

The Shattered Dragon

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The Shattered Dragon

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Summary

After Voldemort wins, the wizarding world realizes he's not quite the best choice for a leader and the community falls into chaos...economy crumbling, crime and violence. Hermione Granger is caught embezzling funds from Lucius Malfoy's accounts and thrown in jail. Draco comes to offer her a chance at freedom if she agrees to come work for him...at The Shattered Dragon...a brothel outside London.

WINNER! Granger Enchanted Survivors Awards 2019 - Stone by Stone Award (Best Relationship Development)

Thank you so much for your support, your votes, your nominations! Love you!

The Proposal

It was an old stone manor far on the outskirts of London, set on rolling hills with century old trees and a stream running through the front gardens like a moat. The windows were old, warped and bubbled glass, some of them framed in elaborate stained glass designs, the front door painted a deep forest green with a brass knocker in the shape of a crossbow. The lawns were impeccable, flowers blooming bright and dense, even a little herd of deer strolling the grounds...just for ambience.

No one would ever believe it was a brothel.

Hermione stepped out of the gatehouse along with her escort and they began the long walk up the winding cobblestone entrance. It was cold, nearly November and the wind whipped her hair and cut through the thin fabric of her coat.

“Why didn’t we floo right to the main house?” She asked, holding her single bag tight to her side.

“Not allowed. Trust me,” Theo said, striding on a bit ahead of her. “Once you’re inside for a while, you’ll appreciate the fresh air.”

Hermione frowned, walking the rest of the way in silence.

Theo rapped on the heavy front door with a fast little six knock pattern and they waited, the mottled glass on either side of the door too distorted to show her anything inside. Her teeth chattered and her breath felt tight in her lungs but it had nothing to do with the cold. Bolted to the wall beside them was an unobtrusive gold plaque with finely engraved letters reading:

The Shattered Dragon

Est. 2005

D. Malfoy - Owner

After a moment the door opened and there he stood, a smug beautiful grin on his face, his platinum hair smooth and slick, a bit of fringe sweeping down over his left eye. The sleeves of his slate grey shirt were rolled to expose his forearms, his hands tucked deep in the pockets of his black trousers; very much the business man except that she noticed he was barefoot on the black marble floor.

“Well if it isn’t Robin Hood! Theo,” he said, still not moving or holding out a hand to welcome them in. His eyes slid to Theo for a brief second along with a subtle nod and Hermione felt the bag being pulled off her shoulder and taken somewhere in the house. “Hermione.”

“Draco,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

Draco winced dramatically and then offered a kind, sympathetic smile.

“Oh sorry love, I should have told you. While you’re here, you’ll call me Mr. Malfoy. So sorry, but we have rules.”

She ground her teeth together, knowing he was waiting for her to argue, to swear, to refuse, but instead she simply nodded.

“Of course Mr. Malfoy.”

“Good girl,” he said, reaching out to smooth a wrinkle from the panel of her coat and pick a small twig from her hair, frowning at it before flicking it out into the yard. “Come on in then. We’ll show you the ropes...” he laughed and offered her a wink. “So to speak.”

Voldemort had won. The war was short and devastating, with losses in the tens of thousands for both sides. And so in the end the purebloods, the faithful who stepped in line behind Voldemort came into power. But Voldemort was nothing if not a dictator and as it happened, a poor one, with little ability to lead an entire wizarding population when all he cared about was amassing more power for himself. Before long everyone suffered. Hogwarts crumbled with no one wanting their children attending. Little tourist towns like Hogsmeade and business centres like Diagon Alley decayed to almost nothing. Wizarding families moved elsewhere in Europe, the reputation of Wizard England plummeted. But he dug in his heels and ran roughshod over the country, amassing wealth and property and slaves for himself, not caring a moment for anyone else...not even the pureblood families, the death eater families that had sworn their allegiance. Nothing mattered to anyone anymore except money and survival.

And it all fell apart.

For everyone.

The cell was small and smelled of urine and musty bricks. Across from her was a cell no bigger than hers, but holding four people: two parents and two children. His is what it had come to. They were imprisoning families. She tugged at her shapeless grey dress, trying to stay warm, rattling the chains around her wrists, little flakes of rust and dirt sticking to her forearms.

Slow, ambling footsteps crunched over the stones in the hallway outside her little hovel and she steeled herself, waiting for news of her incarceration, how long, how awful, whether she had any chance of release, although stealing from one of the last powerful wizarding families in England didn't bode well for her, especially given her history.

"Good morning Granger, you're looking spectacular."

Draco stood outside of her cell with his arms crossed over his chest, smiling a smug little smile of victory that she knew only too well. He seemed out of place with his crisply pressed trousers and black button down shirt. He wore a thick silver watch around his wrist that would have paid for the family across the hall to live comfortably for a year and a thin silver chain around his neck with a small, flat pendant.

"Fuck off Malfoy," Hermione said, closing her eyes, resting her head against the stone wall. She hadn't been able to sleep in days. The smells, the sounds, the cold, the fear; she was exhausted and hungry and this was the last thing she wanted to deal with.

"Did you know that crimes against pureblood families are punished to the fullest extent? Particularly when committed by a muggleborn."

She opened one eye, honestly shocked that he'd not called her a mudblood or one of the other artful slurs that had been developed over the last few years.

"If you're here to gloat, please do it quietly. I'm tired."

He laughed genuinely then and she looked at him, really looked at him. She hadn't seen him in at least two years, maybe longer. He looked healthier than her, certainly, but still a bit drawn, dark circles around his eyes. He didn't look like a millionaire playboy, that was for sure. She knew he was a bit of an outsider in wizarding society...but it was to be expected in his line of work.

"I'm here to break you out, or offer you a chance to get out. Being a handsome citizen in good standing I've spoken to the authorities and the Pureblood Council and they've agreed to let you go."

"What?" She stood, walking towards the bars that separated them. Nothing he was saying made any sense.

He could see her fully now, her stick thin frame and features sharpened by hunger, the shapeless prison dress hanging off of sharp shoulders. Her eyes were not the fiery chestnut

color he remembered, just dark, dull pebbles, her cracked lips twisting and worrying, her teeth chewing at the bottom one.

“Don’t get too excited darling. You know I’d never let you walk free just out of the goodness of my heart. You’re a dangerous criminal after all,” he said, examining a dial on his watch, then his fingernails, his face a mask of complete boredom. “But you can leave this prison and work off your debt to society elsewhere.”

“What?” She asked again, still confused.

He smiled then, a wide wicked grin that made her blood run cold. He curled his long, pale fingers around the iron bars, leaning in close.

“All you have to do, darling, is come work for me.”

She laughed out loud, flipped him off and headed back to her tiny cot, curling her knees up to her chest.

“Suit yourself Granger but I’ll have you know that my father doesn’t take kindly to embezzlement and has requested you receive the maximum sentence.”

“But that money barely made a dent in his operations...in his holdings. The maximum is...”

“Life. What are you now, twenty seven? Eight? That’s a long time to live in this pisshole. I’m offering you a very easy out.”

“At a brothel.”

“A gentlemen’s club,” he countered. “Let me be clear, it makes no difference to me, but I do need an answer. It’s a one-time offer because I’m feeling magnanimous. Got a lovely blow job this morning and I want to return that positive energy into the world. Besides,” he said, leaning in close to her again. “It would feel so good to see you reduced to living as a pureblood slag.”

She didn’t bother to respond; confident he was baiting her into a tantrum she didn’t have the energy for. Besides, as he spoke she could feel her throat tightening, nose stinging. She was on the verge of tears and didn’t want him to see.

“Anyway, I have some business in The Alley. I’ll come back in a few days and see what you think, right? Have a lovely day.”

Before she could fling any sort of answer he’d wandered away and as if on cue, the baby in the cell across from her began to cry.

"You even paying attention, mate?" Blaise asked, leaning forward across the pub table. "You're not even here."

"I'm here. You're trying to get out of paying your tab at The Dragon and I'm blocking out all of your excuses."

"Jesus Draco, we're old friends! It's not like I stole property or time or...it was just a few nights with Felicia. She doesn't even get that many visitors so what's the difference? She would have just been laying there anyway..."

"The difference, Zabini," Draco said, finally snapping back to full attention. "Is that I'm trying to run a successful business in this crumbling trash heap of an economy and you're abusing your relationship with me to get your dick wet. If you like her so much, buy out her contract and take her home. But as of right now you owe me 750 galleons. And you can't come back to the club until you pay it."

He threw a galleon on the table to pay for the two pints they'd had and made his way to the door.

Seeing Hermione at the holding cells in London had taken him aback. No one looked good these days...everyone so tight and angry, riled up, on edge. Life was just one step above base survival for so many people, but she had just looked broken. Even the insults she threw at him came on a breathy, graveled voice, weak with hunger and exhaustion. She'd reduced herself to swearing at him, flipping him off with the ol' two fingered salute, something he'd expect of Weasley or Nott, but not the brilliant Hermione Granger.

Then again, she was a criminal, a thief. The arresting officer told him she'd skimmed nearly a hundred thousand galleons out of the Malfoy accounts in only a month. If she'd not been caught she could have drained him inside of a year, no question. Not that it mattered to Draco. He hadn't seen Lucius or Narcissa in nearly three years. In fact he had no idea whether Lucius had asked for the maximum sentence in Hermione's case. For all Draco knew his father had asked for leniency, show some mercy to the mudblood.

But Hermione didn't need to know that. Hermione just needed to be pulled off of her high horse, to stop trying to be the savior of the wizarding world. Hermione needed to learn that sometimes you had to do the worst kinds of things to survive, and that sometimes the sheep is just wearing wolves' clothing. If he were pressured for an answer as to why he was asking Hermione to come join his stable of whores, he just wasn't sure. It had just been an idea that came to him when he'd heard she was in jail. It started as a passing thought and became an obsession. He needed her in his brothel for some reason, some reason that absolutely had nothing to do with who she was or how he felt.

He just needed her to give up.

Hermione walked behind him through the wide, echoing corridors of the mansion, marveling at the beautiful artwork, classical Grecian erotic paintings and Asian sculpture, some, she was sure, dated back to ancient India. Every door they passed was closed, the number either glowing red or silver. Somewhere down the hallway music was playing, but otherwise the only sound was their heavy footsteps, Hermione trying to keep up with Draco's, long purposeful strides.

"Where's my bag?" She asked.

"Safely stowed. Is there something in particular you needed from it?" He asked, leading her up a wide, winding staircase.

"My wand."

He stopped then and looked over his shoulder, shaking his head, giving her an amused but knowing glance.

"Everything you need will be provided as a condition of your employment." They made their way to a wing off the second floor landing with four more doors, these without numbers, only a brass plaque with a unique arrangement of seven green gems, each door highlighting a different gem by replacing it with what looked like a diamond. Something about the layout of the gems was familiar to her but she couldn't put her finger on why. "Clothes, food, medications and medical care if necessary, alcohol, party drugs, contraceptive potions... toys..."

"Stop,"

He laughed and opened a door, revealing a modest but comfortable bedroom. It was decorated in soothing, seaside colors: beige and blue and pale green. The bed was thick with pillows and white linens, the sight of which reminded her of her exhaustion.

"I'll leave you to get settled in. And looky here Granger...I even gave you books."

The far wall was indeed lined with built in bookshelves, mostly empty but for two rows nearest to the bed containing thick, leather bound volumes...at least thirty. She stood, speechless, looking at her reflection in the vanity mirror. Draco stayed in the doorway, his hand on the knob. He hadn't walked into the room.

"I'll call you up later and we can go through some...particulars," he said. "And Granger...you can take a breath. You won't be working tonight."

He closed the door to her newest prison cell and she sunk down onto the bed, letting out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She'd learned long ago to never let down her guard...to never relax in the presence of the enemy, but her plan to stay awake was rapidly being thwarted by her body's exhaustion.

After her release from the holding cells in London, Draco had allowed her three days at home to *get her affairs in order*.

“What, are you going to kill me, Malfoy?” she’d asked.

“So dramatic my little sparrow. No, but you won’t be returning to this life any time soon,” he’d answered, wrinkling up his nose at the tiny flat she’d shared with Hannah Abbott for three years.

Even in her own bed she hadn’t been able to sleep, her mind racing with fear, curiosity, shame, a list of questions that she knew he’d never answer. Why in the world would he offer this to her? More importantly, why did she accept? She knew of a couple of classmates who had ultimately turned to various kinds of sex work in order to stay alive, and she certainly didn’t judge them for it. But Hermione had never been a...sex kitten, for lack of a better term. Draco couldn’t have heard rumors of her prowess, and as a muggleborn she couldn’t possibly be in demand for his particular clientele. There was no way to know if she’d ever get the answers as to why Draco had done what he did, but even more puzzling was her own motivation.

She’d known as soon as he left her cell that day that she was going to say yes. She knew deep down that despite the taboo nature of it all, sex was just another human pastime, a comfort in a dying time, a way to feel powerful in a world that nearly enslaved you.

“It doesn’t have to be about eternal devotion, Mione,” Ron had told her when they were out there in the wilderness, snuggled close for warmth. “It can just feel good.”

She couldn’t quite remember the last time she felt good.

The Black Doors

She was roused from her sleep by a knock on the door.

“H-Hermione? Mr. Malfoy wants to see you now.”

The girl at the door was young, no more than twenty, her dark hair pulled into a messy topknot. She wore black satin pants and a matching robe, far more demure than Hermione had expected to see.

“What’s your name?” Hermione asked, following her through the corridors to Draco’s office.

“Sarah. Sarah Bonefield,” she answered with a bright smile. “Halfblood from Surrey.” They reached a large pair of black lacquer doors and Sarah held her arm out. “Here you go, love. By the way, my room is just across from yours, if you ever need anything or you can’t sleep...”

“How about an escape plan?” Hermione said with a laugh.

Sarah’s brow furrowed, her head tilted to the side, pondering such a question. Finally she shook her head.

“What is there to escape to?”

Beyond the imposing doors was Draco’s private suite; spacious with dark, upholstered walls and heavy ebony furniture. Even with its tall, ceilings with ornate crown moulding it felt like a cave, oppressive, dense. She stood in the front room: something of a study with wall to wall book cases, fireplace, a comfortable looking black leather sofa and overstuffed chairs, while he finished writing something with a long raven quill, signing his name with a dramatic flourish and folding the parchment in quarters.

“Is your room to your liking?” He asked, making his way to the small wet bar across the room. Again, he was barefoot and she found it strangely grounding for someone like him.

Hermione caught a glimpse of the bedroom through the doorway beside his desk, the sheets a white jumbled mess piled on an ebony four poster. He poured two firewhiskeys into crystal glasses and handed her one.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked, taking the drink and setting it on the table.

He shrugged, sitting in one of the chairs, propping his feet up on the antique coffeetable. Still not answering, he pulled out a silver cigarette case and lit a smoke, exhaling slowly over her head.

“You’re so good at everything else, I figured you’d make a good prostitute.”

“Bullshit.”

“Well how about we just pretend that’s the reason then since you’ll always be suspicious of any explanation I have to offer. Maybe I just didn’t want to see a schoolmate rot in prison thanks to my father’s greed.”

“A schoolmate you hated,” she said.

He laughed then, sipping his drink. “Whatever you say, little sparrow.”

After a few moments of quiet he crushed out the cigarette and smiled.

“Now then...on to your...orientation.”

“My what?”

“You’ll see the healer tomorrow. Theo said you vomited after apparating from the jail. Its not even twenty kilometers from here. I suspect you’re malnourished, dehydrated, iron deficient. Do you even menstruate anymore?”

Hermione picked up her firewhiskey and downed it in one gulp, grimacing at the burn sliding down her throat.

“I assume you’re not a virgin,” he continued.

“Not that it’s any of your business.”

“Actually love, it’s almost exactly my business. A virgin in the stable would make me a small fortune. Keep up, won’t you? As I’m sure you’ve gathered, this isn’t some pox riddled glory hole establishment. I cater to a distinct clientele.”

“Purebloods.”

“The rich,” he countered instantly. “I don’t give a fuck about blood status.”

Hermione visibly flinched. Perhaps his outsider status had less to do with the brothel than she originally thought. He held his hand up and crooked two fingers at her, indicating she should come closer.

“Now that you’re here, you don’t leave the house, except for the courtyard garden out back. Give me your right hand.”

She hesitated and he rolled his eyes, sighing in frustration. His grip was strong around her wrist as he held her hand out and touched his wand to her forearm. With a few muttered words under his breath a cluster of eight four pointed stars appeared on her arm in black, an elaborate swirling line connecting them all.

“Oh goody,” Hermione said. “Now we’re twins.”

He looked up at her, his lip curled in a sneer. “Difference is, sparrow, my ink doesn’t lock me in the house.” Tucking his wand back into his pocket, he sat back down with his drink.

“If you aren’t requested for service on a particular evening, you’re free to wander the house, the library, kitchens, conservatory out back. You also have time to yourself during the day when the brothel isn’t open for business, although you need to stay out of the club rooms, the bar, the gaming tables unless you feel like fending off drunk, randy wizards trying to get something for free. And if I find you’re giving it away for free, I’ll be sure to make you sorry for it.”

“And if I am called for service?” She asked, crossing her arms defiantly, ignoring his threat.

“Then you go to the assigned room, tuck that hair back and suck cock like a good little girl.”

Although deep down she’d known the answer, part of her, a tiny, hidden part had prayed that it was all a trick, a joke to throw her off guard and Malfoy really only wanted her for her embezzeling skills, or he needed help running the business. A tiny part of her refused to believe that she’d willingly agreed to selling her body and an even smaller part never thought that Malfoy would ever turn her out, that he couldn’t possibly hate her that much.

She barked out a laugh, sitting back on the sofa.

“Not a fucking chance Drac— “

“Imperio.”

The wandless spell caught her unaware so she made no attempt to deflect it and was immediately overtaken by a warm, cottony feeling; a calm, comforting submission.

“Strip for me little sparrow.”

She nodded and stood from the sofa undoing the button of her jeans with shaking fingers. A little piece of her was saddened by the fact that he was barely watching her, instead getting up to refill his drink and light another cigarette. It wasn’t until she was entirely nude that he sat back and looked her over, frowning, tilting his head to the side, his eyes squinted from the smoke.

“Good girl. Come kneel in front of me, between my legs.”

She did as he asked, sitting back on her heels, running her hands up over his thighs. He hissed through clenched teeth, resting his head on the back of the chair as her hands moved to the button of his trousers. He was hard. She’d made him hard without even touching him. His cock twitched beneath her palm.

“Finite,” he said, looking down into her eyes.

She blinked, shook her head and jumped away from him, looking for the clothes he’d already vanished.

“See how easy that was?”

“Bastard.”

“Relax. You didn’t do anything but strip. I’ve seen tits before, although yours *are* fairly amazing.”

She blushed, hugging her arms around herself as if it did anything to hide her nakedness, the flush that spread to her neck and chest.

“The point is, Hermione, I know you don’t want the Imperio. I know you don’t want to wander the halls high on Lotus Powder like some of these girls, numb to everything that happens, but if you don’t fulfill the conditions of our agreement, I’ll do it. I don’t have time to fight with you about your pride. My business is at stake. And you know it’s only sex. It just another job. A pastime, a hobby. It’s sex in a safe, monitored environment with clean, respectful clientele. It’s far better than suffering a crucio at the hands of Miles Bletchley every Tuesday.”

She said nothing, but knew he was right. She’d told Hannah for years that in times of survival, morality went out the window. There was no room to be on a high horse when you could barely scrounge up the money for rent and food.

“You should know I had no intention of making you suck me off. I asked you to strip so I could look you over. Making you kneel was just to prove a point. Are those bruises from your arrest?” He asked, pointing to the dark, purpled blooms on her biceps.

She nodded.

“How often did you eat?”

“I didn’t have much of an appetite.”

“Or survival instinct,” he sneered.

“I’m here aren’t I,” she snapped.

He ignored her, standing up and summoning a white satin robe from the armoire across the room. She snatched it from his hand and put it on, wrapping the belt tight around her waist.

“I won’t put up with you not eating,” he said, standing in front of her. “If there’s something particular you want to eat, that you have a taste for, ask for it. This isn’t prison. Like I said, you’ll see the healer tomorrow and she’ll find out how healthy you are. If she thinks you have the strength for it, I’ll tell the club members you’ve joined and are available. Once I get a request for you, one of the other girls, Sarah or Leanna or whoever will help you out with where to go. OK?”

She nodded. She wasn’t sure where the nausea she felt originated from, whether it was fear or hunger or exhaustion, but she didn’t feel like talking anymore; especially with him.

“You can go,” he said, turning away from her. “Oh, and when you’re in the bath tomorrow, trim up down there, will you? No one likes to fight through a jungle to find the pearl.”

Draco stayed awake for a long time after Hermione left, drinking half a bottle of firewhiskey, staring into the fireplace, thinking about how he could see her spine rippling down her back, the little bumps of her hipbones stretching her skin. It was true what he said; he wouldn't put up with her not eating. He wouldn't be responsible for her starving to death under his care.

Protection.

It wasn't care.

But in addition to her health he sat and thought about her kneeling between his legs, the way her eyes glittered, heavily lidded, the little quirk of her lips. He thought about her fingers brushing over his cock, which had stiffened instantly at her touch. She'd been stroking his thighs, her body undulating like a snake, moving as if she wanted to seduce him...moving as if she wanted him. Moony (or Crouch, actually) had told them fourth year that there was a theory amongst higher thinking wizards that one couldn't perform things under the Imperio that they didn't really truly want to do. It had to be a part of their deepest character. They had to have a kernel of desire in their soul in order to carry out the demands.

And besides, all he'd told her to do was kneel.

"Mr. Malfoy?" There was a knock at his door.

"Come in."

One of the other girls stood there in her midnight blue satin pajamas, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, the silver Pleiades pendant hanging around her neck, an indication that she'd been there for a year.

"What can I do for you Wren?" Each of his girls had a name...a given name separate from their birth name that they used when they were working. It was a good way to separate the two identities.

"I haven't been requested for this evening," she said, walking further into the room, loosening the belt on her tunic top. "I was wondering if you were in need of any company?"

Draco downed the rest of his drink and stood up from the sofa. Taking Wren's shoulders in his hands, he pulled her forward and kissed her forehead. Her family was murdered by a gang of pureblood supremacists only two years ago and he'd found out through the grapevine that she had nowhere to go, her house burned to the ground in the old Death Eater custom. She was a Hogwarts graduate, three years behind him. He could remember what she looked like in the Great Hall her first year, so tiny and nervous, waiting to be sorted. Ravenclaw. Not that

houses mattered anymore, or even existed. Nevertheless, he felt a sense of obligation to take her in off the streets where he'd found her selling her body for sickles. It nauseated him.

"Go to sleep. Take a hot bath. Go see if Lark will do you hair for you or something. Some sort of girl thing. Treat yourself."

She smiled, but it was weak and forced. She was looking down at the floor and he could see she looked defeated. She wasn't the first to try and make her way into his bed. It just didn't feel right.

"I'm surprised Mr Z hasn't come to see me lately," she said, her mouth turned down at the corners.

"It's not due to your performance love. It's his funding. Don't worry. He'll be back."

"You don't want me, Mr. Z hasn't come back...the other girls work every night almost. I'm just worried that no one...I don't feel...like I'm worth anything."

He tipped her chin up and she gasped at the stern, icy color of his eyes, the straight line of his mouth as he stared down at her.

"Never again. Never a-fucking-gain will I hear you say those words." He let go of her chin and walked towards his bedroom, rolling his neck as he went. He'd never been good at warm fuzzies or words of affirmation, but he knew what it was to feel worthless and he wouldn't have it in his house. Worthlessness lead to desperation and desperation lead to tragedy. Every time. "Go back to your room Wren. Have a drink. Get some sleep. I promise you'll feel better in the morning."

She nodded, pulling her tunic closed and heading for the black double doors, letting them click shut behind her.

Draco Malfoy always slept alone.

The Pleiades

Chapter Notes

This chapter and chapter 4 will contain scenes of dubious/coerced sexual content

Hermione was surprised at how quickly and deeply she fell asleep in her new surroundings. She didn't have any wine (although the girl, Sarah, had offered it) or sleeping potions, but there was something about sinking into the downy softness of the bed, of hearing Draco say "you can breathe, you won't be working tonight," that took a weight off of her shoulders, a weight she didn't know she'd been carrying, allowing her muscles to relax, her shoulders to drop and before long her eyelids were too heavy to hold open any longer and she sunk into unconsciousness, stroking her fingertips over the fresh black brand on her arm.

It was late morning when she was stirred by a knock.

"Ms. Granger? It's me, Healer Moonstone. May I come in?"

Hermione pulled on the white robe that Draco had given her the night before and shuffled to the door, stretching her neck from side to side. Her muscles were stiff with sleep, her bones aching. Whatever the healer would have to say, she knew it wouldn't be good.

"So thin," Healer Moonstone said, walking around, casting warm, tingling diagnostic spells on her heart, stomach, lungs. "We'll get a good fry up in you and you'll feel like a new woman."

She was an older woman, not quite old enough to be Hermione's mother, but there were crinkles at the corners of her eyes and a few threads of silver running through her auburn hair. All of her tests were done silently and she gave no information as to what she was looking for or what she found...but when she cast a throbbing, uncomfortably hot spell between Hermione's legs, she knew it was contraceptive in nature.

"Why don't the men need to be responsible for contraception?" Hermione asked, as Moonstone wrote things in a little black leather book.

"They're submitted to testing as well, don't worry. No one walks through the front door until they've been vetted by Mr. Malfoy, and they're all tested for diseases and infections. It takes quite a bit of rigamarole to become a member of the The Dragon. It's just that the contraception charms are easier for women, with fewer negative side effects. But I'm sure you know that," she added, giving her a knowing smile.

"It doesn't bother you, working for a whorehouse?" Hermione asked, once she was told she could put her robe back on.

“Should it, dear?” She asked, making checkmarks and furrowing her brow as she reviewed her notes. “These girls are very well taken care of and are far better off here than they were on the streets. It’s a different world out there, love. We all have to do what we can to survive. For example, you have to eat. And I’ll be sending supplement potions to your room daily: iron, calcium, vitamin B. Breakfast is being served downstairs right now until about...ten am I believe. If you’d like I can walk you down.”

“No thank you, I don’t really feel like...”

“Or we could force you,” Moonstone said, cutting her off. “And I know you don’t want that.”

A handful of girls sat at a long table in a casually decorated dining room on the first floor. On the sideboard were carafes of coffee and hot water for tea, fresh fruit, sausages and waffles, yogurt, granola...it was as if she were staying at a hotel.

“Hermione! Come over and say hello,” Sarah called out, waving her hand. “Here are the other girls. This is Wren and Finch, did you get your name yet?”

Hermione stared blankly. She didn’t know the answer. Draco had called her little sparrow when she was in his office, but he’d also called her Hermione. She wasn’t sure who she was at the moment.

“I...I don’t think so. Or at least, he hasn’t told me,” she said, picking at a bunch of grapes. Her stomach cramped up at the first touch of food in almost a day and a half, but she pushed herself to keep eating to stave off the headache she could feel starting to drill its way through her left eye.

The girls around her chatted as if they were a bunch of happy schoolgirls...talking about new men they’d slept with, the gifts that were brought for them, the new outfits they’d found in their closets. They made plans to soak in the spacious hot tub on the second floor at the end of their wing and mused on what might be for lunch. They looked...content.

“I wonder if Mr. Z will come for me tonight,” the girl named Wren said, pushing food around her plate. “He hasn’t been back in nearly two weeks and he told me he couldn’t live without me.”

“That’s what they all say, love,” Sarah offered, touching her arm. “Then their wives find out or their money runs out or they find someone else. You can’t believe a word that comes out of their mouths, so just get your money and kiss them goodbye.”

For the first time in days, Hermione smiled.

At seven o'clock there was a knock at Hermione's door and her heart dropped, the book falling from her hands.

"Y-yes?"

"Come on, we have to go to line up," It was Sarah.

"I'm not dressed...I'm still in my pajamas..."

"It's fine, you'll have time to get ready when you find out who's coming for you."

Hermione stood in the center of the line up of seven girls, three of which she hadn't met yet. They were on the landing of the first floor staircase, backs against the railing, waiting for Mr. Malfoy. The mansion was golden with candlelight, sconces lining the walls, tall candelabras highlighting the artwork. Music filtered up from the first floor and she heard male laughter from somewhere in the distance. He appeared from the door of his suite looking sharp as a tack in a black three-piece suit and black tie, shining black shoes and his customary thick silver watch. On his lapel was a small pin with the same symbol as her brand, studded with diamonds.

"Good evening ladies," he said, looking each one of them over, stopping at Hermione specifically. He lifted her arm, turning it over to look at the delicate skin of her wrist, his finger tracing over the branching blue veins that ran up her forearm in an oddly gentle gesture. "Did you see the healer today?" He asked, letting her arm drop.

"Yes," she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Did you eat? Sleep?"

"Yes," she answered, unnerved by the tiny smile of encouragement he gave, the nod of his head.

"Good. Then I'll get the report from Moonstone and let the members know that you're officially on the menu. My little Pleiades are complete again!" He said, standing back and holding his arms out, indicating them all as a group. "In the meantime, Lark, Finch, Starling and Dove, you've all been requested for tonight. You'll receive your room numbers and clothing requirements within the hour. The rest of you are free for the evening unless I receive any last minute owls. Thank you."

The girls all turned to leave, chatting amongst themselves as they walked down the corridors. Only Hermione hung behind, watching Draco head back to his office and following him through the double doors.

"How many members do you have here?" She asked.

“Not that it’s any of your concern, but nearly sixty. They pay a monthly fee for access to the games rooms, food and the bar and the opportunity to request a companion for the evening... which comes at an extra cost.”

“Why would they do that? People are starving on the street. People are dying just to make a galleon a week. And they waste their money, paying that much money just for a fuck?”

He visibly winced and she couldn’t help but smile at how quickly she could cut through the bullshit façade he built around this brothel, making it seem like some sort of luxury spa, some family he was caring for.

“It’s their money to waste, sparrow. I can’t help it if the rich are selfish and idiotic. But I suspect they come here because I have a reputation in London,” he said, straightening his tie in the mirror beside his desk. “I was procuring women for friends and associates from the age of nineteen. I have an eye for...talent...should we say? And I treat my little flock well, keeping them clean and healthy, which is more than I can say for the slags on the street. Now if you’ll excuse me, darling I have to go welcome my guests. Perhaps we can talk more tomorrow, if you’re that interested in the ins and outs of the business.” He smiled at her then, his eyebrows arched high. “For lack of a better term.”

She growled a sneer and left him laughing as she stomped down the hall to her room.

It was a slow night and Draco spent most of his time strolling through the bar speaking with the handful of members who had stopped in for drinks after having dinner with their wives, openly ogling the cocktail waitresses and bartenders who were beautiful witches in their own right, but weren’t on the menu for full service. Watching these men flit back and forth from dedicated husband and father to panting wolf amused him to no end. What was the point of it? Why even pretend to want the former, when the latter brought so much more pleasure? Obviously their wives didn’t give them what they needed anymore, or they’d grown old or dull or ugly or distant and the desire was no longer there. Why spend the rest of their lives together when it was bound to bring nothing but misery?

After the last guests were gone, the girls locked in tight with their visitors, Draco returned to his suite, quickly shedding his suit in favor of his favorite white linen pants, kicking his tight, uncomfortable Italian shoes across the room. Everything about the trappings of money felt constricting and yet he’d rather die than live a day without them. Money didn’t buy happiness, but it bought safety and survival and a modicum of comfort for him to languish in.

He was exhausted, but as usual, there would be no sleep. Instead he drank. He drank and he smoked and flicked through the custom built wooden rack containing hundreds of little vials of memories that he’d extracted from the girls, checking their visitors at random to make sure that nothing unsavory had happened between them.

Remembering Wren’s sadness at missing Blaise, he poured a crystal vial of the silvery liquid into his penseive and watched her and Zabini together: tangled and twisted, panting and

groaning...Blaise pulling her in against his chest when they were finished, stroking her hair as she fell asleep in his arms. He never left until after she woke up. It was a strange practice, and one he didn't see very often with the members. After all, the old adage rung true; you don't pay a prostitute for sex...you pay her to leave you alone afterwards. Collecting up the memory again he checked a few more, doing a different sort of research...learning a couple of secrets about the older members...men who were working to smuggle halfblood family members out of the country or cheating their company out of thousands of galleons a week, men speaking of underground revolutions, attempts to infiltrate the government, not to mention the rock solid proof of adultery should it ever prove useful. Draco stored up these little nuggets in a black leatherbound diary that he kept in his bedroom. A treasure trove of information in case any of the members decided to turn on him one day; a simple form of insurance.

A few moments before dawn, bleary eyed and on the ragged edge of a punishing headache, he heard a tap on the windowpane: a fat little screech owl carrying a rolled parchment. The report from Moonstone, delivered earlier than he thought. He fed the owl and sent it on its way, scanning the words with half drunk eyes as he flopped down onto the edge of his bed. The report should have pleased him. It was what he needed after all, another healthy, capable girl in the stables. It should have pleased him to know that her life of poverty and her two weeks in jail hadn't damaged her permanently. Instead he found himself crumpling the report in his hand and tearing his cupboards apart looking for a sleeping draught. He needed the numbness, the blankness. He needed his energy to tell Hermione that starting tomorrow she was being put to work.

He woke in a pool of sweat, his hair damp, stuck to the back of his neck, the images of his nightmare still burning behind his eyes. Jumping from the bed, he went to find his store of marijuana...a blessed muggle herb that helped to soothe his soul and numb his mind when the worst of it hit. He lit the thin cigarette and held the smoke until his lungs burned, waiting for the world to blur. Perhaps it was having her in the house, bringing up old memories... thoughts of the war, blood running over the stones of the Manor, hearing the screams of his classmates dying, the embodiment of evil clutching him in his icy arms, praising his 'good' works. Whatever it was, it was why he did his best not to sleep, and why it was safer that no one was there when he finally did.

Theo and Greg were on the balcony off the second floor with a bottle of champagne, smoking cigars and watching the girls flit around in the garden...living up to their namesakes.

"Granger is available now, is she?" Theo asked, his eye following the newest girl as she wandered from corner to corner, keeping herself distant from the others, but doing her best to drink in the little block of sunshine she was given.

"That she is," Draco said. "A thousand galleons and she's yours."

“A thousand fucking galleons. For a mudblood criminal?”

Draco shot him a withering look, his eyes catching the sun and glinting silver. The members knew better than to speak ill of the girls around him.

“Or I could cancel your membership immediately and call your wife?”

“Ex wife, mate. We’ve been separated for a year.”

“I’m quite sure she’d still like to hear about when exactly you started coming here two years ago.”

“The other girls, Leanne and Claire, they’re only five hundred and they have experience,” Theo said, crushing out the stub of his cigar and sitting back, thinking it was a negotiation, thinking that Draco might change his mind.

In fact he hadn’t even gotten this far in considering Hermione’s...employment. It all had moved so fast; the way she accepted his offer, the way she had fallen in line so quickly, barely fighting him at all, and now the report that she was healthy, ready to work, he’d just thought it would be more of a challenge. Perhaps his wish for her to admit she was broken had come true. He should have felt a bit more victorious.

“The other girls weren’t a catalyst for the greatest war of our generation. I’m sure there are dozens of members who would pay more just to see one of her tits much less spend a night with her. If you can’t pay it, pick someone else.”

“I’ll pay it,” he said, his grin spreading from ear to ear. “I’ve been waiting to get my hands on her for years.”

There was a strange pit in Draco’s stomach, some sort of warning or regret, just another one of the many he carried with him day to day, for nearly ten years, wrong turns taken, bad choices made, dark allegiances trusted. Still, business was business, and he knew Theo to be a decent man.

“When do you want her?” Draco asked, trying to sound as casual as possible.

“Tonight,” Theo said, standing up. “I’d take her now, but I suppose I should bathe from last night.”

He clapped Draco on the shoulder and left the balcony, jingling the galleons in his pockets as he left.

Hermione sat at the small vanity in her room, staring in the mirror while Leanna pulled the sides of her hair back into one long plait. Her hands were clenched into fists in her lap, her teeth grinding together. Draco had come to her before the line up to tell her she had been requested.

"I'm not supposed to tell you who it is...only what to wear, special instructions, but since you've never done this before and I know you're...hesitant..."

"Who is it?" She asked, sitting on the edge of her bed.

He wouldn't cross the threshold of her room, only leaned on the doorjamb, arms crossed over his chest. He didn't look happy or victorious, he didn't have the sneer she expected when he would come to tell her she'd been sold. If anything, he looked tired.

"Theo."

"Nott?"

"No, Theo Flaxhammer from Glasgow. Yes, Theo Nott. He's been a member for quite some time and I trust him to treat you well. Still, you have a way to get out if things go sour. If ever anyone hurts you beyond what's agreed upon, if your limits are not respected, just press your finger to the Atlas star and I'll be there. I'll feel it on my own brand. The members know you have this option so it keeps them in line. I hear the other girls enjoy his company so you have nothing to worry about."

When he was finished with his speech he rolled his shoulders, his eyes closed, brow furrowed with tension.

"Are you sick?" She asked, rather suddenly, noticing the dark circles beneath his eyes, the even paler cast of his skin. "You don't look well."

He froze in the doorframe, his eyes stuck on hers for a moment before he sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Just tired. Tired," he said. "Be ready for him at ten. Room six."

Now it was 9:45 and she was pulling on the black satin nightgown that Theo had requested, one of many different lingerie selections that hung in her closet. Leanna was still futzing with her hair.

"Have you...been with Mr. N?" Hermione asked, tapping her fingertips over the stars on her forearm. The Pleiades: the seven sisters and their guardian...Atlas. Atlas, who carried the weight of the world. The design of the mark was beautiful and delicate and of course she'd tested it the moment she'd left his suite that first day, trying to walk out the front door. In an instant her arm burned as if engulfed in flame, taking the breath from her lungs with pain, forcing her to her knees before crawling back inside. When she saw Draco in the corridor later in the day he'd given her a playful smirk.

“Satisfied with your experiments, doctor?” She’d met his joke with her mouth set in a tight line of frustration and he’d patted her head like a dog. *“Do yourself a favor, Sparrow. From now on, just trust that I’m telling the truth.”*

“I have,” Leanna said, stirring her from her memories. “He’s fairly standard, a bit dominant, likes you on your knees, but nothing outrageous.”

Hermione nodded. It was just like anything else she’d done in the past five years. It was no different than deciding to steal money from her employer, or making illegal potions in her kitchen for those who couldn’t afford to buy them. And Ron had been right...sometimes it was just enough to feel good.

Theo found her perched on the end of the king sized bed, dressed in black satin just as he’d requested. She certainly wasn’t the Granger he remembered, the one with a firm set jaw and raised chin, eyes glittering, ready for a fight. This wasn’t the Granger who’d fought a dozen battles, still throwing hexes as her best friends died at her feet. This was someone entirely different; thin and dulled at the edges, her eyes wide and brown but blank, as if she wasn’t truly there.

“I’m so glad you survived the war,” he said, pouring her a glass of champagne. Before handing it to her he slipped half of a lust potion into it, just to ensure he got his money’s worth, but kept it out of her sight. “I always wondered what happened to you.”

“The same thing that happened to everyone else that didn’t bend the knee. And now I’m here.”

She drank the champagne in one long gulp, knowing damn well he’d spiked it with something...she could taste a faint herbaceous aftertaste. Part of her was grateful for the assistance as it would make the night easier. He was standing in front of her, loosening his tie and even she had to admit that he’d grown up to be far more handsome than she suspected with brown hair and green eyes, tall and lanky, his lips full and soft.

He held a hand out to her and she stood, going to him easily and letting him slip the straps of her gown off her shoulders so that it slid down over her body like liquid midnight, revealing her nakedness to him. He kissed her, holding her face firm in his hands, his tongue playing expertly over hers and after a moment he felt her shiver as the mixing of their saliva triggered the potion.

“There’s my pretty little mudblood,” he whispered, holding her tighter when she stiffened in his arms. “Ah ah...don’t get upset,” he said, his hand stroking down over her breast, twisting her nipple playfully, sending a jolt of energy down between her legs. For a moment her eyes sparked with arousal and he smiled. “It’s just a little game I like to play. The bully and the schoolgirl.” He kissed the side of her throat, down where her pulse was racing beneath her

creamy skin, yet her cheeks and her chest were flushed red. And although he could feel the tension in her muscles, the anger at the hinge of her jaw, a sweep of his fingers through the heat between her legs told him she was still willing. “I like to see a little bit of your fear.”

The Bully and The School Girl

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains scenes of dubious or coerced consent.

Three of the other girls were spoken for but the club was slow, leaving Draco to pace the corridors until the early hours of the morning, sometimes catching a stray giggle or moan or the sound of a hand smacking against flesh as he made his rounds. Once or twice he found himself lingering outside of room six, but Theo was too clever and had obviously cast a muffliato, leaving the activities within a mystery. Sitting in the leather chair in his office with a glass of whiskey, Draco ran his fingers over his own Pleiades Mark that sat above his heart on the left side of his chest. Part of him was waiting...part of him was wanting to hear her call.

Hermione slept in past breakfast, her body aching and sore, a stiffness in her joints, a twinge of a headache from the lust potion leaving her system. Even after she woke up she stayed in bed, the heavy down duvet wrapped around her as she followed the flower pattern on the wallpaper with her eyes. Theo had finished with her just before dawn and escorted her to the staircase, kissing her gently on the neck before bidding her goodnight. She nearly laughed at the formality of it all, how he'd washed and dressed back into his suit and smoothed out his hair, even looping her hand through his elbow as they walked the marble floors to the front entrance...a fine gentleman taking home his date. She snorted, remembering how he'd kissed her hand to say good bye.

The sound of paper sliding under the door caught her attention.

My office please, once you've

dressed and freshened up.

- Mr. M

She pulled herself from the bed and stepped into a pair of buttery yellow satin pajamas and the black satin slippers that all the girls wore. As she walked down the corridor to his suite she pulled her hair into a knot, securing it with a pencil. It was Sunday morning and the mansion was quiet, Autumn sun filtering through the windows, a few elves polishing the ebony balustrades on the staircase. Far down the hall she heard the tinkling of china and silverware, the elves cleaning up after breakfast. It was nearly noon. The closer she got to the

black double doors, the harder her heart pounded, her confidence faltering. Had Theo complained about her? Had she unintentionally misbehaved somehow? Her hand absentmindedly went to her wrist, clutching at the brand. She was angry at her fear. Angry at herself. She certainly didn't care what Malfoy thought. She was angry at how easily she lied.

"Good morning, Sparrow," Draco said, pulling open the doors to his suite. "I was just fixing tea. You want a cup?"

She nodded, glancing around the study, looking for some clue as to why he wanted to see her. He looked so much softer than usual, a faded blue t-shirt and linen pants, his hair a bit tousled as if he'd just woken up himself. She glanced around him to see if he'd had anyone in his bed, but the suite was empty.

"You weren't at breakfast this morning," he said, handing her the tea. "I'd offer you something to eat but it's nearly lunchtime. It's so important for you girls to –"

"My guest left late and I wanted to get some sleep," she interrupted. He responded with some sort of a grunting noise, pulling out his silver case of cigarette supplies and rolling up a thin little smoke. "What is this?" She blurted out. "Why did you call me here? What do you want?"

He held out a hand towards the sofa, inviting her to sit before taking a long drag off the cigarette.

"You're here because I want all the dirty details, love," he purred, leaning forward, his hands on her knees. She could feel her heart pounding. He was close enough to her that she could hear the little wet sounds his mouth made when he spoke, see the diamond shaped flecks of blue in his eyes. Those silvery grey eyes that had always fascinated her: so dark and focused, pinning her in place with a blink. The wispy trail of white smoke floating up between them was hypnotic. She couldn't look away from him. Her throat went dry and he said, "Legilimens".

She gasped at the invasion, awaiting the painful drilling ache that usually accompanied the spell, but instead he moved slowly through her mind, navigating around the mundane daily thoughts with nothing more than a brief fluttering pressure. She knew what he was after and made it easy for him to find, thinking back on her night with Theo.

He'd only called her mudblood once, but it was enough to give him the desired effect. As terrible as the world had become in the past few years, she'd not heard the slur thrown in her direction since school. It was considered childish and crass, unheard of it polite company to use such a word, and even in poverty, Hermione had earned something of a reputation that kept the worst name calling at bay. Still, just as he wanted, it made her muscles twitch, her jaw set with tension, her blood pressure skyrocket. He saw all of that in her face and all he'd done in response was kiss her harder.

He kissed her for a long time, his hands deep in her hair, around her neck, down her back. He called her a single minded little swot, so cold and noble, a dusty old bookworm. But he knew how to loosen her up, he said in her ear. The lust potion he'd dosed her with worked wonders on an empty stomach and she quickly felt the heat and wetness between her legs almost as soon as their tongues touched. She hadn't had a good shag in years and his mouth felt so good, his arms so tight and strong. And as his fingers moved between her legs, teasing her open, it became obvious why she'd taken Draco up on his offer.

When Theo pushed her onto the bed and spread her legs, kissing his way up the inside of her thigh, she felt everything else go away. Her bones didn't ache, her muscles were loose, her mind was clear. When his tongue circled her clit, his fingers sunk three deep in her cunt, there was no prison sentence, no brothel, no brand on her wrist. There was only her wet pussy clenching around his fingers, his lips sucking her bud into his mouth. She reached down and pulled at his hair, grinding against his face, moaning and bucking, begging out loud for more...begging for him to push her over the edge, her legs spread obscenely wide, back arching off the bed.

"Not yet, sweet witch. The whore doesn't get to come first," he growled, pulling away from her completely and yanking her off the bed and onto the floor by her ankle, her knees burning against the carpet. "On your knees girl," he said, unbuttoning the rest of his shirt and pulling it off. His body was lean and muscular, his torso covered in tattoos that swirled across his chest and up over both shoulders. "You do the rest."

It certainly had never been part of the lore of the Golden Trio that they were sexually active. It wouldn't have fit their holy martyr status, particularly Harry's, but on those long cold nights when they were sleeping in the forest or in alleys or in basements, huddled on the cold floor of a safehouse for warmth or security, they found that physical contact, intimacy, touch, affection, was sometimes the only thing that kept them going. Those few moments of bliss carried them into their next hours of horror.

It should have been degrading to Hermione to kneel in front of Theo and take his cock in her mouth, but ever since she'd given her first blowjob in the forest of Dean she'd found it incredibly arousing and extremely powerful. Yes, she was on her knees, yes he was pulling at her hair, guiding her like a trained animal...but she held his pleasure in her mouth. She was extraordinarily good at giving head, and she could see it in his face, the straining tendons in his neck, his fluttering eyelids. He needed her at that moment more than she needed air. His thick, hot cock twitched and hardened further as she laved him with her tongue, his knees buckling just a bit before he came, growling as she let it pour down her throat.

Sex made her feel good. It was just that simple. In a world where everything was sharp and harsh and hurtful, her body knew how to make her forget. Theo let her come three times that night, taking her from behind, letting her ride him while sat in the chair and finally, when the sun was peeking up over the horizon he slipped into her while they lay side by side, her back against his chest. He moved slowly, his hands massaging her breasts, laying kisses along the back of her neck and shoulders, thrusting slowly, deeply until she shuddered and whimpered, following the directions he'd given to thank him for his cock.

Draco pulled back from her mind and stood up, walking to the other side of the room without a word. When she turned to face him she could see that his cheeks were pink, his eyes bright, but his mouth was turned down at the corners. He pulled the memory of watching her from his own mind and put the silvery threads into a glass vial, filing it away with the others, shaking his head.

“He drugged you,” he said, sitting behind his desk and making a note in a small, leather bound book. “Did he tell you he was going to give you a lust potion?”

“No, but I tasted it in the champagne,” she said, shrugging. “I didn’t think it was –”

“Never let them pour a drink out of your view, Hermione!” He said, slamming his hand against the table. “It could have been poison, he could have killed you. You didn’t even hesitate to take it from his hand!”

“I just thought...it was Theo!” She felt sheepish and angry, taken aback completely by his response. He was right. She never would have taken a drink from a stranger in the ‘real world’. “I thought I could trust him! I thought you trusted him!”

“And do you trust me?” He asked, his voice incredulous, nearly amused. “Why do you think I take the memories of every night’s activities? I don’t trust a soul who walks through these doors, not even you. And you’d be wise to do the same.”

“Draco...”

“Mr. Malfoy!” He spat, his voice sharp and cold. “Forget it. Just go.”

She walked over to him. He looked entirely undone as he shuffled parchments around on his desk and she could see his hands trembling. When she was on the other side of the desk she touched his hand to stop him, to force him to look up.

“Mr. Malfoy,” she said softly. “Everything turned out OK. I knew Theo in school and so did you. I knew, somehow, that he wouldn’t really hurt me. I’m sorry if I broke your rules. You’re right, I should have watched, I should have refused...but it’s ok. I’m ok.”

He stared at her hand on his, not looking up at her for the entirety of her explanation, yet when she drew her hand away he felt as if he’d lost something...missed an opportunity he was supposed to take. Not moving from his place behind the desk he lifted his eyes to watch her leave, closing the doors quietly behind her, angry for an entirely different reason.

The other girls stopped by his office, expecting to have their memories recorded, but he sent them all away, instead sitting behind his pensieve and rewatching Hermione with Theo, every one of her moves burned into his brain for eternity, every sound she made becoming a part of his blood. He watched Theo sweep her hair back from her face, twisting it around his fist as she took his whole length down her throat and Draco could swear there was a smirk on her

face, as if it were her idea all long, as if she relished doing it. He watched how her whole chest flushed red when she came, how she bit into her bottom lip and rolled her hips in a certain rhythm when she needed him to go deeper.

It wasn't that he'd thought of Hermione as some sainted martyr...or maybe he did...but seeing her so raw and unabashedly sexual took his breath away. And he'd felt what she was feeling, felt that it felt good to her and that she deserved to feel good. She'd come here to work for him seeking some sort of relief. Whether or not she'd used it before, sex was a tool to her. Yet she wasn't detached; or efficient about it...she felt it with all of her heart, every physical sensation, every fingertip or tongue against her skin she absorbed it like heat and light...it fed her.

There was a knock at the door.

"Mr. Malfoy?" It was Malia the bartender. "Your guests are starting to arrive. Can I tell them you'll be down soon?"

"Yes," Draco answered, hurriedly putting the memories and pensieve away in their cupboard. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

The club was quiet and after line up Hermione spent most of the evening alone in her room, enjoying a hot bath and reading through one of the books Draco had left for her. It was no surprise that they were all variations on a certain theme...either erotic poetry or fiction, manuals on sex magic, tips and tricks for witches in the bedroom. Some were so old that the pages were curled and yellowed, the text written in Latin and she devoured every word. It had been months since she'd had something new or challenging to read. Still, her mind kept wandering back to seeing Draco and his reaction to her night with Theo. She was sure that he'd spend the whole time giggling gleefully at seeing her brought so low, making fun of her technique or her body or something equally humiliating. Instead he'd scolded her for not being cautious enough, for not having the sense of self-preservation to call him in to rescue her. The whole scene had thrown her for a loop, showing her a side of Malfoy she'd never expected. He was angry though. She'd known him to be angry before. And a tiny nagging fear at the back of her mind wondered if he was going to burst through the door and send her packing, back to prison, back to Lucius. Wasn't that what this whole exercise was about? Humiliating her? Isn't that what he'd always wanted? She honestly had no idea anymore.

She was awake well after midnight when the working girls were tucked away with their guests and the bar and gaming rooms were closed. She put on her robe and decided to explore the far rooms of the mansion, maybe even walk in the garden. Even in the autumn cold it was refreshing and peaceful to breathe the fresh air.

On her way through the front hallways she heard the sound of a piano, the few measures of a Chopin piece repeated over and over...the notes quiet and hesitant, as if the player were trying to remember. Hermione followed the noise to the back parlor near the garden and saw Draco, still in his black suit, pouring himself an obscenely large glass of firewhiskey while a

cigarette dangled from his lips. He sat at the piano with the bottle of liquor at his feet, his left hand stretched over the keys while he sipped from the right.

"I didn't know you could play," she said, leaning against the cover of the piano.

"What are you doing up?" he asked, speaking out of the corner of his mouth so as not to drop the cigarette. "A working girl needs her rest."

"I could ask you the same thing. You always tell us how tired you are and yet here you are getting drunk and serenading us in the solarium."

He laughed then and crushed out the remains of the smoke, downing his whiskey.

"Tell me Granger, when's the last time you had a really good night's sleep?" He asked, his fingers playing some quick chords, then scales, exercises a child would do. "A peaceful, glad-to-be-closing-my-eyes type sleep?"

"Honestly?" She said, moving to sit beside him on the black bench, touching a few of the keys herself. "The very first night I was here. I thought you were going to keep me chained up in a cell, but you gave me this beautiful bedroom and a thick, down covered mattress and you told me I wouldn't have to work that night...It was such a relief. I hadn't felt relief in a long time."

He was staring at her, his jaw slack, but as soon as she noticed it was gone, his crooked sneer back in place.

"Yes, well, I didn't want you dropping dead under your first client."

"Why are you doing this? Why did you bring me here?"

"Are you going to ask this every time you see me? What does it matter? Do you not prefer it to jail? Because I can send you back. No question."

"No, I just...I haven't gotten an answer that I really understand."

He was quiet, nodding slowly, images floating through his mind of seeing her injured on the battlefield, of suffering the cruciatus for not giving up the trio's location, of choosing to walk away from the right side of the war when all he wanted to do was defect. And between every image of the past were fresher, more recent memories, things he didn't want to think about with her sitting so close.

"I haven't slept well in years," he said. "Not since...not since fifth year really. You don't know how lucky you are to have a clear, unburdened conscience. To not be haunted. Maybe I brought you here to see how you do it. To see how you stay standing after all this time."

She remembered hearing murmurs of Draco's imprisonment in Voldemort's dungeons, how he'd refused to speak out against the Order even though he had spotted them in a safehouse outside of Surrey. She remembered seeing his whole body twitch in surprise when it was announced that Harry was dead. Lucius had intended to break Hermione with the news, but it

was Draco who wavered on his feet, nearly falling back into some Death Eater's arms. Hermione had already known, she'd already closed down, something she'd learned early on.

"I'm haunted Draco. All the time. I have nightmares. I have guilt. I just...I've found ways to compartmentalize...to try and live and enjoy what life I have..."

"Sex?" He asked bluntly, reaching behind her to pull the bottle of whiskey off the floor, drinking two large gulps right from the bottle, nearly dropping it on the marble floor. "That's why you didn't fight, didn't try to run. You don't mind doing this job do you?" He said, his lips curling into a knowing grin. "You weren't counting on me getting in your head to find that out."

"No," she said, looking down at the hem of her robe. Her cheeks felt hot. She'd never been this close to him, close enough to feel the heat radiating from his skin, feel his breath on her neck. "I don't mind. I just concentrate on what feels good and hope that eventually it will block out the bad. I just go through it because I know that eventually I'll be done and I can move on to the next trial that the world throws at me. Certainly you must understand that, living here, owning this place. I'm sure you have a different girl every night to rock you to sleep," she said, nudging him, smiling, trying to lighten the conversation, to stop him from staring into her soul.

"I don't. I don't...partake of any of them," he said, his words starting to slur. "I won't. I don't think they would really...it wouldn't be right. They're not here for me." He stood up and grabbed his cigarettes and the bottle. He looked exhausted, as if his legs wouldn't hold him up, his eyes barely open. "And I already told you I don't sleep. I black out. It's the best I can hope for."

Hermione sighed and stood, slinging his arm around her shoulders.

"OK, Mr. Malfoy, maybe I'll just make sure you get back to your room then, yeah?"

He leaned down, brushing his lips over her temple.

"I can take care of my fucking self," he hissed.

"I see that," she said, as they walked up the stairs, Draco stumbling once or twice, his full weight pressing against her side.

"I'm sorry that you lost," he muttered as she pulled him through the double doors of his office. "For everyone you lost. You shouldn't have lost."

Hermione walked him into his bedroom and set him down on the edge of the bed, kneeling down to pull off his shoes. He wasn't the first person she'd helped ride out their drunken misery. It all reminded her of nights at Grimmauld Place when injured fighters came back and drank themselves into a stupor, swearing to burn the world down the next day, swearing revenge.

But Draco was silent, just watching her take care of him, laying him back on his rumpled white sheets, adjusting his pillow and pulling the duvet up to his chest. She pitied him; he

could see that. She saw him for what he was, broken and beyond hope, guilty and blackened with sin and crime. Before she left she went into his bathroom and he listened as she opened and closed cabinets and drawers, eventually coming back with a glass of water and a vial of hangover potion.

“For the morning,” she said, reaching out to brush some of the mussed hair back from his forehead. He nodded, but was frowning, his brow furrowed with tension and she could have sworn that the redness in his eyes wasn’t from drunkenness but tears.

“We didn’t lose because of you, Draco. I know you fancy yourself the center of the universe, but there was actually a fairly gigantic army of dark wizards standing right behind you.”

He didn’t laugh. He didn’t roll his eyes. He had no answer. He was clinging tight to her hand, something she only noticed once he’d passed out, when his fingers finally let go.

Atlas The Guardian

Hermione spent most of the next few days in her room, her stomach having violently rejected the rich food that she'd eaten too much of too soon. She had headaches and nausea and the healer told her she should go back to chicken soup and tea, but make sure to take her supplement potions every morning.

"Sometimes, when you finally have a moment to relax, your body gives out after being strong for so long. I suspect you'll be back to your old self in no time." Moonstone said, her tone light and friendly. "I heard you had your first...client. Did everything go ok?"

"I suppose," Hermione said, lying back on her pillow. She'd quickly grown to like the healer: her motherly quality, her speech rhythms and her gentle touch. It was a rare find in such a sharp world. "He gave me a lust potion."

Moonstone came closer, standing beside the bed, speaking softly.

"Does Mr. Malfoy know that?" She asked, her face twisted with concern. "Did you have any side effects?"

"Just a hangover. Yes, he knows. He was...angry with me. More worried I guess."

"I suspect your client will probably get a stern warning, he may be blocked from coming back entirely. Mr. Malfoy doesn't take his position as caretaker lightly. He runs a tight ship."

Although she was beginning to believe that this wasn't your ordinary wizard brothel, Hermione still snorted, rolling her eyes, a bit unnerved by everyone casting Malfoy as some sort of benevolent knight in shining armor. Moonstone caught it and gave her a disapproving look.

"I've been with him here since the beginning. Since the day he brought in his first two girls. They were bruised and beaten, malnourished like you...they'd had their money stolen, one of them had her magic stolen, wand broken and was enslaved..."

"And what happened? Are they still here?" Hermione asked, her place at the Shattered Dragon becoming more confusing rather than getting clearer.

"One of them received an offer from a client to leave with him. He bought out her contract and she quit. The other was here for years...until she got sick." Moonstone paused, her brow deeply furrowed. "We lost her. It weighed heavily on him." She finished packing her potions and books and made a few quick notes on a parchment. "You've taken her place so the constellation can be complete again."

"But why me? He hates me. Always has."

“I guess you’ll have to ask him, love. But I know that he doesn’t reveal much, not until he’s good and ready to do so.”

Theo came back a week later, approaching Draco in the bar immediately upon his arrival.

“You’ve got some heavy stones coming back here so soon, Nott,” Draco said, draining his drink and signaling for another. “You know I’m not opposed to magical enhancements, but that you snuck her a lust potion? Fed it to her without her knowing? I should terminate your fucking membership.”

“C’mon mate, it was her first night! Besides, it’s Granger! I thought she was going to claw my eyes out. I’m pleased to report that wasn’t the case however...”

“Don’t do it again,” Draco growled, looking him dead in the eye. “Nothing unexpected, nothing she doesn’t know about. You know the rules.”

Theo rolled his eyes and waved him off, nodding in assent before leaning in to Draco’s ear.

“She’s delicious. I want her again. Tonight.”

“She’s not available,” Draco said, the lie falling easily from his lips. “As you can imagine she’s in high demand. You’re not the only one interested in sticking it to the class swot. Even if she were free what makes you think I would do you any favors? I wouldn’t trust you with a Knockturn slag at this point.”

“Oi! Take it easy, friend. Next week then.”

Draco shook his head.

“Then when is she available?” Theo asked, his eyes narrowing suspiciously on the club owner.

Draco stood up and pushed away from the bar, taking his glass of whiskey.

“I’ll let you know, *friend*. Until then, pick someone else.”

Hermione stood in the nightly line up while four of the other girls were given their assignments. Draco was wavering on his feet, already half drunk, his eyes bloodshot, hair a mess. The girls looked at each other from the corners of their eyes, not used to seeing their

boss so...undone. There was no pep talk, no cheeky speech, no jokes...just names and room numbers accompanied by times.

“The rest of you are free to go, enjoy your evening,” he said, his eyes locked on Hermione with every word.

He found her in the garden sitting on one of the stone benches, looking up at the black sky scattered with stars.

“Moonstone says you’re feeling better, able to eat,” he said, standing in front of her, hands deep in his pockets.

There was a shock of his platinum hair hanging in front of his eye, his bow tie hanging undone around his unbuttoned collar. For the first time she could see a hint of the brand on his chest that mimicked her own.

“Yes, thanks. I just needed to get used to living so well I guess,” Hermione said, only adding a dash of sarcasm. In fact she couldn’t remember when she’d last lived so comfortably, which would be wonderful were she allowed to leave at will.

He sat down next to her then and joined her in looking up into the darkness. When he closed his eyes, even to blink the images of her writhing under Theo came unbidden, the slack jaw, damp hair, her arms stretched over her head.

“I have a secret,” he said. “I loved Divination class. I know we all thought it was a load of shit when we were there and we all made fun of Trelawney and her dramatics...but I loved the stories, the mythology, the symbols. I love astrology and palmistry and tea leaves and all of that.” He took her hand and held her arm out, tracing his fingertips over the marks on her skin. “Do you know the story of the Pleiades?”

“They’re seven sisters,” she said. “Their father threw them into the sky, turning them to stars.”

“To protect them. The eighth star, Atlas,” he said, drawing his finger over the darkest, largest star on her arm. “He is their father, their guardian, watching over them to keep them safe from evil men.”

The story was over but his fingers still played over her skin, tracing the blue lines of her veins up to the inside of her elbow and back down to her wrist. She was mesmerized by his gentle touch, how unafraid he was to be close to her, to be kind to her, not at all the bully and bigot she remembered from school.

“Atlas also carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, doesn’t he?” She added.

He smiled and pulled away from her standing up to leave.

“You were right when you said that it isn’t my fault that your side lost the war. But I certainly did my part to get the ball rolling, didn’t I? And for a long time I fought on the front lines of darkness, standing up for what my father told me was right. Now I live with that guilt every day, every minute. I don’t ever escape it unless I’m drunk or high or unconscious. The only thing that assuages it is taking care of these girls, keeping them safe. It’s like a drop of water in the ocean but I consider the Dragon my reparations in some twisted way.”

“And so why would you want to save me?” She asked, wondering if now she’d finally get an answer she could understand. “You came to the jail that day to laugh in my face, to force me into a corner and watch me squirm.”

“Actually, you’re right. I did come down to the jail to gloat,” he said, shrugging. “I came to celebrate that I knew someone as broken as me. Schadenfreude. Instead I found that even though you were imprisoned and starving you were still standing your ground, still fighting. Dammit Hermione. Nothing breaks you!” He paused then, as if biting back anger, stopping himself from yelling, lashing out. “Maybe I wanted to see if you could be broken.” He spoke quietly, his fingertips digging into the bridge of his nose.

She still couldn’t be sure of his reasoning...she could never be sure of when he was sincere or just playing a game. In her time at the brothel she’d seen his different sides; sly, sarcastic Draco, gregarious, confident Draco and this one: small, exhausted, wilted Draco.

“Or maybe you wanted to see if you could be fixed by flinging another star into the sky,” she said, standing up, moving close to him. “If you’d like a piece of advice, one thing I didn’t do...Mr. Malfoy...was try to cover up my fear and sadness and guilt with pixiehair weed and firewhiskey. You’ll never pull free of its clutches if you can’t even see straight to move on.”

He was staring at her, his face blank, neither angry nor grateful for her words, just...absorbing, existing.

“Too right you are. But sometimes, sparrow, I just need the silence.”

His shoes crunched over the gravel as he walked away, leaving Hermione behind in the dark, once again staring up at the stars.

Three weeks went by without a visitor for Hermione and she began to wonder if Draco was rethinking his investment. She didn’t mind not “working” but if it wasn’t worth his while he’d already said he would send her back to the prison without a second thought. Winter had set in and even if he didn’t send her back to the jail, she’d be on the streets. He knew that. He knew she was his prisoner, bound by his generosity. But the other girls had visitors at least twice a week, and on the weekends everyone was occupied but her, making her evenings long, quiet and quite lonely leaving her with nothing to do but think.

Until Draco found her.

And he managed to find her every night, passing her in the hallway, stumbling upon her in the garden, walking past the reading room or out by the piano. Most times he would say nothing, just sit down beside her with a cigarette or a drink, staring out into space, or he would pick up a book and start reading, maybe flip through the Prophet. Other times he would ask her if she remembered things from school; the blast ended skrewts, the time Crabbe tripped on his robes and fell down the stairs in front of everyone, the Krup that got loose on the fourth floor when a second year tried to sneak it into the Hufflepuff dormitories or the Black Forest cake they used to make on Saturdays. Of course she remembered all of those things. The early years at Hogwarts were the best years of her life...finally discovering who she was, what she could do...exercising her mind, learning new things, making new friends. How ironic that the man wanting to revisit all of these childhood stories was the one who did everything he could to make her life miserable, ruining what should have been paradise. Still, she knew better than to start a fight with him about it. And he knew better than to ask about anything after fourth year. He rarely mentioned Harry or the war and when he spoke of Dumbledore it was quick, rushing through to get to something else.

She knew what he was doing. She'd done the same thing with Hannah, huddling in their crumbling flat, scrounging together money for rent, wondering where their next meal would come from. They survived on nostalgia, the warmth of memory, a better time, an easier time. They thrived on a sense of normalcy, talking of school and friends...reciting incantations for spells and recipes for potions, trips to Hogsmeade. For a few moments they would laugh and sigh and talk about things of no importance. It was like jumping in a cool river, scrubbing off the filth. So she let Draco talk, answering his leading questions, even telling him stories of life in Gryffindor tower when he fell silent. Eventually he would cut her off or simply stop responding and tell her to go to bed...something triggering a need to get away from her, a need to be alone. Still she would walk with him to the doors of his suite, making sure he went inside before doing as she was told. It became their routine.

It was after one thirty on a night in December when he knocked on her door. Of all the places he'd managed to "stumble upon" her, he'd never actually come to her room.

"Are you awake?"

Hermione set aside her book, got out of bed and shuffled to the door. There stood Draco barefoot, wearing a pair of white cotton pajama pants slung low, too low, on his hips. His chest was bare and she couldn't help but notice the thin trail of golden hair beneath his navel as he braced himself against the doorframe with one arm, his eyes bloodshot and barely open, his stare locked on hers as if he were entranced.

"Are you high?" she asked, having seen the effects of marijuana all too often amongst the impoverished wizards who discovered it soon after the end of the war, looking for something, anything that would let them escape...if only for a few hours.

"Come with me sparrow. We haven't talked for a while. My brain is hungry for stories...or history...memories. It's empty. I need to walk." He trailed off, losing his eloquent train of

thought, and turned to walk down the hall.

She followed, if only to make sure he got to bed safely, a mission she'd assigned to herself over the last month. Thinking they were going to his suite, she was surprised to see him take the stairs to the first floor, heading for the club rooms. All of the guests were gone or otherwise occupied, but she still felt uneasy. He'd told her explicitly not to go there.

"Draco...what are.."

He went behind the bar, started uncorking bottles and putting out glasses. It was a cozy room with low ceilings and dark paneling, polished wood chairs with emerald green velvet upholstery, silver candelabras dripping with white wax in the center of each table. It smelled like smoke and cedar and a mix of rich colognes.

"I don't think you need another cocktail Mr. M," she said, gently, watching him mix two golden colored drinks, topping them with a twist of lemon, ignoring her completely.

"Our signature drink – The Shattered Dragon," he said pushing a glass toward her.

"It's so late, Draco...I don't..."

"Drink it," he snapped, his eyes flashing, a bit harder, more focused. "You follow my directions now, Granger. You belong to me."

She hesitated a minute longer and then sipped at the drink – spicy, bright, heavy with firewhiskey and ginger. While he drank his own, her eyes fell to the tattoos on his chest and shoulders, all black, all obviously symbolic in their stark simplicity. There was the Pleiades Brand over his heart and on the other side of his chest were three runes in the shape of a pyramid. She recognized one as meaning *forgive* but memorized the lines of the others to look up later. A long, serpentine dragon crawled up his left arm in a spiral, sliced into segments, dotted with stars, its face contorted in agony. Finally, on the inside of his right wrist, a line of six black stars.

"Not quite as powerful as his," he said, lifting his left arm to show off the scarred, darkened skin where the mark used to be. Once the war had ended and everyone had bent the knee to Voldemort, the markings' power was diluted, their tracking and summoning charms no longer needed, and with that the color had faded away.

"They're beautiful though," she said, hoping he wouldn't notice that she'd only had half of her drink.

He stepped out from behind the bar and stood in front of her, his head tipped to the side, studying her face through glassy eyes.

"You think so?" He said, taking her hand in his. His fingers were warm, his movements slow and she watched closely as if keeping an eye on a coiled snake.

"Yes. The dragon especially. His face, so lifelike."

“Touch it,” he said, his voice coming out more cracked and hoarse than demanding, a hint of desperation.

He pulled her hand towards his arm closing her fingers around it, his eyes fluttering closed. She traced the lines of the tattoo from tip to tail, listening to his shallow, shuddering breaths as he stood perfectly still. Her fingers trailed down lower, stroking over the remains of his mark, then to the slashing angled scars across his torso from the Sectumsempra he’d suffered sixth year. Upon closer inspection there were other scars: a thick, darkened brand near his hip – the letter V, and straight lines, nearly invisible, across the insides of both of his elbows. She didn’t ask for an explanation and he didn’t offer one. Instead he leaned in closer to her, his lips hovering near hers for a breath before he moved to rest his forehead on her shoulder.

“Sometimes, I just want to turn everything off. Is there a spell for that? Magic? Every thought, every feeling, every ache. Just...nothing.”

Without thinking, she put her arm around him, hugging him close, noting how he stiffened beneath her embrace.

“I’m so tired,” he whispered.

Hermione stood and took his hand, starting her ritual of making sure he got to bed. They didn’t speak as she led him up the stairs, but once they were in the suite he held fast to her, his voice low and even, a bit more clear headed than he’d been earlier.

“Stay here. Sit here. Just a few minutes longer,” he said. “You stayed before...once...and I fell asleep. I stayed asleep.”

He pulled her toward the couch and sat down. There was a bottle of red wine and little, half smoked joint in a crystal ashtray. She made a point of pushing them both out of reach.

“Sixth year. That awful year. Advanced fucking potions.” He paused. “Do you know what Amortentia smelled like to me?” He asked, his head against the back of the sofa, eyes closed.

“Wine and weed?” she asked. He smiled.

“Polished cherry wood, raspberries and Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion.”

He curled onto his side then, his head in her lap, and within a minute she knew he was sound asleep. The clock above the fireplace said two thirty and her own exhaustion overtook her – the warmth of the fire, the soft sofa, Draco’s low, even breathing on her lap. She adjusted her position and pulled a throw pillow over to prop behind her head. While falling asleep she remembered, quite suddenly, that for her birthday sixth year her mother had given her bubblebath, an expensive bottle with a silver shimmer and a cap that looked like a giant diamond. It had been heavily scented with raspberry.

She woke later to his whimpering, desperate pleading in his sleep, his arms twitching, head thrashing from side to side.

“Please. Please no. Stop!” His back bowed, brow furrowed in pain. In sleep his teeth chattered, crashing together as he writhed.

Hermione grabbed his arms to hold him still and at her touch he woke suddenly, pulling from her grip, jumping up from the couch. The room was dusky with pre-dawn light, the fire reduced to embers. She looked at the clock – six forty.

“What is this? What are you doing here? Why are you here?” He growled, storming out of the room.

“You asked me here Draco,” she called out, making her way to the door, uninterested in enduring his abuse. Her body ached from sleeping sitting up and she stretched her neck as she walked. “And I wouldn’t dare disobey orders. I belong to you now, after all.”

He came back out from the bedroom pulling a black t-shirt over his head. Before she could get the door open all the way he slammed it shut, hovering behind her, caging her in with his arm.

“What happened here?” He asked, and she could tell he was struggling to keep his composure...to keep his voice even, but still she shivered at the sound of his voice near her ear. “What did I do?”

He sounded frantic, nearly terrified, and her blood boiled at the sound of it. The idea of being alone with her, touching her must have made him sick. Without turning to face him she said,

“Nothing you need to worry your precious pure blood about, Mr. Malfoy.”

She yanked the door open and without waiting for an explanation, she was gone.

Broken

“Looks like you’ve made quite a name for yourself as you do your best to ruin mine in the process.”

Draco looked up from his place at the bar to see his father. Lucius Malfoy, the Death Eater and Voldemort Bootlicker whom he hadn’t seen for more than five minutes in over a year. He looked far older than Draco remembered, the lines in his face much deeper, his eyes a bit dulled even though he was obviously angry.

“Father!” Draco cried dramatically, jumping up from his seat. “Come to peruse the merchandise? I’m sure there’s a few innocents you could brutalize for an hour or two. And since you’re my father I’ll only charge you double.”

Some other guests glanced over and Draco could see that Lucius was bordering on maniacal rage even as he tried to maintain composure, his ever-present even keel that most people found offputting.

“Yes, your...merchandise,” Lucius said, running a finger over the bar and examining it for dirt. “I hear you have something here that actually belongs to me.”

More people were staring and Draco knew the conversation wasn’t going to go well. He nodded to the bartender and straightened the cuffs of his jacket, smiling icily at his father.

“Let’s take this upstairs. I’m sure that neither of us are interested in causing a scene.”

“So,” Draco said, summoning two glasses and a decanter of firewhiskey to his desk while Lucius sat and stared. “How’s mother?”

“Where is Miss Granger?” Lucius asked, unwilling to play his son’s games.

“Straight to the point! Well well, I guess we won’t be having that heartfelt reunion today,” Draco said, draining a shot of the punishing liquor before leaning back in his chair. “Miss Granger is in her room I suspect, waiting to hear if she has a gentleman caller for the evening. You came at just the right time. Line up is in an hour.”

“You had no right to interfere in my business, Draco. They tell me at the jail that you negotiated her release on my behalf, something I never would have agreed to but that you’d forged my signature on falsified documents. She robbed me blind while working my books and I intend to get restitution.”

“Yes,” Draco said, rolling his eyes. “I’m sure of that. If there’s a punishment to be doled out, you’ll certainly find someone to take it.”

“There are laws in place to deter these mudblood crimes and I intend to see justice meted out, Draco. Your petulant rebellion against your heritage means nothing.”

The elder Malfoy was seething with anger, his silver eyes glinting like ice in the low light of Draco's suite and for a few moments his son was terrified, taken back twenty years to the night that his father caught him fiddling with potions unattended. It didn't matter that Draco was nearly thirty years old, his father would always have the ability to make him feel insignificant and off kilter, balancing precariously on the end of a broom. He poured himself another drink and took a deep breath. There was no reason to be afraid. He had the power; that's why his father was angry.

“I highly doubt you want to drag this out into the garish light of day, Lucius. What's done is done. A hundred thousand galleons is little more than a week of slave driving to you...is it really worth having your name associated with The Dragon? Having people talking about your estranged pimp son who denounced the Dark Bigot? The failure progeny who couldn't find success on either side of the battle? Do you think mother would approve?”

Draco raised an eyebrow of victory with the last sentence as he knew the answer as well as Lucius did. Narcissa's entire life was devoted to rebuilding her reputation in the world of wizard social climbing and the less scandal that occurred on that front the better. In fact, with Draco's snatching up of Hermione, the story of the mudblood stealing the pureblood fortune was quickly buried and none of Lucius' investors were the wiser. If he decided to kick up a fuss about Hermione's current line of work, Draco would make sure that every shit covered stone was turned over until the Malfoy name was ground into the dust.

Lucius stood, his drink untouched, and loomed over his son's desk, his hands folded behind his back like a gentleman.

“I intend to get my one hundred thousand galleons, and I want to make sure I take it out of Miss Granger's ass. In six months, you will pay me every penny that is owed plus...fifty percent interest. I don't care if you have to line up twenty men a night to fuck her inside out, I will get what is owed to me from that uppity mudblood whore or I guarantee you this palace of smut will be taken down. I know enough people at the Ministry to tell you that you would fail any number of surprise inspections and I would make sure that you were arrested in full view of a dozen photographers. And if that doesn't work, there's always fire.”

“You'll get your money back,” Draco said, standing up himself and heading for the door. “And in exchange I never want to see your face in this building again.”

“With pleasure.”

Hermione was walking through the second floor library after lunch when she heard a thump and a tinkling crash followed by,

“Shit.”

Looking in, she saw the glass shattered on the hardwood floor, a crystal decanter that had been filled with scotch. Draco didn't see her watching him, watching how he just sat for a moment, his shoulders dropped, frowning at the wet mess on the floor, shaking his head. In his hand was a glass half full of liquor which he set down carefully before moving to clean up the mess. As usual, he was barefoot and she watched as he took his first step, hovering over a glinting sliver of glass.

"Draco!" She cried.

He looked up, startled, and stepped on the crystal, hissing with pain as he fell back into the chair.

"Dammit Granger," he growled, looking at the bottom of his foot.

She crossed the room quickly and knelt in front of him, looking closely at the wound. The shard was sunk deep into the sole of his foot, dark blood starting to stain the glass.

"Hold still," she said, gripping the slippery triangular piece between two fingers and sliding it from his skin.

The blood flowed freely then, a small rivulet onto her fingers and down her hand. Without thinking twice she slipped her thumb into her mouth to lick it clean before wiping her hands on her thighs. His fingers dug into her shoulder as she squeezed his foot to clear the wound.

"I need to get bandages," she said.

"Just leave it," he said, pulling away and waving his hand over the cut, easily healing it with a whispered spell. Having had her wand taken away, she'd almost forgotten that magic was an option. "It's like you never even went to school," he said with a smirk.

She turned and crawled towards the spill, picking up the biggest pieces of wet glass and gathering them in her palm.

"Don't. You're going to..." he held his hand out to her. "Sparrow, don't. I'll take care of it."

Sure enough, with another flick of his wrist, the mess vanished.

"I'm so sorry," she said, still on her knees. "I shouldn't have startled you. I saw that you were..."

"Granger stop," he touched her shoulder again. "It's fine."

He was staring down at her kneeling between his legs just as she'd done the first night she was there, looking up at him with those wide brown eyes. The only difference was that her mind was her own this time. Her feelings were her own. He needed to know.

When he reached for her she froze, unsure of what he was going to do as the look on his face was a cross between rage and need. Draco took her face in his hands and bent down, pressing his mouth to hers and at the touch of his lips a bolt of electricity whipped through her body – unleashing energy like the snapping of a taut wire. She held fast to his forearms as he kissed

her again, his lips pushing hers apart, his tongue slipping languidly, slowly over hers, drawing the moment out, savoring the twisting connection of their bodies. Heat flooded between her legs, her heart hammering behind her ribs. She went up on her knees and kissed him back with more power, moaning against his mouth, reaching her hands into his hair, massaging the back of his neck.

He pulled back to look into her eyes, pressing his forehead to hers as he caught his breath in fast, shallow gasps.

“Go,” he said, rubbing his thumb over her wet bottom lip, doing his best to ignore the ache for her deep in his belly, the voice telling him to push her down, to take her. “Go back to your room.”

“Draco...” she tried to pull him back, to pull his body flush against hers. “Let me show you. You can have this. You can feel good. It’s ok to feel good.”

“Go back to your room Granger...before I do something I shouldn’t,” he whispered, his voice sad, broken, his nose brushing over her temple, drinking in the feel, the smell of her skin, the play of her breath over his lips. He’d only wanted to know what it would be like to taste her, to kiss her. It wouldn’t be right to take any more.

“Let me help you Draco,” she said, threading her fingers through his hair, trying to make him look at her but he only blinked and turned from her face. “You don’t have to do this to yourself.”

He wasn’t listening as he stood and pulled her hands away.

“Goodnight Sparrow,” he said. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

The morning delivery of potions woke her and she thanked the elf who set them out on the vanity.

“Healer Moonstone is wanting to remind you to take all the potions every morning. Especially this one,” the elf said, handing her a tiny vial of pale purple liquid.

“What is this? I know the others are supplements and vitamins.”

“Is a contraceptive potion, miss. Now that your cycle has started again Healer is wanting to make sure you take it every day.”

She’d nearly forgotten what her actual purpose at the club was in the past few weeks, but there was always a chance someone would come for her. The elf leaned in to her, holding out the vial. As unnerving as it was to have the house elves discussing her period, she took the potion and uncorked it.

“The other girls are loving the potion because it is stopping the painful curse for as long as you take it.”

She downed the vial in one gulp.

Sarah and Claire were sitting near the kitchen window watching the first snow of the season, drawing flowers and letters on the frosted glass. Hermione couldn't help but smile at the childlike smiles on their faces, both of them wearing pink fluffy slippers with their lush satin robes.

“Good morning,” Hermione said, moving to stand beside them, looking out at the sparkling landscape, everything frosted and frozen, sparkling in the morning sunlight. “How were your evenings?”

“I had a lovely time playing healer and patient with a visiting professor from Durmstrang,” Sarah said, “but poor Claire had to be a love counselor

Claire rolled her eyes and laughed.

“Wren's Mr. Z hasn't been back for her and she's heartbroken,” she said. “I think she was counting on him buying out her contract and whisking her off to a life of high wizard society.”

“Isn't that what all of you are hoping for?” Hermione asked, drawing an eight pointed star in the window frost. “A way to get out? You can't possibly want to be a prostitute your whole life.”

She was shocked to see both girls shrug, not at all horrified at the prospect.

“Mr. Malfoy found me at an inn in Bromley,” Claire said, not looking away from the window. “I started out as a cleaning girl because I couldn't find work anywhere else. The owner knew I was muggleborn, desperate for somewhere to live, desperate for work, and before long he was turning me out, selling me off to whomever was spending the night. I didn't have a say in anything; not the price, the customers, what was off limits. I had no way to escape if someone decided to beat the shit out of me, break my cheekbone, bruise my kidney. I was just...the pub whore. Mr. M came in for a pint and saw me cleaning tables with a black eye and bruises around my throat from the night before. ‘How much for this little bird,’ he asked. My boss said ‘three galleons and she's yours’. Mr. M threw a bag full of money onto the bar and took me by the hand and next thing I knew, we were here.

Healer Moonstone fixed up my wounds and healed my bruises, gave me potions for the three infections I hadn't known I was fighting off; I had a hot bath and a good meal and I've been here gladly ever since. I'm a muggleborn. I'm lucky to just be alive in this world. Mr. Malfoy is the first person in years to treat me like I'm worth something and the first person who cares

how others treat me.” Finally she turned to Hermione, a few tears glistening in her eyes. “So no, I’m not looking for a way out.”

“Not all of us grew up as the hero of wizardkind,” Sarah added, a hint of ice in her words that Hermione had never heard from her. “Not all of us are destined for greatness alongside the chosen one. We know we’re at the bottom of the food chain...we’re not so high and mighty as to think that were too good to fuck for money.”

Sarah put an arm around Claire who was crying quietly, wiping her nose on her sleeve.

“I only meant...” Hermione started.

“We know what you meant. We know how you feel. We also know you’d be rotting in prison if it weren’t for Draco,” Claire hissed at her. “We know that for all of your snooty, bookish posturing, you’re just a petty thief who would still be in chains if it weren’t for him. And for some reason he only has eyes for you. Think about that and maybe someday you’ll do something to deserve it.”

The girls walked away leaving Hermione alone, staring out at the swirling snow.

Three days later she stood in the line up, keeping her distance from the other girls. Sarah and Claire had revealed what the rest of the Pleiades were thinking and ever since Hermione had noticed how they whispered and stared at her out of the corner of their eyes. She noticed how conversations died when she walked into the room, even as they greeted her with wide smiles and gentle hugs. Now she stood alone, leaning against the bannister, thinking about what book she was going to read and whether or not she’d washed her hair in the last two days when she heard her name.

“Sparrow,” he said, his voice clipped and cold, barely meeting her eyes, his hands clenching and unclenching into fists. “You’ve been requested.”

“It’s a miracle,” Wren muttered, but quickly shrunk back when Draco flicked his eyes in her direction, his top lip curled into an angry snarl.

“Yes sir,” Hermione said, breathing deep, steeling herself for what was to come.

“Room five. Eleven p.m. Your clothing will be in your armoire. The rest of you are free for the evening. Enjoy yourselves.”

“Thank you Mr. Malfoy,” they all said in unison.

Requested

Chapter Summary

Smut herein. For those who wanted to be warned, there is explicit content under the umbrella of prostitution.

She got to the room early, wearing the gunmetal grey pushup bra and lace panties that had appeared in her armoire, her hair pulled back halfway and braided down the back as her client had requested. The room was spacious, decorated differently from the first room she'd been sent to, with a downy soft king sized sleigh bed covered in snowy white linens and a small leather love seat in front of the roaring fireplace. It was homey...comfortable. There was no champagne, no potions or toys, no further instructions. No books. All she could do was wait.

This would be her second client and now that she was aware of the protocols, there was something about knowing that Draco would be watching this later while she sat right in front of him that triggered a flare of heat on the back of her neck. It would be different now when she spoke or posed or moaned with pleasure. For some reason the fact that it was essentially all for him increased her arousal tenfold: a lust potion in itself. She wondered if that was the case for all the girls, if they'll upped their performance knowing it would be pulled from their heads the next morning. They were clearly angry that Draco was close with her and she was confident that countless women had tried to seduce him over the years; either because they truly felt something for him or because they knew he had the power, money and influence to change their lives. Still she doubted that any of them knew the weight of the chains he wore, the past horrors that the two of them shared. The war was like a disease the two of them carried, leaving them immune to each other.

Her client knocked on the door at ten minutes after eleven and her heart leapt, filling her with nerves and excitement, a sort of anticipatory fear.

"Come in," she cooed, undoing the knot on her robe and leaning back on her forearms seductively.

After a moment more the door swung open and Draco walked into the room. She stood up immediately, retying her robe, thinking she'd made a mistake, she'd gone to the wrong room, her guest had changed his mind. He was in his black suit, the first few buttons of his shirt undone, his black silk tie hanging loose beneath his collar. Although he looked tired, nearly tormented, his eyes were clear and he was steady on his feet. He was sober.

"Sparrow," he said, stepping further into the room, but staying near the door. "I shouldn't be here."

"...Mr. Malfoy..."

“No...” he said, holding a hand up to silence her. “Don’t call me that. Not tonight.”

“Draco...”

“No!” He snapped, almost too loud, too harsh. “I’m not him. Don’t let me be him. Pretend I’m someone else.”

Hermione nodded and took a few steps closer, loosening her belt again and letting her robe fall open. His eyes fell to her breasts, his tongue darting out over his lower lip.

“What shall I call you then?” She asked, slipping the tie from around his neck.

He closed his eyes and breathed deep, working his jaw as if he wanted to speak, but nothing came until she touched his face, forcing him to look at her.

“Atlas,” he said, pushing the satin robe from her shoulders. “I want you to show me,” he said, pressing a kiss to the side of her neck, the hollow of her collarbone. “Show me how to block it all out and just feel. Show me how to feel good. I want to feel good. I want to come hard enough to feel it in my toes.”

Again Hermione nodded in full understanding, letting the robe fall from her arms, standing before him in her bra and panties, waiting for him to move, to say something – to touch her, to take her. He was frozen, staring as she moved to unbutton his shirt, pushing it back and down over his shoulders, stroking the warm skin on his chest, the tattoo on his arm. Her own hands were shaking, trembling with nerves, but also with arousal. She’d known from the moment she set foot inside the Dragon that this day would come, that the two of them would come together like this somehow. It was a strange, thrumming tension she’d felt between them since they were just kids, some sort of crackling energy that sparked back and forth even as they fought, spitting insults and invective that cut to the core. Friends had made jokes about it over the years...*can you imagine...it would be so funny if you guys...* And now, twelve years later, that tension was about to snap. But even as she felt that energy throbbing in the air he only stared, his shirt halfway down his arms, untucked at the waist, his jaw slack as his eyes followed the movement of her lips as she placed a trail of kisses to his collarbones.

“What would you like?” She asked, tracing her fingers over the runes on his chest. “What would make you feel good?”

As if broken from a trance, he shook the shirt from his wrists and unbuckled his belt, not once breaking eye contact as he pulled the leather free and set it aside. He was silent for another moment before grabbing her wrists and holding them tight, keeping her hands flat against his skin, taut and warm over hard muscle.

“The war ruined me,” he said, looking down at where she touched him. “I’m stained by it. Everything was hard. It was all hard and fast and frantic. It was dark. There was no romance.

There was no love. No tenderness. There was no time for it.”

She nodded reassuringly even as his grip on her wrists grew tighter, his harsh words turning her on for some reason. Perhaps everyone had been ruined.

“I want you,” he said, his words barely a whisper. “I’ve wanted you for a long time, since the moment I saw you on my doorstep...your defiant face, your unbroken spirit. But I don’t want to *sleep* with you. I don’t want to *make love* to you. I want to *fuck* you, Hermione.”

She shivered at the sound of the words slipping from his lips. He let go of her wrists and wrapped a hand around the back of her neck, pulling her into a hard, nearly punishing kiss.

“I want to fuck you,” he repeated; this time with more strength. “I want to bruise you,” he said, his hands tight around her biceps. “I want to mark you with my teeth. I want to taste your sweat.”

She nodded and he walked her backwards towards the bed, her knees buckling as she hit the mattress while his lips and tongue slid over her neck in a line of hot open mouthed kisses following the tendons in her throat. He kissed her mouth again before pushing her onto her back, marveling at the sight of her laid out for him, her arms stretched high above her head as she smiled. He unbuttoned his trousers.

“I want to fuck you.”

The icy flare in his eyes took her breath away and she eagerly spread her legs, making room for him to wedge himself between her thighs. Without a word he hitched her legs up and kissed the warm skin on her calves and behind her knees, his hand splayed out on her stomach to hold her still.

“Show me,” he growled, nipping at the skin of her thigh. “Push your panties to the side and show me your cunt.”

Already hot and impossibly slick, Hermione complied instantly, stroking herself with two fingers before parting her lips and swirling over her clit, opening herself to him. He groaned his approval, lunging forward to suck her fingers in deep over his tongue, breathing in her scent, licking up every drop of her essence. He’d known exactly how she would taste. He could have predicted it. Earth and ocean, bright and real.

“More,” she murmured, grabbing his hair and grinding against his face. “lick me, please. Eat my pussy.”

Her begging went straight to his already hard cock and he dove between her legs. With a sharp snap of his fingers her lingerie was vanished and his tongue sunk deep between her satiny lips up to her clit, circling and swirling as she whined for release. His eye glittered, shining like quicksilver.

“No,” he said, pulling back and hovering over her. “Not yet. The first time I feel you come will be when I’m buried inside you.”

He backed away and pulled her up to her knees, his kisses deep and insistent as he worked her to the edge of oblivion with his fingers, one hand holding the back of her neck, keeping her close enough that they breathed each other’s air, their foreheads pressed together, holding her gaze. Before long she was gasping, trembling in his arms, pushing against the heel of hand, chasing his lips. His mouth twisted into a cruel smile as he kept her from kissing him, kept her from going over. He craved being needed.

“Beg me,” he whispered, his voice ragged as he slowly pumped three fingers inside of her, twisting and scissoring against her walls.

She ran her hands down his chest to the hard length beneath his pants and squeezed. He growled in her ear and she pulled at the zipper, slipping her hand inside to touch him and he grabbed her wrist to stop her, still looking her in the eye.

“Beg me,” he said again, pulling her onto his lap so that she straddled his hips, so he could feel the heat of her cunt through the fabric of his trousers.

She rolled her hips, her tongue flicking out over his lips as she nearly panted with want, her cheeks flushed red, eyes fiery.

“Please...please give me your cock. Fuck me with it. Please. I want you inside me.”

He kissed her hard as he vanished the rest of his clothing, pulling her against his chest so she could wrap her limbs around him, feeling every inch of her skin sliding with his. Hermione knew that with the tiniest shift of her hips she could sink down onto him. But she also knew that it wasn’t what he wanted. That wasn’t what he needed. He didn’t want a slow, languid screw. He wanted to fuck. She needed to do her job.

Breaking the kiss she unwound herself from his body and turned to lay on her stomach, spreading her legs and tipping her ass up. Looking over her shoulder at him fisting his thick length, his chest heaving with breath, she whispered to him one more time.

“Please.”

He moved to lay on top of her, interlacing their fingers before pinning her hands, his cock nestled between her spread thighs, his breath hot on the back of her neck.

“I shouldn’t have started this,” he said, thrusting inside her. “Fuck, Hermione. I shouldn’t be here.”

Knowing that he wouldn’t turn away, that he couldn’t, she groaned in response, closing her eyes to feel him filling her, the stretch, the heat, her clit grinding against the mattress. His movements were focused and intense, only his hips snapping against her as he lay over her

back. Clutching her hands tighter, he ran his tongue up the side of her neck as he pushed harder, his weight pressing the air from her lungs with every hammering thrust.

“Every night,” he panted in her ear, “every night I watch you fuck Theo again. I watch your face when you come for him, I watch how you smile when he fucks your throat. I want it to be me.”

Beneath him she twisted and bucked, desperate for release, but he demanded his own pace, his teeth sinking into her neck to still her.

“Every night I come all over my own hand wishing I could feel your mouth on me, your tongue, your pussy. Every night I want to fucking devour you.”

His thrusts were more punishing, deeper, his hips moving faster as she cried out, her muscles clenching tight around him as her orgasm ripped through her body, white sparks clouding her vision, her arms trembling as she felt every nerve bubble with ecstasy. Still she wanted more.

“Please,” she whined, arching her back, bending her neck. “Harder, please. Come inside me. I want to feel it inside me.”

He growled his response and with his last frantic thrusts he answered her pleas, groaning almost in pain as he emptied deep within her heat.

For a moment he kept her body pinned beneath him, the two of them catching their breath in silence, their skin slick with sweat and sex, but as soon as he pulled out of her she rolled him onto his back, her mouth covering his, her tongue hot and twisting, slipping over his own as she straddled his chest, his seed dripping out onto his belly, mixed with her own slick arousal.

“You can have me every night,” she said, moving down to lick him clean, her lips and tongue sliding over his chest and stomach, taking up every drop, her eyes hooded and burning with lust. “Anything you want...my mouth, my tongue, my pussy. I can give it to you. Isn't that what I'm here for?”

He ran his fingers through her damp hair as she took him in her mouth and hissed at the overstimulation. Yet within minutes her ministrations had coaxed him back to life and she smiled as his cock slowly hardened again, running her tongue over the smooth length of his shaft. Her scalp prickled at the feeling of his fingers running through her hair and she thought back to the image of him watching her...wanting her.

“Let me suck your cock,” she whispered, placing a kiss on the tip of his prick. “You won't have to watch me with Theo anymore...you'll know what it's like to feel me swallow around you.” Her tongue ran down his shaft and she pumped him with her hand, her eyes on his as he tried to keep his composure, breathing slow through clenched teeth. “Let me take care of you.”

“Yes,” was all he could manage, his head thrown back, eyes closed.

Hermione took his full length to the back of her throat, swirling and sucking as she bobbed over him. She wanted him to feel good. She wanted to feel him come again, to feel the same blinding, pure bliss that she’d felt. This man who had blackmailed her, imprisoned her, turned her into a whore; all she wanted was to see him feel pleasure at her touch. He hardened and twitched against her tongue, his hands deep in her hair, holding her as he bucked his hips against her mouth.

“Touch yourself,” he breathed. “Make yourself come when I do. Fuck yourself with your fingers.”

She did as he asked, slipping two fingers between her legs, circling her wet, oversensitive clit in time with her slow movements over his cock.

“I make you so wet, don’t I,” he purred, sliding in and out of her mouth. “You’re wet for me.”

“Mmm,” she hummed and he bucked hard, twitching on her tongue.

“Turn around, let me taste you again. Give me your pussy.”

She swung around to straddle his face, lowering herself down to his lapping, warm tongue. He let go of her hair and dug his fingers into her thighs, plunging his tongue deep inside as she ground her hips against his mouth. When he moved to suck her clit between his lips and swirl his tongue around it she began to tremble, working faster over his erection, massaging his tightening sack as she felt the first waves of his climax. They came, his face slick with her juices, his seed sliding down her throat, each of them crying out as their bodies slipped together, riding out their orgasm.

She rolled off of him and curled onto her side on the bed next to him, her hair fanned out over the pillow, her hands clasped under her head. It was as if she were floating, riding the wave of an endorphin high.

“Do you feel better?” She asked after a minute, watching him lay still, his eyes closed, his flushed chest rising and falling with deep, slow breath.

“Yes,” he said, drawing out the final letter on a sigh. He reached out for her hand and pulled her knuckles to his lips. “It’s been a long time. Thank you, Sparrow.”

“Just doing my job, Mr. Malfoy,” she said, moving to lay closer, to throw an arm over his chest. But as he heard her use his name he stiffened slightly, she saw his brow furrow. She smoothed the tension from it with her thumb. “I didn’t want to fuck Atlas,” she whispered against his cheek. “I wasn’t turned on by some stranger. It wasn’t a client that made me dripping wet with need. It was you Draco. I wanted Draco. I still do.”

“You shouldn’t,” he muttered. “I’m your boss.” He turned onto his side, facing away from her. “This can’t happen again.”

She pulled away from him then, hearing the change in his voice...a different Draco from the one who had been desperate to give her pleasure fifteen minutes earlier, growling with need. But when she moved to get out of the bed he pulled her back by the wrist, back to lay beside him. He waved his hand and the duvet covered them both, the fire low and crackling.

“Not yet. Just go to sleep,” he said. “It’s late.”

The Upper Hand

He lay beside her awake for some time, still holding tight to her wrist, anchoring her to the bed as if she would disappear, float away, dissolve like a dream if he weren't touching her. She moved to curl against his side, molding herself to his body with one leg thrown casually over his...entirely comfortable, completely at peace. He didn't think it was possible.

Still he refused to close his eyes, to let his muscles soften, to allow the warm, thrumming glow in his blood lull him to sleep. He'd seen the look on her face when he'd fallen asleep beside her in his office; the horror in her eyes at seeing him screaming in his sleep, and it wasn't something he'd put her through again. No matter what she thought, an hour of euphoric bliss wasn't going to wash the darkness out of his mind. She *had* made him feel better though, more than he had expected. When he told her that he couldn't be gentle with her he'd expected her to be afraid, to pull away from his grip, his teeth sinking into her skin, his hands pinning her down, and yet she'd only wanted more...begged for more: harder, deeper. Perhaps she was just as twisted as he was, perhaps they'd all been ruined.

The fire died down to embers and beside him her leg twitched, a long sigh rushing from her parted lips. The sheet had fallen away to reveal her breasts, stomach, the dip of her waist. For the first time he looked closely at the pale, silvered scars that slashed across her abdomen and arms, running his fingertips over the raised skin down to the bone of her hip. They were remnants of spells thrown in battle, each one unique: the small starburst shape of a stupefy, the jagged, forking lightning strike of a cruciatus. He bore the same lines, carried the same history. A fresh bruise was blooming on the side of her neck where he'd bitten and sucked at her flesh just to hear her moan, whining with need. He felt no shame at leaving it; in fact it made him want more. The sight of his mark on her made him want to brand every inch of her as his alone, something he knew he couldn't do. He'd grown so adept at showing people what they needed to see, becoming the Draco that was expected that he could easily switch masks revealing only what was necessary. The things he wanted, truly wanted from Hermione, he had no right to ask and he knew she'd never give.

Careful not to wake her, Draco slid out of bed, wrapping himself in the black satin robe hanging in the bathroom. He'd chosen room five because it was so close to the main staircase and he'd be able to leave and slink back to his room, silent and undetected. With one last glance at his Sparrow in her nest of crumpled sheets, he kissed her bare shoulder and left, making his way to the front hall. It was nearly two a.m.

"Mr. Malfoy?"

He froze halfway up the staircase, Felicia standing in front of him in her pajamas, her arms tightly crossed over her chest as she was padding down the cold marble stairs barefoot.

"What are you doing up, love?" He asked, running a hand through his hair, trying to smooth it, pulling his robe tightly closed.

Wren cocked her head to the side and examined him for a moment before yawning. It was a Wednesday night and the club rooms had closed early, the house had been dark for hours.

“I couldn’t sleep. I was going to see if the elves had a sleeping draught. Why are you up?”

“Same reason I’m afraid,” he said, exhaling in relief. “Go on then, I’ll see you in the morning.”

He pulled her into a hug and kissed the crown of her head before she shuffled past him down the stairs on her way to the kitchens. Still half asleep, she nearly tripped over Claire, who had been sitting alone in the dark having a cigarette, just outside room four.

Hermione woke up in the dark, the other side of the bed empty, pillows straightened, the duvet tucked in. He’d left. The antique clock above the mantel read five thirty and the sky outside was inky black, dotted with winter stars. The pillow he rested his head on still smelled like his soap...or was it cologne? Or just him? Whatever it was it was bright, spicy, woody cedar and citrus, the smell of deep winter. Burrowing beneath the down duvet, she pulled his pillow into her arms and went back to sleep, imagining she wasn’t alone.

It was past nine by the time she made it back to her room, finding her daily potions lined up, her bed neatly made by the house elves. While she started running a bath there was a knock on her door.

“Come in,” she said, pinning up her hair.

“Good morning.” Claire stood in the doorway, arms folded, one eyebrow arched high. In those two words Hermione could tell that her warm greeting was anything but.

“Morning, Finch,” she said, paying her little attention, looking for a book to peruse while soaking in the bath.

“How was your client last night? Not too rough I hope.”

“No, it was fine. I’m...he’s asked to remain anonymous. I’m not supposed to talk about him,” Hermione lied easily while facing away from her.

“I’ll bet.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” She finally turned, walking closer to the younger girl, looking her right in the eye.

“Nothing,” Claire said, shrugging. “Just that things rarely remain anonymous in a brothel. And once one person knows...everyone knows. Of course nothing is a secret to Mr. M for long anyway. But I’m sure you already know that.” She pushed off of the doorframe and curtsied dramatically. “Have a lovely bath little Sparrow. See you at breakfast.”

The girls who had worked the evening before reported to Malfoy's office after breakfast for their usual legitimacy session but found him tired, distracted, his usual quick wit and bright smile dulled around the edges.

"Sit, sit," he said to Claire, holding out his hand. "Everything ok last night? Nothing out of the ordinary? I've known Victor Handlesham since I was seven. He worked for my father after graduating Hogwarts. Never would have picked him for the ladies lingerie type but I suppose it takes all kinds."

"He was lovely, thank you sir," Claire said, smiling ear to ear; the cat with the cream. She leaned back against the sofa crossing one leg over the other, bobbing her foot. "And how was your evening, sir?"

He looked up sharply but covered for it in a blink, letting his eyebrows fall, adopting a bored, noncommittal tone as he rolled and lit a cigarette for both of them. It was a vice they both shared and he indulged her in a treat every now and again.

"It was fine, nothing to alert the press about," he said, offering a weak, brief smile.

"No?" She asked again, raising an eyebrow and exhaling a long stream of smoke over his head. "That's a shame."

His face went very suddenly dark, eyes laser focused and she felt a cold shiver down her neck, her arrogant swagger draining from her face. She'd been at the Dragon longer than most of the girls and was more prone to push the boundaries of their relationship but now she knew she'd gone too far.

"Did you have a question for me, Finch?" He asked, the words clipped and sharp. "Something you'd like to talk about?"

"N...no sir. I only..."

"I'm sorry, what?" He took a long drag on the cigarette, waiting for her to respond, his eyes squinted slightly from the acrid smoke, head tipped toward her as if straining to listen.

She only looked down at her hands and swallowed her nerves. When he spoke again his voice was quiet, a bit softer, and so she looked him in the eye.

"You're very comfortable here, little Finch, aren't you? Been here a while, taken care of very well? Maybe you're a bit too comfortable. I would hate to have to remind you of what your life could be like. What it *was* like before you came here." He reached out and wrapped a hand around the back of her neck, pushing her against the back of the couch, his eyes ice cold and his voice a deadly whisper. "We are not friends, *Claire*. This is not a gossip session over tea. You've been a very good girl for me, an essential part of the Pleiades...but going forward I suggest you remember who is in charge here. You may think that you have some sort of

information that may give you the upper hand, but I assure you it does not. I *am* the upper hand, darling. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes sir," she answered, her hand shaking as she flicked the ash away from her cigarette.

He reached out to take her hand between both of his, patting them in a gesture of reassurance.

"You're a good girl. Now, relax, look at me...Legilimens..."

Hermione sat alone in the dining room with her lunch and a book...Claire and Felicia chatting in the corner, looking in her direction from time to time. It was quite clear that someone had found out who her "client" was the night before, and it only served to drive a deeper, wider wedge between her and the rest of the Pleiades. It didn't matter. She'd learned long ago that it was safer to stay detached. Clinging to family and friends, swearing never to leave one behind, only ended in regret, second thoughts, hesitation... things that weren't conducive to survival. There was a time when she would have begged for a shoulder to lean on, but now it was something she didn't have the luxury of indulging in. Back before the war...even during the war she'd treasured the bonds she had with Harry and Ron, even Ginny and Hannah, but now she knew it was only a liability. Love and loyalty were dangerous. That was the state of the world.

Just before she got up to leave, Draco strode into the room dressed in a black suit and shining black shoes – fresh as a daisy. His hair was perfectly smooth, swept back from his face and he was wearing black-framed glasses that stood out starkly against his pale skin. He walked by her without even so much as a glance and yet just seeing him sent a ripple of lust through her; just looking at his hands, the back of his neck, the cupid's bow of his lips. She'd touched every part of him, licked his semen off of his chest. She'd seen him come undone.

"Ladies, good afternoon," he said, stopping near the bar to pour a ridiculous amount of scotch into a crystal glass. "Just to let you know I will be out this afternoon at a Christmas party in London." He rolled his eyes as if it were a prison sentence. "As it happens we don't have any guests on the books for this evening, although I guarantee this weekend to be very busy. Everybody trying to get one last good shag in before going to see mum for the holiday." He stood with his back to her, as if she weren't a part of his group...his little birds. "So you all have tonight off. Behave yourselves."

She watched from the window as he left the mansion, walking briskly to the floo he'd installed in the gatehouse at the top of the drive. The day was gray and windy and he walked from the house with his hands deep in his pockets, the collar of his black coat turned up to block the wind. Against the wide gray sky and rolling grounds his slim black figure looked very stark and alone.

Hermione couldn't remember the last time she'd celebrated Christmas. Of course it came and went every year and she and the other mixed blood wizards watched as the pureblood world celebrated to excess with glowing lights and loud music, wine, women and song. While

working for Lucius she bit her tongue as she calculated the cost of the endless list of gifts he purchased for business associates, friends and Narcissa of course. One less ruby bracelet and he could have fed and clothed a halfblood family for a month. But Voldemort had instilled in everyone the necessity of letting the cream rise to the top, told them how no one would succeed if everything was handed to them, that a true wizard would either find prosperity or create it on his own. The strong should be rewarded for their strength, enjoying the spoils of their hard work. Charity, he bellowed, was for the weak.

Draco, apparently disagreed. She woke up the next morning and found the mansion dripping with decorations, two twelve foot tall trees in the front foyer, glittering with lights and silver ribbons and more, smaller trees in each of the club rooms and libraries decorated with gilded fruit and pinecones, charmed snow and glittering icicles. Big silver bowls of oranges studded with cloves sat on every table filling the house with a homey, cozy scent and white fairy lights wound up all of the banisters and floated near the ceiling casting everything in a warm glow.

“He loves Christmas,” Sarah said, when she found Hermione staring at the ornaments on the tree in the library. “The club is closed, we always get something nice and there’s a big roast dinner.”

“I suppose its because he doesn’t have family to go to, or that he wants to go to,” Hermione said, happy at least to have someone talking to her again. “I used to love Christmas too. I didn’t realize until now how much I missed it.”

“He’ll be happy to hear that,” Sarah said, smiling. “Anything for his *little sparrow*.”

She smiled at Hermione and sauntered from the room before she could offer any response.

Take What You Want

The weekend was busy as promised, but still Hermione wasn't requested. It had been over a month since Theo had asked for her, but still she stood in the lineup dutifully every night and every night he walked right past her, barely catching her eye with a curt nod before speaking to the others. She didn't care if the girls froze her out but Draco held her life in his hands. As kind as he had been to her, as much as he'd revealed, she knew he had another side...a dark streak, a need for revenge. If she'd offended him she had to make it right.

"Mr. Malfoy..." she called to him when they were released on Saturday night.

"I have to go," he said. "My guests are already arriving, they'll be looking for me."

She reached out to grab his elbow and he wrenched his arm away as if she'd burned him, glaring at her over his shoulder.

"Don't," was all he said before leaving her alone on the landing, hopping down the stairs two at a time.

When the guests were there, Hermione often kept herself locked in her room, reading or writing in the journal Draco had given her. She took hot baths and stared out the window, fighting down the urge to break through the glass and run, damn the consequences or the pain. With winter coming she knew that her cabin fever would only get worse and being trapped in this well disguised prison did nothing to help, particularly with no one to talk to.

After the club was closed she wandered the halls to stretch her legs. Or at least that's what she told herself. As she shuffled through the hallways she found herself peeking into the atrium to find the piano closed, silent. She picked books from the library shelves but he never showed up to criticize her choices. Even when she sneaked into the kitchen to steal biscuits from the cupboard he didn't appear over her shoulder clucking his tongue and reprimanding her sweet tooth. She was awake until well after two in the morning and even then the light from his office seeped out under the black lacquer doors and she could hear the fire crackling within, but even knowing he was in there and most likely alone, Hermione never dared to knock.

Until Monday, when she'd grown tired of his game and decided that she'd waited long enough to get her answers.

"Mr. Malfoy?"

There was a long pause and she nearly turned away before he said,

"Come in."

He didn't look up when she opened the door and strode confidently into the middle of his study, standing with her arms crossed as if awaiting his answer to a duel.

"Why did you leave?" She asked, moving to stand directly in front of his desk arranging herself so he would be forced to see her. "I woke up and you were gone, the fire was out. You didn't even say goodbye? Thanks? See you later?"

With a sharp upward wave of his hand the door to the office slammed shut and he muttered a muffled just to be safe. Finally he looked up and she could see that he'd fitted his aristocrat mask into place, his smile lopsided, eyebrow arched high. He wanted her to know that he was quite amused with her hysterics and he was ready to perform.

"You must not be familiar with prostitution, darling. You don't get paid to cuddle and fawn."

"I don't get *paid* at all Mr. Malfoy," she snapped and he barked out a short laugh, shaking his head.

"I never suggested I would be spending the whole night and you shouldn't have expected such a thing." He paused then, looking down at the journal he was writing in before glancing up again. "You're no different, no better than the other girls here, Sparrow."

When he looked at her she was shaking her head, her brow wrinkled with disbelief and confusion. She *was* different. And he knew that.

"Why are you doing this?" She asked, her voice soft, demure. She refused to take his bait, to lash out and throw a fit, but still he wouldn't look up. So she moved to put her hands on his desk, covering his papers, invading his space and refusing to be ignored. "Why are you doing this?"

"What, love?" He scribbled nonsense words in the journal, anything to keep from meeting her eyes. His mouth had gone dry and he felt like the walls were closing in. If there was one person in the world who could see through his thickest layers of bullshit, it was Hermione Granger, and she'd done it since she was eleven.

Obviously tired of the silence, she snatched the book out from under his quill and threw it across the room, just inches from the fireplace.

"Why are you pretending like nothing happened? Pretending like you didn't feel something when you were with me?"

He stood then, his eyes cool, face calm, rounding the desk to stand in front of her.

"It was one night, Sparrow. Just as you offered I used you for a release, a respite. Don't go fooling yourself into thinking it was anything more."

"Then why hide from me? Why avoid me? Why refuse to look me in the eye, locking yourself up in your office so you won't mistakenly see my face?"

For a brief moment she saw his expression flicker but he quickly went blank again, walking past her to pick the journal up from the floor.

“Go back to your room. Go back to your books. Just go.”

“Answer me, Draco.”

When he looked up his face was icy hard and terrifying. His jaw squared, tension pulsing at his temple.

“You must not have heard me. And I’m getting tired of your insubordination, everyone around here...digging holes where they’ve got no business being. Go back to your room. You’re not here to take care of me.”

“Well someone should, because it’s quite clear that you’re falling apart.”

She turned to leave, but before she could get out the door he slammed it shut again and pressed her face against it, his body heavy against her back.

“Do you want to know why I won’t look at you? Why I won’t talk to you?” He pulled her hair to the side, his lips against her neck, hips grinding against her ass. “It’s because every time I see you I want to fuck you again.”

“Draco...” she breathed as he ran his hand up her side, palming the silk covering her breast, plucking at the hard jewel of her nipple.

“I want to throw you on your knees and choke you with my cock. I want to spread you out on the dining room table and bury my face in your pussy, feel you come on my face. I want to... I...fuck...I can’t look at you anymore Hermione without getting hard.”

“I can feel that,” she said, pushing back against him. “You know that I want you too.”

“Do you?” He asked, his hand moving down, sliding over her stomach, between the panels of her robe. “Because I won’t be nice to you little Sparrow. I’ve tried to hold back, but I want to hurt you. I want to tie you up and stripe your ass with a belt. I want to close my hands around your neck until you’re begging me to let you breathe.”

She stepped her legs apart and he sunk his hand between them, finding her hot and wet, easily accepting his fingers.

“I’m not the sad, broken little schoolboy you think I am, Granger,” he hissed, pumping his fingers deep inside her, goosebumps rippling down his arms as she whined and writhed, her back arching away from his chest, her head thrown back to rest on his shoulder. “I don’t need your pity. I don’t need nurturing. I’m a monster. You should be afraid of me.”

“You can try to hurt me, Mr. Malfoy,” she breathed. “But you forget I’ve been through the same nightmare you have. It seems we were made for each other.”

He grabbed a fistful of her hair and bent her neck backwards as her thighs began to tremble, her hips bucking against his hand while he hissed in her ear.

“I wasn’t *made* for anyone,” he growled. “It’s just fucking. I won’t give you anything else. I can’t give you anything else.”

“I don’t want anything else Mr. Malfoy. What else would I want from you?” she moaned, groaning and pushing, dripping onto his hand, her face twisted in near agony as he teased her, pulling out to gently circle her clit before sinking in again. “Oh fuck,” she whispered. “Oh God. All I want is this.”

“Then kneel,” he said, pulling away from her completely. “Show me that you want it.”

Without a second’s hesitation, Hermione spun around and sunk to her knees, reaching out for the buckle of his belt.

“Ah ah...” he said, pushing her back with a hand on her throat. “No hands, witch. If you really want my cock, you’ll find a way to get it.”

He was pushing her. She could see that his eyes weren’t as fiery as before...she knew this was a test to see how far she was willing to lower herself and it nearly made her laugh. Wasn’t it clear already? Still, she clasped her hands behind her back and leaned in, taking the supple black leather of his belt between her teeth and pulling it free from the silver buckle. With a sharp jerk of her head, it was free of the tongue and hung loose.

“Eager little slut,” he muttered, granting her the favor of undoing the black button on his trousers. “Go on.”

She nodded and took the tab of the zipper in her teeth, looking up at him with a tiny, lopsided smile and pulled down, dragging her nose along the hard length she felt beneath the fabric. He pushed his pants down over his hips, his jaw slack as she dragged her lips and tongue over the outline of his cock, moaning obscenely, her robe fallen open, one breast exposed.

“Please,” she murmured against him, sitting back on her heels and spreading her knees wide. “Please let me have it.”

“Don’t move,” he said, tilting his head to the side, looking her over. After a minute he reached out pushed the robe off both of her shoulders, exposing her to the waist. Leaving the belt tied he pushed the fabric away from her legs, exposing her completely. “No knickers Granger? You must really be aching for it.”

“Check for yourself,” she said, grinning. “I’m dripping.”

He pulled his cock out, stroking himself slowly, watching her lean back against the door, her legs spread wide, hands still folded behind her back like a good girl. When he caught her eye she licked her lips and held her mouth open...waiting. Waiting for him. It was like being in a

dream. He never thought he'd see such a perfect work of art, panting, flushed, kneeling for him.

"Get up. On the desk," he said, still fisting his cock, nearly lightheaded with arousal as she let the black satin puddle at her feet before walking past him.

Her first instinct was to bend over, to present her ass to him while gripping the sides, her face pressed to the piles of scrolls and papers he'd been working on. Instead he grabbed her arm and spun her around, lifting her easily to sit on the edge.

"I want to see your face while I'm fucking you," he said, brushing her hair back over her shoulders.

She was surprised at the touch of his hands on her jaw, holding her gently as he kissed her, suckling at her lower lip. As their tongues slipped and stroked against each other she reached down to replace his hand, wrapping tight around his shaft, her thumb grazing the weeping tip of his erection. His eyes were wide as he pulled back to watch her work, thrusting slowly into her hand.

"I want you inside me," she said, inching forward, wrapping her legs around his hips. "Please...sir."

At the sound of the word he looked up with a sharp inhale, his thickness twitching between her fingers. He pushed her hand away and pulled her forward, sinking into her slick heat with one hard thrust. She fell back, balancing herself on her forearms, groaning with pleasure as his hips snapped against hers. His rhythm was smooth and even, his breath hot on her stomach as he watched his wet cock sliding in and out of her. Within minutes she felt the first buzzing ripples of her building orgasm and begged him to fuck her harder, her ankles locked behind his back, pulling him in deeper. Her mind started to go blank, reality feathering dark at the edges. It was what she craved, this blank slate for a few beautiful minutes.

And then he looked up.

She'd seen him aroused before, obviously. She'd seen his pupils blown wide, his cheeks flushed red. She'd seen his hair damp with sweat, falling in front of his eyes. But now there was something more. There was a dark, burning hunger in his stare. She smiled and pushed against him, grinding downwards, biting her lip. He stopped thrusting and lifted his hand for a moment before dropping it again, his eyes falling back down to her hips, his hand awkwardly placed on her shoulder. In that second she'd seen what he wanted. He'd told her as much earlier, but now he was afraid to take it.

"What do you want sir?" She whispered, slowly rolling and bucking her hips. "Tell me what you want. Take what you want."

He grabbed her thighs and pulled her hard against his hips, shaking his head. Hermione stopped moving and put a hand on his chest, forcing him to look up.

"Do it," she said quietly. "Don't be afraid. Do it."

He said nothing, still breathing heavy, still buried to the hilt, comforted by the tight warmth enveloping him. She reached for his hand, pulling it off of her arm and lifting it up, holding it between them.

“Go on...it’s what you want.”

“Hermione I...it’s not...”

She pulled his hand to her neck and closed his fingers around her throat. As he pressed lightly she bucked her hips again, purring with delight. He squeezed harder and she nodded, her mouth fallen open, her cheeks pinking up. He felt the heat, the rippling wave building low in his belly, the tightening in his balls as she reached up to cling to his forearms, her eyes calm. He hammered relentlessly into her pussy as he held her neck, grinning with a kind of malevolent evil she hadn’t seen since school.

“I decide,” he growled, his thrusts becoming shallower, faster. “I decide when you breathe little sparrow.”

She nodded, her eyes rolling back, lids fluttering. She saw sparks in her vision, a swimming dreamy feel, tight burning in her lungs combined with the orgasm racing towards her.

“Come,” he said, slamming her back against the desk, grinning over her as her mouth gaped, her eyes wide. “Come on my cock.”

Within seconds he felt her stiffen in his grip, her muscles trembling and twitching, her insides clenching around him as her mouth fell open in silent cry. He let go of her throat as his own climax rolled over him, her tight cunt milking him dry as she gasped for breath, whining as her back arched up off the desk.

He fell back, pulling out of her and catching his own breath as she lay splayed out on his desk, her hair a dark fan over his papers, her legs still spread, still glistening with arousal. Around her neck he could see red marks, the beginnings of bruises from where he’d choked her. He’d left another mark.

He pushed his hair back from his face and went to the table beside the couch to find the joint he’d rolled earlier, lighting it off of one of the candle sconces on the wall and taking a long hit that he held for far too long. Picking up his trousers and pulling them on he noticed that his hand was shaking. His hand that had choked the breath from her; that wanted to do it again. He stared at it as if it had betrayed him.

“Thank you...” she said, finally sitting up. “God that was...I don’t know what it was...”

She smiled and stood up from the desk, padding over to where he sat on the black leather sofa, staring into the fire. He looked up at her standing in front of him, her eyes dreamy and sated, a soft smile on her lips. Her pose reminded him of an old renaissance painting he’d seen once, some Goddess entirely comfortable in her own skin.

“Anything else, sir?” She said.

Yes. He wanted to bend her over his lap and smack her ass until it was purple. He wanted her on her knees. He wanted to watch her fuck herself with a crystal potions bottle. He wanted to put an iron collar around her neck that could never be removed, to burn his initials into her skin and keep her locked in his room. He wanted to fuck her again, five minutes after emptying inside her.

“No,” he said, taking her hand. He pulled her knuckles to his lips and kissed them before dropping her hand and taking another hit off the joint.

“I could run you a bath,” she said, running her fingers through his damp hair. “Or you could show me your bed...”

“I have work to do,” he said, resting his head on the back of the sofa as the herb began to hit, wrapping everything in comfy cotton, blurring the edges. “Just go.”

“Yes sir,” she said, her lips turned down at the corners.

“Wait,” he said, shaking his head. “Come here.”

She quickly walked closer, kneeling at his feet, her hands on his knees. His brow was furrowed as he frowned at her, his fingers running over her neck. She tilted her head to the side and closed her eyes, smiling at his touch; but just when she thought he was going to kiss her, or pull her up into his lap, or lay her on her back... he held his palm to her throat and muttered a spell that warmed and tingled against her skin. He healed the bruises, fading them before they could get any darker.

Pulling away and sitting back on the couch he muttered “People would ask questions. You can go,” with his eyes closed.

“They already know, Draco. It isn’t a secret.”

“I know,” he said, not looking at her. “I know they know. I don’t want to add any more fuel to their fire. I’ve seen how they treat you already. This would only make it worse.” He took another small hit from the joint and shook his head, his voice tight as he held the smoke. “Just go, Hermione.”

She stepped away and picked up her robe, tying the belt tight around her waist before heading for the door. With her hand on the knob she looked over her shoulder, watching him recline, the cigarette smoldering between his fingers.

“Don’t hide what you really want...sir,” she said softly. “I can take it. I want to take it. You need to let it out. You won’t feel better until --”

He looked up at her, his eyes glassy and heavy lidded but his jaw still tight with tension.

“Goodnight sparrow. I’ll let you know when you’ll be needed next.”

The club opened at nine, a few dedicated drinkers and gamblers waiting at the door, but their host wasn't waiting to greet them. Malia fixed Mr. Zabini and Mr. Wood some drinks and excused herself to find him.

"Mr. Malfoy?" She knocked on the door to his office and it pushed open only to find Draco sprawled on the couch, one arm hanging off the side, snoring softly...sound asleep.

Swathed in Silk

The club closed completely on Christmas Eve in order to throw a party for the staff and all of the Pleiades, who found sparkling beaded gowns in their armoires and black boxes filled with heavy, decadent jewels waiting on their vanities. Each outfit was styled perfectly for their personalities, the best colors for their skin and hair, their height and curves and everything was paired with expensive black leather heels at least three inches high. Hermione's dress was a deep wine red with jet black jewels dripping like rain down the front of the bodice, sleeves off the shoulder, the ankle length skirt dragging dramatically behind her in a short train. Two black leather cuffs with silver clasps and a thick silver choker were her jewelry and she wondered if the other girls' pieces were just as suggestive.

They weren't.

Draco greeted them at the entrance to the dining room where they enjoyed a four-course dinner with bottomless champagne out of enchanted crystal flutes. Before they even got to dessert, Hermione was feeling warm and tingly, her eyelids a bit heavy but her smile still genuine. Draco wore a black tuxedo with a diamond pin in the lapel, making toasts to each of them from his spot at the head of the table, his spirits high as he made jokes about each of their favorite customers, their 'special skills' that kept them in demand, or some specific spicy or filthy memory from the past year; each of his stories leaving them all howling with laughter.

"And what about Hermione?" Leanna asked, leaning back in her chair with a sly smile on her face, swirling the bubbly in her glass. A few of the other girls lowered their heads, giggling into their own champagne.

"What about her?" Draco shot back, his eyes burning into Dove's from across the room but keeping his voice light. Everyone fell silent and Leanna set her glass down while Hermione stared into her lap. "She's our newest little star and while she hasn't quite found her...rhythm yet...I'm sure we'll have her on her back with some regularity soon enough to find out where her expertise lies. Let's just say that as of now...the reviews are still out."

The table burst into appreciative laughter and he raised a glass to his little Sparrow, nodding at the look of relief on her face.

Once dinner was over they all stayed up late playing Christmas songs on the piano and drinking far too much. Draco took up residence behind the bar and mixed Shattered Dragons for everyone, taking this one opportunity to serve them, presenting the drinks in heavy cut crystal highballs on shining silver trays. They played ancient wizarding parlor games, Draco transfiguring apples into mystery trinkets that needed to be guessed from behind blindfolds, or changing something on the Christmas Tree and seeing who could discover it first. Everyone was happy and gracious. Even the girls who had whispered behind her back or tried to humiliate her at dinner gave Hermione drunken hugs and well wishes for the coming year.

For a few precious hours they were all the same, the pureblood and the muggleborn, prisoner and jailer, the stars and their guardian.

After half of a bottle of Champagne, Sarah took her aside and admitted to admiring her when she was growing up, to being awed by her bravery, her brilliance, how she fought to the very end in a war that the rest of them had given up on. She refused to be brought down. She talked about Harry and Ron's deaths as if they were episodes of a television show or scenes from a book she'd read and Hermione suddenly felt as if someone were stepping on her throat, her breath tight in her lungs. She could remember standing on the battlefield in Surrey, stepping over bodies and seeing the shock of red hair, seeing Ron lying in the mud, his face so peaceful, as if he were only sleeping. Ron and Harry had died. They had died in the cold and rain, swallowing blood and mud and tears, fighting for witches like Hermione. And Hermione lived. She lived and by some strange twist of fate, her punishment for surviving was to live in the lap of luxury, warm from the brutal winter cold, a full belly, swathed in silk and weighed down by jewels, fucking millionaire purebloods for money while thousands of muggleborn wizards and witches were dying in the streets. The glittering lights and bright Christmas decorations blurred before her as her eyes filled with tears that she tried to blink away. When Sarah noticed that her smile had faltered, she sat down beside her and took her hand in hers.

"It won't always be like this," Sarah said quietly. "We just have to survive for now, right? We won't always need him. But you could be suffering under the thumb of worse people, no? We won't always be here, hiding who we are."

"Out there I was helping people," Hermione said, swiping two fingers across her damp cheeks. "I was arrested for embezzling money. I used it to pay for potions and food, rent...not for me...for others, my friends' parents and grandparents...now they have no one...I was"

A burst of laughter and applause from the other side of the room caught their attention and the two girls looked up to see Draco with a blindfold over his eyes, being spun in a circle by two of the other girls. He stumbled and wavered on his feet, his arms outstretched as he tried to snatch the little Santa Claus figure hovering in the air in front of him. Even as he failed in his task, his smile was wide, his whole demeanor relaxed with his tie loose and the first buttons of his shirt undone. His pale cheeks were flushed pink from the champagne and the fire.

"I think you're here to help someone else," Sarah said, patting Hermione's back before standing up to join the others.

Draco stood up and tapped a silver spoon against his glass to get everyone's attention.

"Time for bed," he said, raising his glass. His words were just beginning to slur. "Don't forget to hang up your fishnet stockings. Santa likes to leave rewards for good girls."

He winked at Hermione, who rolled her eyes but still smiled at him. There was something infectious about this Draco...a bit tipsy and paternal, a light behind his eyes that she didn't see at any other time. Christmas was another way for him to detach, to gloss over the cracked

surface of his life with champagne and parties and gifts and pretend they were all somewhere else...someone else...that they were in a different world. She rubbed her hand over the brand on her arm and watched as he made his rounds about the room kissing each girl on the cheek, accepting hugs and words of thanks. None of these girls knew him before. They'd never seen the sneering, bitter name-calling or hateful bigotry he'd displayed in school. He still wore a shroud of darkness, a short temper and sharp tongue, but in this room he was a benefactor, a prince, a hero. In this world he was good.

Perhaps he wasn't locking them into the mansion.

Perhaps he was locking everything else in the world out.

On Christmas morning she found a small green box outside her room wrapped in a silver ribbon. It tugged at her heart to see his old house colors represented, the remnants of a tradition that didn't exist anymore, a world that didn't exist. The small white tag was handwritten in an elegant, narrow script.

Happy Christmas Granger.

Hope this brings you good memories of times past.

-DM

Nestled in black velvet inside the box was a pristine copy of Hogwarts - A History. With tears filling her eyes, she ran her fingers over the embossed leather cover and gold script title. The spine crackled as she opened the cover to read his inscription. *"To Hermione, who already had it memorized...Christmas 2008. Draco"*

Most of Hogwarts had been destroyed in the war, but a few classes after Hermione's had managed to graduate with a skeleton staff, doing their best to keep the traditions alive amidst the rubble and ruin. Eventually, the Puritan Wizards (as Voldemort named them) grew tired of seeing halfbloods and muggleborns treated with any modicum of respect, never mind the audacity of being granted an education and Hogwarts was closed altogether, the castle razed to the ground, burying a thousand years of history along with it. Any mention of the school was met with punishment and all known copies of Hogwarts - A History were ceremoniously burned in front of Voldemort's mansion. Bookstores, libraries, antiquities dealers were all threatened with fire, imprisonment and violence if they kept even a single copy of the book. Filling the hearts and minds of the impure with hope for a better life, reminding them of the idyllic past, reminding them of Harry Potter, simply could not be allowed.

The Death Eaters that had attacked Grimmauld Place had found Hermione's treasured copy hidden in the walls of the house and had charged her with possession of contraband, a mark on her record that would make it nearly impossible to gain employment after the war. Back then she hadn't worried about such things. Back then she'd been sure that the right side would win. The three masked men had held her and Ron with their arms behind their backs, laughing at her tears as each one of them took turns pissing on the cover before burning it to white ash with a sickly green flame.

Her heart bursting with memories, Hermione flipped through the pages to her favorite chapter – the history of the castle libraries – her tears dotting the paper as she read the familiar words for the first time in years. It was a painful sort of nostalgia, calling up faces of dead friends, the wizards she'd considered family, the professors who had shaped her values, instilled her confidence and shored up her strength. Before long she was crying too hard to read the words at all. Placing the book back in its velvet nest, she put the entire box on her nightstand, the gift tag from Malfoy marking her place within the pages. It was only noon but she was drained, her heart heavy, and she curled onto her side and cried herself to sleep.

Draco ate too much at the annual Christmas breakfast and after accepting thanks from all of the girls but the one he'd woken up to see, he retreated to his room where a small pile of boxes and scrolls were stacked on his desk; the owl deliveries that had come in over the past few days that he'd put off opening. The members always sent heartfelt messages of undying appreciation at Christmas thinking it would be a unique way to worm their way into his inner circle, gaining better access to the girls, but also to Malfoy's connections with the rest of the pureblood underworld, illegal potions, muggleborn slaves, plants and creatures sold on the black market. He knew how to find them all. Some of them went so far as to send bottles of his favorite scotch or a rare wine or gaudy, excessive tie tacks and cufflinks; prettily decorated bribes.

One of the red boxes with a white satin bow held two delicate glass vials with gold tiger head caps. The sparkling green liquid within was Feast of Liber, a notorious "endurance potion" that guaranteed it would "leave your partner begging for more even after hours of participating in the love act". The small note inside indicated it was from none other than Nott.

At this festive season of the year Mr. Scrooge, I hope you'll set aside our little unpleasantness and give an old school chum another crack at your prize mare.

With Ever Enduring Affection,

Theodore

Draco rolled his eyes and tossed the box in with the others while reaching for the next, a small silver square with a wine colored ribbon and the telltale M monogram he'd seen plastered everywhere since his birth. Inside was an ornate diamond and onyx cloak pin meant for his dress robes. It sparkled in the firelight and he felt his throat tightening as he read the note enclosed.

"My heart,

I think of you every day when I walk past your suite in the east wing of the manor. You must know that I haven't changed a thing in your room, haven't moved a book or shoe or broom..it's just as you left it, waiting for your return. Although I know it can't be true, I swear that I can still smell your hair on your pillow and sometimes that's all that gets me through the day. You are all that I love in this world. You are the only reason I still live. Wherever this owl finds you I hope that you are safe and happy and cared for. I hope that amongst the villains and unsavory people you've chosen over your family, your blood, I hope that someone is giving you the love that I can't show you. Please let me know that you are well. I miss you. I love you.

He loves you too. I know he does. You inherited your stubborn, tightly closed heart from him, but I can see through the hard armor that both of you wear.

Mother."

He barked out an incredulous laugh at his mother's insistence that his father still harbored the tiniest inkling of feeling for him. She was brainwashed, naïve, living in a dream world where he was still a six year old boy needing help lacing his shoes. She was frail and broken...and he'd contributed to most of the damage. He was the one who revealed the location of his father's battalion to the Order, who spoke against him at the Wizengamot...something that wasn't forgotten even after the Ministry fell and Lucius was released from Azkaban. Draco had proved himself unworthy of being a Malfoy, a traitor to purebloods and Narcissa had had to watch every moment of her family torn in two.

He crumpled her parchment in his hand, the edges of the thick paper digging painfully into his palm as his eyes began to sting. Sniffing up tears he refused to allow, Draco swept his arm across the top of his desk, sending scrolls and books and packages flying, quills and bottles of ink rattling across the floor, the black liquid staining the stones and seeping into the grout between. An involuntary growl rumbled from his lips as he picked up the box from Theo and threw it towards the fire, taking sick pleasure in hearing the crystal bottles shatter, the potion hissing as it bubbled on the stone hearth. Still it wasn't enough; his heart hammering against his ribs with a boiling combination of pain and rage. Something strained under his skin, screaming to be released.

"Draco?"

And there she stood in the doorway, her hand still on the knob as she hesitated on the threshold in her bare feet. She was so soft, dressed all in cream colored satin. The sunlight behind her outlined her in a gold glow, her hair down, curling over her shoulders. Pure. Clean. The rage roared inside him, the beast rattling its cage. Its what the beast inside him did. It stained. It bruised. It destroyed. He ran his tongue over his bottom lip.

“Close the door,” he said, through gritted teeth, moving to pour himself a drink, steadying his hand as he gripped the glass.

“Are you OK? I was coming to thank you for the...”

“Stop talking,” he said, turning back to face her, draining his glass in one gulp. She stood before him, still in the sunlight so he could see the outline of her body beneath the thin fabric; the slope of her hip, the curve of her breast. At the sound of his command she dropped her hands to her sides, her eyes lowered. The sight of her so demure, so humble, heated the blood in his veins. He set his glass down and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Strip.”

Ice

“Strip.”

Without so much as a blink, Hermione slid her white robe from her shoulders, letting it fall at her feet. He was amazed that she complied without question, eyes locked on the hollow of her throat as she pushed at each strap of her nightgown. The fabric slid down like cream over the tops of her breasts, revealing her completely when it fell from her hips, a puddle at her feet. She stepped forward, arranging her hair into a knot that somehow held itself together and he was finally jarred from his trance.

“No,” he said, a bit too abruptly, and she froze midstep. “Crawl. Get on your knees and crawl to me.”

“Yes sir,” she said, the corner of her mouth turning up into a smile.

For some reason her submission angered him. Her willingness to reduce herself to an animal for him, to let him push her to her knees made his blood boil.

And it made him want her even more.

She approached him with long strides, her arms stretching far in front of her, shoulder blades poking up from her back like a stalking cat, her hips swinging with each forward thrust of her leg, and all the while she kept her caramel colored eyes locked on his, her lips parted, deep pink like the color of her nipples. Her heavy breasts swung between her arms, her cheeks flushed and he felt his mouth go dry with want, a thirst to feel her own mouth against his, her tongue between his lips, the silken walls of her pussy, the ruched skin of her breasts beneath his fingertips. She knelt in front of him, looking up, her neck long and slim, her thighs spread enough that he could see the glistening pink of her sex. She was smiling. Draco rolled his neck, working the tension from his jaw, his hands dug deep in the pockets of his dress trousers, flipping a galleon coin between his fingers to stay focused.

“Why did you come here today?” He asked, looking down at her, running one fingertip along her jaw line, one word running through his thoughts.

Mine, mine, mine, mine.

“I wanted to say Happy Christmas,” she said. “And to thank you for the book.”

“You’re welcome. But you could have just come to breakfast and thanked me there. Is there some other reason you came to my room?”

She didn’t answer right away, but he could see the answer in the expression on her face, the heat in her eyes before she lowered them, her parted lips.

“Could it be that you want me to fuck you again?” He asked, his fingers combing through her hair, pulling it free to tumble down her back, massaging the back of her neck.

“Do you want to fuck me again?” She purred back at him, smiling, leaning back into his palm.

His face went dark, eyes flashing with something she couldn’t name...something between rage and surprise.

“I’m not answering questions today little sparrow. Only asking them. I’ve told you before that you aren’t here to plumb the blackened depths of my psyche. You’re not here to take care of me.” He reached for the buckle of his leather belt and tugged it free, letting it hang loose as he pulled down the zipper. “The last time you were here I slept peacefully, no nightmares, for the first time in months. You’re here to make me feel better, aren’t you?”

“Yes sir,” she answered, watching with a slack jaw as he stroked himself at a slow, leisurely pace, thumbing the head of his prick. She licked her lips. He made her feel better, too. The rougher he took her, the harsher his words, the more perverse his demands, the more she fell into that haze of endorphins, high on arousal, jittery with need, the world around her, the walls, the wards...fading to black as she sunk into pleasure.

“You told me I should take what I want, didn’t you?”

She went up on her knees, her eyes darting from his prick to his face, waiting for his instruction.

“Yes sir,” she breathed. “Don’t be afraid of what you want.”

He thought for a minute then nodded, standing up and pulling the belt free from its loops with one hot swish. He folded the black leather in half and snapped it near her ear, making her jump.

“Look at me,” he said, tipping her chin up with the cool silver buckle.

She did as he asked and he quickly wrapped the belt around her neck, slipping the tail through and pulling it tight. It wasn’t enough to cut off her air, just enough so that he could see it digging into the creamy flesh of her neck, just enough to make her eyes open a bit wider, enough to knock her off balance just a bit. After all, that was what he wanted.

“Go on then,” he said, yanking forward on the makeshift leash to make her fall forward against his hips. “Suck.”

He stumbled back from her when he’d finished, watching, rapt, as she swiped her tongue across her lower lip to capture the last drops of his seed. The belt hung loose around her raw, reddened throat, her chest flushed and heaving as she drew in deep breaths, her lips swollen from use, but still, she smiled at him, a secret, grateful smile.

“Don’t move,” he said, walking away, leaving her in the middle of the front room as he went to his adjoining bedroom, the room he hadn’t yet invited her into, the bed she’d not yet been

in.

She watched as he stripped out of the dress pants and button down shirt he'd been wearing, slipping into white linen pants, his chest bare. For a few moments he disappeared from her view and she sat back on her heels. Although she was aching for some kind of release she didn't dare touch herself for fear of punishment. Instead she took the time to collect herself, looking around the room.

He'd looked like a cornered wolf when she'd first opened the door, his eyes glinting, shoulders high and tense, hair a mess from running his hands through it like she'd seen him do when he was thinking. Around her she could see the evidence of his unleashed rage; the broken glass and crushed boxes, the black smear of spilled ink drying on the stones, a scattering of parchments, scrolls and quills and his desk completely clear. On the floor beside her she saw a curled piece of paper with the ornate letter M on the wax seal, a delicate slanted handwriting, not unlike his, peeking out on the edges. In the fire, remains of colorful boxes and ribbons curled amongst the flames.

For a moment, when she'd first seen him, she was afraid. He looked like he had the last time she'd seen him nearly eight years ago...standing amongst the black cloaked Death Eaters as Flourish and Blotts burned behind him. He'd been wearing a mask when he first appeared in front of her, but lifted the ornately etched black and silver metal from his face and sneered at her, barely holding back a laugh at the tears in her eyes.

"Mourning your precious books?" He'd asked, drawing a laugh from the other figures around him.

"My entire childhood," she answered, not rising to his bait, her eyes focused somewhere beyond him, looking in through the broken windows as her favorite sections disappeared in roaring flame. *"Everything that was precious. Not just the books."*

She looked back at him and his face had changed, as if another mask had been pulled away, finally revealing the real boy...the young boy...beneath. She would never forget it. His eyes had gone wide, the sneer melting away into a tight, trembling frown. He couldn't look her in the eye, and instead of disappearing like the others, he'd simply walked away alone. For a moment she'd wanted to follow, to ask him what he was thinking about...but someone pulled her in the opposite direction.

"Get up," Draco said, stirring her from her memories. "Come over here."

He stood across the room near the bar in his white linen pants, the tattoos and scars and marks that littered his body on full display as he poured another drink: scotch with two small ice cubes. She stood and made her way to the sofa in front of the fire, stepping carefully over the mess, the broken glass and ink.

“Sit and spread your legs so I can see your pretty pink cunt,” he said sharply, his voice much colder, much more harsh than the other times he’d been with her, all traces of hesitation or shame gone. Something lit up in her mind...a tiny creeping fear that she’d created a monster.

Still it was a small, hidden warning and her lust, her need, the wet between her legs was much stronger, capable of blotting the fear out completely. So she sat, doing as he asked, her hands on her knees, pushing her thighs apart, her back straight as she held her head high, holding his gaze.

“You’re wet,” he said, tipping his head to the side, looking between her legs and smiling in satisfaction. “Sucking my cock made you wet, didn’t it?” He took a sip of his drink and put it on the table in front of her before sitting down on the edge, running his hands over her skin.

“Yes,” she said. “I like hearing you groan. Making you come makes me wet.”

Draco nodded and reached into his drink for an ice cube and sucked it in between his lips, rolled it over his tongue and pulled it out again, moving to kneel between her spread thighs. She shuddered out a sigh as he drew the ice over the warm skin of her legs, then her stomach, holding it up to let cold drops of water fill her navel.

“Oh God, yes,” she breathed, throwing her head back in ecstasy.

Bending over her, he pressed kisses to her belly with cold lips, licking the drops from her skin as she tried to push forward, urging him lower.

“So hot and so wet,” he said, letting the melting ice drip down over her pussy, holding her open with two fingers so that it hit her clit.

She pushed up onto her elbows and watched as he dipped down to kiss her, licking deep with his cold, wet tongue. She was so focused on the work of his mouth she didn’t notice the ice between his fingers until he’d slipped it inside her heat, crooking his fingers around it as he licked and sucked at her clit. The chip of ice melted quickly, water and arousal dripping from her pussy as he drove her closer to orgasm, humming and growling against her sex.

“Fuck Draco, I love it when you eat me. I love your tongue.” She sunk her hand into his hair and pushed herself against his mouth, her thighs starting to tremble.

He looked up at her, into her eyes. He’d thought for a moment when he’d first walked back into the room that she’d looked frightened, detached. He’d worried that she regretted what she’d done or was anxious to leave. She’d been frowning, her eyes downcast, brow furrowed. Yet now, when he looked at her face, her lip trapped between her teeth, her sparkling eyes locked on his as she dug her fingers into his hair...he knew she was telling the truth. He ran his hands over the insides of her thighs, opening her further, licking slowly, driving his tongue deep inside, staring into her eyes the whole time. She gasped, grabbing his forearms before quickly drawing her right hand away.

And he’d caught it.

“Touch it,” he said, holding his left arm out to her, pulling away from his ministrations completely. “It does nothing. It won’t bite you. It’s only a mark.” She didn’t move and he shoved his arm closer to her, his words like stabbing needles, “Touch it.”

She hesitated, but he watched as she steeled herself, blinking, breathing, before closing her hand over the Dark Mark and pulling away again after only a moment. Still, it had felt good to have her fingertips there, the place he hated looking, hated touching himself, the part of his body that he always tried to hide.

“You don’t like to be reminded of who you’re spreading for, do you?” He asked, his fingers slipping down to her sex once again, circling her clit while he questioned her. She was still dripping for him. “You don’t like to look at that and know that a Death Eater is fucking you, a Death Eater making you come.”

“Y-y-you’re not...I know you...”

“You don’t know anything,” he said, driving two fingers deep inside her, drawing another gasp as she fell forward into his chest, her forehead on his shoulder, her legs clamped down tight around his fingers as rolled her hips. “You want me to believe that I’m good. That I’ve changed. You tell me I deserve what you give me, that allll the ugly darkness is gone.”

“No...that isn’t...” her voice was a stuttered breath as she fought for her release, pushing herself onto his fingers, a third stretching her open as his thumb brushed her clit. “Please. Please, sir,” she whined against his neck, her teeth raking over the tendons of his throat.

“Then what,” he said, his fingers pumping deep inside her. “What is it you’d have me believe? What is it you’re trying so hard to teach me, little Sparrow?”

She ground her hips against the heel of his hand, her teeth sinking into the skin of his shoulder as he worked her over. She was trembling in his arms and he wanted nothing more than to lay her down, to bury his cock in her, to hold her...he wanted to kiss her...but he wanted to hear the truth. He wanted to hear her say it. She liked the darkness. He grabbed a fistful of her hair and pulled her back to look into her eyes.

“Tell me,” he said, his words clipped, nearly angry. He pulled his fingers from her completely, swiping them across her lips while he still held fast to her hair. “Tell me and I’ll let you come.”

Looking up into his eyes, she took a minute to catch her breath before holding his face in her hands, leaning in to lick at his closed, tight lips, letting him taste her arousal in their kiss. He called on every god he knew of to allow him resist her.

“We all have darkness in us Draco. You and I, anyone who fought in that war...we are all shattered into a thousand pieces; relief and sadness and grief and guilt and rage.” She paused for a moment before stroking his cheek. The rims of his eyes were going red. “Jealousy, regret. None of us should be held responsible for the choices we had to make, but none of us were innocent either.”

She slid from sofa to kneel in front of him, her hand slipping beneath the waistband of his trousers. Hot, hard, velvet smooth, she stroked him as his eyes fluttered shut. He was twisting what this all was. They were supposed to be blocking it out, packing it away and feeling good for a while. She didn't want to talk about the war. She didn't want to talk about who she'd become, who either of them used to be.

"Please..." she groaned again, taking his hand and pulling him down to the black and gold rug beneath her. "Please let me come, Draco."

He hovered over her naked, his skin like new gold in the firelight, platinum hair hanging in front of his sparkling eyes. She touched her fingers to his lips and he twisted his tongue around them, sucking them deep into his mouth.

"Fuck me," she whispered pulling her hands above her head and stretching her arms long, her back arching up to press her breasts against him. "Hold me down and fuck me."

With a tight nod Draco held fast to her wrists, pinning them to the floor as he sunk into her slick pussy. Almost immediately he could feel her start to twitch and clench around him and he bent down to lick the shell of her ear.

"Not yet, my pretty little slut. At least let me feel it for a minute."

She nodded and threw her legs around his hips, her heels digging into the backs of his thighs as he pistoned into her, his breath hissing from between his teeth like an angry viper with every thrust.

"Harder...deeper..." she struggled against his grip, knowing he wanted to feel how he held her down, feel that he was strong enough to keep her there. "Please." She was breathless, her chest glistening with a sheen of sweat that he crouched down to lick.

His hips moved faster, his rhythm stuttering and erratic.

"So good..." he panted. "You feel so good. Just for me...you come for me. You're mi—" his voice stuttered, he went quiet. "Come for me, Sparrow. Now."

They lay together on the floor and Draco summoned a blanket. The sun was setting and the room was dusky and cold. He covered her and rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling with a lit cigarette. She watched him smoke for a moment before reaching out to touch his left arm, feeling him tense under her fingertips.

"Don't..." he muttered, the cigarette tight between his lips.

She sat up fully then, the blanket falling away from her naked body and he was mesmerized by her hair hanging over her shoulder, the flush in her cheeks, the curve of her breasts, her silhouette in the firelight. He tried to pull away from her but she pulled his hand up to her lips and kissed the tender skin of his forearm, the thin, wiry tendons in his wrist. He watched

intently as she drew her tongue over the mark, the outlines of the snake, her mouth dragging a trail of wet kisses and licks from the open viper's mouth all the way to the garish skull. It was horrifying and erotic and shameful and he couldn't take his eyes away from her.

Pulling back with a final lick down the length of his forearm, she leaned in to kiss his mouth, her hand on his cheek.

"I'm not *afraid* to fuck a Death Eater. I'm not afraid to fuck a pimp or a pureblood or a Slytherin or even a pouty white haired prick. Since the moment I got here you've been trying to make me afraid of you. That's just what you do."

She felt him pulling away from her but held onto the back of his neck with both of her hands, forcing him to look her in the eye. His lips were pursed tightly, eyes rimmed red.

"I know, I know. I'm not here to take care of you. I guess I'm here to help you take care of yourself."

"I can handle it. I've been on my own a long time," he said, finally pulling free and flopping back down and pulling the cigarette back from the crystal ashtray. He was quiet for a long time before saying. "I don't need mummy anymore."

"What happened?" She asked, after a few moments, when she could feel the tension go out of his muscles, his breathing slow. "The mess...the desk..."

"I told you I'm not answering questions today," he said, exhaling a stream of white smoke above their heads.

"Draco..."

"No," he said. "I just want to fuck and get high and sleep the rest of the day away."

"I thought you loved Christmas," she said, propping herself up on her elbow to look down at his face, his glazed over eyes, the furrow in his brow. "Why would you..."

He stood up then, striding away from her angrily, but still beautiful in his nakedness. It suited him, stripped bare like that, like some ancient warrior...showing his true self, all of his marks and scars, imperfections. She watched in silence as he vanished the mess around the room, all but the parchment with the Malfoy seal, which he tucked away in a desk drawer before crushing out the remains of his cigarette.

"I said I *wanted* to get high and sleep the day away, not that I would. I have to check on the kitchen, get dressed for dinner," he said, heading for his bedroom. "So do you, little sparrow, unless you're comfortable going to the dining room naked."

Mr. Malfoy had returned, she was his obedient Sparrow and their moment was over. She picked up the blanket and wrapped it around her as she walked towards him, surprised that he was waiting, lingering in the doorway. There was no point in asking why he switched on and off so quickly, why he left so many questions unanswered. He would tell her in his own time

she supposed. Instead she went up on her toes and kissed him; a gentle, chaste kiss of thanks that he returned with similar tenderness.

“I like what you like, Draco,” she whispered, her hand on his chest. “I like your Dominant side, I like it rough, I like serving you and giving you pleasure.”

“I can tell,” he purred, twining a lock of her hair between his fingers before catching the fire in her eyes, the frown on her face.

“But I won’t let you use me to take out your rage for someone else. Don’t call for me in anger. Someone will end up getting hurt.”

The third mask dropped into place...the Malfoy she knew years ago, the Malfoy that had taunted her in the jail and he stepped back from her, his lip curled up at the corner.

“With me, darling, someone always gets hurt.”

Serving the Sentence

She woke up the day after Christmas with a slight hangover and a bit of a bellyache from too much rich food and far too much champagne. Still, the dinner had been festive and lavish and even Draco, who had left her thinking he was unhappy at the prospect of hosting the party was in his usual jovial form. Even so, Hermione saw him withdraw occasionally, frowning into his drink or staring out the window towards the woods, looking out at nothing in particular. She knew better than to approach him, but for some reason it tugged at her heart, the lost, empty look on his face. *I don't need mummy anymore*. He tried so hard to convince himself that he wanted to be alone, a sentence he'd handed down to himself.

With a whip crack of apparation, her door flew open, revealing Healer Moonstone holding a vial full of pale purple liquid.

"Happy Christmas, Moonstone," Hermione said casually, smiling, sitting up and stretching, wondering if a headache potion might be hiding in the healer's pocket.

"You didn't take your potions yesterday and it's nearly noon already today. You usually take them by eight," Moonstone said, her voice edging on panic. "Did the elves not tell you it was crucial to take them every day?"

Hermione sighed and shuffled across the floor, plucking the vial from her plump fingers.

"Yes, they did, I just forgot. It's fine," she said, downing the sparkling sweet potion and putting the empty vial on her vanity.

"And what if you get called to service tomorrow?" Moonstone said, pulling out her wand.

"Tomorrow?" Hermione asked, taking the rest of the supplement and energy potions that she was prescribed daily, including a hangover potion that must have been given to all of the girls as a Christmas Treat. "What would it matter? I just took it."

Moonstone sighed and rolled her eyes.

"They are carefully calibrated to cater to your own cycle, Hermione, holding ripened eggs at bay. They regulate your hormones based on the phases of the moon and your own body chemistry..." the healer sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. "You can't miss a day. Not even one day. Ideally you'd take it at the same time EVERY day, but now you're thrown off for at least a week since a missed dose *could* trigger ovulation and once that's happened, these potions don't work. Not that you won't be able to...perform...it's just not...not as secure..." she mumbled, walking a circle around her.

Hermione stood in front of her, jaw slack, her pulse beating a bit fast in her throat as she thought back to her evening with Draco. Moonstone lifted her wand to Hermione's stomach and made a tight figure eight, casting a white light that held steady before blinking out completely after less than three seconds.

“You’re fine this time. There’s no danger. You aren’t fertile right now,” she said, tucking her wand away and heading for the door. Before leaving she whirled back on Hermione, grabbing her chin tightly and giving her a stern glare. “Take. Your. Potions. Every. Day. Do you hear me young lady?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Happy Christmas,” she said, finally smiling, patting her on the cheek.

Hermione stifled a laugh and nodded, relieved that she was in the clear and also feeling a bit of warm nostalgia at being cared for again...fussed over. The healer reminded her of Molly Weasley, soft and sweet smelling, but solid iron underneath.

After the New Year, the club began to attract its regulars back from their wholesome family time. Luring them into the underworld after spending a week playing Sniggy Snake Charmer and Exploding Snap with their children was easier than leaving birdseed in the snow and before long, the requests and reservations were in full swing yet again. Still, Hermione would go to the line up each night and each night she would be released, told that she should enjoy herself and relax. Not even Draco called for her, although she could tell by the tension in his jaw, the way his fists clenched and released at his sides as he spoke that he needed her. He needed something; but maybe he’d taken Hermione’s warning to heart. He wouldn’t take her in anger.

Theo came back near the end of January and brought his friend Trevor Archlight, a prospective new member and a rather high ranking member in the Pureblood Government. He’d been behind them in school by two years and his family name carried nearly as much power as the Malfoys in wizard England because of their links to powerful pureblood families in France. Trevor was young and handsome with sandy blonde hair and smoldering green eyes, made even more attractive because he was poised to inherit millions of galleons along with his father’s publishing business. After Voldemort had taken over, Archlight Printers had issued new, mandatory history books, books of law, as well as children’s books and pamphlets on the dangers of sympathizing with mudbloods. There was no question what side Trevor was on.

“Mr. Malfoy, may I introduce Trevor Archlight,” Theo said, raising a glass of scotch to the two men. “He’s interested in learning more about the club. I’d be happy to sponsor him for membership.”

Draco raised an eyebrow along with his glass. As a rule, he didn’t like guests of members arriving unannounced, waltzing in before Draco could do any research whatsoever, setting him back on his heels. Luckily Trevor was something of a household name around London although his interest in joining a private brothel seemed odd as his family was firmly ensconced on the straight and narrow.

“Nice to meet you Trevor. Let me get you a drink.”

“I’d rather you get me a girl,” Trevor said quickly, leaning on the bar, looking around the room at the clusters of men gathered around small tables, chatting and drinking, a few men playing poker as they waited for their turn with the Pleiades.

“I’m not sure who is available tonight. If this twat had told me you were coming I could have made arrangements. What about a tour of the club? Come on up to my offices and I can see if we have someone to accommodate you. Theo, I believe you’re with Starling at eleven thirty.”

“Yes sir,” Theo said, draining his drink and signaling for another. “I’m feeling a bit...antsy. Haven’t gotten sucked off in two weeks.”

“You could always wander outside the box and fuck your wife,” Trevor suggested drily, as the three men walked the corridors of the mansion.

Theo wrinkled his nose and Draco laughed out loud. Theo’s marriage to Adelaide Fawley was over in all but the most official of terms, but they still appeared in public for the sake of preserving the illusion of Happiness, Fertility and Success, a marital illusion demanded by the Pureblood Council. Divorces were rarely granted, and only if the wife had been proven as “impure or traitorous”. Draco couldn’t tell if Trevor’s suggestion was made in jest or if he genuinely believed that the two were still together.

“Let me show you the gaming parlors on our way to my office,” he suggested, changing the subject. “Cards, dice, any number of table games to entertain you while you’re wait...”

The two men with Draco had stopped walking, staring down the corridor where Hermione stood with a stack of three thick books. She was in her yellow satin pajamas and robe, little black satin slippers, her hair in a long thick braid that hung over her shoulder. In her months at the Dragon it had regained its thickness and shine, and grown at least two inches. Just looking at her, Draco could remember how it smelled, how it felt under his fingertips.

“Granger!” Theo called out, his smile wide and toothy, some would say...predatory, a wolf on the prowl.

Hermione looked up and caught Draco’s eye before smiling at the other two gentlemen; one she didn’t recognize but he clearly knew who she was. She could see it by the light in his eyes.

“Hello Theo, how was your Christmas?” She asked, setting the books on a low hallway table before folding her hands behind her back, presenting herself so demurely that Draco wanted to throw the other men out and take her up against the wall.

“Very quiet,” Theo said, pulling one of her hands up to kiss.

She could see Draco sneering, feel the tension radiating off of him in waves and she smiled at him in an effort to soothe his building anger.

“Granger,” the other man said quietly, stepping forward to examine her as if she were a zoo exhibit. “Hermione Granger, the Mudblood Gryffindor?”

“Don’t use that term in here,” Draco said sharply. “We call her Sparrow. Sparrow this is Mr. Archlight.”

“Nice to meet you,” Hermione forced a smile, holding her hand out as she knew would be expected. Mr. Archlight didn’t take it. His eyes were focused on the opening of her robe, the exposed tops of her breasts. She picked up her books and held them over her chest, wrapped tightly in her arms.

“I’m surprised she looks so good...for a former criminal,” Mr. Archlight asked, walking around her, running a finger across her shoulderblades like a matriarch checking for dust on the mantel. “Look at those tits.”

“They’re exquisite,” Theo said, stepping closer, his tongue flicking out over his bottom lip, his eyes flashing. “And she can deep throat like a goddess.”

“And she’s available to use?” Mr. Archlight asked, holding her jaw, twisting her face from side to side, as if looking for flaws in the light.

“No,” Draco answered quickly, his voice a bit too loud. “Not this evening.”

“Not for a while now,” Theo added. “I do wonder sometimes what keeps her so busy since I’ve not spoken to a single member who’s had her.”

The men were crowding her against the wall and she looked to Draco to help her, to call them off, to tell them why she wasn’t available, but he said nothing, standing back and watching as his *guests* stood close enough for her to feel their breath. She closed her eyes.

“May I go, Mr. Malfoy?” She asked, looking at the floor.

Draco cleared his throat and held his hand out to her, pulling her between the two guests and to his side.

“Yes Sparrow, head to your room now. I’ll let you know when you’re needed.”

She smiled and leaned forward, kissing Draco on the cheek briefly before backing away.

“Thank you Mr. Malfoy,” she said, “I’ll wait to hear from you.”

Once Theo left with Starling, Draco called for Raven and she took Trevor off to room three for a complimentary evening of entertainment; anything to get him out of Draco’s hair.

He just needed to be alone. It had always been his solution for the stressors of his daily life. And yet after the club was closed for the night he found himself outside her door. He found

himself knocking.

“Sparrow.”

He stood in the hallway in the dark, his forehead on the door. He wasn't drunk. He wasn't high. He was tired. And he knew by now that without her, he wouldn't sleep.

“Sparrow, are you awake?”

He couldn't hear through the door but still he leaned against it, his eyes closed, hand on the knob. It was a line he'd never crossed, barreling into the girls' rooms unannounced, invading the one space he'd allowed them as their own, but he needed her to answer. He needed to know if she was angry with him for letting Theo and Trevor humiliate her. It was part of their job, to stand there and be a good girl, but somehow watching Hermione take it in was wrong. Perhaps because he'd seen her suffer it all her life, since she was a child standing stoically in the Great Hall or the Three Broomsticks or the stands of the Quidditch Pitch while he and his friends picked and prodded at her proud silence, never once biting back. He'd seen her eyes glisten with tears, but never had seen her allow them to fall. Not for him at least.

“Hermione,” he said, softly. “I'm sorry that he called you that. I'm sorry for how he looked at you, touched you, the things he said to you. I want you to know that I won't ever let him get near you. I won't ever let him fucking touch you. Not Trevor, not Theo. I can't fucking stand watching them touch you.” He paused as he came to the realization, wondering if he should even tell her, wondering if he truly meant it. “It's over. No one will touch you again. No one. For as long as you're here, the only man you'll be with...is me. You belong to me. Only me.”

He sighed, running a finger over the wood grain in the door, listening for the sound of her footsteps over the carpeting, the squeak of her bed as she stood up from it, any sign that she was listening.

“Understand that nothing has changed,” he said, clearing his throat...refocusing. “You still work for me. You're still...trapped here. I can't give you anything more than what we already...have. I'm not fucking fit for it. I'm not what you want, not what you deserve. But you're right. We're both fucking shattered from this fucking war...twisted up and stained. And somehow we fix each other. And I'm selfish. I want that all for myself. Hermione. Please.”

He stood up straight and stepped back from the door, letting go of the handle, giving one last knock.

“I need you. Please. Will you come to my room? Please? I have work to do but I can't focus. I feel my pulse in my ears. I want you there to...just to...I just want you there.”

And from behind him, in the hallway, he felt her hand on his shoulder. He heard her voice, quiet but certain.

“OK.”

Cracks

He didn't talk at all on the way to his suite and Hermione walked dutifully behind him with her books in her arms, watching as he rubbed the back of his neck, his shoulders high and tense. She hadn't heard all of what he'd said while standing at her door, but she *had* heard that nothing had changed, that while he admitted to needing her, to wanting her, he couldn't give her anything more; and still she told herself that she didn't want anything more. Even without the words she could hear the brokenness in his voice, the fear he had of never being whole again, the deep-rooted hate he had for himself. It hurt to hear, so she was willing to serve his purpose, to give him what he needed, whether he asked for it or not.

Draco opened the black doors and walked straight to the bar, kicking off his shoes along the way and pouring a drink before heading back to his desk. In truth, she'd been so quiet he'd nearly forgotten that she'd actually agreed to follow him there.

"Sit," he said quietly, motioning towards the leather chair. "I have some owls to write before the guests go home." He paused and shook his head clear. "Sorry. If you want a drink, help yourself," he added, waving his hand. "That teapot is bottomless, there's an Assan blend in it now."

Hosting duties completed, he sat behind his desk, but she could see that his gaze was still trained on the teapot. She'd seen similar enchanted items at Pearl and Dunkel, an apothecary and teashop that once did a brisk business in Hogsmeade. Pulling a delicate white cup from the shelf behind the bar, she ran her fingers over the tiny red phoenixes painted on the pot, their wings tipped with gold leaf.

"Did you ever try their Dark Forest Blend?" she asked, looking up at his glazed over eyes, standing in front of the teapot to break the trance. "It was a little too smoky for my taste, but Mistress Pearl always said it was a 'more masculine leaf', whatever that's supposed to mean."

"She did know how to blend tea, but anything else in her brain was incredibly suspect," he said quietly. "She told me once that Ceylon is bad for pureblood fertility." Finally he locked on her gaze. Finally she could see that he was actually there with her. "So I told her to give me three pounds of it," he said, allowing himself the tiniest hint of a smile.

Hermione laughed, flopping back down in the leather chair beside the fire.

"Wizard medicine is pretty archaic to start with," she said. "But her advice always did raise an eyebrow...probably because it actually worked. She had an incredible poppy tea for menstrual cramps."

His smile faded and he looked down at his papers, shuffling them around, looking for a quill.

"She was arrested. Imprisoned for being a mudblood sympathizer. She was suspected of smuggling families to France," he said.

“What? How could she possibly...she was at least eighty years old when we started school! And nearly blind besides!”

He nodded and looked up, his face drained of color, lined with exhaustion.

“Once the smuggling ring was broken up and they knew she had no involvement they were going to release her as a house slave to the Greengrass family.” He sighed and leaned back in his chair, pinching the bridge of his nose. Hermione caught his eyes flicking over to the bar... to the comfort of his whiskey. “The dungeons were damp, cold. It was February. She caught Black Lung. She died frightened, alone, in pain, coughing up blood on the floor of a filthy, windowless cell.”

“Draco, how did you...”

“Where do you think she was held, love? Who do you think was sent down every day to make sure she was breathing, scourgifying the piss out of her cell after she was crucioed? You were there. You saw what became of the Manor. It was a prison, a torture chamber. The house I was born in became a fucking morgue. No, it was never a cozy little cottage like the Burrow, I know that, but it was my home. It was the one place I felt safe.” He ran his fingertips over the soft edges of the black quill, looking down at an ink splatter on his desk. “It was the only place I felt safe.”

Unable to resist the pull any longer, he stood and went back to the bar, pouring another generous shot of whiskey. Hermione sipped her tea and sat quietly, her feet tucked beneath her, warmed by the fire. After another long silence she tested the waters again.

“When did you leave?”

He was rolling a cigarette, his head bowed over the desk as he twisted the ends closed, wiping away a few stray bits of tobacco with two fingers. For a moment she thought he wouldn't answer, but after taking a long drag and blowing it out in a thin, tight stream, he sighed and shook his head.

“When they brought in Seamus,” he said. “You know I always hated that prick. He was just a hopeless fucking twat. Couldn't tie his tie properly, left a mess like a fucking storm blew through every time he touched something...always a smart ass...but I saw him in that cell and...he was only nineteen. He was nineteen and he was never going to see the daylight again. He was never going to smell fresh air, see the stars. He was nineteen and he wasn't going to see twenty. And of course they wanted me to do it. They wanted me to torture him. Torture him! Fuck, Granger, *I* was only nineteen.” He took another drag, holding it a bit longer, the smoke escaping from his nose like his namesake. She could see the tendons in his neck, the flush of anger creeping to his cheeks. “Not for information, not for a confession or to try and turn his allegiance. They just wanted me to do it to see if I fucking could, to see if I wasn't the fucking coward weakling they thought I was. To see if I was really the failure I'd already proved myself to be.” He shook his head. “I knew right away I couldn't do it. So I went down there at two in the morning, woke him up. I grabbed his arm and we disappeared...took him to a field outside Hogsmeade. ‘*Tell them,*’ I said. ‘*tell the Order that I've left, that I'm not fighting for him anymore. Tell them.*’ ‘*Fuck off, Malfoy,*’ was all he said, and he was gone.”

“Draco, I’m sorry...I’m sure he was just scared...”

“And what do you think I was, Granger?” He nearly yelled, banging his open palm on the desk. “What do you think I had been since fucking sixth year? You think I was out there having the time of my life? Not sleeping, not eating, trying to solve some puzzle so my parents wouldn’t be murdered, like some fucking sick party game? I was terrified! Always terrified!”

“Draco...” she could see the tears in his eyes, the way his hand shook as he brought the cigarette back to his lips as if he were reliving the entire story in a single breath. As he continued to talk she stood and walked over to him.

“I had no where to go. The dead of night, the middle of nowhere. I couldn’t go back to the Manor, I’d be killed on the spot. I couldn’t seek help from the Order, you would have turned me in as soon as look at me.”

In fact she couldn’t look at him in that moment at all. She thought back to the night Seamus had shown up to one of the safehouses north of London. In fact he HAD told them that Malfoy had let him go, but not a single person believed he’d done it to help the side of light.

“Said he’s no longer fighting for HIM,” Seamus had said, fishing a bottle of beer from the back of the fridge.

“That doesn’t mean he’d necessarily fight for us,” Hermione had countered, although she was nagged by the memory of his face as Flourish and Blott’s burned. In the end, she’d felt bad about writing him off, but the war was ending and they were being slaughtered. There was no room to give people the benefit of the doubt.

“I went to Gringotts, cleaned out my vault, my inheritance, took a few sacks of galleons from my father’s vault and I left. I went to Paris for a year, hoping everyone would think I was dead. France is where I got the idea for the Dragon. I came home and found that my own fucking father had put a price in my head! I was his only son; his son that he was so proud of when I fixed the cabinet, when I took the mark, when I swore to uphold Voldemort’s sadistic ideals. But I refused to commit murder so now he wanted me dead. I knew then that I could never go home. I could never...be who I was again, not that I wanted that. But I could never see...her...”

His voice cracked and his head dropped. She could see his shoulders trembling, heard him sniff.

“Draco...” she knelt at his feet and took the half burnt cigarette from his fingers, placing it in the crystal ashtray on his desk. “Draco look at me,” she said, holding his face in her hands. His eyes were red rimmed and crystalline with tears. She leaned in, kissing the tears from his cheeks and he closed his eyes, breathing deep, his body drooping, his head heavy in her hands. “We’ll find a way,” she said.

“Find a way to do what?”

“The scroll you saved on Christmas? The only one you didn’t vanish, that was from your mother, wasn’t it? She wants to see you.”

“Don’t do this.” He pulled her hands from his face and sat back in his chair, trying desperately not to look at her there kneeling in front of him, soft and quiet, her satin skin and warm lips. The last few months had shown him that she would let him do whatever he wanted, whatever he asked, never demanding a thing in return: only dragging everything out of his soul, things he had long since buried.

“You can’t just give up on never seeing your mother again. Things have changed. I know there’s no longer a bounty on your head...they dropped those years ago.”

“That’s not the point though, is it? The point is that my own father put a price on my head... he asked people to kill his son.”

“Do you really think *he* made that choice, Draco? Do you really think *he* made the decision to put a price on your head? Once he took over no one had any choice.”

He returned to his papers, shuffling through them absently, picking up a quill and dipping it in ink without knowing what he was meant to write. She knew then that he’d shut down, the crack she’d found in the façade had resealed.

“I’m not doing this now,” he said, his voice sharp and final. “I just wanted you here to keep me company while I worked, not to...I didn’t want this.”

“I’m sorry sir. I’ll behave.”

She stood then, leaning in to give him a quick kiss on the forehead before walking back to her chair, picking up one of her books from the stack on the end table and settling in to read.

It was nearly three o’clock when he finally put his quill down, his desktop covered with carefully folded parchments that would be sent by owl in the morning. He looked wilted, his suit wrinkled, hair mussed, a light golden shadow of scruff on his cheeks. Hermione watched as he rubbed his eyes then sipped at his third glass of whiskey.

“Are you finished?” She asked, putting down her book. “It’s late.”

“I’m finished,” he said. “You can go.”

“Will you sleep?” she asked, setting down her book.

“Sure,” he answered, but she could see he was already rolling another cigarette.

Hermione walked over to him, gently removing the little leather pouch of tobacco from his hand and pulling him up from his chair. He stared down at her with heavy eyelids, wavering a bit on his feet, feeling the effects of the whiskey once he stood.

“Are you going to take advantage of me when I’m drunk?” he slurred, leaning in to kiss the curve of her jaw, the freckle just below her ear.

“No sir,” she said, pulling away and walking backwards, holding his hands. “I’m putting you to bed.”

He sighed and rolled his eyes but kept walking, stumbling once over his feet. He knew that he should stop her, send her back to her room, but her hands were warm as she slipped his jacket down over his arms and he gave no protest as she pulled his tie free from his collar. His head was starting to spin. Without a word she unbuttoned his shirt, pressing a single kiss to each of the three sharply angled runes inked on his chest. They were basic wizarding runes but each of them had been artistically rendered, wrapped in black thorny vines to obscure their lines.

“Maybe someday you’ll tell me what these mean,” she said, tracing her fingertips over the topmost figure that looked like a wide, stylized M. “I know this must be for forgiveness.”

Draco grabbed her wrist and moved her hand away.

“Maybe I will, but not tonight, Sparrow,” he growled, pulling his shirt off completely and throwing it over the back of a chair.

She could see the tension renewing, his discomfort, so she touched his cheek, forcing him to look her in the eye. His gaze was glassy and unfocused.

“OK. It’s fine. Just let me help you into bed,” she said, reaching for his belt.

On any other night he would have found her actions seductive, an open invitation to devour her, debase and consume her, but tonight her touch was nothing but a soothing balm. It was clean and innocent. She helped him out of his trousers, all the while humming some old childhood song that seemed familiar to him, a lullaby or something he’d heard over and over again on a music box, something from the background of his life.

“Lay down,” she said, pulling back the thick white duvet. “Do you need a hangover potion? Water?”

He shook his head, unable to speak. His throat was tight with holding back sudden tears; his nose stinging. Laying down beneath the crisp cotton sheets, cool against his skin, he was reminded of his mother, the way she used to dote on him when he was sick, rubbing his back, reading him books, casting cooling charms on his fevered brow. On the night he took the

mark, the skull and serpent searing beneath his skin, making him lightheaded and nauseated, she'd run him a bath, squeezing sponges of cool water over his forearm.

"I don't want this," he'd said quietly, worried she'd chastise him, slap him, call his father, or worse.

"No one does," was all she said.

Hermione covered him with the duvet and bent down to kiss his forehead.

"Aren't you going to tell me that you don't need me, sir?" she said, her lip curled into her usual lopsided grin.

"No," he said, already feeling sleep dragging him under. "I do."

His quill and two of his parchments had fallen from the desk when he stood and Hermione retrieved them, placing them on the stack with the others. Her eye caught an open ledger on the opposite side of the desk, open to a page filled with rows and columns of numbers written in Draco's usual narrow, slanted script: pages of accounts; money in, money out, dues and bar tabs, records of evenings with the girls. She flipped through the pages, amazed at the amount of galleons flowing through the Dragon, wondering what Draco was actually worth, how much power he actually had as a wizarding outcast. Turning another page she saw a fresh table, nearly empty, with one word at the top.

SPRW – NO CONTRACT – 1,000

100,000 Owed

Beneath the owed column were calculations, percentages, interest payments and the date of MAY 15. An amount of 1,000 was entered for her night with Theo as well as 5,000 for *A. Renfield*, entered with the date of her night with Draco. Why would he pay for her? She ran her fingers over the numbers again. 100,000 was the amount she'd embezzled from Lucius. Was he paying his father back? Had he spoken to him?

In the bedroom she heard him sigh and shift in his sleep. Startled from her kthoughts she turned the ledger back to the page it had been open to and quickly left the room.

Possession

Chapter Notes

Two quick updates? Is it the apocalypse? No, I just realized that the next couple of chapters were too long so I broke them up and that means more updates for you :) Thank you so much for all of your amazing comments and questions about the story. It was originally supposed to be nothing but a smut fest but it's definitely evolved into something much more.

Edit 3/24/19 - I can't keep track of my little birds! I misnamed Sarah as Finch when she's actually Lark. This has been edited :)

Draco sat at the bar nursing a drink, staring at himself in the smoky antique mirror behind the shelves of various bottles and glasses glittering in the low candlelight of the room. It was a Wednesday and fairly early in the evening so things were quiet.

"If it isn't Master Malfoy, Lord of the Manor," Theo bellowed, shattering the silence and clapping him hard on the back.

Draco closed his eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath to gather himself, preparing to deal with Nott, one of the last people he wanted to see.

"Good to see you again Draco," and Trevor Archlight, the other one, who seemed to be continuously at Theo's side.

After a few visits to the Dragon, Theo had nominated Trevor for membership, assuring Draco that landing the future owner of Archlight Printers was an incredible win for the club...he had money and influence and could bring in more members...pureblood members. But Draco had not forgotten Theo's treatment of Hermione...the names he'd called her, slipping her the lust potion.

"I'm not interested in catering my business to please the purebloods," Draco had said. "I'm not letting a bunch of bigoted assholes march in here and torture the girls I swore to protect because it gets their dicks hard, Nott."

"Of course not mate...Trevor's not like that. He's just looking to have a little fun outside of work. You know what it's like out there. We need a place to let our hair down. It's all up to you of course, mate. Private club."

And yet there they were, with Trevor Archlight now a member in good standing. He'd taken quite a liking to Sarah, having visited her four times in the past month, something she seemed to be all too happy with. Draco had watched her memories carefully, looking for any reason to bar him from returning, but he was respectful and kind, a gentle lover, if not a bit boring.

"Not your usual type, eh Lark?" Draco had said, pulling the memory from her temple and slipping it into a vial for safekeeping. "Perhaps you need to show him a few tricks so you can stay awake."

"He's perfectly fine, Mr. Malfoy. You won't catch me complaining about a man who treats me like a queen. Don't you worry about me."

The men sat themselves on either side of Draco, signaling to the bartender for drinks.

"I don't have you boys in the books for tonight. To what do I owe this...pleasure?" Draco asked, his jaw tight with tension.

"Can't a man escape the hustle bustle of the city and come enjoy a drink with his mates? Play a few hands of Durak?" Theo asked, throwing back half of his gin and tonic in one gulp. Draco could tell that he'd already had a few cocktails, making him even more boisterous and erratic...unpredictable.

"Of course he can, I was only curious, making conversation." Draco signaled for another drink and caught a reflection in the mirror.

It was Hermione standing just outside the entrance to the bar, framed perfectly by the open doors. She was dressed in a midnight blue satin gown and robe, her hair pulled back in a long braid that hung over her left shoulder. Even in the low light he could see the scattering of freckles across her nose, the caramel bronze color of her eyes. Locking on to his gaze in the mirror she smiled and nodded. He flicked his eyes to the left, tipping his head, indicating she should leave, go upstairs, to the kitchens, anywhere but where she was standing. But it was too late.

"Little Sparrow!" Theo called out.

He stood and sauntered towards Hermione, throwing an arm around her shoulders and pulling her into a loose, familial hug, kissing the crown of her head. She held her breath, looking to Draco for help, but he only stared, looking both helpless and angry. It was clear she was on her own. Of course, it wasn't Theo she was worried about.

"Come in, come in. Let me get you a glass of champagne, my treat," Theo said, pulling her along by the elbow.

One of the first rules Draco had ever given her was that the guests were in control. He prided himself on his little stable of sexy yet demure women, quiet and delicate, appealing to the

fragile male egos of his membership. So although she had no interest in sharing a drink with the three of them she stumbled obediently into the bar, lingering near the doorway while Theo went to pour her a glass from the bottle Trevor had ordered. Archlight turned slowly in his seat and looked at Hermione with an arched brow and hungry, mischievous eyes. They were the color of damp moss, lids heavy with what looked either exhaustion or pretentious boredom. Still, she could see why Sarah was infatuated with him, although it surprised Hermione to hear that he treated her well, respectfully even.

“Nice to see you again little mudblood,” Trevor purred, getting up from his seat and bowing. “Won’t you join...”

“Don’t call her that again,” Draco said, cutting him off. “Or you’ll not be welcome here, I don’t care how much money you have.”

“Oh, of course,” Archlight said. “So sorry. I meant nothing malicious,” he added, his eyes narrowed and glittering as he stared her down. “I thought it was a little pet name between you and Theo.”

“It’s isn’t. I don’t have pet names,” Hermione said, finally speaking up for herself.

The three men looked at her, Draco biting back a smile, both Theo and Trevor aghast at her impudence.

“Then perhaps we should give you one,” Trevor said, his voice a bit colder as he ran a finger up her arm and across her exposed collarbone. He leaned in close to her ear, his voice quiet enough that Draco couldn’t hear him. “I hear you’re an excellent cocksucker, would that a good pet name for you?” She said nothing, unwilling to take his bait and he pulled back, amused at his own joke. “How much for the night?” He called out to Draco, not taking his eyes off of her, his hand on her arm as if she might run were he to let her go.

She held her chin up, looking him in the eye, doing her best to hide the fear that ran through her blood like ice. Somehow, she prayed that Draco could hear her thoughts, could hear her begging him to save her. There was something about Archlight she didn’t like, the way he looked at her as if she were a rare animal, a trophy to gather. Prey. She knew that Draco was possessive, that he wanted her all to himself; but she’d also seen the ledger in Draco’s room and knew that her purpose here was to pay Lucius back. In the past few months she hadn’t been earning her keep. No matter what Draco had told her, she knew that her body was for sale to the highest bidder...or at this point any bidder, she supposed.

“She’s not available,” Draco said, draining his second whiskey and slamming the heavy crystal glass onto the table a bit harder than he’d intended. “Let go of her. Sparrow, you’re not supposed to be in the bar if you aren’t working.”

“Which is it mate,” Theo said, laughing. “Is she not available or not working?”

“My guest isn’t coming until eleven,” Hermione blurted out, her eyes darting between the three men who stood around her, slowly moving closer like an encroaching virus. “I was...I just wanted to ask Mr. Malfoy for the room number. I’d forgotten.”

Draco nodded almost imperceptibly and looked up towards the ceiling as if trying to remember.

“Yes. Mr. Renfield. He’ll be in room nine at eleven thirty. But you’re to be there at eleven, remember? And I believe he wanted you shaved entirely.”

“Yes sir,” Hermione said, her cheeks hot as she looked into Draco’s sparkling grey eyes. She could tell by the tension in his posture that he would most certainly need her...services this evening. “I’ll be going...I need to...”

“No no, I said you should have a glass of champagne and you will,” Theo said, pushing her down into a chair. “I insist.”

A few more of the evening’s guests arrived and so the four of them sat at a small table off to the side of the bar making small talk about the approaching spring, plans for summer holidays and the like. Trevor pulled a cigarette from a silver case and offered her one as well, which she declined politely, unwilling to be beholden to him for even the slightest kindness. As the men chatted Hermione sipped her drink slowly, doing her best not to smile when she felt Draco’s finger tracing circles up the outside of her thigh. It was innocent and meaningless, but still she found it reassuring as she sat alone in the den of wolves, a small sign to let her know he was there for her.

“Draco, I nearly forgot,” Trevor said, pouring another drink for all of them. “We’d love to have you at the Archlight Spring Gala this year. It’s the biggest social event in wizard London if I do say so myself.”

“It really is,” Theo added. “Food, dancing, an open bar until well after midnight and the most beautiful witches in England wearing the best, most revealing gowns. It’s quite difficult to get an invite.”

“Unless you cry and beg like a baby; which is Nott’s usual tactic,” Trevor said, leaning back in his seat with a smug smile.

The three men laughed and Hermione smiled politely although the conversation was making her sick. She’d heard of Archlight’s annual gala, as well as the other lavish, wasteful events around Wizard England...purebloods wearing their finest robes, spending tens of thousands of galleons and gowns and jewelry, drowning themselves in excess while halfblood and muggleborn children died starving outside their doors. Every January Voldemort himself held an ostentatious and completely unnecessary rally in his own honor, reminding everyone of the peace and prosperity he’d brought to their country, while in the crowd everyone knew that England had become the laughingstock of the wizarding world, overrun by bigotry and paranoia, greed and sadism. She glanced at Draco who was smiling, but his eyes seemed dead. Beneath the table he dug his fingers into her knee in silent disgust and she took his hand in hers and squeezed.

“I’m not much for dance parties, you know that Nott. I sprained Parkinson’s ankle fourth year trying to waltz. You can give my precious invite to one of the beautiful witches that wants to attend.”

“No, no...Draco, I’m afraid I have to insist,” Trevor sighed, shaking his head. Then, leaning in conspiratorially he added, “I may have promised my little sister that you would be her date. She’s had a crush on you for some time. And now that you’re something of a rakish outlaw in pureblood circles her panties are all a flutter. You’ll love Melody. She’s the epitome of pureblood beauty...blonde hair, blue eyes...the two of you would make beautiful children.”

“Perhaps I should meet her before we start naming them?” Draco asked drily, and Hermione could see the pulse pounding in the hinge of his jaw, his eyes darting around the room. She’d seen that look before, the walls closing in on him. Panic.

“Look, I can see you’re uncomfortable. And I think I know why,” Theo said, clapping a hand on Draco’s shoulder. “This is strictly First Generation. Lucius won’t be there.”

“What a shame,” Draco said, fiddling with the cuff links on his shirt. “He really knows that Veela Quadrille like the back of his hand.”

First Generation was the name Voldemort had given to the youth who had fought in the Potter War. They were the “first generation to live in a world of pure wizardry, a world unsullied by mudblood thievery and halfblood deception.” It was a badge of honor they were meant to wear with pride, but all it did was remind them of all of the friends and family they’d lost. A whole generation of children, students conscripted as soldiers as young as eleven dead on the grounds of their own school.

“It will be good for the club’s reputation, mate,” Trevor said. “And it will be good for you to get out, see some friends. We haven’t seen you around London since the Travers’ Christmas Party. It’s just one night and it’ll make my sister’s year. She’s had a crush on you since her first year at Hogwarts. I’ll be forever indebted, honestly.”

If there was one thing Draco couldn't resist, it was having someone in his debt. He squeezed Hermione’s hand beneath the table once more and let out a heavy sigh.

“When is it?” He asked.

“Saturday next, the night of the Spring Equinox,” Trevor said, his smile wide in victory. “We’ll all meet here first? Have a drink and arrive at the gala together, what do you say?”

Draco drained his third glass of firewhiskey and forced a smile.

“I can’t wait.”

Later, she and Draco lay quietly in the rumpled bed in room nine. Her wrists were bruised and sore from being bound above her head; her entire body aching deliciously, each movement bringing up a memory of how he'd spanked and pinched and licked her, bit and stroked her before finally flipping her onto her stomach and fucking her relentlessly, reminding her over and over that she was his and only his. It was clear that Theo and Trevor had gotten under his skin. She sighed audibly and turned on her side to face him, brushing the damp hair from his forehead. His eyes were closed but she knew he was awake. He'd told her long ago he didn't trust himself to sleep around her.

"Have you turned down others who have asked for me?" She asked, reaching out to run her fingertip over his eyebrow, down the length of his nose to the delicate arch of his cupid's bow.

"What?"

"Trevor and Theo. You lied to them. You and I weren't meant to meet tonight but you told them..."

"I don't like how Theo treated you," he said, cutting her off, but not opening his eyes. Her touch was soothing and he didn't want it to stop. It wasn't sexual or arousing...it just felt peaceful, sending a tingling sensation down his spine. "I don't care that you ended up OK, he drugged you and called you a...I don't like it. And Trevor, well Trevor I just don't like. He doesn't deserve...He has Finch to entertain him."

"It's silly for me to be here if I'm not doing my job, not making money for you."

"I have money enough, darling. What is this really about, are you saying you want to fuck someone else?" He asked, finally looking at her as he sat up against the headboard.

His stomach was tightening with an acidic combination of fear and anger. Surely he'd misunderstood what she was saying. Or was it possible she'd grown tired of him so soon? He reached out to the nightstand before he remembered that he hadn't brought his cigarettes, then moved to get out of bed. Hermione stopped him by rolling over and sitting astride his hips, her hands on his chest.

"No Draco, I don't," she said, her voice calm and even. "My God, no wonder you're so exhausted. It must be tiring flying off the handle like this all the time."

He sighed and looked away from her crooked grin, his mouth a tight line. She touched his jaw, gently turning his face to look her in the eye.

"I know why you brought me here. I know you want me to pay your father back," she said. His eyes went wide and he opened his mouth to speak but she shook her head, touching his lips with two fingers. "I *don't* want to fuck anyone else. I don't *want* anyone but you. But a hundred thousand galleons is a lot and I'm not going to earn..."

He grabbed her wrists and pushed her off onto her back, looking down at her, his eyes burning silver.

“I don’t know what made you think you’re here at my father’s request, but you aren’t. In fact my father would much prefer you were rotting in prison and he’s ready to tear down The Dragon because of it. I don’t care,” he growled, his grip tight on her forearms, his breath hot over her cheek. “He’s nothing to me. You’re here only because of me, only *for* me. I told you you’re mine and only mine. Yes, my father will get his precious galleons back, but that’s not for you to worry about. There isn’t a man alive that you have to be worried about hurting you. I don’t care if Voldemort himself walks in the front door, no one in this world will have you but me and I’ll tear apart any man who tries. Do you understand?”

She had no words, only nodding in response, her heart nearly bursting from her ribs as he made his declarations. It was possible she’d misread the ledger, that she misunderstood his notes; whatever it was, she was relieved, a weight lifting from her chest that she hadn’t realized was holding her down. He let go of her wrists and bent down to kiss her lips, quickly moving to her jaw, her throat...sliding down her body to settle between her thighs.

“Thank you sir,” she said, sinking her fingers into his cornsilk hair. “That’s all I wanted to hear.” She closed her eyes and let herself go, let her mind empty of everything but the feeling of him licking between her legs. It was good. It was luxurious and decadent. And suddenly she felt happier, more content than she had in years. As Draco Malfoy tongued her pussy, focusing on nothing but bringing her pleasure, for the first time in nearly a decade Hermione Granger felt safe.

Cinderella

He called for her just after dinner, asking for her help getting ready for the Gala. But when she got to his room he was already showered and nearly completely dressed. She swallowed a pang of disappointment at not being able to help him “clean up”. Much like his boundaries of never entering her room, however, Draco had yet to invite her to his bed or his bath. Every time they were together it was either in a downstairs room of the brothel or the front room of his suite. Even now he was finishing dressing there. It was, perhaps, his way of keeping her at some sort of distance.

“Come in little Sparrow. Would you like a drink?”

After pouring a mug of tea, she sat on the black leather couch and watched as he buttoned up his crisp white shirt, slipping diamond and silver dragon cufflinks into the sleeves, catching her confused gaze in the reflection of the mirror.

“You’re certainly going all out this evening, Mr. Malfoy,” she said leaning back on her elbows with an eyebrow raised. “Hoping to snag yourself an heiress?”

He made a face of genuine disgust and she laughed, surprised at the relief that bloomed in her chest. She had no doubt that Melody would make a move on him, and not only because he was a “rakish outlaw”. He was beautiful. Looking at him standing in front of her in his black suit and tie, his platinum hair painstakingly arranged to look neat but a bit tousled, a few white locks hanging in front of silver eyes, it was hard to picture the sharp faced bully from school. Luna had always predicted he would grow up to be “almost frighteningly handsome” but they’d never believed her. But it wasn’t just the way he looked that had changed. Everything about him was a bit softer, the stiff aristocratic snobbery broken down a bit to show a real man. A man who was still capable of slicing anyone down with a smart retort or devastating sarcasm, a man who was still infuriatingly arrogant but who also had a sense of empathy, a sense of humor, a man who had learned the importance of seeing the pain in others and doing what he could to alleviate it. Like everyone else, the war had changed him.

Not to mention he was a lover unlike any she’d ever had.

She cleared her throat and sat up straight again, watching as he pulled his black tie from the pocket of his trousers.

“Pouting, Cinderella? You know I can’t take you to a Pureblood Ball,” he said, slipping the black satin tie under his collar. She was fairly certain he hadn’t meant it to sound so condescending and obvious but it still hurt.

Hermione wrinkled her nose and stuck out her tongue in disgust, standing up to help him, effortlessly twisting the fabric into a perfect bow

“You are sorely mistaken, Mr. Renfield. You see, I don’t *want* to go to a pureblood ball. I wouldn’t have accepted your invitation anyway.”

He tipped her chin up with his finger and smiled at her; his confident, lopsided Draco smile, eyes sparkling as if he were about to laugh. After searching her face for a moment, however, the light went out of his eyes completely.

“You’re jealous,” he said before frowning and pulling his hand away, moving to find his black suit jacket. “You’re feeling something I told you not to feel. I told you that I wouldn’t be able to give you any more than what we have already. I told you that and I meant it.”

“Of course I’m jealous! You’re leaving the building I’ve been a prisoner in for nearly nine months! But that’s beside the point. Don’t stand here and pretend you’re surprised at my reaction. Why would you ask me here to help you get ready if not to rub it in my face?” She asked, her cheeks fiery hot, her jaw tense, tight. “If not to see if I was jealous, to see what I had to say about your little blind date?”

Although he’d already found his jacket, he continued rummaging around his closet, unable to look her in the eye. How could he tell her? How could he explain that he just needed to see her, even if it was only for an hour, before having to go out amongst the walking dead, the icy aristocrats with their lofty ideals and false compassion for the “unfortunate” halfbloods and muggleborns still in the country? How could he tell her that before she’d come to his room his hands had been shaking, his stomach burning with acid? He’d wanted to feel her hands on him, smell the berry-scented shampoo in her hair, hear the even, buttery tones of her voice, her musical laugh.

“I just wanted to see you before I left,” he said, finally turning back to her, taking her hand and pulling her in, close enough that he could feel her breasts pushed into his chest, feel her ribs move as she breathed. He bent his head to kiss her, a deep kiss, slow and luxuriant, his hand warm on her cheek. Breaking away, he rested her head against his chest, his fingers threading through her hair. She allowed him to hold her for a moment and he heard her quiet sigh. “See? You know you’re good for my blood pressure,” he said, placing a kiss on the crown of her head. “This wasn’t my choice, darling. You were there. You saw how I got roped into it. You must know I would much rather stay home and find new ways to make you scream.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and went back to her place on the couch, watching him primp, flipping through an old issue of *Witch Weekly* she’d found in one of the sitting rooms.

“Roped in. Why do you even agree to go to these things? You’ve never met Melody, so it’s not like you’d be breaking her heart. You said yourself that you don’t like Trevor and I know that Theo drives you mad. Besides, I thought you hated mingling with your old... *colleagues*.”

“Careful, Sparrow,” he said, raising an eyebrow to her in the mirror. “I still have a few minutes to dole out a wicked spanking for your smart mouth. Besides, you know damn well why I’m going. I seem to have caught the eye of young millionaire Melody Archlight. Do you think she’ll let me bend her over the silent auction table on the first date?”

She didn’t laugh, didn’t smile, only stood up to leave the room. She fully intended to leave without even saying goodbye or admitting that she would wait up for him, would miss him, would be thinking of him for the rest of the night. She was going to leave without telling him

anything he would have been surprised to hear, but before she could get to the door he spoke again, his voice much softer.

“I go to learn things. Just like when I pull the memories from the other girls. I glean information from drunken idiots with loose tongues. I keep myself apprised of what’s happening in the world that I can take advantage of. That’s all anyone does these days, really. We’re all looking for someone we can destroy in order to keep ourselves alive.

She turned then to see that he was no longer looking at himself in the mirror. His eyes were focused on her, a few deep worry lines in his forehead. His voice had been insistent and low...sincere. Hermione walked backed to him, smoothing the satin lapels of his tuxedo. He smelled delicious...cedar and bergamot with a hint of leather. While she straightened his tie she could feel his stare, his breath on her bent head.

“Maybe you should start listening for something different,” she offered quietly. “Maybe instead of walking around torturing yourself, losing sleep, fucking and drinking and smoking yourself in to oblivion, maybe you could try and help.”

“Hermione...”

She looked up at him then, her eyes wide and imploring, her face begging to be heard.

“I’m not trying to change you, Draco. You’re the only one who hates who you are. So start changing. I couldn’t care less if you fuck Melody Archlight,” she lied. “But while you do, try and listen for weaknesses, listen for plans, listen for people who are like you. Listen for cracks in the façade.”

For a moment she thought she saw a glimmer of energy in his eyes...newfound purpose or even hope. But it was gone as quickly as it lit up his features and in the next breath he sighed.

“Kiss me before I go,” he said, running his fingers through her hair, surprising her with how desperate he sounded, like he feared she might not do it. “Give me something good to think about.”

She reached up and pulled his face down to hers, kissing him slowly, tracing the cupid’s bow of his lips with the tip of her tongue.

“Something to think about?” She whispered, her hand wandering down to the placket of his trousers. “While you’re gone I’ll be thinking about you,” she whispered, palming his length, her mouth against his. “I’ll wait for you on your couch wearing nothing but the black satin knickers you gave me last week and one of your white shirts. I’ll keep my long legs spread wide while I read Feversham’s Wizard Erotica. You know which one, the story about the poor little virgin witch lost in the woods.”

“You’re a wicked little slut, aren’t you, Sparrow?”

He kissed her hard, one hand sunk deep in her hair, the other on the small of her back, pulling her body flush against his. She moaned into his open mouth, both of them wondering if they had time for...

“Mr. Malfoy? Mr. Malfoy?”

There was an insistent knock at the door and Hermione instantly pulled away from him, wrapping her robe tight around her waist. Felicia was calling for him.

“What?” Draco barked, picking up his leather money pouch and tucking it into his pocket.

“Mr. Archlight and Mr. Nott are downstairs,” she called through the closed door. Then her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper, “...they have...they brought *women* with them...they’re all waiting for you in the bar. I didn’t know we had *female members*...Claire said that...”

Draco opened the door a few inches and gave Felicia a warm smile and held up a hand to stop her talking.

“The women are welcome. We’re all headed out to a gala in London tonight and Trevor suggested we all enjoy a drink first. I’ll be down in a few minutes, get a bottle of champagne and a table in the corner for us, thank you.”

He shut the door and turned back to Hermione who had already gone back to the couch, her nose in a book of something decidedly *not* erotica.

“You shouldn’t wait up for me,” he said, running one hand over her hair one last time, smoothing it down her back.

“I know,” she said, not looking up. “But for some reason I probably will.”

She sat in the front room of his suite for a while, drinking his wine, staring into the dying fire. Of course she was jealous, but it wasn’t something she wanted him to see. She didn’t want him to see that she thought of him as soon as she woke up, wondering if he’d gotten any sleep; that she worried for him when she read about Lucius in the paper. Had he contacted his mother since Christmas? Was business at the brothel good enough for him to pay Lucius back? Was he thinking of her? Her job at the Dragon, and one she much preferred to sucking off strangers, was to keep Draco off the ledge. For some reason he’d let her see that he was falling apart, that his brash and boisterous persona was only an act, a carefully constructed costume holding a broken man together. Right from the beginning he’d told her that he was in no position for love, to give or receive it; and she knew it was true because she wondered sometimes if she felt the same, if her heart had also turned that cold since the war, since she’d lost her best friends, lost them without even getting to say goodbye. In truth there was no room in Voldemort’s world for romance...for devotion and love and tenderness. It was true that she felt the fire of passion, the heat of lust and the connection between them when they were together, but it was only physical. They were all in a daily fight for their lives and they

had to put themselves first. And yet lately, Hermione was finding it more and more difficult to do.

A loud burst of laughter from the front hall of the mansion shook her from her thoughts and she stood, pulling on her robe and gathering up her books to head back to her room. Opening the doors and heading out to the landing of the staircase she looked down and saw them. Draco, Trevor and Theo standing in the front foyer helping their glittering tittering dates into fine black velvet cloaks. Hermione stood at the railing and watched Melody Archlight smile at Draco, putting her hand on his forearm to get his attention. Her skin was milky pale, not unlike his own: complimented by golden blonde hair and bright blue eyes. They made a beautiful couple. She turned her back and allowed him to drape the cloak over her shoulders, covering the lush, sky blue gown covered with elaborately embroidered birds on the skirt and sparkling gems dotted along the neckline. It was gorgeous and Hermione could feel the ache of envy welling up in her throat again. As if hearing her thoughts, Draco looked up toward the landing, his eyes finding hers immediately. She felt ridiculous and plain in her yellow satin pajamas and she held her books protectively over her heart.

As Melody pulled on her black opera gloves Draco smiled at up at her, his Sparrow, his good little girl. She looked powerful and inviting standing at the railing as she were the lady of the Manor, her hair falling in soft waves over her left shoulder, the light catching the golden tones of her skin, made warmer by the buttery satin of her robe. He was thrown back for just a moment to fourth year...seeing her glide down the stairs for the Yule Ball in her periwinkle gown, her hair sleek, swept into a knot, with a touch of makeup on her perfect face that made her eyes look bigger, brighter, her lips glossy and kissable...he'd been struck dumb by her transformation and everyone in the school right along with him. Now he couldn't help but imagine her coming down the steps of the mansion in the gown he'd picked for her for Christmas, blood red, low cut, elegance beyond compare. She would turn every head at that gods forsaken gala and he was angry that he couldn't have her on his arm to watch it happen, to watch them gape in awe at a muggleborn witch putting them all to shame. Noticing his smile she nodded down at him, although he couldn't help but notice her lips turned downwards as she lifted a hand to wave goodbye.

"Let's go," Melody said, slipping her hand through his elbow. "I can't wait to see what Annabella Hornberry is wearing."

The three women giggled together and Melody clung to his arm possessively. With one last look up at the Sparrow on the stairs, Draco opened the front door to the Dragon and they were gone.

The Perfect Accessory

It was true; Draco hadn't been out to one of these wizarding social events in forever. The Christmas tea he attended had only been twelve people and all of them were not exactly top tier Purebloods, most of them fairly outspoken about their opposition to Voldemort, outcasts or criminals, unwelcome anywhere else, the people he felt most comfortable with. So it came as no surprise when people stared at him, whispering behind their hands as he entered Archlight Manor. Photographers from the Veritas rushed to take a picture of his rare appearance, reporters asking questions that he ignored entirely. All the while, his date clung to his arm, drinking in the spectacle she'd orchestrated so perfectly, waving and blowing kisses at the gawkers as they made their way into dinner, the heiress and her little pet. Already he could feel the tension in his neck, the hinge of his jaw. He thought of how Hermione would occasionally kiss him there...right at the pulse point near his temple, telling him to relax and let her take care of him...something that actually wasn't relaxing at all, but certainly took his mind off his worries.

Melody Archlight was about as interesting as he'd expected: a beautifully wrapped package with nothing inside. She sat demurely between Draco and her brother at dinner, her golden blond hair swept up in a tight twist secured with diamond and sapphire combs with almost military precision. More jewels dripped from her ears, around her neck and from her wrist, so many that Draco wondered if they made it difficult for her to walk under the weight of them. They made her look sharp, icy, rough edged and unapproachable. Sitting at their table at the gala sipping champagne, she laughed when expected to laugh, responded to questions with easy, agreeable answers and raised no eyebrows with her Pureblood Approved Opinions.

"Oh! I saw your mother the other day, Draco," she said, her voice light and cheerful.

Draco put down his fork and sat back in his chair, choking down the instinct to get up and run.

"Oh yes," Trevor added, "and your father too. There was a Pureblood Elders Dinner at the club in London."

Still Draco said nothing and hoped his obvious indifference would signal an end to the conversation, but Melody just wasn't that smart.

"Naturally I told Narcissa I was bringing you along to the Gala and I thought she was going to burst into tears," she said, laughing. "She told me to give you her best and tell you to come home and see her. How long has it been? Aren't you a bad little boy?"

"The worst," Draco said, sneering across the table at Theo who seemed to be the only one who knew that the Malfoys were no longer a happy little family.

"But you love bad boys, don't you Mel," Theo said, giving her a wink.

“Of course, I wouldn’t have it any other way!” She said. “A little darkness keeps things exciting!”

The girls all giggled, flitting off to some other subject and Draco nodded to Theo across the table, not noticing at all that Trevor was watching him carefully over the rim of his glass.

After dinner Draco performed his expected duty and asked her to dance once or twice. She eagerly accepted, pulling him in close, pressing her breasts against him, even resting her head on his chest with her hand on the nape of his neck.

“What is it you do, exactly, Melody?” He asked as they stood in the middle of the dance floor beneath the slowly swirling multicolored lights. He’d been sitting for an hour or two and when he stood the three shots of fire whiskey he’d had at the table went straight to his head.

“I’m the face of Archlight Printing. I make appearances, cut ribbons at openings, host fancy luncheons, throw my name and money behind noble causes,” she said, smiling that wide, sparkling smile that’d he’d seen plastered to her face all night, posing for photographs with anyone who asked, particularly the reporters from The Veritas and Real Magic Monthly.

“And what causes are those?” He asked. Hermione’s voice was quiet and constant in the back of his mind. *Listen for something, what people are doing, what people are saying. Find a way to help.*

“Oh you know...charities for those poor little mudblood children whose parents have abandoned them. So many criminals out there, they don’t even think of their kids. They’re smuggling potions, robbing the markets or trying to escape the country, leaving children behind. And those kids will have nothing. I mean, they can’t go to our schools of course, I wouldn’t want them around *my* children, but they can’t just be living on the streets. It’s a disgrace.”

“Yes,” he said, through clenched teeth, wondering how much longer the song was. “It is.”

“My brother is working hard to crack down on it with the Public Nuisance Committee.”

“Trevor works on the Pureblood Council?” Draco asked, surprised to find out he was involved in politics at all given his activities at the Dragon.

“He’s not on the senior Council, of course...but he’s close with a lot of the members so he was named to the committee. He’s going to propose a new law allowing pureblood families to take in mudblood children as household staff. It gives them a place to live, a purpose in life.”

“Slavery you mean.”

She scrunched up her nose distastefully.

“Well, only very technically. I mean, they barely belong in our world at all, do they? We don’t pay cats for catching mice do we? They’re just grateful for the work and a warm place to live. And it feels good to do something nice.”

Afraid he was going to say something hurtful, Draco spun her out to the middle of the floor then pulled her back again as the song finally came to an end.

“If you’ll excuse me. I think I see your brother signaling me from the bar.”

Trevor was waiting for him with a glass of champagne. He'd been missing for nearly an hour and Draco had never seen him so...disheveled, his tie undone, a few buttons opened, his sandy hair tousled by the hand of his date. It was clear that the party was quickly devolving into a drunken free for all and it wasn't even midnight. The good news was that it meant Draco could duck out soon enough and throw his torturous shoes into the Manor fountain on his way out the door.

“Is my sister keeping you entertained?” Archlight asked, leaning against the bar, staring out at the crowd. “I’m surprised she hasn’t asked you upstairs for a...private gala.”

“She’s lovely. I hope I’m serving as an adequate accessory,” Draco said, eager for the subject to change. In fact he’d left her on the dance floor to keep from backhanding her in front of the crowd.

“As lovely as your little Sparrow?” Trevor asked, raising his eyebrow.

“Pardon?” Draco downed the rest of his drink and signaled for another. Hermione’s words echoed in his head again. *They already know, Draco. It isn’t a secret.*

“C’mon mate, I know Theo fucked her, but there’s a reason she’s never available isn’t there? Keeping that exotic pussy alllll to yourself. Admit it, you’ve got a soft spot for her.”

“Soft isn’t really the word, now is it?” Draco said without thinking. The alcohol was loosening his tongue. But what did it matter? It was his brothel, they were his girls, he could do what he wanted.

“So you *are* fucking her!” Trevor said, breaking into a mischievous smile. He nudged Draco with his elbow and laughed. “Good for you, mate. I must say she’s grown into quite a specimen. A little dose of forbidden fruit is good every once in a while.”

“Well, it’s not public knowledge so let’s keep it between us three, yeah?” Draco said. “Wouldn’t want to make the other girls jealous.”

“Not a word, my friend. Although I do wonder what your father would think of such a thing,” Trevor said, laughing. “His only precious fair haired boy buried face first between the thighs of a mudblood.”

“I told you not to fucking call her that again, Archlight. Or are you trying to make a scene just like your sister? Hoping the disgraced golden boy will punch you in front of your friends? What am I to you anyway, the night’s entertainment?” He threw back his whiskey in one shot and flung the glass to the side, sending it tumbling down the bar, shattering on the floor. He needed a cigarette. He needed her.

“Easy mate,” Trevor said, holding up his hands in surrender. “Easy. I was just joking around. What do I care what your father thinks, I was just getting a rise out of you. Bit of a joke! I thought we were friends!”

“We’re acquaintances, that’s all, and it’s because you have a monthly membership. Friends don’t pay for the opportunity to see one another. Don’t go thinking you have some deep emotional bond with me, Trevor, digging for some deep information. I’ve got all the friends I need. And I don’t want to hear you insulting the woman I...am...sleeping with.”

“Fair enough. I apologize. I’m not trying for anything more than your friendship...and access to your little birds of course. I like to think I’m keeping your little Lark satisfied.”

“Yes,” Draco said, unwelcome flashes of Trevor thrusting between her legs running through his brain. “I hear she likes you very much.”

“She’s a good girl...for a halfblood. That’s why I like your set up, Malfoy. Mutually assured destruction, isn’t that what the muggles say? We all keep our filthy little secrets under one roof and no one will expose the other. Slytherin down to the bone.”

Draco raised his glass, although he didn’t much feel like toasting anymore. No one spoke of Houses anymore...except for the house that won.

It was nearly one when Draco gracefully bid his date farewell.

“Will I see you again?” She asked, batting her eyelashes, drawing a finger over his left forearm. She’d tried to touch his mark several times throughout the evening and he’d had to pull away, although every time she did it he was reminded of Hermione licking and sucking at his marred flesh, telling him she wasn’t afraid. Melody saw it as an alluring addition to his costume. Hermione knew that it was a scar.

“I thought you liked me because I was the outlaw of pureblood society, sweetheart. As such I must tell you that I *never* see a woman twice.” He leaned in and kissed her cheek before scraping his teeth over the side of her throat. “Get your knickers wet with someone else, love. I’m otherwise engaged.”

What he was; was drunk. He was drunk and exhausted, tired of being stared at, enduring the polite nods as people stepped back, not wanting to be seen with him. This whole evening was why he stayed in the mansion...in his bubble of safety where people saw who he really was, who he wanted to be.

Grabbing his cloak from the coatroom he made his way to the front door of the manor, cleverly avoiding anyone who might want to drag him back into the debauchery. Before apparating back to the Dragon he stepped into the little sculpture garden near the front gate to have a cigarette and try and collect himself, enjoying the quiet and the cold spring air as he sat on a marble bench beneath the stars. Looking South he found the Leo constellation, then Bootes and finally settled on his namesake...Draco...the circumpolar Dragon...always visible, weaving its way through the sky. A few wispy clouds obscured many of the smaller stars but it still calmed him to trace the outline with his eyes, to name each pinpoint as his mother had taught him when he was a child. He could rely on the stars to remain the same, year in, year out.

No matter what, Narcissa had always said. *You will always have your name.*

He flicked his cigarette off into the darkness and wiped his eyes. What a bad boy he was.

On the other side of Archlight Manor, Trevor excused himself from the party to quickly prepare a short note, rolling the parchment tightly and sealing it with wax. With his wand he summoned the white Eagle Owl that waited for him in the Manor's stables and fastened the scroll to the green harness on his leg. Message secured, Trevor gave the bird a bit of food and clucked his tongue.

"Off you go, mate," he said, and the bird swooped from the windowsill with a loud screech, headed Southwest towards Wiltshire.

Ruined

Chapter Notes

Warning for mild dubious consent and bad BDSM etiquette.

After waiting in her room until after midnight, Hermione wandered back to the kitchens to look for ice cream or biscuits or something sweet. Her eating habits had become ridiculously decadent in her months at the Dragon, making up for the years when she'd go days sometimes with nothing more than an apple or half of a sandwich split with Hannah. Remembering her friend sent a wave of guilt through her, a heaviness that ruined her appetite knowing she was still out there, still suffering, maybe hiding...maybe worse. For a moment she wondered if Draco could find her, could bring her to the Dragon. Then she shook her head clear, nearly laughing at the thought of asking Draco Malfoy to imprison her friend and force her into prostitution. He'd done an excellent job at making her forget why she was here, what she'd become. Forgoing the sweets entirely, Hermione poured a glass of red wine before heading to the reading room on the first floor.

It was after one when she heard the front door swing open and quickly slam shut, the force of it making her jump in her chair, dropping the book she'd been reading. She stood in the doorway of the parlor, watching silently as Draco hung up his black cloak, rubbing absentmindedly at the back of his neck. Still in his perfectly tailored black suit and black leather gloves, thick-soled black hippogriff hide boots that clicked loudly over the marble floor, she found him mouth watering. His hair was a mess, but whether it was from the wind, apparating or something...else...she couldn't be sure and she wasn't sure she wanted to know. Her throat tightened with jealousy. Melody Archlight had indeed been beautiful, like a porcelain doll, and it would be just like Draco to use her to prove a point to Hermione.

"Did you have fun?" She asked innocently, leaning against the doorframe.

When he turned to her, she felt her skin prickle with goosebumps. His eyes were narrowed and icy, his lips pulled into a sneering smile. Taking a few steps towards her she could tell he was drunk, more drunk than he'd been in a while. She saw it in the long blinks, the slow, wavering walk. He never took off his gloves. His tie hung loose beneath his collar, the first buttons of his shirt undone, revealing the thin silver chain around his neck, glinting in the low light of the foyer. Everything about him was dark.

"It's not safe for little Sparrows to be out wandering at night," he said, some of the words slurring together.

"I was just heading to bed actually," she said, leaning in to kiss his cheek, smelling a mix of whiskey and cologne, tobacco and a woman's floral perfume, honeysuckle and vanilla. "I wanted to make sure you got home safely." He turned his head and caught her mouth, kissing hard, their teeth crashing together, biting down on her lower lip. She smiled as she pulled away, stroking his stubbled cheek with one hand. "Goodnight sir."

But before she could get too far he grabbed her elbow and yanked her back, spinning her around to press her against the wall, caging her in with his arms. Belying her anxiety, she looked him in the eye, holding her chin up and staying calm. Suddenly he felt much taller, much more imposing than he ever had before.

"I don't want you to go to bed, Granger," he said, dragging one leather clad finger tip over her cheek, the line of her jaw. "My pretty little Granger. My Sparrow. Mine. I want you to strip. I want you to kneel down on this cold marble floor naked and suck my cock. I want to come on your face and watch it drip from your eyelashes."

"You're drunk," she whispered. "You're not thinking..."

"Shh," he hissed through glittering white teeth, covering her mouth with his gloved hand. "Listen to me and do as you're told. I don't want you talking. I'm done with talking. Talking gets us all in trouble. No talking. Just thinking. I've been *thinking* of you all night, *thinking* of you sitting here alone while I was...while I...I couldn't do a damn thing without you creeping into my thoughts. Everyone knows. Everyone knows how I feel. You know. You know damn well," he said, narrowing his eyes as if he were going to invade her mind again. She held her breath, the taste of his glove salty and earthy on her lips. "But right now I don't want to talk, I want to fuck. I want to fuck you. I'll take my hand away and you'll be quiet and do what I say, won't you, my pretty little Sparrow?" He reached down with one hand to unbuckle his belt and unzip his trousers, still holding her mouth shut with the other.

Seeing that she'd waited up for him...that she was wearing his favorite yellow satin, that she was there in the foyer greeting him with a smile had made him ache for her. He ached for this woman that he'd enslaved, branded, locked in a cage, a woman he'd allowed other men to touch, to insult and belittle because he hadn't worked up the courage to claim her in public. He was filth. He wasn't a man worth waiting up for...but somehow she still did it. She insisted on seeing something he told her wasn't there. He told her a thousand times and still she continued to see it. And now, as she stood there, pinned to the wall beneath his hand, there was something about seeing her eyes widen that made him even harder. It angered him. It angered him that while she did everything she could to pull the light from him, the tiniest things would churn up the dark. A smile, a tilt of her head, a word of affection and he wanted to devour her. She'd warned him before not to come to her when he was angry, not to confuse his anger at others with frustration towards her, not to conflate rage and passion. She'd warned him...but she should have known that one day he would fuck up.

Draco pulled his hand away and kissed her, hard, his tongue driving deep in her mouth as he ground his hips against her, pushing her roughly into the wall. And damn him, she responded. She felt that unmistakable frisson of arousal between her legs and up her spine as he dragged his lips over her neck, the warm of his hand closing around her breast.

“My little sparrow...all mine,” he purred, his cock hard against her stomach. “She’ll do anything for me, won’t she?”

“Y..yes. Yes sir,” she said, although again she felt that tiny wave of fear...a warning somewhere deep in the pit of her stomach. Still he was right...she was his completely.

“Get undressed. Let me see that wet pussy,” he said, shoving one hand roughly inside the waistband of her pajama pants.

Her knees nearly buckled at the touch of his leather-covered fingers between her legs. She moaned in response and slipped her pajamas off, spreading her legs a bit to give him better access, but he pulled away as soon as she was bare.

“Get on your knees,” he hissed, pushing down on her shoulder. “This is your specialty isn’t it? This is what you like doing best? Sucking pureblood cock?”

His use of the word stung for a second but she ignored it, attributing it to his drunkenness. Kneeling in front of him she took him deep into her mouth, holding tight to his hips as she worked, humming and moaning around his thick length.

“Fuck yes...what a good girl you are,” he sighed, tangling his fingers into her hair. “Would you let them watch you suck me off? Theo and Trevor? They want you so badly and they’ll never have you.” He drove deeper into her mouth, touching the back of her throat and she gagged until tears sprung to her eyes before he pulled out and thrust in again, deeper each time until she clawed at his legs to let her breathe.

She’d never believe it, but the sight of her unraveled, her hair a tangled mess, saliva dripping from the corners of her swollen lips, her eyes glittering with tears...it was beautiful to him, so raw and wanting, a wild animal at his command. He pulled her up by the arm and pushed her backwards into the reading room, towards the black leather sofa.

“You’re hurting me,” she tried to pull her arm from his painful grip. If he heard her, he ignored her pleas, only kept walking until he could easily bend her over the arm of the sofa, kicking her legs apart. “Draco...”

“Mr. Malfoy,” he said, slapping her ass with his gloved hand. “Watch your mouth, pretty girl, or I’ll make you suffer for it.”

She closed her eyes, waiting for him to thrust inside her, but instead he ran his hands down the length of her spine and she felt his tongue, warm and wet, slipping between her folds, dipping into her core.

“She likes it rough,” he whispered against her pussy. “My little Sparrow likes when I drag her down to her knees. Look how wet it makes her. Fuck if she's not dripping for me.”

She whined, bucking her hips against his probing tongue as he stroked her clit with the pad of his thumb. He wanted her to come for him. He wanted to give her that, to be the only man who could give her that, to be the only man she wanted. He worked deeper, slower, his licks and strokes more languid as her thighs started to tremble. With one hand she reached back to

touch herself, to spread herself open and feel the silky warmth of his tongue in her wetness as she stroked along either side.

“Come,” he said before sucking her clit between his lips, flicking it with his tongue.

She stiffened and went up on her toes, crying out at the overstimulation...her whole body shaking, her pussy clenching around him as he tried to push her ecstasy further, holding her open, his face buried deep between her legs.

“Oh God...oh my god yes,” she breathed, folding forward over the arm of the couch. “Oh that was good...”

“Not done yet little slut,” he said, standing to line up his cock with her still twitching, wet entrance.

Again she flinched at the words he chose, the names he used. It reminded her that he was still drunk and not completely in control of himself, something that frightened her with any man who tried to dominate her. Still, she didn’t protest, as he’d made her feel so good. She knew he wouldn’t hurt her, not intentionally. She trusted him.

Sinking inside her with one slow thrust, Draco wrapped a hand around her throat from behind, pulling her up and back, pressed to his chest, his hips snapping hard against her ass, the edge of the sofa digging painfully into her pelvis.

“So tight. You’re so tight and so wet for me,” He breathed.

His hand squeezed tighter, pressing against her neck until she couldn’t breathe and once again panic bubbled to the surface. He thrust faster, harder, and she clung to his forearm, clawing at his iron-clad grip.

“D-draco –“ she pushed the word from her lips but it barely made a sound, just a desperate puff of air. Her lungs were burning, head swimming.

“Just another minute. Just be a good girl for another minute. For me.”

Shadows crept to the edges of her vision and she felt light, tingly, her eyes tight in their sockets. His rhythm never stuttered and she stomped her feet, using all of her energy to try and twist out from beneath him.

“You told me,” he said, his pace erratic, with quick shallow thrusts as he neared his own climax. “You told me to take what I wanted. You said you wanted me this way. You like me this way.”

He could tell she was afraid, feel the tension in her muscles, but something told him to keep going. The feral, wild animal deep in his belly told him to keep fucking her. Fuck your pretty little sparrow. Come inside her. She was strong. She would recover. She would forgive him. He groaned, and with one last roll of his hips, emptied inside her, his hand falling from her neck just before she thought she’d pass out.

Coughing and sputtering, gasping for lungfuls of air, Hermione crumpled forward, crawling onto the couch and away from him. He looked down at her, the red bruise already blooming on her throat, tears streaming from her cheeks as she sobbed.

“I couldn’t...you...you nearly killed me!” she cried, curling her knees up to her chest.

Draco was suddenly quite sober – sober and horrified by the scene in front of him, as if waking from a trance and finding yourself at a crime scene. He choked back bile that bubbled in his stomach.

“Hermione...I’m sorry. This was wrong...I’m...I...just let me...” He rounded the couch to pull her into his arms but she scrambled away from him. He’d never seen her so afraid, not even when she was in jail. Terrified. Of him. He was nauseated.

“Get away from me,” she said, her arms wrapped tight around her stomach. “This is what I was afraid of. I gave you everything you wanted Draco! I gave you what you needed and all I asked was one thing. One fucking thing! This wasn’t supposed to be about anger. It wasn’t supposed to be...I told you not to come to me when you were like that.”

Again he tried to apologize. Again he reached out for her, but she was already at the door, picking up her robe to wrap it tightly around her. Turning back to see him on the floor, broken, ashamed, gave her no pleasure. It didn’t make her happy to see him suffering. She’d trusted him; trusted him to do what he wanted to her, to give her what she’d always wanted, because she was sure she would be safe. In fact, for a moment earlier that evening, before the gala, when she’d been straightening his tie, she wondered if she actually loved him, but now she knew - he wasn’t capable of returning it.

“I waited up for you. I only wanted to say goodnight. I wanted to see you...” she said quietly, almost to herself. Draco looked up at her standing in the doorway, her frown deep and pitying, eyes shining. “You ruined it.”

He watched her leave, rubbing the bruise he’d left on her neck. She hadn’t even allowed him to heal it. His hands were shaking, acid burning at the back of his throat as he finally pulled off his gloves and threw them across the room.

“I always told you I would, darling,” he said, doing his best to force an arrogant laugh; but the noise caught in his throat and he was sure that she didn’t hear him anyway.

Dark Purple and Blood Red

The girls stood at lineup, whispering to each other as they leant against the railing waiting for their assignments. It was already ten minutes after seven and Mr. Malfoy hadn't appeared. They hadn't seen him all day in fact; not for their legilimency sessions, not at meals, not even at the bar. He'd had the Gala the night before so perhaps he was hungover, but that had never stopped him from showing his face before. In fact drunk or hungover had been his default state for years.

"Should I knock?" Leanna asked the others, stepping forward.

They all exchanged glances and shrugs and finally Claire nodded.

"Mr. Malfoy?" Leanna knocked weakly. There was a bit of shuffling behind the door. "Mr. Malfoy...it's nearly quarter past."

The door swung open and Draco stepped out in his black pajama pants and nothing else, feet bare, hair a dull mess, unshaven, his eyes red, but it was unclear if he was high or had been crying.

"Sorry girls," he said, his voice low and gravelly, as if he hadn't spoken in years. "I...hang on..."

He disappeared again and came back with his black ledger, flipping through the pages.

"Wait," Sarah said, heading for the stairs. "Hermione's not here."

Draco froze, his finger still on the page and squeezed his eyes shut. After a deep breath he shook his head.

"It's fine. Come back. She's...she won't be here...it's fine." He looked up then, his face suddenly hard and angry. "You know damn well no one is coming for her. And quit looking at each other. You all are shit at occlumency and I know you've been gossiping."

The girls stared, eyes wide, nervous at the bitter resignation in his voice, the defeated look on his face. Still they stood in their line, awaiting their assignments. Never looking up, he listed the girls who had appointments and wished the other girls a good night.

"Mr. Malfoy," Claire said, "can we do anything for you?"

He looked up at them, his little birds that he'd trapped in their cages for so long that they no longer realized they were imprisoned. No matter what he told himself or others about how he cared for them or wanted to save them, he still held them hostage, unable to leave the mansion, selling them off to strangers and friends, making a profit off of their bodies. And here they stood, eyes wide with worry, wanting to help *him*; the one man who didn't deserve it.

“No,” he said, before closing the door on them all.

Hermione didn't leave her room. She'd become close with the elves that brought her potions and messages and they'd agreed to bring her food, books, anything she asked for a few of them visibly upset at seeing her so withdrawn. She knew Draco wouldn't stop them from helping her. He'd already knocked on her door once the day after the Gala asking if they could talk, but she'd never responded, only stood silently on the other side, her forehead resting against the door, knowing he was less than an inch away. Still, she kept the barrier up. If she saw his face she would crumble. It wasn't until she'd been sequestered away for three days that healer Moonstone came knocking, her voice low and soothing.

“Hermione, may I come in, dear? I've spoken to...” she trailed off and Hermione watched the closed door of her room, wondering what she'd say next. The silence was awkward, too long, and finally Moonstone sighed. “I only want to make sure you're alright. May I check your... injuries? I'm alone.”

The bruise was hideous, dark purple and blood red, a splotchy half moon around the front of her neck. Her cheeks and eyelids were dotted with spidery broken vessels, the white of her left eye filled with blood. Moonstone's expression was grim as she rummaged through her small bag of potions and balms. She was able to clean the blood from her eye with her wand and reduce the bruise to a pink crescent that would fade before the next morning. Still it hurt to swallow and she needed pain potions to sleep.

She'd wanted to be stone faced and strong, to hide her heartbreak behind indignant rage, but feeling Moonstone's gentle touch had broken the dam and she collapsed in the older woman's arms, allowing a maternal touch that she'd not felt in nearly a decade. It was like fresh water and cool air and sunshine all in one, conjuring memories of falling asleep in her mother's lap, or the touch of her cool hand to her forehead when she ran a fever. The release of emotion, tension, just feeling the witch's warm arms and smelling the powdery, flowery fragrance of her perfume was the first time she'd felt clean in days.

“I'm so sorry this happened to you,” she said, stroking Hermione's hair.

“It's fine. It's...not your fault.” Her voice was hoarse and weak, even three days later, gravelly with disuse.

“Well of course it isn't,” Moonstone said, her voice suddenly sharp and strong. “Nor is it any of yours. I know exactly whose fault it is and he's gotten a piece of my mind. Lucky I didn't call the Council,” she said, clucking her tongue. “And even beyond that, the fact that he wouldn't heal you himself when he's perfectly capable...”

Hermione held up a hand and shook her head.

“He tried but I wouldn't let him near me,” she said, standing up and retying her robe closed, headed back towards her bed. “And it isn't entirely his fault either. It's my fault for indulging

him when he was drunk...for letting our...agreement get out of hand..."

She could hardly believe she was saying the words aloud. All her life she'd admonished women who refused to challenge their abusers, their attackers. All her life she'd refused to allow victims to shoulder blame for their suffering, and yet here she was, doing it herself. She remembered a crying, black eyed woman crying in her living room...*you have no idea what you'd do until you're forced to do it.*

Perhaps she didn't want to believe the truth. Perhaps she didn't want to say it out loud: that Draco had hurt her, had kept hurting her when she'd begged him to stop, that he'd let their little game of Domination spiral out of control but that he'd still made her come, still made her wet with his filthy language and rough treatment. Perhaps she didn't want to admit that what hurt her most was that she now had to stay away from him, that she was on her own in this prison, that she could no longer expect him to find her under the stars or in the library, that he would no longer leave dirty books outside her room, or send her notes with descriptions of the things he'd dreamt of doing to her. She didn't want to admit that it was over. She didn't want to admit that it shouldn't have started in the first place.

Once Moonstone was satisfied that she'd done all she could, she gave Hermione a powerful, pain potion laced with poppy and a kiss on the forehead. The tenderness brought tears to her eyes and she turned away to keep from sobbing.

"I know you're hurting, petal. And it feels like curling up and disappearing is the best course of action. But you can't hide away in here forever Hermione," she said, heading for the door. "I'm sure I don't have to tell you that he's torturing himself for what he did. I know that isn't good enough...I know it doesn't fix what he did...but...he was certainly navigating new ground with you, sweetheart...he was bound to stumble."

"What do you mean by that?" Hermione asked. "New ground."

Moonstone looked at her as if the answer were as simple as 2 + 2 then shook her head and dropped her daily potions on the vanity.

"He cares very much for you," she said plainly.

"I thought he cared for all of the girls," Hermione said, feeling petty and childish. She wasn't supposed to care at all, particularly after what he'd done; and yet hearing the healer say it out loud had caused her heart to flutter.

"Of course dear, but he isn't quite used to having some care for him so deeply in return."

Moonstone left and Hermione made her way over to the vanity for her potions, only then finding the tightly rolled scroll tucked among them.

Draco was half-conscious on his sofa, his pensieve floating in front of him, crystal vials scattered on the cushions and the floor as he relit his joint, taking a deep drag. In the past few days he'd taken to relieving his nights with Hermione: the first time he kissed her, the first time he'd felt her beneath him, on top of him, the way she would look him in the eye as she came, as if wanting him to experience it with her. But it wasn't just the sex he wanted to remember. He looked back at the times that he'd shown her a book she'd never read, watching her face light up with anticipation. He watched the first time she'd touched the tattoo on his arm, tracing the outlines with her fingertips, raising goosebumps on his skin or how she listened, rapt, as he told her the mythology of the constellations she didn't know, Orion the Hunter, Perseus and Andromeda, the life of King Cepheus. He watched the fuzzy drunken nights that she'd gotten him to bed safely, stroking his hair, telling him that everything would be OK, humming silly songs, holding his hand until he fell asleep.

Reassuring him that she'd always be there.

They'd sworn it would only be sex. That there was nothing else they could give. No. Actually, that was what *he'd* sworn. She'd just been willing to accept it.

He pulled the memories back and searched for another vial; the night that he'd hurt her, the night that she'd looked at him with genuine fear in her eyes, not letting him touch her afterwards. His heart raced as he watched it unfold, anger and fear and regret bubbling in his stomach.

You ruined it.

"Well well, if it isn't the crown prince of debauchery himself," Lucius said, coughing.

He was standing behind Draco, having come into the suite without knocking, no one warning Draco he was here...just...appearing like the terrifying ghoul he was. Normally he would enjoy pestering his father with jokes and barbs, digging deep under his skin; but today he wasn't in the mood. Today he just felt like levitating him out the window.

"Father," he said, not turning around. In fact he picked up the cigarette and took another hit, holding the smoke until his lungs felt like they were filled with shards of glass. But it wasn't enough. He could still feel.

"I heard you made a spectacle of yourself at the Archlight Gala," Lucius said, rounding the couch to stand in front of him, unwilling to be ignored.

"Yes, I'm sure you did. I saw the flashbulbs going off all night. I wish that I'd been told I was going to be the night's entertainment, I would have prepared better material, made sure to drop your name."

Draco licked his fingertips and pinched off the end of his cigarette before standing and stretching, making a dramatic show of his slovenly state, barefoot and unshaven, still in his

sleeping clothes at four in the afternoon.

“I’ve come for my money, or at least an update as to how much of it has been recouped.”

“At our last lovely visit you told me I had until May fifteenth. To what do I owe this change of the rules?”

“I made those rules before I knew you were fucking Ms. Granger yourself, keeping her safe and happy in the lap of luxury when she should be rotting in prison with the rest of the mudbloods.”

Draco breathed in slowly, holding it in his lungs before exhaling on a count of four like Hermione had taught him. She said it was a relaxation method Hannah had taught her, to keep from flying off the handle and getting herself in trouble or to keep from strangling his father.

And Trevor.

“Ahhh, it all comes into focus. I should have known you’d send in a spy. No chance you’d actually trust your only son to pay his debts.”

“Seems I was right to do so,” Lucius said, helping himself to an inordinately large glass of Elf Vodka, a bottle that had cost Draco nearly fifty galleons.

“A wizard has to get off every once in a while. You made no such stipulation that I wasn’t to touch her,” Draco said, finally getting up from the sofa and moving to his desk where the ledgers, money pouches and his wand were under a charmed lock.

“I’ve never told you to keep your cock out of crup either, as I thought it went without saying.”

Because he was a bit drunk and more than a bit high his aim was off and so his Everte Statum missed its target, exploding against the wall behind Lucius’ head, leaving a spidering black smudge in the paint. Lucius pulled his own wand and the two men stood in silence, their weapons trained at each others’ throats.

“I will give you the money,” Draco growled through a clenched jaw. “I will give you the full amount today, plus any amount you ask in interest. I couldn’t give less of a toss about the money. But after that she is of no concern to you. Neither of us are, and you have no say in what we do or where we go.”

“You would do that to your mother? Your mother who cries herself to sleep, wandering the halls looking into your old bedroom, which hasn’t been touched since you left? Are you so starved for physical affection that you’d trade away your family, your name for a mudblood whore?”

Lucius easily ducked Draco’s Stupefy and countered with one of his own, knocking his only son back against the bookcases before he slid down to the floor. It took a few moments for him to get his bearings after he came to and when he looked up, his father was standing over

him, his familiar, deadly sneer pulling at the corners of his lips, like a window into Draco's childhood.

"I allowed you to keep her here because I thought you would have the decency to see her punished for her crimes. To have her work off her debt in pain and humiliation like she would have in prison, to make sure she regretted crossing her superiors...as an example to the other rebels out there who think they're going to make a difference in the world."

He spat the last words out as if suggesting swimming in shit.

"Yeah, well, don't worry," Draco said, working his jaw as he shook his head clear. "By now she's regretting coming here well enough."

Lucius was quiet for a long time and when Draco looked up again, his smile was even more cruel and twisted.

"Ahhh, you weak minded little fool," he said, tucking his wand away and walking towards the open drawer of the desk, pulling a black velvet bag of narrow gold bricks from inside, each one worth five hundred galleons. "Trevor says that you fancy yourself some sort of big dangerous player in the wizarding underworld. But I see that one good fuck and you fall apart like a schoolboy. What happened? Did you profess your love and she laughed in your face? Proposed marriage after a particularly choice blow job?" Lucius laughed at his son crumpled on the ground as he tucked the shrunken bag of money into his robes. "You always were a delicate flower, but this is rich. Let me guess, you showed her the poems you wrote about her eyes back at school...is that what drove her from your bed?"

"Yeah," Draco said, not looking up, his eyes stinging with tears that he absolutely would not reveal. "Something like that. Congrats. You've got your son all figured out."

"Let it be a lesson to you Draco," his father said, chucking him under the chin with the head of his walking stick. It was hard to believe, but his voice was a bit softer...a bit more paternal than only a minute before. "She's your weak spot. Make her suffer. Make her suffer for making you suffer. She won't dare to do it again. I know how you've felt about her your entire life, Draco, no matter how well you tried to hide it. Don't let her find the crack in your armor...it will be your undoing."

Draco nearly laughed, still hunched over on the floor amongst the fallen books and splintered wood as his father left with his money. The fatherly advice was too little too late. He was already undone.

If she were stronger, she would have torn the scroll to pieces. If she were Hermione from ten years ago she would have thrown it into the fireplace before reading a single word. Instead she carefully peeled off the M seal pressed into shining black wax and ran her fingertip over the stylized curves of the monogram. During her time at the Dragon she'd amassed a little collection of trinkets and knickknacks, all stored up in the top drawer of the table beside her

bed. As she placed the little circle of embossed wax in the drawer now, she realized they were all from Draco. The copy of Hogwarts A History, the black cuffs and collar he'd given her for Christmas, small diamond earrings he'd given to each girl at Easter, a quill made from the tail feather of an Argus Pheasant and all of the notes and cards and gift tags from the holidays including a ridiculous erotic drawing that had made the both of them laugh for nearly fifteen minutes. "Apparently your cock is triple jointed, sir," she'd said as they examined the seductive portrait Draco had attempted to render. He'd told her later that the greatest noise in the world was hearing her gasping with laughter.

She sat on the bed with the parchment, her body starting to feel warm and loose from the pain potion. The effects had started to open her heart as well, a bit of the stubborn anger she'd felt for the last few days beginning to fade as she looked down at Malfoy's familiar narrow, slanted script. What shocked her was his use of her actual name.

Hermione,

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. All day, every day all that goes on in my head is I'm sorry. There's no excuse for what I did. I told you from the beginning that I was ruined. I ruin everything good, everything that might make me happy or sane. I should never have come to your room those months ago, never should have let you kneel at my feet. I never should have touched you.

I never should have brought you here when I knew something like this would happen.

I know you don't want to see me right now. I know that we'll never have what we had again. You're right not to trust me.

*But you **were** helping me. I told you a thousand times that I didn't need your help. I told you that I didn't need anybody, that I could take care of myself. It was always a lie*
Hermione.

I need you.

Tell me. Just tell me how to fix it. Tell me what to do. I need you.

Draco

She dropped the letter and wiped at her eyes, leaning on her chin to look out the window at the spring sunlight dappling the courtyard. Sarah and Leanna were outside with their tea, giggling about something and Hermione felt an ache in her throat. The girls had been through cycles of compassion, hatred, friendliness, iciness with Hermione and at this point she had no idea where she stood with any of them, but she was so very tired of being alone. If she thought she was lonely before, wandering the halls and rooms of the mansion, it was nothing compared to hiding in her room. A tear fell from her cheek and blurred the word *need* in Draco's letter. While she'd read it her heart had been pounding with a sort of terrified

anticipation that had left her like a deflating balloon when she got to the end. Of course it felt good to hear him voice his guilt, to hear him apologize, even as it dripped with self pity. It felt good to hear him finally admit that he needed her, something she'd known for months. But as she'd read the words she'd found herself hoping he'd admit to something else.

Something she never thought she wanted to hear.

A bit after noon she heard a small knock on the middle of her door...a knock she recognized as Fawn the house elf.

"Miss Gr—Hermione?" The elf whispered, correcting herself. "I came to see what you were wanting for lunch miss. There's a shepherds pie and lemon tarts if you like..."

Hermione pulled herself out of bed, tucking the letter from Draco into the drawer beside her bed. Walking to the door she pulled her hair back into a sleek ponytail and wiped her face dry, breathing deep to compose herself. Opening the door she forced a friendly smile for Fawn.

"It's OK. You don't have to bring it up to me. I think today I'll go downstairs for lunch."

The Dangling String

Coming back from the dining room where she sat alone, enduring the quiet whispers behind the hands of the other girls, Hermione found herself wandering the halls of the second floor, poking her head into the reading rooms, the empty bedrooms, even the balcony that looked over the courtyard where she'd once found Draco watching her as she read outside in the sunshine. Without looking where she was going, she turned a corner towards the main staircase and ran into a broad, unmoving chest.

"I'm so sor—" Her blood ran cold as she found herself staring into familiar, glinting silver eyes. But they weren't Draco's. It was Lucius. "I..."

She stepped backwards, fully intending to turn on her heel and run, to lock herself into the first room she found open; but Lucius grabbed her arm before she could escape, pulling her back and flinging her against the wall.

"Ah well, if it isn't the valiant little princess," he hissed, holding her face tight in his gloved hand. "Not quite so brave and bold anymore are you?"

The touch of black leather on her skin made her stomach bubble with nausea, a cold sweat prickling her forehead as she was immediately transported back to the night of the Gala, Draco's hand heavy around her throat. Fear made her teeth chatter and she looked towards the black lacquer doors of his study.

"He's not coming for you," Lucius said, smiling in that small, condescending way that she'd known since she was twelve. "Too busy feeling sorry for himself." He looked her over, eyes lingering on the crescent shaped bruise on her neck, the shadows around her eyes, sunken from exhaustion. "Or maybe just regretting his investment."

"Please," she said, her voice as quiet and meek as a child, barely more than a breath. It was unlike her, but she was on the verge of collapsing in panic, her heart hammering against her ribs, her eyes stinging with tears. It had been a long time since she'd felt such unmitigated terror. She had no interest in fighting with him, engaging in a battle of wits and insults. She only wanted to get away from him, from the color of his eyes, the smell of leather, the angle of his jaw that was exactly like his son's. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry Mr. Malfoy. Please let me go."

His frown deepened and he stared into her eyes, his brow furrowed with something like confusion, as if he were trying to translate her statement into a different language.

"Look at you now," he said, nearly whispering, as if discovering a secret. "Hero of the mudbloods, Dumbledore's Princess...cowering, begging me for mercy. Why, you look like you're about to cry, pet," he said, turning her face from side to side, inspecting her like an old broken down nag, his thumb stroking her cheek. "Just a shell of who you were before. Back when you thought you actually *were* somebody."

He looked down at her throat again, tipping his head to the side before closing his fingers around the bruise. She whimpered, flinching at his touch, her hands clenched into fists so tightly that she could feel the edges of her nails cutting into her palm. For a moment she was worried that her knees would give out, that she'd fall forward into his arms or face first onto the floor. For a moment she thought that her life would end here, staring into the hateful, icy eyes of Lucius Malfoy. Her breath came in short, shallow pants and before she could beg him again, he let go of her and she fell back against the wall. Her legs buckled and she slid to the floor, pulling her knees into her chest, holding herself as small as she could.

"Maybe I've underestimated my son," he said with a hint of pride. "It seems he's broken your spirit after all." He straightened his cloak and brushed an errant lock of hair from his forehead. "Good day Ms. Granger."

Draco,

There is still a red mark on my neck. It isn't as dark as it was yesterday, or as painful as it was the night you hurt me. What I mean is, it's healing.

My heart and my feelings...are the same. Although they may take a bit longer as Moonstone doesn't have a potion for heartbreak and I don't have the access to illicit substances that you do.

But I am growing tired of hiding from you, and tired of not talking. I'm tired of being alone. I don't know what will happen. I don't know how it will happen or when. But I do know that I just need a bit more time.

Hermione

Since receiving her first parchment from him, they'd taken to communicating via these short notes. It allowed her more succinct eloquence and the time to find the exact words she needed. When she was finished composing it, she tied the scroll with a bit of ribbon from one of her nightgowns and handed the note to Fawn before heading down to dinner. After a couple weeks it was becoming easier to walk around the household, to ignore the whispers of the girls and the staff and the other elves. Still she refused to go to the nightly line up, to submit herself to his inspection, to let the others see her with him, watching for some sort of fireworks. Draco had managed to stay out of her presence otherwise although she'd heard that he'd basically sequestered himself in his quarters since the Gala...just like she had.

Knowing the tension that had built between them and the slow crawl back they were both making, she chose not to tell him about her encounter with Lucius or her panic attack in the hallway. She chose not to tell him that in the days following the encounter she realized that her greatest fear was not that Lucius or Trevor would hurt her, or that she'd have to go back to prison. The fear that made her head spin and her throat tighten was that she'd never be able

to let Draco touch her again, whether it be in passion or kindness or comfort, without collapsing into a quivering mess. She couldn't let that happen. She would get better with time, she told herself. Everything would get better with time.

Three weeks after the Gala, instead of going straight to her room, at seven o'clock she lined up with the rest of the girls, standing at the far end, some distance away from the rest of them with her arms folded tightly over her chest. She told herself that she only wanted to see him, to make sure he was taking care of himself, that he wasn't high or drunk or hurting himself, doing permanent damage.

"Good evening ladies," he said, rocking back on his heels as he looked down the line.

He still wasn't quite himself, still feeling the sting of his father's visit, still enduring the gossip around the mansion; but after reading Hermione's letters he felt a twinge of hope...a sign that there was something he could do, some path he could follow to earn her back. Things were changing. Still, it startled him to see her standing in the lineup, fresh and clean in her midnight blue pajamas, her hair swept back, her throat clear of any bruising. She looked him right in the eye, but there was no smile on her lips, her face blank, no hint as to how she felt seeing him. When finally she blinked, looking away from his uncomfortable stare, he cleared his throat and stepped away.

"Busy evening my little stars. Lark, Finch, Starling and Raven, you'll have guests at ten. Starling, you'll need to go blonde for Mr. Mulciber. The rest of you will have the usual instructions in your rooms. You can go ahead and get ready."

From the corner of his eye he saw Hermione turn to leave.

"Sparrow. It's good to see you," he said, keeping his voice light, businesslike. "Will you join me--"

"Am I requested, sir?" She asked.

The question was so simple, something she asked every night, but it made his heart race to hear her voice again, to hear her answer when he called for her. It made him bubble with energy to see her eyes meet his. It lifted a weight from his shoulders, but she showed no similar enthusiasm.

"No, but I..."

"Then goodnight, sir," she said, her eyes lowered again. Yet before she turned from him completely she added, "Get some sleep."

He watched her slip away down the darkened corridor, resisting the urge to call after her. To yell after her, to stomp his foot like a child and demand that she come back and talk to him, demand that she do what he ask. She belonged to him after all. Did she not remember that?

But instead he stood silently, fists clenched at his sides. She'd told him to wait. She'd told him to give her time. It had been over two weeks, and he was growing impatient.

"Mr. Malfoy?"

He looked down and saw Leanna, Dove, smiling up at him with her crystal blue eyes and shining, honey colored hair. Hermione had told him that she looked like Cinderella, some cherished muggle princess.

"Yes?"

"I just thought...maybe," she said, stepping in closer to him, her hand on his forearm.

"You've been so sad lately...so overworked...and tired. I thought maybe I could...help you out."

She was nearly pressed against him. The other girls had all gone, Hermione was in her room with the door closed to him. She'd come out and dangled herself on a string, pulling back at the last moment and he was sure that she'd done it just to hurt him. He just needed something. He needed to not think about her, about Lucius, about money or blood status or politics. He needed to be numb, just for a while.

"Yes," he said, reaching down to tuck a lock of hair behind her ear. "Come back here in an hour or so. I'm sure you'll be a great help."

It was late and the club rooms were nearly empty. Hermione felt safe wandering the first floor, pouring herself a glass of wine before heading into the smaller reading room off of the courtyard, the one with the view of the piano. With her feet tucked up beneath her and a thick book in her hand she could almost fool herself into believing everything was fine. She was in a gorgeous mansion of her own volition, doing exactly what she wanted, free to come and go at anytime, a gorgeous man upstairs asleep in her bed, waiting for her to come and join him. Sipping at her wine she could pretend it was paradise. Yet every time she turned the page her eye was drawn to the constellation on her wrist; the cluster of black stars swirling on her creamy flesh. The Pleiades were flung into the sky to keep them safe. It was meant as an act of mercy – but they were there for all eternity.

After an hour or so of reading she heard a bit of giggling followed by a lower, male voice. The door squeaked open and Sarah walked in with Trevor Archlight on her arm, looking darkly handsome as usual in his all black suit. They were both visibly surprised to see her in the room.

"Little Sparrow!" He cried dramatically. "I haven't seen you in weeks. How have you been?" He asked.

She could see Sarah pouting, obviously frustrated at having lost a bit of her customer's attention; attention that Hermione would gladly have gone without. Just hearing Archlight's voice made her pulse stammer, her breath freeze in her lungs. To reassure her, she smiled kindly at Sarah but it wasn't returned. Hermione had done her best to isolate herself and

unfortunately it had worked. Any rapport she'd built up with the girls before had dissolved. She ate her meals alone, spent her afternoons watching the other women play cards and gossip, making themselves a family from the ruins of their lives. The light hearted camaraderie made her heart sick, but she'd learned her lesson well. It wasn't safe to open up. Not to anyone. But now that everyone had turned away from her, the Dragon felt more like a prison than the day she'd arrived.

"I'm well Mr. Archlight. How was your Gala?"

"Very nice," he said, his hand moving to massage the back of Sarah's neck. Hermione watched her eyes flutter with pleasure and she was suddenly jealous, missing the touch of a man's hand, his lips, feeling his breath on hers, the slick warmth of his tongue. No, not just *a man*. She missed Draco.

"I heard that you were quite envious of Mr. Malfoy's invitation from my sister," Trevor continued. "But really it's better that you weren't there. You would have felt so out of place amongst such opulence. Pearls before swine and all that...mudblood."

It shouldn't have, but the name caught her unawares and she flinched visibly. Even Sarah let out a small gasp, no doubt surprised at her latest Knight In Shining Armor exposing his bigotry so casually. Hermione took a deep breath and looked back down at her book. In the past weeks she'd lost her fire, her willingness to fight the unwinnable battles. She'd learned to be afraid; defeated and afraid.

"We should go to our room," Sarah said. "We can have much more fun there, Mr. A."

"Is that so, little Lark?" Archlight said. "Yes, I suppose we should go. I've been dreaming of fucking your mouth all day."

He looked down at her, rubbing his thumb over her bottom lip. She whimpered as he slipped it into her mouth for her to suck provocatively, groaning as if Hermione weren't even there.

"Well," he said, pulling Sarah in against his side. "Please try to have a wonderful evening, mudblood."

Hermione refused to look up, refused to take his bait until he spoke again.

"Go on Lark, say goodbye to your friend."

Hermione looked up to see his hand on the back of Sarah's neck, pushing her forward. The girl grimaced with discomfort, her shoulders high and tense.

"Goodbye," she said quietly.

"Tsk ts. Say it properly...goodbye...mudblood."

In the silence Hermione found Sarah's gaze and gave her a smile of reassurance. It wouldn't matter, she knew she had to obey. Archlight was smart though. Somehow he knew that Draco only took the memories from inside the rooms. Unless Sarah chose to show him Trevor's cruelty, he'd never see it.

“Goodnight mudblood,” Sarah said, her eyes wide with embarrassment and regret.

“Goodnight Sarah,” Hermione said, standing finally and offering a sweet smile. “And goodnight to you as well, you venomous, pompous, bigoted prick.”

With a surge of adrenaline Hermione shouldered past the two of them, nearly laughing out loud at the indignant rage on his face. For the first time in a while she felt good. But her victory was short lived. As she climbed the stairs, anxious to tell Draco what happened she remembered that she’d told him to stay away. She’d told him to give her space. He’d tried to talk to her earlier and she’d turned her back on him. Standing outside his suite she raised her hand to knock on the door, to end this terrible silence between them, but pulled back at the last moment, her stubborn pride leading her away.

Draco allowed himself a few hits of weed as he waited for Leanna to come back. While the drug curled around his nerves he convinced himself that it was his right to fuck these girls whenever he wanted. They’d all offered themselves to him at one point or another, he wouldn’t be forcing them, coercing them. They wanted him. And he wanted to be wanted. Slouching down and leaning back against the couch he closed his eyes, quieting the conflicting thoughts warring in his head.

It was just sex. It was always just sex. Just like his drugs and his drink and anything else he did. There was no emotional attachment, no personal connection. He had a right to have sex. He had a right to feel good after feeling bad for so long. He missed feeling soft, feminine skin under his fingertips, soft lips on the side of his neck, slim fingers dragging through his hair. He missed looking into deep brown eyes, a little dusting of freckles scattered across pink cheeks. He missed long, caramel colored hair. He missed...

“Mr. Malfoy?”

Leanna had come in without knocking and he resisted the urge to growl, the urge to turn her over his knee and paddle her ass until she spread her legs for him, begging to be fucked. He resisted all the urges he ever had with Hermione.

“Come over here,” he said, patting the sofa cushion.

She very nearly ran, sitting down beside him in her white satin gown, cut low enough that he could see the curves of her breasts, a bit bigger than Hermione’s, a bit firmer. He shook his head clear and set down his cigarette.

“I’m so glad you called for me, sir,” she said, putting a hand on his knee, sliding off the couch to kneel in front of him.

He remembered the first time Hermione had knelt under the Imperious, how she ran her hands up his legs, how her back had arched.

“Fuck,” he said, standing quickly and pulling Leanna up with him. “Just...just strip,” he said. “Let me see you.”

She smiled and nodded, slipping the straps from her shoulders with no ceremony, no seduction. She was a whore after all. Draco had made her a whore at the top of her game; efficient, unashamed, businesslike. Stepping from the pool of satin on the floor she walked forward and ran her hands up under his t-shirt, pulling it over his head. He sighed at the touch of her fingers, her lips on his skin, the press of her soft breasts to his rough, scarred chest.

“Do you want me?” She asked, running her fingers through his hair, pulling his mouth down to hers.

He swept his tongue between her lips, willing himself to relish the differences, the tastes, the scents, the way he was angled as they kissed, the sounds she made. All of it was different. He was a young, single man and he could fuck a thousand women if he wanted to, there was no one to stop him. No one.

And yet all he could think of was how Hermione used to rub her thumbs over his temples while they kissed, trace over his cupid’s bow, how she would drag her teeth over the tendons in his throat, or nip at his bottom lip. He could only think of Hermione.

“Mr. Malfoy?” Leanna held his face in her hands and made him look at her. Her face was serious, her question more introspective than seductive. “Do you want *me*?”

He pulled out of her grip and walked past her, picking the nightgown up from the floor. He summoned a robe from his closet and wrapped it around her shoulders, pulling her in to kiss her forehead.

“No, Leanna,” he said. “I don’t.”

She nodded, looking at the floor and he braced for her to slap him, to cry and scream. He felt like a monster, cruel and hurtful. Instead, she looked up at him, smiling as she touched his arm.

“She’ll come around sir,” she said quietly. “I see her looking for you. I see how she changes when you come in the room. I can see she’s hurting too.”

She left the room without further explanation and Draco went back to the sofa, back to his drugs and drinks and back to the crystal vials of memories that he used to pass the time alone.

Teeth and Insincerity

Chapter Notes

The next two chapters will contain some violent triggering content. Please scroll to the notes at the bottom of the chapter if you would like to know the specific triggers. Also, this is a bit short for a chapter but it was hard to find a suitable splitting off point so I'll put up the next one a bit earlier :)

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

On the way back to her room the adrenaline spike from telling off Trevor quickly wore off and now she was shaking with terror. There were no unforgivable curses anymore...not for purebloods at least. Once he was finished with Sarah he could find Hermione and kill her with a single wave of his wand and there would be no time for anyone to do anything to save her. It was obvious he thought nothing of her and she knew he'd never suffer a consequence for her death...the rich never did.

All she really wanted was the sanctuary of her room; a warm bath and a locked door. Before she could get there, however, she saw Leanna walking quickly towards her, wrapped in a thick white robe that was far too big for her.

"Hermione!" She called in a loud, rasping whisper, trying not to wake the other girls.
"Hermione, can I talk to you? Please?"

As she got closer, Hermione realized why the robe looked so familiar. It was because she'd worn it herself, run her own fingers over the silver thread that made up the scrolling M monogram. A bit of bile seared her throat and she was taken aback at how seeing the robe on someone else hit her like a punch in the gut.

"Hermione please stop walking," Leanna pleaded, reaching out to take her hand. Hermione quickly pulled free, crossing her arms over her chest and stepping back.

"What?" she snapped. "Have some exciting news to share? Come to gloat?"

Hermione had been at the Dragon for nearly nine months. She'd been imprisoned, stripped of her wand, branded as a sex slave and yet of all the ways she'd feared Draco hurting her, this had been last on the list. For weeks, months she'd left herself open to pain and suffering as he choked her and spanked her, burned her with wax, bitten the most tender skin of her inner thigh. She'd trusted him without question as he'd pulled her hair and humiliated her with words, but she'd never even considered the agony that would come with breaking her heart.

Still, Leanna's brow furrowed in genuine confusion.

“What? Hermione, I only wanted...” she followed Hermione’s gaze to the monogram on her robe and almost gasped with realization. “Oh God no, please. Please just listen to me,” she pleaded as Hermione started walking away once again. “This is why I wanted to see you. I knew someone would go whispering behind my back. I knew that it would get back to you somehow.”

“So you’d rather tell me that you fucked him yourself,” Hermione said, shouldering past her into her room; but before she could slam the door shut and lock it, tiny Leanna wedged herself in and followed her.

“You walked away from him at line up,” she said, her voice laced with a bit more anger than Hermione anticipated. “You wouldn’t even look at him when he asked to talk to you so I can’t imagine why you’d even care if I did fuck him except that every single one of us knows how you feel about each other. Everyone but you two of course.”

“How we feel? How I feel? You have no idea what he’s done to me,” Hermione hissed, flopping down into her reading chair, her body suddenly exhausted from a day of extreme emotions, a roller coaster of bravery and fear, anger and hope. She just wanted to start everything over. She wanted to be alone and yet hated being alone. Nothing made any sense and she felt completely detached from the world, anchored to nothing at all.

“Of course I know what he did to you. There are no secrets in this house. I know why you hid from us until the marks were gone. I know why he tortured himself for weeks.”

Hermione’s eyes flicked up to connect with her, expecting a look of smug confidence, but seeing nothing but compassion...empathy. Still, she found herself digging her fingers into the arms of the chair as Leanna continued.

“He wanted to apologize or something...he wanted to talk to you tonight and you just walked away from him and he...deflated. He looked as sad and broken as he had the day after the Gala. You’ve been hiding in your room for weeks, avoiding him for weeks so you haven’t seen how he’s suffered, too. And I don’t think you really understand what any of us will do for him in exchange for all he’s done for us.” She sighed when she received no response, not a word, not a look. “What the girls will tell you is that I offered myself to him,” She said, kneeling at Hermione’s feet so that she could look her in the eye. “I offered myself and he accepted. He told me to come to his room.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and moved to stand up but Leanna, all five foot three, one hundred and ten pounds of her stood and shoved her back into the seat, her eyes on fire with a need to tell her to the truth.

“No. You sit down and listen to me, Sparrow,” she said, waving a finger in the older woman’s face. “Yes, I went to his room. I found him half drunk, surrounded by vials of memories. Memories of you and him...together. It’s how he spends every night, every day. He doesn’t even collect our memories anymore because all he does is look at you. It’s like none of us are even here.”

Hermione flopped back in her chair and Leanna nodded, pleased at not having to fight any longer.

“You’re not the only one who’s in love with him,” Leanne said, looking down at her hands. “I’ve been waiting for years. We all have...thinking that one day if we were demure enough, subservient enough, sweet enough, he’d choose one of us to spend his time with and then you came along, turned everything upside down and he was blinded. Just...fucking blinded.”

Hermione snorted and turned to look out the window.

“Yes I stripped for him. I tried to seduce him. Yes, I kissed him but it felt cold...mechanical. We didn’t go any further. Look at me Hermione,” she said, her voice a bit softer, a bit more encouraging, kinder. “The point is, he didn’t want me. Not really. I felt it. He admitted it. He gave me this to wear back to my room. He wants you, Hermione. I know he hurt you. And I know he’s sorry. I hope you’ll give him another chance, because more than anything, we all want him to be happy.”

Hermione said nothing, staring past her to the other side of the room, to the nightstand where *Hogwarts: A History* sat, opened to Chapter Six, one of Draco’s letters serving as a bookmark. Leanne sighed and stood, heading for the door, but before she could leave Hermione called after her.

“Thank you Dove,” she said. “I just...thanks.”

The following Friday Draco called for them all to sit together at dinner. They were surprised to see him clean shaven in his black suit with a diamond and onyx lapel pin, his hair was shining clean, swept back from his face and he looked better than he had in weeks. Just like at Christmas he sat at the head of the table and carried on pleasant conversation for most of the meal, his eyes flicking over to catch Hermione’s every once in a while, offering a placating smile or nod that she half heartedly returned, Dove’s words echoing in her head. She needed to give him another chance. He was trying so hard. Near the end of dinner he cleared his throat and stood, a signal that the chatter should stop.

“Thank you for joining me for dinner ladies. I wanted to gather you here together to let you know that I won’t be in the club tonight. There won’t be a formal lineup.” He paused then, his glance falling on Hermione for a moment before looking away. “I...something has come up and I...it’s a personal matter you needn’t worry yourself about. The good news is that it’s a fairly slow evening and I’ve left Mr. Zabini in charge. I have full confidence that he’ll take good care of you seeing as you’ve taken good care of him over the years.” The girls giggled for a moment before quieting again. “See me for your assignments and the rest of you can enjoy your night to yourselves. Oh also, Malia has asked us to recommend the Iron Feather Champagne as we mistakenly ordered 15 cases instead of 12. Thank you!”

After he sat down again the girls murmured around the table, eyebrows raised, voices lowered. It was rare that Draco left them alone overnight, even more so that he left someone else in charge. One by one they made their way over to him to learn their assignments,

wishing him a good night. As Hermione approached he could sense that there was still hint of fear radiating from her. It was how she stood a bit further away, how her eyes widened or how she unconsciously touched her hand to her throat when he spoke. There were signs that the ice in her veins was thawing but he'd never been one for patience, preferring to melt it away with fire. Still, he didn't push it. Something about him had to change. Moonstone had told him to move slowly, to give her time – but he missed her. He missed her more than he thought possible and he didn't *want* to leave her alone.

“Sparrow,” he said quietly. “I wanted to tell you-“ but she was already walking away.

Without thinking he reached out and grabbed her elbow to pull her back, to make her listen. Just listen! Instead she froze, staring down at where his fingers wrapped around her arm. He let go immediately.

“I’m sorry...I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t have...I just wanted to...I wanted to tell you...”

“Am I requested?” She asked, just as she did every time he tried to speak to her; giving her rote response to any of his attempts at conversation.

“No, you’re not, but Hermione please. I just wanted to tell you...I heard from –“

“Then goodnight Mr. Malfoy,” she said, not unkindly. In fact, he could hear a bit of warmth in it. Still, she wasn’t going to listen, not tonight.

“Goodnight Sparrow,” he said, before watching her walk away.

It was after midnight when she heard a knock on her door and she felt a little zing of adrenaline at the sound. After cutting him off earlier in the evening, Hermione had been restless with regret unable to eat, read. Finding her alone in the reading room, Sarah had offered to plait her hair, the first crack in the icy wall that had gone up between them. But even as she chit chatted with the younger girl, taking comfort in the soft, innocent touch of another person, her mind would go back to Draco, to the sadness in his eyes as she'd shut him down. It was clear that he'd wanted to repair what they'd had, she knew it, but she wasn't sure she had the strength to be that vulnerable with him again. And now, as a result of her stubborn pride she'd been laying awake for hours, staring at nothing, her mind racing.

She was sure that the quiet knock on her door was him, that he was respecting the boundaries of her room as always and she smiled. Wrapping her robe tight around her waist she smoothed her hair and walked to the door. She wouldn't turn him away. She was ready.

“Good evening little Sparrow,” Trevor said, his grin wide and frightening, all teeth and insincerity.

“M..Mr. Archlight,” she said, clutching her robe closed and stepping back from the open door. “I...you..”

“I.I.I,” he mocked, laughing in her face. “Well well, not quite the brave little sharp tongued shrew you were when last we spoke, are you, pet?”

He was dressed more casually than she’d ever seen him, black pants and a grey v-neck jumper that revealed the flickering edges of a dark tattoo on his collarbone. The shirt was tightly fitted, accenting the lean lines of toned muscle in his arms, highlighting a strength that had been hidden from her before. This was not the buttoned up businessman she was used to interacting with. This was a different Trevor, eyes bloodshot, cheeks flushed. He was close enough to her that she could smell fire whiskey.

“I’m sorry Mr. Archlight,” she said, keeping her tone low and pleasant. “I’m not working this evening.”

“You’re always working, you worthless slag. A whore doesn’t go on holiday.” He pulled her from the room and flush against his chest. He was a bit taller than Draco and his grip on her arm was painful. “Your pimp and I have an understanding you see: as a friend of the family I can sample the goods whenever I please.”

“No,” she said, trying to wrench her arm free. “He would never...”

She thought back to the evening’s dinner, her conversation with Draco. He’d wanted to tell her something, he’d needed her to hear it and she’d shut him down.

“I want to ask him myself,” she said, struggling against his grip.

Still the wicked smile never left his face.

“But he’s not here, remember darling? You’ll just have to take my fucking word for it.”

“I wouldn’t trust a word you say,” she spat, unafraid of looking him right in the eye.

He held her tighter, wrapping his arms around her, his hands sliding down her back to grab her ass. She cried out for help and he covered her mouth with his hand, smile gone, his eyes glittering with anger in the darkened hallway as he pushed her backwards, slamming her head against the wall.

“Now now, none of that you filthy bitch. Frankly you’re lucky a man like me even *wants* to fuck you. This childish tantrum is completely out of line.” He held her hair tight in his fist, keeping her face upturned, her eyes on him. “You seem to forget that you are a whore. Draco’s whore. You’re nothing but...inventory to him. Property.” He pressed his hips against hers, his breath hot on her cheek as he leaned down to hiss in her ear. “And tonight, I’m nothing more than a petty thief.”

the next two to three chapters contain mild violence and threats along with non-con content.

The Fool

Chapter Notes

*** CW this chapter includes violence consistent with sexual assault as well as non-consensual sex. ***

Draco stood outside the front door of the Manor trying to slow his racing heart. Of course his mother had begged him to visit before, had sent out owl after owl flooding him with guilt, telling him that she was heartbroken, lost without him. And every time he'd written back, telling her that he loved her, telling her that he couldn't go back to the Manor, it wasn't his home, not anymore.

Maybe it was his own heartbreak that made him go to her now, maybe it was Hermione's influence, urging him to be a better man, to find ways to change. Or maybe it was simply the clipped and urgent tone of the latest scroll he received. It was nothing like his mother's usual flowery, dramatic prose; wordy and witty as if writing for an audience of thousands. No, this one was short...to the point, and its brevity was upsetting.

Draco,

I need to see you. Tonight. Your father has told me everything.

He isn't here. We can talk.

Please. 9 PM

Mum

She almost never signed her notes Mum anymore, like she used to when he was in school. It was a detail that caught in his throat.

He brought her a bouquet of hellebores and orchids and a bottle of wine as if he were attending a party, a guest making an impression on a new hostess and not the woman who had comforted him with hugs and chocolate when Pansy Parkinson had rejected his very serious proposal of marriage first year.

He wanted to see her. He'd wanted to see her and confide in her, hold her for years, but something had changed between them after he took the mark. She'd seen a part of him die

that day, seen him choose a path she'd prayed he'd never take, and since then it had all been different between them.

Opening the front door brought back a flood of memories both good and bad. The Manor was his home and his hell. It was where he'd had his first kiss and seen his first murder. It was where he'd learned to fly and learned to administer torture. Over the years Narcissa had tried to brighten the rooms, change them, open the windows and let in fresh air, but they still held the stench of Voldemort in every corner. On the day he'd left home he swore to them both that he'd never sleep in their house of horrors ever again. That was nearly eight years ago and he'd stayed true to his word.

"Mother?"

Only a few sconces were lit as he walked further down the front corridor. Lighting a few more lamps with his wand brought two charcoal grey Chartreux cats from the shadows. His mother had adopted them as kittens – Rufus and Julian. They rubbed against Draco's legs and purred as they wove themselves between his ankles.

"Where's mum?" he asked, setting down his packages. Then, calling out down the corridor, "Mother?"

He figured she would have been waiting at the front gates for his arrival and after another minute of silence he wondered if something was wrong. But as he turned towards the stairs to the East Wing, he heard a crack of apparition and he was engulfed in his mother's arms.

"Draco! Oh thank the Gods. Oh my Draco! You're home!"

She smelled the same, the sweet, welcoming scent of honeysuckle and rose, and a wave of nostalgia nearly brought tears to his eyes as she fussed over him, all kisses and hugs fixing his hair, admonishing him for the three days he'd gone without shaving. Every elf in the house gathered round, looking at him in awe. The prodigal son come home.

"Mum. Mum...I...I can't...let go!" he said, laughing. "Listen to me for a minute. I can't stay long. I just know... I know you needed to see me. That you wanted to talk."

She pulled back, her smile strained and sad, still holding tight to his shoulders.

"Of course. Of course. My only son finally returns home to his lonely old mother only to run out the door a minute later."

"Mother," he said. "You're forty-eight."

She reached down for one of her cats, holding it over her shoulder like an infant, stroking it dramatically from head to tail.

"Come on then," she sighed. "Warble, will you please bring us a couple of Knockturn Spritzers in the small parlor?"

The elf nodded and disappeared and Draco followed his mother through the house.

“You look awful,” she said after they’d settled in with their drinks.

“Thank you, mother. I’m so glad I came. It’s this sort of affection that I’ve been missing out on these past years.”

She rolled her eyes and shook her head, not responding to his sarcastic outrage. There were very few people who politely doled out brutal truths like Narcissa Malfoy, and she knew that he admired her for it. In fact, it reminded Draco that there was only one other woman in the world who saw through him so easily, saw right down to the depths of his being, past the brash and bombastic mask of confidence. There was only one other woman he would rather die than lose.

“You know I only mean that you look exhausted, gaunt.” She touched his cheek. “I spent all those years keeping you out of the sun, slathering you in creams...and now look at these little crows feet near your eyes...” She traced over the newly developing wrinkles, smoothed her hand over the slight bronzing of his skin that came from actually going out into nature for a few hours at a time. He found that it calmed him in the months after the war, to stand in a field or a forest and hear nothing, to not fear what was behind him, not wonder what was coming; the smell of trees and flowers and fresh soil washing away the coppery smell of blood, the sulphur of fired spells.

“It’s not good for you. This...this house of...” she lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper, “...Ill repute.”

It was Draco’s turn to roll his eyes, letting out an audible snort.

“A gentleman’s club, mother. Father belonged to one as well, if I recall. Back when I was in school he spent plenty of time at The Manticore outside Avebury.”

“Draco Lucius Malfoy! Your father went there to play cards not to...to...”

“Fuck?”

She slapped him across the face and instantly he was consumed with guilt. In fact he didn’t think he ever *had* cheated on her and he had no right to even plant such a seed in her head. While his relationship with Lucius was permanently torn asunder, he had no reason to be so cold and crass with his mother. There was no reason for him to ruin this brief reunion except to make himself miserable, to drive everyone who loved him away by hurting them. And of course he was still talking about his mother.

“I’m so sorry mum,” he said, moving to sit beside her on the sofa, setting aside all polite upper class pretense to lean on her shoulder, holding her hands tight in his. She smelled welcoming, familiar, and he still fit perfectly in the crook of her arm. “That was entirely out of line. It’s been a bad few weeks.”

Narcissa pulled him into a tight hug, rubbing his back like she did when he was small. He felt warm, dreamy. He wanted to curl up beside her and hear stories of her grandmother or stories of her own adventures with Lucius before he was born.

“I heard you had a lovely evening with Melody Archlight last month,” she said, trying again to make small talk. “What a nice girl, beautiful. Good reputation...I met her...she has connections with...”

“She and her brother are spies for father and the Pureblood Council,” he said, sitting up and smoothing his hair, the moment of quiet nurturing suddenly gone. “She did nothing but use me.”

“Draco...I...”

“He’s trying to ruin my business. Ruin me. He’s stuck on getting revenge for Granger stealing from him and me stealing Granger from jail.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have meddled in his affairs. Maybe Miss Granger belongs in prison. Interesting how you always find yourself tangled up in her business, helping to solve her problems. Strange for someone you claimed to dislike so strongly for such a long time.” She sipped her drink with a knowing smile, one eyebrow arched high, and he growled, getting up from the sofa to pace the room.

“So *this* is why you needed to see me so badly? This was the emergency that I needed to address tonight? To criticize my business practices and my relationship with Lucius?”

“Always so dramatic!” She declared, standing up to put a hand on his shoulder. “I’ve been asking you to come home for months darling. I never said it had to be tonight.”

“What?” His pulse quickened just a bit, his mouth gone dry. “Your owl said that *I needed to come tonight*.” He was nearly yelling as he realized why the parchment had looked so strange. “Did you...did you even send me an owl today mother?”

“No darling,” she said, scooping up her cat again. “I most certainly did not.”

Trevor dragged Hermione down the darkened hallway with a hand clamped tightly over her mouth, her feet barely touching the ground. Knocking the door open with his shoulder he pulled her into a spare bedroom, furniture covered with slipcovers, curtains drawn tight, dust swirling through the air as he threw her onto the bed.

When finally he let go of her she attempted to scramble off the mattress but he easily grabbed her ankle and dragged her back and pulled his wand from his pocket.

“Petrificus Totalus.”

Her body stiffened, eyes open wide, and she screamed inside her own mind, begging for someone, anyone to hear her.

No. Not anyone. As much as she didn't want to admit it was true she wanted Draco.

She was forced to watch as Trevor took his time undressing down to his boxer shorts, his eyes on hers, a crooked smile of victory on his face. Again pointing his wand in her direction he vanished her own pajamas leaving her naked, frozen in place. Inside she was angry, afraid, desperate, a raging storm of emotions beneath a frozen shell. Trevor ran a finger up the side of her leg to her hip, his eyes hungry, burning.

“So mouthy and arrogant for a criminal mudblood. Walking around telling a pureblood man what he can do, what he can take. And yet so beautiful. This skin, so creamy; your big brown eyes...those lips. It's almost unfair for you to look like this.” His fingers slipped between her slightly spread legs and he laughed. “I can only imagine what's going through that pretty little head.”

His eyes went dark and he crouched over her, nearly panting with desire, covering her body with hot, wet open mouth kisses, biting down on one of her nipples before sucking it between his lips.

“I sort of want to hear you though, my little muddy slag. So I'm going to release you.” He stroked between her legs again. “And you're going to fucking behave. You're going to be a good little whore and spread those legs. You're going to whine and moan and beg for my cock just like you're supposed to, because if you don't, I'll Imperio you and you'll do things that are a thousand times worse.” Finished with his speech, he licked up the length of her thigh to her hipbone “And I'll leave the memory here for Draco to watch you get thoroughly and properly fucked...over and over again.”

“Finite,” he whispered, bending down to kiss her throat.

Immediately she began thrashing and twisting beneath him, whimpering as he pierced her with two thick fingers. She cried out in pain as he thrust deep, hard and fast.

“So tight for a whore...can't wait to feel this wrapped around...”

“Don't do this, please,” she begged, interrupting him. “Please Mr. Archlight. Please.”

“Yes, I like that,” he said, finding her open mouth and kissing her, nipping at her bottom lip. “I like it when you beg. So fucking pitiful. I own you now mudblood, beg me for mercy.”

He forced his tongue into her mouth and she bit down hard. Trevor growled and reared back, on his knees, his teeth stained pink with his own blood as he cracked his hand across her cheek.

“Filthy cunt! I told you to behave!”

He pinned her hands beside her head and nudged her legs further apart. Feeling the head of his cock pushing against her, tears sprung to her eyes. He tried to kiss her again and she clamped her mouth shut, turned her head...

And saw her tattoo. Seven black stars and their guardian. *If ever anyone hurts you, press your finger to the Atlas star and I'll be there. I'll feel it on my own brand.*

Again she whimpered, hissing with pain as he pushed inside her but this time, instead of fighting him she rolled her hips slightly, letting her arms go slack in his grip.

"Ahhh, good girl. She's finally learned her place," he purred, thrusting inside her, moving one hand to hold her face, kissing her again.

Hermione kissed back, giving him exactly what he wanted, pulling her legs up to wrap around his hips. Trevor moved faster, groaning and panting in her ear.

"So good. I knew you'd be good for me. I knew you wanted me," he said. "So filthy and tight, a proper slut."

Still he held tight to her other wrist, pinning her beneath him, grunting with each deep, painful thrust, her insides burning.

"Oh, oh God," she lied, clenching her muscles around him to add to her illusion. "I'm going to...oh fuck..."

He pulled back, nearly laughing, his grin wide with triumph.

"Come for me. Come on, let me hear you scream for me instead of him you fickle bitch. What a fool he is. He's a fool to leave you unprotected, a fool to trust Zabini." He was nearly breathless now, pushing hard, fast, her head slamming against the headboard. "A fool to think you really cared about him, a turncoat coward like him."

"Touch..." she said, pressing her lips to his damp chest. "Let me touch you."

He stared down at her, pausing in his rhythm, breathing heavily.

"What?" He was clearly taken aback.

"Let me touch you," she breathed. "I want to feel your cock sliding inside me. It will help me come." She forced herself to kiss him, to picture her as someone else, the man she wanted inside her. "Please."

Trevor let go of her wrist and began thrusting again, his eyes locked on hers and she knew it was close. Bucking him off of her, Hermione rolled to the side and pressed two fingers to the star on her arm, holding firm for as long as she could.

"What are you doing? What have you done?" He asked, pulling her back beneath him by the hair and shaking her. But it was too late. She smiled.

"I'm calling the fool."

In an instant she felt a hot frisson ripple through her body. She hadn't felt her own magic in so long and it was nearly euphoric, goosebumps rising on her arms, renewed energy from head to toe. Trevor backhanded her again, hard enough that she could taste blood. But it didn't matter. She knew that he'd heard her, she felt it deep in her bones. Let Trevor do his worst. Draco had heard her. Her dragon would come.

The Dragon

Chapter Notes

Content Warning

**** this is a continuation of the last chapter so there is continued violence and non-con****

He was standing in the parlor of the Manor when he felt the tingling warmth in his chest. It spread like a throbbing electricity, pulsing in warning, but took a moment for him to recognize. It had been nearly a year since any of the girls had made use of the call and there was no way for him to know which of them were summoning him back to the mansion, nor did it matter. He'd sworn to protect all of them no matter what. Yet as soon as he felt the burning beneath his skin he'd known. He could sense that she was in trouble.

"I have to go," he said, squeezing his mother's hand. "I'll be back. But I have to go."

"Draco," Narcissa looked panicked, clinging to her son's robes as he put down his drink and moved to the front door. "Draco what is it?"

He put a hand over his chest as he stood on the threshold, holding his mother's hand firmly with the other, offering what reassurance he could.

"Someone is...something is wrong at the Dragon. I have to go." He leaned in and kissed her cheek and disappeared from the front steps.

The call took him to the second floor of the mansion, down the darkened hallway of extra, unused bedrooms. As soon as he got his footing he heard a struggle behind the door he was facing.

"Hermione?" He called her name. The door was locked, sealed shut with a hasty, half assed ward of some kind.

"Dra— "

He only heard part of the word before it was smothered somehow, but it was her. There was no time to fight through the wards, Draco simply pointed his wand and blew a hole in the wall beside the door.

As soon as Trevor discovered that she'd somehow signaled Draco, he'd become enraged. Yet even as he crouched over her, his eyes burning with anger, she stayed silent, her heart calm, a small smile on her face.

"I'll kill you, you mudblood cunt," he hissed, hitting her again. "He'll never get to you in time."

After another crack with the back of his hand she instantly felt the side of her face swelling, her jaw stiff and hot. Blood filled her mouth, which she gathered on her tongue and spit back at him.

His face speckled with her filthy blood, he roared and lunged forward, closing his hands around her throat, right where Draco's hands had been, where she'd only just healed. And now she was going to die. She was going to die without telling Draco that she forgave him, still wanted him. She was going to die without telling him that she...

"Hermione?"

She burst into tears at the sound of his voice, her name on his lips, relief washing through her fear.

"Dra—" her scream was weak and Trevor easily covered her mouth, one hand still tight around her throat, cutting off her breath.

With one last burst of adrenaline she kicked and bucked beneath him, catching him once in the gut. He groaned in pain and she thrashed in his grip but her strength was fading, darkness feathering along the edges of her consciousness. She couldn't fight anymore. It was too hard. She needed Draco to fight for her. Digging her nails into Trevor's forearms she prayed for mercy and heard a deafening explosion before she finally passed out.

Trevor was on top of her, naked, and he could see Hermione's legs lying limp beneath him. The heat in his blood was no longer panic, but rage, and he gripped his wand with white knuckles.

"Hermione!" He called out to her again but heard nothing. She didn't move.

Trevor sat back on his heels and looked over his shoulder, laughing, his face dotted with her blood.

"Too late mate," he said, climbing off her limp, naked form. "But feel free to give her a go, I'm sure that cunt is still—"

He barely got the words out before Draco hit him with a crucio, knocking him to the ground where he kicked and twitched as the pain ran through him like a living poison. His muscles tensed, back arched, foaming at the mouth with his jaw locked tight. Holding the curse, Draco felt a cool wave of vengeance wash over him, a certain calm that came with watching Trevor suffer. Luckily Draco had felt this exquisite agony himself many times and knew how much a grown man could take, then he pushed it a few seconds longer before lifting the torture, assuming he'd have no strength left.

He was wrong.

Weakened but not defeated, Trevor staggered and lunged across the floor, knocking Draco onto his back, his wand rattling away out of his reach. They were no longer wizards, no longer well-behaved pureblood gentlemen. This was a fight between animals and if Hermione was gone...if she was gone Draco would kill him, no matter the consequence, even if it meant his own death. Trevor landed a punch to the side of Draco's face with a sickening crunch, blurring his vision as he felt the immediate throbbing of bruised and broken skin. He quickly recovered and got in a few good hits of his own, knocking Trevor off balance before stretching out his hand to summon his wand.

"Hermione, please. Are you OK?" He called to her again, his wand trained on Trevor's throat. "Please answer me...Sparr—"

"You had to know this was how it would end Malfoy," Trevor laughed, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth. "When was last time any of your bullshit schemes worked to your advantage? What's next...you going to send me poison jewelry?"

"Hermione..."

"No wonder your father talks about you as if you were dead. He probably wishes that fool Harry had left you to burn..."

Draco wouldn't let him finish. Instead he focused every ounce of his fury, his sadness, his fear and guilt and grief on the end of his wand and raised it to Trevor's eyes.

"Avada..."

"Draco... don't."

It was her. Her voice was weak, pained, the two words taking every ounce of her strength, but it was still her. Both men turned to look at her crawling to the edge of the bed, her lips and cheeks stained with blood, a bruise blooming around her left eye. Still, Draco wouldn't drop his wand.

"If you kill him I'll lose you forever," she rasped, holding a hand to her throat, eyes shining with tears. "He isn't worth it."

She was overcome with coughing and Trevor snorted, sitting back on his heels. Draco opened his mouth to argue with her but she shook her head and reached her hand out, her fingers brushing over his arm, the only place she could touch.

“Don’t. Please. I’m OK Draco. I promise you. You saved me. I’ll be OK.”

Draco lowered his wand and Trevor lunged again with renewed energy, knocking Draco down, the two of them rolling across the floor. She could still feel her magic thrumming through her blood and without knowing whether it would work, she grabbed Draco’s wand from the floor and with a sharp, downward slash of her arm she yelled;

“Sectumsempra!”

The wand trembled in her hand, the spell flying from the tip like lightning and knocking Trevor on his back. Before her eyes, long red gashes appeared on his torso, his stomach, blood seeping from the wounds and rolling off his body in thin ruby rivulets. She remembered Harry telling her how gruesome it was watching Draco’s shirt turn red, the cloud of blood swirling on the bathroom floor. And Draco had told her how the pain had taken his breath away, so deep and so sudden, everywhere all at once. It was excruciating and made all the more torturous because it was a slow, drawn out death. Trevor groaned in agony, his breathing hissing out between clenched teeth as he pressed his hands uselessly to the wounds over his heart. Hermione climbed out of the bed and stood over him as Draco prised the wand from her shaking fingers.

“I can reverse it,” Draco said simply, his voice calm and even. “I can save your life right here with a few muttered words, Archlight.”

“Then fucking do it!” He snapped, the words cracked and desperate. “She’s right. You let me die here and its over for you. The only one who could save you has all but disowned you, and trust me when I say that the Dark Lord would love to see you hang for my murder.”

Still the blood dripped from his ribs, pooled on his stomach and ran down over his collarbones, his skin looking grey sunken against his bones. Hermione stood beside Draco and squeezed his hand.

“Draco...you have to...”

“If I save you now,” Draco said, moving to stand beside Trevor’s trembling body. “You’ll be in my debt. My foolish, drunken, traitorous, cowardly, weak debt,” he said, crouching beside Trevor’s head. “You’ll owe me.”

“You’ll be lucky to not be hanging from the gallows, you slimy cunt. That should be prize enough for you.”

Draco’s face was blank, the mask of confident arrogance that Hermione had seen so many months ago. Without even a blink he stood and pressed the muddy sole of his dragonhide boot to the widest wound on Archlight’s chest. He howled and bucked weakly, clawing at Draco’s calf. In that moment she saw the Draco that the others saw outside the mansion...icy and calculating, deaf to a man’s dying cries, and not for the first time.

“Draco don’t...” Hermione was still holding tight to his hand but it was as if she weren’t even there...her begging seemingly unheard.

“I’ll...I’ll be in your debt...” Trevor gasped finally, his eyes rolling back as he passed out.

Draco removed his boot and crouched over Archlight, leaving a smudge of dirt and mud across his bloodied chest. Muttering *Vulnera Sanentur*, he waved his wand over the wounds, which quickly clotted and knitted back together. Once the bleeding stopped he muttered a *Tergeo* and the worst of the mess was cleared away. Trevor had stopped moving but Hermione could still see a weak pulse in the tendon of his neck. Deep down she knew that if she hadn’t woken in time, Archlight would be dead.

Once he was satisfied that Trevor was stable, Draco turned to Hermione.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I wasn’t here...” He ran two fingers under her chin, tipping her face up to assess the damage Trevor had done to her face. The damage done when he’d left her, abandoned her, leaving her vulnerable. The white of her left eye was filled with blood, the skin dark and swollen around it. On the other side of her face her jaw was swollen, already turning a sickly purple, little broken blood vessels spidering just beneath the surface. He wiped at the corner of her puffed, split lips to gather the drying blood and she started to cry. Within seconds, she was overcome by huge wracking sobs shaking her body as she put her head on his shoulder, her own arms wrapped tight around her battered torso.

“I tried to fight...I wanted...to fight...to show you I could take...care...of myself,” she whispered, her voice shaking as she choked out the words between sobs. “I wanted to be ... strong.”

“Hermione...” He put his arms around her for the first time in over a month and it was like breathing fresh air, like diving into clear water. Even as she cried she felt *right* curled in against his chest, his chin resting on the crown of her head.

“I’m...strong. I can...I wanted to do it, to show that I ... wasn’t...scared.”

He felt her waver in his arms, her knees buckling. Still holding her he carefully stepped towards the bed, helping her to sit and then lay back.

“But Draco,” she said, finally looking up to meet his worried gaze, her fingers digging into his forearms as he covered her with the blanket. “I was so scared. I was so scared and he hurt me.” Her voice was childlike, filled with fear and shame, as if he’d blame her for what had happened. She was in shock, babbling nonsensically, repeating her words, stuttering broken thoughts... “He hurt me. It hurt so...it hurt...I was afraid I was going to die...”

She dropped her hands from his arms, overtaken with a thousand emotions, each so strong that she couldn’t find any words. The room was spinning and she felt like she couldn’t get enough air. She was nauseated and exhausted and wired and terrified and relieved and before she could look up to tell Draco that she needed help, she passed out.

In her dark, fitful sleep she heard voices, hushed and urgent and she blinked awake, feigning sleep to listen, watching Draco and Blaise through her lashes.

“How many times can I say it Draco, I knew nothing about this!” Blaise hissed, jutting his chin in the direction of Trevor’s unconscious body.

“I should have your bloodied body on the floor right beside him, mate, letting this happen to her. He never should have come through the front door.”

“I’m telling you Malfoy, he put me under the imp, or slipped me a potion, threw a spell... disillusionment. Whatever it was I don’t even remember seeing him tonight. You have to believe I would never let him near her. Not after what you told me.”

Draco paced the floor, rubbing at the back of his neck, running a hand through his hair. Hermione saw that he’d stripped out of his bloodied white shirt and dress pants, now just standing proudly in front of Blaise in his black boxer briefs, hands on hips, face bruised, knuckles cracked open and bleeding. He was in her room. For the first time in the seven months since she’d been there he was standing at the foot of her bed. Tears stung her eyes and she sniffed, immediately drawing both of their attention.

“Hermione...” Draco was at her side in two steps, pulling her hand up, running his fingers over the stars on her forearm. “I’ve called for Moonstone, she’ll be here in a moment. You’re going to be ok.” He ran his hand over her forehead, smoothing the hair back from her face, offering a weak, but sincere smile. It was gone in a moment as he turned back to Blaise, levitating Trevor’s body and motioning for the door to open.

“Take him next door,” Draco said to Blaise, “When Moonstone is done with Hermione we’ll send her over to revive him and send him on his way.”

She watched as the drawn, nearly bloodless body of Archlight slipped through the door and with him gone she felt herself shaking again, memories flashing in her head. She could taste his tongue in her mouth, feel him pushing inside her, his fist in her hair, tearing at the scalp. Her forehead prickled with cold sweat as the images cycled through her mind until she heard his voice...deep and commanding.

“Hermione look at me,” he said. “Stop. It’s over. You’re going to be ok.”

Her superficial wounds were easily tended to, the blood drawn from the white of her eye, her cracked cheekbone knitted together, the swelling in her jaw reduced. Draco stood away from the bed, watching over Moonstone’s shoulder as the healer gave her potions and applied pastes and balms. There was no spell to take the terror away from her face, no potion to undo what Archlight had done to her. Draco could offer to pull the memories, burn them, but he knew she’d refuse...she was too strong to hide like that. Finally, after an hour of work, Moonstone turned, gathering up her supplies to tend to Trevor next door.

“I’ve given her a calming draught and a pain potion. She didn’t want the dreamless sleep.”

“Thank you,” Draco said, looking over the healer’s shoulder to watch Hermione, curled on her side, staring at her bookshelf, eyes glassy and blank from the pain potion. “Please make sure Mr. Archlight is healed...satisfactorily. Replenish his blood and heal the wounds...but he doesn’t need a pain potion. And he leaves as soon as he can stand. I don’t care if he has to walk back to London.”

“Yes sir,” Moonstone said, shuffling towards the door. “Sir?”

Draco turned to meet her soft, kind smile, tempered by a shadow of worry in her eyes.

“Yes?”

“She’ll be ok. But she needs you.”

Draco vanished his bloody clothes and gathered his wand and moved to Hermione’s bedside, running a hand down her arm before bending down to kiss her forehead.

“Sleep well, Sparrow. I’ll be here in the morning.”

He stepped away and she grabbed his wrist, clinging as if he were a lifeline, her only chance.

“Please don’t leave me Draco,” she rasped. “Stay with me. Here. Please. I can’t be alone. Draco...I need you.”

He set his wand on the bedside table and moved to the other side of the bed, slipping beneath the comforter and sliding up beside her. Hermione turned to face him, her hands tucked up under her chin, eyes wide. She was still shaking, even after the calming draught.

“Come here,” he said, wrapping an arm around her, pulling her against his chest. “You’re safe now, Sparrow. I promise. I’ll never leave you alone again.”

Hermione sighed, tucking herself beneath his chin, her ear to his heart, comforted by the strong even rhythm. It may not be true in the morning, but as long as he was there for tonight, it would be enough.

Bruise Paste

Chapter Summary

Whew, we're out of the woods for now as far as CW goes :)

He stayed awake as long as his body would allow it, watching as she twisted and twitched beside him, her head tucked against his chest, arms curled between their bodies. She whimpered and he smoothed the furrow from her sleeping brow, cooing in her ear to soothe her.

“It’s OK, Sparrow. You’re OK. You’re safe. I’m here.”

Of course why would that comfort her? He was the one who left her alone, left her vulnerable to Archlight. He was the one who hurt her after she’d chosen to trust him. Draco brought her to the Dragon in the first place, tearing her apart when she was at her lowest point, trapping her in this hell, stealing her wand. And yet her crying stopped and she burrowed in against him, sighing over the runes inked on his chest. Forgiveness, Grief and Guilt. Two of them ached with a bone deep pain when she breathed on them and he adjusted his position, closing his eyes to breathe through the agony.

The rhythm of their breathing synced together and it made his eyelids heavy. She muttered quiet, nonsensical words in her sleep and in doing so her lips moved against his skin and he shivered. While running his hand through her hair and finally he drifted off to sleep.

The sun woke her slowly, like swimming up through a thick sea, as if her mind didn’t want her to return to the world she’d closed her eyes to. She blinked and stretched and felt the ache in her jaw, the tenderness around her eye. She lifted two fingers to touch it and hissed in pain. The medical advances in the wizarding world were incredible, but they couldn’t remove pain instantaneously or completely. Beside her Draco whimpered in his sleep, his brow furrowed in deep consternation, his chin trembling, mouth forming silent words.

“Draco,” she whispered, running a hand over his cheek.

He was injured too, his eye blackened, lower lip puffed and split, a slight swelling where the skele-gro worked to knit his jaw back together. It pulled his lips down a bit into a lopsided frown. She touched them, parted and swollen, a bit of dried blood gathered in the corner.

“Draco, you’re ok. It’s OK. I’m here.”

She pressed a kiss to his forehead and he woke with a start, pulling back from her to get his bearings. The nightmare he'd been drowning in dissipated in the sunlight but his heart was still racing and it took a moment for him to recognize her touch, her voice. She reached for him again and he let her touch his face, her fingers grazing over his wounds, her eyes filled with tears.

"I'm so sorry Hermione," he said, pulling her hand from his face to press a kiss to her knuckles. "I wish I could...I want to take what happened...."

"I know Draco. You can't. It happened. It can't be undone. And I don't want you poking around in my brain to try and undo it. I'm just grateful that you got here when you did or I would..." She shook her head and sat up, pulling herself gingerly from the bed. "Thank you for staying with me. I'm...I'll be ok now."

She smiled at the line up of potions on her vanity table along with an extra pain potion and a little pot of bruise paste. Everything was the same. She was still the trapped little sparrow in the brothel, her pimp had simply rescued her from a particularly difficult night. It was what her brand was for, after all. She swallowed the potions and slipped the paste into her vanity before moving towards the bathroom to start a bath. Draco was climbing out of bed himself, pulling on a robe from her armoire.

"I would never leave you girls if I thought someone was planning...I would never..." he couldn't pick the words correctly and his head pounded with a headache from the skele-gro and being punched eight or nine times in the face.

"Then what was it you wanted to tell me? Before you left?" She said, turning on him, blocking his path to the door. "Did you know that Trevor would be here last night? Is that what was so important?"

"No! How would I have known...Hermione, never!"

"Then what was so important for me to know? What did you need to..."

"I went to see my mother," he said, interrupting her. "Trevor tricked me, sent me an owl that looked like it was from my mother, telling me it was an emergency. I haven't seen her face in three years, Hermione. And out of nowhere I get this note that I have to see her... immediately. That she needs to talk to me. I was...I was terrified and I just...I went to her thinking that she..."

He was cut off by Hermione throwing her arms around him; holding him tight. She knew. She knew he couldn't have done that, that he wouldn't have left her knowing Trevor was going to be there. Every time she assumed the worst about Draco Malfoy, she was always proven wrong.

"I'm sorry Draco. I'm...I'm all messed up I just..." she pulled back to hold his face in her hands. "You saw your mother! I'm so happy for you. Are you OK, did you talk?"

He nodded, still frowning.

“We did. Not...for long because I felt you calling me. But as usual you were right, she was happy to see me. It felt good to see her, as much as I hate going back to that house.”

“Take her to lunch,” Hermione said, offering a smile. “Or meet her for a drink in London, somewhere you’ll both feel good. Neutral.”

He smiled then, shaking his head in disbelief. Here was Hermione, hours from being beaten, raped, humiliated and she was giving him family advice. Still, even as she spoke he could see the exhaustion in her eyes. Her hands were still shaking.

“Go back and get some rest. I’m going to have the elves bring you some tea. You need to take some time to...”

“Draco I’m...”

“No you’re not.” He ran his hand over her cheek, his touch gentle, tentative and she leaned into it, her eyes closed. “It’s OK to not be fine. It’s ok to admit you’re hurt. You’ve always been so obsessed with everyone thinking you’re strong, you’re fine, you’re happy. It’s OK to fall apart, even in front of me. Especially in front of me.”

Her chin trembled and he wiped a tear from her cheek as she nodded, unable to find the words, unable to speak for fear of sobbing.

“I just...I don’t like to keep thinking about it,” she whispered, looking at the floor.

“I know,” he said, even though he couldn’t possibly fathom the horrors that flashed behind her closed lids, the images and feelings she couldn’t shake. “It will get better. Go lay down. I’ll come check on you later if you want me to,” he said.

“I want you to,” she answered.

He kissed her forehead and left her to rest.

Blaise sat across from him in his office, his knee bobbing nervously as Draco poured himself a drink. He’d taken a couple of hours to shower and pull himself together before calling Zabini back in. He turned on his friend last night, but the truth was that if there was anyone he trusted with the girls when he wasn’t there it was Blaise; and he knew that there was no way he would have let Trevor near Hermione voluntarily. They’d had their arguments in the past and he had something of an obsession with Felicia, but Zabini was a good man and he never lied.

After flopping down on the sofa, Draco let out a long sigh, rubbing the back of his neck where he could feel a knot forming.

“I should let her go,” he said, running his finger over the rim of the glass. “I brought her here on an evil impulse, a way to get back at Lucius, a way to get back at her, as if she hadn’t suffered enough. If I hadn’t brought her...”

“You can’t,” Blaise said, a hint of panic in his voice. “You can’t just let her out there, not now when everything is going to shit, mate. Yeah, Archlight is indebted to you but you can’t control him forever. And if Lucius finds out she’s free...”

He was right. Draco threw his drink back in one big gulp. What was once her prison was now the only place she was safe. Of course she’d never understand it, she’d rant and rave that she could protect herself, that she wasn’t afraid, but even in the few months she’d been locked away the atmosphere on the outside had deteriorated. Voldemort wasn’t interested in the welfare of the people, even the purebloods. All he cared about was his own wealth and the power he wielded. And now as even the pureblood lifestyles started to decay they took it out on the halfbloods and muggleborns instead of turning on the man they’d put in charge.

“What about the other thing,” Draco asked, if only to bring his heart rate down. “Have you negotiated the purchase of the estate?”

“Y..yes! Yes,” Blaise said, excited to be off the hook. “And Pansy and Michael want to help. She has family there and has connections all over the country.”

“Good. Good. Thank you Zabini. The sooner we get that started the sooner this ends.”

There was a knock at the door.

“Yeah?”

“Mr. Malfoy?” It was Sarah.

“Come in little Lark,” Draco said, waving a hand at Blaise to dismiss him. “Thank you mate, I’ll need your help in the coming weeks when I have to travel out to the site. You’re the only one I trust anymore, you know that.”

“Of course, Draco. You can count on me,” he said as Sarah came into the suite. Then, leaning in closer to Draco and squeezing his shoulder he added, “I never would have let anyone hurt her. I would have stopped him if I had the chance. You know that.”

Draco nodded. “I know.”

Sarah’s eyes were wide with fear and confusion as she watched Blaise leave, giving her a curt nod as he straightened the black silk tie he wore.

“What’s wrong?” She asked, sitting on the coffee table across from Draco, biting her lower lip. “What happened?”

“I wanted to tell you before people start whispering. Trevor Archlight attacked Hermione last night. He lured me out of the mansion and he got to her...she’s...”

Sarah clapped her hands over her mouth, tears springing to her eyes.

“Is she OK? I should go check...”

Draco stood and touched her arm, keeping her from leaving the room.

“No. She wants to be alone. Healer Moonstone is taking care of her and she...”

“Are you?” She asked quietly.

“Am I what, love?”

“Are you OK? I see your...eye and your hand.” She looked at her feet, her voice low, nervous. “Did you kill him?”

Draco sighed and stepped away, back to his desk where he could distract himself with paperwork and books, anything to keep the revived anger at bay. He shook his head as he rolled and unrolled various parchments, stacked galleons in equal sized piles.

“No. But I wanted to. I promised all of you that I would keep you safe in here. That if you worked for me you wouldn’t have to worry, you’d always be safe. I couldn’t keep...I failed her...she’s...”

“It’s my fault,” Sarah said suddenly, rushing to Draco’s desk, her chest heaving with breath.

“What? No. Of course it isn’t.”

“I...Trevor came to see me last week and we saw Hermione in the reading room. He was...he was awful to her Mr. Malfoy. He called her a m-mudblood and he made me call her names,” she said, worrying the edge of her robe between her fingertips, shaking her head. Her voice was shrill and shaky, her eyes filled with tears. “We went to my room and he was...rough. He was aggressive, not like usual. You...you haven’t been taking our memories lately, not always, and you don’t see everything. I didn’t want to worry you because he didn’t hurt me, but he kept muttering *mudblood c-cunt* under his breath. He asked me if you ever left the mansion...if you ever left anyone else in charge. I’m so sorry Mr. Malfoy, I should have told you...I should have known he would...”

“What did you tell him?” Draco’s hands were clenched into fists, hard enough that his fingernails dug deep into his palms. “About me?”

“I told him...I said that I’d never seen you leave us alone unless there was an emergency...like if something happened to your mother.”

He wasn’t angry with Sarah. Again, it was himself. Again he had failed his girls by being so sunk into himself that he’d neglected to check their memories, to make sure they were safe. If he’d seen Trevor acting that way with her he’d have been removed from the club long ago. Once again, everything he touched shattered to pieces.

“It’s not your fault Sarah. It’s no one’s fault but Trevor Archlight...and me. I should have been there. I should have seen what he was doing to you...I’m...I’m sorry.” He pulled her into his arms and kissed the crown of her head. She was still shaking. “Why didn’t you tell me he was cruel to you? Why didn’t you tell me he’d gotten aggressive?” He whispered into her hair.

“I didn’t...I didn’t want to worry you,” she said, pulling away and wiping her eyes. “I thought you’d been through enough.”

Hermione was still sleeping when he went back to her room. Moonstone had given her another pain potion, “mostly to help her rest,” she said and she told Draco that she’d taken a warm bath and even eaten half of a sandwich. Instead of waking her, Draco sat in her reading chair with his package of vanilla buttercreams and a new book he’d seen about the history of wizarding schools in France. He supposed he could have lay with her, crawled into the bed beside her and pulled her into his arms, but he didn’t want to risk frightening her, touching her while she was asleep, so instead he watched.

He watched her looking almost peaceful: her features soft, eyes flitting a bit below closed lids. Her lips were parted and he could hear the tiny rushes of breath each time she exhaled and it made him smile. She was beautiful, even in her pain, her hair fanned out over the pillow in caramel waves, the bruises on her face faded even from a few hours ago, the violence of the night before slowly retreated beneath the skin. As the sun went down he lit the fire and a few of the candle sconces before sitting on the edge of her bed when she started to stir.

“Hey there,” he said, when her eyes flickered open. “I wanted to check on you. We’re closed tonight so I...”

“Do they all know?” Hermione asked, her voice thick with humiliation, still shaking with fear.

Draco ran his fingers through her hair, down over her cheek, careful to avoid the tender skin near her eye.

“They do,” he said, sighing. “Sarah wanted to come check on you but I told her she should...”

“I don’t feel like seeing anyone yet,” she said, pulling herself up to sit, running a hand over her throat.

The bruises there were deep, but a bit lighter than they had been. Just seeing them made him angry, filled him with regret at not killing him. Hermione reached out and took his hand, pulling his bruised and swollen knuckles to her lips.

“Why didn’t the bruise paste work on these?” She asked, kissing each finger. His cheeks burned and he squeezed her hand.

“I didn’t use it. Moonstone was busy enough.”

Hermione dropped his hand and pulled herself out of bed, sighing and rolling her eyes as she moved to the vanity. She brought over the little pot of sweet smelling paste and sat beside Draco, pulling up his hand and touching the medicine to his wounds, blowing a stream of cool air over each one. He didn’t pull away from her and she was happy for the distraction, a way to turn her brain on to some other task, some other worry. It had been over a month since she’d taken care of Draco in any capacity and it felt like slipping into a comfortable sweater. For a brief moment she forgot about how she’d been hovering near death only the day before.

It felt good to be close to him again, to feel his breath on her skin, smell the pomade he used in his hair, the same scent he’d had in school...that Malfoy smell. Even when they were sworn enemies, the girls of Gryffindor had agreed that Draco smelled better than any wizard in school and she smiled thinking about it now.

“Why didn’t you tell me that Trevor had confronted you in the reading room?” He asked as she finished massaging the paste into his pinky.

She turned his hand over and ran her finger over the six black stars inked across his wrist.

“What do these mean?” She asked, as if she hadn’t even heard his question.

He was silent for a long moment and she wouldn’t let go of him. Her head was on his shoulder and she traced the outlines of the stars, then up along the tendons in his forearm. It was soothing and he was sleepy, warm. Finally, after a deep breath and a shake of his head he spoke

“Six stars for the six deaths I carry. I’m responsible for them no longer being here. Dumbledore, Lavender, Crabbe...you know them. James Hornbeam was killed trying to bring me in, Olive Pearl died in the Malfoy dungeons under my care, and Veronica Fairform...my Robin...the first girl I ever took in. None of them would be dead if it weren’t for my actions. I have to bear the guilt of it.”

She didn’t say anything, didn’t challenge his belief or his reassure him that it wasn’t true. He wouldn’t have accepted her absolution anyway. Instead she brought his wrist to her lips and kissed it once before lowering it again into her lap.

“I thought it was just an argument with Trevor. I didn’t think he’d come back and I was...I felt safe here so I didn’t think to bother you with it I should have told you. I was just...being stubborn.”

“You? Hard to believe,” Draco said, and the sound of her quiet laugh was like sunshine washing over him, if only for a second. “I missed you.”

Hermione took his face in her hands and pressed her lips to his, a slow kiss, soft and sure, her hands moving back to sink into his hair. Draco pulled back, searching her face, her eyes, unsure of whether she wanted more and she smiled.

“I missed you too,” she said, massaging the back of his neck.

He pushed forward, kissing her with a bit more insistence, licking at the seam of her lips, pulling her against his chest. This was all he wanted. He wanted to hold her again, to kiss her. That was all he could ever have asked for. She let his tongue slip against hers for a moment, the tiniest whimper of pleasure vibrating between them. Draco ended the kiss first, brushing his lips over the bruise on her jaw, her cheek, then kissing her forehead.

“Get some rest, Sparrow. You’re safe now. I promise.”

It had been the worst night of her life, but Hermione fell back on her pillow feeling lighter than she had in months.

Caged Birds

Chapter Summary

Heading out to the wilds of Canada on vacation for a bit so i wanted to toss out this shortish chapter before I go!

Sarah came to her two days later, after the elves had brought her a tray of supper that she only picked at, both hungry and sick to her stomach at the same time. Moonstone had visited her again as well, giving her sleeping and calming draughts...anything to numb her, make her forget. But she didn't want to rely on them, only taking the required potions that were left on her vanity every morning. She didn't want to be numb. She wanted to be able to sleep on her own...one day.

"Hey," Sarah called out quietly, hovering in the doorway. "Can I come in?"

"Sure," Hermione said, pushing her food away and getting out of bed. Her muscles and bones were stiff, not only from the attack but from laying in bed all day, too exhausted to even walk the corridors of the second floor. Everything just seemed too difficult to manage. "What's up, Fi—"

The younger girl pulled Hermione tight into her arms, already sobbing. One might think their roles were reversed as Hermione shushed her, stroking her hair.

"I'm sorry," Sarah cried. "I'm sorry that he made me call you that name...I'm sorry for how he spoke to...this is...it's all my fault. He was crazy that night...mad...angry. I should have warned you that..."

"Sarah...no." Hermione pulled back and smiled at her, shaking her head. "It's no one's fault but Trevor's. Not you, not me, not Draco...just Trevor."

Sarah looked much younger to Hermione than she had a few days earlier, a bit more wide eyed and innocent, regardless of the life she'd been through before coming to the Dragon. Or perhaps that it was she just felt that much older. Hermione brushed the hair from her eyes and patted her on the shoulder, not having the energy for much more, but still not wanting her to feel guilty for what that monster did.

After he'd had his blood replenished Zabini had taken Trevor back to his flat in London, leaving instructions with Nott. He let Theo know what his friend had done, that he wasn't only a spy for Lucius but a rapist and he wasn't to come anywhere near the Dragon again. As for the life debt, Draco hadn't decided how to call it in yet, satisfied to let the asshole stew in his juices until called upon at a later date.

“You should have let Draco kill him,” she hissed, flopping down in Hermione’s reading chair, her eyes burning with vengeance as she ate a potato off of her plate. “Cut his dick off and post him in Diagon Alley.”

Hermione laughed and went to start a bath.

“And then Draco gets sent to Azkaban for killing him and where would any of us be? Besides, don’t you think he carries around enough baggage as it is?”

“This would have been one murder well deserved,” Sarah said. “Self defense. And the others...he’s not a murderer, Hermione.”

“I know that,” Hermione snapped, surprised at her own sudden protectiveness. She sighed and smiled. “But he’ll never believe it.”

Sarah stood then and helped Hermione, twisting her hair into a braid and winding it up to pin it at the nape of her neck. It felt good to have someone taking care of her, a delicate touch on her skin.

“I really didn’t think anyone would ever...get to us. I trusted that he would keep them out,” she said, looking at the floor. “I thought Trevor was...nice.” She shrugged. “Nice enough.”

“I know. I know he treated you well,” Hermione said, although she struggled not to scrunch her nose in disgust. After all, there were those in the world who would no doubt find it hard to believe that she...had feelings for Malfoy.

“I can’t trust anyone anymore. I’m not safe anywhere...” Sarah was starting to shake again, panic setting in. “I thought after the war things would start to get better. I never thought it could get this bad. I didn’t think people would let it get this bad. There’s no one on our side...”

Hermione took her by the shoulders and looked her in the eye.

“Draco is on our side,” she said. “He was tricked, Sarah. Manipulated. You know if he had been here he never would have let someone in if they were going to hurt us. I trust him.”

Sarah smiled up at her, one eyebrow raised.

“You do?”

“I do,” Hermione said, her sigh heavy with realization. “I trust him with my life.”

There were subtle changes to the Dragon after that. It took a few more days, but Hermione slowly began returning to meals, even sitting out in the garden as the summer got hotter,

happy for the company of the other girls, just to hear other voices, think about other things. They told her that business was much slower, few members came to the club and no one new was admitted for membership. The bar was closed earlier and the gaming rooms were only open on weekends. Since Trevor's break-in the wards had been tightened down, the girls more closely monitored. Where they used to be able to walk a few of the side gardens nearest the house, they were now only allowed in the enclosed space at the center of the mansion. Draco assured them that perhaps one day soon they'd be able to loosen things up, one day when he was sure they weren't all being hunted down like Hermione was.

"Mr. Zabini is working here full time now," Felicia said with a smile, a blush creeping across her cheeks. "He's in charge of wards, security and things because Draco has been traveling so often."

It was true. Hermione had noticed his comings and goings...sometimes closing the club overnight, sometimes leaving in the morning and coming back in the middle of the night, his arms filled with scrolls and books. When he saw her in the corridors or at meals he would smile and say hello, but gave no indication as to what he was doing. The mystery had her burning with curiosity and it tugged at her heart not to know, reminding her of the distance she'd put between them, wanting desperately for him to confide in her.

"Mr. Malfoy told us we don't have to worry," Claire said. "We always have a place here."

"Until the place is gone," Felicia interjected, pushing food around on her plate. "Mr. Zabini said he's moving a lot of money around. Out of the country even."

"Felicia!" Claire spat, "that's none of our business."

"I guess not," Felicia shrugged. "Until we have no business at all."

July was warmer than Hermione had ever remembered and she spent most of the days in the garden, desperate to smell flowers, water, soil...anything that she hadn't seen or touched in nearly a year. Around the enclosed yard were perches filled with birds of all kinds that Draco had brought in, although ironically they were free to leave at any time, flying out and off into the distance, Hermione watching them, her stomach tight with jealousy. He found her there just like he used to, ambling in to sit beside her on the stone bench.

"You look happier like this," she said, pulling the leaves from a weed she'd pulled out of the garden.

Draco had stopped wearing his suits all the time, his expensive shoes and dress robes. She wasn't sure if it was because of the heat or some other change that had come over him. Most days he wore light linen pants, loose white shirts that he left unbuttoned just enough that he caught Hermione staring once or twice, a look on her face that he wanted desperately to take advantage of. He rarely wore shoes and if he did they were old broken in trainers, nothing like the bespoke wizard high fashion that he and the other purebloods were usually seen in.

Everything about him looked softer at the edges...looser. To some it may look as if he'd given up, but to Hermione it looked fresh, clean...a new Draco, but she didn't push him for a reason why.

"Just more comfortable," he said, pulling out a cigarette and leaning back on his palms, his long legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankle. "I always know I can find you out here lately. It's much cooler in the library you know, shady."

"I like the outdoors. Especially in summer," she said. "Well, actually Fall is my favorite for smells and breezes. A chill in the air, my birthday.." she stopped for a moment before adding. "I miss it. The outdoors. The forest. Wandering by the water..."

She expected Draco to admonish her, to remind her of the dangers of being a muggleborn wandering wizard England, to remind her that Lucius had spies and mercenaries all over London just waiting to punish her, even kill her but instead he only nodded, taking a drag on his smoke and exhaling over her head.

"I know you do," was all he said before they fell into another short silence.

She didn't mind it, happy to just be sitting beside him, even when he felt distant or distracted or even cold, because somehow she knew that beneath it all he was choosing to sit beside her. She knew that someday it would go back to how it was.

"Your debt has been taken care of," he said suddenly. "I just wanted to tell you."

Her heart stammered for a moment, breath caught in her lungs. Of course it would never wipe her slate clean with Lucius Malfoy, but having her debt paid at least would keep him from breathing down her neck legally when she got out of the Dragon.

If she got out.

"Draco, you didn't need..."

"Oh shut up would you, Granger?" He said, laughing, shaking his head. "I told you I was going to pay it. You're working for me, aren't you?"

"Not really," she said, returning his smile. "I haven't...done a thing in months."

She paused there and lowered her voice, her fingers inching towards his splayed out hand. There was a golden cast to his skin now, pink on his cheeks that made his eyes even brighter, his teeth flashing white. Who would have thought Draco Malfoy would ever have a tan...and look good with it? When he didn't say anything she covered his hand with her own and leaned in towards his ear, pressing her chest against his shoulder.

"Not even for Mr. Renfield, my best customer."

She could feel him tense beneath her but he didn't draw his hand away. After their kiss a couple of weeks earlier he had made himself quite busy with his project outside of the Dragon, and while he didn't actively ignore her like he had in the past, she could tell that he

was walking on eggshells, afraid to even lay a hand on her shoulder or brush the hair from her eyes like he used to.

“I’m not afraid of you, Draco,” she said, her finger running over the back of his hand, the tendons and veins that stood out from the skin. “Don’t be afraid of me. You can touch me.”

She was ready for him. She wanted him to come back to her, to kiss her again, hold her. Yes he’d hurt her, he’d made a mistake that had haunted her for weeks, but now she needed him. She felt empty without him. When she woke in the night afraid and alone, all she wanted was to find him. He grounded her.

“Hermione…”

She pulled the cigarette from his lips and took a drag of her own before crushing it out on the stone bench and leaned in to kiss him, her hand on his warm cheek. He let her lips press against his own but made no move to return it, nearly frozen under her touch. Pulling back, she held his face in her hands, her forehead pressed to his, searching his gaze. His eyes were nearly sad, regretful.

“Kiss me back, Draco. Please,” she whispered against his mouth, her fingers dragging through his hair. “I want you to kiss me back.”

He held fast to her wrists and closed his eyes.

“I hurt you. I lost control with you and you nearly…you tried to tell me and I nearly lost you and I…”

She kissed him again, capturing his parted lips between her own, her tongue flicking out to tease him. He groaned, his grip on her wrists loosening.

“And that’s over now, I forgive you for it,” she said, running her hands down to his chest. “I don’t like being apart from you. I want you.”

She smiled and he pulled her against him, guiding her onto his lap, letting her straddle his hips. Sinking his hands into her hair, thick and wild and warmed by the sun, he crushed his lips against hers, his tongue slipping and twisting as he held her to his chest. It was only when she began to roll her hips against him that he remembered where they were, who could see them, and he gently pushed her away.

“Come see me tonight,” he breathed, kissing her eyelids, her cheeks, finally one last kiss on her lips. “Please.”

“I will,” she said, getting up from the bench, running a hand through his hair. “I’ve missed you.”

Hollow

In February of Fourth Year, Viktor Krum invited Hermione to go ice-skating with a few of the other Durmstrang students and their girls. She had already been to the Yule Ball with Viktor but there was something about this casual “date” that made her even more nervous than dressing to the nines and appearing in the Great Hall. The idea of him selecting her for an intimate afternoon with a few of his friends was intimidating and she’d shook the whole time she was in the bath, scrubbing her skin with sugarplum scented soap, pulling a comb through her damp hair. Ginny had helped her to dress and plaited her hair into two pretty pigtails that hung down her back.

“Girls can’t help but be beautiful in the winter,” she’d said to Hermione, giggling. “The cold makes our eyes sparkly and our cheeks all pinked up. He’s going to love you. Hermione’s gonna get snooooogged,” she sang, each word drawn out louder and longer the more embarrassed Hermione looked.

Still, the energy she felt that day...the anticipatory fear and excitement, a combination of hesitance and want, was one of the most delicious feelings she’d ever had.

And she did get snogged.

Preparing to go visit Draco a few hours after lineup filled her with the same bubbling electricity, the same heat in her cheeks as she wondered what would be waiting for her behind the black lacquer doors of his suite. Leanna stopped by and lingered in the doorway of her room, smiling as Hermione wove her hair into a French braid.

“Do you mind if I say something that might...get your blood up?” Leanna asked, smiling wide.

“What’s that?” Hermione asked, looking over her shoulder.

“I just wanted to say that you are...so...fucking...lucky,” Leanna said on a laugh. “God, Draco is the best kisser in the world. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered, doing her best to keep her eyes bright and her smile friendly.

Inside her throat was tightening as she thought of Leanna in his room, stripping for him, serving him. Draco had accused her of jealousy back before the gala and she’d been too proud to see the truth. And it wasn’t just the physical touches, it wasn’t even the fucking, the kissing. What she was jealous of was the possibility of some other woman taking care of him, some other woman making sure he got to bed, falling asleep with his head in her lap as she stroked his hair or ran a thumb over his eyebrow, some other woman listening to him cry, telling stories of his childhood. She was jealous of the idea of him breaking, cracking,

revealing himself to someone else, some other woman, a woman who hadn't earned what Hermione had.

"We didn't do anything, Sparrow. It was just a kiss. I mean, a kiss that blew my mind...it was definitely—"

"Ok thank you,"

Leanna sighed, finishing up her hair with one last pin.

"There's no one in the world for him but you, Hermione. We all know that now," she said. "And honestly, I'm glad things are back to normal."

"Not quite yet," Hermione said, frowning at her reflection in the full-length mirror. "But they're getting there."

Draco had been sitting on the sofa for nearly two hours, careful to only have one glass of firewhiskey as he stared into the fire, waiting for his Sparrow to arrive. The ice rattled in the glass when he lifted it to his lips, his hand shaking. She'd agreed to visit him but he was sure she would cancel, change her mind, or she would show up and he would frighten her, hurt her again. It had only been a month since Trevor's attack and he felt foolish to even ask anything of her. A kiss, a touch, any intimacy at all was no doubt an enormous hurdle for her to leap and he had no right to ask her to do it. Yet she'd been the one to come to him. She'd said she wanted him.

Of course he knew that it couldn't be the way it had been before, and deep down it was his greatest regret, one he could never voice. The dark, visceral passion they'd shared before he'd hurt her was the most blissful high he'd felt in years and the deepest connection he'd ever felt to someone else, like sharing the details of a dream and finding that she'd had the same one, a secret and a fantasy that was theirs alone. It was pure pleasure that quickly became something...more, something stronger that he wouldn't dare acknowledge. He couldn't. If she thought being strangled by Draco had hurt, imagine the damage being loved by him would do.

She knocked on the door a few minutes after eleven, once the club was dark for the night, one or two girls entertaining their regulars, the bar and gaming rooms closed.

"Come in," he said, embarrassed at how his voice cracked with the tension of anticipation, like a boy waiting on his first date.

He was beautiful, reclining on in his white linen pants, his chest bare and golden in the firelight, hair damp from a shower. A thin line of white smoke trailed up from his cigarette and he glanced at her over his shoulder, his mouth breaking into a wide smile. Hermione's stomach swooped as if she were a girl again, her skin tingly, cheeks flushing pink. She'd waited a long time to be alone with him again. A part of her knew it was wrong to want him,

to want sex at all after what she'd been through. There was some short circuit in her brain that made her want these things. She shouldn't want to be near men at all, to feel the weight of their body on top of her, their tongue on her skin, smelling the mingling sweat and slick from a passionate fuck. And yet once she'd healed from Trevor's attack it was all she craved. Perhaps it was like Draco had said to her the first time they were together. The war had ruined them. They were shattered to pieces and knit back together full of cracks and chips and imperfections. And so now she only wanted to remember what it was like to be wet and aroused, aching, begging for pleasure, giving it willingly, frantically. When Draco came to her she felt beautiful and wanted, alive, vital. When Draco dominated her she felt strong, her blood heated, her heart pumping like a primitive animal acting on her basest instincts. All she wanted was to replace the pain she felt at Trevor's touch with the euphoria she felt at Draco's. Whether it was wrong or not, she didn't care. Not anymore.

"Come sit," He said, his legs stretched out in front of him, arms long across the back of the couch.

"Where?" She asked, raising an eyebrow.

Her instinct was to kneel at his feet, to serve him how she used to, parting his thighs and closing her mouth around his length as he dug his fingers into her hair. Instead, Draco patted his lap and held a hand out. She sat, wrapping her hands around his neck and dipped down for kiss, nearly sighing into his mouth as she pulled in the taste of the spicy firewhiskey and tobacco, a flavor that was decidedly Draco, and one that she'd missed. He crushed out his cigarette as they kissed and he pulled her down to his chest, satin sliding up over her hips as he rubbed her back. Her hips rolled over him like a wave, her fingers carding through his silken hair, moaning at each stroke of his tongue over hers. He was already hard beneath her and she rocked against his pelvis, straddling his thighs. Before he could ask she pulled the nightgown over her head and Draco eagerly bent to take a nipple between his teeth. His bite was gentle and instead of twisting and tugging at the pink peak he suckled until it stiffened between his lips. After a moment he pulled back, kissing between her breasts, the smooth skin below her ribs then just above her navel. Hermione arched backward, offering herself fully and he ran one hand down the length of her torso, his thumb brushing lightly, once, between her legs.

"Did you shave for me little Sparrow?" He asked, smiling. "So beautiful. I'm honored."

His voice was low and buttery, a seductive purr rippling over her flesh and she nodded before pulling away to stand before him for inspection.

"What would you like?" She asked, running her fingers down the trail of golden hair that ran below his navel before reaching for the waistband of his trousers. "What can I do for you?"

He held her by the wrists and pushed her back, standing to face her, admiring the perfect lines and slopes of her naked body, the glow of her skin in the firelight, the strength displayed in her scars and healing wounds, the imperfections only adding to her beauty. She could not be defeated.

"Nothing, love," he said, taking her face in his hands. "I want you to feel good. I'm here for you."

He kissed her, flicking his tongue over the seam of her closed lips and she opened instantly, moaning and whimpering with need. His lips moved to her jaw, the soft, sensitive spot beneath her ear, the hollow of her throat. As he sunk to his knees in front of her she ran her fingers through his hair, watching as he kissed his way downward, his open mouth leaving a wet trail on her skin. He carefully spread her legs before stroking two fingers along either side of her clit and her breath caught in her throat as he slowly worked her open, warming her, spreading her slick juices over her folds, dipping inside and pulling out again, circling the tight bundle of nerves before starting it all over again. It was gentle and precise, his movements performed with a kind of reverence that she'd never felt from him before, and yet she found herself aching for something more, a deeper touch, something with more fire behind it. Hermione rocked against his hand in an effort to find relief but he only moved with a lighter touch then, nearly a tease, one hand on her hip to hold her steady.

When he pressed his lips to the tender flesh above her bare mound, she groaned, bucking against his mouth, remembering when she came to him once and he sucked a dark bruise into her skin there, marking her as his. His bruises and bites were her jewelry, gifts from him that she treasured, and yet now he only let his tongue trace light circles, his lips leaving fluttering kisses.

"Please, Mr. Malfoy...I want more...please lick me, my cunt is dripping for you."

She stepped her legs apart for him and he did as she asked, his warm tongue stroking through her lips expertly as he held her open with two fingers.

"Tell me..." she breathed, holding him tight to her sex, grinding against his mouth. "Tell me what you want from me."

Still tonguing her clit, Draco's hands ran up over her hips, palming her breasts, his touch almost feather light, a shadow, like a memory of what he could actually do, what he'd done. He hummed and sucked and pulled back to kiss the tops of her thighs.

"I want you to come," he said, dipping his tongue into her navel, kissing her stomach. "I want to make you come. I want to see it. That's all I want."

Something in Hermione felt hollow, as if there were a piece missing that she couldn't quite place but was quickly forgotten when his mouth returned to its work. When her legs started to tremble she backed away, sliding to the floor to kiss him, tasting herself on his tongue. As he moaned into her mouth she reached down to palm his length through the fabric of his trousers, teasing him with long slow strokes. He reached down to stop her and she smiled, expecting to hear him admonish her impatience, to call her a hungry little cock slut, to give her some kind of instruction. Instead, he pushed her hand away and kissed her mouth again, softly, almost...chaste in its tenderness and again she felt a strange awkwardness creeping between them.

"You don't have to do this," he said. "It's enough for me to see you. It's enough for me to give you pleasure."

They were only inches apart, a breath, a word, and yet it felt like an ocean.

This wasn't the Draco she missed. This wasn't the Draco she craved. In the weeks after Archlight's attack she'd been pampered and whispered to, everyone on eggshells as they walked past her room. Moonstone had all but swaddled her and put her in a cradle while trying to help her recover. It had been days and days of nothing but soft touches and platitudes, kind words and fake smiles deliveries of chocolate and flowers and offers of help; and all she'd wanted was her Mr. Malfoy back. She wanted his punishing kisses, his decadent, filthy words. She'd wanted his fist in her hair, sweat dripping from his brow as he pounded into her from behind. She wanted to be wanted that passionately. She wanted Draco to believe she could take it. She wasn't made of glass.

"It's not enough for me," she said, reaching down again to pull him free from his trousers, her thumb brushing over the drop of pearly liquid at the head of his cock. "I want to make you come."

She stroked a bit harder and his eyelids fluttered as he fell back against the sofa, his knees spread wide.

"I want you to fuck me," she said, running her own fingers through her wetness as she tugged and stroked him to his full length, the hard, thick cock she'd wanted for weeks. "I want to feel you inside me, filling me."

Draco groaned as she lifted herself and settled onto his prick, sliding slowly down, nearly purring with pleasure as every inch filled her, stretching, slipping over her clit, stroking the spot inside that made her eyes roll back.

"So good..." he sighed, wrapping his arms around her, his fingers tickling over her back. "You feel so good. Go on...take what you need," he said, barely moving, letting Hermione rock and writhe over his hips, a desperate whimper escaping on her breath.

"Help me come," She said. "Tell me what you want to do to me. Tell me what you've missed."

His heart stuttered, his breath catching in his lungs. He couldn't tell her what he'd missed, what he wanted. Not really. To admit that he wanted to tie her down, that he wanted to blindfold her and turn her over his knee, that he wanted to wrap his hands around her neck again...it would ruin it, crumbling the delicate bridge they'd finally built to each other. Still, the feeling of her hot cunt squeezing around his dick was like a drug. Being inside her he felt renewed, forgiven, whole. Those were the things he'd missed. Those were the things he could say.

Finally he reached up to palm her breasts, twisting her nipples beneath his long fingers as he thrust up inside her, tugging just hard enough to give her a little rush of pain, a burst of adrenaline she'd been waiting for.

"I want to see you come apart," he said, reaching down to circle her clit, the hair on the back of his neck prickling at her moan. "I want you limp and soft, your hair damp with sweat, wrung out and spent from riding my cock."

He sunk his hands into her hair and gently pulled her head back to expose her throat, where he licked and sucked at the pulse point in her neck.

“Oh God, oh fuck I’ve been desperate for this,” she said, bending down to kiss him again, as he stroked and fucked her closer to the edge.

They rocked together, limbs intertwined, her heart beating against his chest and she felt his fingers dig into her hips, his thrusting stuttered and slowed before he hissed his release through clenched teeth.

“Shit, oh God I can’t hold on... Hermione..I...”

She clung tight to him as he rode out the waves of his climax, still running his thumb over her clit, trying to bring her closer. But after a moment she stopped him, pushing his hand away and sucking his wet thumb in over her tongue as she slumped against his chest.

“Thank you, Mr. Malfoy,” she whispered, kissing his mouth and pulling herself from his lap.

“Hermione, you didn’t...”

“It doesn’t matter. It felt good,” she said, curling up beside him, her legs stretched over his lap, head on his chest. “It felt good just to have you back.”

He sighed and rested his chin on her head, the two of them staring into the fire. She’d said was fine but he could see the shadow in her eyes, the disappointment. He’d failed her somehow, frightened her. It wasn’t how it used to be and now he was afraid they were changed forever. Still, he was happy to have her in his arms, even without saying a word, and he closed his eyes to drink it in. He could make this be enough.

She sighed. It *was* good to have him back, to have a part of whatever they’d had before. She let herself melt into his embrace as he drew swirls and circles over her back, but he couldn’t see that she was frowning. He couldn’t see that even in her drowsiness, in the comfort of Draco’s arms, she was angry. Something had changed inside her, something wasn’t working anymore, not like it used to. Trevor Archlight had broken her and now she wasn’t sure it could ever be fixed.

The Pumpkin Shell

There was no point in hiding their...whatever it was...anymore. The girls knew she wasn't working, the members knew not to ask for her and whenever the two saw each other in the hallways or at meals, their eyes locked together and the power of it nearly sucked the air from the room.

"Will you be moving into his suite?" Claire asked, biting into a strawberry with a bit more ferocity than was really necessary.

Hermione knew that some of the girls were jealous of her time spent with Draco, but Claire just seemed blatantly angry, as if she didn't deserve such happiness, good fortune. Hermione bit her tongue of course, not wanting to explain the piles of shit she'd dragged herself through since the age of twelve that might indicate she was actually the most deserving of such things, deserving of a bit of happiness, release, pleasure, a bit of selfish joy. Instead she just shrugged and smiled politely.

"He hasn't asked me to. And frankly, he hasn't ever invited me into his bed, Claire. And he's only spent the night with me once. He has quite a hang up about it."

"Or he doesn't want you as badly as you think," she said, pointing her fork at Hermione's nose.

"A bitch to the last," Leanna muttered. "Jealousy makes you look fat Claire."

"Well at least for me it just an illusion," she fired back.

Instantly, the girls took sides and all began hissing insults at each other and Hermione looked up to find Draco sitting alone at a table near the window. He was bent over a scroll, his hair hanging in front of his eyes, writing frantically with his black quill. She couldn't help but smile at the picture he created, looking just like he did third year, his lips set in an earnest pout of concentration. She stood up from her uneaten lunch and went to join him.

"Working on a Potions Essay Mr. Malfoy?" She teased, running a finger over his shoulder.

"Yes," he answered flatly. "I still owe Snape 14 inches on Amortentia, may he rest in peace."

She playfully walked her fingers across the table before reaching for the scroll and he pulled it back, covering the words with his arm.

"Did you need something?" He asked. "I thought you were having lunch with the girls..."

"I was, until the fighting started," she sighed, sitting across from him. "I think we're all getting a bit of cabin fever being on lock down, fewer visitors, the heat...tempers are flaring."

He nodded but offered nothing by way of advice and she noticed that he was packing up his work, hiding it away. There were two books on the table; A German to English dictionary and History of Bavarian Wizarding Communities. She glanced at the titles but didn't dare touch.

"I've been curious about your new project. It seems to be consuming you lately," she said softly. "If I could help..."

"You can't," he snapped, looking up finally. When his eyes met hers they softened a bit, the tension in his face melting. "I mean...not at the moment. You...I can't tell you anything yet. I'm not trying to be secretive, I only...I'm not sure of what..."

"It's ok, I'm just curious is all; jealous to see people reading and doing research. It gives me the itch to do my own."

It was the one thing they'd had in common in school, their love of learning, devouring books. Although she could never voice it at the time, she often enjoyed competing with him in potions class or debating him in history. It had been energizing to find someone else who loved the material, who wasn't just going through the motions to get to lunch.

They were quiet for a few moments, her hand brushing against his pinky. When they touched he stopped breathing, his eyes locked on where their skin touched.

"Will you come visit me again tonight?" He asked, curling his fingers around hers, tugging her hand across the table. "We could...read or have tea or...."

"Fuck," she said, smiling. "Isn't that what you really want?"

His mouth opened and closed but he didn't let go of her hand.

"I want you, yes, always, of course" he said, looking over his shoulder, wishing he could be half as blunt as Hermione ever was. "But that isn't all you are. I would never force you to do anything..."

"Except live in a mansion and become one of your stable of whores. You would force me to do that," she snorted, one eyebrow arched high.

"I..."

She stood then, letting go of him, but he was surprised to see a smile on her face, pink in her cheeks.

"I'm teasing you Draco," she said. "I know I'm essentially trapped here."

"Hermione,"

"No, honestly," she said, stepping back to cross her arms over her chest, avoiding his gaze.

"I've read the Veritas, I know what it's like beyond these walls. It's getting worse for us. There's nowhere else for me to go, safely, until things change on the outside. I just...I wanted

to tell you somehow that I don't feel like a prisoner anymore. And ever since...well, I appreciate you keeping...damaged goods around."

She was still smiling, but her lips trembled as she traced a finger over the grain of the table. He took a deep breath and stood, leaning in to kiss her forehead and a quick brush of his lips over hers. Somewhere in the background he heard a fork drop to the floor.

"I think you told me six months ago that we're all damaged goods, remember? And I..." he paused, biting back the words he wanted to use. "I wouldn't have you any other way."

It was Draco's turn to smile at her, gathering up his scrolls and books as if late for something.

"Don't wait so long to come see me tonight, Sparrow. Right after lineup I'll be waiting." He shouldered past her and turned to speak over his shoulder, his voice near a whisper. "It's not like you to give up hope, Granger. I don't like how it looks on you. Things are changing, I promise."

She went to his room at eight thirty, wearing his favorite yellow satin pajamas with her hair in a half braid, just like it had been the first night he spent with her. She told herself that it was all going to be different this time...Draco would remember the passion he had for her and not hold back, not treat her like one of the tiny crystal kittens that Umbridge used to keep perched on her shelves. Draco would remember how strong she was, what she'd been through, how thick her skin had become...so thick in fact that it was immune to gentle touches, softness and affection. She didn't trust those things, they never felt as real as rage and want and hunger. A soft touch of his lips on her cheek felt forced, but his fist in her hair, holding her mouth against his: that let her know that she was truly needed. Wanted.

"Draco?"

She opened the black lacquer doors without knocking and found the front room empty, the fire dormant, a cigarette still smoldering in a heavy crystal ashtray. The door to his bedroom was half closed, a gold glow of light pouring out into the dusky room.

"Mr. Malfoy?"

Shrugging out of her robe and laying it over a chair, she wandered over to his desk where the piles of scrolls and sealed messages from owls was growing. There was another copy of *Hogwarts: A History*, battered and worn, dogeared pages and stains on the cover sitting among the clutter. Beneath it a list sat out, his black quill laying across it:

Parkinson - Ar - conf

Longbottom? - Hb

Corner – P - conf

Spinnet – healer

DV

DA

MS

She reached down to move the quill when she heard the door squeak on its hinges.

“So nosy,” he said, clucking his tongue. But she could hear that he was smiling. It was his usual teasing drawl. “I’ll tell you when I can tell you, Sparrow. Don’t you believe me?”

She felt him standing behind her, then his arms around her waist, pulling her into his chest.

“Would you like a drink?” He asked, kissing the side of her neck before letting her go.

“Yes...sure,” she stuttered, biting back her instinct to cry out for him to come back, to fall to her knees and crawl to him, begging him to touch her again, run his fingers through her hair, slip his hand beneath her shirt. “Tea?”

“No no, come on...let’s have a real drink.”

He stepped up to his small wet bar and poured firewhiskey into two crystal glasses. She saw then that he was in his boxer briefs only, barefoot, his hair damp, cheeks flushed as if he’d just showered. In fact the suite smelled of cedar and bergamot and something else spicy, musk. Perhaps she was right. Perhaps he had remembered what she was really here for.

Smirking over her glass, Hermione sipped at her drink and set it on the desk before slinking up to him, her hands running over the ink on his chest, the scars, the light dusting of hair. He all but purred at her touch, downing the rest of his drink. She took the glass from his hand and set it on the bar.

“What would you like?” She asked, remembering the first night he came to her. *I want to fuck you. I want to fuck you.*

I want to fuck you.

Before he could ask, she unbuttoned the shirt of her pajamas and let it slide down her arms while Draco’s eyes burned hungrily, roaming over her exposed flesh, down to her hardened nipples. He reached out and swept her hair back behind her shoulders, bending down to kiss her mouth. Hermione took his hands in hers and guided him to her bottoms, letting him slide them down over her hips. His tongue slipped over hers slowly, one hand moving to cup her ass, just teasing her with a sweep of his finger between the backs of her thighs.

“Mmmm,” she said, kissing deeper, pushing against his roaming hand.

“You’re awfully eager,” he whispered into her lips. “Come on then Sparrow, I have a surprise for you.”

She smiled, stepping out of her pajama bottoms to follow him. He reached back to take her hand, leading her towards his bedroom and for some reason her heart started pounding against her ribs. His bed? In the months they’d been together he’d never invited her into his bed, not even when she tucked him in drunk and half asleep. It seemed like some sort of boundary that he wouldn’t let her cross, some sanctuary that he withheld. The bed itself was neatly made, slate gray duvet with plump pillows and a quilted headboard. It looked... sumptuous.

But it wasn’t where he was taking her. Looking over his shoulder, Draco smiled and pushed open the door to his bathroom where he’d drawn a bath, the ceiling alight with suspended candles.

“A little nostalgia for the old days, eh?” He said, twisting one of them with two fingers.

“A dangerous decoration,” she said, tipping one of them so that a drop of pearly white wax fell onto the hollow of her throat.

Draco followed the drying wax with a hungry gaze but she only giggled and wiped it away, sidling past him to step into the tub. He slipped out of his briefs and sat down behind her, pulling her to sit between his legs, squeezing a sponge of soapy, scented water over her shoulders, his hands running over her skin. She could feel him getting hard, pressing into the small of her back and reached back to stroke him lightly, just teasing. He bit back the groan she triggered and kissed her temple instead.

“I thought you would find this relaxing,” he said, running his fingers through her curls, her hair sleek and damp in the steamy air. She hummed her approval and leaned back, her head cradled in his shoulder. “I’m sorry that you think I’m keeping secrets from you,” he said, his nose in her hair. “It’s a complicated situation and I don’t want to...”

“It’s not my business,” she shrugged. “I just can’t help but snoop, you know that.” She looked over her shoulder at him. “I’m naughty,” she added, raising an eyebrow.

“So naughty,” he said, smiling. For a moment her blood bubbled with excitement, waiting for him to grab her wrist, spank her, threaten her somehow...but the moment passed. “A naughty girl with a birthday coming up.”

She froze, her brow furrowed in shock. Disbelief. Was it true? Living in this pumpkin shell had completely warped her sense of time. Were it not for holidays, seeing the changing of the seasons through her window, feeling the heat of the sun in the garden in the day and watching the stars at night she wouldn’t have any idea if she’d been here a month or three years. She’d been arrested for embezzlement and theft just a week after her twenty seventh birthday and she could still remember Draco appearing outside her cell, a handsome, lethal trickster offering her a deal with the devil. It really had been nearly a year since she’d been to London, been caught in the rain, stayed out late at the pub. A year of her life, lost.

But it was true that she didn't feel like a prisoner anymore. It was true that she knew she couldn't leave the Dragon without risking her life, but she also knew that it wasn't because she was happy or fulfilled, it was because she was damaged. Her life as one of Draco's whores had twisted her mind, no matter how comfortably she was treated, how well he fucked her, how many gifts she was given...she was still serving a sentence. The difference was that now she'd accepted it. This was what she'd become.

Her silence cut through him like an icy wind; the way her face paled, eyes glazing over. He shouldn't have brought it up at all, except that he'd intended to tell her the gift he was planning to give her. Now it just didn't seem right. He'd ruined the moment, as usual. And yet instead of climbing out of the bathtub or pulling away from him, he felt her move closer, her hand slipping beneath the surface to touch him again, her warm fingers stroking him until he was aching to ask for more.

"What can I do for you tonight Mr. Malfoy?" She asked, rolling onto her stomach to face him. Her hand moved a bit faster as she searched his face for signs of his passion, his...fire. If she stopped, drew her hand away, would he growl at her, punish her for teasing? Would he pull her back into his arms, yank her from the tub and into his bed? She slowed her strokes, her lips on his neck.

"I..." his eyelids fluttered and he sighed, pulling her up into a kiss. "I just want you to be comfortable, Sparrow. I'm being careful...I want you to..."

She frowned and straddled him quickly, sinking down onto his length, stopping his ridiculous speech with a hard kiss on his mouth. Did he not understand her at all after all this time? Did he not see that she wasn't meant for careful? For comfortable? She'd made the mistake of putting limits on him before, but she wouldn't do it again if only he'd take her like he had back then. Yes, she would end up broken and bruised and aching, but for a moment before all that she would at least feel alive. Did he not remember his words to her their first night together? There was no place for romance or softness in this world. There was only fucking, raw need, his cock driving into her pussy. She held fast to his shoulders and rolled her hips, pulling up before driving down again, grinding into his pelvis.

"Hermione..." he breathed, holding her hips, finally meeting her thrusts with equal fervor. Still he wasn't digging his fingers into her flesh. He wasn't biting the tendon in the side of her neck to slow her, slapping her ass to speed her up. He took what she gave her and attempted nothing more.

"Do you like fucking me?" She asked, moving faster, chasing that wave, that rippling heat that he used to trigger low in her belly. "Tell me how you like fucking me. It feels so good to have you inside me...stretching me with your big, thick cock..." She ran her fingers through his hair, bending his head back to suck at his pale, beautiful throat.

His hands moved to her hair as he thrust up into her, water splashing over the sides of the tub.

"So good...fuck it's so..." he bent his head to kiss her breasts, suckling and mouthing her nipples, his rhythm getting erratic, short, punishing strokes.

He tried to hold back, to wait longer, completely enraptured by her slick, tight heat enveloping him, but it was too much. Feeling her wrapped around him, her warm, wet skin slipping against his, their limbs twisted together was a dangerous drug. He wanted more. He wanted to devour her, consume her. As she whispered filth into his ear, rolling and grinding into him, he closed his eyes and imagined his hand around her neck, his teeth scraping her skin. He imagined bending her over the counter and dripping hot wax down her back, his fist in her hair. His beautiful little slut...

And he came, stiffening and emptying into her with one final, hard push. She arched her back and he felt her clenching around him but then she slowed her movements, running her hands through his hair before bending down to kiss his mouth as he caught his breath. She was smiling, but there was no sparkle in her eyes, no flush in her cheeks.

"Where are you going," he said, reaching down between her legs to stroke down the sides of her clit with two fingers. "I shouldn't have finished without you..."

Hermione pulled away, still smiling, stepping out of the tub. She bent over and kissed his forehead.

"It's ok...I'm just...it just hasn't been working. It isn't..." she shook her head and wrapped herself in a towel. "It's fine. I'm going to have a drink."

He looked so beautiful in the bath, his wet hair slicked back from his face, soap bubbles and water droplets shining on his shoulders and arms. He was still a bit limp and groggy from his orgasm but he looked happy, and as she stood there wrapping her hair in a towel, she realized that her throat was tight with emotion, her eyes wet. Draco deserved to be happy. No, he wasn't perfect. He wasn't a knight in shining armor. He wasn't even... "good" in the strictest sense of the term, but he was trying to do some good in the most twisted way possible, caring for these broken birds, shielding them all from those who would hurt them, keeping her alive even as his own father wanted her imprisoned and abused. He'd been willing to kill for her even as she'd held him at arms length. He deserved this bliss, and it made her happy to see him in it. Her orgasm was a sacrifice she was willing to make. She would get used to it in time.

Draco watched her rifle through his armoire before pulling out one of his old t-shirts and pulling it over her head. It looked so much better than the fancy lingerie he kept them all in, so much more natural and...Grangerish, stretched over the swell of her breasts and just covering the curve of her perfect ass. He smiled and got out of the tub, shaking off the guilt he still felt for coming before she did...letting her down. She'd come to him for pleasure and he'd failed her. Twice now. Wrapping a towel around his hips he followed her into the front room where she was sitting in front of the dormant fireplace with another glass of firewhiskey, her feet tucked up beneath her.

"I shouldn't have pushed you," he said, lighting a cigarette and flopping down beside her. "I don't want to frighten you, Hermione. It's only been...barely two months and I was..."

His skin was still wet, still warm, and she wanted nothing more than to curl up in his lap and sleep. She didn't even want the sex anymore, maybe she never would. Perhaps that was a side effect of nearly being murdered. All she knew was that right now she just wanted to be near him, but of course there was nothing for *him* to get out of that particular deal.

"It's nothing you did," she said, sipping her drink. "You don't have to apologize."

There had never been awkward silences between them like there was now; a loss for words, hesitation. He put a hand on her knee and rested his head on the back of the sofa, his thumb tracing circles on the inside of her thigh. There was a weight to the quiet...each of them searching for the right thing to say and it made him want to go find his weed, to get the bottle...to go numb, but he resisted the temptation.

"You look good in my clothes," he said. "You can have that if you want."

"As if I'd wear a Slytherin t-shirt in public," she said, rolling her eyes.

The joke was a relief, both of them laughing to break the tension and Draco turned to kiss her shoulder. He could try again. He could make her feel good. He moved to kiss her neck, her lips, But she pulled away, lacing her fingers into his, leaning into his side.

"Could we just sit?" she asked, her voice quiet, nervous, as if he'd deny her anything. "I just want to sit."

"We can do anything you want, Hermione. I'm happy just for the company."

He sighed and took a drag off his smoke before crushing it out, pulling her into his arms. And they sat while she silently fought back tears, relieved to not have any expectation from him. They were quiet for the most part, occasionally she would remember something one of the girls had said, or Draco would mention something he'd read in the paper. He ran his fingers through her hair while she told him about her secret dream of having a house right on the beach and a dog one day and he told her about the Christmas he got his first broom. When Hermione finally felt herself growing drowsy she stood, picking up her robe from the floor. She felt better than she had in weeks. Peaceful.

"I should go," she said. "Thank you for...tonight."

He stood and walked her to the door, pulling her close for a slow, deep kiss, his thumb brushing over her cheek.

"You're not a prisoner, and you won't be trapped in here forever," he said. "I promise you that."

She blinked back tears and nodded, squeezing his hands before slipping out the door, biting her tongue to stop from saying *I love you*.

White Wrapping, Silver Ribbon

It was late August when the girls were told that the wards around the mansion had been amended. They could go outside again, walk the manicured gardens, even swim in the pond behind the house, something they'd never been allowed before. In the past his fear had been keeping the girls from getting out, but now he knew how critical it was to keep them safe inside. So Draco had an enchanted iron fence installed around the grounds with nearly impenetrable wards and Hermione had convinced him that his birds would be safe if allowed to wander. She spent most of her afternoons on the grassy banks of the pond, staring up through the willows, squinting in the dappled sunlight. The water itself was warm, only ten feet deep, and she and Sarah would swim until the sky turned purple with twilight, relishing the cool, late summer breezes. Sometimes Draco would come out and sit on the grass, forearms on his knees as he watched the girls in the water, calling them in for dinner when the sun started to set. Once or twice, in the dark, when the mansion was shut up for the night, he would bring Hermione to the pond and they would swim naked in the moonlight, Draco's pale hair and skin making him appear like a ghost sliding beneath the surface.

"Thank you for this," she said, swimming up to wrap her legs around his hips as they floated together. "They're all much happier."

"Are you much happier?" He asked, smoothing her hair back from her face.

She smiled but he could see that it was forced, not reaching her eyes.

"You know, I never knew how much I loved the outdoors until it was taken from me," she said, swimming away from him on her back. "It's like my magic. I had a taste of it when I took your wand and cursed Trevor and it was like...a drug coursing through me. I'd nearly forgotten what it was like to cast a spell, to apparate, transfigure...brew potions...I never could really learn how to cook but I can brew any potion you put in front of me...well...I used to be able to."

She stopped kicking her feet and floated in the center of the pond, staring at the moon, the clusters of stars in the black sky.

"I want it to be as simple as you think it is," he said, his heart aching as he watched her frowning into the dark. "I want to just go back inside and give you your wand back, reinstate your magic. I want to give you everything you want, but I can't."

She was quiet, waving her hands beneath the surface of the water creating little ripples.

"If I give you your wand back I have to give it back to everyone. Some girls don't have wands at all...they were taken from them, broken, their magic *revoked* by the council. There would be a power imbalance that some would take advantage of. And," he said, sighing, "there are some girls I still don't trust. The last thing I need are witches stupefying each other all over the mansion."

But most of all, and the reason he couldn't give her was that he was afraid of letting her go. It was selfish and cruel of him but he knew that if he took Hermione's tattoo away, if he returned her wand and her full magical power she'd be gone in the blink of an eye. He'd never see her again. He couldn't lose her...not yet. Not after all this work.

Hermione let out a snort of a laugh and flipped back onto her stomach, gliding over to stand beside him.

"I know. I just felt like telling you," she said. "I just wanted you to know."

A breeze kicked up and chilled them both. Draco reached out to pull her into his arms and she kissed his wet lips, both of their bodies covered in goosebumps as their mouths slipped together.

"Let's go inside, Sparrow," he said, his fingers trailing down the length of her spine. "I can't afford to catch a cold."

At the beginning of September Draco left for over a week. *Just boring business*, he told her, *nothing you need to worry about*. He came to her room the night before his trip and they had sex in her bed and for the first time ever with him she faked her climax, whining and panting and clenching her muscles around him, crying out as he came deep inside her. She couldn't take the disappointment on his face any longer, the defeat he felt at trying to put her broken pieces back together again and so she gave him what he needed, convincing herself that his happiness was enough for her; because she didn't want him to stop coming to her. Whatever it was that they shared, she couldn't bear to lose it, to lose him; especially if she was destined to be a prisoner in his house for the rest of her life.

Draco, however, was no fool. He'd been with enough women to know a real orgasm from a fake one, and he'd made Hermione come enough to feel the difference. He heard her cry out, heard her call his name. Indeed he felt her muscles clench, her fingernails dug deep into his back, but there was something missing. They'd been together long enough that he knew her body, the way she shook, the way her chest flushed pink just before she would come, the nonsensical words that stuttered from her lips. But he said nothing, assuming she was doing it to placate him, to give him what he wanted and be done with it. When they were finished, laying beneath her heavy down duvet, she snuggled into his chest, sighing in what he assumed was false contentment. But he was already late and had no time to confront her on the façade.

"When will you be back?" She asked, pushing up onto one elbow. He was taken aback by the earnest look in her eye.

"Soon. Hopefully when I get back I'll have some progress to report to you all. To save time I could whisper it to Sarah and then the whole South of England would know by the following Tuesday."

She laughed and he was nearly lightheaded at how good it felt to hear it, to see her eyes twinkle in the low light of her bedroom. He was reminded of watching her with Harry and Ron in Hogsmeade, watching her stumble out of The Three Broomsticks after too many butterbeers, laughing, hiccupping...innocent. He ran a hand through her hair and pulled her down into a kiss.

“I’m sorry Hermione. I’m sorry for all the names I called you, for the way my friends treated you, the torture you endured. I’m so sorry for the family you lost. I’m sorry that you were born into this amazing, unparalleled magical universe only to have it turn its back on you completely. I can’t even imagine how lonely it must have felt, being away at school...”

“What brought all this on?” She asked, moving to lie across his chest, her hair fanned out over his arm.

“Hearing you laugh,” he said, running his fingers through her hair. “It’s one of my favorite things. I don’t think I ever heard you laugh when we were at school. Maybe when I was a ferret, but I’ve blocked that all out.”

She laughed again and he sighed, holding her tight to his ribs, as if he could absorb her into his soul.

In the weeks following their bath, their night on the sofa staring at nothing, she’d discovered how much she enjoyed his company. What started as nothing but a sexual release, a distraction from the hell that her life had become had turned into...something more...something Draco had promised her he wasn’t capable of. And yet even on the nights that she told him she’d rather not have sex, rather not be touched at all, he was all too eager to sit and play chess, or simply share a joint and watch the fire, giggling over stories about the girls and their favorite customers. Sometimes he would surprise her with her favorite dessert and they would sit on the floor, picnicking in his suite, or he would invite her to the solarium where he attempted to teach her how to play Russian card games. When they were alone he was happy to talk about the past, his childhood, his early years at Hogwarts, before everything went sideways. Hermione was careful not to mention sixth year, not to mention how her heart had broken when she saw the mark on his arm. Those were the things he didn’t want to talk about. Instead she learned that his original ambition was to be a Potions professor at Durmstrang; that he wrote and drew a secret underground Slytherin Comic book circulated amongst the dorms (except for Gryffindor). The summer before second year his father had hired a private Quidditch coach to teach him to play Seeker, a position he wanted only because Harry already held it. *But then I actually learned to love the game*, he said.

Hermione gave him the physical touch he wanted as often as she could, happy to see the ecstasy on his face when she made him come with her mouth or rode him on the couch, his hands tight on her hips, groaning her name as he emptied inside her. And every time he touched her she prayed that it would be different, that something would click and she would be able to climax like she used to, shuddering and crying out, every nerve in her body alive with pleasure. But no matter how hard she rocked against him while imagining him pulling her hair, slapping her ass, growling debauched filth in her ear, she was never able to tumble over the edge. Of course it felt good to be connected to him, to feel his hot skin rubbing over

hers, his breath on her neck. His kisses were still dizzying and electric, making her weak in the knees, and she still felt that throb of arousal every time he called her his Sparrow, still ached when his tongue dipped between her legs. She still wanted him, just as badly, if not more so, than before. Only now she found that she wanted his heart as well.

Her birthday dawned with a grey sky and pelting rain and she took her time crawling out of bed, running her fingers over the stars on her arm, her throat tightening with tears as she realized it really had been a year since he'd taken her in. Locked her in. Kidnapped her. Employed her. Seduced her. Her mind was a jumble of emotions, telling herself how she *should* feel as opposed to how she *did* feel. She should have fought harder to escape, to set the other girls free. She should have sent Draco away the moment he showed up at her jail cell. She should have rejected Draco's advances, turned him away when he finally showed up at her bedroom door. She should have woken up on this rainy day filled with rage and a burning desire for vengeance. But she didn't. She woke up aching to see Draco and nothing more.

The girls were waiting for her at breakfast, even Claire, with a beautiful chocolate cake and sparkling candles. She smiled and hugged all of them, even Claire, and they sang while she searched the dining room for the one guest who never showed. While they all sat and enjoyed cake and tea for breakfast, Sarah sidled up to a quiet Hermione with an envelope in her hand.

"I know it's not the ideal place to spend your birthday, but I'm glad you're here, and that you're alright," she said.

"Thanks, love," Hermione said, forcing a smile. Was she alright?

Draco was always at breakfast. Sometimes he was late, sometimes he was surly and hung over, but she could always count on seeing him and his notable absence tugged at her heart. Particularly today.

"He's not here," Leanne said, sitting on the other side of her, the two girls sitting overly close, actually leaning in to Hermione's personal space.

"But he wanted me to give you this," Sarah said, handing her the envelope. "Happy Birthday."

The two girls were grinning ear to ear, but after handing her the card they stood up and walked away. The envelope simply said "Granger" in Draco's handwriting and she opened it to find a blank white card folded in half. Inside it read "The Solarium". She looked up to see all of the girls smiling at her, watching as she read the card.

"Go on!" Felicia said! "Happy Birthday...Granger!"

The girls all laughed and she made a quick exit. The smile on her face was almost painful as she made her way to the Solarium where the piano sat, where she'd first encountered Draco in the middle of the night, drunk and melancholy, needing someone to talk to, or just someone to listen. She expected to find him waiting with flowers, or books, or champagne... but the room was empty except for a box on the piano, white wrapping with a silver ribbon. Inside was a beautiful periwinkle blue dress...not unlike the gown she wore to the Yule Ball, but a bit more fashionable with a shorter skirt, a bit more grown up and sexy, with thin straps and a low neckline. It lay in the box like a cloud with another card tucked beneath it.

Maybe I'll finally get to dance with you. The bar is closed, but get dressed in blue and be there by noon. - D

Hermione's face flushed red as she clutched the box to her chest, racing up to her room to shower and dress, pulling her hair back into a knot at the nape of her neck. For the first time in months she wished she had a bit of makeup or sophisticated jewelry...or just some reasonable shoes. She looked down at her black satin ballet slippers that all the girls were fitted with and pouted at how they stood out, too casual, too worn.

Of course he would choose to meet her in the bar, the place where she first pulled him into her arms, where she touched the tattoo on his bicep, tracing her fingers over his warm flesh. But still, he wasn't there; only another box, again white with a silver ribbon and a pair of shoes inside; silver, strappy heels that sparkled in the low light of the room as she held them up for inspection. Gorgeous. She slipped them on, tossing the black shoes aside, feeling a bit more mature, a bit more stylish. Within the box was a second box, this one black velvet, long and narrow. She bit her bottom lip as she opened it to find a delicate diamond necklace highlighted with clusters of sapphires. It was heavy, beautiful, far too valuable for someone like her, but she knew that when she finally saw him he would expect to see it around her neck.

Once it was in place she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror that hung behind the bar. Her mind was thrown back to the night of the Gala, to seeing Draco with Melody Archlight in the foyer of the mansion, both of them dressed to the nines. She'd felt so mousy and inadequate, a shadow of who she once was. It wasn't just the luxury of Melody's dress or her million galleon jewels, but the way she carried herself with the confidence of someone who had no bounty on her head, no council calling for her imprisonment, no society looking at her like an animal, a thief, no man waiting for the first chance to tear her from her pedestal. She was proud and happy and strong...all the traits Hermione once had, back before everything crumbled, back before she lost everyone who had built her up. And yet now, looking at her reflection, she saw new budding strength radiating from her face, a hardness that wasn't cold or offputting, but simply born of experience, like tempered metal. She'd been through hell and she was still walking, but she'd found someone who was helping her to find her way out and it was the very man who had lead her there. The dress, the shoes, the jewels...they only highlighted what was already glowing about her, and she smiled.

The card at the bottom of the box instructed her to go to Draco's suite for her final gift. She hoped it meant that he'd be waiting for her, but the suite was empty, the fire extinguished. His

desk was clean, not a scroll or ink pot in sight, every book put away except for the worn, dog eared copy of Hogwarts A History, and one final envelope with her name on it.

Although I can't see you just yet, I'm sure you look beautiful. Seems a shame to waste all that walking around the mansion on your birthday. I'll see you soon. You can pass the time by reading your favorite book. -D

Hermione furrowed her brow in confusion, flipping the card over, looking in the envelope for some further clue but there was none. The clock over the mantle read 2:00 and he'd given no idea of when he'd come for her. After wandering through the suite and looking out over the grounds for any hint as to his location, she decided to do as he asked and sitting down at his desk, she reached for the old book. The moment she touched it she felt the telltale magic course through her, goosebumps rippling down her arms, her body twisting inward as the portkey whirled her away.

Black Tie

Being unused to wearing heels, Hermione stumbled upon landing on the massive and ancient looking stone platform. She pulled herself together and looked up at the sprawling museum like building in front of her with giant stone columns and open air corridors. Nothing looked familiar; but the sky was an almost painful blue, puffs of white clouds with silver underbellies gliding off to the east. No matter where she was, she took a moment to breathe in the miracle of freedom: the smell of smoke and frying foods, the sound of music and construction. Still Draco was nowhere to be found. She turned and found herself confronted by a gigantic statue; a magnificent, powerful woman draped in Grecian robes with a lion at her feet, a wreath of leaves in her outstretched hand. Beyond the statue was a wide thoroughfare, not unlike the grounds of the Quidditch World Cup, but there were far fewer people coming and going from the giant tents and the park looked empty.

“Oktoberfest.” She heard his voice behind her and spun around to see Draco standing with his hands in his pockets, a sly smile on his face. “It’s not officially open until this weekend but there’s a few last minute touches I suppose.”

He was dressed impeccably in his all black suit, his dark framed glasses and shining dragon hide shoes. She smiled and ran toward him, throwing her arms around his neck.

“You look beautiful Sparrow,” he whispered into her hair. “Happy Birthday.”

“Thank you Draco,” she said, her throat tight with tears. “Thank you so much.”

He pulled back smiling and gave her a kiss on the crown of her head. She looked even more exquisite than he’d imagined when buying the outfit, picturing her looking angelic in periwinkle just like she had been so many years ago, when his stubborn house pride and bigotry had kept him from telling her just how much.

“I must say, it seems I have a particular talent for buying women’s clothing,” he said, “and my taste in jewelry is impeccable.”

Hermione rolled her eyes but the wide, toothy smile on her face was enough to let him know that she agreed with his assessment.

“Where *are* we?” She asked. “Germany?”

“Munich. Oktoberfest starts officially this weekend which is why it’s so busy, but I thought you would appreciate seeing one of the Wizarding World’s oldest inns.”

Hermione gasped, her eyes wide as she realized where exactly she was; standing outside the statue of Bavaria!

“Haus der Zauberei?” She asked, grabbing Draco by the forearms.

She'd read about the ancient German wizarding lodge while at Hogwarts. In fact, for their Wizarding History class sixth year...

"I remember you did a presentation about this place," he said, laughing at the amazement on her face. "My father knows a few of the board members. We used to come here when I was a child. Dreadful vacation back then; I was bored to death."

They stepped into the back of the statue and Draco took out his wand to tap the base of the spiral staircase and whisper a short phrase. Hermione stood back in awe as it split into two, the statue itself broadening as the steps wound out and down.

"But I'm sure we can find a way to entertain ourselves this time," he said, smiling at her over his shoulder, his eyebrows wagging suggestively.

Hermione followed him down the stairs, fighting back tears even as she laughed at his joke. It wasn't just that they were in the Haus der Zauberei, a historic magical landmark she'd wanted to visit since she was a child. It wasn't just that she was out of the mansion, breathing fresh air, seeing a different horizon. It was that Draco had promised her that she wouldn't be a prisoner in his brothel forever and she'd never dared to believe it. She'd never seen him treat any of the other girls to something so extravagant and thoughtful on their birthdays. In fact, if someone were to ask her right now if she thought Draco loved her she would swear that he did, even though he'd also promised her right from the beginning that it was the one thing he couldn't give.

The stairs opened up into a vast lobby with gold chandeliers and black marble floors and wizards sitting on purple velvet sofas. An elf in the corner played the violin and a few wizards sat at an ornate mahogany bar sipping champagne from tall cut crystal flutes. It struck her how similar the bar at the Dragon was to this lobby and she wondered if Draco had been just as fascinated with this legendary magical meeting place as she had been as a child.

"This is perfect Draco," she said, wrapping her arms around him to kiss him chastely on the lips.

He held her tight for a moment, their lips hovering close together. His eyes were dark, hungry, and she felt a shiver of arousal down her spine.

"How would you propose that we entertain ourselves?" She asked, her fingers tickling at the back of his neck. He looked positively delicious in his dark suit; ominous and powerful and it reminded her of the Draco that used to hold her.

"Mr. Malfoy, if you're ready I have your suite prepared!"

A dapper little elf in a tuxedo had appeared at their side and Draco quickly pulled away from her, nodding and listening to the concierge's instructions while willing his pulse to slow down. Hermione stood by with her hands folded behind her back, her cheeks still hot from Draco's kiss.

“Some of these suites are over two hundred years old,” the elf, Jimothy, told them as he escorted them down an elaborate hallway lined with portraits of famous European Wizards through the ages.

Most of the frames were empty, but one or two nodded at them as they walked past. One of the smaller pictures in an ornate gold frame, held a beautiful blond woman in a silver gown. As Hermione walked by she stood.

“You,” she said. “I remember you.” Her eyes narrowed then, her lips in a tight sneer. “Thank the Gods your kind are finally in their place.” She marched angrily out of the painting and the elf cleared his throat.

“I’m so sorry Miss Granger. She shouldn’t have mentioned your...*blood status*.”

“She didn’t,” Draco snapped. “And you shouldn’t mention it either.”

The elf looked nervous, wringing his hand, betraying the sort of upper class demeanor he was desperate to portray.

“Of course sir. Of course.” He turned to Hermione and bowed. “I hope you know that we do not discriminate against any kind of wizard here in Germany.” He looked between the two of them conspiratorially. “England seems to have fallen into dark times.”

“Yes well,” Draco interrupted. “We didn’t come here to discuss politics did we? We’re here to celebrate Miss Granger’s birthday.”

“Yes of course of course!”

Jimothy rushed ahead to open the double doors to their suite, bowing low as they walked past and locking the doors behind them.

“Mouthy little elf,” Draco said, loosening his tie. “Should have slapped a silencio on him.”

Just the sight of it made Hermione feel a throbbing heat between her legs; just seeing the fabric wrapped around his hand, the base of his throat when he undid one button on his shirt.

“No,” she said. “He was trying to be polite. You made him nervous. It’s just nice to...see someone new.”

She walked past him towards the wide window that looked out over the Theresienwiese. Even just this, just seeing different buildings, different clouds, brought tears to her eyes. Having Draco there with her to share it was the icing on the cake.

“Still, I bet you would have liked to have thrown a hex at that bitch in the painting,” Draco said.

Hermione laughed and shrugged, resisting the urge to agree with him. But it wasn't safe to hex the ruling class. Besides,

"I couldn't have hexed her if I wanted to. You know that..."

She turned to see Draco standing in front of her, his hand outstretched with a long narrow box. Her heart skipped as she felt herself pulled to it, desperate for it. Then she felt something indefinable; fear, anticipation, maybe magic, ripple through her blood.

"Happy Birthday Sparrow," he said, handing her the box.

"Draco..."

"I have to take it back when we go...home. It wouldn't be fair," he said, watching as she let the parts of the box fall to the floor, rolling the vinewood between her fingers. "But I know that you hate being out of practice. And it's...it's my fault you're out of practice."

She stepped past him and held the wand out. When she adjusted her grip, the feeling of the wood against her fingers sent her back nearly fifteen years. Back to dueling club and the war, being on the run. She could remember learning complicated spells, throwing up wards, twirling the wand between her fingers absently while chatting with Ginny Weasley.

"Lumos," she whispered.

The simplest of spells, barely a wand movement needed. Still, when the tip glowed, lighting up the room, she felt drained, worn. Her magic was out of practice, just like Draco had said. She turned, holding the wand out, lighting up Draco's face like an angel. He was smiling, but she could see that it didn't quite reach his eyes. Guilt. She whispered Nox and set the wand on the table.

"Thank you Draco. You can't understand how much this means to me."

"I think I can," he said. "I can't imagine what I'd do if someone took my magic from me." He rubbed the back of his neck, not meeting her eye. "He tried. My father spoke up for me but I'm sure he regrets it now. Anyway, you can use it for as long as we're here. Consider this...another dimension. Different from the Dragon. It's just you and me in a different world."

"How long are we in this different world?" She asked, and Draco noticed that her voice had gone low, husky. Her eyes were glittering almost bronze in the late afternoon sunlight. She stepped closer to him, wrapping her arms around his waist. She smelled like fresh berries and ocean air and he couldn't resist nuzzling her neck, pulling her hips against his.

"Three days," he muttered against her skin. "I have another gift for you but it isn't until tomorrow. I figured you might want to spend a night...in."

She stepped back from him and folded her hands behind her back again. Seeing her standing in front of him so quiet and demure...so submissive went straight to his cock, his pulse pounding in his neck.

“So we’re doing whatever I want then?” She asked, looking up at him through her lashes. Her teeth sunk seductively into her lower lip.

“Of course, Sparrow. Whatever you want.”

Of course what *he* wanted was to grab a fist full of her hair and push her to her knees. What *he* wanted was to make her tremble and weep, begging to come, her arousal dripping onto his hand. But it was *her* birthday, and if she wanted nothing but to sit on the couch and play cards, that’s what they would do.

And so it shocked Draco to see her reach down and unbuckle each of her shoes, carefully setting them aside. She pulled the pins from her hair and let it tumble down her back and his mouth went dry, his heart beating faster. Hermione could see that his pupils were blown wide, a flush in his cheeks. If she reached out to touch him she was sure he’d be hard for her. Instead, she bent her arm back and took down the zipper on the periwinkle dress, letting it fall at her feet. Draco gasped at the sight of her black lingerie, a lacy bra with jeweled accents and a tiny black pair of panties, a little cluster of rhinestones drawing his eye right to her pussy, not that he needed the guidance.

“I want to go back in time,” she said, letting one of the bra straps fall.

“Oh?” Draco was starting to feel warm. A bit too warm. To keep from lunging at her he took a moment to take off his jacket and roll up the sleeves on his crisp, white shirt.

“Back to before the gala, before we met Trevor, before everything changed,” she said, slipping the other strap down, the lace cups of her bra clinging to her breasts, tempting him.

He frowned at her. If he could go the rest of his life without ever hearing Archlight’s name it would be fine with him, and he especially didn’t want to talk about him on her birthday, after all that he’d done to make sure she felt safe, and comfortable. She prowled closer to him. He still held the black silk tie in his hand, wrapped around his knuckles, his fists clenched tight as he watched her hips swing with every step forward.

“Do you remember what you told me the first night you came to me? The very first night we were together?” She asked, lifting his hand and pulling the tie from it, wrapping it tight around her own wrist.

He finally met her gaze and saw what he hadn’t seen for weeks...months. He saw passion and need. He saw an impatient lust that he’d felt himself but had locked down and tried to hide for her own sake.

“I do,” he said, gently touching her other wrist and wrapping the remaining fabric around it, effectively binding her wrists together.

“I want you to fuck me Draco,” she said, holding her wrists out to him palms up in supplication before continuing. “I want you to bruise me, to mark me with your teeth. I want to sweat and weep and ache in the morning. I’m tired of being careful and safe and *comfortable*. I’m not a piece of china. I’m a woman who has literally been through a war,

been thrown in prison, been turned out as a prostitute, tortured, abused, raped. You aren't going to break me. But I want you to try."

Draco couldn't find the words to answer her, to express his relief and desire and surprise; so instead he wrapped one of his hands around the back of her neck and pulled her lips to his, kissing her hard, his slick, hot tongue sweeping into her mouth, his teeth scraping across her bottom lip. Her moan vibrated between them and he pulled back, his forehead pressed to hers as he caught his breath, her bound hands firm against his chest.

"I've wanted to dominate you for weeks little Sparrow, but I was sure you didn't want it. Not after you..."

"I'm smart enough to know the difference between someone who..." she chose her words carefully, "cares for me and someone who wants to hurt me. I know the difference between delicious agony and sadistic pain. I wish I didn't, but I have extensive experience with both."

He nodded and kissed her again, his heart racing as his mind was flooded with images and scenes, endless ideas of what he could do to her. If he hadn't already made plans he would tie her to the bed and keep her there for three days; but as it was, he was entirely ready to give her exactly what she needed.

"Tell me Sparrow, what will you do if you need me to stop?" He purred, moving to grip her hair, tugging hard at the nape of her neck.

"I'll say Lumos. And I know that you'll stop."

"That's right, I will," he said, kissing her again, his other hand roaming down over her ass. "You're sure you're ready for this?"

She nodded, goosebumps raising on her arms, her panties already wet, her whole body hot, shivering.

"Good girl," he said, stepping back from her. "Then kneel."

Dripping in White

He'd intended to take it slow with her after seeing that she was amenable to even having sex at all. But once she stood in front of him and bound her own wrists in black silk, once she'd knelt at his feet with her thighs spread wide he'd come undone. With one eager hand he snatched the loosened bra from her tits and threw it over his shoulder, rolling the rosy, ruched nipples between his fingers until she whimpered from the stimulation. Keeping her on her knees, he bent down and kissed her, his tongue sliding wickedly over hers, slow and sensuous, fucking her mouth with his hands rooted at the nape of her hair.

"I should punish you for making me wait," he growled, bending her head back further, dragging his tongue along her jawline, down the length of her throat. "For not telling me what you needed all this time. I should stripe your ass with that belt until you can't sit for the next week without remembering me."

Hermione whined, her hips rolling as he whispered his threats to her on a low, rasping breath. Meeting her mouth again, he sealed her lips with his and slowly moved his hand to close around her throat, the exact place he'd hurt her before. He didn't squeeze, barely put pressure on the skin, but it was enough that she could feel him there, his long fingers wrapped nearly to the back of her neck. His thumb stroked at the steady pulse underneath her jaw and he pulled back, breaking the kiss, his forehead pressed to hers. Still holding his hand over her throat, he searched her eyes, the heat of her gaze, looking for fear or hesitation, any hint of resistance. When he found none he let go and stood in front of her.

"Don't you move, Sparrow," he warned, loosening his belt. "You don't know how long I've been waiting to see you kneeling at my feet again."

He pulled the leather from his trousers with one rough tug and coiled it tightly, laying it in her open palms.

"For later," he said.

She smiled and he reached in to pull out his already hard prick, dark and weeping at the tip. As he stroked himself he ran his other hand through her hair, tipping her head back to meet her eyes.

"Such pretty makeup, a beautiful dress and gorgeous jewels around your neck," he panted, his hand moving faster along his length. "But I like you better wearing my cum. What fun it will be to ruin you, pretty girl."

She whimpered at the sound of his voice, the debasing filth he spoke so plainly, holding nothing back.

"Are you wet?" He asked, slowing his rhythm a bit, extending the pleasure for just a moment more. No matter what he did he was going to topple over the edge soon, just from wanting her so badly, from having her like this after waiting for so long, but he intended to draw it out as best he could. "Spread your legs."

Her wrists were still bound and she dropped the belt, spreading her thighs as she sat back on her heels. Her black knickers were nearly too small to cover her and when she opened up to him, the damp gusset slipped between her pussy lips, rubbing against her clit and she gasped.

“I want you to come when I do,” he breathed. She held her hands up for him to untie and he shook his head. “My poor baby can’t touch her slippery cunt. I’m sure you’ll find a way to get off, you horny little Sparrow.”

She nearly opened her mouth to protest when he slid his foot forward, still wearing his black dragonhide shoe, polished to a mirror-like shine. From the sounds of his staccato breathing and skin slapping against skin she could tell he was close and she rocked her hips against nothing, the fabric of her knickers pulling taut and sliding over her clit, but not with enough friction to give relief. She raised her eyes to his, meeting his molten silver gaze. His perfectly coiffed hair had fallen in front of his eyes, his cheeks touched with pink as he sunk his teeth into his bottom lip. His unbuttoned shirt had fallen open to reveal his sculpted chest, the tendons in his arms pronounced as he worked himself closer to the edge. He appeared nearly feral in his ecstasy and she whined with need.

“Go on, Sparrow, he said, tapping his toe. “You know how to get what you need dirty girl.”

She inched forward onto the warm leather shoe, her thighs spread wide as she rocked against his foot, watching him pant, open mouthed, his hand moving faster. Unable to keep her balance, Hermione fell forward, resting the side of her face on his thigh.

“Every time I’ve been with you these past weeks I’ve wanted to hold you down, I’ve wanted to smack your ass until it’s cherry red, hear you scream for me. I’ve wanted to bend you over and fuck into you from behind, leaving bruises on that gorgeous backside.”

“I’ve wanted you to pull my hair,” she said, grinding her damp pussy against his shoe. The first dramatic waves of her orgasm arched her back and she wailed her pleasure, moving faster, all pride pushed away as she chased a deeper, shuddering climax. “I’ve wanted you to pin my wrists above my head and bite my neck, to make me strip for you, to make me yours. Mark me.”

He groaned at her breathless admission and grabbed her jaw.

“Open your mouth good girl,” he said. “I’m going to fill it.”

The first hot jet of his seed hit her bottom lip and she eagerly flicked her tongue out to catch it as he came in her mouth, a few warm, errant spurts sliding down her cheeks, and a single drop glistening on her long, darkened eyelashes. Before she could swallow fully he pulled her up and kissed her ferociously, tasting himself in her mouth as he walked her backwards toward the bed, holding her face tight in his hands. Her wrists were still bound and he easily spun her around to bend her over the edge of the thick, pillowy mattress, the tall window in front of her giving her a view of the midway of the fest, now lit up as the sun began to set.

“Spread your legs, show me that slick cunt,” he said, kicking at her ankles.

She did as he asked and he stepped back, taking the opportunity to strip out of his shirt and trousers, kicking off his shoes. He was only in his tight black briefs and she watched him hungrily as he went to retrieve his coiled belt, folding it in half and snapping it near her ear. The cool air of the room on her sensitive lower lips was making her ache again for his touch, for some stimulation and she tipped and rolled her hips in invitation, hoping he'd give her what she needed.

Draco chuckled at the sight of her writhing on the bed, her pussy dark and wet, open for him. His mind was racing with a thousand fantasies he'd stashed away, never to be realized, ideas and punishments (and pleasures) he'd figured she'd never take from him again. Seeing her mouth open, his pearly seed on her tongue, had been like a dream; his Sparrow, just as he'd remembered her. And there on her knees she'd had her own climax only five minutes earlier but already she was very nearly begging for more, her hips wiggling, her eyes following every movement he made, her tongue flicking out over her lips as she did her best to behave.

The room was dusky with twilight. They were meant to be at a gourmet seven course meal at a hidden restaurant in the heart of Munich, but food was the furthest thing from his mind as he grabbed his wand and conjured up three thick white candles, lit and glowing, casting the room in a golden light. She still wore the diamond necklace he'd given her and it looked decadent on her naked body, throwing sparks of light around the room as he circled her.

"So wiggly," he murmured, running the folded belt down the length of her spine. "So impatient. For what exactly?"

"For you," she breathed, bucking her hips backwards, spreading her legs further. "Please. Please sir."

With one hand he pulled off her knickers and ran his fingers between her shining pink lips before snapping the belt across the tops of her thighs making her squeal.

"Please what? What do you need, love?"

She paused, her haze of lust cut through with him calling her love. She couldn't remember him ever using the term, as common as it was, and it rolled off his tongue so easily, the word sinking deep in her heart.

"I...I want..."

The slap of leather burned across the cheeks of her ass, the throbbing heat shooting straight to her pussy and Hermione groaned.

"Speak up, girl. What is it you want?"

"Your...y-your hand, your tongue...your cock...anything. Please. I need you."

"Wiggly *and* greedy. Your offenses are just piling up tonight, little girl. So unbecoming."

He stood at the edge of the bed slipped two fingers inside her, laughing as she bucked and twitched, still sensitive from her climax. In the times they'd had sex over the past few months she'd never been quite this wet, this sensitive. He'd known she was faking her orgasms but never asked her why, figuring it wasn't his business. It was a mistake he regretted and now that he knew, he'd never allow it again. He'd never allow her to go unsatisfied at his hand. When she pushed back against him he slapped her ass with his open palm, rubbing the heated flesh after.

"I think you need a bit of punishment before you get your pleasure, pretty girl."

"Yes sir," she purred, arching her back, going up on her toes.

He picked up one of the thick candles and held it over her back. Tipping it just slightly he let a thin stream of the white wax drip onto the small of her back. She hissed and moaned, rolling her hips. The sting and heat of the wax was a delicious pain that warmed her through, sending shockwaves between her legs that demanded relief. Another hot stream dripped down between her shoulder blades, then the length of her spine. With every movement the cooling wax crackled against her skin, leaving every nerve alive with sensation. Draco ran his fingers over the trails of hardened wax and bent over to place a kiss on the bone at the top of her spine.

"More?" He whispered. He kissed his way down her back, massaging the globes of her ass as he held her open, dragging his tongue down the length of her, just once, a tease. "Your body looks beautiful, love, all dripping in white."

"Yes, more, please sir," she said, turning to look over her shoulder, her blood sizzling with arousal at the sight of his blond head between her spread thighs. His eyes flicked up to meet hers and he pulled away.

"What? You want to watch me lick your cunt?" He asked, his fingers sliding between her wet folds.

She nodded and he stood, grabbing her hips and flipping her onto her back. Never taking his eyes from her, he unwound her arms from the black tie they'd been wrapped in, pulling each hand up to kiss the insides of her wrists. Her hair fanned out behind her spread across the white sheets, her skin golden, a bit tan even from the afternoons spent near the pond. Draco slid up the length of her body and kissed her mouth, nipping at her bottom lip before pulling away and holding up the candle again. Hermione watched with wide, eager eyes as the white liquid dripped into the hollow of her throat, rolling down to her collarbones. The sounds she made with each touch of the heat were making him hard again already, but he wanted to draw it out.

"More, you dirty girl?" He asked, holding it over her stomach that was fluttering with her quick breaths.

When she nodded her consent he stuck his pinky into the pool of hot wax and brought it down to her nipple, circling the tightened pink nub, making her cry out, her back arching off the bed. He coated the other and looked her over, skin coated in crackling, glistening wax, her nipples thickly encased in white. Without being asked she'd kept her legs spread obscenely

wide, hoping he would return to his work on her pussy. Now that he was satisfied with his artwork, he began kissing his way back down, licking at her ribs, the dark little freckle at her waist. He pressed open mouthed kisses to her navel, the hills of her hipbones and finally knelt between her thighs, spreading her open with both hands, blowing a cool stream of air over her clit.

“Do you promise never to hide from me again, Sparrow?” He asked, kissing the top of her mound, one finger sliding inside and back out again.

“Yes sir,” she whined, pushing forward.

“Do you promise to always tell me what you need, what you want?” He asked, dipping down to stroke her once with his tongue.

“Y-ye-yes. I promise sir,” she said.

He bent down and sucked her clit between his lips, flicking at it with the tip of his tongue. She writhed against his face, her fists pulling at the sheets.

“Oh fuck Draco, fuck...”

She pulled her knees up and dug her heels into the mattress as he darted his tongue deep inside her wet heat, his arms wrapped tight around her thighs. She looked down to find him watching her, his eyes dark, burning with desire and she reached down to dig her fingers into his hair, pulling him tight against her as she started to tremble.

“Please, please...” she panted. “Your cock. Please. I’m going to...I can’t...”

He was only too eager to oblige, sliding his briefs down and climbing up her body, to slot himself between her legs. The wax on her nipples and throat cracked as he pressed against her, thrusting inside in one deep stroke. Both of them groaned as their bodies met and for a moment he kept still, cradling her head in his arms, looking down at her heavy lidded, contented gaze.

“I’ve missed you,” he whispered, rolling his hips once, pushing himself even deeper as she threw one leg over his hip. “I’ve missed that look on your face.”

“Oh god,” she thrust back against him. “I’ve missed you. Harder. Please. Please sir,”

He pulled out almost completely and drove in deep, grinding against her clit when he was buried to the hilt. Hermione threw her arms around his shoulders, digging her fingers into his back.

“What do you want, Sparrow?” He cooed, dragging his tongue along the line of her jaw. “Tell me what you want. Tell me what you need.”

“Fuck me. Please fuck me.”

He began a steady rhythm, snapping his hips into her as she panted into his shoulder.

"Tell me again," he said, pulling back to look into her eyes. "Tell me."

Her mouth fell open as she felt his gaze burning into her, his thick, warm length sliding in and out of her. Before answering she reached for his hand and placed it on her throat, pressing hard to close his fingers tight around her neck. His eyes widened and he paused in his thrusting, not daring to move, but Hermione nodded, holding his hand in place.

"Sparr-"

"I need your cock, I need you to bury it deep inside me," she pleaded, clinging to his wrist. "No one can fuck me as hard as you can. I want you to fuck me like you used to. I need you to come inside me. Please...please sir."

His pace became relentless as he pulled one leg up and over his shoulder, nearly bending her in half, while the other held firmly to her throat, squeezing just enough to restrict her breathing. Deep at the base of his spine he could feel the first throbbing pulses of his climax. Her eyes rolled back in ecstasy as her slick channel clenched around him and she screamed, dragging her fingernails over his back as she came.

"You're all I want," he said. "You're all I ever want, Hermione."

Her name fell from his lips on a groan as his own orgasm overtook him. His whole body stiffened as he rode out the waves, her walls milking every last drop from his shaft. Catching his breath he let her legs fall from his shoulders and collapsed across her chest. Both of them were exhausted, contented and spent, but he wanted to stay inside her, to stay linked to her body, holding her, listening to her heart pound behind her ribs.

"Thank you," she whispered, carding her fingers through his damp hair. "Thank you Draco."

He pulled himself up on one elbow and bent to kiss her neck, the hollow at the base of her throat.

"Happy Birthday," he said, smiling.

She laughed but his smile faded just the slightest bit and he pulled out of her, moving to lay at her side.

"Why did you keep this from me?" He asked finally, twirling a lock of her hair around his finger. "I knew you were unhappy, unsatisfied, but I didn't want to push you. I thought if I –"

"I thought that after seeing me with Trevor, that maybe you..."

"No," he touched two fingers to her lips to stop her before stroking her cheek, running his hand through her hair. "That bastard did nothing to change how I feel about you. He never could. You're every bit as beautiful and alluring and sexy as you were the first day I saw you here. You're every bit as strong and passionate. It breaks my heart to know you were suffering alone." He paused for a moment, his eyebrows drawing in, something on his face that she couldn't read. When he spoke again, his voice was so quiet, so distant she could barely hear it. "I should have realized..."

Hermione snuggled up closer to him, tracing her fingertips over the outlines of his tattoos.

“Thank you for bringing me here, for letting me...out. It’s more than I could have imagined.”

“Good,” he said, kissing her forehead, his voice cheerful again. “There’s more to come in the morning.”

“I have to wait until the morning?” She said, pouting dramatically. “It’s not even eight o’clock.”

“I know that Sparrow,” he said, his voice going velvety dark as he flipped to a crouch, smiling as his body flattened over hers. “But we’re nowhere near done here.”

Guilt, Grief and Forgiveness

The lights from the midway cast the room in an orange glow as they rested in each other's arms, his head on her stomach, staring out the window. She ran her fingers through his damp hair and over the tattoos on his back, enjoying the silence of the room. They'd missed dinner. Draco eventually rolled onto his side, moving to pull her into his arms.

"Worn out?" He asked, kissing the crown of her head.

"For now," she said. "But I like laying here with you. Just being quiet with you." She paused, picking her words with care. "I never get to stay with you at...home."

He nodded, his gaze drifting somewhere over her shoulder, giving no response.

"Shall we draw a bath?"

They soaked in the clawfoot tub together, washing each others limbs and backs, Draco massaging a spicy, musky soap into her skin and a bright, minty smelling shampoo into her hair. She soaked in the warm, bubbly water after he'd gotten out and he took the opportunity to order room service, slipping into some satin pajama bottoms for their night in.

Sleepy and sated, Hermione wandered back into the suite wrapped in a towel and he smiled, handing her another white box with silver ribbon.

"Draco...this is getting silly," she said, but he could see that she was giggling and eagerly tearing at the box.

It was a warm pair of pajamas, trousers and top, buttery soft, grey jersey, modest and comfortable; nothing at all like the revealing outfits she wore at the mansion. At the bottom of the box was a pair of thick, white wool socks that made her laugh out loud.

"You are the world to me, witch," he said. "But your feet are like ice."

Hermione laughed and changed into the cozy outfit, sitting down with him to eat.

"What did you love about school?" He asked, pushing the food around on his plate after he'd finished eating. "I don't mean the people, your friends...or the fact that you're an insufferable swot who loves learning, but Hogwarts itself. What was it that had such a hold on you?"

She looked up expecting to see a sarcastic sneer on his face, poised to tear her down for her love of an antiquated system. Instead he was focused, eager...searching her face for an answer. He actually wanted to know.

"As a muggleborn, I felt out of place the minute I set foot on the castle grounds," she said, sipping her wine. "But being assigned a house...a team, a group of people who would work together for some sort of success, it helped me to feel like I belonged."

He nodded, finishing his wine. It would be hard for almost anyone to believe but he understood her loneliness at school even though his was different. All his life he was raised to believe that he was uniquely wonderful, a towheaded prince among men. And as such his father had warned him to trust no one; that everyone around him would only want to be close to him for his name, his fortune, his power in the wizarding community. A kind word was not to be trusted.

His own father found it impossible to fathom that anyone would want to be Draco's friend.

It was Crabbe who'd taught him otherwise. Goofy Crabbe, who followed him around like a puppy dog doing whatever ridiculous, humiliating thing a twelve year old could devise; he was the one who truly liked Draco and made him feel needed, appreciated. He sat up with Draco when he was sick with the flu one winter, making him tea and reading comic books. He was so...simple. He didn't care about money or power, but he knew a lot about being lonely and excluded and he didn't wish it on anyone...so he befriended Malfoy immediately. Draco was still haunted by his death. Had it not been for Crabbe's loyalty he might still be alive.

Hermione interrupted his thoughts.

"I didn't so much care for the rivalries or the cruelty that arose from it," she said, shrugging, "I didn't like the stereotypes that followed everyone for the rest of their lives...the stigma that some of you were forced to bear. But there's something about being a part of a house that gives you purpose. And the competition gives you a joint goal to work towards. Although..." she raised an eyebrow then, smiling at him over her glass, "I'm not quite sure I'd ever allow students to assign points."

Draco laughed.

"The power was incomparable, darling. I held the world in the palm of my hand," he joked dramatically.

They sat together on the sofa after supper, each sipping at another glass of wine, recalling more stories from the early years at Hogwarts, before they knew their roles in the war, the division and the future of Wizard England; before they knew the weight they'd be forced to carry. After they'd combed through a lifetime of memories they fell silent and Hermione snuggled into his side, running her fingers over the runes on his chest.

"Will you tell me about these?"

"They're from him," he said, looking down at her slim fingers tracing the outlines of the markings. "They were supposedly imbued with magic to dampen my perception of each emotion – to make me a better killer. A machine. We all got them when the war was teetering on the edge. Each rune selected for each particular acolyte...the younger Death Eaters."

He drained the glass of wine and stood to fill another. Having her touch the runes felt like he was...poisoning her, the evil passing through to her own blood, like drawing out venom and

he had to step away from it. The room was completely dark and he grabbed his wand to light the fireplace. As it roared to life he poked at the little pile of dark coals beneath the logs.

“Guilt, Grief and Forgiveness,” he said. “To successfully mute those feelings is to harden the heart towards compassion.”

He repeated the words like a mantra, something he’d heard a thousand times before, then he came back to the sofa and sat beside her. She didn’t dare interrupt.

“I was sure they were working, that with the Dark Lord’s help I was becoming an efficient monster. Before long I would make up for my hideous mistakes at school, my failure, my tendency toward mercy. I could lose my humanity for good and all of the messy fucking feelings that came with it. I got these marks and just like when I got the first one I felt darker, colder, distanced from everyone else. Even my mother treated me differently. I was ice....until I saw you in Diagon Alley; until I saw you crying outside Flourish and Blott’s. I swear I felt my heart crack. You said you were mourning your whole childhood. And I realized I’d been doing it for years.”

“Dra—“

“I left the raid that night sobbing until I couldn’t breathe, till my head ached. I walked for miles before apparating home. I sat in my room and gouged at my mark with my fingernails, my wand, a knife...anything to get rid of it. My mother screamed at me for staining the carpet. I was – I was too weak for the power he gave me, the power he trusted me with. I was weak...” he said, his eyes fluttering closed as she pressed her lips to the runes.

“No you’re not, Draco,” she said, kissing his neck, the hinge of his jaw, the corner of his frowning lips. “Your light was just too bright for his darkness to penetrate it.” She put her hands on his cheeks, forcing him to look her in the eye. “Voldemort is a liar. A liar, a con artist, a...a...miserable soul thief...a husk of a wizard.” She grabbed his arm and held his mark face up between them. “The only power this mark ever had was tracking. He could find you. He could call you. It didn’t make you stronger, it didn’t make you any darker or more evil. But he told you that it would; because it served him best to have you believe it. These runes are no different. You’ve shown more guilt in this past year than any ex-Death Eater I’ve ever known.” She turned his hand over, exposing the six stars across his wrist, running her finger along the line. “You’ve wept with grief for people gone for over a decade. And you allowed me to forgive you and we came out better on the other side.”

For a moment he just stared at her fingers closed over his wrist and he wanted to believe that he could be with her forever; the girl he’d known to top every student in school, the woman he’d seen crack and scream under torture and still rebuild herself to fight again. Her trust lead her to offer her body to him and she’d nearly died because of it. Still, she took him in her arms. Her passion hadn’t dimmed. Their needs were the same and they fed each other perfectly. He wanted to believe that they could put the horrors of their lives behind them and just be Draco and Hermione, hidden away somewhere, free and happy. As the thoughts ran through his head he realized that it was all he wanted...the only thing in the world.

“Thank you,” he whispered, his eyes lowered, head bowed. “Thank you.”

Hermione smiled and climbed into his lap, straddling his thighs, wrapping her arms around his neck. Her hips rolled once or twice over his hardening cock and he tilted his head to smile at her, sliding his hands up beneath the shirt of her pajamas, his thumbs brushing over her nipples and back down between her legs.

“Thank you for dinner Mr. Malfoy,” she said, leaning into the rough calloused stroke of his fingers. “It was delicious. And...I’m no longer worn out.”

It surprised Draco to wake up with her warm chest pressed to his back, her arm thrown over his waist and her silky brown curls draped over his arm like a curtain, their naked bodies wound together like climbing vines. It was only at her insistence and unfair playing of the “birthday card” that he’d agreed to share her bed. He’d fully intended to transfigure something and give her a safe, separate space, somewhere away from him.

“Why?” She’d asked, her arms crossed, chin up, challenging him exactly like she’d done for nearly twenty years.

“You know why,” he said. “I don’t sleep very well. I’m restless, I have nightmares,” he said, his voice trailing off as he ran his fingers over the seams of the sofa cushions.

She could see there was obviously something else, something more that he wasn’t revealing.

“Come to bed,” she said, pulling back the duvet. “It’s so comfy and warm and we can snog ourselves to sleep...” She smiled but he didn’t return it. “Please Draco, for my birthday? I can’t tell you how long I’ve wanted to fall asleep in your arms.”

“It’s not safe,” he muttered when she took his hand, pulling him down. “I don’t trust myself.”

“I do,” she said, with an air of finality. He was sitting beside her at least and she took his face in her hands and kissed him. “Haven’t I proved that a dozen times over by now?”

Even so, he’d intended to just hold her, to stroke her hair and kiss her goodnight and when she fell asleep he would leave. But now the sun was filtered through the gauzy curtains and he’d slept through the night. He couldn’t even remember dreaming. Behind him she gave a little purring moan, stretching and pressing against him, kissing the bone at the top of his spine.

“Good morning,” she said, her voice low and gravelly with sleep.

Draco pulled her hand up to his lips and kissed her palm, then her wrist and her forearm.

“Good morning, Fraulein,” he said.

“May I say I told you so, sir?” She asked.

He could hear the smile in her voice as she unwound her limbs from his and pulled herself up to sit, resting against the headboard. Draco joined her, reaching to take her hand, lacing their

fingers together.

“It was Robin,” he said, kissing her knuckles. “Back when I first opened the Dragon I tried to drown myself in work and drink and drugs and excess. Robin was my first girl and I...we...I asked her to sleep beside me, share my bed. I was so lonely. I just felt...lost.”

“I know,” she began. “After the war —“

“I almost killed her,” he said suddenly, as if the words burst from his chest. “I was holding her while we slept. I had a nightmare. I don’t remember anything except waking up on top of her, strangling her. She was kicking at me, crying out my name, begging, scratching; but I was...frozen...stuck somewhere else,” he said, rubbing his jaw with one hand, staring out the window. “Thank God Moonstone heard her, me, us. She ran in and pushed me off of her and it woke me.”

He was quiet and Hermione simply lay beside him, her head on his shoulder, running her fingers over his arm.

“She said she understood...Robin,” he said, sighing. “But by the end of the day everyone in the house knew the story. They all looked at me a bit different after that. Distance. Of course they all said they weren’t afraid, they knew why it had happened...but I could see it in their eyes. All they saw was my darkness.” He ran a hand over his mark before crossing his arms, hiding it. “I didn’t let anyone in my bed after that.”

She snuggled even closer, pulling his hand free and draping his arm around her shoulders. He’d loved waking up with someone when he was younger. Even when he was in school he’d clumsily seduce girls into sneaking into his room after hours for a snog and a cuddle, hoping they’d fall asleep until morning. Later, when he lived on his own he let any girl who’d ask to spend the night, regardless of how he felt about them, even if it was just as friends. He did it just to feel that warm body beside him, fingers in his hair. His parents had never been overly affectionate, and once he’d discovered the bliss of human touch, he found himself starving for it.

“That night you fell asleep in my suite, the two of us on the couch, I was terrified that I’d hurt you while I slept. But I shouldn’t have snapped at you like I did.”

“It’s OK,” she said. “I’m a big girl.”

“A birthday girl, too,” he said, his face finally lifting, eyes glittering as he pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Let’s get ourselves together, little Sparrow; we’ve got a big day ahead of us.”

Nooks and Crannies

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry that it's been so long. With the holidays and some personal things and a bit of writer's block I was feeling a little stressed and unhappy with the writing I was producing so it took a long time to pull this chapter together even though I've known what it was going to be for almost...oh...six months :D

We near the end of The Shattered Dragon...I predict four more chaps AT THE VERY MOST...and I just want to keep thanking you for sticking with my slow updates and supporting my work. You're awesome.

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

They dressed warmly at Draco's request and walked the quiet grounds of Oktoberfest, Draco in horrified awe at the dangerous thrill rides that muggles willingly subjected themselves to, (*I trust magical engineering far more than muggle handiwork, love*) Hermione telling him the history of the festival itself as they strolled hand in hand down the midway. Just being outside and breathing the crisp Autumn air with her fingers laced with his was nearly birthday gift enough, but it didn't really make sense.

"Is...this my big surprise?" She asked as they made their way to the center of Munich, heading into the busy train station.

"Why yes, of course," he said, rolling his eyes. "I brought you to a German beer fest that isn't even open yet. Isn't it what you always wanted?"

Hermione huffed and rolled her eyes.

"Come on," he said, looping her hand through his elbow. "I want to grab a cheese pretzel and we're going to be late."

They bought breakfast in the bustling food court, Hermione breathing deep the fragrant steam of a strongly steeped tea with a hint of sugar while Draco threw back tiny cups of espresso until he was nearly buzzing out of his seat. The excitement and anticipation in his eyes as the minutes ticked by were making her own heart race, but she knew better than to pester him; he'd tell her when it was time.

A nondescript staircase on one of the platforms in the center of the Hauptbahnhof was roped off as restricted; but with a tap of his wand the rope disappeared and they descended, unseen two floors below where a hub of magical trains waited, hissing out steam, horns wailing, announcing their departure while crowds of wizards bustling through to points throughout Europe. Draco walked the platforms as if he did it every day, tugging her along behind, weaving through the crowds, making his way to a beautiful silver and black steam engine.

“Swots first,” he said, holding out his hand. “I obviously secured a first class compartment, even though it’s only an hour’s journey.”

She ordered another cup of tea and Draco smiled as she cooled it with her wand, practicing her spells like working old muscles. She tied and untied his shoes, even cast a cooling charm and quickly reversed it, feeling the magical energy bubble through her bloodstream like a drug, renewing her energy, her hope, her strength. Outside the train the landscape quickly changed, leaving the populous city and suburbs of Munich out to the green and rolling hills of Bavaria. They approached a narrow tunnel, pitch black and short, dipping deep into the land and when they emerged Hermione gasped.

Ahead of them, rising out of the wooded hills was a white castle with five turrets sprawling over acres of land surrounded by thick groves of pine trees. The sun glinted off the stained glass windows in the various towers as the train slowed, coming into the station with a deafening whistle. Draco squeezed her hand and pointed to the station sign, white with bright gold letters:

Malfoy Academy of Magic

“Draco! What is this?” She asked, smiling, jumping from her seat as soon as the train stopped.

“Oh sorry darling, could you not read that? I always forget you’re just a Gryffindor.”

She pinched him just beneath his ribs and he took her hand as they alighted onto the platform. All around them builders and painters, designers and administrators all gathered in groups, picking up luggage and heading for the portkey cubicles within the station house. Out on the road outside the station carts waited while workers loaded in cages filled with frogs and birds, chimeras and nifflers, a menagerie of animals, magical and muggle.

“So this is my project. Ever since Hogwarts closed there have only been two magical schools that allow muggleborn or halfblood wizards, and no schools at all that allow halfbreeds...Veela, Werewolf, Merfolk. This would be the first. Of course the school itself isn’t open yet,” Draco explained, strolling the long narrow platform. “We’re still preparing for the first year of students, but we’re close. Some of the teachers and support staff are living in the dorms as we put on the final touches. Maybe by next Fall term.”

Hermione watched a group of wizards bustle past with scrolls and bags and stacks of books. Two of them nodded at Malfoy, calling out a cheerful greeting and Draco waved to them happily. He was beaming with a kind of pride that Hermione had never seen on him before and it was beautiful. His silver, ethereal eyes glittered in the sun, his smile wide and genuine, not a hint of sarcasm behind it. It was...clean. Innocent. The exhaustion and pain and self loathing that he usually carried were nowhere to be seen as he stuck his hands in his pockets, his shoulders relaxed while describing the various highlights of the building.

“The muggles see nothing here but an old abandoned ski resort. Obviously that tunnel we went through was the transition point.”

“This is...Draco its amazing,” she said, barely able to take in the immensity, the detail, the gigantic nature of this project that he’d been working on for months.

The portkey in the cubicle (a small bronze dragon figurine on a bronze pedestal) brought them to the front entrance of the school and Hermione’s jaw dropped at the ornate nature of the architecture, the gargoyles perched on the cornices and the tall, lifelike wizards that stood sentinel on either side of the massive mahogany doors, wands outstretched to create an arch. Windows ten feet tall were filled with ornate stained glass portraits of historical wizards and she caught sight of a familiar face on the second floor; a lanky, shaggy haired boy with round glasses and a glowing yellow scar on his forehead. Beneath the portrait the letters HP were carved into the stone - 1980 - 2000.

Draco set his hands on her shoulders and studied the window with her for a few moments of heavy silence.

“Every window is a memorium, a tribute to someone who can inspire young wizards,” he said, “someone who changed the wizarding world for all mankind.”

“It’s beautiful,” she said, wiping tears from her eyes. It was easy to identify the others...Snape, Dumbledore, a handful of American and Parisian wizards that she'd read about in school, even a Malfoy from the 1800s who was a famous healer in London. “But how have you been able to do this? To build all this, commission these works, hire all these people without detection? I thought we weren’t allowed to leave England?”

“*You’re* not allowed to leave England, Sparrow. A pureblood can travel with some restrictions and ridiculous paperwork. A pureblood with a Death Eater history can do whatever he wants...even if he’s a pariah to the rest of the nest of vipers. This mark does still carry a few benefits. At your advice I’ve been in further touch with my mother and she’s helped me to secure travel papers for a crew of people building a new ‘Malfoy Property’.”

They strolled through the entrance hall with its wide winding staircase (*no moving this time... that was just cruel*) to the main courtyard of the building where a grand white fountain bubbled. It looked like the gnarled trunk of an old broken tree with charmed marble birds swirling around it in spiraling loops; robins, larks, finches, wrens and of course, sparrows. All the while water trickled from the broken branches into a reflecting pool below. It was a beautiful piece of magical art.

“I would take you on a tour of the classrooms but they aren't quite finished and it would be rather anticlimactic. We can see the dormitories later, perhaps can help me choose house colors...besides green of course...” Hermione had stopped walking, chewing her bottom lip, deep in thought. “What?”

“How would you get the students here?” She asked. “You can pull strings for yourself but you know that the borders are closed under the Mudblood Restriction Act.”

“That’s where Blaise comes in. His family owns several properties in Belgium, and he’s agreed to let us use three of them as portkey bases. Traveling to family homes or property is allowed and won’t draw too much attention. We just have to bring them in batches. Hopefully we can find a few more families to aid in the network...perhaps start a chain of portkeys to

the border..." His eyes drifted off in thought and she could see the gears working in his mind. No one had ever denied his brilliance or creativity, and his cunning was unparalleled. She knew that he'd never give up. He'd find a way to get the students out. "I mean, there are more details to work out but that's why I brought you here. I want you to be a part of all of it, to help us establish the school. I wanted to show you what I've done...what you helped me do."

"Draco...I didn't..."

"I told myself that I was doing good by playing the smoldering hero. I was taking these abused or wanted girls and hiding them from the world that wanted them dead. Girls with bounties, warrants. Yeah, I was making money, I was getting something in exchange, but at least they weren't in prison, they weren't being beaten or cheated or..."

He looked at her, waiting for some angry retort, a snide remark that he'd already made to himself a thousand times, but she simply stood and waited, listening...believing. She knew he knew the ugly truth.

"I know now that everything I did was just for myself. I did it to piss off my father, to piss off Voldemort, to assure everyone that I really was the worst pureblood wizard in England. I still wanted money, I still wanted status, I still wanted to pull strings and give orders and I still wanted to be Draco Malfoy. And I told myself I was perfectly content, happy to be alone for the rest of my life as long as I had power.

He took her hand in his and smiled, leading her down a darkly paneled hallway lit with flickering golden sconces. The floor was set in black and white stone like a chessboard, the sun muted by the stained glass windows that lined the walls. They walked towards two massive doors set with elaborate windows featuring figures holding a finger up to their lips.

"And then you had to go and rob my father blind," he said. "Hermione, the offer I made you was horrid, selfish. It was simple revenge for a childhood bully, a grudge I'd held for a decade. But I realized so quickly that it was more. I realized it the first night you knelt at my feet. I realized that I'd always hated you because you showed me what I really was. And you weren't afraid to do it, to reflect my bullshit right back at me, laid bare. That night that you tried to bandage my wound, my foot, the first time I kissed you..." he backed her up against the massive doors and stroked two fingers down her cheek. "I knew it was all going to fall apart. Everything I worked for was going to crumble. And I didn't care." He kissed her, gently, softly, his hands on her face. "You told me to find a way to help, not to just sit back and feel helpless." He reached around her to put his hands on the polished brass doorknobs and smiled at her raising an eyebrow, looking every bit the haughty Draco she'd known all her life and she couldn't help but snicker.

"You certainly look proud of yourself, Mr. Malfoy," she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Oh trust me darling, I am."

The doors swung open revealing a huge library with a soaring arched ceiling, charmed just like the Great Hall at Hogwarts; a deep, dark sky with purple and pink galaxies slowly spinning through the twinkling stars. The books were neatly stacked on ten foot high shelves,

ladders and pulleys making them easy to access. Hermione, who had spent a year reading the same thirty or forty books over and over again, nearly leapt into the stacks, running her fingers over the leather spines, rattling the chains that held the more ancient tomes in place.

“Draco this is incredible. Where did you get all these books?” She asked, flipping through a thick tome of Australian Herbology, actually lifting the old, yellowing pages to her nose and breathing in the familiar scent.

“Contributions from family libraries throughout England. I shamed Theo into donating quite a few from his father’s Dark Arts collection. Pansy and Blaise helped as well. A few were even saved from Hogwarts.” He walked through the aisles as he talked, his shoes clicking over the shining parquet floors. “There are still some sections that need filling out; healing, arithmancy. I want to have some more muggle studies, muggle history and the like. I was thinking you could help me with the best choices for those.”

He came to a stop, leaning against one of the long low study tables to watch her poring over the books, shaking her head, mumbling.

“You definitely should have Hedgeknobs’ Perfect Potions. It has a lot of healing and hexing in one compact book. It would be perfect for second or third year students. Oh! And if you need more Herbology...maybe I could...I could talk to Longbottom. He wanted to teach —“

“I already have,” he said, smiling at her. “He’ll be our beginning Herbology professor, and yes, he’s donating books from his and Loony’s family...although I’m not quite sure I want to perpetuate some of her more...fantastical views,” he said, rolling his eyes.

She laughed and moved to stand between his legs, wrapping her arms around his waist.

“This is amazing Draco. I knew you could do wonderful things. This is an incredible birthday gift. Thank you.”

Draco pulled her close and kissed her, running his fingers through her hair, his lips moving to trail kisses along her jawline, up to her temple.

“I made a point of adding a few little secret, darkened nooks and crannies in here, Ms. Granger...if you’d like to check a few library fantasies off your list.”

“And what makes you think I have any library fantasies, Professor Malfoy?” She asked, smiling, fiddling with the cuff of his white shirt.

“You almost lost your knickers just looking at the basic potions text, I assume you have a few salacious thoughts. Besides, I didn’t have dinner planned for another three hours and this concludes this portion of the tour.”

“Oh,” she said, looking up through her eyelashes, reaching up to undo his top two buttons. “Well then, perhaps you should show me a few of those...nooks and crannies.”

“I’d be delighted to Sparrow,” he said standing up, “with pleasure.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not kidding about those Oktoberfest rides. They're unreal.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hf4BuE5sd8>

Headmaster Malfoy

Chapter Summary

A shortish chapter...but an important one!

only two to go...if my calculations are correct :)

Chapter Notes

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

The fifth turret of the castle held a spiral staircase leading to a round room. On the heavy oak door was a golden placard with gorgeous, scrolling lettering reading “Headmaster Malfoy”. Hermione ran her fingers over the etched letters, tracing the M before Draco smiled and pushed the door open. Inside, the stone walls were covered in jewel toned tapestries and oil lamps dangled from the ceiling on iron chains to compensate for the light muted by the emerald and wine colored stained glass windows, leaving the room brightly light, but with a warm, golden glow. There were ten foot bookcases, sculptures on pedestals, living paintings and terrariums filled with magical plants. Miles of shelving held jars of ingredients, boxes of powders, bottles of potions, and a small work table held a bubbling cauldron beside a rack of glass tubes, twisting and dripping a pale green potion into a waiting vial. Away from the makeshift laboratory a wide black desk sat in the center of the room with shining black inkwells and ceramic pots filled with black quills. Hermione stood and stared at the charmed ceiling swirling with stars that became living constellations, sparkling with their ghostly outlines.

“It’s beautiful,” she said. “This place, this room...everything. I can't believe it.”

“And there’s more...” he said, taking her hand.

The twisting staircase lead up to a second floor where Draco’s private quarters would be housed. Contrary to the office below, this room had a low, dark ceiling. Here too there were stained glass windows arcing across the curved walls and a wide, sumptuous bed with an intricately carved curved headboard that fit neatly with the contours of the room. It was like a soft, darkened cocoon.

“I don’t know what the living quarters were like for the professors at Hogwarts, but I am accustomed to a certain level of luxury,” he said with a dramatically raised brow, his voice taking on a perfect haughty tone that sounded almost exactly like Lucius. Still, Hermione couldn’t help but laugh.

Outside the sun was setting and the room was cast in a purplish twilight, the ceiling glowing with stars just like in his office. He’d always loved astronomy, constellations, mythology,

divination based on the stars, and now he'd surrounded himself with the endless darkness of space. She was suddenly struck with a desire to show him all that the muggle world had discovered about the planets, to show him pictures of man on the moon or the colorful blooming nebulae seen through the Hubble telescope. She wanted to travel the world with him, see the tropics, tour Paris, walk the Great Wall. She never wanted to be away from him again.

Draco leant against the footboard of the bed and loosened his tie. When he looked at Hermione again she was smiling mischievously, her hands folded behind her back.

"I've never seen the living quarters for a headmaster either, Mr. Malfoy," she said, opening her eyes wide, her voice a bit higher, a bit more innocent than usual. "Are you sure it's ok for students to be up here?"

He pulled the tie free from his collar and set it down on the bed, his face growing stern in an instant.

"Well, Miss Granger, normally I would say no, it isn't *ok* for students to be up here, but I'm afraid you've received enough verbal warnings that haven't gotten through, and now you need a formal punishment."

"Oh no, Mr. Malfoy..."

He walked past her to the dressing table set against the wall and pulled out the straight backed chair.

"Please have a seat," he said, his eyes hard and cold.

While most women would see that silvery ice and be frightened, the sight of it sent a shiver of want up her spine, a bloom of heat between her legs. She sat down and pulled her knees together primly, hands in her lap. Her heart was already racing at the thought of what lay ahead, and not only because of the obvious.

It was because he was playing. He was having fun. He was comfortable. He was happy, and he was with her.

He stood behind her and pulled the pins from her hair, combing through it with his fingers and smoothing it down her back.

"I've seen how you look at me in class Ms. Granger," he began, "the way you hike up your skirt and uncross your legs. On Monday you weren't even wearing knickers, little girl! Scandalous." He leaned in to put his lips to her ear, licking and nipping at her skin as one hand roamed down to circle her throat. "I could see that pretty pink pussy from across the room, little one. And I'll bet it was deliciously wet for me."

"I...it was. It is," she said, her voice barely a whisper as her heart pounded against her ribs.

He wrapped her hair around his fist and bent her head backwards. When she looked up into his eyes, the corner of his lip curled up and she gasped, squeezing her thighs together.

“Well then, Ms. Granger; we’ll just have to do something about that disgraceful behavior,” he purred, ending his sentence with a wink.

Hermione woke in the dark, looking up at the ceiling of stars now twinkling, glowing and swirling in their orbits. Draco was still asleep, sprawled out wide on the bed, his head on her stomach. She could feel his breathing, slow and even, his body twitching with the occasional dream. It was a beautiful thing to see him truly at rest, sleeping peacefully, and she smiled to herself. Their playtime earlier in the afternoon had been intense and fun, both of them bursting into laughter more than once throughout their roleplaying; but in the end they had come together passionately, exploring each other in a new light, with new knowledge and uncharted tenderness. Now, in the silence she ran her fingers through his hair, smoothing it away from his forehead that was free of wrinkles or tension for the first time in weeks, maybe even months.

“We’re supposed to be in the grand hall eating dinner with the staff,” he muttered from the corner of his mouth, not even opening his eyes. “I’ve told them to prepare a flourless chocolate cake and everything.”

“Good, because I’m actually starving,” Hermione said, reaching for her wand on the bedside table.

She lit the lamps that hung around the room and pulled herself out from under him, smiling at how quickly the little flicks and waves and swishes of simple spells came back to her. Before she could get out of the bed, Draco grabbed her around the waist and pulled her down, pinning her on her back.

“Happy Birthday...again,” he said, laying a trail of kisses down the side of her neck to the little hollows of her collarbones. His hand roamed beneath the sheets to the soft warmth between her legs, a slow, encouraging stroke, but she tried to remain strong.

“Draco...you just said...”

“I know what I said...but we’re already late so we may as well...” he attempted to duck beneath the sheet but she quickly wriggled out of his grip and got out of bed.

“There’s time for that later,” she said, sauntering away, her beautiful ass swaying with every step, her hair a wild, wavy, beautiful mess tumbling down her back.

There was a beautifully carved wardrobe on the other side of the room and Draco had filled it with clothes not only for himself, but for Hermione. She was pleased to see that instead of “Sparrow’s” collection of satin gowns and sheer robes, he’d provided her with jeans and wool trousers, button down shirts and cashmere jumpers. She smiled at the sight of her clothes mingled with his, her knickers neatly folded beside his boxer briefs in the top drawer, her birthday dress hanging beside his black suit. After selecting a few pieces she spoke to him over her shoulder.

“This is nice,” she said. “Maybe...we could do this...at home? Sharing...space.”

He was quiet and she worried that she'd misunderstood all that he'd done for her, what it all meant.

"Draco?"

She turned to see him sitting on the bed, still tangled in the sheets, looking down at his hands. Even with his head bowed she could tell he was frowning and her heart sunk. She'd overstepped, overestimated.

"Forget I said it," she said quietly, pulling the black jumper over her head. "I was just thinking—"

"I don't want you to think of that place as your home," he said. "It's not a *home*, not for anyone."

He pulled himself out of the bed and shouldered past her, pulling a pair of trousers and a t-shirt from the wardrobe and stalking past her to dress.

"I don't want it anymore," he said. "It was a cover...a balm. I'm miserable in England, seeing the way that it is. And worse, I don't know that it will ever change, ever get better. So I used sex and drugs and fire whiskey and money to convince myself I was happy. I used you to convince myself I was happy. Anything to keep from seeing my own misery."

"But you were happy Draco," Hermione said, pulling him into her arms and tenderly straightening his hair. "When you sat with us by the pond as we swam, when you played games on Christmas Eve, when you were alone with me. It isn't the Dragon that feels like home. It isn't the building or the gardens. I realized it months ago, when I was keeping myself away from you. I realized it when I missed you when I couldn't fall asleep, when I just wanted to see and touch and talk to you, to tell you about something I read or saw or heard. I don't care about the mansion or the money. I don't care about the power you have or the jewels you can buy. It feels like home there because of you. And being here makes me realized that anywhere I go feels like home if I have you beside me. I don't care if we're sleeping in a million galleon mansion or under a willow tree as long as I wake up beside you." For a moment she paused, unsure of whether she should say exactly what she felt. But she'd waited long enough, and she was sure he knew the truth anyway. "I love you Draco."

His eyes widened. She nearly laughed at how much he looked like a child; the innocent shock on his features.

"I know we said that it would never come to this, but I love you," she repeated. "I have for a while."

He pulled her close and pressed his lips to hers, holding her face in both of his warm, strong hands, his kiss strong and insistent. She broke away to breathe and he held on, smiling.

"I love you too," he whispered, and she could see that there were tears in his eyes. "I told you that I couldn't. I told you I wasn't capable of it, but I know now that's a lie. All of this, all that I've built and created is because of you. It's *for* you, Hermione," he said, pressing his forehead to hers. "Because I may not be very good at it, but I love you."

He exhaled as if releasing a weight he'd carried his whole life and Hermione stroked his face.

“You did it for you Draco, and that’s ok. It’s OK to love yourself. You’re worthy of it.” She kissed him again as he wrapped his arms around her, clinging to her as she spoke. “It makes me love you more. We’ll do this. We’ll make it work. We’ll create strong, smart, confident wizards, an army of them. And when we’re done...we’ll go back and finish what Harry started. We’ll find a way. Harry always told me that the secret to defeating him was to use the one thing he didn’t have.” She kissed him, gently, but with a depth and intimacy she hadn’t felt before. “Love.”

Chapter End Notes

If you're upset that I didn't expand on the smut regarding Headmaster and Student, fear not. As it happens this will be the next topic in the Mr. M and Kitten series so I didn't want to do the same sort of story twice. :)

Sky Full of Stars

Chapter Summary

I decided to break this up into two chapters, so two after this and we're done kids! :) Hopefully I can get a bunch of writing done while on social distancing lock down, but I make no promises. Thank you so much for all of your comments and support.

Chapter Notes

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

Draco felt like a carefree child as they made their way down to the kitchens, giggling and padding in sock feet through the dark, half built hallways. They turned the corner at the base of the spiral staircase and Hermione came face to face with a statue of a Thestral that Draco had commissioned. She screamed in surprise and stumbled backwards into his arms, the two of them nearly collapsing in laughter, holding each other until they caught their breath.

When he was a child he'd gotten a terrible case of the Shatter Lung Flu. It had kept him in bed for nearly two weeks, unable to do anything but sleep. Sleep and cough and stare at the ceiling, wondering what sort of universe would put a nine year old through such agony. Every chest wracking fit felt like his body were being run through with swords. On the rare occasions when he could snatch a moment or two of rest in the darkest hours of night he was inevitably woken, soaked in sweat, calling for his mother even though he knew it was weak, babyish, something his father certainly wouldn't approve of. Alone, quarantined in his room he was forced to open Christmas gifts while confined to his bed, unable to join the annual Boxing Day party down on the first floor. Not only was he in pain, not only was he weak: he was lonely. He never imagined he could be so lonely, was barely old enough to understand the meaning of the word. Then, on the eleventh day the healer came to visit, running her wand over his tiny, frail body.

"You'll be feeling better soon, perhaps even by tomorrow," she'd said, nodding with confidence and giving him a chocolate frog for his exemplary behavior.

He'd woken up the next morning, actually sore from having slept so deeply for so long, his body not even moving as it repaired itself. As long as he lived Draco would never forget the euphoria of that relief, the weight that was lifted from his soul, the joy that filled him at knowing he was getting better, knowing that soon he would be whole again. The worst was over. Everything would be better.

And now, as Hermione held tight to his hand, whispering excitedly about ideas for extracurricular clubs and second year study groups, he could feel it again. He could feel that he was no longer a Death Eater, a shamed pureblood. He was no longer a pimp, a bully, the physical manifestation of disgraced house Slytherin. He was no longer the enemy. Now, in

this hallway, he was loved, and even more shocking, he completely, whole heartedly loved her back, and it was the greatest feeling in the world.

“Have you given any thought to what you might like to teach?” He asked as they both went through the sparsely stocked cupboards and iceboxes looking for leftovers from the meal they’d missed.

“Oh,” she said, picking a roasted potato out of a bowl. “I hadn’t. I mean, I...Draco I’m more of a research...I just...am I even qualified to teach? I’ve never...”

She looked up and he was staring at her in utter disbelief, one eyebrow raised nearly to his hairline.

“Qualified to teach? Hermione...is this a joke? Have you forgotten your unchallenged title?”

“What?” Her cheeks were bright red with embarrassed humility. “What title?”

“The brightest witch of your fucking age, Granger. I don’t care what official scrolls or tests or qualifications you have. If there’s anyone in the world more suited to teach nervous, homesick, first year wizards about the history of magic I’m not sure who they would be.”

“I...I just didn’t think you would...”

“What?” He asked, crossing his arms over his chest, pinning her with his gaze as he leant against the counter. “Let you live in the place I built for you? The school you inspired? Did you think I would give you one last slap on the ass and leave you behind, witch?”

It sounded ridiculous when he put it that way.

“Of course not I just...” she shrugged lifted her wand, summoning a small tub of chocolate ice cream, the air from the icebox soothing the heat on her face.

He shook his head and laughed, reaching past her to snag a basket of cranberry scones.

“Come on, let’s sneak this up to our room.” He leaned in behind her and nipped at her earlobe. “I want to get back to bed.”

“What are these?” She asked, running her fingers over the thin white scars on the insides of his elbows. He’d explained nearly everything else, but these were still a mystery.

They were laying together in bed; temporarily sated, warm and naked, Draco with his eyes closed, Hermione carding his fingers through her hair. He liked the way she explored his body with such open curiosity, her fingers running over his tattoos and scars as if they were priceless artifacts, works of art. She furrowed her brow as she scrutinized the runes on his chest, fascinated by their depth of detail and the supposed power they held...always researching. The stylized, raised V on his hip bone made her snarl in anger, “*branding you like cattle*,” she’d said after he explained that all of his highest ranking followers were required to submit to it, proving their eternal allegiance.

“He was paranoid after Harry died,” Draco said, staring up at the ceiling. “He only has one horcrux left and if it’s destroyed then he would just be...a regular old human, weak, broken. He became accusatory and secretive, doubting everyone around him. His circle grew smaller. We, the Death Eaters were subjected to blood rituals, testing our purity again and again...and he used...some...of us to test immortality potions he’d discovered in his research, blood potions, dark spells. As one of the youngest I was...I...”

“He *bled* you?” She asked, propping herself up on her elbow, her eyes fiery with rage. “Like a common vampire?”

Were she not so serious in her anger he would have laughed at how indignant she looked, ready to jump out of bed and fight a war stark naked.

“Not just me,” he said, “but definitely the younger, stronger Death Eaters. *The Next Generation of Purity* he called us. He wants to find a way to strengthen his body so he can create another horcrux, something he can bury or lock away somewhere to insure it’s never found. But he had it in his head that he would have to kill a pureblood to do it, to make it stronger.” He stretched and sighed, working his jaw. “It was another reason I left. I didn’t want to be sacrificed for the “good of wizard England” or whatever the fuck notion was in his head that day.”

“And knowing all that, your father still...he wanted you to stay? *He* wanted to stay?”

Draco snorted, but followed it with a childlike shrug, not meeting her eye. Hermione could see that he wasn’t sure of his answer, that it was something he wondered about himself, something he hadn’t dared to ask his own father.

“He’d made his decision decades ago,” Draco said, yawning and rubbing his face. “It was too late for him to change course. If he admitted that what Voldemort did was wrong then, it would have made him look foolish, negating the previous twenty years of his life. An irreparable damage to his pride.”

“You’re his son.”

“Was,” Draco corrected, offering a sad smile. “When he discovered the school he told me that I was no Malfoy, very dramatic. Mother threw him out for a few days. I think he’s more angry about the school than he is about the brothel.”

Hermione lay beside him quietly for a few moments, chewing on her lip. The heartbreak in Draco’s eyes, in his words, was devastating. He was alone, drifting through the world with no roots, just like her. The only difference between them now was money and for the first time it just didn’t seem that important.

“When was that?” She asked suddenly. “When he found out about the school?”

“Not long after we released Trevor back in to the wild. Blaise told Theo, Theo can’t keep his blessed mouth shut and Trevor found out. Of course he reported my whereabouts back to Lucius. What does it matter?”

“So he disowned you,” Hermione said. “But he didn’t tell Voldemort about the school.”

“No,” Draco said, “I suppose not. Although Voldemort knows he has no power here. The German wizard society saw what fascism did once, they wouldn’t let him in again.”

“Still, Lucius kept your secret,” Hermione said, kissing the white scars on the inside of his arm before snuggling in, her head on his chest. “That’s something.”

After he fell asleep Hermione got out of bed and curled up on the leather couch near the window, looking out at the clear Autumn sky now dotted with stars. She thought back to a short year ago, when she was sitting in a cold, dirty cell staring up at that same sky through a tiny window near the ceiling, most of the stars obscured by bars and clouds, light pollution from the city.

It was an odd conclusion to come to, but she realized that if Draco had come to her back then, begging and pleading to give him a second chance, trying to convince her that he’d changed, was a bigger person, she wouldn’t have believed him. She’d seen enough of his cunning trickery to know how good he was at changing masks, lying through his teeth. It was the fact that he’d come to her, still sneering, still poking fun and flinging insults...it had convinced her he was genuine in his offer to her, no matter how distasteful, immoral and probably illegal. He wanted to turn her out just to see her brought low, to see her suffer...but he also openly hated the world that had thrown her there and wanted to undermine it. He used her as revenge against his own father, but he also didn’t want to see her rotting in a cell, because he’d seen enough of that already. But she wouldn’t have believed him if he’d said all that. She’d needed to see the change in him for herself. And it hadn’t been just his treatment of her. It was the way he had comforted Finch and Wren, or laughed with Lark and Dove, hugging them, kissing them on the cheek. It was the way he gave them all bird names, recognizing the delicate, vulnerable nature of half and muggleborn witches in the world he’d helped create. It was the way he worked so hard to resist her when he wanted her so badly, even when she begged and taunted and nearly threw herself at his feet. And when she’d been lying there, on the edge of death, Draco Malfoy had been at her side, willing to kill to save her and there was not one other person in the world she would rather have come to her rescue.

Wrapping a throw around her shoulders, she looked over her shoulder at him sleeping... *sleeping* soundly. He’d allowed her to sleep beside him again with some hesitation and she’d held him to her breast as he dozed off, running her fingers through his hair, humming some song she’d heard on a music box back at the mansion. He’d had another nightmare of course, but she was there for him this time, waking him when it got bad, distracting him with talk of other things, forcing him into the present, then kissing his forehead and holding him until he went back to sleep. She smiled at the way he’d flopped onto his stomach, a pillow clutched tight in his arms, one knee jack knifed up to his chest, the white sheets a tangled mess around his bare, beautiful body.

His earnest belief that the school would work, that they’d be able to successfully transport wizards out of England was so blissfully naive. Hermione had no doubt that his compassion, his desire to help those he’d hurt before was genuine, but as pureblood and a death eater, even

if he was disgraced, he simply had no idea what it was like for a “mudblood” in Voldemort’s society. He hadn’t experienced the constant surveillance or been stopped for questioning on the street. Even before her arrest she’d barely been able to buy a butterbeer without someone threatening to throw her in jail. It was easy to imagine flying under the radar when the radar wasn’t looking for you, but the “unclean” were watched like hawks, just waiting for the opportunity to take them down, to hold them up as an example of a true degenerate, a disgrace to wizardkind. It was just the way life was now.

But she would never attempt to dissuade him, never dim the eager optimism in his plan. Because she wanted it to work as badly as he did.

She knew they would find a way.

Chapter End Notes

stories of opening Christmas gifts in quarantine may or may not be biographical :P

Ash

Chapter Notes

Back when I said “only one chapter to go” I was being silly about how long that one chapter could get. 😂 So I’ve broken it down into two. NOW there’s only one chapter left. I promise 😊

They talked the whole way on the train back to Munich, Hermione scribbling notes in a little journal that he’d given her a few months earlier, leather bound with beautiful thick paper pages edged in gold. He’d known that as soon as he showed her the school she’d run with it, making plans and sharing ideas, offering opinions and criticisms and comparisons of how things were run at Hogwarts, *not that it wasn’t perfect*, she uttered after every observation. Seeing her work, watching her figure and research and question was like flicking a switch, lighting her from within. Over the past year Draco had learned to love the dark and damaged Hermione, the shadow of her former self who, while still smart and funny and beautiful and sexy was a dull pebble compared to who she was when he’d given her the wand and set her magic free.

The portkey home to the mansion wasn’t ready until the next morning and so they walked through Oktoberfest on its opening day and bought sausages and sugar roasted almonds. They watched the carts of beer barrels pulled through the crowd with giant black horses decorated with silver tack and blue flowers and Hermione stopped to pet their noses and scratch their manes.

The list of things he wanted to give her grew with every moment. Of course he wanted to give her freedom and choice and the respect of her people. He wanted to give her jewels and gowns, rare books and art. Now he wanted to take her riding, to see her flying free on the back of a stallion. He wanted to show her every country she’d ever read about, let her touch the statues she’d studied, sleep in the architecture she marveled at. Of course she would tell him she didn’t need any of it, didn’t want any of it, but he knew he’d happily work to please her for the rest of his life.

As the sun went down Draco was nearly dumbfounded at the bright, flickering neon of the midway and the giant terrifying rides with loud, pulsing music accompanying the screams of the riders. Hermione cajoled him into riding one, promising never to reveal to the rest of the world how he wailed like a child the entire time, fingers digging into her arms as the car spun and flipped, tossing them into the air. He derided electricity as a scourge against humanity, they made toasts under the stars and sang songs from their school days. They kissed each other in the open air, Hermione smiling against his lips as crowds of unknowing muggles swirled around them.

And on their final night in Germany they tumbled into bed together and made up for lost time; breathless, speechless, bodies sliding together with sweat and heat. Even while holding her down, his hands strong around her wrists, Draco worshipped her body, soothing her scars and painful memories with wet kisses and whispers of love. They twisted and rolled and Hermione went on all fours, Draco bent over her, his lips on her neck as he slid inside her from behind, his whole body pressed to hers.

"I love you," he said, thrusting at a steady pace, his hand wrapped around her waist as he teased her clit with his fingers, stroking her until she trembled. "I'm sorry," he whispered, nuzzling into the hair at the nape of her neck, holding her, covering her body as if he could shield her from the world. "I promise you'll never hurt again, Sparrow. I promise."

"Draco..." was all she could say, his name like a stuttered, breathy prayer as he kissed the bone at the top of her spine, pulling her back harder, deeper onto his cock. "Draco..."

"Never...hurt...again," he groaned, grinding against her, their bodies made one as if it was exactly what the universe had intended. "I love you."

Hermione cried out, her body clenching around him as her orgasm hit, a rippling white wave of pleasure that coaxed out Draco's own release, the two of them coming together for the first of countless times before falling asleep just as the sun was rising, Hermione stretched out across his chest with a contented sigh. She was spent, sore, but it was a comforting sort of exhaustion, the sort of let down that comes after finally letting go. It was a weight lifted from her mind and her shoulders, relief in the knowledge that she'd never be separated from him again, that she wouldn't be fighting for her life on her own, that she wouldn't have to run.

The Dragon seemed different when they got back, the porkey dropping them at the gate house at the front of the property. Draco took her hand in his and they walked up the gravel drive to the imposing front doors, the brass plaque that she'd examined with scorn on the day of her arrival. It occurred to her just then that she hadn't seen it since. As they stood on the front stairs she ran her fingers over the engraved letters of his name.

"Oh!" She said, reaching into the sleeve of her jumper and drawing out her wand. "I almost forgot." She'd dreaded the moment she'd have to relinquish it again, but understood why.

"Keep it," he said, standing at the front door and staring at the elegant vine wood in her hand. "I'm giving them all back today. You were right. We can do this. I kept finding ways to delay, to hold off on telling the girls, to hold off on exposing all of this to...everyone...my father, the Veritas, the Council...because as soon as we make a move we have to keep moving. As soon as we make a move we have to start looking over our shoulders for the rest of our lives. As soon as we do this...we have to start fighting."

Hermione smiled and lifted her wand to unlock the front door.

"It's nothing that I haven't been doing for years, Malfoy. Don't worry, I'll show you the ropes," she said with a wink. "...so to speak."

TWO MONTHS LATER

The loss of the Dragon was front page news for six days. The mysterious fire had started in Malfoy's office and ripped through the second floor, gutting the bedrooms of all of the girls. All of the records, financial or otherwise were reduced to ash and investigators found a pile of broken and emptied memory vials in the locked cabinet behind the charred desk. The fire was so devastating and the building so destroyed that they couldn't be sure if there were casualties. Clothes and shoes and personal items were found, but no bodies...a mystery that baffled ministry workers, as there had been no notification of mudbloods leaving the area. The Dragon had no floors and there were no portkeys found. It was as if everyone involved in the brothel had simply...

disappeared.

But Draco had enemies all over wizard England and the list of suspects, a comprehensive list of people who wanted to see the youngest Malfoy suffer for his sins, would take months, if not years to investigate. The list of pureblood patrons of the Dragon, men who had indulged their taboo fantasies and revealed their secrets was equally long and seeing the mansion burnt came as something of a relief to them. The wizard population in England was in a shambles in every aspect, including pressing issues of pureblood infertility, lack of work, and general political discord as more and more people realized that they'd put their loyalty and trust behind a man who had no desire to serve them. Under this cloud of unrest the people soon grew bored of hearing about Malfoy's mystery. It was just a handful of mudblood whores sacrificed to the flames after all, no real loss. First Generation Inspectors and Veritas reporters were uninspired to pursue any leads, particularly given the lack of gory details, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy mourned their son as if he were dead (although they refused to hold a funeral ceremony) and before long The Shattered Dragon's existence in England at all had been forgotten.

EIGHT MONTHS LATER

The Academy bustled with energy as the finishing touches were put on the dormitories, Sarah and Katie overseeing deliveries of food to the kitchens and Claire helping Professor Longbottom with planting in the herbology gardens and greenhouse. Hermione sat in her History of Magic classroom, standing proudly behind her desk, imagining what it would be like to have rows and rows of expectant children depending on her to fill their minds, to guide them; a daunting thought to be sure. She slid down into her chair and picked up her quill...at a loss of how to begin.

Draco had warned her not to put too much pressure on herself, not to carry the burden of every muggleborn wizard's future on her shoulders; but it was hard for her to shake off the feelings she'd had her first few months at Hogwarts, even with friends like Harry and eventually Ron it had been difficult and now they were going to ask children to leave their

families in another country for nearly a year at a time and she didn't want to be responsible for their misery.

As the staff worked together to make plans for student life outside of the classrooms, she'd told Draco the importance of emotional support, particularly for children who may be war orphans, whose parents may have been torn away from them, who may have suffered at the hands of purebloods since birth. She wanted older wizards to mentor the younger, she wanted no one left out, no one bullied, no one hurt.

"You can't prevent people from being hurt, love," he'd told her as they sat in the Great Hall brainstorming about house colors. "I know... Believe me I know it was hard for you, and for the other muggleborn wizards at Hogwarts. I know that you don't want anyone to feel that way, but we could work every day for the rest of our lives to prevent it and kids are still going to be kids. There will always be bullies, and cliques and cruel nicknames and... boys... growing a girl's teeth too long because he has a crush on her."

Of course they couldn't prevent hurt. Just like they couldn't prevent homesickness or heartbreak or bigotry. But they were being given one chance to create a perfect school, a new shining beacon for freedom in wizardry, a place where halfblood, muggleborn, even pureblood wizard children could learn what the world was like BEFORE Voldemort took over, back when there was hope, when there was fun and when it felt good to have magic flowing through your blood.

She'd laughed and shrugged, running her fingers over a rich, pumpkin orange fabric that would represent the Historians Dorm. There would still be houses, but they wouldn't be chosen based on personality traits or flaws or genealogy. They would be broken into interests and focus of study; Healers, Historians, Artists and Potioners. There would still be competitions and points and Draco insisted there would be quidditch. But there would also be football, dueling, archery and intramural fencing tournaments. She wanted them all to love being at school. They deserved a bit of levity after a lifetime of being hated.

"Excuse me Professor, do you have time for a hopeless potioner who can't remember the exact year of the Great Mandrake Plague?" Draco said, slipping in to one of the desks.

"1834," Hermione said, looking up at him and shaking her head in disappointment. "I should make you write a thousand words on the Plague's effect on the development of healing potions in the early nineteenth century... considering potions are your specialty!"

Draco feigned falling asleep as she spoke, throwing his head back with a loud and dramatic snore. Even now, at nearly thirty years old he looked like a bored teenager in his tight dark jeans and black jumper that clung deliciously to his chest. While he'd told her that there would be occasions for formal wizard robes at the Academy, he'd forgone requiring expensive uniforms or house insignia.

"Some of these kids will have nothing," he'd told her as he prepared a series of secret owls to send out to various underground sources in London. "They'll be coming here from a safe

house somewhere, or having been in hiding in the forest. I can't stand by and make them traipse through Diagon Alley looking for cauldrons and owls."

Even the instructors and staff could dress casually, although they'd jointly vetoed some of Claire's choices on the basis of "possible hormonal distraction".

Now he sat behind the front row desk and clasped his hands behind his head, looking confident and relaxed and doing an excellent job of distracting Hermione's hormones just with his smile. His hair was trimmed up short again, but he would sometimes go a few days without shaving and she found she liked the more "rugged" Draco, particularly when they were off the clock.

"Don't let me interrupt your work, darling," he said, smiling up at the professor in her sensible black skirt and pale green silk shirt, holding her wand between her teeth as she flipped through a heavy book. Her hair was pinned up in a wild knot on top of her head with three pencils stuck through the back and she was barefoot, her shoes kicked off into the corner. She was gorgeous. "Go on then, let's hear what you've got," he said. "I should tell you I already have third year potions lessons ready for the first three weeks...not that it's a competition, Sparrow."

She put her book down and flopped into her chair, letting her wand rattle across the top of the desk.

"It's going to be hard to tell them what happened," she said. "Telling them why their aunts and uncles, grandparents...maybe brothers and sisters are dead."

Draco nodded slowly, rubbing his left forearm through the fabric of his jumper. He'd briefly considered changing his name, dying his hair, using glamours to be someone else when he opened the school, but hiding for the rest of his life seemed exhausting. The children he was trying to save deserved to hear the truth of who he was, who Hermione was, how she was thrown out on the streets for doing the right thing, how he'd grown up under a banner of blood purity and how it had nearly destroyed him.

"I can't think of a better person to tell them about Harry," he said. "Or Albus, or any of the heroes and villains of Hogwarts. This is going to be a school of honesty. Fairness, truth and honesty, and I want them to know everything, even the ugly bits. It's why we're still teaching Dark Arts. It's why I have the vanishing cabinet on display, it's why the windows hold the names of the dead."

Hermione chewed on her bottom lip and moved out from behind her desk to sit beside him in the classroom. They both faced front and Draco shifted his chair a few inches closer to hers, his fingers creeping over to brush over her exposed knee.

"Draco Malfoy!" She gasped. "We're not doing schoolboy fantasies today."

"You're no fun," he whispered, brushing his lips over her temple. "All work and no play..."

There was a swishing and beating of wings behind them and a huge barn owl swooped through the classroom door with a heavy scroll, dropping it in front of Draco before perching at the edge of the desk.

“Thank you,” he said, “Hermione do you have any snacks for the gentleman?”

While Hermione tended to the owl he opened the scroll. Blaise and Felicia had secured fifteen more students from Leeds and had successfully brought them to a safehouse in Exeter. The first year’s attendance at the Academy was already up to over a hundred students. Draco was simply unable to turn anyone away, and foolishly promised everyone they’d be safe without having any way to guarantee it. Non purebloods weren’t allowed to use floos or to apparate without a pureblood chaperone for each, and they hadn’t secured a portkey safe enough for a group of more than five. He was still pondering the problem when Hermione came back, sitting beside him to read the scroll over his shoulder.

“We need to get them here in the next week or so,” Draco said, picking at his cuticles. “Once they’re out of England they’re safe, magical refugees. It’s a matter of one portkey that can bring a large group. A secure place for them to land. Bringing them one by one, or even a handful at a time would take forever and risks trouble with every trip.”

“Something of that size would be expensive and certainly traced,” Hermione added, taking the scroll and reviewing it on her own. “Why not a boat, just travel by muggle transport?”

“There are Death Eaters patrolling the channel. Not always, but it’s too risky. A family was caught trying to escape a few months ago and they’re still in prison.”

The thought of it reminded Hermione of the family that had been in the cell across from her in the jail before Draco had pulled her out. She remembered the look on the older child’s face, fear and confusion...absolute panic, something a child of six or seven should never know.

“I can create a portkey, but as soon as I activate it, it’s entered into a book in the Ministry. I’m not even supposed to exist in England anymore,” Draco said.

“What about Blaise? Or Pansy?”

“No, they’ve already done enough. I don’t want to risk getting them on a list they’ll never get off of.”

They’d already taken tens of thousands of galleons from Blaise and even guilted Theo into funding a great deal of the school’s construction. But it wasn’t money they needed to get the children to Germany...it was secrecy. Floos and portkeys were all registered and published monthly with the owner’s name. A few people at a time, staggered throughout the year with a suitable chaperone would easily go unnoticed, but if they were going to establish a permanent school and try and hide it from Voldemort, they would need to have dozens of children, staff, professors going through, a great deal of them being restricted from using portkeys at all.

“What we need is for the portkey to disappear,” Hermione said, staring off through the stained glass window with Remus Lupin’s likeness. “Not literally of course, but from the record. It needs to be a secret.”

“We need a secret keeper,” Draco said, “with an unbreakable vow.”

A Debt Come Due

Chapter Summary

I'm so sorry that it took so long to finish this story. Part of me didn't WANT to finish because I love these people so much ;) But I appreciate everyone's support and their comments and kudos that kept me going to finally get it done. love you love you love you.

For a company wielding so much power over the wizarding community, Archlight Printing was unassumingly situated in a narrow, three story building hidden on a colorful street of row houses in Chelsea. While a large department within the Ministry printed and sent out The Veritas every day, some of the smaller, monthly publications, legal documents and decrees more directly related to the activities of the Pureblood Council were created offsite where the Archives were held. In particular, publications like the Monthly Portkey Register.

Theo told Draco that Trevor had meetings there on Tuesdays and the rest of the staff usually steered clear hoping to avoid his inevitable temper tantrums when he didn't get his way. There were other rumors too. Rumors that Trevor had withdrawn from most of public life, that he'd developed a drinking problem and moved out of Archlight Manor to hide it. The society pages of The Veritas and Witch Weekly said he didn't look well...hadn't for months; appearing pale and gaunt with dull, unkempt hair. He was rarely seen in the company of women unless they were paid for and most pure blood whores refused his galleons because he was known throughout London to be violent, to call them all mudblood princesses, punishing them physically for some misdeed only he knew.

It was Hermione's first trip into London since she'd been thrown in jail nearly two years earlier and the city seemed threatening and gigantic, the looming buildings and shadowy alleys giving off a sense of foreboding as she walked behind Draco through the narrow streets. They'd apparated to Diagon and took the Underground to Chelsea, Draco holding tight to her hand as they crammed into the tube with the usual London commuters. None of them could know who she was or what she was doing there but still it felt as if they were staring and so she was grateful for his protection. As an extra precaution she'd chosen a simple glamour to shorten, straighten and lighten her hair and wore a simple grey skirt and jacket. Draco was in his best black suit, looking every bit the millionaire playboy he'd been only a year earlier, the two of them easily blending in with the muggles. She didn't realize she was shaking until they entered the building on Cadogan Street and Draco approached the pert looking receptionist. He squeezed Hermione's hand before letting go and whispered into her ear,

"It's ok, love, before you know it we'll be on our way home and all of this will be behind us."

The girl behind the desk couldn't have been a day over twenty and her eyes lit up at the sight of Draco's suave approach. He gave her his cockiest, smarmiest smile, dragging a hand through his hair as if modeling for a catalog and Hermione had to cover her mouth to keep from laughing out loud at the preening display. Another part, a quiet and feral part of her that she wasn't very proud of wanted to tear the girl's eyes out for even looking at him how she did, but she swallowed that jealousy down and stood behind her Dragon waiting patiently for their moment to proceed.

In truth, Draco hadn't wanted her to come at all. He couldn't fathom that she'd ever want to see Archlight again in her life, and he didn't want to send her off into a spiral of shame and fear at the sight of him, the smell, the sound of his voice.

"I'm going," she'd told him, crossing her arms over her chest. "I've faced every person that ever hurt me, looked them right in the eye, and I won't let him be any different. This is the end of our story with Trevor Archlight and I want to be there for it. Besides, you need me to finish the task. I trust that you'll protect me if necessary."

His eyes had gone dark and serious in that moment and he held her chin in his hand, locking on to her gaze.

"You'll never be within a mile of this man after today if I have anything to do with it. He will never speak to you, never touch you, never hurt you again, I promise."

And Hermione believed it.

The girl behind the desk flashed a devastating smile, leaning a bit forward in her chair to show off the severely low cut of her shirt. She trapped her bottom lip between her teeth and opened her big blue eyes wide and Hermione nearly snorted at the attempt but kept her composure, straightening the cuffs on her blazer as the performance progressed.

"Hello sir, my name is Annabelle Goldraker, how can I help you?"

"Hello darling," Draco purred. "What beautiful eyes you have. We're here to see Trevor."

"Of course," she said, her voice husky and low. "And who can I say is calling?"

"Tell him it's his debt coming due," Draco said without losing his grin. "He'll understand."

Hermione stood with him outside the door of Trevor's office, her wand tight in her hand as they waited for it to swing open at Archlight's command.

"You're safe. We're safe," Draco whispered, almost like a mantra as he squeezed her hand. "This won't take long."

The office was dark with curtains drawn over the two windows so that Archlight appeared almost like a shadow sitting behind his desk. Although it was summer he had a fire burning, casting half of his body in an orange gold glow. She remembered Draco telling her that a long term effect of the Sectumsempra was sensitivity to cold, particularly after such a blood loss. He was much thinner than she remembered, sitting primly with his hands folded on the desk. If he was surprised at their appearance he didn't show it, but the frown on his face gave them the welcome they expected.

"And here I thought you two burned to death," he said, not moving from his spot. "But I guess I've never been that lucky."

His eyes flicked up to meet Hermione's and for a moment she saw that glittering malevolence that had stared right into her soul so many months ago.

"And look at the mudblood, dressed up like a real witch and holding a wand," he spat, finally standing up. "How adorable."

Draco had warned her before they walked in that he would try to bait them into violence. If she gave in to her urge to hex him he would kill her without a second thought and not suffer a moment's punishment for it. Everything they worked for would be lost in one minute of revenge. So she followed Malfoy's cue and kept her face blank, but met Trevor's eye, showing him that she wasn't afraid.

"I assume you need something Malfoy, so let's get on with it so I can forget I ever knew you," he said, making his way to the wet bar on the other side of the room.

When he came into the light it was clear that the hex had done more damage than she thought. He was much more pale than she remembered, his skin sallow with shadows beneath his eyes. There was a slight limp when he walked, his left foot dragging behind him and she had to fight her natural instinct towards compassion. He didn't deserve it.

"We need you to unregister a portkey," Draco said, not moving from where he stood but following every movement Trevor made with the tip of his wand. "I won't tell you where it will be placed or what it will be used for but you will also make an unbreakable vow..."

"Like hell I will..."

"You owe him a life debt, Archlight," Hermione said stepping forward with the vial in her hand filled with the telltale silvery liquid. It was the memory of the night that Trevor raped her. Every detail of his brutality and his attack on Draco. "You may not go to prison for raping a Mudblood, but if this were to get to the Veritas it would ruin you. A fine upstanding pureblood specimen in a mudblood whorehouse with the Malfoy pariah, beating a woman half his size. You've fallen pretty far, but this would only make it worse. I, for one, would love to see it. But this means more." She was no longer afraid of him. Of anything. Tucking the vial safely into the pocket of her blazer she replaced it with her more powerful weapon. The wand felt good in her hand and she was confident she could block anything he threw at her. "I'm here to witness the vow."

While she spoke Draco pulled the black raven feather quill from his pocket and set it on the desk. They'd already enchanted it with enough power to transport up to ten students every fifteen minutes. With one final activation spell it would appear in the registration log and with one wave of his wand, Trevor could vanish that record as if it never existed.

"You should have let me die," Archlight muttered, shaking his head as he stared down at the feather.

"That remains to be seen," Draco said. "You can still do something right with your miserable life."

"Miserable? Miserable?" Trevor forced a laugh as he downed the firewhiskey he'd poured. "I'm a millionaire, a pureblood wizard in one of the most exclusive wizard societies in the world you fatherless fuck. I have the ear of Lord Voldemort whenever I desire, the power to decide people's fates, whether they rot in prison or sit on the council, whether they live or die. I have more influence and repute than you and your fucked up little family could ever dream of having."

Draco snorted with laughter and rolled his eyes. It was as if he were seeing a past version of himself, the shattered version with missing pieces and a rotten soul. From the corner of his eye he saw Hermione standing tall, wand outstretched, her eyes fiery with determination and courage, every bit the lion she had been in school. And she loved him. She loved him not because of his power or his money or his influence in society. She loved him for who he'd become in spite of it. She loved him for everything that he'd given, everything that he'd healed and soothed and put right. It was a love that Archlight would never know. And in realizing it he smiled.

"And you're still alone," Draco said. "More alone every day. It's just like you said, Trevor. After tonight, we'll disappear. And like you said, you'll be able to forget you ever knew who we were. You'll still have your money and you'll still have your influence and you can still bully and belittle women as much as you'd like, but the greatest revenge I'll ever have is knowing that even without all of those things, even living in exile, I'll always be happier than you are. Always."

For a moment Hermione saw the light go out of Trevor's eyes, the smug, pureblood sneer leave his face as the words hit him like a punch to the gut. He knew Draco was right and there was nothing he could do about it.

"Activate the portkey," Draco said, pointing his wand. "Now."

Trevor pulled his wand from the sleeve of his jacket and performed the quick spell, causing the portkey to rise a few inches off the desk before glowing for a brief moment and falling again. Then he stepped behind the desk and pulled a black leather-bound book from the shelf and opened it to the back where the words Large Volume Quill Portkey - Archlight appeared in black letters. With a reversed infinity wave of his wand and a whispered spell the words disappeared. He turned on the both of them with his wand outstretched.

"Done. And if I ever see you in London again Malfoy, I'll gut you and your little mudwhore in the street. I promise you that."

“The vow,” Hermione said, unfazed by his threat.

Trevor walked in front of her, close enough that she could smell the cologne that he wore that night. She flinched involuntarily and he smiled, one final victory before reaching out his hand to Draco.

“Go one then,” he said, the two of them grasping hands, “Let’s get on with it.”

ONE MONTH LATER

The front of The Great Hall was crowded with staff eager to see the first class to attend the Academy as they filed in to find their seats. Later, when the houses were determined, the tables would be broken into four even sections, but for now they were all one roiling mass of energy, a school of wizards, safe and happy, eager to begin a new year. Hermione looked down the length of the table, unable to hide her smile of pride at Draco standing in the center in a crisp button down shirt and grey trousers, looking out over the one hundred and thirteen students that had been registered and transported out of England. He looked both proud and nervous, his eyes darting around the room at all of the expectant faces. Faces counting on him to do the right thing.

Neville and Blaise had worked to create some of the strongest security wards Hermione had ever seen, not only obscuring the entire Academy from view, but keeping anyone not recorded in the Academy Register out of the castle. Inside the new students sat at long tables chatting excitedly, pointing at the windows, at the vanishing cabinet that stood solemnly in the corner behind a security ward, reading the informative plaques on the walls. Each place setting had a stack of books and a cauldron and Hermione watched as the youngest students flipped through them excitedly, eyes wide with anticipation of what they were going to learn. Later in the week, the students without wands would be taken to a wand maker in the local village and fitted with one. She was flooded with warm nostalgia, thinking back to the first nights at Hogwarts, the music, the food, the welcoming announcements. A brand new year with brand new possibilities.

“OK OK,” Draco called out, knocking his hand on the table. “Let’s all get settled down...” he cleared his throat and glanced over at Hermione who smiled at him, nodding her head in encouragement.

She had moved in to his quarters the moment they took up residence at the school. He’d offered to give her her own suite of rooms, perhaps to act as the house mother for the Historians, but she refused, insisting that she would sleep beside him for the rest of their lives and there was not a thing he could do about it. Blaise and Felicia had also moved in together, volunteering to work as librarians and house managers in exchange for Felicia being able to finish school, learning potions and basic healing, something she was never granted as she came of age under Voldemort’s regime. The other Birds were there too...all of them had all been eager to help, even when Draco offered to give them money and find them safe passage anywhere in Europe, they told him that this was where they belonged, working in the kitchens, the grounds, Claire even offered to start the dueling club after she shook the dust off her wand. His old friend Pansy Parkinson sat on his right, checking her lipstick in the

reflection of her butterknife and winking when she caught his eye. In school she had been the best Slytherin in Arithmancy, tutoring all of them, even students three years ahead of her, so she was a natural to be the professor here. To his left was Neville Longbottom, sitting with a smile on his face and dirt under his fingernails, a bit tanned from a day in the gardens with Leanna. He'd been more than happy to take Draco's offer to teach at the new Academy and congratulated him on the successful creation of the school, their rivalry and bad blood from Hogwart's long forgotten.

There were still things to do...professors to secure, wards to complete. There would be battles to fight in the future as London began to wonder where the halfblooded children had gone, how so many families once used as slave labor had disappeared, following their children to Germany. They would have to find a way to secure Draco's money when his vaults were raided in London. They would have to be on their toes, working day and night to keep these students safe.

But one day soon there would be enough highly trained, confident, strong, happy witches and wizards at Draco's academy that they could return to London together without fear. One day they would hear word from London that the pureblood council had weakened as the older generation grew old and feebleminded and the younger wizards saw no reason for the segregation they proposed. They would all gather together and take Wizard England back from the oppression it labored under, wiping clean the bigotry and violence and poverty. They would fight to finally destroy Voldemort and it would be remembered that Draco Malfoy and Hermione Granger had raised the army to do it in the memory of their first school, in the name of their friends who were lost, to take back what had been stolen from them and rebuild it better than before. One day soon Draco would see his mother again and introduce her to his true love. He would walk the streets of Diagon Alley holding Hermione's hand. People would whisper about the strange and storied path their life had taken; filled with cruelty and prejudice and jealousy and lust and respect and finally love. They would save hundreds, thousands of wizard lives and in time they would be honored in books and art and legend. Their home in the country would have a giant birdcage filled with finches and white doves and larks that sang when the sun rose every morning and Hermione would get one final tattoo; that of a black sparrow on her forearm, covering the Pleiades, to match the tattoo of Atlas that covered Draco's dark mark, which would fade completely with Voldemort's death leaving nothing but a pale scar.

All of those things would happen, but before they could, they would have to get through their first Fall term. And so after he returned Hermione's smile he cleared his throat once again and said,

"Welcome to the first term at Malfoy's Academy of Magic. Before we begin our feast...I do have a few announcements..."

THE END

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