to that realisation. You will serve and grovel, until you grow to accept it as the way it should always have been."

She realised he was naked and she wanted to gag. She prayed that it was true and none of his kind wanted to touch her. If she believed him and that is what they used halfbloods for, then the half bloods really were worse off. She wondered at the mentality of someone who would treat people like that-a thought that had remained with her over the years that she had known Draco Malfoy. She'd always thought it was bravado and sheer maliciousness.

"Now serve," he said and let go of her hair so her head flicked back from the pressure he'd placed on it.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Hermione got into the routine of this horrible place. It was cold and barren, and only a lunatic would choose to live here. She was pretty sure none of the purebloods would chose to live here otherwise. Well, she hoped they suffered with the bleakness of the place too.

The place had a certain routine. They were left alone provided they did as they were supposed to. The fat man would come in suddenly and yell, sometimes whip, then leave. They served. That was all there was to it.

Hermione stood in the corner and waited as Malfoy spread the shaving foam across his chin in smooth swirling motions. He stood with a white towel around his hips and his pale torso bare, water drops glistening off she shoulders from his shower. She could see the scars as he moved, his muscles tensing as he scraped the cut throat blade across his skin. She wondered if anyone she knew had given him one of those scars. He deserved them.

"What are you thinking, mudblood?"

"Does it matter?"

"Anything I say matters to you," he said and washed the foam off his razor in the sink. "My word is gospel in your ears." He waited. He obviously wanted her to answer.

"I was wondering who gave you your scars." His eyes sought hers in the mirror, the icy grey connecting with hers. She hated it when he looked at her. She hated him.

"Who gave you yours?" he asked back. She shrugged. "I'll give you some more." He stared at her again until she lowered her eyes away from him. He wanted a staring contest, she wasn't interested.

"You'd slit my throat if I gave you the razor," he said. It was true.
"You'd die for it, but I'm not sure you care." He smiled. She kept her eyes on the ground. This would be over soon, he would dress then go do whatever it was he did during the days. "One day Granger, you will be so acclimated to your new position, you'll shave me with nothing but tender care."

She suppressed the grumble and just kept her face impassive. She'd rather die sooner than get to the point where she accepted this. The uncomfortable truth was that she was going along with it, at least physically. She'll never get to the point where she will mentally accept this.

"The only reason I am here is because I'm forced, coerced."

"That will change," he said with a grin.

"No, it won't."

"It's only natural, over time."

"Nothing here is natural."

He grew serious for a moment and Hermione wished she'd just shut up. He liked crucioing her, she was sure he liked it when she was in pain. Sick fuck. But he didn't reach for his wand, he just stared at her while she stared at the floor.

"Clean me," he ordered. She stepped forward with the towel and dipped it under the running water before bringing it to his face and stroking the excess shaving foam off him. When she was done she turned the towel around to the dry part and patted the remaining moisture off him. It was strange caring for someone like this, someone you hated. She hoped he wasn't right in that the physical process of caring bled into emotional realms.

She could feel his eyes on her and she gritted her teeth. He waved her away then reached for a comb, pulling it through his hair, pulling

it back off his face. It had a slight yellow hue when it was wet. He looked at himself in the mirror. She wondered what he saw when he looked at himself, surely not the psychopath she saw. He was attractive and he knew it, he always had been. She'd fought hard to deny it when she was at Hogwarts. There had always been something there, something very dark and forbidden. They had always been enemies.

He'd hated Harry, but she knew there had always been jealousy and envy in the triumphs and respect that Harry managed, maybe even some kind of empathy. Ron, he'd just despised, but her, there had always been his constant reminder of his superiority. His hatred for the boys had always remained constant, but with her it had changed and intensified-not overtly, but she had felt the change as he'd grown older. It had made her stay away from him. Where she used to goad him with her wit and quick comebacks, things had changed and she'd stopped engaging with him in any way, just pretend that he wasn't there. Because with her, his hatred took on nuances that the boys didn't get or didn't see. She'd told herself that he wasn't worth it, but she knew that she had seen something there that had scared her. And as it turns out, he turned into a full on nut job.

He moved into his bedroom and toward the wardrobe. She went and collected his clothes from the dresser. He dropped the towel on the floor and waited for her to hand him his black underwear. He put them on while she collected his shirt and robes, which she brought out on a set out on hangers.

"The hunting robes today," he said. He hadn't worn them for a while.

"Are you hunting?" she asked before she could stop herself. He wore those when he was chasing someone down. He didn't answer. "I hope they get away."

"They never get away."

She switched out the robes, pulling out the hunting robes, which she had cleaned herself. It wasn't uncommon that they came back to her

with blood over them. She never bothered to hide her look of disgust when they did.

She whipped the white shirt out and pulled the material up his arms. "Maybe your dreams will come true and someone will kill me today," he said. He watched her as she did up the buttons of his shirt. It was a disturbingly intimate act.

"One can only hope."

His persona seemed to grow darker when he put his hunting robes on. He'd worn them when he'd come for her. There was a slight shift and she instinctively became more quiet. He regarded himself in the mirror for a moment before turning away.

She wanted to call after him to be merciful, but held her tongue as he left the room.

"You have to take this to apartment 10 on the third floor." Mary handed her a tray.

"Apartment 10?" Hermione said with confusion. There was no apartment 10.

"It is in that building over there," Mary said and pointed across the street. This was the first time Hermione'd had to serve another building. She sighed and took the tray. It was freezing outside and the skin on her bare arms and legs stung with the cold wind. She walked gently up the stairs no not to spill the drink; she'd only have to come back if she did.

She knocked gently on the dark door and was told to enter. She opened the door while balancing the tray into a dark room, sumptuously decorated. It was definitely a masculine room, the furniture covered in black lacquer and silver. There was a messy black four poster bed, with crisp white sheets.

She trod inside on thick carpets and froze when she saw Lucius Malfoy. He sat in a chair, smoking and reading, still dressed in his silk morning coat. She felt a moment of panic, a reaction she'd always had to his presence. He waved his finger over to a side table and Hermione placed the tray down, before quickly turning to the door.

"Turn around," he ordered, his voice the cold distinct drawl she remembered. She considered dashing out of the room, but pulled herself together. It was only a matter of time and she might as well face it now. She turned around.

She saw the muscles of his jaw working as he considered her out of the corner of his eyes.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" he said with amusement as he turned his head toward her. "The Granger girl."

"Hermione," she said not knowing why.

"Mudblood, I think they call you." He pronounced each word separately and completely. She didn't respond. "And how long have you been a guest in our fair town?"

"Three weeks."

He considered her again, looking her up and down. She felt like picking on her nail, but stopped herself. She would survive the scrutiny of Lucius Malfoy. He watched her back, refusing to cower. He looked exactly the same, haughty, arrogant.

"Let me guess, Draco tracked you down."

She felt her resolve waver a bit. She wanted to be out of there.

"Interesting." He said and returned to his book before waving her away.

She almost fell down the stairs she was getting out of there so fast her feet could barely keep up.

"That was Lucius Malfoy," she said with disbelief when she got back to the basement. "You could have warned me."

"Oh yes, sorry, didn't think of it," Mary said chopping some carrots. "He rarely leaves his room. Not in the Dark One's good books."

Hermione absorbed the news.

"Probably be dead if it wasn't for his son."

"Really?"

"Some of them," she said pointing outside, "think he's a bit mad. He's actually the best of the lot of them."

"Lucius Malfoy?" Hermione repeated with incredulity.

"No one will go near him because of Draco Malfoy, but I'm not sure why the Dark One hasn't just killed him. Obviously the Dark One isn't scared of Draco, but he still refrains from killing off the elder."

Hermione couldn't get her head around what she was hearing. Lucius Malfoy was the consummate power player, but he was completely alienated. She'd know he was in Voldemort's bad books when she was younger, but she'd expected him to wheedle his way out of that by now.

Draco returned that evening and ate elsewhere. She had to bring more wood for his fire in the evening. She could hear laughter coming from his room even before she was there. There were women in his room. He always had women in the evenings, but particularly after he'd come back from hunting.

She opened the door as silently as she could, carrying the pail filled with chopped wood. She saw him on the sofa with two girls, one on either side of him. They were both wearing sexy lingerie, or what

someone would deem as sexy-slutty was a more apt description. One of the girls has her hand roaming his bare chest, while the other had her hand down his pants.

He noticed her almost immediately and Hermione looked away the moment she saw the scene before her. She moved as fast to the fire as she could, feeling his eyes on her. She hated this. She couldn't think of anything worse and she certainly didn't want him watching or thinking of her while some girl was playing with his bits.

As she snuck out of the room, she could see through her peripheral vision that one of the girls was straddling him, kissing him.

Every level of yuck, she told herself when she closed the door. She was unbelievably grateful to be a mudblood at that moment. She didn't know whether to feel disgusted or sorry for those girls. The sad truth was that they looked like they were enjoying themselves, or else they were just really good actresses. Hermione shivered with disgust. Maybe Malfoy was right and these girls starting believing their own act. It was not going to happen to her.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Hermione ended up being Draco's default...slave, by sheer circumstance and the fact that if anyone else ended up serving on him, he would ask for her directly. The 'new mudblood' he would say. He never used her name and he went to great lengths to inform her that she didn't have one anymore-like that was something he could erase.

Naturally, she couldn't tell him what a complete arse he was, but she could try to not let it get to her. It had been the aim of a lifetime and it was still something she struggled with. Because he really wanted to get to her. He would try every possible insult and she was sure he was judging the reactions. She wished she could just not care, let it roll off her like it was nothing. That was intellectually how she felt-he wasn't worth the brain space to get upset over. It was much harder in practicality, but she tried.

"You're serving the Snake Pit tonight," Mary said. The Snake Pit was like the new version of the common room for younger Slytherins. It was where they hung out together, drank and socialised.

"Come on!" Hermione said with dismay.

"You know Samarah can't do it and they are cruel to Stephen."

"They are cruel to me too."

"No, they are awful to you, they are cruel to Stephen. There is no one else."

Hermione knew it was true. She didn't seriously want Stephen to face their taunts, but she still wanted to have a whinge about doing it. Serving them on mass sucked. They seemed to feed off each other, showing off how awful they can be. There might have been

one possible exception of when Draco was in a mood, then it was definitely better to have other people around. Others wanted to inflict insult and pain, but when Draco was in a mood, he wanted devastation. Not even Slytherins wanted to be near him then, because he wasn't always selective on who he spent his ire on.

Hermione carried a tray of butterbeers into the Snake Pit. Most of them were drinking harder stuff, but there was always the hope that they would chose to get less drunk. It was a vain hope, but there nonetheless.

They sat on a group of sofas in the centre of the cold room. She caught her foot on something, but managed to avoid it. She had grown used to people trying to trip her up and had learnt to anticipate it.

"Watch where you're going you stupid bitch," one of the more handsome younger Slytherins said. She didn't know him, but he would have been in the younger years at Hogwarts in her last year. He pushed her over with a hard shove, sending her and the tray crashing into the ground. Apparently he was adamant on having her fall and if he couldn't make it appear like an accident, he would achieve his aims by more direct means. Roaring laughter canoned through the group. Hermione knew better than to look at them. The worst thing she could do was look hurt by their actions, instead she went about gathering up the pieces of glass from the broken butter beer handles.

"She is uniquely stupid, Lawrence," Pansy's awful twang cut in. "You didn't have to suffer through her presence at Hogwarts. Believe me, it was murder, because she actually thought she was intelligent-would butt in with her thoughts all the time and everything she said was wrong. And she is sooo thick, she didn't realise it."

Hermione bristled at the statement, trying to calm herself into dismissing the insult. It was rich coming from Pansy who didn't even pass most of her exams, and whenever she would struggle with a topic, her mother would come along and say she was too high strung

for whatever it was. It had always amazed Hermione how she always got away with it. Snape-of course.

"And Merlin, she stinks," Lawrence said pinching his nose.
"Someone should hose them off every once in a while."

"They have no pride in themselves," someone else said. "It makes you worry sometimes if they actually taint the food."

Hermione could tell by their manner that the person speaking firmly believed in what they were saying. She knew that Pansy didn't truly, she said what she did out of sheer spite. Draco swung both ways, he firmly believed some of the things he said, but not others, and she suspected that was the source of some of his anger toward her-she broke his rules. He knew she wasn't stupid, but she should be in his eyes.

"Why don't you dance for us mudblood," Goyle said. Hermione froze out of sheer mortification. She tried to ignore the request and continued picking up pieces of glass. "Dance, I said," he shouted more forcefully, then shot a hex that burned her foot. She had to jerk it away and then the other foot to avoid his next hex. He continued and she had to move her feet to avoid them, her face burning with embarrassment.

The group laughed and she could see the amusement in Draco's expression as well. Pansy was laughing to the point where she was almost snorting.

"Enough with the fucking mudblood," Theo Nott said, bored.
"Seriously, is this the height of amusement? What is the point of living here is the only entertainment we have is the fucking mudbloods?"

"Watch your tongue Nott," Draco warned.

"Or what?"

They stared at each other. Hermione realised that Theo Nott was not defending her or her dignity, he was referring to some deeper dissatisfaction in the over state of affairs. It was the first time she had seen any pureblood complain about Voldemort's utopia.

"What's the matter, Nott? Can't get it up lately?"

As interesting as this conversation was, it was the perfect time to sneak away. Hermione picked up the tray of broken glass and turned to go.

"Where are you going, mudblood?" Draco roared. There was silence in the whole group. "I don't recall you being dismissed?"

She turned and stood there holding the tray of broken glass. She knew better than to challenge him in even the smallest way right now, he would crucio her if she did. She desperately wanted to, but being crucioed for this group's entertainment was not something she wanted.

"I told you, too stupid to know what's required of her," Pansy said dismissively. "Perhaps you should knock some sense into her." Pansy directed her suggestion to Draco, but for some reason he didn't take the bait.

"Go stand outside until you're called," he said dismissively. "I don't want to see your ugly face."

Hermione followed the order as the group of Slytherins laughed. Pansy had another potshot at her, but the door close behind her before she heard all of it. She stood next to the door and waited. She knew they would call her in again to do something, and for a bit of amusement. They always had a go at her when she was in the room, and the more drunken they got the more awkward their requests would turn. They had her crawling around meowing like a cat last time.

"I'm sure you can put the tray down," a voice said from down the hall. She knew the distinct drawl and closed her eyes, not knowing how much more she could take tonight.

She heard tapping and slight shuffling. He walked with a cane. She hadn't realised he walked with a limp. She'd heard nothing about him getting injured severely enough to leave permanent damage. But then, she hadn't heard much about Lucius through the intelligence gathering they'd done over the last couple of years.

"Are you going to stand there all night?" He came into view with his arctic eyes on her. He was wearing what she could only describe as a smoking jacket. Not strictly something to be worn in public, but it was late at night.

"Until I am called for," she said, not quite sure what he wanted or how she should deal with him.

"Ah," he said. "Well, put that down and carry these for me." He held up a pair of books he had in his hand.

"I have been told to stay".

"Well, I am giving you new orders," he said. "Direct orders. It would serve those idiots to take care of themselves every now and again." He held the books up for her and she took them tentatively. He was right, she had to take every order given to her and a direct one overruled a less direct one like 'be available'.

She followed Lucius as he slowly walked down the hall. He was particularly slow up the stairs.

"They should install an elevator for you," she said.

"They are a little iffy on doing me favors. Someone here likes that I suffer a bit."

She knew he was referring to Voldemort. She had heard that Lucius was not in his favor. "I'm sorry," she said, not really knowing why—perhaps because she could empathise with someone who was made to suffer deliberately. Then she realised that it might have been a very bad step to indicate that a pureblood should get the sympathy of a mudblood.

He went quiet for a bit and Hermione waited to see what the implications would be. "It intrigues me that you would alleviate my pain when I have caused you nothing but."

"I didn't say I would alleviate your pain," she said. "I was just noting that your kind should. I am obviously not."

He laughed. She had never heard Lucius Malfoy laugh before. It was odd to think she was privy to it or that he should laugh in response to something she said.

They finally got to his door and he pushed it open. "Place them over there," he said pointing at a table. She looked at both books as she placed them on the table. They were both history books, covering a period that happened in the magical world eight hundred years ago.

"Would you like a drink?"

Hermione turned, not knowing what to say. He was standing by his bar, holding a decanter of whiskey in his hand. She subconsciously licked her lips. She couldn't remember the last time she'd had a glass of whiskey. She almost longed for its warming anesthetic effect.

"I can see that you do," he said as he poured a glass for her. "You should perhaps shut the door."

Hermione knew she should say no, but she was curious about why he would offer a glass of whiskey to her. It was not a kindness that would or should be afforded to a mudblood. She closed the door wondering if she was in for trouble.

He had hobbled over to the seat where he seemed to spend most of his time.

"I hate it here," Lucius said after taking a long sip of his drink. "To have to live in this frozen, desolate place."

She knew that Malfoy Manor was to the south of the dividing line what cut of the Northern Wizard World, from the south where the muggles had all been pushed down to. There was a magical barrier that kept them apart and it kept people out as well as in. Hermione and the Order had been dealing with that barrier for years. It was strong and it was impenetrable.

"I take it Voldemort is aware of your feelings," she ventured.

"Oh yes."

"Why doesn't he let you leave?"

"Because he is spiteful." Lucius watched the liquid in his glass. "And keeping me subjugated here served him better than an example of someone leaving his regime."

"You don't support his regime?"

Lucius didn't answer, but the implication was enough. They were dangerous sentiments to voice and he was smart not to. He had already said things that would be deemed mutinous. "Voldemort only serves himself when it comes down to it."

"Draco supports it."

"My son is young and an idiot."

Hermione wanted to say that he wouldn't get any argument from her on the latter point, but she knew better than to voice them. She took a sip of her drink and let the liquid burn down her throat. She felt the effects of it immediately.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

The cold of this place seeped into everything. It was impossible to feel warm-except the purebloods that were nice and warm in their beds.

Hermione went about her morning duties before trudging up to Draco's room like she did every morning. Her life had settled into a kind of rhythm. Every so often she thought about escape and the wall that kept the muggle world out and the slaves in. She had no way through the wall. It was the thing that kept the purebloods cosy with their slaves. If the slaves ran away they couldn't go far. Hermione had lived escaping getting caught for a while, but in the end they were all caught-killed more like.

She was starting to wonder if she was plain better off dead. What was the point of living like this? She hated the idea of giving up, but a gray and bleak future stretched out in front of her.

Draco was awake when she arrived. "Bit slow, mudblood." Some girl was sleeping in the bed next to him. There was no rhyme or reason to the girls he picked. He called them all the same thing, and she was fairly certain he didn't bother asking their names. He sat up and watched her as she went to the fireplace and started a fire with old fashioned kindling and wood. He could easily use his wand, but she suspected it pleased him to see her struggling with the more mundane way of doing things.

"You're actually looking worse, Granger. You weren't much to start with, but you look like shit now."

She kept her mouth shut. He was goading her and she wasn't going to rise to it. If she kept quiet and did what she was supposed to, there was a greater chance she would get out of here sooner.

"I said, you're looking like shit, Granger," he said louder. She had to respond now or he'd crucio her, or even something else.

She stood up and turned. Draco's stormy grey eyes were filled with malice and amusement. God, she hated him.

"All thanks to you," she said. He liked being acknowledged as the one responsible for her misery. He got out of bed, which wasn't good. Stark naked. Hermione looked away.

"Are you blushing, Granger?" he teased.

"No," she said and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Don't salivate, Granger. Nothing you'll ever get."

Shock horror, she said to herself, how will I survive? His body was not something to scoff at thought. There wasn't a spare gram of fat on him, they had worked him hard doing whatever it was he did-torture kittens along with other innocent, misfortunate things.

"I curse myself every morning," she said sarcastically. That had been a little too far and he grabbed her by her hair and pulled her head painfully back-another of his favorite things to do.

The girl in the bed stirred. "Get out," he said menacingly. She shot out of bed like a dart, grabbing what clothes she could find.

"Doesn't it bother you that none of them would be here if given a choice?" she said.

"You wouldn't be here if given a choice."

"Given, but I'm not the one warming your bed."

"Good thing I have all the choices. More choices than I actually need, now that I come to think of it. Better than having none at all." His face was close to hers, then he let go of the painful hold. "Run the shower."

She walked into the bathroom and turned the shower on. She stood and waited while it ran warm, then as he stepped under the water, cleaning off all the after effects of the day and night before.

"How does it feel to have nothing, Granger?"

"Fine."

"Really, to serve as a dog at my beck and call."

"Well, that sucks, but otherwise it's fine." She felt safe saying that because he was in the shower and would likely not reach out for her. He had a mean temper, but it also fleeted very quickly-typically. But then she knew she wasn't truly making him angry either-this was just what he normally was like.

He shot a crucio at her, he didn't even have his wand. Frigging wandless magic. She crumpled down in pain, writhing on the floor with the feeling of glass cutting into every cell in her body. She was completely exhausted when he let up, too weary to get off the floor. She hated how strong he was. He was without a doubt stronger than her magically, and it rubbed every kind of wrong way. "God, I hate you," she spat through gritted teeth.

He was standing over her with a towel wrapped around his hips. "I love it when you call me God." He laughed then stepped over her and left the bathroom. He was dressed and gone by the time she made it out. He could certainly dress himself when he wanted to.

Hermione brought a tray of hot chocolate cups up to Rose Parkinson. The woman and Pansy were sitting waiting for her when she arrived.

"What took you so long?" Pansy demanded tartly.

"I'm sorry, it takes time for the milk to boil."

"You're utterly useless. Pathetic. You always were."

Hermione gritted her teeth as she placed the cups on the table. She wanted to pour the contents of Pansy's head, but she forbid herself from doing it, instead placed it on a spot in front of her. Her hand shook with the awkwardness of it and a little of the chocolate spilled over the edge of the cup.

"You've ruined it, you useless cow. Look at it! You insolence is unbelievable. I want her punished," she demanded to her mother before sending a patronus off somewhere.

"Get out," Rose Parkinson said viciously.

Hermione had no desire to stay, but she knew that patronus spelled trouble.

The fat man was waiting for her when she got back to the basement. Mary and the others were cowering in the corner.

"No tolerance for insolence, you stupid girl. Too stupid to ever learn, but I'll teach you."

"I didn't do anything," Hermione yelled when he grabbed her arm painfully. He dragged her up the stairs toward his office, where he grabbed a whip. Hermione saw it and struggled, but he wouldn't let go of her elbow. If she had been at full strength, she would be able to fight him off, but cold and hunger-not to mention a morning of crucioing-meant she didn't have much strength. He dragged her out the door and to a pole where he magically attached her wrists above her head. The icy air bit into her skin as he tore her dress off her shoulders.

She screamed as the whip bit into her back. It was surprisingly painful, more than she'd thought. It was actually not far off the crucio, sharp pain then burning like her skin was on fire. She could hear the echos of her own screams off the building walls. They kept coming relentlessly and before long, blackness released her.

She skirted consciousness as long as she could, there was pain there, but her mind brutally returned her like lifting sleep. She was accosted by pain, making her cry out. There was someone there, someone tending to her. When she made her mind function, she could feel that someone was closing her wounds. Deft fingers spread a soothing potion on the wound before moving to the next.

She was warm and as her wounds closed, more of the pain settled into dull ache. She was naked, feeling soft bed sheet along her front. She looked up, she knew this room, but it took her a moment to place it.

"Lay still," a familiar voice said. A man's voice. She was in Lucius Malfoy's room. She turned around sharply to see that he was sitting by her, closing her wounds with his wand. Then she was really self conscious about the fact that she was naked. But the relief he was giving to her outweighed the self consciousness she felt. His hands soothed her back. "If you're good and lay still, I might just be able to do this so there are no scars. Not that you aren't covered with scars already."

She did have scars. Years of fighting and all manner of flying hexes had left a complement of scars. Battlefield wound dressing had always been the only healing available. She had never imagined the current scenario as an alternative.

"Why are you helping me?"

"Who else would?"

"Doesn't explain why you would."

"Perhaps I don't like seeing beautiful young women suffering."

It had been a long time since anyone had called her beautiful-it made a change from the 'ugly mudblood' she normally got. Actually, she wasn't sure it had happened before. Not that she trusted it or the

man who'd said it, but it made her curious. She wouldn't challenge his intentions as long as he was healing her back, maybe later.

She felt her anger flow in. "They whipped me for no reason," she said. "They're utterly barbaric."

"They have created a new perspective of the world."

"Why did you not fight against it, if you believe it is wrong?"

"Because I am not a martyr and I am certainly not a member of your Order," he said with distaste.

"So you're a friend to none?"

"This isn't about friendship, Miss Granger, it is about survival-the thing that makes you get up in the morning and make my coffee."

She had nothing to wear, she realised. Her dress was torn beyond repair and she was naked in Lucius Malfoy's bed. And if she moved, she would flash more than she wanted to, which likely he'd already seen. She felt herself go red and turned her face away. He was working on her lower back now, and she knew there was one wound left now, one that had swung low across her right cheek. All she could do was lay there and let him tend to it.

"Thank you," she said when he was finished. He got up and walked across the room. She still wasn't in the mind to move. He moved to his closet and she watched him as he rifled through for something.

"Since I must sacrifice my wardrobe for you, I suppose you might as well be warm." He brought out a black vest and transformed it into a dress. It looked positively medieval, but it was much better than the sack she'd worn before. He brought it back and placed it by her.

He sat down in his chair, watching her. His eyes were mischievous, he wasn't going to give her privacy to dress. "Care for a drink?"

"Yes," she said with a huff. She needed to bolstering. She felt his eyes on her as she stood up and put the dress over her head. It was woolen and large, but with a belt, it would fit better. She would almost look like a friar. She liked it. It was certainly more dignified than the sack she had worn. "Thank you," she said again. She looked back at the mess below her. "I've bleed on your sheets."

"You're not the first," he said. "Although normally, under circumstances that are more ...pleasant."

She glowered at him, trying not to blush at his comment-ideas she didn't want in her head. He held out a tumbler of whiskey for her. She took it and drank it down, the liquid burning down her throat.

"Your body is still suffering from the shock it's had. You need to sleep," he said. She did feel extremely tired. It was the shock of waking in Lucius Malfoy's bed that had her on her feet. "Have you got somewhere to sleep?"

She didn't. The only place she slept was by the stove and she couldn't possibly sleep there during the day. He could see the answer in her eyes.

"Well, you're welcome to sleep in my bed. You've already made a mess of it."

She shouldn't, but the idea of it was too tempting. Her body ached with exhaustion and if she left she would have to go through the entire day. "And what is the price for your generosity?"

"So cynical," he said with a grin. She saw where the son got his from. "How about you clean my sheets?"

"I would have done that anyway."

A/N Just to reiterate for those concerned, this is a DracoXHermione story, but a messy one.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

It was a rare day of sunshine and Hermione spent a few minutes outside, sitting on a log. It was still freezing cold, but as she sat still in a shaded spot, the sun actually warmed her skin a bit. She even pulled up her dark woolen dress up to expose her legs. A bit of sun could only do her good, she'd seen so little of it.

She wished she was somewhere warm, but she would have to get past the wall cutting the North from the South. Maybe she'd never see proper sun again. The world was carrying on outside the wall and she'd had the back luck of being stuck behind it when it went up. She didn't mind at the time, they were going to fight and win-foolishly believing that good always won over evil. But it hadn't turned out that way, they'd lost and now all was gone and she was stuck here.

Lucius had turned out to be a surprise. He was kind and she hadn't expected that. He was alienated by the others, well, that was strictly not true. He was marginalised by Voldemort, but he still had sway with others, except the die hard Voldy suck ups. Draco-she wasn't sure whether he was all there, or he'd just released his all together nastiness. She'd used to think there was hope for him, and that it was his father that was the detrimental influence. She'd felt sorry for him.

"Hermione!" Mary yelled. Hermione closed her eyes and tried to ignore it. She was having such a rare lovely moment, she didn't want to ruin it. "You have to set his fire."

Mary was speaking of Draco, because God forbid he had to actually raise his hand to charm a fire in the fireplace. Most other purebloods could manage that, at least. But she knew with Draco, he was doing it for some power reason-like he didn't feel he had enough already.

She trudged up the stairs and snuck into his room as quietly as she could. The usual sight confronted her. Him, some girl, typical stuff. She cleaned the grate and placed kindling and paper in the fireplace and pulled out the barbecue lighter she'd stumbled across. Finding it had felt like a little victory, the modern world still existed. She ignored the matches she normally used and clicked the flame as she moved it to light the paper. It was a small thing, but it felt subversive. She needed to feel that.

"Where'd you get those?" she heard a sharp voice behind him.

She hid the lighter in her skirt. He couldn't have seen it. Maybe he heard the click.

"Who told you, you could wear that?"

Understanding dawned, he wasn't talking about her light, but her new clothes. He hadn't see it.

"My others got ripped."

"Doesn't mean you can go and grab some others." He was angry. She could hear it in his voice. He jumped out of bed and charged toward her. She couldn't help but feel fear. He didn't have his wand, but she wasn't sure it was a good or a bad thing. He was on her in a second, pushing her painfully against the wall, tearing at her collar.

"I didn't take it, it was given to me."

"Liar," he shouted and tore at the material, making it rip along the seams and along the back.

Hermione noted the girl from the bed slipped out of the room, woken by the confrontation and smart enough to know that it wasn't a good idea to be around Draco when he was like this.

He tore at the material, ripping it down the seam, while Hermione hunched over and held onto the front of the material. She was not

going to show him her chest. That was not for him to see, and ridicule she didn't need, because he would ridicule her, on principle if nothing else.

He stopped. He was standing over her and she was hunched with her side to his completely naked body. She did not want to be this close to him when he was naked, or any other time.

He stilled, but Hermione remained where she was. "Who healed your wounds?" he demanded but in a quiet, steady voice.

She didn't answer.

"Who!" he roared, making her jump.

"Your father."

"Liar!"

He pushed her away, hard into the wall. Her whole back was exposed and it got stung by the cold wall behind her, but her front was still covered, only because her arms were holding the material up.

"Why would my father help you?"

"Maybe because he's a more decent person than you give him credit for," she said. She knew she shouldn't have, because he back-handed her. The whole world spun as the hit reverberated through her head. God she hated him. His father looked like a saint compared to him. Who would have thoughts?

"If you lie to me again, I will whip you myself and I'll make sure the wounds don't heal," he warned. In a quieter but deadly voice he continued, "If I find you're doing magic, I'm going to make you hurt in ways you didn't think possible." He was completely serious; she could see it in his eyes.

"I'm not," she challenged.

He stared at her for a while and she refused to cower. His whole face was drawn and his eyes were arctic. They kept staring at each other and she knew she had to back down, look away, but she didn't want to. But it was him that was into the whole power trip thing and he seemed to have no limits in how far he would go. She looked away.

"Get out," he ordered and Hermione didn't dawdle one second.

"Now what happened to your dress?" Lucius said when she delivered his mid afternoon tea service.

Hermione didn't want to say. Lucius was nice to her and she didn't want to ruin that by engaging his loyalty to his mental son.

She'd tried to repair it, by tying a sting at the top, holding the front and the back together. But Draco had done a good job tearing it.

"Tell me," he said gently but firmly. She didn't want to lie to him; she wasn't a good liar, something she'd learn back in Hogwarts. The truth was always best, no matter how the chips fell.

"Your son."

"Did he now?" Lucius said. "Such a brute." Lucius said this gently, without the indignation that she felt. No matter how nice Lucius was, she couldn't lose sight that he was Draco's father and that when it came down to it, his loyalty would always fall with Draco.

"Come here," he said urging her toward the floor in front of where he was sitting. Hermione complied, feeling a bit nervous in case her understanding of Lucius was wrong. He brought out his wand and funnily Hermione didn't feel any concern as he did.

He mended her dress, which she knew would anger Draco. Maybe she was in the middle of some kind of pissing contest between father and son, she wondered.

In essence, she didn't mind if that was the case. It might end badly for her, but she was already in bad, a change in bad probably wouldn't make that much difference. But on the other hand, it could be very useful to have an ally. It might prove very useful indeed.

She stayed where she was, at his feet. "What do you know of the wall?"

"Are you seeking to escape, Miss Granger?"

"Can you blame me?"

"No, but I'm afraid the wall is unbreakable. Believe me, I have tried and suffered greatly as a consequence. There are some powerful hexes on the wall that befall anyone who tamper with it, strong enough to kill."

Hermione felt disheartened. She knew Lucius was a powerful wizard, much more powerful than her, and if he couldn't break through, there was no chance for her. She knew it ran all along the coastline as well, stretching out along important spots like Azkaban, which Voldemort used as a threat to control the population.

This discussion only made her feel a little more comfortable that Lucius was an ally. Anyone else and she would be in trouble just for broaching the subject.

"I should go," she said. She was neglecting her duties and it would spell trouble for her before long.

"Why don't you take some of the books you've been eyeing so longingly?" he suggested. She had been eyeing the stack of books that sat in almost every corner of the room.

"I can't, I'll get into trouble and you would likely lose some of your collection. And I would likely lose some more of the skin on my back."

"Well then, perhaps, you will have to read to me. In the afternoons, I think. And if anyone argues, you will have to send them my way."

Hermione bit her lip. It would be fun to read again; it had been so very long since—even before she was brought here. They'd lived with the slimmest of means and books were not a part of the essentials. She was also curious about the knowledge that Lucius had. He was a great wizard and he could tell her things that there were likely no other way of knowing. The idea was tempting.

Hermione spent the afternoons in Lucius' room. For some reason the fat man who'd whipped her didn't argue. She suspected that Lucius'd had words with him because he ignored her completely and focused his ire on Mary. Unfortunate for the harried Mary, but Hermione wasn't in the position to challenge him.

She lay on the sofa and read from a book on obscure charms. It was a fascinating book and she learnt many interesting things.

"Did you know Draco could do wandless magic?" she asked one day.

"Yes, I've trained him since he was a young boy."

Hermione reiterated to herself that she couldn't underestimate the bond between them, no matter how much she felt that Lucius supported her.

She continued reading, lying on the day bed, which he sat in his chair and sipped a glass of hungarian fire whiskey, which seemed to be his favourite in the afternoons. It had a peppery

flavour. He'd let her try some of the different flavours. She had very little experience with whiskey and he informed her of what the important things were that made a good whiskey from a bad. She was actually starting to like the taste of it.

Right now she was reading about the use of vegetation growth charms. "The success of the germination process when introducing vegetation on inhospitable environments," she read as Lucius sat back in his chair, "is dependant on a number of factors-

The door burst open and Draco entered. Hermione stopped reading and there was a moment of silence as they all considered each other. Hermione lay on the day bed, with her dress slightly pulled up to take advantage of the sun coming in through the windows. Lucius had seen her naked, so she wasn't that worried about showing a bit of leg. Lucius was still in his dressing gown and Draco's eyes travelled from one to the other.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Nothing," Lucius said in his lazy drawl. "The girl is reading to me."

"You can find someone better to read to you."

"And why would I do that, when I have such a lovely creature at my disposal?"

"She's not lovely, she's a mudblood." Draco almost bit the words. "And you have no right giving her clothes, you'll give her ideas and then you'll give the other ideas."

Lucius shrugged. "She needed clothes. We could of course have her running around naked, but it would do detrimental things to my concentration." Hermione blushed slightly at the words. "She is my reader."

"Get someone else."

"I like her voice."

Hermione watched the exchange, wondering if she should take her leave.

"I like her," Lucius continued. There was definite challenge there.

Draco strode over to Hermione and pulled her up from the bed by her upper arm. He pulled her to the door and pushed her out, shutting the door behind firmly behind her.

She waited for a few seconds and went downstairs. They were going to have words and there was a possibility that she would lose her ally. Then again, perhaps she shouldn't underestimate Lucius.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Hermione lay down on the daybed and picked up the book she'd read the day before. It was a tome about the Goblin wars.

"Not that one," Lucius said. "The beige one."

Hermione looked over at him where he was sitting. He cut the end of a cigar and placed it carefully on the table next to him. He liked to smoke and Hermione didn't mind the thick heavy smoke. She had learned to associate it with her one pleasure in life, her time with Lucius.

She put the book down and picked up the beige one. "James Joyce?" she said. "You do realise this is a muggle author?"

"Have I given you reason to question my intelligence?"

She glared at him for a second. "It's just, I thought muggle literature was a little beneath you."

"I have of late learnt to appreciate the creative efforts of some muggles."

"You're just being subversive," she accused. A look over at Lucius confirmed it; his mischievous grin only confirmed it. She liked his grin, it was like they were co-conspirators. Draco's on the other hand was just malicious. "You're a bad man and you are going to get into trouble." She knew he liked it when she chided him. He appreciated when his subversiveness and innuendoes were noticed.

Lucius was pressing his luck, perhaps to see how far he could go. Draco protected him against the wrath of the hard core Voldemort supporters. While Voldemort was punishing Lucius for not being a sycophant, he hadn't gone so far as to kill him, or to physically injure

him in any meaningful way. The further away Lucius moved, the less Voldemort seemed to know what to do with him. It was a curious thing. Voldemort would punish Lucius severely when he was one of the inner circle, but now that he'd slipped out of it, Voldemort appeared less willing to do so. But that could change any minute, Voldemort could decide that Lucius' belligerence had gone too far and to rid himself permanently of the problem. Hermione wasn't sure because she wasn't privy to any of it, just what she picked up and interpreted.

No one else would get away with the behaviour Lucius engaged in. Hermione suspected it had something to do with Snape and his death. She'd been told that Snape and Lucius had been friends for a very long time. Not that Lucius was being completely confrontational and denouncing Voldemort and his corrupt regime. That would get him a one way ticket to pain and death. Lucius was too smart and too careful for that, but he did push his luck. He wasn't engaging other in his behaviour and he wasn't working against Voldemort in meaningful ways, encouraging revolts and such. In truth, Hermione wasn't entirely sure what Lucius stood for. He dismissed the Order of the Phoenix as ineffective and sometimes downright ludicrous.

Lucius wasn't a teddy bear, he had barbs, sharp barbs that he would sting anyone he saw as unworthy. He suffered no fools and he derided ineffective decisions-of which he saw most of the Order's work.

She had to be sharp to keep up with him and it was her sharpness that he appreciated. Plus he liked her legs. Having her on the day bed with her legs on show when Draco had come in had amused him. His subversiveness extended to Draco as well.

"Now read, girl," he said and leaned back in his chair closing his eyes. Hermione took a moment just to look at him, his patrician features, smooth long hair. He was much more confronting when his cool shrewd eyes were open. She'd had a dream about him last night. One she'd never tell him about. Blushing, she distracted herself by starting reading.

Clenching her fist for a moment, she knocked quietly on Draco's door. He'd rung and like she had to, she'd come running.

It was dark in the room when she entered. She saw him sitting in a chair over by the window. Surely he didn't call her here to turn on the lights. Striding over to a side table, she turned on the lamp, sending diffused light into the room.

He wore his working clothes, hunting clothes. There was mud on the floor and he hadn't bothered changing before sitting down in the chair. She would have to clean the mud off both robes and chair later, but he obviously didn't care about making her life easier.

The heavy leather of his robes groaned as he moved, lifting his drink up to his mouth and taking a sip.

"I'm dirty," he said.

"You're mental, she corrected him silently.

"Run the shower."

Without reaction, she walked into the bathroom and turned the lights on before running the water. She felt herself being jerked before she knew what was happening. He'd come up behind her silently and she hadn't noticed. Her head slammed into the marble wall. That is going to leave a bump, she thought as she winced. But his hand was on her throat and he was demanding her attention. He held her there for a moment, his grip tight on her throat. She felt her pulse up in her ears as he studied her. She stilled, knowing that if she struggled he'd only grip tighter. She felt her brain scream for oxygen, but she refused to allow herself to panic.

"You fucking my father?"

Her eyes widened. It wasn't a question she'd been expecting. He loosened his grip on her throat. He didn't let go, but gave her enough leeway to speak. "No," she croaked.

His eyes narrowed. "You're not spreading your filthy mudblood thighs for him?" He looked down her front like he would be able to see any evidence of it. It was actually more uncomfortable knowing he was thinking of her thighs than the violence he was perpetrating.

"I'm a filthy mudblood, remember? Who would want to touch me?" She used his own words and prejudice against him. She knew he believed it and as a result he might agree with her statement.

"He fixed your dress," Draco said almost absently. He was studying her now, studying her to see if he could see any other evidence of his father's affection.

"Maybe he didn't want to see me running around half naked." His grip tightened, cutting off her air again. She forced her eyes to his, letting him know that she knew she was under his power. It worked, he let go. Psycho fuck, she said in her head.

"Promise me you never will," he said.

"What?"

"Promise me you'll never fuck my father."

"You have no right to ask me that." It wasn't something she wanted to promise to him. He had no right to ask her that. Even if there wasn't an issue of her agreeing to comply with his decree on what she did when she was away from him, she still wasn't sure she wanted to commit to that.

"Promise," he demanded more forcefully.

"No!" His hand was back at her throat, pushing her back into the wall. His eyes were boring into her now and she met the challenge, refusing to be the submissive she'd been a moment before. Turned out she'd take a bit of pressure and pain for her one and only friend. She'd never even thought it would ever be an issue Lucius and her engaging in that way, but for some reason, right now, she was not

prepared to promise to forego such a potential development. More interesting was the idea that Draco thought it a possibility.

He stepped away and crucioed her. She collapsed in pain, screaming. She was exhausted when he let up. "You know I have no control over what he does," she croaked when her voice could manage. "I can't stop him if he chose to do that. I could say no until I was blue in the face and it wouldn't mean a thing."

He stood where he was above her without moving. She looked up at him. Technically it was true, she had no power and wasn't in a position to tell Lucius or anyone else 'no'. Draco was considering her response. He couldn't argue with the logic.

"Undress me," he finally said, looking away from her.

She sighed silently and stood up on her shaky legs. Reaching for the clasp holding his outer robes together. The muddy robes fell heavily to the ground and she moved in front to undo the clasps of his muddy boots and to help him step out of them. She reached for his belt, but then decided that it might not be a good idea to undo his belt while she was on her knees in front of him. Instead, she moved behind him to reach around and undo his pants.

"Don't get any ideas, Mudblood. You're disgusting and filthy. I wouldn't have you touching me if I was clean."

Hermione ignored the jibe, knowing that he was saying it to reinforce the belief he thought she held about herself. But then he'd just accused her of sleeping with Lucius. She wasn't going to argue with his contradiction, she just busied herself undressing him. Her fingers brushed his bare shoulder and he was warm. She froze. She tried to do these things without touching him. He didn't react at all to the touch and Hermione sighed with relief.

He was naturally slim, but he was muscled and fit from fighting and whatever else he did. Naked, he moved into the shower that had steamed up. She grabbed the towel and folded it around her hands,

waiting for him to be done. She missed Dean, his warm body and the way he touched her. She missed touching. A flash of Lucius stole through her head. It was a confronting and disconcerting thought, one she hadn't really considered, it seemed too outlandish.

She looked over at Draco, seeing his outline move behind the steam covered glass. She wasn't entirely sure why he was so concerned about a relationship between her and his father. Perhaps in Draco's mind, it signified his father sinking further. Maybe he had hope that his father's profile and reputation would be restored provided he would stop being so awkward-not a goal that would be helped if he was dipping his wick in one of the untouchable slaves. Obviously something Draco feared was happening, or could happen. Maybe as a result she wasn't as completely untouchable in his mind as he liked to believe. The thought panicked her slightly, something in her really wanted Draco to believe in her complete and utter untouchability.

Chapter 10

A/N For those of you asking for it to not 'go there'. You know it will. This is a twisted tale.

Chapter 10

It was snowing outside. Hermione had lost track of time. There seemed to be no seasons here, just one long winter. Perhaps Voldemort's evil presence scared the sun away. Whatever it was, the sun could not compete. Hermione sat out in the cold and let the cold air clean out her lungs. Living down in the basement, next to a stove, probably wasn't the healthiest place to be, but she had little choice-staying warm took precedence over the quality of the air.

It was still early and there were no lights in the rooms above her-the purebloods cosied up in their warm beds. She could kill for a cup of hot chocolate right now. She could sit here warming her hands with it. But those were dreams from a bygone era.

Soon she had to go deal with Mr. Grumpy. He alternated from being vicious to being withdrawn. He was going out a great deal, doing Voldemort's bidding. She wished there was some way she could find out what he was doing, if there was some resistance somewhere she could join. He was adamant in telling her that there wasn't, but then he would lie just to hurt her.

Her thoughts turned to the other blond man in her life. Her face softened when she did. Her co-conspirator. He made her life tolerable. She would have laughed if someone had told her that this would be her life, being stuck between two Malfoys, hating one and adoring the other. She had no delusions that Lucius was a saint, he wasn't. He was mischievous and self serving. He was intelligent, but not powerful enough to take Voldemort, and shrewd enough to know it. The pureblood ridiculed him, dismissing him. They couldn't see that he was worth more than all of them put together.

She certainly didn't think she would ever end up singing Lucius Malfoy's praises, but here she was. Looking up, she saw that his window was still dark. He would be lying in his bed, warm and peaceful. She never got to see him in his bed. There were some things about him she never got to see. She wanted to know what he looked like when he was sleeping. She wanted to know what he looked like when his clothes were off.

She did miss him, when they were apart. He brought colour into her life and she would miss him greatly if she couldn't see him anymore. She'd developed this ridiculous fear that he would grow tired of her. She knew it was ridiculous-brought on by her situation, but he was the only good thing in her life. The only thing that fed her soul. But she didn't entirely know what she meant to him. He had become such an important part of her life, but they were not in the same position. He liked her, but he had many more options open to him. He could easily turn away and just forget about her-dismiss her and just stop paying attention to her. She felt unease grip her gut-knowing it was irrational. Analytically she knew, but that didn't mean she stopped feeling it. Maybe Draco had been right, maybe she would end up happy to serve, but only Lucius. She served him gladly. Maybe these relationships just became complicated.

It wasn't complicated with Draco, he was just a dick. He was back to reinforcing how disgusting she was and how no one would ever think of her any more than manual labour, here to fetch and carry-all she was good for. Things that had never gotten to her, and less so now that she had the counterpoint in his father.

She had to get Draco out of bed soon. It was like caring for a child, a horrible, evil little child, incapable of doing anything for itself.

Trudging her way up to his room, she let herself in. He was sleeping alone for once, which was different. Perhaps none of the girls came when he called. Although she knew it wasn't true. As completely horrible as he was, the girls, those girls, liked serving him. Yuck.

There was no sympathy or friendship from those girls. They completely bought into the class system here. Perhaps in an attempt to protect the fact that they weren't on the bottom of the pile-being one of the untouchables, like her.

"Move out of the way, mudblood," Draco said as he pushed her aside, moving into the bathroom, where he stood over the toilet, doing his business. It was strange how she was privy to his most intimate things. She went to make his bed and she heard the shower turn on. For once, he managed to do something himself. She heard the water cascade off him as she finished making his bed, and she went to stand beside him, ready to dry him when he got out. She saw his form move through the steam covered glass, his arms come up and wipe water through his hair, then heard the shower turn off.

She started drying him as he stepped out, holding his arms out so she could do her work. She could feel his eyes following her in the mirror as she ran the towels over every part of his body.

"You're just a bit of absurd amusement, you do know that, don't you? A perversity."

She cast him a glance, then continued her task. She knew he was talking about her relationship with Lucius, surprised it was still on his mind.

"He'll grow tired of you."

Draco was highlighting all the fears she already knew. She wasn't going to show any uncertainty and weakness in front of him. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

Standing back when she was finished, Draco turned around, facing her. She kept her eyes lowered, so as to not challenge him. He would react to a challenge. Stepping forward, he grabbed her firmly on the chin between his thumb and forefinger. She didn't like him being this close, crowding her. He pulled her face up so she was in line with his eyes, holding her head back as he was so much taller

than her-his naked body crowding her. Finally she gave him her eyes, which was what he was after. She didn't know what he was looking for. His cool arctic eyes, staring into hers. Was he trying to figure out if she believed him?

Finally he grinned slightly and walked away, leaving her with the ghost from the pressure of his fingers. God, she hated him. Whatever he saw in her eyes must have pleased him. Perhaps he saw her uncertainty.

Hermione sat on the daybed, holding a small plate with chocolate biscuits. Lucius wandered around his room, his black silk dressing gown flowing around him as he moved. She didn't normally approve of silk on a man, but he managed to pull it off. His hair was loose, flowing around his shoulders, like the silk flowed around him. He managed to pull that off too. She conceded there was something sexy about a man who was so comfortable in his own masculinity, he didn't worry about things that could be interpreted as feminine. Perhaps it was the mix of the feminine and masculine. He was looking for something.

"Lucius, do you know where Draco is going when he leaves here?" she asked. He stopped.

"I haven't asked."

"Is there still resistance out there?" she asked tentatively. He came and sat down in his chair, crossing his legs out on the footrest.

"Are you thinking of flying the coup, little bird?" She knew it was a risk asking, but she trusted him more than anyone else. And if she was wrong about him, she wanted to know now. She would actually take the pain of it, maybe even feel it was justified for her being stupid enough to trust him. She wanted to push the issue, place herself at risk and see what he did, see if this friendship meant anything. She wanted proof that it did. "You need to be careful asking such questions, little bird."

She moved to sit next to his feet on the footrest. "That is why I'm asking you." She looked into his eyes, the same clear arctic blue eyes she'd been looking into earlier in the morning. She felt his calves next to her thigh, only the slightest touch.

"I don't know. I haven't asked, little bird. I try not to get involved with those things. If you are looking for a way out, I wouldn't recommend it. It would hurt me to see the things they'd do to you if they found out you were thinking about such things."

She flinched at his comments-feeling her heart lurch as he said it would hurt him if something happened to her. It was the closest thing he'd ever said along the lines of him caring about her.

"You can't get through the wall," he continued. "So you would just be prey for their hunting. You are better off here, with me."

She closed her eyes. His words were both distressing and soothing. She liked him saying they were better off together. She thought of the idea of them running away together, but saw his point that they may as well be here and comfortable, than running around hiding in the cold Scottish countryside. But he had never indicated that he would come with her, she was jumping head-injecting her own hope.

"Now, enough of such things. I need to dress," he said. "I am going for a hunt of the elusive Scottish Beetlehope." It was a rare herb that she knew cause hallucinations. It was used in many ancient rituals, where takers were believed to be seeing the fabric of time, the past, present and future. It had been dismissed as a mere hallucinogen of late, and its rarity means very little of it was seen. It was legend. She wondered if Lucius wanted to experiment with hallucinations, she wouldn't put it past him and his curiosity. "A very useful drug."

Her interest piqued, "Have you ever tried it?" She'd heard mentioned of it in history class, but she didn't know anyone who tried it-not that she approved of drugs for recreational use as such, but it was an important herb, tied in with many historical events and decisions.

He gave her that look like where was her faith in him. "Of course I have."

"What was it like?"

"Unique."

She pushed his legs at the unsatisfactory answer and he smiled.
"You know, curiosity killed many a cat."

"Fine, don't tell me."

Pulling his legs away, he rose and walked over to his wardrobe. She missed his warmth. She never touched anyone and she missed the warmth of another human being. Sitting down in the chair he'd just vacated, soaking up his warmth, she watched as he let the dressing gown drop down from his shoulders as he stood facing away from her. His white hair hang in straight lines down from his crown, brushing his shoulders slightly. His back was a bit broader than Draco's, his skin the same pale colour, without the scars that ran along Draco's body. She watched his back, the muscles that ran down into the low riding black waistband of his silk pajamas. She felt a rush of heat. The first true rush of heat she'd felt in a long time.

The thoughts of how important he was to her returned, along with the uncertainty she felt. She wanted them to be close, needed it. Getting up, she moved behind him. He was aware of her presence, because he stopped moving.

She felt the heat from his body as she stood apart him by mere inches. Her heart was beating frantically as she put her hand on his back. His skin was warm and smooth under her hand. Moving her hand out of the way, she stepped closer. She was propositioning him and there was no doubt about it.

He cleared his throat and she stopped. He didn't step away, Hermione felt uncertainty flood her, maybe she had made a huge mistake, but she wanted this, wanted him. "You have made an

interesting point, Miss Granger. One I would like to debate with you in great detail, but I'm afraid now is not the time."

She withdrew herself and her hand, feeling embarrassment flood her. Her whole body was burning with embarrassment and desire as he turned around. She wanted to reach out and touch his chest, but he had rejected her. Well, not rejected as such, he'd said he wanted to, but not now.

His eyes were not cold, reproachful or distant. He almost looked a bit sorrowful. "Come to me this evening," he finally said. She smiled. She couldn't help it. She felt like she'd won something, something important. She also knew she would be incredibly nervous in a minute, that she'd propositioned him and that she would be sleeping with him that night. She'd never done this with anticipation involved. In the past, it had just been one those things, one minute they were just there, the next they were kissing. That was how it had happened with Dean; it had just happened. But now, she would have to wait all day. She would wait, then she would walk up here, this evening, with the intention that he let her in and they would ... She felt heat rush her again. She didn't want to wait, she wanted it now.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Hermione felt slightly short of breath the next day. Anticipation was killing her and there were points where she was adamant she wouldn't go up to Lucius' room that night. She spent every second thinking about it. She was worried too-worried that this would change things and in some way she would end up losing what she had, her friendship with him. It really was the most precious thing she had, but she also wanted him. It had been so very long since someone had touched her, and it felt even longer than it'd actually been. She didn't want to go through life being untouched, and she certainly wasn't going to accept that was how things should be.

She was a woman and there was a beautiful man interested in her-there was no reason in the world why she shouldn't. When darkness fell, she found herself drawing closer to his door. She was scared, but her entire body was rife with tension and anticipation.

Placing her forehead on his door, she waited some something-courage. She didn't lack courage and she was not going to let this place tell her that she did. She knocked quietly and hear his permission to enter. Her stomach lurched like she was on a rollercoaster as she turned the handle.

Lucius was sitting in his chair, a glass of whiskey at the small table near it.

"So, you are here," he said. She felt nerves attack her again.

"Yes."

"I wasn't entirely sure you would come."

"Neither was I."

Lucius turned his head slightly to the side, considering her. "But here you are."

"Yes." She sounded a little breathy.

She stood next to the door, leaning against the wall. It seemed such an abstract thing and she didn't exactly know what to do.

He picked up his glass and took a swig, before replacing it on the table and held out his hand to her, and she slowly moved to take it. He pulled her down until she was sitting in his lap. She felt slightly unnerved. The only touches they'd had before were slight touches when she was handing him something.

"You are flushed," he said. Hermione closed her eyes, she was burning up in nervousness and anticipation. His hand came up to her cheek, which she was sure was red. He stroked his thumb down her hot cheek and across her lips. She felt the touch deeper than she'd expected. She wanted to kiss him, but he wasn't inviting it. He undid the belt holding her woolen dress in place, the dress he had made for her. It gave, then he tugged the dress up and lifting it over her head as she sat in his lap. She felt the cold air envelop her as the dress came off. She was completely exposed. She wasn't cold, the cold air felt nice to her heated body.

He leaned back in the chair and she felt his eyes travel over every part of her. "Umm," he said, his voice low and leisurely. He indicated no hurry at all. "Beautiful."

His finger returned to her lips, placing slight pressure on them, then running down over her chin, down the front of her neck, down between her breast, all the way down to her navel. She felt it's path like there was both fire and ice on her skin. Goose bumps covered her entire body, and she felt her insides clench painfully with want.

His hands came to her neck and he pulled her to him, giving her the slightest touch of his tongue on her lips. She exhaled the breath she'd been holding. He didn't kiss her, he was teasing her. His lips

ran along the bottom of her jaw, only giving her the slightest of touches. She wanted so much more. This teasing was unbearable. Her body was on fire and he was torturing her with these slight touches.

She went to touch him, but he intercepted her hand, bringing it back to her thigh. There was no doubt that he was in control of this. She hadn't really expected anything else, it was just hard to have to wait and just receive as he saw fit. He kissed her again, just slightly and she strained for more, feeling denied when he wouldn't give it. Seriously, he was going to have to hurry up or she would be coming before he even touched her properly. Heady desire pooled in her stomach and she groaned in frustration.

"There is only one first time for touching someone," he said chidingly and he drew her attention back to his eyes. He had the most beautiful eyes; their cool attention was hard to look at sometimes, but their sheer beauty was never in doubt. They mesmerised her.

He pulled her to him firmly and she sighed as their bodies touched properly. She was beyond propriety, pride or games, she just wanted him. He kissed her now and it undid her completely; his mouth forceful to hers, showing her some of the passion in him, which she realised she'd been wanting for some time now.

She let her hands roam over him, feeling the warmth and firmness underneath, feeling the movement of the muscles. He stood up, carrying her to the day-bed, to lay her back on the dark red velvet of the day-bed and her legs came around him, pulling him to her. She couldn't take any more teasing, she was burning up and she needed him. She felt the weight of him settle on her and she sighed with the sensation of it. He stopped moving and she had to bring her attention back to him until they lay there in complete stillness. Control. He slowly leaned down and kissed her, and she closed her eyes as his lips touched hers. Her body was a painful vessel of pure tension, but this was the price, control. She didn't mind, she trusted him. He moved and she felt him pushing into her slowly. Her body convulsed around him, sending waves of pleasure throughout her.

He'd teased her so thoroughly, she couldn't wait. He waited fully inside her, for her orgasm to pass, before he pulled out and pushed into her again, making her gasp with each delicious stroke.

He had her on a knife's end of tension in mere moments, never losing control, only losing the eye contact when his release stole through him. It was insane the jumble of emotions she felt, pride, fear, love; she wasn't even sure could identify the jumble of feelings. She held him close as they recovered. There was a hard edge to Lucius Malfoy-beneath the kindness, the subversity and the playfulness, there was a hard edge. She wasn't afraid of it; she might even respect him more for it.

Hermione lay on the floor in the kitchen just before dawn thinking of the night before. She didn't regret it and she knew it was more emotionally charged than any other encounter she'd had-perhaps because she was in such a desperate state. She'd never been so completely turned on as she'd been the previous night and she didn't know if that was him or just her state. There was still this slight breathlessness in her and she knew it wouldn't let until he touched her again-and she would just have to wait until he did.

Mary rose and went to feed coal into the stove. "Another beautiful day in paradise," she said like she did every morning. Hermione smiled; there were a few moments last night when it hadn't been far from the truth. "You better go stir the fire of His Horridness," Mary said and Hermione's thoughts turned to a more unpleasant topic. It'd actually been hours since she'd thought about him and it had been a nice reprieve. Not only did she enjoy thoughts not including him and his pervasive nastiness, she liked the idea itself, that she wasn't thinking of him.

Sighing, Hermione dragged herself out of her sparse bed and found the pathetic thing she called a toothbrush-but it did the job. Once she'd borrowed Mary's comb, she trudged up to Draco's room.

He was sleeping on his stomach, revealing his pale, scared back. He was alone again and she wondered why, before chiding herself for why he was spending his nights alone just recently. Maybe he wasn't, maybe he just didn't let them sleep in his bed anymore.

Your father fucked me good and hard last night, she itched to say, but it was a perverse thought and she had no idea what kind of response that would invoke from him. He would probably be enraged and there was something in her that wanted to push him until he completely imploded-likely he'd just kill her, she conceded.

The morning went in the typical fashion-he insulted her, she stood by as he showered and then she dried him, before helping him dress.

He was wearing his working robes, the ones he wore when he was leaving to carry out Voldemort's orders and duties.

"Going out to spread your horridness around the country again?" she asked tartly. He watched her briefly through the mirror before ignoring her.

"Maybe I should take you with me one day," he said quietly. Hermione felt goose bumps of dread travel up her skin. Whatever true horridness he was, and did, she didn't want to know. She'd seen enough of it when he'd come for her. "Hmm, maybe you can help."

"You know I would never help you," she bit. He grinned that evil little grin he did. "Then again, any opportunity to get away from here, I might just take. Any distraction and I'm gone, disappear into the undergrowth." Holding his head back, he watched her through narrowed eyes. "It might be worth it, having to witness how truly vile you are, for a chance to watch for an opportunity to sneak away, to never have to see your face again."

He moved so incredibly quickly, placing his hands at her throat, squeezing until her eyes waters. "Would you preferred that I lied to you?" she croaked.

"Might have you tell me how much you love me," he said nastily.
"Have you crawling behind me, kissing my footsteps."

"That would say more about you than it would about me, wouldn't it?
It means nothing, just a consequence of duress. It doesn't even
bother me."

A flick of his wand and she felt pain sear along the skin of her stomach. "That's all you've got," she stated harshly. She could see the anger in him, the muscles of his jaw stone tight under his pale skin. He reached up and pulled her hair tight, pinning her where she was as he stepped closer, his arm framing her face, pushing her into the wall. Just more threats and pain; it only proved her point. His mouth was so close to her ear, she could hear his ragged breathing. He was angry, really angry, but anything he did only proved her point. And then he was gone. She felt the release of tension and pressure like a physical thing, leaving her feeling light. She'd pushed him that time, maybe too far. It was an incredibly stupid thing to do, but she couldn't help it; it was like a wound she couldn't help herself picking.

She was a jumble of emotion the rest of the day. It seemed to fly by and the chores were actually nice as a distraction. She had the two Malfoy's preying on her mind, both leaving her incredibly confused. She didn't want to think of one, but he snuck in there, demanding attention.

She would see Lucius again that night. He hadn't expressly said so, but he hadn't said no either. She needed to see him. She needed some comfort and some sanity, and he provided that with some minor caveats.

Picking up the heavy bucket of water she was carrying, she walked ahead of Mary as they ascended the stairs from the basement to the courtyard outside that ran between two of the buildings. She paused when she heard Lucius' voice, not completely, just the odd syllable carried by the wind. Her heart skipped a beat and she felt

anticipation at seeing him, but as her she moved up the stairs and he came into sight, she saw him standing with Draco and froze. They were talking about something. It wasn't angry or confrontative, they were just talking.

"Maybe we should go the other way," Hermione said, backing down the stairs.

"What? It's much longer and this is incredibly heavy," Mary stated.

"Let's just go the other way. It is necessary."

"Fine," Mary said with anger and exasperation.

Hermione sent a quick glance back before descending down the stairs again. She wasn't entirely sure why she couldn't just go about her business and walk past them; she just couldn't, something in her strained against it.

The ill at ease feeling stayed with her for the rest of the day, until dark and it was time for her to see Lucius again.

He was fine when she saw him, exactly the way he used to be, talking about some book he wanted to study, but it was written in Ancient Egyptian and he was having trouble finding someone in Voldemort's 'nation' who could translate it for him.

Before she saw it coming, he was kissing her. She welcomed the change, welcomed him. There was no teasing this evening, just straight need. Hermione body responded, heat pooling deep inside her.

She rode him on the day bed, taking him deep inside her, undulating her hips to draw as much sensation out as possible, watching him respond to her ministrations. She loved the feeling of fullness with him inside her and he'd given her control-something she hadn't expected. He laid back and watched her and she felt like a goddess-

until a slight movement drew her attention to the door which was slightly ajar.

She felt panic as she realised that they'd forgotten to close the door completely, it was open a few inches, but worse, which sent sheer waves of adrenalin pumping through her system, was Draco standing on the other side. Her breath hitched to the point where she was robbed completely of breath; fear and adrenalin pumped through her system and then waves of pleasure as Lucius ground his hips into her.

She didn't want to come right in that second, but she couldn't help it; it all took over, making her cry out her unwelcome orgasm, which robbed her of sanity and concern for an indeterminable amount of time.

When she could compose herself enough to look back again, the space between the door and doorframe was empty. She prayed desperately that what she'd seen was a figment of her imagination, but deep down, she knew it wasn't. She tried to get control of her ragged breath, just as she tried to get control of her mind. Fuck. She knew there would be fall-out from this-one way or another, there would be hell to pay.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

A/N I have warned you so many times about this story. This chapter is necessary.

Hermione managed to cajole Mary into doing the Malfoy duties the next morning, but it was a temporary reprieve.

But Mary was back much too soon. "He threw me out," she said. "I don't know what's gotten into him, but he was..." she drifted off with a shiver.

Hermione closed her eyes and cursed.

"He demanded that you go," Mary said. "I'm sorry duck, but he seems to have a preference for you."

Hermione let her head drop in resignation. These might be the last moments of her life. She just had no idea how he would react. She wondered if she should talk to Lucius, have him intervene, but she also knew that Lucius tended to ignore some of Draco's worst behaviour. He probably wouldn't believe her, and even if he did, she would place him in an awkward situation, that could in the end be dangerous to his safety in this community. She couldn't risk Lucius that way. She also couldn't put him in a position where he had to choose between them, because she knew that at when it came to the crunch, blood was more important to Lucius.

"Fine," she said. She trudged up the stairs. It wouldn't be a great loss if she died. Her life here wasn't something that she particularly valued. Whether she lived or died, she was likely in for some pain.

She stopped in front of his door and breathed deeply. This was courage, she thought, facing pain and maybe death with no

recourse, no protection and no hope. It wasn't like she could appeal to his higher nature; he didn't have one.

She hoped she wasn't disfigured at the end of this, she thought as she opened the door, expecting a hex to fly at her as soon as she stuck her head in the door. The room was dark. Her eyes moved to the bed, but it was empty. She searched the room and her heart skipped a beat when she spotted him on the couch. He was sitting with his ankle crossing the top of his knee, leaning back. He had no right to be angry; what she did with others wasn't any of his business.

She moved silently into the room, feeling his eyes on her as she moved to the hearth. She nearly jumped out of her skin when she heard movement, but he had only shifted slightly. He didn't comment on her jumpiness, which boded badly. Normally, he would just ignore any sign of tension, or apprehension in her. She placed the wood into the grate and crumpled some paper to help light it. The noise was deafening in the quiet room.

Her body was tense, expecting a hex, but it didn't come. She hated this waiting, almost wishing he would get on with it. The anticipation was excruciating and she was almost light-headed from breathing so quickly.

Once the fire was going, she got up, her knees aching from kneeling in front of the fire. She walked into the bathroom, sneaking a peek at Draco as she walked past. His face was expressionless, slightly hostile as always, his eyes fixed on a spot ahead of him.

She ran the shower and waited, hearing him move as he slowly walked into the bathroom. He turned to the mirror and started undressing. He wasn't looking at her and she tried her very best not to look at him, but he looked strained, the muscles of his jaw working, making him seem completely tense.

She felt the air move as he walked past her, and she held her breath. He seemed to stop momentarily, but then moved on. Hermione got

the feeling that he didn't know how to react to this, or he hadn't decided how to. Maybe he would just accept it, she thought with an internal laugh. No, he would do something, he just hadn't decided what yet.

Anything he did, he acted against his father. Perhaps that did afford her some protection, but Draco hated her and loved torturing her; he wouldn't just let it go, she was sure.

She heard the water fall in the shower as he stepped in and ran his hands over his head. Somehow she'd gotten through the first bit of the morning; there was just the second bit, when he came out and usually insulted her, sometimes hexed her, depending on his mood. All she should focus on right now was to get through this first day. She sighed heavily, trying to clear some of the tension out of her shoulders, which were getting sore.

Draco washed himself and stayed under the warm stream of water. Hermione kept her eyes low, seeing the water flow off his feet and onto the shower floor. Then things went extra silent; she couldn't explain it, but somehow, things froze. And then Draco turned to her, she could see a malicious gleam in his eye. He had obviously decided her punishment. Hermione felt her heart stop as she stared into his eyes. His smirk spread across his features.

"Since you've strived so hard to work up to whore status, you should be commended on your achievement," he said. She had no idea what he meant, but he was working up to something. "If you want to be a whore so badly, we'll treat you like one. Better than you deserve, but if you insist. I suppose you can't say there is absolutely no social mobility here," he said with wry amusement. "So, I guess congratulations are in order."

She didn't quite know what he was saying, but it wasn't good, whatever it was.

"So, come here then," he said.

"What?" she said, feeling panic flood through her.

"If you want to be a whore, you have to act like one."

"I don't," she said.

"Oh, you do. You've made that abundantly clear."

"No."

"Come here," he said firmly. It was an order.

She stared at him for a while, but he only raised an eyebrow. "What, in there?" she said.

"Yes in here. Do as you're told."

She thought through her options for a moment, but she didn't really have any. She couldn't defy him; there would be a world of trouble if she did, and it would just attract attention to the whole thing.

Reluctantly she stepped into the shower, feeling the warm water soak through her clothes. She stopped, but he waited for her to move closer still. Gone was the emotionless look and the uncertainty, he knew exactly what he was doing now and he was enjoying this.

"Touch me," he said.

"What? No."

"That is what a whore does, mudblood."

"No," she said in a whisper.

"Come now. This is what you've worked so hard for." He was watching her reactions, ensuring he got maximum discomfort for his efforts. "Or we can call in all the other and welcome you to your new status."

Her eyes widened at the threat. She knew he had no qualms about torturing her and he probably would carry through his threat.

"Now touch me. I would have you suck me off, but I really don't trust you."

"Malfoy, please," she pleaded.

"If you keep that up, this will go all too fast," he said, stepping toward her, making her step back into the corner of the shower. "I'm waiting."

Again Hermione frantically searched through the options, but she really didn't have a lot of choice, and none that played out well. This was the path of least resistance and least trouble. She couldn't exactly foresee the consequences of defying him, but it would likely be much worse than the humiliation she faced right now.

Closing her eyes, she reached her hand out until she hit his thigh, traveling up until she reached what he wanted her to. He was already hard and reached her fingers around him. He was large enough that his size was not the root of his prickly personality. His breath caught as her hand came around him, running her fingers and palm over the smooth, silky skin.

He stepped closer to her, shortening the distance between them, which also gave her better access. She was seeing the most intimate part of him, things only a lover should see. "Is there no part of you that you want to keep private?" she asked.

"From you? You don't matter," he said, his voice breathy, his hard eyes softened slightly with the sensations she was stirring in him.

His erection was rock hard in her hand, as she stroked back and forth. She couldn't believe she was here, touching him in this way. And this was an act of war. She wanted to throw up, but her squeamishness would not end this quickly. If she wanted this over and done with, she knew what she had to do. Closing her eyes, she

moved her fingers faster. His breathing responded and she could feel tension building in his body. He moved even closer to her as she stood in her corner, his elbows coming up around her, to support him. She was pretty much surrounded by him.

He wasn't watching her now; he was lost in the sensation, groaning as she continued, building up to a relentless pace. His forehead came down to hers and she turned her head to the side, feeling his lips at her temple. He wasn't kissing her, but his lips were there, his heavy breathing on her skin, just by her ear.

He pressed his body to her as his jerked slightly. Hermione could feel that he was losing control of his balance slightly as he tensed, pressing hard into her. His breathing stopped completely for a moment, then returned with deep groans as he came somewhere down on her dress. She could feel his cock twitching with it and she let go.

He was still pressed heavily to her, his breathing riotous in her ear. He was calming and he finally stepped away from her. She refused to look at him. feeling the absence of him with a great sense of relief. Looking down, she tried to see the evidence of his spill, but it had washed away in the water. She felt like crying, but she forced herself not to.

He was out of the shower and was drying himself.

"Amateurish, really," he said as he raked his fingers through his hair in the mirror. He turned and left the bathroom, leaving her still standing in the shower. Hermione lowered her head to the wall of the shower, trying to get a hold of her disgust.

She quickly left his apartment, dripping wet, a trail of water following her all the way to the basement, where she had to take the dress off and leave it by the stove to dry. Hermione sat down on a stool and tucked her knees to her chest, closing her eyes to the images and sensations burned into her brain.

"Did he try to drown you?" Mary said. "The bastard."

Hermione couldn't mention what had just happened; she wasn't sure she could mention it to anyone. His revenge had been complete, and highly effective.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Hermione sat in Lucius' room. He was reading something, but she couldn't recall what it was. She was having trouble following along.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, looking up from the book.

She stared at him for a moment and stopped her leg bouncing up and down from nervous tension. She wanted to tell him what'd happened, but wasn't sure if it was a good idea. If it had been anyone other than Draco she could, but with Draco, his loyalties were divided, and she wasn't sure he would come down on her side. "No," she said and tried to smile, but it came out like a grimace.

She leaned back and tried to not look so nervous. Looking out the window, she could see nothing but grey clouds moving slowly across the sky. She didn't know what this all meant. It was probably the part that disturbed her the most. Realising what she was doing, she pulled her nails away from her teeth, rolling her eyes at how cliche she was, biting her nails-pathetic.

Lucius continued reading, his voice almost droning and soothing. She looked back over at him. He was so beautiful. But she felt tainted. Draco had tainted her with his nastiness.

Looking back at the sky, she wondered if she had to do that to him again, maybe every day. She was still flabbergasted that he would pull her into be part of something so private, but then he normally had a different girl with him every night, so he obviously spread it around. Perhaps he didn't feel like it was something intimate that you shared with someone you cared for. She'd never slept with anyone she didn't care for, or been involved in any sexual act. She clenched her fist. She couldn't believe that she had touched his..., it was just unbelievable.

Yet again, she stopped herself from chewing her nails, chiding herself for being so ridiculous. She mustn't let this get to her, that was what he wanted. He wanted this to prey on her mind—that was why he'd done it. She tried to wipe the thoughts away.

"Now you must tell Mary to make some more of those French Cardamom biscuits. Tell her they sooth a weary man's soul—if he had one, that were."

Hermione nodded. She knew Mary would like hearing that. Mary did pride herself on her cooking.

"More than you deserve, she is," Hermione said.

"One of our few comforts."

She smiled. She wanted to touch him, but she just couldn't at the moment—someone else were too ingrained in her thoughts and she needed to get him out first. Luckily, Lucius wasn't making any indications in that direction today. He seemed to have picked up on her tension, and maybe he was just giving her some needed space. Turning to her side, she watched him. He seemed to know exactly what she needed and she appreciated that.

Hermione didn't sleep well that night. The following morning was occupying her thoughts. She got up a little earlier than usual and just sat in the dark. It was a better day than yesterday, where she worried that it was her last day. Worried wasn't the word—resigning herself.

Time passed and the others got up, the sun rose and it drew closer to the time to tend to Draco. She trudged up the stairs as slowly as she could, took a deep breath before entering, hoping there was some girl in the bed with him. She figured if there was some girl there, taking care of his needs the previous night, there would be a smaller likelihood that he would use her as part of his wanking routine.

Cursing silently, she noticed that there wasn't. He lay on his stomach, with only his shoulders and head showing. She wished she could curse him-maybe turn him into a mouse or something, but she knew Lucius would suffer if something like that happened. There was irony in that-that the one she wanted to please was so protective of the one she really didn't, the one she wanted to hurt.

She lit the fire and drew the curtain. Draco seemed to stir at the introduction of light. "Rise and shine. I'm sure you have someone to torture today."

"Are you volunteering?"

Hermione sighed and shook her head. She refused to cower, she'd decided. She certainly wasn't going to show that she was bothered by his demand that she touch him in inappropriate ways.

"I can always get some practice in."

"But why? I thought you were the expert. Isn't that what you do? I'm not entirely sure anyone is more skilled than you-at torturing people, destroying lives and families."

He turned over and watched her from the bed.

"Perhaps I should work on the more unusual forms," he said. His blanket was riding down his stomach. She refused to look at him. "What's the matter, mudblood? Cat got your tongue?"

She didn't quite know where to go from here. He actually had two forms of torture he could use against her now. It was hard to keep her dignity when her defiance only egged him on.

"Haven't you got somewhere to be?" she finally said. "I'm sure you're not kept here just amuse yourself with the mudbloods."

His eyes clouded over. An interesting reaction, she thought, until she doubled over with pain. Damned his wandless magic. She writhed on

the floor.

"You're just a bonus," he said, getting out of bed.

His hex let and she dragged herself off the floor, straightening herself with as much dignity as she could and went into the bathroom turning the water on. She stood waiting as he walked past her completely nude.

"I'd have you wank me off, but you just weren't worth the effort." He stepped into the shower and started washing. Hermione sighed her relief when he had his back turned. Perhaps it had just been a one off. She couldn't help smiling-as long as his back was turned.

Mary handed her a tray of snacks to take up to the common room. It wasn't really, but it was what they had all started calling it, the Slytherin common room. It was where they hung out, where they drank and talked and were their nasty old selves.

She hated going in there, and it was debatable if she hated Draco more when he was alone and could do what he wanted, or when he was with them. He was angry and annoyed, she could tell from her first look at him. Her entrance drew Pansy's attention too. Why did Pansy always have to notice her? It was like she was a magnet for Pansy. Although, sometimes she wondered if she was watching Draco watching her. Really Pansy, she wanted to say, you don't have to feel jealous of being the one Draco was torturing for fun, it really wasn't that great an honor.

"Look who it is, the nosy little mudblood," Pansy said with derision. "I am sure she listens to everything we say."

Pansy was trying to get rid of her and Hermione could only support the effort.

"Her?" Marcus Flint asked. "And who is she going to tell?

"She's just creepy, Marcus," Pansy said with annoyance that she was being challenged. She stood up abruptly and marched out of the room. Hermione was secretly pleased at Pansy's lack of response, until she turned around and noticed that she was now confronted with a room full of Slytherin males, remembering Draco's threat. Suddenly, she wished Pansy would come back.

Tentatively, she put the bowls of snacks down on the table in front of them. Most of them were ignoring her, but Draco watched everything she did. He reached for something, which slipped out of his hands and down to the floor in front of him. Looking at him, she saw malice in his eyes. He'd promised, she wanted to say to him. If she did what he asked, he wouldn't involve the others. But then, what were his promises good for?

"Clean it up, mudblood," one of them said, pushing roughly on her arm. Her eyes returned to Draco and she saw challenge. She felt her heart race. She wanted to run from the room, but she knew she couldn't. Her pride wouldn't let her, and she would only make it worse for herself, but she wondered how much she could take. At some point, her pride wouldn't be enough.

Drawing a shuddering breath, she stepped closer, around the table to where Draco was; where he'd spilt his bowl-probably on purpose. It was an awkward space between the couch and the table. He parted his legs, giving her room to kneel down.

It was definitely an awkward position and she rushed to clean up the mess. She could feel his eyes on her and she was squeezed into the place between the table and the couch between his legs. His eyes drew hers and he was amused. He'd gotten her in a suggestive position and he was enjoying himself.

He could make this very bad. He could enact his threat and turn this into some kind of disgusting orgy. She let her eyes drift to him, begging him not to. She was below these people's regard and she would stay that way unless he made her not so. He could at this moment and they both knew it. He could place her at the mercy of all

of these people-a whore being passed around to whoever wanted her.

He leaned close to her. "You are aware that I have complete power over you." She felt his breath on her ear and she shuddered, feeling a new level of anger and disgust wash over her. Before she could help herself, she reached out and pinched his calf-then realised what she'd done. He'd driven her to distraction and she had bit back. In a small way, but it was defiance and it was the worst possible time. How could she have been so stupid?

His eyebrows shot up and she looked up at him, horrified. "Please don't," she beseeched him.

His face grew hard. "I want you to beg me." They were still quiet enough that the other's hadn't really noticed.

She swallowed the lump in her throat, along with her pride. "I am begging you," she said, looking straight at him, beseeching him not to.

He leaned back, considering her. She started getting up, slowly moving away without breaking eye contact. She was going to pay for her show of defiance, but she got the feeling it was something he wanted to keep private. She gathered the tray and ran from the room, her breathing barely able to keep up with her legs.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Yet another night during which Hermione didn't sleep well. Draco preyed on her mind insidiously. She tried to dismiss it, because she knew that was what he wanted, but she couldn't. He was in there, his voice in the back of her mind threatening her, taunting her. This was about power and he had it. She had nothing to fight back with-he could literally do whatever he wanted. And then her thoughts turned to Lucius and the dark, heaviness turned light. Lucius was the antidote. She had to focus more intently on him. He was fun and he was her friend-her lover. She had to keep that intact and protect it, particularly against the dark, because she knew that Draco was the weakness. Draco could abstractly burrow between them if she pulled him in as a topic between them. She couldn't let him; she had to keep the two separate.

As much as she hated it, morning came. First the faint light, then stronger, then direct sunlight-weak, but the sun was up, and so she needed to be as well.

Trudging up the stairs again, she almost dragging her feet. She hated that she couldn't just dismiss him. She felt weak, but she knew she wasn't. She existed in the more dire circumstances and she was at war with someone who had all the advantages and all the power.

Quietly, she opened the door to his room and stepped inside, checking for his whereabouts. He was alone again. Why wasn't he taking the halfbloods to bed anymore? She was clearly not to his taste-he'd said as much, and to her eternal relief, really.

She quietly let out a shuddering sigh. He was sleeping, again on his stomach. Tending to the fire, her thoughts ran to the previous evening. He could have made her life hell last night and he hadn't. The threat had been there, they'd both known it, but he hadn't taken

that step. She was damned if she'd thank him. Stacking the wood, she recalled what he'd said in the beginning, that she would be glad to be serving given enough time. She had to guard herself against that. She couldn't go thanking him for not making her situation worse. But then she didn't know how far she would go with that. At some point she would break and he seemed to be pushing her in that direction, testing her boundaries. But duress was duress and they both knew it. She knew there was no pride for him in forcing her hand through duress. Some might, but he was playing a insidious game, one she didn't quite understand.

Staying where she was, she heard him move. She dismissed the rising tension in her shoulders. She was here to do a job and that was all; she needed to stop reading more into it. Getting up, she moved to the curtains and drew them apart. She could feel his attention on her. "Are you leaving camp today?" she said with a tinge of fake cheeriness.

"This isn't a camp, mudblood. This is your new home." Her thought immediately travelled to Lucius.

"What robes would you like me to lay out for you?" There was safety in role professionalism, it kept them away from places they shouldn't go.

"Do you like it when I go out, Granger?" It was the first time he'd used her name. She wasn't sure he realised he'd done it. He'd gone out of his way to rob her of her identity. "There's always a chance I won't come back. Would that make your day?"

She wanted to say yes, was itching to. "It makes no difference to me either way," she said, shaking the curtains slightly to see if they needed dusting. "You're just another room to clean."

She felt something hit her back, a hex-expecting pain, but none came. Then she noted that she couldn't move. Her hands wouldn't let go of the curtains, her arms wouldn't move. Only her eyes moved and she was facing away from him. His fucking wandless magic. He

liked showing it off to her, just to reiterate that he was stronger than her. Of all the true injustices, that was the worse-he was fundamentally stronger than her magically. He moved and she felt panic rise in her. Control, he was exercising it again-like she hadn't gotten the point already.

She heard him move, then felt his presence behind her-maybe it was the heat of his body. She could feel his anger. It was always there, but more so when he directed it to her. Reaching up, he forced the curtain material out of her pinched fingers and then awkwardly turned her around, pushing on her hips until she shifted like a statue. She was facing her now, his eyes boring into hers.

"Maybe I should leave you here, put a charm on the door so no one can enter. Then you will die if I die. Starve to death."

She just stared at him. The 'I'll kill you' threats had never worked on her. His finger moved to her forehead and ran down to the tip of her nose. She wanted to bite him, but she couldn't move. He could run his fingers all over her if he wanted to, which was the point of this little exercise.

"I saw you cry when Potter died."

She only stared at him, his eyes watching her intently. She hadn't been aware that he'd been there; seen her. It had been the worst day of her life. She'd known then that there was no hope. She'd kept fighting, probably with more viciousness, because it didn't matter now, nothing did anymore-it was just a matter of time and how many of them she killed before she succumbed.

She glared at Draco. He wasn't privy to her thoughts or her sorrow, and she sure wasn't going to give him access now. She refuse to look at him, hearing a little sarcastic pitiful 'agh' from him. He was wearing his pants. He wasn't naked like he normally was, which meant he hadn't quite undressed properly. Perhaps he finished the night a little drunk, or a lot. She didn't normally see how he finished his nights.

He grinned. "Maybe if I die, I'll order you to be buried with me." She would have given him a pointed look if she could have moved his facial muscles. Maybe even he realised how creepy that was, because he chuckled and left for the bathroom. "Just to spite you, mudblood. You can spend an eternity with me," he called from the bathroom.

The hex didn't let for hours, long after he'd gone. Her whole body screamed in ache when it finally let and she collapsed to the floor. If nothing else, it proved that Mr. Useless could at least dry and dress himself if he chose to. Arsehole.

The fat man back-handed her for not completing her chores. Apparently being frozen for the amusement of the purebloods was not a reason for not completing one's chores. She had to rush to get through some of the things that needed doing, or apparently they were all going to get a whipping that night.

The work actually was a bit of consolation. She could lose herself in the mindless droning tasks and sometimes even pretend she was somewhere else.

He carried the water bucket out into the street where the well was, and threw it into the water to pull up. Voices distracted her and she saw men, purebloods further down the street. Her eyes instantly drew to Lucius' light hair. He was talking to some men, looking relaxed in his full robes on, the blackness of them distracting with his pale hair.

She smiled slightly to herself than studied him some more. She watched his figure. He looked formidable in his robes. Her thought wandered back to when they'd been together, his hands running down her back as she rode him. She sighed and smiled again, then watched as he moved away with the group of men he was conferring with.

She continued pulling the pail up, grabbing off the hook, and her attention was distracted to the other direction, where she met Draco's eyes. He'd been watching her. She felt adrenalin rush through her system at the sight, and panic. He didn't look mischievous or amused as he was when he toyed with her, he looked much darker, murderous. He wore the same black as the others, but these were his working robes, the ones he was wearing when he'd first come for her.

Quickly grabbing the pail, she turned back to the house, rushing as fast as she could with the heavy pail and disappearing out of sight as fast as she could. He'd been watching her and he wasn't amused. Probably she'd broken one of his rules for her total misery. Any moment of lightness and he was there, squashing it out.

She hurried faster as she heard footsteps behind her, feeling panic rise to new intensity. He was moving fast. She knew it was him; she could feel him coming. He was going to do something to her-punish her in some way. He had no right; she didn't owe him her misery.

She felt his hand forcefully at the back of her neck, steering her into the wall, making her drop the pail and the water spilt all over floor.

"Leave me alone," she said, but knew it as the wrong thing to say the moment it came out. His eyes were hard as marble, his hand at her throat. He moved even closer, pressing her into the wall and she felt the pressure on her windpipe. She grabbed onto his wrist, but he was too strong.

He stopped at a noise down the hall, froze with his hand at her throat, but no one came around the corner. Then he decided it had passed and his attention came back to her. She glared up at his eyes. She couldn't make herself beseech him to stop, whatever it was he was doing. There was something in his eyes that just didn't look right.

He stepped even closer, pressing her back with his body now. She tried to struggle, tried to get her hand in to push him away, but it was

no use. He just grabbed her wrist and pulled it painfully back behind her. He wasn't using magic on her, they were physically wrestling, until he had her higher up on the wall. It wasn't until he tore her underwear that she understood what his intentions were. He pushed himself forcefully inside her and she froze with shock as the pain of it broke through her. He thrust hard into her again, as she was pressed into the wall, suspended above the ground by his hands and his body. She knew he was watching her and she refused to look in his eyes. She was completely disbelieving this was happening. The pain subsided a bit as her body adjusted to the intrusion, but he thrust hard into her again. She could feel him inside her now; she hadn't at first, through the pain and shock. His breath was ragged and he pushed into her again, his breath exhaling with a hiss through his gritted teeth. She forced herself to close her eyes, to try and block it all out, not quite believing this was happening.

She'd thought she was safe from this, but it was happening. And with him of all people. He was coming and she could feel him straining-straining for breath and consciousness. She kept her eyes on his throat and his pulse point at the side of his pale neck. She tried to calm herself.

He was taking a considerable risk doing this in public. She was one of the untouchables and it wouldn't look good him fucking one in the halls. It would be much more accepted as part of a cruel trick as he had threatened last night, but on his own, being caught dipping his wick in one of the untouchables, it was a risk.

Her body ached with misuse when he withdrew from her. His breath was the only thing she heard, still refusing to look at him. She hoped he wouldn't say anything; she didn't want to hear anything he said right then. He'd broken a fundamental barrier between them and she felt raw with the realisation-but that had been his intent, or something along those lines. She put up barriers and he tore them down.

He moved quickly and almost silently as he left, leaving her alone in the dark, cold hallway. She was fighting the tears that were threatening and swallowed wildly to work through the lump in her

throat. Damn him. She hadn't been entirely sure she could hate him more than she had, but apparently she could.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Hermione slept surprisingly well. She'd closed her eyes and woke what seemed a moment later, feeling relatively rested. Perhaps she slept well because the dreaded thing had already happened and there was nothing else to fear. There was, obviously, but perhaps her subconscious hadn't caught up to the fact.

She tried not to think about it, but it sat there demanding to be acknowledged. And she was going to have to go up and face him in a moment. She could conceivably beg for Mary to do it, but what was the point. He'd won. She wasn't sure why she was surprised; if she took a step back mentally, it was amazing it had taken this long for it to happen.

She wasn't even dreading having to go wake him today; she wasn't dragging her feet up the stairs. Resignation was what she felt. She wondered if she'd given up; she probably should, there wasn't really anything worth fighting for.

Entering his room, she walked over to the fireplace. Draco was in his usual pose on the bed. Placing kindling and paper, she started the fire, then went and ripped open the curtains.

"Get up," she said. He blinked with the shock of light and then covered his eyes.

"Draw them back."

"It's morning, time to get up."

"Do it or I'll crucio you."

She thought about whether she cared at the moment, but then huffed and drew them back.

"Get out," he stated, his voice rough with sleep. He turned his face away from her.

"Fine," she said and headed straight for the door. Actually that couldn't have gone better, she decided. She quickly made her way down the stairs, back to the basement.

"Everything ok?" Mary asked.

"Fine. Everything's fine," she responded and went outside into the bitterly cold air, letting it bite into her skin and lungs. She walked until she found a firewood box and clambered on top of it, pulling her knees in under her chin. She didn't want to think at all; she was too tired to think. Today, she actually wanted some hard work. She smiled bitterly at the thoughts; she wanted someone to work her hard, not leaving her a moment to think, recalling Draco's words how she would be happy to serve. He'd meant them in another context, but the jist of it still applied.

"Lucius Malfoy wants a cup of hot chocolate," Mary said later in the afternoon as Hermione was chopping carrots. "You should go; he seems to like you."

Hermione hadn't thought of Lucius all day and the thought of him now washed over her with a light and bubbly feeling. Wiping her hands on a towel, she nodded.

She carried the cup carefully up the stairs, feeling anticipation at seeing him again, and nervous because she may not be able to be the person she should be around him, that Draco's action had tainted her and ultimately the relationship between her and Lucius.

"Come in," he said when she knocked. "There you are."

"Here is your hot chocolate," she said with a smile. He was standing behind his table, with materials spread out. He was making a potion.

"It's for you, my dear."

"Oh," she said smiling wider. She appreciated the sweet gesture-how could it be that they were related? Sitting down on the day bed, she took a sip of the chocolate, letting the warmth and taste suffuse her mind, which was still feeling a bit numb.

He continued with the potion-some recipe she didn't know. She watched him as he moved, feeling herself relax.

"How has your week been?" he asked. She couldn't help the frown that spread across her face. "That bad."

"It wasn't the best week."

"Anything I can help with?"

She shook her head. She felt like crying, but refused to let herself. A tear escaped and she wiped it angrily with her sleeve. "I hate this place."

"Only the lunatics like it here."

She thought of Draco. She wished she could speak to Lucius about it, but she couldn't. "You're the only one here that makes this place tolerable." He smiled as he continued what he was doing, squashing some root with the side of a knife.

"We must do what we can."

She looked around his rooms, his Death Eater robes were hanging on the outside of his dresser. "Are you going out?"

"Yes, later. I have to." She nodded. She didn't like seeing him dressed as one of them, but he was on some level, even if unwilling most of the time.

The chocolate was having a soothing effect. She wasn't used to sweet things anymore. What they ate rarely included dessert and the

only time they normally had access was if they were clearing up someone else's dinner, but Hermione wasn't motivated enough to eat one of their leftovers.

"Did I tell you about the time I went to Syria?" Lucius said.

Hermione shook her head.

"Draco must have been around eight and we spent a Christmas there." Hermione frowned at the mention of Draco, and particularly as a child. "It was still very warm, but not uncomfortably so. We spend a day at the bazaar, which is one of the most incredibly things in the wizard world."

Hermione lay down and listened to his voice, not really taking in what he was saying; it was just soothing hearing him talk. Her eyes grew heavy and his stories slowly started morphing from images in her mind to dreams.

She woke by a gentle stroke of her cheek, leaving her disorientated for a moment. Lucius was sitting by her, stroking her face and hair. "Time to wake." Her hand moved to feel his thigh.

"I'm sorry, I fell asleep. You should have woken me. What time is it?"

"I am waking you now. You looked like you needed a bit of rest." She stilled and let his thumb stroke down her temple.

"Thank you," she said.

"You're stronger than you know."

"Not always."

"Don't underestimate yourself. Now drink this."

"What is it?"

"A potion, vitamins and such. It will give you strength. Living here doesn't give the body everything it needs. This will make you feel better." She took the little vial he held and drank it. She didn't care what it was; she trusted him, and if that turned out to be wrong, she would be happy to suffer-hopefully die. "There's not enough sun here."

"The winter never ends."

"No."

"Thank you," she said, letting her fingers stroke the top of his knuckles. She reached up and kissed him, letting the pleasure of it suffuse her mind. He kissed her back, letting the kiss develop as her hand roamed the thick leather of his robes. Heat flared in her and she wanted more, but he pulled away from the kiss.

"I must go now, and so must you." Biting her lip, she felt a deep sense of disappointment. "Now, come," he said. "I've kept you long enough."

Rising, she followed him out the door and watched as he walked toward the staircase. He turned to her as he started descending and smiled. She wanted him desperately, but for some reason he was being called into duty. She thought they had essentially retired him, but apparently not. She hoped they wouldn't make him do anything too awful; she would hate seeing him struggle with it after.

There was a rush to get dinner ready and sorted, luckily there was a range in preference around dining times. Hermione lost herself in the work and worried about Lucius every spare moment. The dinner rush settled and she sat for a moment, not really knowing how long.

"He's calling for you?"

"Who?"

"Malfoy," Mary said. Hermione felt hope and expectation flare in her.

"Lucius?"

"No, Draco." Her hope and mood plummeted, leaving nothing but bleak darkness behind. Why can't he just die, she asked herself. Everytime she managed to feel half way decent, he came along and ruined everything.

"Fine. Can I take a knife and stab him?" It was a joke and they both laughed. Actually, there really wasn't a reason she couldn't. She'd die a slow and painful death herself, probably not even achieving hurting him, but the idea was tempting. Although she never could; Lucius meant too much to her and Draco's death would hurt him.

Cursing Draco's name, she walked up the stairs.

"Hello, mudblood," he said when she stepped inside his room. He was sitting on the couch with a bottle in front of him, shirtless in only a pair of grey pants. His dinner, which Mary had served, sat untouched on the side table next to the door.

"Are you drunk?"

"What's it to you?"

"Nothing," she said noncommittally. "What would you like assistance with?"

He stared at her, his eyes slightly glassy with alcohol. He didn't say anything. The curtains were still as she'd left them this morning. She wondered if he'd even gone out today. Maybe old Voldy was giving him a day off, and he'd spent it getting drunk.

"Stand on one foot," he said.

"What?"

"You heard me."

She narrowed her eyes and grudgingly lifted her foot up, bringing a grin to his face. "Oh yes, well done," she said tartly. "What do you want, Malfoy?"

"I thought you were supposed to call me Master."

"What do you want, Master?" she said tartly.

"Nothing from you, mudblood," he said strongly.

"Excellent. Have a good evening." She turned and marched to the door, hearing a charm hit the door and the knob locked in place as she tried to turn it. Closing her eyes, she sighed, hearing Draco get up from his position in the couch.

As she turned to face him, his hand came up to the side of her neck and he pulled her away from the door, firmly, but not as rough as he could be. He forced her over to the bathroom and if she fought him, she would only meet the warmth and firmness of his body. For being drunk, he was remarkably stable, and strong.

He pulled her into the bathroom and opened the shower door, turning on the water.

"Take that off," he ordered. She stared at him for a moment, but his eyes were hard, stormy grey and watching her. "Now," he said harshly as he started undoing his belt. She felt tears prickle the back of her eyes and her lips pressed into a tight line of dismay. "I'll tear it," he threatened.

Giving in, she pulled her dress over her head. He would tear it and this was going to happen no matter what she did. He yanked her into the shower and under the warm water, lifting her up against the wall before she even had a chance to draw breath. He pressed inside her. It wasn't as painful as it had been the day before, because her body was still processing the tension that had flared in her a few hours ago. This was however, much more intimate because she was

naked and her bare chest was pressed up against his as he thrust hard into her.

He was strong and all the muscles of his body strained as he held her there, forcefully burying himself in her. His ragged breaths and groans sounding though her mind. It was too much to lock out and ignore. But at least it didn't take him long to come; she felt the power of it jerk through his body.

She wondered if doing it to her in the shower made him feel cleaner. His forehead rested on hers for a moment as he calmed down, then lowered her down and withdrew from her. He was gone from the shower the next moment. She stayed under the water, letting it do its best to wash her clean. She was disgusted and angry, but knew that the fault lay with him; this was none of her doing and she refused to take on any blame in it.

His drenched pants lay on the floor as she grabbed a towel to quickly dry herself before pulling her dress back on.

He was dressed in black pajama pants, riding low on his hips when she got out of the bathroom. His hair was slicked back and his slim, muscled body still wet. He wasn't looking at her, standing with his side to her, ignoring her. She wasn't sticking around and headed straight for the door, but the knob was still locked.

"You have to open the door," she said, turning around. "It's still locked."

"Don't you want to stay?" he said teasingly, looking over at her.

"Please, just unlock the door," she asked through gritted teeth. He waved his hand and the door unlocked, and she was out of there.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Draco had ignored her again when she went to sort him in the morning. Hermione wanted to hit him, but she couldn't. She didn't know if him having sex with her was to become a regular event or whether it was some way of toying with her. She didn't understand him. Why he would do that when his disgust for her had obviously been real? Why would you have sex with someone you found disgusting? Perhaps he was doing it just to mess with her. Or maybe it had something to do with Lucius, which would be completely messed up, but then who was she talking about.

It was a strange feeling being violated. It had never happened to her before and there were competing emotions in her. She proudly rejected the idea that it having any impact on her, but also couldn't deny that it did. The sovereignty of her body was not her own. It was a hard concept to deal with. Draco being such a horrendous person actually made it easier to deal with because she had no problem with placing all the blame with him. He did this. She just couldn't quite understand the mentality of someone who wanted to hurt another person like that. Actually she did. She would gladly let him suffer if she had the means. He deserved to suffer.

She wasn't sure if he suffered in any respect, but she didn't see any joy in her life either. He screwed girl-he screwed her-and then dismissed them from his room. It was nothing more than a physiological act. He had his horrid friends, some weird and strained relationship with his father-obviously begrudging any happiness his father found. And then he had his work, which she couldn't see how anyone could tolerate. But maybe he was just the kind of fucked up person who thrived on what he did. Maybe she just plain could not understand Draco because they were nothing alike. Maybe his life made sense to him-it sure didn't to her. Perhaps you had to be an evil git to understand what it was about his life that he valued and

why he would want to have sex with someone who wanted nothing to do with him.

All these thoughts bombarded her mind. The one thing he had achieved was taking up residence in her head and she resented it bitterly. He intruded on everything she did-except when she was with Lucius. It felt like a true victory to her. The better man, chased away all the shit he offloaded on her like he didn't exist.

She practically ran up the stairs when he called. She was excited to see him, and she really needed her friend right now.

"There you are," Lucius said when she arrived. They didn't talk about what she had to go through when she was away from him and that's how she wanted it. There was that and there was this, and never shall they cross.

"Yes," she said with a smile. She ran over and kissed him as he reclined on the day bed. He hadn't dressed properly yet, still in his informal day wear.

"Where do you get your energy from?"

"I save it up," she said and smiled.

"I have a gift for you," he said, a sly look on his face.

"What is it?" she said with excitement.

"I am not telling you. You will find out later."

"You are in a good mood," she observed. He slid down on the bed and moved over, leaving room for her. She joined him and snuggled in, groaning at the nearness of his body.

"I have solved a puzzle I have been working on."

"The ancient script on the box you've been studying?"

"Yes, and it's a charm. A powerful one."

"What does it do?"

"I can feel the anticipation in you. Does your curiosity know no bounds?"

She smiled at him and placed her chin down on her shoulder, she rubbed her thigh carefully along his. "You are teasing me."

"Yes," he said. "It is a charm to detect a certain kind of magic." Hermione's interest piqued. One of the things she loved about Lucius was that he exercised and challenged that part of her that was so very seduced by knowledge and discovery—that part that got nothing elsewhere.

"What magic?"

"Dark magic, of course. You place the item in the box and the charm will detect if dark magic has been placed on it."

"Have you tried it?"

"Yes, but I still haven't managed to make it work. Because the box was made to detect a certain kind of magic and I haven't discovered which one," he said. She let the heat of his body soak into her, letting her hand travel across the dark green material of his shirt. She wanted to reach under the shirt, but he stilled her hand. Hermione felt disappointment flare in her. Lucius could be so intently focused on the intellectual things, he seemed to bypass the physical, to her endless frustration. "The box was made to detect something very specific—something pertinent to the person it was made for."

"Do you know anything about who it was made for?"

"No, but they feared something enough to have this box made. It would have been made by a master magician, someone who knew

dark magic intimately. Someone whose skills would be known, leaving a few contenders on the table."

Hermione lay her palm on his chest, feeling it rise with her breath. While she understood knowledge and research being completely absorbing and distracting, she wished he would turn his attention more to the things they could do. Frustration bit at her.

He continued talking about the wizards of that age who had been powerful, and what magics they specialised in. He reached over and placed a plate of chocolates on his chest. They were shaped like dark, glistening jewels.

Hermione gingerly took a chocolate and nibbled on it. The inside was creamy and sweet, and she couldn't quite make out the flavor.

"Do you like them?" he asked, turning to her. She still pure tension whenever he looked at her directly like he was. "I made them."

"Are you a chocolatier now?"

"When the mood strikes me."

Hermione reached over and kissed him and he let her. She felt relief flood her as he welcomed her kiss. She wanted to so much more, but restrained her ardor. The kiss was sweet and it feed a need in her, until he broke the kiss. "You must go," he said, breathing heavily, just a few centimeters away from her. "Dinner is about to be served."

Hermione's brow contracted. Had it been that long? "I want to stay."

"But you will get us both in trouble if you stay." As much as she hated it, she had to concede his point, now when she'd finally got his attention physically. She would get them all in trouble if she wasn't there to help with the madness at dinner time. Groaning, she pulled away, feeling her body ache for more.

She grudgingly walked to the door.

"Enjoy my gift," he said. Hermione turned to see him smiling mischievously.

"What have you done?"

"You will see, my dear. Enjoy it."

Hermione turned away feeling disconcerted. He had done something to her. She felt nothing as she walked down the stairs and once down, she was too busy to even remember.

The first thing she noticed was the flower that had been placed on the tray she was carrying up to Mrs. Parsons started to move.

Someone must have charmed it, she thought. She went about her business, left the tray with its recipient. Then she saw parrots in the hall when she got back-big, brightly colored birds which squawked as they flew past her. The floor started feeling soft under her feet.

Realisation struck that it might be her experiencing these things and that they may not be real. Lucius had done something to her. The banister moved under her hand, its surface, buttery like the scales of a snake. The Scottish Beetlehope he'd been looking for; he'd found it and he had given some to her, but how? The chocolates. This was his gift.

The walls all seemed to move and she felt extremely light, like she could float away. Somehow she managed to make her way down to the basement and she tried not to act like she was on drugs, but the ceiling was full of water and she feared it would all come crashing down on her.

Hermione groaned. She was lying somewhere, somewhere soft and warm. She lifted her head up and it ached with the movement of it. Oh my god, she thought as she looked around. There was bright morning sun and she was naked, in Draco Malfoy's bed. She felt nauseous and suppressed an urge to vomit. Strange images started

creeping through her confused and scattered mind. She'd had sex with him-panting, screaming, cloying sex. Nausea rose again.

Her whole body ached-her sex ached. She had no idea how many times, but more than a few. How the fuck had she ended up here? She closed her eyes in absolute dismay, hoping this picture would be gone when she opened them again, but she felt the rumpled up bedsheets under her body the whole time, and the smell of him everywhere.

Rolling over on her side, she moved her leg to get out. She had no idea where her clothes were; she could have come here naked for all she knew. Panic rose as she heard him moving behind her.

"Where are you going, Mudblood?" he said, his voice rough and gravelly with sleep.

She didn't answer, just kept moving, feeling beyond mortified. She moved quickly, but he was faster, grabbing the top of her knee and pulling it back as his arm came around her, pulling her on top of him. His warm body was beneath her, his muscles moving along her back. He'd maneuvered her ankle so it was trapped beneath his leg, pinning her there. Forcing her hips, he was inside her, creating feelings of utter familiarity and soreness.

"You showed me exactly how you like it, Granger," he said. His mouth next to her ear. "You couldn't get enough." He undulated underneath her and moved inside her, sending the devastatingly familiar sensations shooting through her body. She went to loosen the grip he had on her hip, but he wouldn't budge. His other hand travelled to her sex and roughly massaged her clit, with the perfect amount of pressure.

The tension in her body flared into heat, no matter how much she fought it and his cock massaged her insides until her orgasm overwhelmed her, making her arch above him, drawing him deeper. His hand moved to her hips, grinding her to him.

"How does it feel to come against you will, Granger?" he asked through gritted teeth. She wanted to cry as the waves of pleasure washed through her. He was right, she didn't want this, but her body was so in tune with his, perhaps an after effect from the drug that had taken over her the previous night. "And you want it like no one I've ever seen, Granger. You were begging," his sharp words were loud in her ears. His arm pressed across her chest, holding her tight to him. She knew what he said was true, the memories where there in bits and pieces. "I wouldn't believe it was possible, but you've worn me out. You've sucked so much out of me, I've run dry."

He let go of her and scrambled out of bed, running to the bathroom and closing the door behind her. The nausea finally took over and she threw up into the toilet bowl, but there was nothing in her stomach other than bile. She hadn't eaten anything last night. Her hands shook when she flushed it down.

She couldn't look at herself in the mirror. She wasn't sure mortified embarrassment even came close to what she was feeling at the moment. Her whole body was sore and she was physically exhausted. Mentally, she couldn't even go there.

She considered running out and grabbing whatever clothes she could find to flee, but she would have to live with the smell and mess of him on her all day. Breathing sharply, she made herself calm down. She needed to be calm. She needed to shower and wash all this away. She forced herself to stay and ran the shower, stepping into its still cold stream, which burned her before it warmed up.

Lucius' gift had turned into something disastrous. He shouldn't have done it. His intention had been to give her something pleasurable; something people paid dearly for, but it had turned into an absolute nightmare. He should have kept her there with him, where he could have kept an eye on her, instead of sending her out where she was prey to monsters.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17

Hermione sat outside on the wood box she sometimes retreated to. The sun created a pale leemony light that had absolutely no warmth whatsoever. Winter would never end here. She actually had no idea what date it was or what season it really was.

Draco hadn't called for her the previous night and she's stayed down in the basement the whole time, refusing to take anything up. She didn't know what to do. She wasn't sure if itwas possible for her to be degraded more than she'd been. Draco's derisive words kept echoing through her mind and she felt like she was losing this battle. He won skirmish after skirmish. How was it possible to keep her dignity when she'd spent a night with him in complete whore fashion. He'd even made it worse by making her come in the morning, when she was past the effects of the drugs. Well, maybe not completely considering how quickly he'd made her come. She wanted to think it was the after effects of the drug.

Groaning, she placed her palms over her eyes. She wasn't that into Draco. He was beautiful and he was undeniably attractive, but there was too much animosity between them for that ever to make her want to be with him in any capacity. She wasn't pining away for him. She was for Lucius-who had completely screwed up with giving her the Scottish Beetlehope.

Had he even known that he could potentially cause her a lot of trouble? She hadn't told him of her ongoing battles with Draco, so he would be unaware that he'd completely stripped her of armour and defences when she needed them. And she had lost a big battle. In one sense, it changed nothing; it had all been against her will and judgement-even if it had seemed like she'd participated at the time. But on the other, Draco would know he'd won and nothing she would

say or do would change that-even if it had been fake. In his mind, he would accept it as a victory.

'How does it feel to come against your will, Granger?' he'd asked as her body completely betrayed her under his ministrations. That was the clincher; the thing that made this an unmitigated loss. She'd been conscious and unwilling, and she'd come while he was fucking her.

Her sanity felt slightly precarious and she feared for her future. If he did it again-if he did this every night, where would that leave her? How was she to keep her emotional steadiness if they were reenacting a porn film every night.

'You'll be happy to serve me,' was the other thing he'd said at the beginning, the one that had bristled so very hard. She'd refused to believe that was ever possible, but if he made her pant and quiver at his touch, how long would she be able to keep her integrity?

Her thoughts turned to Lucius. The way he was going, he wasn't giving her enough; she needed more to combat the negativeness she was getting from the other side. She didn't know how to address it. She didn't have the right to expect more than he was giving her.

The morning was creeping ahead, as much as she hated it. It was time to continue her battle with Draco.

She stopped for a minute outside his room and tried to gather her wits about her. She had absolutely no idea what she would be in for on the other side of the door. She never knew with him, but what she got was not what she'd expected.

The room was dim as per normal, and so was Draco, lying on his stomach, his upper body pale and bare. But one of the half blood girls was lying next to him. Hermione paused at the sight. It had been a while since he'd called one of those girls to him. Hermione had no idea what this meant, but she was elated.

Going about her business, she heard Draco stir. "Let out," he growled like he always did and the girl scrambled out of bed. Hermione went to run the shower as was her normal duty and held her breath. If he was going to impose upon her it would be now. She wanted patiently for him to walk into the bathroom and she kept her eyes on the floor as she heard him coming in.

"A whore is just a whore, just one hole or another," he said as he stopped in front of her. She wasn't entirely sure what message he was trying to communicate. It seemed like he was trying to tell her that she wasn't special, and just another whore, who had now been replaced. If that was the case and he was trying to hurt her, he had seriously misfired.

She smiled as she hoped this meant he was done with her. Perhaps he had done what he set out to, proven whatever point he was after and had now moved on. The fact that one of the random was now gracing his bed, might mean he'd lost interest in her. If that was true, then it was all worth it-the anguish and reprehension-all worth it.

She wanted to sarcastically say how charming he was, but she didn't want to push her luck, deciding it was best to seem as dull and boring as possible, perhaps she'd even try to seem downtrodden. When the truth was that she was absolutely elated and wanted to do a massive fist pump. If he was moving on, things were going to be fine.

He was watching her when he stepped out of the shower and she had to dry him. Obviously she was supposed to look at his body longingly now that he was depriving her. For fucks sake. How deluded can he be?

"What would you like to wear today?" she asked. She couldn't quite manage to look upset-she had some pride. She settled for cool professionalism-no emotion. Hopefully he would interpret that as hurt.

Hermione practically skipped down the stairs when he released her. This shit hole was a better place than it had an hour ago, and this high would carry her throughout the day.

The Slytherins had a bit of a party in their 'common room' that night. Hermione had been required to cart drinks in and remove the empty glasses, bowls and garbage. It had been a raucous party and Hermione had kept her head down each time she walked it, making eye contact with no one. Draco had his arm around one of the halfbloods and the sight only warmed the cockles of her heart.

In the morning, she had to go clean up the room, which would be a downright mess. The room smelled of booze and there was even sick somewhere. Lucky her to have to clean this all up. There were still people there, sleeping on the sofa, and she stopped short when she saw that Draco was there, sleeping sitting up with his head leaning back on the head rest.

The table in front of him was covered in bottles and they clinked slightly as she started collecting them into a hamper. Draco stirred at the noise. His grey eyes were glassy and she felt a moment of apprehension as they made eye contact. He was still drunk.

"Granger," he smirked.

"Good night?"

"Better than yours."

"Undoubtedly, considering that you are here is this lovely hamlet by choice and I'm not." She felt it was very important to communicate that she didn't want to be here, in case he'd assumed otherwise.

"I wonder, Granger. Would you kill me if you had the chance?"

"You mean like when you were drop dead drunk and couldn't really defend yourself?"

He gave her a pointed look. "You know, I would rape you right now, but I couldn't get it up if I tried."

"And I am glad to hear it. And that might be the most pathetic thing I've ever heard."

He leaned back and studied her, making her feel uncomfortable under his scrutiny. "Want to help me back to my room?"

"No."

"Come on, Granger. I know you want me. You offer your pussy so sweetly."

She had to check herself not to state that it was his father she pined for. Perversely, she wanted to say that he gave it to her good and hard, and she wanted him so badly she couldn't stand it. She desperately wanted to say it, but she didn't know how he'd react. She could just goad him into continuing the sick game he'd just moved on from. "I will try to contain my disappointment," she said sarcastically.

Hermione looked around the room at the devastation. "Aren't you supposed to be out torturing kittens or something?"

"I'm having the day off."

"Day off from being an evil git. Who would have thought?"

"You sound like Weaselby. Did you ever fuck him?"

"Did you imagine we did?" she said to distract from answering his question.

"I can imagine that was a riveting experience. Was that why you lasted all of two seconds when you finally got together?"

"None of your business, Malfoy."

"Touchy. What do you think they'd do if they knew what I did to you?"

"I think you would be a stain on the floor," she said. He smirked again. "You really are an evil git, aren't you? You know, there was one point when Harry actually wanted to save you. Everyone told him he was wasting his time."

"Did you tell him he was wasting his time?"

"Absolutely. And looking back, I couldn't have been more right."

Draco's grin faded slightly. "Fuck off, mudblood, before I hex you. In the state I'm in, it could all go seriously wrong-it might pull you to bits, but it might be fun to try."

Hermione picked up the heavy hamper full with glass bottles and turned to the door. She would come back and clean the room when he was gone. She gave him a last look of complete hatred and left.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18

The door was open and someone was there when Hermione arrived at Draco's room. Gibbon, a Death Eater she didn't really know and didn't serve, was in there.

"You've been told what you need to do."

"It's a stupid mission-a complete waste of time."

"Yet it's what you've been told to do."

"Fuck him."

"Words that will see you die young, Malfoy. And about time if you ask me. Keep it up," Gibbon said, sweeping out of the room and Hermione pressed himself to the wall as he passed her. She knew this man was one of Voldemort's inner circle.

Only Draco was left, sitting up in the bed, nude as always, with a sheet covering his legs. The room smelled of alcohol; he'd been drinking, which wasn't really a surprise; he seemed to do it every night.

From what Hermione could gather, Draco had just refused a mission and told Voldemort to 'fuck off', unless she was mistaken.

"Trouble in paradise?" she asked as she walked over to light the fire.

"Shut up, mudblood," he said testily.

"Temper, temper," she said under her breath as she loaded the logs and the kindling.

She heard Draco laying back in the bed and the room was silent.

It seemed Draco was making enemies. Perhaps it was normal due course for politics in this place; she didn't know enough about it, but telling Voldemort to 'fuck off' can't be good.

She finished and went to the bathroom to run the shower, hoping he wouldn't do anything to her today. There could have been someone with him last night; someone with enough sense to escape when two Death Eaters were having a confrontation. She hoped so, then felt bad for it-for wishing the problem of Draco on someone else.

Draco walked into the room and she held her breath, but he walked straight past her, looking preoccupied. Maybe his position in Voldemort's inner circle was being threatened, but then again, if he was drinking himself stupid every night, maybe that was a natural consequence.

Draco showered without incident and Hermione dried him off. "Are you going out today?"

"No," he said, and it wasn't the answer that she was expecting. He really was defying an order. She wanted to ask if that was wise, but it really wasn't any of her business.

She got out of there as soon as she finished dressing him, turning around when she was halfway down the stairs, wondering what he was playing at, but then she wiped it from her mind. It was her natural instinct to react if she felt something going awry, but he was not her problem, even if things were going sideways. Although maybe they weren't, maybe this was all part of some game he was playing. It wasn't her concern.

Hermione got on with her business, which today was scrubbing floors. Of course, Pansy walked by giving a vicious and snide remark, to which Hermione couldn't do anything but ignore and continue scrubbing. Her hands were raw with the soap and the constant friction, but there was nothing she could do about it.

She almost sagged with relief when the order came to bring a cup of hot chocolate to Lucius Malfoy. She knew the chocolate was for her and she eagerly took the stairs to his room. She hadn't seen him in a while and she was still angry with his carelessness with the Beetlehope, but it was hard to hold a grudge with the only good thing in her life-it was like robbing herself of air.

Lucius was dressed when she got there and she frowned when she saw him in his full Death Eater robes. He sat on the daybed with his ankles crossed in front of him, waiting for her.

"Hello, my sweet," he said when she arrived. "You look well."

"Do I?"

"Come here. Drink."

She walked over and sat down on the side of the day bed. "Are you going out?"

"Yes, unfortunately, but I have a few minutes."

Hermione took a sip. She wanted more than a few minutes, but she wouldn't turn a second down. "You caused me a great deal of trouble the last time I saw you."

"Did you have an interesting time? I found a spot where it grows if you want more. It is worth its weight in gold, you know."

"No, once is enough, thank you. I think in this place, I need to keep my wits about me." Lucius considered her for a moment. Part of her wanted to chide him severely for having given it to her, but what purpose would it serve? It was done now. "No more surprises, please. There are people here who I need to be wary around."

"Anyone in particular?"

Hermione considered her options for a moment. "Some of the younger people seem to enjoy exerting their power."

"You're smart enough to know that says more about them than it does about you."

"I know," she said, looking down at her hands as it lay next to his.
"It's just hard to deal with sometimes."

His hand came up and stroked her on the cheek, the touch made her sigh. "You are stronger than anyone here."

"It is hard to feel strong when they bend my will." It was the closest thing she'd ever said, that indicated what happened to her when she left this room; she just wasn't giving exact details on who. She wasn't sure if it would serve things well if she did; she might lose the one thing that kept her afloat.

"Whatever people do, they do to assuage their own needs."

"How can someone need to subjugate someone else?" she asked heatedly.

"Healthy people ask for what they need-just like you did."

Concern creased her brow. "Is that what this was?" she asked quietly, not sure if she wanted to know the answer. This was not a direction she'd anticipate this conversation to do, but she also needed to know how he saw their relationship. It had been an issue that had preyed on her mind relentlessly.

"And I gave."

Hermione brow creased even further. "Is that all?"

"I would give you anything you needed."

"What about what you need?"

"You're giving me exactly what I need."

Hermione smiled. She wasn't sure exactly what had just happened, but it was good to hear that she was important to him.

Her heart sped up as he leaned in and kissed her, softly. The leather of his robes creaked as he did, contrasting with the sweet, soft lips. Hermione ached for more.

"As for the other", he said when he leaned back again, "people in desperate need will take. The key to dealing with difficult people, even someone like Voldemort, is to figure out what it is they want. Don't ever forget that they want something from you, and it's something about them, not you."

Hermione's lips still tingled, and she tried to absorb every slight taste of him, wishing he'd give her more. Maybe she had to ask for it.

"Now I have to go, and I'm not going to be back for a few days."

"Voldemort is requiring more of you," she stated.

"Unfortunately. Stay for a while if you want," he said, getting up from the bed, his deep black robes floating around him. She preferred it when he wasn't wearing them, recognising how austere they looked. It was hard to see the man she loved in the enemy's garb. "I must go."

"Lucius," she called when he walked to the door. He turned back to her, his hair flowing dead straight against his shoulders.. She took a moment to formulate what she wanted to say. "Draco is drinking a lot." He didn't respond and waited for her to say more. "He was having a confrontation with Gibbon this morning. It seemed he was refusing a mission."

It really wasn't any of her business, but she felt like she needed to tell Lucius. Something was obviously going awry and although she wished Draco every pain in the world, she didn't want to see Lucius suffer with it.

"Thank you for telling me. Please keep an eye on him while I'm gone. I fear he is deteriorating."

Hermione nodded, probably out of desire to be agreeable to Lucius' request than any true concern for Draco. It was strange being privy to someone who was actually concerned for him. As for herself, she would happily see Draco slipping under the water and disappearing-he deserved it.

Lucius closed the door behind him and Hermione stayed sitting on the day bed, trying to get a handle on the conversation they'd just had. Things were competing in her mind-her relationship with Lucius and Lucius' relationship with Draco.

She lay back absorbing the warmth that Lucius had just left. She didn't know whether she should be concerned that Lucius had admitted that he'd slept with her because she'd asked for it. But then he'd also admitted that he cared enough about her to give her anything she needed. And then there was Draco. The completely selfish part of her wondered if she could have Lucius all to herself if Draco died-that unselfish part that analysed things very shallowly. Lucius would be hurt by Draco's death and although she would be there for him, he would be deeply unhappy.

And then there was Draco, taking what he needed. She wasn't sure she bought Lucius' understanding of his violence. Maybe Draco just needed to be the evil git he was; she couldn't see any other justification for what he was doing. But the statement that he was deteriorating unfortunately rang true, and him dipping his wick in mudblood was part of that. From his own sentiments earlier, he must have sunk quite low to force himself on a mudblood. She'd seen it as him going out of his way to hurt and humiliate her; she'd never even seen it as something driven by his need. Again, the needed to be an utter evil git. Maybe Lucius just saw things that weren't there, but that didn't sit right either-she just didn't want to understand Draco's motives. She wanted nothing to do with him.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Hermione groaned when she woke up in the morning. She'd had a dream about Lucius, one where they were so close, but he denied her. She'd started to wonder if he didn't find her attractive anymore. Maybe that was the reason. She didn't look awful-strictly. Being a slave in Voldemort's paradise didn't exactly encourage a good beauty routine.

But to make it the worst possible morning, she found Pansy sitting in Draco's room when she got there. It was a surprising sight, but Pansy was dressed, sitting on the couch, Draco wasn't. It didn't look like they'd spent the night together, which would have been beyond gaggable.

"What's she doing here?" Pansy demanded when Hermione walked into the room.

"Sometimes I fuck her in the mornings," Draco said from the bed, leaning back arrogantly with his hands above his head, revealing his naked chest. Hermione quickly moved toward the fireplace in case she blushed. It was actually true, although not for a while now.

She could hear Pansy's shocked protest, sputtering on a comment. "You're disgusting, Draco. I don't know what's happened to you, but you need to get your act together and to stop being so revolting. I'm starting to think you're actually trying to disgust people on purpose." For some reason, Draco seemed intent of upsetting Pansy, not that she didn't deserve it, but Draco seemed to be rocking the boat amongst his own friends too. He seemed to be systematically alienating everyone.

Pansy stormed out of the room.

"Feeling a bit perverse today?" Hermione asked. He didn't answer. For once, he didn't tell her to fuck off. He just watched her as she went about her business. "Are you going out today?"

"No."

Once the fire was lit, she moved over and drew the curtains. She could feel his eyes on her as she moved. The silence in the room stretched, making her feel uncomfortable. "Shall I run the shower?"

Again he didn't answer. She turned to him. He was staring out the window, a concerned look on his face. Something was obviously bothering him.

"If that will be all?" she said, but again he ignored her. She left without saying anything further. His room did need tidying, something she usually did when he wasn't there. But as he rarely seemed to leave lately, the mess was building up. She would have to deal with it later.

She didn't know what kind of moment Draco was having, but he'd flaunted the fact that he was screwing a mudblood, which to them was a grave sin. He was making waves of some kind.

Lucius' comments about him deteriorating returned to her as she returned downstairs and grabbed a bucket to go fill the water store. He truly deserved it if he was. She didn't know how he could live with himself, doing the things he did. Or likely it was something else entirely. She just couldn't think what.

She'd agreed to keep an eye on him, but she really didn't want to. She didn't want to spend any more time thinking of him than she absolutely had to. If he was having a bit of remorse for the things he'd done, who was she to argue?

When she had a moment to herself in the afternoon, she retreated to her woodbox in the chilly air outside. Lucius wasn't back and she started to worry. If something happened to him, she didn't know what

she would do. But there was also another concern because their relationship was going sideways. He wasn't sleeping with her and her frustration was only escalating. Tension filled her body, but it was intermixed with deep guilt and dismay. The only release she'd had lately had been with Draco, and that had been a while ago. Luckily he wasn't interested in her anymore, but neither seemed Lucius. The uncertainty and the guilt of it all plagued her.

When she closed her eyes, it was Draco's body she saw. She'd seen so little of Lucius and so very much of Draco. He seemed to crowd out anything else. Clenching her fist, she tried to dismiss the thoughts in her head.

She couldn't escape him. When she finally had to end her moment of quiet contemplation, she had to go back to his room and try to clean it. Even if he was having a bit of an existential wobble at the moment, he would eventually notice his room turning into a pigsty, and would punish her. Draco's creative punishments were the one thing she avoided in this life.

To her amazement, he wasn't there. She hurried around the room and picked up the clothes on the floor, including some girl's underwear. Probably some girl who had been eager enough to escape as to leave her clothes behind. She wondered about those girls sometimes. Some of them clearly wanted him, but then left in fright when he dismissed them. Actually, she liked to think that they wanted to be with him; it made her feel better about the whole situation. But then, this wasn't her responsibility, she reminded herself. What he did wasn't her responsibility.

"Back again, mudblood?" she heard him behind her, making her jump. "Can't get enough of me?"

"I have to clean," she said, turning to him-noting that he hadn't closed the door, which was a good sign. He moved to the sofa and sat down, watching her, wearing a white shirt and black pants, too nice for his usual 'go out and kill' get up. Tentatively she started cleaning again, picking up the rest of the discarded clothes and

putting them in a pile. She gathered the empty bottles and placed them in a basket. "Are you planning on drinking yourself to death?"

"Would that bother you?"

"I would dance on your grave," she said. He smiled. "I think that would be a worthy goal for me, to outlive you."

"Such a spiteful bitch, aren't you? But it's nice to know you aim high," he said sarcastically and took a swig of the glass by the small table next to the sofa.

"And what do you think I should do, Malfoy? How do you think I should live? Be happy to serve you?"

"Might be better. To have someone who protects you."

This was an unexpected turn of the conversation and she didn't really know what to make of it. "I already have that."

"You mean my father? If you think he's a saint, you're an idiot," he said breaking into a sly grin.

"Maybe he just likes me," she challenged. "I do offer an interest in some of the things he's interested in."

Draco didn't say anything, he was just considering her. "If you want my advice, you should figure out what it is he wants from you."

"Although, realistically, you are probably the last person on earth whose advice I want."

"What do you want, Granger?" he said after a while

"I thought we'd already agreed that I would settle for a slow and painful death for you." He smiled this time.

"There was always something very spiteful about you, even at school."

There was a part of her that wanted to argue, but another that recognised that she didn't want to discuss their school days. "What do you want? Is this all you hoped for? Obviously one where you can drink yourself stupid, screw anything you chose to, willing or not, and get waited on by your enemies. This must be paradise as far as you're concerned."

His brow creased slightly and his lips thinned. "You forgot to say that I get to screw my enemies, but then you're not my enemy, Granger. You would have been ground into the dirt if you were. You're completely inconsequential."

Hermione shrugged. She'd heard his bravado before. Maybe he was right, but she didn't care.

"Well, you seemed to be giving your enemies a pass at the moment. Who's the Dark Lord targeting this time?"

He ignored her question. "You should be careful with the questions you ask, mudblood."

"Afraid you're giving away secrets?"

His eyes snapped to hers. "And what would you do with them, Granger? There is nowhere for you to go. No one left on your supporters cheering you on."

"Aren't there? Yet you're called out on missions every other day."

"Trust me, Voldemort's paranoia, nothing more. There is no one out there waiting to rescue you. You might as well settle in, because you're going to be here for a long time."

She hated hearing him say it, but she knew he wasn't lying. "And yet, I think you know that the world was a better place before he came along and you were instrumental in making it happen. If you suffer because of it, it is well deserved. He will kill you eventually, as he

does with everyone. Once he's done using you. I think you truly mean as much to him as I do."

Draco looked furious for a moment and Hermione wondered whether she'd gone too far. Then he changed, leaned back with his head high, looking down on her. "Perhaps as I will when I'm done using you."

He moved quickly, having her on her back on the floor before she knew what was happening. He was punishing her now. She had gone too far and this was the consequence. He held her down by putting pressure on her elbows, then leaned back onto his knees and slowly undid his belt as if to show her that this was her punishment. She thought about fighting, but knew that would just make it worse-he would be rougher, but the end result was the same.

In a sharp movement, he pulled her body to him, and pressed into her, having to force his way into her body, just enough pressure to make it bordering on painful. Once this initial entrance was done, it would be better, she knew. Her body would adjust and it would just be a task of waiting it out.

If she didn't fight, her body seemed fairly content with the familiarity of it, of this act, of him. She could tell the point where his intent went from punishment to serving his own desire, transitioning smoothly, but noticeably. She didn't know how he could transition so quickly in his mind, but he did. Gone were the thoughts of punishment and he'd moved onto his own pleasure.

His eyes glazed over as he moved in and out of her. Leaning over her, he was close enough that she couldn't ignore his presence, nor the sensations he wrought as he ground into her. His face close to her, his lips on the side of her cheeks as she faced away from him. His eyes were right there, compelling her to look at him, but she refused. She tried to suppress it, but due to the events with the Beetlehope, her body craved to flare to life. Sitting back, he changed positions and the angle of their hips, reaching further into her, pounding hard, sending flares of heat up her body. She desperately

tried to suppress them, refusing to let them overtake her. She'd be damned if he made her come again, even if her body was starting to ache with the tension.

He faltered in his pace and groaned loudly as his release caught him. His body shook with the convulsions. Hermione almost cried out with release because her body was building up to its own, whether she wanted it or not. It was just sex, she told herself, trying to view it abstractly, ignoring the reality of who it was with and all the implications around it.

Draco collapsed down on her and she took his weight heavily. He seemed unwilling to move and she wasn't struggling to get him off. She should be, but she was too weary with her own body's betrayal. She'd been so close.

Finally he lifted off her and she felt light as his weight came off her again. "Sometimes I wonder whether you push my buttons on purpose, Granger," he said breathily while doing up his pants.

"Trust me, I don't."

"Are you sure?"

She ignored him, instead sitting up and pushing her skirt down, before looking at him accusingly.

"Oh, Granger, I love it when you look at me that way. I might keep you around just for that."

Hermione's lips pursed in dismay and annoyance. She really didn't like it when he made statements like that.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Hermione managed to stay clear of Draco the next day. Mary complained bitterly, but she did it, coming back saying how absolutely impossible he was. Hermione felt bad, but she needed a break. She was tired of dealing with him and the constant tension in her life—that he caused. She almost expected seeing him around every corner.

Lucius wasn't back, so there was no distractions from her situation and her worries. Lazily, she chewed on the stale bread they'd been given for breakfast, wondering if she was better off dead. The reason to keep fighting just seemed a bit pointless. Sighing heavily, she leaned her head back on the wall behind the woodstore she sat on. She could just stay here, freeze to death. That might just be the easiest way to do it. All other alternatives involved a whole deal of pain, which she wasn't all that keen on. She could potentially get some poison—Lucius was bound to have some in his room, except it was locked.

She wondered if he'd be sorry if she died. She wondered if Draco would be sorry—highly unlikely. All her friends were dead and she could be with them now, instead of here, suffering through this awful system. If she knew Lucius would be alright, she would seriously consider it. She wasn't entirely sure if her feelings for Lucius weren't just a consequence of her situation.

Sighing heavily again, she knew she should get back. The purebloods would be waking soon and she only made it harder for the others if she didn't pull her weight. There were breakfast trays that needed to be delivered. She almost wished she could just stop thinking. Thinking hurt. But she trudged back and took the trays given her, delivered them to the various pureblood rooms.

"Will you please do Malfoy today," Mary begged. "He seems to like you, as much as he can anyone."

Hermione shook her head at how delusional Mary was, but didn't feel the need to put her straight. It would serve no one unloading her problems on Mary. Mary had enough to deal with.

"Fine," she said and turned back to the stairs, thinking how much she hated him. Things would actually be so much better for all of them if he would just die. Why wasn't he out on missions where someone could have a lucky day and kill him?

His room was dark, as it always was, but she could see him in the bed-alone this time. Damned, he was back to sleeping alone. She hoped his statements the previous time she'd been here didn't signify a reversion back to her for his sexual alleviation. She should have just kept her big mouth shut.

After lighting the fire, she drew the curtains. He was awake and watching her when she turned around. "Where were you?"

Hermione shifted her stance slightly. "I had the day off."

He raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You don't get days off."

"We organise it amongst us."

"You're not allowed to do that."

"What? Are you going to interfere, rob us of the rare spare time we sort? Really Malfoy, do you really get off on being vindictive and pure malicious?"

He didn't say anything. "Are you getting lippy again?" he said sharply and she recognised the threat he was communicating.

"No, of course not," she said through gritted teeth, then added, "master."

"You know it just turns me on when you say that."

"Then I'll stop."

"Although not as much as punishing you. That really does it for me."

Hermione shook her head. "Are you going out today?"

"No."

"Isn't this dereliction of duty going to get you into trouble?"

Draco shrugged and turned away from her, leaving her the sight of the scars on his back. He obviously wasn't a coward; she'd always thought he was at school, but he'd seen more action than most at this point. But then he was refusing to do his duty, which would eventually get him sorted. Lucius was worried about him; his friends were worried about him.

"Are you having a shower?" He didn't respond. "Fine. Just ring if you need anything. I have other people I need to tend to."

"What do you do for them?"

"Who?"

"The other people."

"Clean mostly. Deliver food. No one quite as difficult as you."

"Admit it, Granger, you secretly love coming here."

She rolled her eyes. "I really, really don't." She moved to the door. "If I had to swear to never see you again, I would do so in a microsecond flat."

"I'll see you later, Granger," he said promisingly. She froze in her step for a second, then continued, closing the door behind her. She

didn't know what he meant, but it sounded like a promise. Sloughing her shoulders, she walked down the steps again.

The day dragged, but then there was nothing to look forward to. Her suicidal thoughts returned, urging her of other ways to think of doing it. There was a particularly perverse part of her brain that wanted to take him with her. He deserved it, but she couldn't do it to Lucius.

"He's calling you," Mary said. Hermione didn't want to ask who; she already knew. He'd given an indication that he would, so it didn't come as a surprise. She suspected he was going to play with her tonight and it would probably include sex, maybe some torture, although he seemed to have shifted it to the more psychological of late, particularly as he made her body react to him-the thing she hated most of all. Sad as it was, he actually knew more of how her body worked than anyone else she'd been with-and they'd loved her.

He sat on the couch when she got there. He was dressed and he'd been drinking. Actually, he looked like he'd sobered after drinking. There was something about him that seemed undone. She couldn't quite put her finger on it.

"They're going to run out of alcohol the way you're going," she said leaning back on the door.

"What do you want, Granger?"

"You called me, remember. I'll go then, since you don't need me." She turned to leave, but the door was locked. Placing her head on the wood, she turned around and faced him again. He had something in mind, obviously. "I think the more pertinent question is what you want."

He didn't say anything, but his eyes never left hers. "Do you think I'm evil?"

"Yes!" she said in a rush. That was an easy one. He was silent for a moment, just watching her. "You do evil things," she filled in,

"hence..." She make a wave of her hand.

"Would you kill me if you had the chance?" He'd asked this before. It seemed a topic of repeated interest for him.

"Funnily, I thought about it today," she admitted.

"Then why haven't you tried?"

"You know why."

He laughed, a little too much for what the topic deserved, a tinge of madness to it. Then he grew serious again. "I want you to fuck me like you would Potter."

"What?" she said with disbelief and confusion.

"You heard me."

"First of all, Harry and I were never ... in that way."

He gave her a look of annoyance. "Please, if he walked through the door at this moment, are you telling me you wouldn't fuck him?"

She just stared at him. The truth was that she would. She would be so happy to see him, she wouldn't care about their unsaid agreement, that they would never explore that area. It had always been a possibility, but silently they had agreed that they were just not going to go there-were going to be friends and ignore the potential for anything else. But if Harry appeared now and there were just the two of them still alive, there would be nothing holding her back.

Draco was watching the emotions play on her face. "Why would I do that?" she asked with sheer confusion.

Draco's eyes didn't leave hers. "It is possibly the cruelest thing you could do to me."

She frowned.

"Show me in no uncertain terms that no one love me. Because let's face it, no one will. These girls come and they fuck me, but no of them really give a damned about me. So, show me what I'm missing. It will sit and burn in my brain forever."

She was going to ask what had him feeling so morose and existential at the moment, but this had been brewing for quite a while and she didn't really want to know. She knew what he was asking, but didn't understand why she should. The very idea of it went against the grain.

She felt like she couldn't breathe for a moment-this was just too bizarre, but on some level it also made inherent sense. There was something in her that wanted to be at peace with him. They'd been at loggerheads, in the most extreme sense, for absolute months, and in truth, much longer than that-sheer psychological torture and there was something very appealing about just letting that go for a moment. She watched as he sat and waited for her response. There was something very raw about him at this moment-this person who essentially was her only link with the past. He was the only one who really knew the people she'd loved, knew the losses she had experienced and the person she'd been.

It would be cruel for her to do it, he'd said. There was definitely temptation in it, but it was competing with a desire to not be fighting for just a moment-to step away from the intense fighting between them, like they were stepping around each other, waiting for the kill. He had all the advantages, but somehow she had survived and was still here fighting.

She walked toward him, not quite believing she was doing it. If she was completely honest, there was also a certain amount of sexual tension to disburse and it wasn't only the fact that she hadn't been getting any of late-willingly that was. She brought her knee over his legs and sat down in his lap facing him.

This was the most bizarre thing, but there was also something that needed expression in it. She wanted to be at peace for once,

knowing this was an anomaly, but for right now, she just didn't want to fight. Leaning over, she kissed him and he let her. The moment of awkwardness passed quickly-he was so very familiar to her; she knew his taste and his smell. She knew how he felt.

He pulled her body to him into an embrace as the kiss deepened. This did feel necessary. His lips were soft and pliant and he just gently took as she kissed. It was strange not having the aggression from him, he was just waiting, letting her explore. Her hands came up and stroked his shoulders, feeling the solid muscle underneath. Her fingers moved to his throat, feeling the pulse beat steadily underneath. She kissed his neck, letting the taste of his skin play on her tongue. This was still the most abstract thing, but she didn't want to stop.

She could feel he was hard as she straddled his lap, but she wasn't ready to explore that yet, so she kept her hips still. Instead, she reached for the buttons on his shirt and undid them, one by one, revealing the pale skin underneath. Slowly she ran her hands over his warm chest and she felt his muscles tighten under her touch. She didn't know why he wanted this, but he seemed to be soaking it in.

She kissed him again and he returned her exploration, stroking his tongue against hers. There was part of her mind that wanted to imagine that she was with Harry, but another part that didn't, needed to focus on Draco.

Her chest pressed against his, the friction dampened by her wool dress. His hand came up, resting on the back of her neck as they kissed, deeply and slowly. This was complete madness, flashed through her brain, but she wasn't stopping. She brought his hand down to her breast, letting herself arch into the pressure of it as it molded around her curves. It was disturbing how turned on she was, but she refused to let herself worry about it.

Pulling away from the kiss, he looked her in the eyes as his fingers moved to undo the rope that worked as her belt. She felt it give way and she held her arms up to let him lift the dress off her. The cool air

met her warm body, and she sought of the warmth of his, their smooth skin sitting perfectly together, flattening her chest to his. She felt his hands exploring her back and thighs, then coming down to settle on her hips. She kissed him again, receiving complete welcome. For this moment, them joined in a kiss seemed like a natural state. She finally ground her hips into his and he groaned with the friction.

Shifting, he leaned her down on the soft sofa behind him, moving on top of her. His weight came down on her and his kiss became more insistent. Hermione let her hand travel up his back, along the ridges of his scars. Her core was on fire, pressed firmly with his hardness. His mouth moved down her neck and she opened herself to him, letting him explore, feeling his lips and his teeth along the sensitive skin of her neck. This was complete madness, she told herself again through the mist of heavy desire she felt.

He moved down her chest and traced the contours of her collarbone, then further down, slowly and deliberately taking one of her nipples into his warm mouth, teasing it between his teeth. Gasping, she arched up into the sensation, feeling it connect with the pulsing warmth in her core, the delicious heat burning through the material of her make do underwear.

He moved above her again, his skin holding more colour than she'd ever seen it and his lips swollen with kissing. His icy grey eyes connecting with hers and she saw nothing in there but desire and curious exploration. There was something about this that felt like a first time, the tentative touching, just as he did now as he tugged on the knot that kept her underwear in place, keeping her locked in his gaze. He closed his eyes in appreciation when the knot gave.

Undoing his belt, he freed himself, placing his warm head at her entrance. Their eyes locked again as he started pushing into her, her body yielding smoothly and fluidly. She angled herself to take more of him as he pushed all the way in, wincing slightly as his hips connected with hers. She could feel her heart beating heavily, and her core throbbing in unison. Until he moved and she was overwhelmed by the friction, gasping as he pulled out of her and

pushed in again. Her orgasm was already building, but she tried to suppress it. He pushed into her again, making her gasp each time he sunk all the way in.

Her legs wrapped around his hips, bringing him deeper, and his winces turned into outright groaning as he pushed into her again and again, bringing them both closer to the building release. He came first, arching into her as powerful spasm took him, which she could feel into the deepest part of her, pushing her over the edge, convulsing violently around him. Her convulsions went on forever, starting again as he moved, grinding into her one last time.

Collapsing down on her, she took all of his dead weight and kissed him slightly on the shoulder, feeling him still buried deep inside of her. They didn't move for a while, then he pulled away, sitting up on the sofa, giving her enough room to get up. She rose straight away and grabbed her dress to her, pulling it over her head and picking up the rope that served as her belt.

She couldn't quite look at him. She wasn't sure what she was feeling at the moment. He sat on the sofa, leaning back, his pants up, but not done up.

"Don't ever ask me to do that again," she said and turned to him. He looked empty like she'd taken everything out of him. He nodded, but didn't look at her. Turning to the door, she left, closing it quietly behind her, unsure how she felt. She wasn't entirely sure what had just happened, but something had-something deep and longstanding had been exorcised.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Hermione felt lighter the next day. She felt like something had been buried and wondered if through some convoluted way, she had forgiven Draco. Clearly she couldn't forgive him, but maybe let it go, was the right word. She felt freer, having no compulsion to think back on the night before.

Mary was rushing around in her normal routine and Hermione did her bit, but it didn't seem as onerous that day; she welcomed the distraction. A slightly alarming turn to her chirpy mood was that she didn't really care about anything. A thought crossed her mind, whether she was truly becoming suicidal, and not in a depressive boohoo kind of way, but in a 'I want to be free' way. Sadly, she overly didn't care about this either.

She brought up a breakfast tray to Mrs. Parkinson, knowing there would likely be insults and dismissive behaviour involved. Again, not caring. It was like the Beetlehope without the hallucinations.

"Where's that stupid girl," the older woman called. "They're always dragging their feet those mudbloods. No pride." She wasn't talking to herself, there was another woman in the room, someone that lived in another part of the village-a place Hermione didn't serve.

Hermione strode to the table where Mrs. Parkinsons liked to eat, arranging the plate and cutlery. "Is there anything you need, madam?" Hermione asked absently, wondering if she wanted to take the knife and plunge it into the woman's hand, or maybe even heart. Then wondering if she should be wanting to do that.

The woman gave a dismissive wave. "So Voldemort is back this afternoon, you said?"

Hermione ears perked. If Voldemort was coming back, Lucius was coming too. She suppressed a smile and discreetly left the room. Lucius was coming. Excitement coursed through her, knowing she would be on the look-out all day. It had been a while week since he'd gone. Actually, it could have been more than a week.

She hesitated slightly when she had to go up to Draco's room. Just thinking about him seemed to drag her back to how things had been before-tense, serious and oppressive. She didn't want to go. If she never saw him again, it wouldn't bother her. She wasn't even sure she wanted him to suffer; she just wanted to be shot of him.

The implications from the previous night sat in her brain, demanding to be acknowledge, but she didn't want to. The only thing it meant was a letting go of the past and an embrace of the future-whatever that might be.

The room was dark in it's typical fashion. Draco was still sleeping and he didn't wake, even as she drew the curtains. He looked almost innocent as he slept. She wished he was dead, but she could see him breathing. There was something really wrong with him, which wasn't surprising. Maybe he was waking up, realising was a total evil shit he was.

Staring at him, she couldn't believe what she'd done the night before. It seemed completely surreal. Looking away, she dismissed the things in her mind that was trying to draw her attention.

Lucius was coming. Perhaps she'd try to tell Lucius that something was very off about Draco. She wouldn't explain the details, but perhaps he should know. She didn't know what she expected Lucius to do about it-as he said, Draco was deteriorating.

She sat down for a moment along the wall. Maybe he was suicidal as well, working through his process to getting there. There was something quite poetic about them both dying, the last survivors of their generation-well, the main combatants anyway. Isn't that how it was with tragedies, everybody died? Maybe she was his tell tale

heart, reminding him constantly about the things he'd done and why he wasn't a good and decent person. He deserved it if it was so.

Shaking herself slightly, she shed the morose thoughts. They were not linked and there was certainly nothing predetermined about them. It was time to cut the cord. Smiling, she thought about her afternoon, when she would knock on Lucius' door and he would open it. At least she had that.

She knocked and waited. For a moment wondering if he wasn't there, feeling a spear of panic at the thought that he was hurt or dead, but after what seemed like an eternity, door opened.

"Lucius," she said, smiling. She rushed into his arms and held him tightly. He smelled so lovely.

"Missed me?" he asked, closing the door behind them.

"Every moment." He looked intently at her as if he was studying her.

"And anything happen here while I was gone?"

She shook her head.

"And Draco."

"Drunk most of the time." Lucius stepped away as if absorbing the news. "He didn't wake today when I came to him room."

"Was he drunk?"

"Uhmm, I'm not sure." She didn't think he had been; she'd been with him the previous night and he hadn't been entirely drunk then, unless he'd starting drinking again after she'd left.

She felt a moment of guilt, wondering if she had been disloyal. He hadn't raped her last night; she'd participated. She felt a deep frown on her brow. She didn't want to be deceptive. "He has an interest in me," she said, not able to carry on a bald faced lie.

Lucius slowly turned to her, interest in his eyes. "An interest?"

"I think I represent the past to him, including all the others that have been."

"Potter," Lucius said. Hermione felt a flash of concern. As much as she trusted Lucius, even Harry's name brought out protective qualities in her. Not that Harry needed protection.

"I think Draco is having trouble reconciling things."

"And he speaks to you?"

"No, not really." Hermione hid her blush by straightening out some books. "Once in a while, he will ask me questions."

"What kind of questions?"

She shrugged, not wanting to tell Lucius about the downright cruel taunting Draco engaged in, or the sexual questions. Her guilt, however, felt alleviated-she had told Lucius; the details were minor. "How was your excursion?" she asked as a way of changing the subject.

"Unpleasant, but Voldemort always is. He is angry too, but that is nothing new either." Lucius sat down in his chair, still dressed in his Death Eater robes-less the heavy robe. He had a glass of whiskey in his hand and took a sip. "He doesn't sleep much, and neither does anyone else when around him-it pays to keep your eyes open. Voldemort takes physical weakness as a personal affront."

"Sleeping isn't physical weakness."

"Funny how it seems to so people who don't. I need to rest."

Hermione understood, but felt disappointed. "Do you want me to go?"

Lucius watched her for a while. "You may stay for a while if you wish. Read. I will sleep."

"Then I will watch over you."

Lucius smiled and got up, moving to the bed, where he pulled off his boots and lay down. Hermione watched as his eyes grew heavy and he slowly slipped away to sleep.

After reading a while, she moved to the bed and lay behind him, putting her arm around him, soaking in his warmth. This was heaven, or as close as it was going to get, here. She was tired of pain and angst-wanting peace. He gave it to her, and for whatever else he did, she appreciated him for that.

She slept for about half an hour then had to leave. She had duties to perform and it was unfair to the others neglecting them. The busy dinner period commenced and completed. She was growing more fond of the busy period where she was distracted for her own thoughts for a little while.

"The demon is calling for you," Mary said when Hermione finished rinsing a large pot. "He's calling for you," Mary repeated, pointing to the little bell on the wall.

"Damn it. What does he want?" But Mary's attention was already on her next task. "Fine," Hermione said grudgingly to herself and dragged herself up the stairs.

Draco was sitting alone in his room and Hermione sighed when she saw him. "Can I help you with something?"

"Shut up, Granger. I'm going to bed and you're coming with me."

Hermione gave him a hard look. "You promised, no more."

"I thought you were smarter than to believe anything I said." He stood up and held his hand out to her. She refused to budge.

"You can't do this."

"And yet I am." He moved closer to her, standing right in front of her, while she kept her gaze down. He kissed her on the temple, stepping even closer. She felt his breath on the side of her cheek, felt the tense excitement in his body. "It seems to be the thing I need right now."

Turning her chin up, he kissed her again. She tried to hold her face away, but he was stronger.

She'd thought this was over, but here they were again, kissing. It called in to her belly, wanting to flare to heat.

He pulled her toward the bed, sitting down with her standing in front of him. His fingers undid his belt as Hermione thought desperately about what she needed to do. She wasn't afraid of this, not in the sense that she feared the act itself, just it's meaning.

"I'm not participating," she said as he pulled her dress over her head, leaving her bare to the cold air in the room..

"I'm not sure if it's a question of not participating as it is of you being able to stop yourself."

He pulled her to him, taking her nipple in his warm mouth as he did so. She couldn't deny the impact of the sensation shooting through her body. As much as she hated admitting it, he had a point-her body was running its own game here, and he knew exactly how to play it.

"Ugh," she said as the onslaught of unwelcome sensations fought her. Swiftly, he moved her around until she was underneath him on the bed. "You promised," she repeated, but he wasn't listening.

Moving between her thighs, he pushed inside her swiftly and painlessly, stirring the heat deep in her core. He kissed her again as he moved in and out of her, knowing that she couldn't fight the claim he had on her body. Holding her hips tight, he increased the

pressure and speed until her heat flared completely. "I hate you," she said.

"I know," he repeated, arching back, finding his release.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Hermione sat out on her wood box in the morning and noted a group of Death Eaters walking past in a hurry. Even too hurried to torment a lone mudblood who was somewhere she shouldn't be. It was really early for them to be up, but apparently they were motivated at the moment. Voldemort was displeased and had punished one of them quite severely the previous day.

It was good to know that as harassed, abused and forced as she was, they got it from the level above them. Everyone was someone's bitch-only they'd signed up for it. Well, not all of them. Lucius hadn't and he would be away from here in a heart beat.

The way Draco was going, he was up for a bit of punishment soon, and he did deserve it for the things he did. He deserved it for being a lying evil bastard, too.

Hermione rubbed her face in a vain effort to rub her problems away. Everytime she seemed to get somewhere, it just didn't seem to get traction and it just stretched out in front of her, like a dream with her running down a long corridor that never ended. She thought she was making progress, but the corridor just stretched on.

Going back inside when she felt thoroughly frozen, she had to deal with Parkinson. Draco had apparently managed to drag himself out of bed with the others this morning, so for once, she didn't have to deal with him. Maybe he was done with his little protest, realising that his status as Voldy's favourite would only stretch so far if he wasn't pulling his weight.

It did make her feel better to realise that on some level he had qualms about what a total shit he was, even if not about the things he did to her.

Hermione felt her mood soar when she was called to bring a hot chocolate to Lucius. Bounding up the stairs two at a time she almost spilled it-not that it mattered, it was for her anyway.

"Come," he said when she knocked on the door and she found him sitting on the day bed reading. "How are you today?"

"Good," she smiled and sat down at the edge of the bed. "What are you doing?"

"Still working on some of the ancient curses. Will you read to me for a while?"

"Of course."

He made room for her on the day bed beside him and she joined him, loving the feel of him beside her as he placed his arm around her. Getting comfortable she started reading where he indicated, a section on ancient binding charms. It was interesting to read about some of the magic that had been lost over the millennia, originating in periods of enlightenment and growth. Compared to that, she was living through the dark ages, and she wondered how history would judge this period. Perhaps it would be swept under the carpet, an embarrassment to future generations.

"How long can Voldemort live?" she asked.

"Sadly a long time," Lucius said and stroked her wrist absently with his thumb.

Hermione wanted more than an absent touch, she wanted kissing and more. Maybe she would steer them in that direction later, feeling uncertain about it when someone she did not want to bring into her thoughts right now was doing things to her. But they were not things she chose, even if he had learnt exactly how to manipulate her; it still wasn't her choice. Lucius was the one she wanted to be with.

Turning her head, she looked up at him, his patrician features and

cool eyes. He was focused on the book she was holding and she turned her attention back to it.

"There is something I need you to do," he said after a while, his tone grave and serious.

"Of course. Anything."

"I need you to save my son."

Hermione blinked, not understanding. "What?"

"I need you to save him. His soul is dying and I can't let that happen."

Hermione felt a true flash of concern and she tried to pull away, but Lucius' arm clamped down across her chest, making her panic.

"Hush," he said, calmly. "I know you can get through to him. I knew it from the moment he brought you here. I need you to do so and to steer him away from the path of self-destruction he is set upon."

Hermione couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"If you love me, you will do this for me."

"You can't be asking this of me." She wasn't entirely sure he knew what he was asked; she wasn't entirely sure she could understand it either.

"I'm afraid I must, my dear," he said calmly and held her firmly as she struggled, feeling a sense of disbelief and betrayal. He'd know this since Draco had brought her here, he'd said. That indicated that Lucius had harboured intentions from the very start-made her care for him, so he could ask her to what-be his son's saviour?

"That is not what I want."

"But it is what I must ask you. He is my son, Hermione, and I have so save him."

"By lying to me. Have you been lying to me all along?" she asked with despair. "I trusted you, and you... You did this to me on purpose. You led me on, so you could ask me to do what you want. You slept with me." Horror filled her mind. "You slept with me so you could manipulate me, didn't you? It wasn't an accident that Draco saw us; you arranged that. Why?" She hoped he would argue, but he didn't. "I mean nothing to you; you used me to get what you want."

"He is my child and I must save him, but I can't reach him, as much as I've tried. Nothing else can matter beyond that. You have to understand it is the only thing I have to focus on. And you mean a great deal to me. You are the one who can save my child. You are the most important person in the world. I would kill for you."

She tried to pull her wrist out of his grip, but he was strong. And here she was, lying in the arms of a man, who wasn't at all what she thought he was; who had used her and cultivated her attraction and love. She had never been so fundamentally used, even by Draco.

Her tears started flowing freely, and he pulled her to him and kissed her on the side of her head. "Hush," he said. "I wouldn't ask if it wasn't necessary. I cannot survive if Draco doesn't. I have watched his descent with increasing despair, trying to find a way to reach him. I know this sounds harsh, but I need you to do this for me. I can't sit by and watch my son die."

"I'm not the person you seek."

He chuckled. "Yes you are. You guide Draco's actions without even knowing you do. Draco can cross the wall and he would do so for you."

"No, he really wouldn't. You completely overestimate what Draco thinks of me. The only thing he wants is to hurt and humiliate me."

"If that is what you think, then you are not as clever as I thought."

Fresh tears flowed down her cheeks-not that he just challenged her intelligence, but that he was still trying to manipulate her. "He is too far gone," she said. "He's horrible. He's not worth saving." She had an urge to catalogue all the awful things that Draco had done and continued to do to her, but then she realised that Lucius knew; he had known all along. She felt sick.

"Yes, he is. You don't know him like I do. He's lost and he needs somewhere to turn. I will suffer endlessly if I lose him and I know you care enough about me to do this for me. You will see my motives for what they are."

Kissing her once again on her temple, he released the grip he had on her wrist, which kept her there. As fast as she could, he strung off the day bed, turning back at him as he sat there, watching her and not moving. He wasn't sorry or apologetic; he was doing what he had to and he would use any means. She'd known that about him; she always had, but she had let herself be deceived, in her desperate need for friendship and love.

"Why should I?" she challenged. He had grossly used her; why should she help him? " You've deceived and manipulated me. You make me care for you through deceit. Why should I help you? You don't deserve it."

"Because he is dying and you can't walk away from that."

"Watch me."

Hermione rushed out of Lucius' room, her tears blurring her vision. It would serve everyone right if she stumbled down the stairs and broke her neck, but fate wasn't merciful to her and she managed to make it down the stairs unscathed. Finding a dark corner in the basement, she collapsed and cried great big wracking sobs. It had all been a ploy-her saviour and friend had turned on her. Not just turned, it had all been a construct to manipulate her. This was what he was and she had always known this. How could she have fallen for it?

Chapter 23

A/N Sorry this took so long. Sometimes my muse leaves for a while.

Chapter 23

Hermione refused to attend Lucius when he called. Mary was a bit surprised with her adamant refusal, but Hermione wouldn't budge. She felt betrayed, but looking back on it, she still couldn't believe how stupid she'd been. It all made sense now; like Lucius Malfoy would have been her friend. He'd used her and he was completely open about it.

She wished she had some way of running away, even if they would chase down and kill her. She didn't want to be here anymore and she couldn't see that changing.

She sat on a stool in the kitchen and refused to move. Even the hurried work the others did around her couldn't get her off; she just couldn't make herself participate. It all just seemed so pointless-the running around, the serving, the worrying. Did any of it actually make a difference, or was it just a way of keeping the delusion going?

"Malfoy's calling," Mary pleaded.

Hermione shook her head, the movements feeling unnatural and awkward. She felt a bit light headed, a little like she was drunk. She wished she was drunk.

"Not him, the other one. Please Hermione." She could hear the desperation in Mary's voice and she wanted to tell Mary that everything would be fine; she shouldn't stress so much. But she also knew that Mary would not be receptive. Mary was stuck in the delusion of this place. Maybe this was Hell, Hermione wondered, but she couldn't bring herself to believe that; it would just be too

depressing. No, this was what she would escaped from. Her friends and all the joy was on the other side waiting for her.

Mary pulled her off the stool and she almost fell to the ground. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I don't know what it is he's done to you, but the best thing is just to get on with the normal things. If you do normal things, it will all seem normal." Hermione laughed, then Mary shoved her up the stairs and closed the basement door leaving Hermione on the other side. She stood there for a moment. She was supposed to raise Draco, like a child-rouse him from his bed like she did most mornings.

Somehow her feet knew where she was going and Draco's room was dark when she got there. There was no one else in his bed, not that she actually cared.

"Wake up, sleepyhead," she said and pulled the curtains. She'd done this so many times before-countless times.

Draco moved to block the light and Hermione could only stare at him.

"What's up with you, mudblood?"

"Nothing."

They had a moment of silence when they were both just staring at each other. Hermione wondered if she should search her feelings, but she couldn't be bothered.

"Are you going to do the fire?"

She stared at him in confusion for a moment, not understanding what he was saying, then realised she'd forgotten the fire and the room was completely frigid. "Oh, sorry."

She lit the fire, felt the heat burning her skin, even at a distance. She was cold, she realised. Maybe she was finally turning cold blooded.

Once done, she went into the bathroom and ran the shower, avoiding the warm water on her skin.

Draco moved to the bathroom, wearing only black pyjama bottoms. They'd done this so many times too, but she wasn't nervous. He stepped in front of her. Ok, maybe a little bit of nervousness still registered. He stepped even close and she had the wall behind her. His breath caressed her cheek. He was warm, like the fire. Her fingers touched his abdomen and his warmth seemed to burn her. She could feel his eyes on her and he leant down slowly, wanting to kiss her. She frowned. It was the softest of kisses, so very deceptive. He had her wrist on the wall behind her and his fingers pressed into her palm.

"What do you want from me?" she asked and he froze.

"I don't want anything from you."

She jerked away, out of his grip. At least he could be honest; she had no tolerance for lies at the moment. He grabbed her by the wrist, but she pulled harder, leaving the bathroom and his room behind. He could have hexed her in the back, but she didn't care.

She wandered downstairs, but the door was still closed and she couldn't bring herself to open it. She knew it wasn't locked, but she couldn't reach out and open it. And then she was upstairs, staring at another door. It led to the roof.

She couldn't bring herself to leave, there seemed nothing in any direction she turned. There was only one way forward and it was up.

There was snow on the roof, it crunched under her feet. She stepped up on the ledge and stared down. It wasn't actually a long distance, but it would release her from this nightmare. Everyone would be there on the other side. She felt nothing actually, not even the cold. It was quite pleasant.

"If you treat your life as so little, you might as well give me what I want," she heard the droll voice behind her. Nothing ever rattled him, not so it showed anyway. "Dying is guaranteed, there is no need to rush toward it."

"There is no reason to say."

"There is every reason and you know it."

"Why should I save him? You've used me."

"So you are doing this out of spite?"

"I don't care enough about you to be spiteful."

"Liar."

Hermione felt anger course through her veins, then she chuckled.
"You accuse me of being a liar."

"I never lied to you."

"Seriously, how deluded can you be? You lied to me everyday, pretended that you cared about me when all you wanted was for me to rescue your beyond fucked up son. Well, guess what, I can't save him. He's done this to himself."

"I take a fair chunk of the responsibility." Hermione closed her eyes. She could hear the guilt in his voice and knew that it would sit heavily in him. She didn't want to feel sympathy for him, but he'd done such a good job on her, she couldn't help it. "Take him away from here. He will recover."

"And then what? I take him across the wall and then what. They'll hunt us everywhere you go."

"You will have to disappear into the muggle world. Until I find a way to fix this."

Hermione turned and looked at him. Even through her own abstraction, she recognised the monumental commitment he was making. He was going to kill Voldemort. Likely he would fail like all the others who had tried, but then he was more cunning. But he needed Draco to be out of the way. She still couldn't quite bring herself to care.

Lucius grabbed her around the waist and pulled her down, moving so quickly, she didn't know what was happening until he had her, tightly held to him. A part of her still wanted to be just there, held by him. She started to cry.

He pulled her to the landing of the staircase to the room and he sealed the door behind him. He didn't let go, just held her. She wanted to fight, but she didn't have any left. "This has to be," he said, not much louder than a whisper. He kissed her on the side of her head and let her go. He turned at the bottom of the stairs and looked back up at her. She couldn't quite make out what was in his eyes. And then she was alone again in the dark staircase and she couldn't move.

She sat in the staircase for hours. It grew darker after a while. She hadn't eaten all day, but she still didn't feel hungry. But she needed to go somewhere and before long she found herself in front of Draco's door, uncertain why. Actually, she knew why-life was on the other side of that door, and death was behind her. And she had to choose.

The door opened, revealing light behind it, enough to make her want to squint. Draco stood in the doorway staring at her. She had nothing to say to him, but he took her wrist and pulled her inside, urging her to the bed where she sat down heavily. He paced around the room, refusing to look at her. "I want..." he started, but stopped as if he couldn't find what to say next. He was having a moment of some kind and it looked painful.

Finally he came to kneel down in front of her. "I want ... you." He still wasn't looking at her. His admission was embarrassing to him. She

recognised that this was difficult for him to admit and to vocalise. Draco the Strong-didn't need anything or anyone. He was actually in exactly the same position as her-she was his light and there was only death behind him. She wanted to laugh at how pathetic it all was, but she knew she would lose him if she did. He would withdraw and she would never get him back. His tentative steps towards life was conditioned upon her accepting him. At least he was trying.

His hand rested on her knee. She felt the warmth of it radiating up her leg and he was waiting. The moments passed, uncertain how long. She needed to choose, knowing she'd been steered here by Lucius, but the situation was true. Everything he'd said was true and this was all about whether she could muster some sympathy for the man in front of her, who had tentatively laid his black little heart bare for her. Could she even bring him back from here? Lucius seemed to think so.

Deciding, she placed her hands on his face and leaned down and kissed him. She felt relief in him before he took over the kiss, making it strong and deep. She felt his weight come down on her as he pushed her back on the bed. Her body heated and she wanted more. The warmth hurt. His hands urging her legs around his hips. If nothing else, they had this. Hermione breath was heavy as Draco moved down along her throat, teasing her skin over her jugular. But there was some kind of urgency between them that forbid any lingering. She needed him inside her, immediately.

Her hands fumbled between them, grappling with his belt and he was tugging her dress up. He pushed into her in one hard movement, filling her and her body yielded. She kissed him and he pulled out and pushed in again, her groan echoing off the walls and he immersed inside her. She couldn't get enough, wishing there were no clothes between them, but they'd been in such a hurry. The tension built so tight inside her she couldn't breathe anymore. Her core started convulsing around him, sending powerful waves out along her body. It wasn't pleasure, it was pure release-from

everything. Her whole body seemed to vibrate with life for a moment and she never wanted to leave this state.

She took his whole weight when he came down on her, but she didn't mind. It felt like it was keeping her anchored and that was what she'd been missing. His breath was heavy in her ear and his lips were playing with the skin on the side of her cheek. It was these odd moments that had saved him, when he was tender. It showed that it was still there inside him somewhere. And just to prove her point, he kissed her eyelids.

Neither of them felt an urge to move, so they stayed there with him inside her, until his moments of tenderness was over, when he drove her hard to another shattering release.

She felt absolutely no urge to speak, feeling it would just be a distraction and too hard. This was simple; it didn't require anything other than plain acceptance.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Hermione woke in the middle of the night feeling her heart race. She looked over at Darco's sleeping form, wondering what she'd just taken on and if she was up for it. He lay sleeping on his stomach, quiet and peaceful, his pale muscles glowing in the moonlight. While she understood the desperation that drove him, there were other things she didn't. Was it even possible for him to move from where he'd been to where he wanted to be? What if this experiment failed spectacularly? Then again, what would happen? He'd kill her and she was right back where she'd started.

It almost hurt to think there was hope. She had to convince him to leave, but judging by how he'd accepted her, she didn't think it would be possible. But then what? They would be hunted. Voldemort would likely take Draco's betrayal badly, and Lucius would be scheming to overthrow him, likely to his own demise. The thought of Lucius dying still twisted her heart even though she felt fundamentally betrayed by him. She could never forgive him, but she supposed she could respect his actions and intent, even if he would squash her under his foot to achieve what he wanted.

Turning over on her side, she watched Draco. She wasn't sure she could love him, or he her, but they were each other's only chance. She wasn't quite heartless enough to dump him on the other side. He would certainly never survive in the muggle world and would have to return to the wizard world, where Voldemort would find him. He would only survive this if she made a place for him.

Closing her eyes, she drifted off to sleep again, worrisome dreams chasing her.

A noise woke her suddenly and she felt Draco react, only to stop half way out of bed with his wand draw. Lucius stood by the door and

closed it behind him. Hermione pulled up the sheets to cover herself, feeling highly self conscious. Drawing her knees up, she tucked a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Get dressed," he said firmly, but quietly. "They're coming for you."

They all stayed as they were for a minute.

"You must breach the wall," Lucius continued. "I will be outside. Dress quickly. Take nothing you can't carry in your pockets."

Lucius stepped outside and Hermione got out of bed to dress, but Draco seemed frozen as if he was considering things.

"We have to cross the wall, you do know that?" she said. She wondered how far through this he'd thought. She could tell that he wasn't sure what to do, wanting time to think. Hermione realised that Draco didn't trust his father, but then she couldn't really blame him- perhaps he'd seen Lucius reach for his agenda too many times. Sighing she wondered what kind of society he came from where he couldn't trust his own family. "We have to go-or they'll take me away." In the back of her mind, she knew she'd said it to manipulate him into deciding, into action. She seemed to be the one thing he wanted.

He stared at her for a moment and she stopped half-way through dressing. "Why are you doing this?"

"Escaping a madman trying to kill us? Do you really have to ask?"

"Is that what this is? An escape route?" It was a perfectly inopportune time to have this discussion, but she guessed she understood his reticence.

"Yes, no. I don't know. What do you want me to say? We go, we live; we stay, we die."

"Is that all?"

"What do you want? A declaration of undying love?"

He looked confused, seemingly as uncertain in taking a step into an unknown future, just like she was. "And what do we do if we go?"

Hermione shrugged. "I think we have to leave Britain. Australia maybe? I have my parents stashed there. Spain? Wherever you want to go." He frowned. She could tell that he was also asking whether she would be dumping him on the other side of the wall. "I can't promise anything other than that I will try. And neither can you." Standing back and looking at them abstractly, there was a vast amount of baggage between them. "What do you want from me?"

As expected, he withdrew. Draco did not talk about his feelings; he had enough trouble just feeling them, she guessed, and he had some issues to deal with. He started to dress and Hermione exhaled the breath she'd been holding. He pulled on his hunting robes. She hated those robes; they represented the worst part of him.

Stepping out Lucius was waiting like a big and stoic dark shadow in the hall. They walked silently outside, through the snow and down to a row of trees.

"Magic will be traced from here. You must make it to the wall without it, and I mean none at all. If Voldemort suspects you are heading south, he will augment the wall. You only have one chance at this and you have to discard your wand after you cross. Voldemort will be able to trace it."

"How are we going to travel 60 miles without magic?" Draco challenged.

"Come," Lucius said and started to walk through the woods. They walked for a while then reached a deserted muggle village. Walking through the village, where people had obviously left in a hurry, they continued to a garage. The lock had been broken and Lucius lifted it up to reveal an old car, something from the 50s and beautifully restored. This would have been someone's pride and joy and it

would have broken their hearts to leave it. Likely that person had no memory of it now.

"It's like a travelling beacon," Draco said. Hermione looked over the cherry red car with white trim.

"There are others, less festive," Lucius said.

"We'll take this one," Hermione stated. Draco turned to look at her disbelievingly. "It's expensive and it will net us money later. We're going to need money."

"You cannot go to Gringotts," Lucius stressed.

"Fine. You do know how to drive it?" Draco asked.

"Of course I do," Hermione said and opened the large, heavy door. There were no keys so she had to hotwire it-a skill Harry insisted they all learn. It purred to life and Hermione drove it out of the garage. "We need blankets and water."

"I'll see what I can find in there," Draco said and entered the door in the garage that led to the house, leaving Hermione with Lucius.

They stood in silence for a moment.

"Draco doesn't trust you," she finally said. Hermione knew he did what he wanted, but she believed that Lucius was trying to save his son. She was a tool he used to do it. The tool that served to tempt Draco crack his shell and away from here. It was still odd to think that Draco would be tempted to desert his station and life for her; she still couldn't get use to it, but Lucius had known, even from the start.

"Did you sleep with me just to make Draco jealous?" she asked, unburdening a question that had been on her mind since.

"Yes," he said. The answer actually hurt and she closed her eyes for a moment.

"Could there never have been anything between us?"

"Hermione," he warned softly. Hermione hated it when he spoke to her softly; it was such a deception. "Do not ask me questions I cannot afford to answer, or to think about."

"Everything is about the mission," she said.

"It has to be." She looked up into his grey eyes and he returned her stare for a moment, before nodding her understanding. She knew he wasn't going to give her any more. "You must be patient with him," Lucius finally said.

"You know, the chances are very low that one of us will not strangle the other."

A fleeting smile crossed Lucius features. "And that is the thing that has gotten us here."

Hermione sobered, knowing that the chances were very low that she would ever see Lucius again. His attempt to kill Voldemort would likely end in failure. He would most likely die and it would be a messy and painful death, but she acknowledged his courage and the fact that he would take on Voldemort as an enemy. Voldemort would most likely outlive them all.

Draco returned with a bag, which he threw in the backseat.

"Go now," Lucius said and turned. He walked away without looking back.

After watching his retreating back for a second, Hermione got in the car and put it in gear, pulling out slowly and driving down the deserted and disintegrating street that nature was slowly starting to reclaim

The drive was uneventful and luckily snow hid their progress down to the wall. When they reached it, Hermione drove at it with speed

while Draco formed the portal for them with his wand. It felt clinging and gelatinous as they drove through. It was an awful feeling like Voldemort was clinging to them, unwilling to let go.

Hermione had to stop when they pulled out the other side, just to catch her breath and let her heart slow. Looking over at Draco, she could tell that he felt the same way.

"We don't have long. Voldemort would have felt the breach," Draco said and threw his wand out the window. He looked after it with worry, but Hermione stepped on the gas and they sped south.

The darkness and chill alleviated as soon as they moved away from the wall. The sun was warmer and the sky brighter. It wasn't quite summer, but it wasn't winter either. Hermione wasn't even sure what year it was let alone season.

Hermione continued driving, turning to look at Draco as he sat back, watching her with his head towards her on the headrest. He looked tired and exhausted. Reaching up, he traced her cheek with his finger. "What do we do now?"

"We keep going," she said.

His finger kept going lower, down her neck and along her breast. She felt her nipple contract at the touch. "You could pull over and fuck me senseless."

"Not yet," she said as she pulled onto the M6. "I want some more miles behind us before we stop." Actually, she was going to do just that. She felt like she needed to release all the tension that had stolen into every part of her body and mind, and it would take quite a bit of exorcism to release the years worth of built up tension. She did want him; the urge for him sitting deep inside her, making her fingers itch to touch him, mold his body to hers, maybe even punish him. If nothing else, they had that.

Resting her head on her fingertips, she worried about the future as Draco fell asleep, finally relieved of the burden of his life in Voldemort's world. Leaving the pressing problems of the wizard world behind, a whole new set opened up. They were perhaps not as pressing, but there was so much uncertainty between them. She didn't know if Draco could be rehabilitated; he was starting from such an extreme state and she didn't know if the promise of him could be recaptured. Only time would tell.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25

Hermione found Draco sitting outside on the small wall that marked the edge of the patio. The sun was low and it hadn't risen enough to provide any real heat.

Sitting down next to him, he opened the quilt he had wrapped around him and let her in. His hair was growing longer, framing his face.

"You alright?"

"I just wish I had some news," he said like he had so many times before.

"You know we can't. If we go back, we'll just be a target."

"I know," he said after a while and held her more tightly.

Hermione placed her head on his neck, drawing in his scent. She wanted to go back to bed.

"What have you got planned today?" he asked.

"I'll go to the market. Read a bit. Wait for you."

"Hmm," he said teasingly. His hand travelled down her back to her backside. "You are distracting me; you're terrible for that." Hermione smiled. "I have to go. You ready?"

She nodded, not really wanting him to go. Standing up, he pulled her to him and placed his arms around her. "I will bring you back the biggest one in the ocean." He kissed her while walking her backwards, toward the steps leading up to the driveway where their scooter was.

After Draco started it, Hermione swung her leg over the back and settled in against his back, hugging him closely as he drove down the barren hills. The sun was starting to warm and Hermione closed her eyes as the warm breeze enveloped them.

It didn't take them long to reach the port where Draco kissed her before taking off and hopping on one of the fishing boats. The greek men welcomed him, accepting him with a slap on his back. It had taken quite a while for the people on this island to accept them, but over time as they gained enough Greek to be functional, the people here started to open to them. Their neighbour had given Draco a spot on the fishing boat after his son went off to Athens for University.

They both knew that Draco was struggling without an occupation and fishing was as good as any. He seemed to enjoy it and it gave his life purpose and structure. Hermione still missed him, but he was more settled now than he had been when he was home causing mischief out of boredom. Spending all day with the local men had made Draco's greek much better than hers and he really enjoyed that advantage.

Hermione smiled as she watched them pull away from the dock. They had picked Tilos at random because it was small and remote, and it had finally started to feel like home-for now.

They've had no contact with the wizarding world for six months and it had taken quite a bit of adjustment. Draco had been wound so tight, it had taken months for him to just relax, going through phases of being sullen and withdrawn. There had been points during their travel across Europe when she'd felt like murdering him. He was now finally starting to open up and he was becoming more like he had been, mischievous, charming and challenging. Slowly he was reverting to the person he'd been at school and she had to admit it: she'd developed a massive crush on Draco Malfoy.

As he returned to the personality he had been before, so was she-starting to feel more like the girl who'd had friends and a bright

future. They spoke a great deal about school and the people they knew, and slowly she could start thinking of her friends in those terms instead of their more unpleasant fates after. They never spoke of the things that Draco had done, but sometimes he would withdraw and she could see his thoughts turning to the darker years. She hated it and tried to distract him.

After buying some groceries at the market, she returned home and read a few of the second hand books she'd bought down in the village-felt behinds from the tourists that came in summer. She would prepare dinner ingredients later and wait for Draco to come home. They would spend the evening in bed.

Watching the clock constantly, she waited. Tilos was perfect for them. They were left alone unless they sought others out. They went out to dinner occasionally and a few times they had traveled to Istanbul, but it was a risk interacting with the magical community there.

Standing at the dock, Hermione watched as the boat came in. She sighed her relief at the sight, always worried of something happening out there on the ocean. She smile broadly as he jumped out, spoke briefly to the men and then strode towards her, carrying a fish in a plastic bag.

"Hey," she said when he was close enough.

"Hey, yourself."

"Brought me something?"

"Dinner. Miss me?"

She was almost embarrassed to admit as much, but he had figured that out and that grin that had always annoyed her so much during school had started to return, and unfortunately made her weak at the knees these days. He was breaking through every one of her defences and he was aware of the fact.

Her thoughts out on occasion turn to Lucius and she prayed that he was successful in his endeavours. She would never truly be able to forgive him, perhaps for the fact that he would never expect her to. When it came down to it, his heart was just a little too hard for her.

Wrapping her arms around Draco, he drove them up the hills again, back to their secluded white cottage. This would be their house for the near future; they had no idea how long. They might still go to Australia one day, but for now, they were fine here. One day they would go back to Britain, maybe even to fight, but for now they would let Lucius' plans unfold. Six months ago, Hermione's affection for the wizard world was so low, she hadn't really cared about the fate of the world she'd lived in since eleven, but their discussions of their schools days was starting to instigate her belief in the magic and potential in the magical world.

The End.