




Bond

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Bond

by [HalfwayThrough](#)

Summary

Years into the war, Hermione is trapped for an entire night between a broken wand and a Death Eater. She leaves tangled in a web of strange bonding magic and lycanthrope that blurs reality and makes her second guess everything.

Broken Wand, Broken Core

Her lungs burned. Each muscle ached with each pounding footstep on cobblestones. Eyes strained to see through the darkness, her throat coated with the thick air of the sewer. Puddles betrayed her path at every turn, her trainers splashing against the surface alerting the men behind her to exactly where she was. She had only gotten a brief glance at them, not long enough to count them. She had recognized at least three figures before she turned, before she started running. How long had she been running now? It could have been minutes, or it could be hours.

In the dim light filtering through grates above her head, Hermione saw a small opening to another wing of the sewer. She swiftly flicked her wand, sending her splashing, frantic footsteps forward and slipped into the alcove ignoring the burning in her fingers from her wand sparking. Her back pressed against the damp stones, her heart beating in her head like a drum.

“Come on Mudblood!” a Death Eater shouted, a scratchy older man’s voice. “Stop running! We’re only going to torture you!”

A roar of laughter filled the sewer and she saw their cloaked figures walk past her alcove. As they passed beneath the grate, she caught a glimpse at their decorative masks, and their wands raised and ready to fire. Her phantom footsteps were still leading them down the sewer and they followed. She tried to count them as they passed, but stopped once she reached eight.

Seemed like a bit of overkill for a single mudblood.

She slumped against the wall when the last figure passed, letting out the air she had been holding in a long exhale. She was exhausted, filthy, and shaking. Her wand had been hit with a hex in her mad dash through the sewers exposing part of the dragon heartstring that was pulled taut inside its core. She cursed herself for being careless. She wished the hex had caught a body part instead- she could live without an arm, she could never get out of this place without her wand.

Hermione closed her eyes and tried to channel her magic through her wand anyway. She thought of the Order safe house and attempted to apparate there only for her wand to give a small spark and fizzle out.

Bollocks.

She tried again, and earned a slightly larger spark. She opened her eyes, ready to try something else. Apparation was, evidently, too heavy of a spell for her wand at the moment. She turned and saw a silhouette standing beneath the grate. Evening light caught his shoulders, clothed in black robes. The metal of his mask shined in the light, accentuating all the intricate curves and details carved into the iron skull.

And he was looking right at her.

Hermione's heart vaulted into her throat. She twisted her wand hand again, begging the piece of wood to work. It sparked and fizzled, searing her fingertips. The Death Eater glanced at her wand, and could guess what she was trying to do. He leaped forward. Hermione cast again, desperately putting every ounce of energy into the spell. The familiar pulling sensation yanked at her navel, and she twisted and vanished from the sewer with a crack just as a black gloved hand caught her wrist.

They stood for a moment, looking at one another inside the living quarters of the Order safehouse. Trunks of supplies lined the walls, and an injured wizard slept on a cot in the corner. Hermione had no time to think of a solution before she was being yanked through space once again. The world twisted around her until it settled into the shape of an enormous fireplace. Black marble stretched out in every direction, the fire in front of her a mere pile of glowing embers. The Death Eater's gloved hand still held her wrist.

Hermione flicked her wand yanking the pair through England again, appearing with a crack at the edge of the Forest of Dean. She collapsed to her knees retching what little was in her stomach onto the dry, brittle grass beneath her. The Death Eater gripped a tree, his black robes swaying as he regained his balance. Weak and struck with a serious case of vertigo, Hermione flicked her wand in an attempt to apparate once and for all out of harm's way. Her wand spit out a cloud of black smoke with a final weak crack.

The sun leaned onto the tree line, as tired of the day as the witch below it was. There wasn't much time before it'd be completely dark. Hermione swallowed hard, shoved her useless wand in her back pocket. She glanced at the Death Eater still holding onto a branch for support. The girl took a deep breath and shoved herself to her feet, starting at a sprint into the tree line.

"Wait!" the Death Eater called, his voice muffled by his mask. She, however, did not wait. She continued bounding through the forest, vaulting her tired body through the underbrush. Thin branches reached out, slicing her cheeks and slapping at her arms. She could hear the masked man following her. A spell shot past her, slamming into a tree trunk and exploding into sparks.

The sun gave out on her, passing their shift on to the stars. Crickets chirped, owls hooted, and unknown creatures skittered through fallen leaves. Hermione cut through it all, racing through the dark. Her beat faster than a hummingbird's wings, blood rushing in her ears deafening the world around her.

This was not how today was supposed to go down. It was supposed to be a simple retrieval. Get some wounded witches and wizard back to a safe house, maybe throw a few spells out as a defense. She was supposed to be back with Ron and Harry by lunch.

Her foot caught on a root, sending her sprawling face first into damp earth and leaves. The impact with the forest floor shoved all the air from her lungs, leaving her gasping in the dirt. She lay there, feeling the effects of running half the day, of having fear rule her body for hours and hours. Hermione wanted nothing but to lie down and rest her eyes. However, that was not a luxury she could afford.

She lifted her head, spitting dirt out of her mouth. Leaves rustled beside her head, and her heart dropped. He had caught up to her. Hermione, against every instinct, sat up in the mud and began to raise her hands to show she was unarmed. That she gave up.

Only, it wasn't the Death Eater staring down at her. A massive body loomed over her, framed by the bright light of the full moon.

Hermione stared, open mouthed, at the mountain of fur and teeth standing before her. It huffed hot air into her face, leaning forward to sniff her hair. She was frozen in place, unsure of what to do next. Her wand was out of commission and she had nothing else to defend herself with.

Suddenly the beast cried out in pain, a sparkle of red glitter bursting in the air and illuminating the forest. The monster's whimper ripped into a howl. An arm was around Hermione's waist, lifting her out of the dirt and dragging her through the trees.

"Come on, Granger!" the Death Eater snapped. That voice, she knew that voice. Her fingers curled into his black robes as she regained her footing and stumbled along with him down a hill. The beast was at their heels, its panting echoing off the trees.

A small hut among the tree trunks. Moonlight danced over its roof, almost pointing them in its direction.

"There!" Hermione pointed, her voice rough from under use. They stumbled towards it, nearly falling down the steep decline. As they neared the door, the hand around her waist moved to her back, shoving her towards the shack. Hermione ran until she hit open doorway. Crossing the threshold was like stepping into cool water. A shiver flickered down her spine as the sensation bled over her skin. She turned in time to see the Death Eater cast a green light at the beast. The rippling mass of fur dodged the attack and swiped a clawed hand at him, knocking against him so hard that his body flew backwards, right through the doorway. Hermione jumped back as black robes and blonde hair crashed into the floor.

A howl reverberated through the building and the creature leaped forward only for the door to slam closed by itself.

Hermione felt the sensation of wards locking into place- a faint sizzling in the air. Someone had warded this hut specifically for hiding from the werewolf outside. She had a creeping suspicion that it was the man inside the beast waiting outside to eat them.

A groan captured her attention. Hermione cautiously took a step towards the man lying on the floor boards. His mask had been knocked off, his pale face marred with a thick red slash across the lower right half of his jaw. She froze, watching him take in the damage and prop up on his elbows.

Draco Malfoy.

She hadn't seen him in years. The war had been dragging on and they had been, reluctantly, dragged into adulthood with it. He looked so different, yet there was no mistaking those grey eyes and white blonde hair. The softness of his face from school had worn away, leaving only

the chiseled features of a man- nearly gaunt. He caught her gaze, silver eyes pinning her in place.

“What?” he asked nonchalantly, as if he caught her staring at him in potions class.

“You... you look different,” she stuttered out. Hermione looked different as well. Her hair was the same unruly mass of curls, but her body had filled out into that of a woman and then quickly nicked down with stress and malnutrition. They both took in the other. Just a few moments earlier she had been running from him and now she was considering him.

“This place is warded,” he said, echoing the knowledge Hermione had already gathered. He pulled himself to his feet, and she was shocked by just how tall he had grown. She hadn’t had time to take in his full height while running and was now staring up at him. He was a couple inches over six feet, and draped in black robes he was quite a sight. However, she could see the outline of his lean frame beneath the bulky robes, betraying his own hardships in the war. He started palming his pockets, tearing off his robe in search of something. “Where’s my wand!?”

He looked up her, his silver eyes burning with accusation.

“I- I-,” she held her hands up, brown eyes flickering to the window set in the wall by the door. Malfoy stepped up to it and Hermione stood on her tiptoes to peer over his shoulder. A small stick, just barely lit by the moon, sat in the leaves outside. The wolfish creature paced over it, as if daring Malfoy to come out and face him for it.

“Shit,” he declared, whirling around on Hermione. “Where’s your wand? Why haven’t you pulled it on me yet?”

Hermione quickly whipped her wand out, pressing the end of it into his throat, so he couldn’t peer down and see the giant hole in the side of it. A bluff, but hopefully it paid off.

“It’s right here, Malfoy,” she hissed, standing exceptionally close to hide her wand’s secret. “You see, good witches and wizards are usually taught not to strike someone while they’re down. You must have skipped that lesson.”

“How generous of you,” he said, his voice flat. He didn’t move. He stood, her wand pressing into his throat, with his hands at his sides. Hermione’s brown eyes flickered over the expanse of his shoulders. He was bigger than her, and with her wand in such a state he could overpower her if he wanted to. She had a few wandless spells she might be able to cast, but she was exhausted beyond comprehension and she wasn’t sure she could cast them even if she had a wand in working order. Not to mention most of them were healing spells of some kind, not exactly suited to keep a Death Eater prisoner. Malfoy lifted an eyebrow. “Well, what are you going to do with me?”

Hermione paused. What was she going to do with him?

“You’re not going to drag me back to Potter? Get me to spill all my Death Eater secrets?” he said, a smirk playing on his pale lips.

“I doubt you know much of anything, Malfoy,” Hermione growled, pressing her wand further into the flesh of his throat.

“Are you sure about that?” he dared her. She hadn’t realized it, but her fingers were shaking. “Granger, lower your pitiful excuse for a wand. I’m tired and I’d like to sit down.”

She hesitated before finally lowering her wand. Malfoy quickly reached up, grabbing the tip and turning it over to inspect the damage.

“Ouch, Granger,” he said examining the exposed core. Hermione huffed, yanking her wand back, stuffing it in the back pocket of her jeans. She didn’t like him looking at her wand like that, like her own core was open as well as the dragon’s heartstring. He slowly walked to the far wall, yanking at the middle finger of his black glove, tugging the garment off finger by finger. “It seems we’re going to be spending some time together.”

He turned to her, biting on the tip of his glove and yanking it off with his teeth. Hermione slowed, moving her gaze to the walls around her and began pacing. There was only the one door and single window, without a single piece of furniture. There was absolutely nothing to occupy their time.

“Come on, Granger. We’re old school chums- tell me what you’ve been up to,” Malfoy teased. She shot him a glare over her shoulder. He sat against the wall, his gloves discarded on the floor beside him, and the top button of his black dress shirt undone. Blood dripped off his chin from the gash he had earned from the werewolf.

“You’re bleeding,” she stated, wanting to move closer. Her healer instincts wanted to kneel beside him, mutter the incantation to sew the gash closed. She knew it by heart, it was one of the spells she knew she could do without a wand, but her knowledge isn’t what stopped her- it was the patient. Malfoy was the enemy. Did she have a duty to heal the enemy under the circumstances? She chewed on her bottom lip. Malfoy touched his index and middle finger to the cut on his jaw, coating his fingertips in scarlet.

“So I am,” he said casually, examining the blood on his hand. Hermione sighed, her mind made up. She quickly walked across the shack and kneeled beside him. “What are you doing?”

“Cleaning you up,” she said, her voice betraying her reluctance. “I don’t need any werewolf germs getting in there.”

It had been her deciding factor. While the creature hadn’t gotten his teeth into Malfoy, his claws alone could be enough to curse the man. She thought on Bill Weasley and the long scars that trailed his face and his affinity for raw steaks. However, it did not make her feel at ease being so close to Draco Malfoy. Every cell in her body screamed at her to put more space between them, that he was dangerous and would use any advantage he got to get the best of her- including exploiting her kindness.

She gently placed trembling fingers on the edge of his jaw. A small gasp left his lips, and Hermione took in his expression. Perhaps the injury hurt more than he had been letting on.

His skin was warm to the touch, but not feverish which she was thankful for. The witch whispered the incantation, and watched as Malfoy's pale skin stitched back together.

"There," she said, her fingers still lingering on his jaw. "It won't even scar."

"Pity," he said, turning his silver eyes on her. "Girls like scars."

"Don't worry Malfoy, you're in the middle of a war. I'm sure you'll have plenty of opportunities to earn some," Hermione said, the bitterness of their reality sinking in. She stood and crossed back to her side of the shack, leaning against the wall but refusing to sit down. She wanted to be on her feet, ready in case Malfoy decided to pull anything.

Malfoy leaned his head back against the wall, staring up at the ceiling. He had one leg bent, and the other stretched out in front of him. His black, Death Eater robes fanned out around him as if he was sitting in a dark pool of water.

Hermione tugged at the sleeves of her jumper, continuing pacing the length of the room. She glanced out the window where the creature stalked outside, its yellow eyes catching her looking at him. He snapped his jaws and she jumped, a small shriek escaping her lips.

"Scared of dogs, Granger?" Malfoy said, still reclining against the wall.

"Malfoy, can you shut up for one minute?" Hermione snapped. She was tired, and scared, and stuck in a room with the worst possible person. The least he could do was stop taunting her every few minutes.

Surprisingly, he listened to her. He closed his eyes and kept his mouth shut. Hermione was truly shocked, but savored the quiet. She paced minute after minute, fidgeting with her jumper and taking her wand out to get another look at it as if it had healed itself in her back pocket. She was disappointed each time, returning it to its spot and wondering what the hell she was going to do. She picked leaves from her hair, but probably missed most of them without a mirror to check.

Eventually, her eyes turned on Malfoy.

There were dark bags under his eyes she hadn't noticed before. She had been so swept up in how much older he looked she was unaware of the damage lying beneath the surface. His skin, while it had always been pale, seemed sallow. His cheekbones sharp not only from genetics, but from a gauntness brought on by stress or hunger or who knows what. His hands fidgeted in his lap, clasp and then unclasp them. When he wasn't moving them around, she could see his fingers shake.

Again, her healer heart tugged forward once more. She tried to fight it, mentally gluing her trainers to the farthest corner away from Malfoy. He is a Death Eater and fucking Draco Malfoy of all people. She didn't need to feel any kind of sorry for him.

A thought crept into her mind. She was stuck with Malfoy until dawn, when the werewolf turned and he could get retrieve his wand. Best case scenario: he takes his wand and leaves. Worst case scenario: he grabs his wand and drags her back to the Dark Lord. She chewed her

lip, her arms crossed over her chest as she wore a grove into the floor boards with more incessant pacing. She could see pale fingers trembling against black robes in the corner of her eye.

Maybe, just maybe, if she used this time to get on his good side he'd let her go come morning. As a favor for all her help and...

Merlin, what was she thinking.

Finally, she decided scheme or no scheme she couldn't stand to watch his hands tremor a second longer. She sat down on her knees beside him, taking his hand in hers without so much as a word. He jumped at the contact, apparently lost in his mind.

"Sorry," Hermione said, instinctively. "I didn't mean to startle you."

She kept her hold on his hand, and he didn't try to pull away. His skin was warm, but terribly thin. She could see veins, more black than blue, beneath the surface. Even with her hand holding onto his palm, his fingers still twitched. Hermione frowned, she had seen the same behavior in a countless number of witches and wizards.

"Does he torture you often?" she asked, keeping her eyes on his fingers. She ran her fingers over his index, massaging the muscles there. Patience and time were needed to reverse the effects of the Cruciatus curse, something she usually didn't have time for while healing members of the Order of the Phoenix. However, here she had nothing but time and desperately needed something to focus on so that she could forget about what may happen when dawn broke. That's all this was- a way to occupy her time.

"Yes," he answered, his face devoid of the smirks he had so happily worn for her earlier. Instead, he was staring off at the opposite wall, silver eyes watching nothing.

She moved on to his middle finger, pressing against the stiff tendons beneath the skin.

"Um, you should try to do this after every... uh session," she said quietly, stumbling to try to find the right words. She looked up and found Malfoy looking at her, his eyes not following her working hands but staring at her face. She caught his gaze, his silver eyes hard and cold without his façade. "It'll help the stiffness, and the tremors."

Suddenly, Malfoy snatched his hand away, hiding it in the thick fabric of his robes.

"I don't need your help," he said coldly. Hermione sat for a moment, her hands suddenly chilled without his fingers between them. Then she shook her head.

"You're an idiot," she spat, standing and retreating back to her side of the shack. She sat down against the wall, hugging her knees to her chest. She wanted to hate him. To hurt him and pronounce it in the name of the Order. Instead, pity made her chest ache. Pity and something else she couldn't identify. Even if she had truly wanted to punish him, she couldn't. She felt completely helpless, trapped by time and a broken wand.

Hermione set her forehead on her knees, taking in a deep breath. The shack smelled like earth and damp wood. She would make it to dawn, and she would fight.

She closed her eyes for a second and was soon weighed down by sleep.

Dreams and Nightmares

Pale fur rippled over muscle. The beast howled over her as she struggled to claw through the endless pit of vines. They wrapped around her wrists and legs, holding her in place as the monster crawled over her body, its claw digging long gashes into her stomach. Its teeth sunk into the flesh of her neck, ripping the skin and sending hot blood squirting everywhere. Hermione screamed, her own blood splashed against her teeth. She screamed and kicked, but the vines held firm. Her life leaked out slowly, dripping through powerful jaws as the beast lapped at her neck. Her head swam, the full moon overhead too bright for her eyes. It seemed to fill the sky, larger than anything she had ever seen. The beast looked up from her throat, staring down into her face, only he wasn't a beast anymore. White fur had retreated back and instead Malfoy looked down at her, his chin coated in blood. His lips pulled into a cruel crimson smirk. She shuttered as his fingers brushed the torn skin of her neck. He leaned down, growling into her ear.

“Granger, you taste *delicious*.”

Hermione woke with a start. She was greeted with stiff muscles and the familiar sight of the empty one room shack. She blinked the sleep from her eyes, stretching out her aching body and trying to calm the rapid beat of her heart. The dream had felt so real, and even awake the metallic tang of iron ghosted across her tongue. Her fingers gripped the base of her throat, half expecting it to be torn open. Instead, it was smooth and unmarred. She turned to window, hoping to see the first rays of dawn but found only starlight.

She hit her head against the wall, groaning. There were still hours to go. She stared up at the candles enchanted in the rafters. Little white wicks that burned and burned but never melted. They were too far to touch, but someone had carefully set them in place so they'd float overhead, banishing the dark for any traveler who came to stay. It reminded her of Hogwarts' Great Hall. Like someone stole three candles from the giant ceiling display to stick in this hut in the middle of nowhere.

Hermione glanced over at her companion. He was awake, his face set in firm lines. His eyes were hard and stared at nothing, unfocused while he was lost in his thoughts. He looked older than his twenty years, like he had seen forty of them. He didn't appear wolfish at all. The gash on his chin healed quite nicely, then again Hermione held no delusion about her own skills. She was the brightest witch of her age, of course she could heal a cut even without a wand. However, werewolf attacks were tricky. The name Fenrir Greyback was bloodcurdling for a reason. Getting hit with a hex was easy to understand, taking allies, friends, and turning them into uncontrollable monsters struck a deep-set fear. Everyone wanted to be in control of their own body, and the curse of the werewolf stripped them of it.

Malfoy wasn't an ally or a friend, so she wasn't sure why she cared. They were under a full moon and he didn't seem affected, so she was safe for the single night she'd been forced to spend with him. Cleaning the wound was preventing episodes in the future- events she would not be around for.

She should have let him bleed out.

“How long was I asleep?” Hermione asked, sitting up. Malfoy blinked, returning back to the world of the living. She was a tad relieved he snapped out of his trance so quickly. Enough wizards and witches had come into her makeshift hospital wards with far off stares for her to know it could mean something more serious than a daydream.

“Uh, half an hour,” he admitted. Hermione sighed. Even sleep didn’t come easily here. She stretched out on her back, laying parallel to the wall. Maybe, a more comfortable position would help foster sleep. She hadn’t been doing her body any favors folded in on herself like that. She closed her eyes, throwing an arm over her face for good measure to block out the candles’ warm glow. Hermione dragged up thoughts of Crookshanks, and old potions homework. Anything to focus her mind on that might lead to pleasant, werewolf free dreams. “You said some things.”

“What?” Hermione shot up. Her eyes widened. Malfoy wasn’t smirking, instead his eyes seemed to drill into her. A shiver ran down her spine and she tried to hide the shutter that shook her entire body. He was far away from her, but it felt like he could see every detail of her person. She couldn’t shake the feeling of being cornered by a fox.

“You spoke in your sleep,” he said. His voice had an edge to it, as if he were hiding something. There was a lot more to his words than just a simple statement of fact.

“Anything interesting?” she said, trying to sound apathetic. Hermione leaned back down, eyes firmly planted on the ceiling. There was something about Malfoy’s eyes now that unsettled her. Before he had been his usual snarky self, almost warm. He seemed to remember himself, and settled behind a cloak of ice. Perhaps it was a Death Eater tactic, although the lot didn’t strike Hermione as a very unemotional group. Bellatrix was wild and uncouth, often openly delighting in pain. The men who had chased Hermione down the sewers had called after her, taunting and greedy. They were a group ruled by a single emotion- hate. Malfoy never seemed to have a limit to his hatred of Harry, Ron, and herself. He’d parrot phrases from his dad, and be content in his simmering dislike. Ever since he had snatched his hand away from her he’d turned into something else. Her touch had burned him, and now he set his soul on ice to heal.

“You were screaming,” despite the words that passed through his lips his face remained neutral, almost bored. Hermione’s cheeks burned at the thought of her shouting in her sleep with Malfoy just sitting and watching.

“Oh, sorry,” she said, her voice stiff. Her eyes remained on the ceiling as the atmosphere shifted from tense to a buzzing awkwardness. The fact that she had fallen asleep in his presence at all was a fatal error that she did not intend to repeat. She should sit up and make herself alert, but that would involve looking at Malfoy and she was not quite ready for that.

“I thought you didn’t see battle.” His voice was low, as if he couldn’t decide he truly wanted to say the words. Hermione’s head snapped to the side, her cheek pressed to the wooden floor. Malfoy was looking at her, still a statue of ice but his eyes seemed... softer.

“I don’t usually... but it’s a war. I do what I have to do,” Hermione slowly sat up, trying to choose her words carefully. She wanted to answer it, but not give away any impertinent information. “Wait, how do you know I-”

She hadn’t even got the full question out of her mouth before he spoke.

“I don’t see you. This is the first time we’ve crossed paths since the war started.” It was such a simple answer, and yet it carried so much with it. It told her that Malfoy regularly saw battle and that during those battles he... looked for her? He probably just kept tabs on the classmates he recognized. While he hid from behind a mask, he could take it all the peers he was facing. Still, it seemed like an odd detail to hang on to. Maybe, he was waiting for the day to meet her on the battlefield to strike her down once and for all. Then again, he had a perfectly good chance moments ago when she was asleep to do the same. It was Malfoy; maybe good old bare-handed strangling was too muggle for him.

“Oh,” Hermione said, sitting cross-legged and leaning back on her hands. “Well, it wasn’t a war dream if you were worried.”

If he was worried? What was she thinking? In the moment it had felt like worry, but she had to put his words into context. He was the enemy, a Malfoy, a Death Eater. He had no right to even think about what she was dreaming.

He seemed to be facing his own struggle with her words. His blonde eyebrows pinched together, a small wrinkling forming in the pale skin between them.

“I mean... wondering,” she tacked on, a half a second too late. Hermione bit her lip, banning anymore words from leaving them. She was talking way too much. She’d barely spent an hour alone with Malfoy and had already fallen asleep and then started talking about her dreams. Her back molars grinded against each other, the sound echoed through her skull. The sensation of the werewolf’s claws digging into her stomach ghosted over her skin and she shuttered.

“I can make them go away.” Hermione snapped her head up. Malfoy’s eyes were on her, focused and burning. His body remained tense, like a snake about to strike.

“What do you mean?” she betrayed her promise of no more words, but it seemed acceptable under the circumstance.

“You helped me,” long, pale fingers gestured to his chin. “I could help you back.”

Hermione narrowed her brown eyes at him.

“How exactly?” she couldn’t help her curiosity. What she should have done was told him to stick his head up his arse and faced the wall. However, this was the Hermione that had healed him without being asked. She was a sucker for favors, and Malfoy knew it.

"I can take nightmares away. I pull them up in your mind and," he flicked his wrist, as if waving a bad dream away in the air. "It's gone."

"Is that what you do for your Lord, then? Pry into people's minds and steal their memories?" she sneered. Malfoy must have practiced quite a bit since their time in school together. Legilimency wasn't an easy skill to learn, but a very useful one especially for an evil wizard with no morals. They could crack open anyone's brain and scan any memory that wanted. They could look at every thought they ever had as if they were scanning book spines in the library.

"On occasion. I don't steal anything, I ease their pain."

"Sorry, but certainly you understand why I don't trust you inside my head," Hermione snorted.

"Fair," was all he said, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning back against the wall. They considered each other for a moment, both taking in the other's form.

"I guess He finds you pretty valuable," Hermione said, her voice venom. She didn't want him to ever forget what side he chose. He could pretend he was offering help, but she knew what he really was.

Malfoy shrugged. Hermione's blood ran cold. Draco Malfoy, the boy who rubbed her with achievement in her face, who was proud for the sake of being proud, just shrugged off being important. He might be more prominent on the dark side than she had first thought. She wanted to snap at him, to reveal that she knew he was lying, to show him she knew all his little tricks. Something stopped her. Whether it was fear or curiosity who is to say, but she pressed her lips into a firm line and moved that tad of information to the back of her brain for safe keeping.

The next few hours dragged by. Hermione eventually stood up, pacing around the shack trying to keep herself from going crazy, or talking to Malfoy both seemed to be equally detrimental to her mental health. She neared the window, chancing another look outside. The werewolf had moved on through the forest, probably in search for a meal that wasn't locked inside a warded hut. The moonlight danced across the wood of Malfoy's wand, still sitting on a mound of leaves. It was so close, just a few footsteps away from the end of the stairs to the hut.

She glanced over at Malfoy, who once again was lost in his thoughts. The man seemed perfectly content being lost in his own mind. It was unsettling how easily he seemed to fold in on himself. Hermione took out her own wand, willing it to apparate her one more time. It didn't even spark. No smoke, no fire, just wood.

Tears welled up in her eyes. She remembered the first time she held her vine wood wand in Ollivander's shop. It was the item that cemented her in the wizarding world. Before she had been a muggle girl, top of her class but nothing special. Now she was a witch- she had the power of magic. It made her feel as tall as a mountain holding that wand. It had carried her through Hogwarts and through the war thus far and now it was broken for good. She shoved

the broken wand in her pocket not wanting to part with it just yet. She didn't know if she ever could. Looking back up at the window, red eyes glared back at her.

Her mouth dropped open, her eyes still blurring with tears unshed. White fur pressed up against the window, blood soaked teeth scratched against the glass. Beady red eyes glared straight through her, as if reading her soul. Then it's giant paw smacked at the glass of the window, sending a splintering crack across its surface.

She screamed, an uncontrollable shriek of terror and fell back on the floor. She scrambled away from the window, fear sending her heart on to a brutal pace.

Malfoy was standing at the window before she knew what was going on.

"What did you see?" he asked, calmly. As if there wasn't a giant werewolf outside. She blinked, and saw that the window wasn't cracked. Her mouth hung open as she tried to make sense of the last few moments. She stood up, slowly walking to the unscathed glass. She passed Malfoy, his cold eyes watchful. She pressed a hand to the window pane.

She imagined it.

The werewolf that kept them locked inside had black fur, and it was no where in sight. The one she had seen... well it had appeared more like the one in her dream. The dream she'd rather not think about at the moment.

"Nothing," she said, her throat dry. Her fingers trembled against the cold glass. She could still hear the beast's breathing her mind, as if it was right behind her huffing into her ear.

Without any prelude, Malfoy grabbed her shoulders and twisted her around. He placed a hand on either side of her face, cool palms pressed to her hot cheeks.

"What are you-"

Silver eyes poured into her and suddenly there was a crash of his mind into hers. She gasped at the intrusion, unprepared for the assault on her mind. He was digging through her thoughts- through her memories. He could see anything that ever happened to her, as if flipping through the pages of a book. Hermione tried to push him out, but he was practiced in the arts of legilimency and knew how to hold on inside another's mind.

She watched as he pulled up the image of the pale werewolf at the window, the glass cracking like a spiderweb. The same terror ran through her veins as the first time she saw it. He dropped it, flicking through the memories to get to the source of the fear.

He paused for a moment at the image of her broken wand and the flood of emotion that came with it. Then he moved on, passing by the empty hours until he reached her dream.

Hermione shuddered at the feeling of the veins wrapped tight around her wrists, cutting off the blood flow to her fingers. She could feel the beast's hot breath against her flesh right before its teeth sunk into her throat. Having felt it once before, everything was clearer now. Every nerve its claws hit, every tendon snapped in its jaws was felt in extreme detail. She

tried to fight it, tried to pull herself from the vines' hold but it was no use. In this dream they could not be severed.

She could feel Malfoy watching, even through the repeated pain and terror, the pressure of his gaze cut through all of it. She tried to press out of the memory, but her attempts were nothing compared to his experience.

The beast shuddered, its bloody fur rippling and changing, its bones cracking and reassembling. Malfoy's dream visage appeared, dripping in crimson and growled at her once more.

"Granger, you taste *delicious*."

Malfoy snapped out of her mind. She was shaking when she came to. Her knees had given out during the inspection of her mind, but she had not tumbled to the floor. Instead she was gathered in Draco's arms, her head leaning against his shoulder. She shoved off his chest, trying to put as much distance between herself and his black robes as possible. However, she was still weak from the unexpected lesson in occlumency and tripped over her own feet, crashing into the wooden floorboards.

Hermione gasped, trying to get air back into her lungs. Her mind swam, exhausted from the attack. She felt like she had just ran a marathon and the prize at the end was getting smacked in the forehead with a mallet. Her skull felt like it was splintering into a million pieces. Sweat dripped down her clammy skin, and she felt like she might throw up.

"Don't worry," Malfoy's voice said from above her, calm as ever. "It'll pass soon."

Hermione shot him an ugly glare, not trusting herself to come up with any string of words that would sound coherent in her current state. Malfoy met her gaze, his lips knighted with a smirk. He knelt down beside her, his black robes brushing her over her as they settled against the floor. He took her chin in his fingers, his skin was warm against her own. He considered her, an idea flashing across his grey eyes. She looked up at him, her tired eyes struggling to stay open. The sparkle in his eye suddenly vanished, locked away in the furthest part of his mind. His hand fell from her face, and he walked back to his side of the shack, his robes as black as shadows trailing after his heels.

Hermione set her head against the floor and welcomed the cool nothingness of sleep.

Her dream came again. Despite Malfoy's insistence of ridding her of the nightmare, he had only observed it. The moon was bright overhead, and the vines snaked around her wrists and ankles only this time she held up perpendicular to the forest floor. She could see the trees around her, and she waited, her heart beating in her ear, to catch a glimpse of white fur. She waited with bated breath, eyeing the stretch of forest before her.

She felt his breath against the back of her neck. Goosebumps raised across her skin as a hand gripped her hip. A human hand, not a claw. Lips brushed over the side of her neck before pressing a kiss at the junction of her shoulder and throat. Another hand slide across her ribcage before palming one of her breasts. She moaned, throwing her head back and exposing more flesh for his mouth to attack. He licked up her neck to her jaw, his hand resting on her

hip inching down between her legs. She bucked against the vines as his fingers slipped under her skirt, his knuckles brushing against the flesh of her inner thigh.

Hermione tilted her head to the side to drink in the silver eyes that stared down at her. He watched her expression as his fingers rubbed a small circle against her clit. She gasped, eyes wide as the sensation of his touch overtook her body. He smiled down at her, pressing a brief kiss to her lips. He tasted like iron.

“Hermione!”

Her eyes snapped open and it was daylight. The door to the shack was open and sunlight spilled over the floorboards. Harry was leaning over her, his green eyes filled with worry. When he saw her eyes flicker open he pulled her into a hug.

“We were so worried,” he mumbled into her hair. She looked over his shoulder where Ginny and Ron stood.

“My wand,” she croaked, her throat sore. She fumbled in her pocket before pulling it out to show them. Ginny gasped at the giant hole blown in the side of the wood.

“It’s okay, Mione,” Ron said, kneeling beside her and wrapping a hand around the wand. “We’re gonna take you back to base. It’s going to be alright.”

Hermione let them dote on her. Ron slipped an arm around her waist, bringing her to her feet and letting her rest her weight against his shoulder. They stepped out into the forest. Birds chirped from high up in the trees, a very different scene from the one she experienced the night before. Her eyes fell to the little pile of dead leaves where Draco’s wand had sat the night before. It was gone. When had he left?

They vanished from the forest with a crack, reappearing in 12 Grimmauld Place. Harry and Ron left to tell everyone that Hermione had been retrieved safely and to find a new wand for her use, while Ginny helped her up the stairs to the bedrooms.

“I’m really sorry about your wand,” she said. Hermione gave her a weak smile, she was thankful for the kindness even if it didn’t help her wand get fixed. “At least it worked for you when you needed it most.”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked, halting on the stairs.

“The patronus you sent. We never would have found you without it,” Ginner said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and helping her up the next step. “Ron barely believed it was yours until it spoke. He said it looked more like a ferret than an otter.”

“Yeah, that sure was lucky,” Hermione said, as she reached the door at the top of the stairs. “Thank you, Ginny. I’m going to rest for a bit.”

“I’ll come check on you in a little bit,” the girl smiled before bouncing back down the stairs.

Hermione shut the door behind her, her mind running rapidly as she tried to connect her thoughts.

She didn't even think Malfoy *could* cast a patronus charm, especially one that spoke. There were a lot of things that he could have done when morning came and he finally had his wand back. With her past out, he could have taken her back to the Death Eaters, could have tortured her, or even killed her.

Instead, he did... that.

She had a million questions, and she was going to get answers.

Parchment

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, sorry this update took so long. To be completely honest I was so enthralled with SenLinYu's fic *Manacled* I couldn't even think about touching this. However, she's on a brief hiatus (get well soon!) so I decided it was back to work. Obviously, this work is heavily influenced by her fic especially *healer!hermione*. She is such an inspiration to me and makes me want to work even harder on my own fanfiction. So, this is me working harder. Thank you for being patient and I hope you enjoy.

As much as Hermione would have liked to investigate Draco Malfoy's motives, in the week following their chance meeting she barely had a moment to herself. Unfortunately, she hadn't been the only one to cross paths with a werewolf. Lee Jordan was lying in the makeshift hospital room of 12 Grimmauld Place with only a third of his face left. He had dragged himself to the doorstep the morning after the full moon and barely remembered a thing. Luckily, Hermione had arrived with Ron and the others not too long beforehand and she had been ready to work piecing the boy back together. It was bloody business, and too long from when the attack occurred to reverse the effects of the bite. After working as hard as she could on making Lee look more like a person, she left him alone with Remus. They had a lot to discuss.

Hermione wandered towards the kitchen as the afternoon brought a calm over the sick. She washed her hands in the sink, a hold over from her younger muggle years, and took a seat at the table. Ginny and Ron were eating sandwiches and offered her one. Hermione took them up on the offer, slowly chewing the bread trying to make the meal last longer than it normally would. If she had the time to savor each bite, she was going to use it.

"I just keep thinking of how scary it must have been," Ginny said through a mouthful of wheat and jelly.

"Hm?" Hermione hummed, more focused on ham and cheese than her companions.

"Last night?" Ginny insisted. Hermione blinked and remembered suddenly what was being asked of her. After a full morning in medic mode she wasn't ready to focus on the confusing night she'd had.

"Yeah, it wasn't... fun." Words failed her. How would one describe the events of the past evening in the shack? Much less when one has to edit out most of what happened. Then again, she could tell them the truth. Tell them all that she had spent the night with Draco Malfoy. That'd go over great. *Don't worry guys he skimmed my mind but didn't get any Order secrets, just the weird dream I'd had about him.* Just the conversation she wanted to have right now. Hermione's cheeks flushed from the very thought of it.

“An entire night alone in a shack with a werewolf outside would be enough to drive someone mad,” Ron said, grabbing a second sandwich from the platter.

“Thank Merlin you’re alright,” Ginny smiled. The conversation seemed to end after that. The two red heads quickly finishing their lunch before heading out on some of Shackbolt’s business. Hermione almost felt relieved that they hadn’t pushed for any details. They obviously wanted to acknowledge that she’d been in danger, but beyond that they didn’t seem to mind her quietness. After all, they thought she’d cast a Patronus and then fell asleep for most of the night. Not the most eventual war story to tell afterwards. The bread felt impossibly dry as Hermione swallowed it. She banished her sandwich only half eaten and walked back to the medical ward.

Hermione spent the rest of the day sealing cuts and discussing the future of Lee Jordan with Lupin. The older man looked especially haggard, even considering it was the day after the full moon.

“He’s strong, he’ll be able to live with it. I just wish he didn’t have to,” his voice was hoarse and his eyes ringed with purple. She’d given him a small smile and told him to go upstairs and rest- doctor’s orders. He just nodded and followed her advice without a word. Hermione made a note to keep an eye on him.

A sober mood hung over the residence. The able-bodied fighters were scattered across England. Hermione had heard talk of trying to help neighboring countries against Voldemort’s invasion as well as their own. It felt impossible to help anyone else before they won their own home back, but Hermione didn’t object. She moved between the small, white beds checking on her patients keeping her mind busy on matters she was completely certain of. Besides Lee Jordan in his own curtained off room and Remus upstairs resting, she had Alicia Spinnet recovering from a slashing hex to her throat. It nearly took her head off. It took a whole slew of bone regrowth, tissue creation, and skin melding but she was coming along. A lot of tissue still needed to be regrown before the girl could even think about standing up. On top of it all, her vocal cords still remained damaged. They were a unique tissue, one that couldn’t be healed as easily as a simple cut or even a tendon. Despite all the prodding and pain, Alicia was being very patient. Angelina Johnson, who was often found at her bedside, was not. More than once in the previous week Johnson had confronted Hermione and accused her of showing more attention to the other patients and neglecting Alicia. They were unpleasant memories that had faded to the back of her mind with all the chaos as of late. Luckily, Johnson was out trying to track down information and the ward was free of confrontations. For now.

She stood beside Alicia Spinnet’s bed, casting a diagnostic on the girl’s throat and examining how far she’d come. She was worried about her spine, but it seemed to be falling back into place quite nicely. Her vocal cords were still slow going, and Hermione prepared herself to hear an earful from Angelina soon.

With all of her patients asleep and no one else to worry over, Hermione started the long trip up the stairs. She rarely had any peace and when she finally had a moment to recover it felt more like a chore than a relief. She’d love to sleep, but she rarely managed an entire night’s

rest. Either she was woken up to deal with a blown off arm, or her mind would wake itself up filling the quiet hours with a laundry list of potions to brew and plants to harvest. She'd have the whole day planned out before the sun had risen: check on Alicia, change the dressing on the brown-haired boy whose name you don't remember, hand out contraceptive potions to witches who need it-

Her duties were endless.

She stopped at the first door at the top of the stairs. None of the rooms were truly assigned to anyone. Members had their preferred beds but when push came to shove you slept where you could. The front room had unofficially been left to the older members of the Order. Tonks, and Moody and the like that could use a few moments away from the youthful chaos. Arthur and Molly also spent time in there when they were around. Most of their time was spent in the homes for displaced witches and wizards, the children who were caught in the middle of this giant mess.

Hermione peeked in and saw Remus snoring, lying on top of the sheets and his shoes still on his feet. He needed more rest, now more than ever. She wished Tonks was here, she always seemed to soothe the greyness he carried with him. A balm to the already long life he'd had to live. However, her power as a Metamorphmagus made her very useful and Moody had her jumping across the country running errands and gathering as much information on Death Eater movements as she could. Lonely work for both of them.

She moved down the hallway, slipping into the "Girl's Dormitory." Hermione recalled someone saying it used to be a drawing room, it certainly didn't look like one now. The Order had managed to fit six beds inside, all pressed against walls and shoved into corners in an attempt to make an open space where they could roll out maps to plot raids and store personal effects. While it wasn't forbidden for the boys to sleep there the usual occupants were Angelina Johnson, Ginny, the Patil twins, Katie Bell, and Hermione. Ginny, however, spent more time hidden away in closets with Harry than actually sleeping in her bed.

Hermione crossed the room to the bed shoved in the farthest corner. It was the most awkward one to get to but the witch preferred to be as far away from the door as possible. A habit rooted in paranoia but helpful all the same. She kicked her trainers off under the bed and stretched out on the sheets. Afternoon light streamed through the thin muslin curtains and Hermione watched the warm beams moved along the floor boards until sleep pulled at her mind and 12 Grimmauld place fell away.

Her school jumper drooped over her hands and she impatiently shoved the sleeves off her wrists. The table in front of her was covered in books and parchment, an ink well sitting precariously perched on top of a volume of *Quintessence: A Quest*. The Charms essay was slow going, not because of a lack of knowledge on Hermione's end, but by the sheer amount of work she had to do. She had just finished all of her Potions homework and helped Ron limp through his own work. There was still Defense Against the Dark Arts and Astronomy projects to do, the latter of which had to be done under a half moon.

Despite the looming deadlines, there was something very comforting about being back in the Hogwarts' Library. Like coming home after a long vacation and being able to sleep in your own bed for the first time in months. The smell of aging parchment and ancient ink combined

with the warm glow from the candles settled the rushed beating of her heart. She could have laid her head down on the table and taken a nap then and there.

But not when there was work to be done.

Hermione gripped her quill, quickly scratching down words as quickly as possible without sacrificing the neatness of her handwriting. There were already a few puddles of ink on the yellowing parchment, but nothing a few spells couldn't fix. If she worked quick enough, she might be able to get to bed at a decent hour. That or have to be ushered out of the library and write the rest of it in her bed with the curtains closed. Hermione much preferred the library to the dormitory for work, especially written assignments, but she'd take what she could get.

She looked up, rolling a cramp out of her wrist, and looked for the time. Instead, her eyes fell on the only other person in the room. It was rather odd to have an empty library, especially on a school night like this. Hermione would have thought most of the other Gryffindors would have had the same work load as herself and be scribbling away. She blinked, looking around. Irma Pince wasn't even walking around flicking her wand and sending books to be reshelfed. There was simply no one here, except for Hermione and the student with their back to her.

Once she was attuned to the silence it was deafening.

The figure sat at a table across the room at the edge of the study area where the tables began to melt into shelves. Black robes trimmed with green had been shrugged off and thrown over the back of his chair. He was huddled over a paper, the sleeves of his white dress shirt were rolled up to his elbows.

Draco Malfoy. His prefect badge hung on his discarded robes, the light catching the edge of the metal. His hair was sticking up like he had been running his fingers through it. His eyes were focused strictly on his parchment. Whatever he was working on seemed to be all consuming.

Hermione watched him for a moment. It was very easy to dislike Draco when he was sneering into your face, it was a much odder sensation to watch him simply be a person. A student. A sixteen-year-old working on homework instead of a menace dead set on humiliating you in anyway he could.

In the distance bells chimed signaling curfew. Hermione sighed, looking down at her unfinished essay. She had at least another hour to look forward to scribbling in the dim wand light of the dormitories.

She glanced up, almost certain she'd have to exchange some words with Draco. However, when she looked towards his table he was gone. The boy himself had vanished, but all of his papers and books stayed behind, even his robes and badge still hung on his chair.

Hermione sat perfectly still for a moment, casting a glance around the deathly quiet library before finally standing up. Her Charms essay was a distant memory in her mind as she quietly slipped through the rows of studying tables until she got to Draco's work station.

She leaned over the chair, peering at the Astronomy and Defense Against the Dark Arts books he had strewn across the table. The parchment he had been scribbling on didn't appear to be any kind of essay or homework at all. Instead it was a mess of bullet points and sentences written nearly on top of each other, a mess of notes without any sense of organization.

Hermione leaned in closer, squinting down at the paper trying to make sense of the hurried cursive.

"What are you doing?" his voice broke the silence of the library like a thunderclap. Hermione gasped, and turned around to face the accusation.

She found only the empty room of 12 Grimmauld Place, late evening light fading over the metal framed beds. Hushed voices leaked in from the hallway. The once quiet house was now full again. Hermione sat up, rubbing a crick that had formed in her neck. From the sun she gaged she must have slept for a few hours but she hardly felt like she'd gotten any rest at all. Her heart was still beating wildly from being caught... doing what exactly?

It wasn't a memory. It had been too strange to be a memory and yet it felt so real. She could still smell the old parchment as if it was right in front of her.

Hermione frowned. This war had taken that away from her. The harmless steady work of homework and essays. The magic of a world separated from her childhood where she didn't seem to fit in. Hogwarts had always been a dream to her. She bit her lip, pushing back the wave of emotion that threatened to overwhelm her.

Not now. Now she had to work.

She slipped on her trainers and stepped out into the hallway. Hermione took a deep breath, steadying herself to face whatever injuries were waiting for her downstairs.

Not Yet

The ailments are never ending. Even with every cut sealed and broken bone grown back there are still wounds to heal. Hermione is completely out of calming draught and only a single vial of dreamless sleep remains in the potion cupboard. A cauldron is bubbling away in the corner, the sweet scent of lavender reaching her nose. It'll only yield another weeks' worth of calming draught at the most, and there were more Order members needing it. No one ever demanded it, but she could see it in their eyes. She slipped the vials on their nightstands and it made the day go by smoother.

The nights, however, were a different story. She had given out the dreamless sleep like candy right after the full moon, but Hermione found her supply dwindling and began rationing it for the members who needed it the most. The quiet midnight hours of 12 Grimmauld Place were no more. The girl would lay wide awake curled up in her sheets listening to her friends' nightmares. Katie Bell, asleep in the bed nearest her, would whimper in her sleep gripping her pillow like a vice. She could hear a male voice down the hall screaming before the others in the room woke him up and calmed him down. Angelina Johnson had returned a few days after the full moon and spent most of the time in the infirmary with Alicia Spinnet, but Hermione always heard her shuffle quietly to her bed and sob against the mattress before finally falling asleep.

It felt unbearable.

With her cauldron occupied, she moved through the hospital ward trying to busy her worried hands. The wand Ron had grabbed for her after the full moon was a bit longer than her original one and not exactly suited for delicate healing spells. She was making do, but some of the simpler spells were better executed with wandless magic and a lot more focus. Hermione kept the wand in her back pocket most of the time, only pulling it out when it was necessary. She knew Ron had grabbed it from the collected of wands taken off of fallen Order members with a couple taken from Death Eaters. She didn't remember who the aspen wand belonged to, and she rather she never learned. When she had the time Hermione already decided to go upstairs to the little box and try out as many wands as she could. It would feel terrible handling the deceased possessions like that, but it might keep the current Order members alive.

Alicia Spinnet was awake, her bright eyes fixated on Hermione as her mouth open and a small groan escaped her lips. She tried to speak for a moment longer before raising a cupped hand to her mouth. Hermione gave her a small, unmotivated smile before moving the glass of water to the girl's lips. She drank half of it before finally taking a breath.

Hermione took out her new wand, casting a diagnostic. The colors didn't glow as bright or clearly with this new wand, and the whole layout was harder to read without her wand channeling the magic but it was enough.

"You're making good progress, just remember not to push yourself," she reminded the witch before turning back to the potions closet to check on her cauldron.

Brown eyes flickered to the single vial of dreamless sleep on the shelf. It had been a week since her night in the shack. She thought her dreams would wane after her afternoon nap spent in the Hogwarts library. A simple trick pulled by her brain, trying to make sense of seeing Draco Malfoy again. Instead, they persisted. The next night she had been walking through the dungeons after curfew, her school robes dragging across the stone floor as she tried to remember her way back to Gryffindor Tower. She'd run right into Draco, his Prefect badge catching the dim light of the corridor. He was young in her mind, his blonde hair falling across his forehead and his cheeks still plagued with acne as they had been when they were in school. He had wrinkled his nose at her, his light eyes looking down at her like she was an insect.

"You're past hours, Granger. That's ten points from Gryffindor," he said, a self-satisfied smirk crossing his lips. Hermione resisted the urge to roll her eyes and instead raised her chin, trying to match the height of a boy at least a foot taller than her.

"I'm well aware, Malfoy," she said, stepping aside to walk around him only for the Slytherin to step into her path. Hermione paused, taking a breath and trying to calm her nerves. "You're in my way."

"I'm well aware," he grinned down at her. She wasn't in the mood for playing games, not right now. Her book bag pulled at her shoulders, weighing down her back with the weight of her books. There were a million things she needed to do once she got back to Gryffindor Tower, and she was already feeling down after losing her house a handful of points. Hermione closed her eyes and sighed, all her frustration and exhaustion released in a single breath.

"Malfoy, please. I need to go." She opened her eyes to see Draco, but not the same Draco from before. He was a few inches taller, his white blonde hair shorter and slicked back. His skin was clear, his jawline more pronounced and covered in a very fine layer of stubble. He had bags under his eyes, like this older Draco hadn't slept in weeks.

He didn't say anything, only stepped aside to let her pass. Hermione hesitated, only for a moment, before walking past him feeling his gaze on her back as she went.

Hermione took dreamless sleep every night afterwards. It didn't seem like a big deal, there had been plenty of vials all labeled and set in neat little lines. Then Dean Thomas was suffering from night terrors, and Katie Bell's incessant whimpering and weeping was keeping the whole room of girls awake. She saw Tonks slip a vial from the closet without asking first, and Hermione wondered how many others were doing the same. She drained a bottle before turning in, not wanting to return to the haunting halls of a Hogwarts she never went to. Her dreams skewed her memories, conjuring up events that never happened and making them feel altogether too real.

But with only a single vial left, she could not in good conscience take it. One night would be fine. Two even. However long it took to get her hands on another batch.

Hermione finished up her cauldron of Calming Draught. It would need to sit over night but in the morning it'd be ready. She made a note to make more as soon as possible, she didn't want to be in a position without any again. It was too risky, especially considering how tightly

strung everyone was lately. Voldemort's hold on England was growing stronger by the day, and the Order was turning to more drastic decisions and attacks to try to keep his influence at bay. That's how Hermione had lost her wand, running headlong into a Death Eater hideout in some attempt at courage.

She took another lungful of the sweet, yet subtle lavender of the calming draught before shutting the door to the potions closet and putting up a new set of wards to keep unwanted members out. In this case the new wand came in handy, the long roundabout way she had to use the spell to set the lock would take way too long to reverse. By the time they got it open Hermione would already be alerted and be down the stairs to face the thief.

Not that the Order was full of thieves. They were hurting and desperate, she understood that, but someone had to be level-headed. Someone had to take charge and make sure there was enough for the witches and wizards who needed it the most.

Hermione climbed the stairs but could already hear poor Katie Bell's mumbling whimpers from the hallway. She cared for the girl and understood her pain was unreal. She'd returned from a scouting mission with burns covering three fourths of her body. Hermione managed to heal most of them, but there was still scarring on the girl's arms and torso, reaching up to wind around her neck like a string of pearls. She never said who did it, never talked about it with anyone. It simply must have been too hard to relive, and yet she did it every night. Hermione almost went back for the last vial of dreamless sleep but stopped herself.

Katie was strong. She could survive one night.

However, Hermione wasn't sure she could get any rest in the room. Instead she wandered to the end of the hallway where a window overlooked the muggle street. There was a small seat set under the window with thick dark green pillows covering the polished wood. The witch curled up, leaning against the wall with her head against the chill window frame. She could hear the other people in the house, walking around the kitchen and shifting in their beds. Every noise seemed too loud, too close.

She closed her eyes, blocking it all out focusing on the cold of the window beneath her cheek. The chill sunk into her skin sending a shiver down her spine.

"You'll be working in pairs," Snape's voice carried across the chilly classroom. It felt cold enough that his breath should be coming out in white puffs, but the freezing temperature didn't seem to affect him or the other students moving around her. Their faces were a blur, familiar enough to not second guess them being in class but not distinct enough to know who they were. A flash of dark hair, a glance of brown eyes, and everyone was huddled around their respective tables peering at their book. Some were already raiding the ingredients cabinet. Hermione blinked. Had she fallen asleep in class? She didn't even know what she was supposed to be making. Her heartbeat frantically as she flipped through her own potions book. She had bookmarks and labels noting their progression throughout the year but Snape did have a tendency to skip ahead when he became impatient.

"Ms. Granger," the professor's low voice drew her name out, emphasizing the s in her title. She looked up, meeting his hard gaze from across the classroom. "Who is your partner?"

Hermione looked beside her to find the space at the table next to her empty. She looked around the room, but all the other students seemed to be paired up. She didn't see Harry or Ron anywhere, were they sick? They always had potions together.

"Ms. Granger, please find a partner. I will now allow you to complete the assignment on your own," Snape said, his dark eyes drilling into her, his fingers pressed flat against his desk. She had requested similar exemptions for her in the past, but today she would get no mercy. Her brown eyes scanned the room, embarrassment and fear bubbling in her gut. This was the closest Hogwarts ever came to muggle schooling. The feeling of standing in front of the class as all the other kids were picked for teams until you were the only one left. Hermione chewed on her bottom lip and began to rise from her seat preparing herself to wander the room until she found someone alone or a group willing to let her join.

"Granger can work with me," a voice announced behind her, a hand settling on her shoulder. Hermione didn't need to turn around to know who owned the voice. Pompous, slightly nasally, and entirely too happy to be paired with Hermione of all people.

"Thank you, Mr. Malfoy," Snape said, giving her a small smile before turning to his supply cabinet where the growing crowd of students were making a mess of his tidy shelves.

"Crabbe and Goyle pick each other, then?" Hermione snapped, focusing on the pages of her textbook instead of turning around.

"They're skipping, probably didn't want to risk being paired with you." His hand was still on her shoulder and Hermione resisted the urge to shrug it off. He leaned over her other shoulder, encasing her in his robes as he peered at her potions book. He smelled like library books and a hint of a deep, earthy scent like teakwood. Hermione kept her focus on her book, flipping through the pages trying to find the right until she finally gave up. The witch slapped her desk in frustration, slouching back in the chair and turning her head to ask Draco.

"What potion are we-" her words tangled up in her throat as she came eye to eye with silver. She didn't move, didn't blink, didn't even breathe. The noise of the classroom faded away until there was only Hermione and Draco, his arm wrapped around her still caressing her shoulder. His eyes ran over her face as if he was memorizing it. Hermione finally exhaled, her breath coming out in a puff of white smoke. She shivered, the sudden cold reaching deep into her bones. Draco's grip tightened, pulling her closer to him. She turned into him, savoring the warmth of his body against her own.

"Hermione?" a voice called for her from the other end of the room, hazy and mottled. Maybe it was Professor Snape? She was in class wasn't she? She needed to make something... what page was it? Hermione tried to turn towards the voice but her head was too heavy, her movements bogged down as the voice grew louder. Draco pulled her closer to his chest, and Hermione gave up fighting the molasses air and leaned against his shoulder her mind hazy but for the smell of parchment and earth.

"Don't wake up- not yet."

Hermione felt the cold creeping into her skin, her teeth chattering as the sharp pang of the chill hit her gums.

“What?”

She woke with a start, her cheek nearly frozen through from leaning against the window pane. Hermione jumped to her feet but found 12 Grimmauld Place still quiet. A clock at the end of hallway pointed a curved hand to three.

The witch descended the stairs, rubbing life back into her frozen chilled cheek and trying to ignore the scent of teakwood that seemed stuck to her skin.

Ripple

Hermione snapped her eyes back open, quickly standing up from the chair beside Alicia Spinnet's chair to pace around the ward. Exhaustion set into her bones, her head throbbing from lack of sleep but the witch was too nervous to slip under. After running downstairs, away from the window and her dreams, Hermione had spent the entire night rearranging the potions closet and banishing dirty linens and conjuring new ones, even scrubbing down the kitchen with a sponge the muggle way. By the time the rest of the safe house woke up the entire downstairs was spotless.

Not that anyone noticed.

Ron commented on the dark bags under her eyes and she'd brushed it off. He didn't push past it, simply grabbed some toast and went off on his way. It was Ginny who stared at her for a second too long, who noticed the tremor in her fingers as she fiddled with her replacement wand that was too long and too foreign.

"You never came to bed last night." It had been a statement of fact as Ginny narrowed her eyes at her. Hermione nodded. Ginny's gaze swept across the hospital ward that was, for the most part, very calm. "Didn't seem that busy when I went to bed."

"Things change." Hermione had said before running off to the potions closet again.

She'd leaned against a bookshelf in there, resting her head against thick leather-bound descriptions of various potions when her eyes started to slide closed. It wasn't until her body started to relax and she nearly fell to the floor that she woke up. She gripped her cauldron watching the calming draught bubble and boil and took a long inhale of its cool scent. She chugged a Wideye potion and went back to the floor.

It was amazing how much one witch could accomplish on no sleep and powered by nerves. Hermione spent the next five days dosing Wideye.

Her fingers shook against the stirring rod so violently she had to put it down and finish the potion in an hour. She saw little black bugs crawling up the staircase that no amount of banishing spells seemed to do away with. She didn't know when it was day or night, dusk or dawn. People came in people came out and Hermione weaved through time like a tourist, unaware of the bonds and rituals held by the others.

That is until the potion ran out.

She paced around the first floor, Alicia Spinnet's eyes watching her drift from one side of the room to the other.

"Sit." She croaked out. She had improved immensely over the last few days. She was awake more often and was able to a couple words at a time. Nothing too long or else Hermione could hear the strain and make her stop. Hermione shook her head, not even stopping her marching to look in the witch's direction.

“I’ll fall asleep if I sit.”

“Good.”

Hermione stopped, this time giving the girl a pointed stare. The corner of Alicia’s mouth curled up and she settled into her pillows satisfied with herself.

“Speaking of which, do you want a potion to help you sleep?” Hermione drifted over to the foot of Alicia’s bed. With recovery came other problems. Spinnet was plagued with similar nightmares as the others that had seen combat. Hermione had watched her wake up clutching her throat too many times not to offer her a vial of Dreamless sleep once the new batch was ready. The doses were going like crazy. Once word got out that more was ready Hermione had a line outside of the little closet begging for a bit. She had another cauldron bubbling away that would be ready in a day and a half, hoping she had enough for everyone tonight.

“Please.” Alicia’s grin fell. Hermione gave her a comforting smile before leaving for the potions closet.

She stepped inside, closing the door behind her and embracing the quiet of the room. Her eyelids drooped and Hermione considered, for the first time, that sleep might be a good idea. She looked to the Dreamless sleep vials, counting the remaining doses.

Seven. Enough for Alicia, Katie Bell, and Lee Jordan to have a dose for tonight and tomorrow night and one left over for her. Hermione bit her lip. Those were the three that needed it the most, but if she took the last vial for herself. But what if another raid happened in the time before the new batch was ready? What if Katie Bell started building an immunity and needed two doses? There was too many questions, too many contingencies. They would need that single bottle. Hermione could not take it in good faith.

But she could not shake what had occurred in her dream.

He’d spoken to her. Not as a student at Hogwarts, not like a figment of her brain placing him in the past, but as a real person.

“Don’t wake up- not yet.”

She could still feel his arms wrapped around her, the smell of parchment and teakwood clinging to his skin. Hermione would turn and smell it on her own clothes, as if he’d been in the safe house. Her chest grew tight and she grabbed a single vial from the shelf before leaving the closet to rush it out to Alicia.

She had to think about something else. If her mind lingered too long on sharp eyes and cruel smiles she’d go mad.

She set the potion down on Alicia’s bedside before drifting from patient to patient on another round of the injured.

The large clock in the hall chimed nine as she flicked her wand over a young sleeping wizard, checking on the internal damage left over from a particularly nasty hex. She was focused on

the soft, glowing orbs hanging in the air when her wards around the potions triggered. Hermione rushed out into the hallway skidding to a stop as the sound of glass shattering filled the corridor.

A young wizard started to run out of the closet, the evidence of the wreckage clinging to his trainers sending a cacophony of smells into the air. Sweet mixed with pungent, sugar and earth together in a mind fogging combination. Hermione whipped out her replacement wand, hexing the boy and freezing him in place. Others were starting to stir at the noise, some patients were out of their beds, and the ones who were sleeping peered down from the landing. Hermione approached the boy, turning him around to look at his frozen, panicked face. He was vaguely familiar but she didn't know his name. They had lost so many and were trying to up their numbers wherever they could. He was young, a child. Her stomach turned.

"I'm going to free you but you are going to stay right where you are," she said sternly before producing the counter spell. The boy's body relaxed and his brown eyes went straight to the floor. "Now. What did you think you were doing?"

The boy held out a hand, a single vial in his palm the liquid sloshing around his hand shook. Dreamless Sleep.

"I.. I can't sleep... I see them when I do," he muttered. Hermione sighed. The onlookers leaned in trying to hear the conversation. For the first time in the five days of no sleep, she felt truly and utterly exhausted.

"If you need something, just ask. Do you understand?" she asked. The boy nodded, still handing out the potion. "Keep that one for tonight, but I won't have anymore until the end of the week. Understand?"

"Yes ma'am." Then he was gone. The others relaxed returning to their beds but muttering among themselves. If they find out which vial he took the kid was going to be hearing an earful. Hermione shook off the encounter and went to her closet to clean up.

A sob lodged itself in her throat.

Everything, absolutely everything was destroyed. Every vial was broken, every stash torn apart. The floor was a puddle of goo, sparkling and sparking with each new reaction. All of her supplies, all of her potions gone.

Hermione held on to the doorframe, trying to keep her wits together. She couldn't cry, not now. The others would find out what was wrong, they'd panic. She took a deep breath trying to calm the wave of emotion threatening to drown her.

"Hermione what's-," Ron turned the corner, Ginny at his elbow but the pair stopped at the sight of the ransacked potions closet.

"Oh, Hermione," Ginny whispered. "I'm so sorry."

That's when the dam broke. Her shoulders shudders and the tears flowed down her cheeks. She had the vague sense of a hand on her back. People were talking, trying to soothe her.

Some were cleaning. She saw Alicia Spinnet out of bed and waved her back. She didn't see the boy who did this, she tried to ask for his name. She never did get an answer.

"Don't worry 'Mione we'll clean it up."

"I've already started a new batch."

"Please go to sleep, Hermione."

It was as if she blinked and time had moved forward a day. Everything was quiet again, save for the lingering sickly-sweet smell of spilled potions. She sat at the kitchen table, staring at a spider crawling up the opposite wall.

Don't fall asleep, Granger. She told herself, brown eyes already sliding closed. They'd been open for so long her eyes were stinging either from strain or dryness she wasn't sure. She had an eyedrop potion, but it was broken with the rest. She could use her wand, but she didn't trust this new one.

No Wideye, no Dreamless Sleep. All she had left was a mug of coffee. Her hands were wrapped around the long cold cup, the liquid doing little for the massive undertaking she was asking of it.

"Don't fall asleep," she muttered to herself. She blinked and it took double the time. Her head drooped towards the table. There was so much to do, but she wasn't even sure what day it was anymore. Had it been minutes since she cried in the potions closet? Had it been weeks? "Don't..."

She blinked and the cold night of Grimmauld Place was replaced by the warm, comfort of the Gryffindor girl's dormitory. Hermione sat on her bed, the curtains pulled to the side to let in light, with books and parchment spread out in front of her. She was still in her uniform, yet the window held only starlight. The room was empty, the beds made and the curtains hanging neatly as when they entered the very first day of school. If not for the little trinkets on the nightstands and the marked up trunks on the floor, Hermione would have thought no one else lived here.

She looked down to her homework and tried to remember what exactly she should be working on. Was it potions? She didn't remember having anything to write for Snape. Her mind was muddled. The pull of duty yanking at her chest, yet she was unsure of what that duty was. Perhaps she had it written in her notes. Hermione hopped off her bed, her socked feet silent against the floor as she made her way to her trunk. She threw it open, pulling out a notebook and flopping through the pages. Her mind was still spinning, unable to focus on anything specific. She knew there were words on the page, but she couldn't for the life of her read them.

Hermione frowned, throwing the book back in her trunk and shutting it. She stood, taking a moment to settle into the silence of the room and stretch out the tense muscles of her back. It was very rare that she had the dorm to herself and that the students downstairs in the common room weren't loudly celebrating a Quidditch match or some other occasion. It felt odd and alien. She moved to the window beside her bed, leaning against the stone wall and looking

out into the night. The night was as dark as ink and just as opaque. Usually she could see lights dotting the grounds and the glowing windows of rooms below, yet tonight everything was dipped in darkness.

Movement in the glass grabbed her attention. Hermione stood up straight, looking at the distorted reflection. She saw a figure, but not one she recognized as the other girls that shared the room. She spun around and her entire body froze.

Draco Malfoy stood in the middle of the Gryffindor Girl's Dorm room as if it was exactly where he ought to be. He was dressed in his Slytherin robes, his white hair was styled neatly like he kept it in their last year together at school. She blinked trying to banish the vision but there he was- standing in room he couldn't possibly be in. Her heart skipped a beat.

"You're here," he whispered, his voice hoarse. Hermione bristled.

"Of course, I'm here, I'm supposed to be. How are you in my dorm, Malfoy? Even if you figured out the password the stairs are enchanted," Hermione snipped, her nerves making the words flow more freely than she cared for. Her eyes darted to her wand left on her blankets back to Draco. How did he even get in the dorm? Did that mean he had been here before?

"I didn't use the stairs," he said. Hermione inched closer to her bed, her hands itching to get ahold of her wand.

"However you got in- please leave," Hermione stated, holding her ground. The world tilted around her, the warm reds of the room twisting and blurring before melting into cool greens and silvers. She paused, looking around to find a similar shaped room, with five beds but covered in Slytherin colors. Her homework and her wand were gone.

"There, I left," he said with a small smirk.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. The distinct smell of the dungeons lingered in the air.

"Come on, Granger. You know what this is," he said, taking a step closer. Hermione looked at him, focusing on his silver eyes as he crept closer.

Hogwarts... they were in Hogwarts but they couldn't be. She had left to fight with Harry. She had... she'd been awake for so long because of those odd dreams...

Dreams. Oh God she was in one again.

"I fell asleep," she gasped, looking around the Slytherin boy's dorm she had certainly never set foot in.

"Brightest witch of her age," Malfoy said, waving his hands out as if presenting her. Hermione snatched his left wrist, shoving the sleeves of his robe up and revealing the dark mark set in his skin. She looked up to his face to find it aged. Like in her other dream his youth faded into the Malfoy from the shack. He had creases forming along his forehead, and his silver eyes had dulled over time. She could feel the dark magic tingle against her fingers where she touched him.

The Malfoy that was a Death Eater.

“Are you real?” she asked, still holding onto his arm. “Or are you part of my mind?”

“Oh, that’s an interesting question,” he said, his eyes lighting up. “Which would be more fun, me being real or Hermione Granger have incessant dreams about me?”

Hermione shoved his arm back, her palms stinging from the contact.

“You’re real then,” she remarked, taking him in again. His robes had melted into a black shirt and slacks.

“You’ve been avoiding me,” he said, a grin pulling ever so slightly at the corner of his lips. He looked hungry and the gaze he set on her sent a shiver through Hermione’s entire body.

“How can I avoid you if you’re in my dreams?” she said, trying to hold onto her composure. Her fingers picking at the sleeve of her school robes.

“By not sleeping evidently,” he said, raising an eyebrow.

Hermione chewed on her bottom lip, but didn’t speak. She felt at a disadvantage in this dream state, surrounded by silver and verdant.

“Were you afraid?” his voice lowered, almost a hush. She realized how close they were to one another, but her feet refused to move. Whether it was the dream or her own stubborn body, Hermione couldn’t tell. Her anxiety bubbled in her stomach, her ears burning beneath her curls as she met his gaze that was simply too excited to see her cornered.

“I’m not afraid of you, Malfoy,” she said. She felt her robes move around her body and the familiar feeling of her jeans and cardigan grounded her. Her war uniform, the one she had to scour every night to remove all the blood and bile from.

“I don’t think you are,” he said, his voice soft for a moment. They flickered down to her attire before returning to her eyes. He raised an eyebrow at her. “You’re afraid of what you think of me.”

Hermione’s mouth fell open. Her hand raising to jab a finger into his chest, her chest bubbling with emotions she was ready to lay into him but he continued without her protests.

“I’ve seen it, Granger,” he said, his voice low. He leaned towards her and despite every part of her brain that told her to move away she stayed put. His warm breath grazed across her cheek. “I saw it in that mind of yours and I have to say, it was quite the fantasy.”

Hermione’s cheeks burned. He smirked down at her and she felt her chest tighten as frustration built in her rib cage.

“So why are you here then?” she snapped, looking straight into his grey eyes. He paused, brow furrowing.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t need the real you to dream about you, I can make up a much nicer Malfoy in my mind,” Hermione said, her anger cooling as her insult morphed into a curiosity. She moved away, moving between the trunks and beds as her thoughts kept rolling. “If you’re real, and I’m almost certain you are, that means you’re also asleep somewhere. We’re sharing a dream.

“I’m not an expert on dreams, but it seems odd that two people would suddenly start sharing a dream because one of them thought about the other. In that case everyone would be hopping in and out of everyone else’s dreams all the time,” Hermione paused, turning back to Malfoy who was standing still just watching her move around him. “But, it’s not just because of that. You entered my mind at the shack. Alone, reading someone’s thoughts would also not create this kind of bond. At least, it’s never been documented by a legilimens.”

She finished her circle around the room coming to a stop in front of Malfoy once again.

“I think you’re in my dreams because I’m in yours,” she said, her own satisfied grin on her lips. She was expecting a rebuttal. A long winded, rambling string of insults of her bloodline and her hair like he threw at her during school.

“You are,” he said, his eyes soft. Hermione paused, thrown by his reaction more than her initial conclusion.

Malfoy dreamed about her? Her mind wandered to the dream she had in the shack, the animalistic, rough fantasy that had both excited and worried her. Her fears and her guiltiest pleasures mixing into one scene. Did he think about her like that?

Her mind felt shattered by the confession. She was working overtime trying to field the amount of questions growing in her mind. However, she didn’t get a chance to answer any of them.

“I have to go,” Malfoy said, his eyes lingering on hers before vanishing from the room. The dormitory oozed into blackness, the dream dismantling around her bleeding onto her skin and soaking her clothes.

She woke up, her cheek pressed against the wood of the kitchen table. Her coffee mug had tipped over during the night, the brown liquid soaking into her sleeves.

“Hermione?” Ginny stood in the door to the hallway, her hair pulled back and an apron tied around her waist. She smelled like burned potions. “Are you alright?”

Hermione blinked, still shell-shocked.

“I’m not entirely certain.”

Touch

Hermione stared at her small wire framed bed shoved into the corner of the girl's room. It was a new moon tonight so only the stairs lit the room. Hermione had the tip of her borrowed wand glowing, not enough to disturb anyone but enough to see by. The others, except for Ginny who was on a mission with Harry and Angelina Johnson who was downstairs with Alicia, were already asleep. Hermione hadn't slept in her bed in a full week, and it felt odd to approach it now.

Especially with how eager she was to sleep.

She kicked off her shoes and slipped under the covers. Her clothes smelled of spilled potions from hastily trying to restock the closet that day. She's inquired about the young wizard and had only received vague responses. A new boy, a friend of an acquaintance. She'd worried a hole right through her sleeve, her thumb running across the fabric until it broke, trying to control herself and not cry in the hallway in front of everyone. She had Ron all but take an Unbreakable Vow to swear to find him. Every patient, every healer, was meticulously watched and evaluated- why couldn't they do the same for their fighters? Are they that desperate that they'll take any young boy who walks off the streets that claims to have good will towards the cause?

Hermione stuffed her face into her pillow. Sitting in the potions closet, nearly choked out with fumes, Hermione had focused on a small book she'd found after scouring the plucked over and half destroyed libraries of Grimmauld place. *Decisive Dreamers: A Guide to the Mind*. The book was smaller than she would have liked and wasn't the end all be all of dream information, but it was what she could get her hands on. She gripped the blankets around her and took a breath. If she couldn't stop thinking there was no way she'd be able to sleep.

She closed her eyes and let exhaustion pull her down.

The collar of her school shirt chaffed against her neck. She sighed, running a finger around her collar before deciding to loosen her tie and undo the top button. She stared down at her textbook, a quill in hand. It was something for Transfiguration, something important but she couldn't remember exactly what.

A thought flickered across her mind and she dropped her quill, gripping the book and forcing herself to look at the words on the page. She knew there were words, and little scratches of ink were arranged in sentences but no matter how hard she focused she couldn't read it.

"I'm dreaming," she laughed to herself, looking around the study room. Her mind had built an exact copy of Hogwarts as she remembered it, not like it was now. She shivered at the thought of what its halls may look like after a year under Death Eater control.

Hermione, however, could not dwell on the school for too long. She had a very specific mission in mind. She rose from the table and exited to the corridor. Her shoes clicked against the floor, but not another soul was around. She didn't need anyone else in this dream, just one.

She wandered around the empty castle. If she wanted to catch Draco she needed to figure out where he'd be. She stopped at the library, chewing on her fingernail. Maybe he wasn't asleep. She could wait until he was, but what if he never went to sleep? Would she wander her dream halls all night alone?

She turned and saw him. Sixth year Draco Malfoy alone in the library peering up at a shelf. She slipped into the room, making her way quietly toward him. He didn't seem to notice her, his mind focused on the task at hand. He had a dark coat on, his forearms strictly covered whereas in his early years he often shed his outer layer of robes and worked with his sleeves pushed up.

They had all known why.

She stepped beside him just as he slipped a volume off the shelf. Hermione quickly plucked it from his hands and let it fall open, inspecting its contents.

"Granger," Draco choked out, his fingers curling into a fist.

"What are you reading? Something interesting I hope," she smiled, eyeing the book in her hand. The dream landscape had neglected to give the book especially identifying other than a worn black cover. She flipped through the pages, each paper filled to the brim with tiny etched scribbles that said nothing at all. She twisted it around, showing him the pages of gibberish. "Bit of a hard read."

She looked up to find him inspecting her, his brow pulled together. His confused expression melted away. The youthful face she remembered from Sixth Year hardened, fine wrinkles forming at the corner of his eyes and purple bleeding in underneath his eyes.

"You beat me to it," he said with the slightest smirk.

"I did," Hermione grinned, pressing the book back into its place on the shelf, as if the dream library minded where she put the volumes. "And I have questions."

"Of course you do," he slumped against the shelf.

"And you don't?" Hermione asked, genuinely confused by his reaction. "This is a very interesting bit of magic connecting us and you don't want to explore it?"

"Explore it all you want, Granger, I don't need to know anymore details," he said, rubbing his palm against the edge of his jaw.

"Malfoy, I thought you were a scholar," she said, her voice rising as if teasing an old friend. The tone felt unfamiliar on her lips. All her friends were focused on the front lines, or on one another. She hadn't the chance to speak truthfully to any of them for any extended amount of time, much less tease them. Ginny was the only one who lingered around the safe house long enough to speak with and even then they had little to say to one another. Hermione's chest tightened at the thought of Draco Malfoy- an old friend.

"At heart," he said, his hand resting over his chest. "But not right now."

“Malfoy, you’re the only one I can talk to about this,” Hermione said. She needed another mind working with her, someone with access to a better library, something to look at it and see what she was missing.

“Oh, you don’t want to tell Weasley you’ve been dreaming about me,” he raised an eyebrow. Hermione felt her cheeks burned but ignored it. There was little to be gained trying to act coy now.

“Malfoy, please, can I just hear what you think about it?”

“So, you value my opinion?” he raised a blonde eyebrow at her.

“I wanted to hear it. I never said I’d value it.”

He snickered.

“I think you’re right. I think we both were thinking of one another enough that we bridged our minds,” he spoke with an easy rehearsed air. Hermione inspected his face, looking for the emotion he was obviously hiding behind a practiced speech.

“You don’t believe that.”

“I do.”

“Then you think there’s something else,” she prodded. Malfoy looked away, his hand rubbing against his jaw again. Her eyes caught the motion, her healer mind full awakened. If the wound from their run in with the werewolf was giving him trouble then she needed to take a look right away. She reached out to grab his hand. “Is it your cut bothering-”

“Granger, did it occur to you that not everything has a proper reason for existing?” his words came out in a rush as he pushed off the bookcase, showcasing his full height. His fingers feel from his jaw and grabbed her wrist, halting her approach. Her eyes snagged on the line of silver skin along his jaw. He pressed his fingers to her chin, raising her face to meet his eyes. The warmth from his fingers bled into her skin but were gone just as quickly, looping around her wrist again as if she might run away. His eyes were hard as he looked at her, his pale cheeks flushed. “Maybe this bond exists simply because we both want nothing more than to touch a person we’re forbidden to.”

Hermione paused. His skin felt hot against her wrist, and she swallowed hard as his meaning washed over her. Could that be true? Many emotions were strong enough to spark magical effects like anger and love. Could magic this strong form from two people simple being, for lack of a better word, horny? She didn’t believe it- she couldn’t believe it. Magic was brought from emotions stronger than simple lust, and that was certainly all she felt. She couldn’t imagine Malfoy feeling anything else.

She blinked, her eyes sliding to where his pale fingers looped around her wrist applying just enough pressure to make her whole body warm. She found silver eyes again and was soon drowning in molten metal.

Her mind was hazy. If their connection was born from their mutual desires, what did it mean? Would they dream together for the rest of their lives, passing one another in ancient halls like an old school peer in Diagon Alley? Or would their magic drag them together until they no longer felt the same want that seemed to warm her entire body.

“What do you suppose we do?” she stuttered, her voice thin as she tried to keep decorum. Almost immediately after the words left her lips, he leaned down as if to kiss her. He stopped, his lips hovering a breath away from her own. Her knees trembled and she was grateful he already had a hand wrapped around her wrist to keep her from completely crashing to the floor if they gave out. Her eyes flickered from his lips back to his liquid silver eyes, burned once again by their intensity.

“Whatever we want,” his voice slithered down her spine like the serpent emblazoned on his chest. Her whole body was burning like kindle. His hand slipped from around her wrist, his fingers interlocking with her own, the action bringing their bodies even closer. She let her fingers tighten, returning his grip. “You can do anything you want here, Granger. I’ll never tell.”

Hermione’s heart raced. The dreams she’d had the past two weeks were curiosities at most, exciting in the sense that adventure is exciting. This was completely different. She felt warmth bubbling through her from her head straight to her toes. She wanted nothing more than to shrug off her robes and stretch out beside Malfoy and see if she could make herself as tall as he was. She wanted his hands on her, his lips, his teeth- all of it. Her throat felt thick. She wasn’t supposed to want that, and especially not from him. Anyone but him.

“What’ll it be, Granger?” Malfoy teased, his hand gently squeezing hers.

There were a million things to worry about. The potions downstairs, all the supplies to make up, the patients to check up on. The Order needed to be kept together, the cause needed to be protected.

But here in her own mind away from prying eyes, she felt she could be entirely and unabashedly selfish.

She grabbed Malfoy by the front of his robes and pulled him down to slam her lips into his. She missed, catching only half his lips, but neither of them cared. In an instant he had his arms wrapped around her and was kissing her back. They were rushed, sloppy kisses like two students might swap between shelves at the actual Hogwarts’ library. Desperate and frazzled. Her heart was a drum beating against her ribcage, her mind foggy and slow yet attuned to every brush of his fingers against the back of her neck and slip of his tongue against her own. She slipped a hand into his pale blonde hair, holding on to him as if he might vanish at any moment.

Perhaps it was because they were stuck in a dream, Hermione swore he tasted like trouble. Like being out of Gryffindor tower past curfew, like swiping ingredients from Snape’s cabinet. Like a secret on the tip of your tongue. She laughed against his mouth at the thought. He pulled her in closer, twisting them both around before pressing her back against the bookshelf. She gasped at the contact but soon lost herself in the sensation of Malfoy’s kisses

sloppily moving down her jaw and dragging down her neck. A moan escaped her throat and she felt Malfoy chuckle against her throat.

“That excited by snogging in the library, Granger?” he snickered. If she were younger, and not hidden away in the recesses of her own mind, she might have smacked him. Instead, she could only giggle in return because for all his teasing he was right.

This was nothing like her dream from the shack. It was real, he was real. His hand slid up her thigh and she parted her legs for him. Her breath hitched at how easily the movement came to her, at how much she wanted him to touch her.

He looked up at her, seemingly equally surprised at her earnestness. His mouth opened, a question waiting on his tongue and she pressed her lips against his before he could speak. Her fingers weaved through his hair, her fingers curling into fists as his hand edged up her thigh until his knuckles pressed against the fabric of her knickers. She shuddered at the contact, her grip on Malfoy’s hair tightening.

She wanted to linger in the library for weeks, exploring every way a simple brush of Malfoy’s hand could make her body feel stunned, yet a clock ticked in the back of her mind. The impending dawn that threatened to rip her from this moment at any minute. Time was so different when they were dreaming and she had no idea of when she might wake up. Her heart pattered as if they were snogging in the Hogwarts library and at any moment a student or teacher would turn the corner and catch them.

Malfoy, pressed a soft kiss against her throat and then sank his teeth into her flesh. She gasped, yanking his hair to pull his face away from her neck. She meant to say something smart but the words vanished when she saw hooded silver eyes looking down at her. He looked starved. Her whole body flushed, her skin burning for more of his touch.

He leaned into her again, pressing his face close against her neck. His hand moved under her skirt, pressing through her knickers before bypassing the garment entirely. His hand slid against hot skin and Hermione felt her breath freeze in her chest. She slammed her head back, her curls catching on the edges of centuries old tomes. Malfoy nipped at her neck, catching the skin between his teeth and sucking relentlessly. His fingers moved quickly, building a fire in her core that threatened to burn her to ash. Hermione’s fingers curled into his robes, her body fighting the overwhelming wave of different sensations that crashed over her with each twitch of his finger and flick of his tongue.

“Draco,” the name came from her mouth like a shuddered prayer. His teeth dug into her neck and she squirmed beneath him.

“Say it again,” he panted, his fingers working faster between her legs.

“Draco,” she moaned, her eyes shut against the sensory overload of the lights of the room. She wanted to focus entirely on the feeling in her body, the sensation of his hands on her and his wet mouth against her neck. His smell, of leather and parchment wrapping around like a scarf. She shuddered as pleasure built and built with no release. She was close, oh so close.

“Look at me.”

Her eyes snapped open. His fingers held her chin, as he looked down into her eyes. She held his gaze as his fingers sped up, circling her clit with desperate, frantic movement. She felt herself reaching a peak. Her body twitched under his hand, unable to stand another second of teasing. She went to turn away from his gaze but he held her face still.

“Let me watch,” he whispered. It felt like his eyes were pouring molten silver into her, burning her from the inside out. Combined with the fire already raging inside her, she was lost to the flames. Hermione gasped, eyes locked with sharp stormy eyes as the pleasure wrenched through her body, grinding down on his hand as each shock rippled through her.

Her knees were trembled, her face slick with sweat. Malfoy leaned in, his lips a ghost of a touch on hers.

“Granger-” his voice cut off.

She blinked and the ceiling of Grimmauld Place stared back at her. She jerked up, looking around at the empty room. Sunlight poured in through the window.

“Shit.” She pulled her trainers out from under the bed, jamming her feet into them and was out the door into the hallway. Her face was flushed, her body like an unruly wand twitching with magic. She marched downstairs, her eyes settling on the first face she found. Katie Bell was halfway out the door when Hermione caught her arm.

“Why didn’t any of you wake me up?” Hermione demanded. She shouldn’t have been harsh, especially with Katie of all people, but she couldn’t hide her frustration.

“Alicia said you needed it,” she said, shying away from Hermione’s tone. “I don’t think we could have even if we wanted to, you were sleeping pretty hard.”

Hermione’s eye twitched but she released the girl’s arm letting her slip out the front door. She moved slowly into the patient room where Alicia Spinnet sat up in her bed drinking a cup of tea.

“Since when do you give orders?” Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow. Alicia smiled, sipping from her cup.

“What good is a healer if she’s compromised?” she said. Her voice was soft, straining to speak the full sentence. Hermione was struck all at once. Proud of her recovery, resignation at the truth in her words, and overwhelming guilt. Shame swirled in her stomach. Compromised. What a word to use.

Was she compromised? Hermione had woken with such a start she didn’t take a single moment to process the dream she’d just shared. She realized her face had dropped and Alicia was looking at her peculiarly.

“Your neck?” she groaned out, her voice gravely as pushed herself too far.

“Shh, rest,” Hermione said, crossing to Alicia’s bedside, her hand raising to her throat feeling for something. All she felt was flesh. She ran a quick diagnostic over Alicia. “It’s just strain,

but please be careful. Don't over do it, even if it is to scold me. Get Angelina to do that- she's good at it you know."

She smiled and went to check on her potions closet. Inside her cauldrons were still running, her shelves not completely bare. A few vials sat as lone guards; hurried writing scribbled across the labels. It was nowhere enough to supply an entire rebellion, but it was something. Hermione peered into the side of a silver cauldron bubbling with Skele-Gro, twisting to inspect her neck in the reflection. To her dismay a giant purple bruise marred the side of her throat.

Hermione gasped, slapping her fingers over the skin as if that would hide it from the world. She spread her fingers expecting the bruise to have vanished but it stared back at her, purple and bruised. She leaned closer to the cauldron, her reflection stretched across its metal belly. She could see dark purple divots within the bruise- teeth marks. She went pale. At least two people had seen her like this, what could they possibly think of her? At least Alicia Spinnet couldn't gossip easily, but had Katie Bell glimpsed it? Where did she think Hermione could have earned such a mark? She certainly hadn't done it to herself.

His touch within their minds had left very real marks on her skin. Her brain was swimming. The implications of such a thing were-

Well, they weren't great.

Hermione whipped out her wand, holding the awkward length of wood against her neck trying to heal the bruise. Her panic mixed with the strangeness of the borrowed wand made it ten times more difficult than it needed to be. It took three different tries at casting before she managed to do anything, and then multiple recasts to put a dint in the purple inked across her neck. Malfoy seemed to be just as ambitious in his passion as he was in every other aspect of life.

She paused. Was passion the right word? She physically waved her wand as if she could banish the thought from her mind. She couldn't think about him right now, she had to hide the evidence he had left.

Hermione managed to fade the mark to a light green and cast a disillusionment charm over it to completely hide it from view. Suddenly, she was extremely grateful no one woke her up. The less people who saw her the better. Yet, she wondered if they could still see it as they slipped past her to start their day. Was it obscured by her hair or on full display? Could they have watched it bloom into existence or had it entered the world when Hermione reemerged from her dream? The connected dreams were already difficult to wrap her head around and now she brought dream touches with her into the real world.

Oh Merlin, had she made noise? She had whimpered his name to his face- oh Merlin had they all left her in her room tossing in her sheets moaning Draco Malfoy's name?

She felt absolutely sick.

Her hand went to her lips, fingers feeling the flesh that Malfoy had kissed so desperately. She looked around her closet, still mostly empty. Maybe she shouldn't have slept. Maybe then she

could have been more proactive and prevented their little thief from ever stepping a foot towards their supplies. She was literally dreaming while they lost the war.

The door creaked open and Hermione snapped her hand to her side. Ron poked his head in.

“I think I found him ‘Mione,” he said, a small smile on his face.

“The kid?” she asked, pushing the door all the way open. There were bags under Ron’s eyes and his clothes were dusty, but he seemed proud. He raised his chin, the light catching the hollow of his cheeks.

“Yeah, he’s with George with some other newer ones. George says his name’s Terrel.”

“Terrel?” she echoed. She’d never in her life heard of him before.

“I don’t know him either, but George is going to bring him back here tomorrow so we can chat. Says he’s kinda squirmy,” Ron said, his face contorting on the word.

“Squirmy? How?”

“I don’t know- squirmy,” Ron shrugged and left towards the kitchen.

Hermione leaned against the empty shelves. Squirmy wasn’t a glowing review. At least they’d be able to question him, try to learn if he was malicious or simply incredibly clumsy. She didn’t know which was worse. A spy was a horrible thing to have let into a safe house, but an idiot with good intentions was just as dangerous.

Hermione spent the better part of the day cramped inside the potions closet. Ginny returned with Harry in the evening and while the pair had seen some action all they needed was a good night’s rest.

“You look different,” Ginny said shoving a spoonful of stew into her mouth. All the abled bodied fighters were filing into the kitchen for dinner and after receiving their bowls Hermione and Ginny ducked into what used to be a parlor and was now filled with cots. Ginny sat on the arm of one of the old couches shoved off to the side and Hermione leaned against the cushions, her knees pressed up against the wall. Old flowery wallpaper crinkled against her jeans.

“I know, I finally slept,” Hermione said waving her spoon at the girl. She didn’t want to get into why she had been avoiding actual rest for that long and she was tired of everyone having opinions on it.

“I mean yes that, but there’s something else,” Ginny squinted at her before raising an eyebrow. “Are you seeing my brother again?”

“Wha-” Hermione lurched forward, choking on a mouthful of stew. After a dramatic fit of coughing she whirled around to glare at Ginny. “What makes you think that?”

“I dunno. You have a glow,” Ginny shrugged, as if it was as simple as that.

“I most certainly do not,” Hermione said, pushing out a laugh that wasn’t entirely convincing.

“Is it someone else?”

“There’s no one,” Hermione snapped. Her voice was harsher than she intended, but the conversation needed to end.

“Sorry,” Ginny said after a beat. “I liked the idea of it.”

“Of what?”

“You finding someone.”

“You know what, I’m exhausted,” Hermione said with a tense smile. She banished her utensils and pushed off the couch. “Night Ginny.”

“Night.”

Hermione raced upstairs, kicked off her trainers and threw herself into the blankets. She shoved a pillow over her head, blocking out the loud conversations floating up from dinner. She enjoyed talking with Ginny, but why did she have to zero on the one thing she could not share. Had she been so boring the last few months that the slightest change was worth questioning?

She took a breath. She was being defensive. Ginny only wanted to be kind, how could she know all the secrets Hermione held in her heart? She twisted in bed, pulling the pillow down close over her eyes and yet the sound persisted. A young woman’s laugh came from downstairs, like a bell clear and strong. Hermione frowned. Her hair smelled of burned potions and fried fabric from where droplets sizzled through her sleeves. She felt a tightness in her chest. A frustration that built up in her spine and that made her kick the blankets off her feet and grip her pillow as hard as she could.

Hermione didn’t want to think about the emotions straining against her ribs. She wanted to sleep, just for the chance to dream.

Spring Rain

Snowflakes drifted through the air. Hermione stuck out her tongue, savoring the cold as a little dot of white melted against her tongue. Her scarf wrapped tightly around her neck, and her pocket laden with a few extra galleons she pushed through the snow drifts towards Honeydukes. Harry and Ron were hanging around the Three Broomsticks and she had quite enough Quidditch talk for one day and didn't care to hear anymore. However, she did have a craving for fudge flies that simply had to be sated.

A bell chimed as she stepped into the shop and into the ever-changing crowd of students shoved within its vibrant mint walls. A witch in a pink apron smiled at her, offering her a chocolate sample from a silver tray. Hermione grinned back, picking one up and plopping it in her mouth. It had the texture of a truffle but tasted like spring rain. Hermione shouldered past a few Hufflepuffs to reach the backwall display where every delight was organized and easy to grab. She peered up at the chocolates and candies, skimming the packages for the little carton she desired. There were some newer packages in plastic wrap tied with forest green ribbon. She didn't recognize them and leaned forward to read the label, but the type was too small to read. She squinted, trying to read the skinny black letters.

Gloved hands slid around her waist. She started to move from their grip, but the crowd shifted. She lost her footing and fell forward, caught between the teal shelves in front of her and someone's chest behind her.

"Miss me?" Malfoy's whispered into her ear; his voice so low she felt it more than heard it.

Her heart lurched behind her winter coat. His lips traveled down, pressing a kiss to the tender skin right behind her ear. She gasped. It was the softness of the action that shocked her the most. She was still emerging from the foggiest of a dream and she was in no way prepared for a mouth against her skin. She twisted in his grip, smacking her back against the shelves and putting some distance between herself and his lips.

Malfoy looked down at her, his black coat hanging open and his green and silver school scarf hanging loosely around his neck. As if he knew it was a costume and hadn't bothered finished putting it on.

"Well, did you Granger?" he asked, his lips pulled into a smirk she could only describe as devilish. The motion pulled at the scar on his chin, stretching the newly healed skin.

"It's barely been a day," she finally said. Her skin ached, her body already thrumming at the idea of being touched again.

"And yet," he pressed closer, leaving no room for any other thoughts between them. "You're thrilled to see me."

"Oh, please," Hermione said as flatly. She didn't like having her emotions pegged so easily, especially by such a person. Despite the absolute need building in her core, she tried to look

as unbothered as she could, which was not easy as Hermione tended to be bothered by many things.

“It’s all over you,” he said, his eyes roaming her face as if reading all her thoughts typed out across her forehead and down the bridge of her nose. “You may have a poker face out there, but in here in your head- it’s all out in the open.”

She opened her mouth to protest but was cut off by a sharp chuckle.

“Relax Granger. You’re not spilling any war secrets, just your own.”

“I don’t have secrets,” she said, pressing her lips together.

“Not with me.” The grin was back. He leaned in, planting a hand on a shelf above her head. He looked ravenous, the corner of his mouth twitching even as he tried to hold his smirk in place. Hermione raised a hand, pressing her fingers to the edge of his lips only for his hand to snatch up her own. He pressed a kiss to her palm, and then her wrist. She felt her resolve melt like chocolate under his touch.

Their lips met voraciously. Hermione yanked on his scarf, pulling him closer to her. He smelled just like he had in her previous dreams. Like old pages of a forbidden tome and freshly turned earth. He never seemed to smell this good when they were in school. She faintly remembered him bathing in cologne most of the time. Hermione never made it a habit to stand close enough to Malfoy to actual smell him. She’d likely get hit with insult before anything else. Now she couldn’t get enough of it. She let the taste of his mouth linger on her tongue. The intoxicating flavor of Draco Malfoy occupying every corner of her mind.

He planted kisses down her jaw to her neck and she briefly pulled herself from her mental fog.

“Be careful,” she whispered, his teeth already nibbling at the bruised skin across her throat. She leaned her head back, giving him a larger canvas to work with but he paused. She looked up and saw him watching her.

“Granger, I’m not-”

“It goes with me,” she interrupted, trying to explain everything in the smallest amount of words. She wanted his lips back on her skin. She yanked on his scarf, but he stood firm, his gaze flickering down to her throat.

“When you’re awake?” Silver eyes flashed.

Hermione nodded.

“Perfect,” he dove in again, his teeth catching the flesh where her neck and shoulder met and biting down hard.

“Fucking hell!” Hermione yelped. She slipped out of his grasp, taking a moment to get fresh air into her lungs that was not tainted with his scent. She nearly backed into a display of candy apples before catching herself. The dream students made a beeline around her, passing

through the space she'd carved between herself and Malfoy. She was out of breath, her heart beating like a caged pixie behind her ribs. "Did you not hear me?"

"Oh, I did," he said, his eyes fixated on her throat. A student passed between them, but his gaze never faltered. His voice was low, his pulse so quick she could see it throbbing in his neck. "And I just love the idea of everyone seeing my fingerprints all over you."

"Malfoy," she panted, her words coming out strained. Rational thought collided with pure desire and they each fought for dominance inside of her. She shook her head and pushed through trying to side with sense. "I thought all of this- I thought it was reserved to my mind. It's different if it... if it has consequences."

He paused, his hungry smirk wavering.

"I have a lot of eyes on me right now and I can't risk someone asking about- about any of this. Even if I don't think they'd understand it," she said.

"Why?" His voice was clipped.

"Hm?"

"Why are people watching you?" He moves closer but did not pin her like before. He kept a respectful distance but close enough that the other students moved around them instead of between them. His hands tucked away in his pockets.

"Not in a nefarious way. Just more than usual. We had an... incident and others are helping me restock," she said, trying to dance around the specifics. She had already said too much. She wondered if Malfoy could perform legilimency inside of a dream. Can you pry open a mind you are already in?

"Incident?"

"A kid knocked things over, I really shouldn't-"

"Enough to have multiple people help you restock?" His eye narrowed. She hated how easily he was putting together the pieces. She must really wear her thoughts on her sleeve.

"No, I mean yes, I mean I shou-"

"And this is one of your own?"

"I don't really know him, but he's just a kid."

"Granger, is your gang of kind hearted renegades really that incompetent?" his tone shifted, his eyes wandering around the shop and his fingers running along his jaw.

"Excuse me?"

"How did someone you don't know get into your stash?" he said, his voice cruel and pointed. "If it's that easy to get close to you then I'm afraid the powers that be have wasted their time

on this little dreamscape.”

“You don’t know anything about it!” she snapped. She thought if she was loud enough, he’d shut up and get back to kissing her. She didn’t want to talk about downstairs when she was asleep. The medical ward was for the daytime, her dreams were the only thing that was truly her own. Oddly enough they became that after someone else invaded them.

“Are you sure about that?” He moved closer, crowding her. She felt her emotions stuck in her throat, choking off any words she might have. “Are you positive I don’t know a thing about your side of this war? Your fighters are sloppy, you know that. They leave traces everywhere. Even you, Granger. You’ve already told me so much.”

“Stop it.” She steeled herself against his attack. She felt her lips settle into a line just as they did at school when he’d turn his attention to her in class. Hermione was used to the sting of Malfoy’s words, and she was foolish to think he’d ever pull punches even within her head. Even after he’d stuck his hands up her skirt.

“Do you want me to stop?” His words were slow and low. He closed the gap between them, his hands still shoved in his pockets. Hermione held her breath waiting for another verbal blow. “Or do you want me to tell the truth.”

She paused. Was he goading her or was this something else? A warning? She met his gaze prepared for either one.

“You know I want the truth,” she whispered.

“The truth is you’ll all be dead within a year.” He said it like it was a fact. Like it was as clear as the snow outside or the time of day.

Her first instinct was to laugh. A half chuckle that died in her throat.

“You don’t- that’s not-” She shook her head. That wasn’t true. They were fighting so hard- Harry, Ron all of them. She saw the injuries they came back- all the blood, all the necrotic tissue, and all that death couldn’t mean nothing.

“What do you think I do, Granger?”

The words hit her straight in the chest. Hermione thought she was safe from the outside. That here with Malfoy they were somewhere above everything. She hadn’t even stopped to think what Malfoy’s role in this war was. Suddenly, her chance at selfishness felt like a dangerous folly. She turned and found the students crowding the sweet shop were gone. The entire place was empty. Even the pretty little witch with the chocolate samples had vanished.

She felt heat behind her eyes, and she looked away. She couldn’t let him see her tears, not now-not ever. Hermione turned, sprinting through the shelves and out the door into Hogsmeade.

The entire village was deserted. Snow swirled between the buildings. Snowflakes jerked around caught in rough winds that yanked on Hermione’s curls and threatened to steal her

scarf. She pushed through the snow even as the entire world shifted around her. The buildings shifted and twisted. She couldn't remember which shop went where and the dream began to break down. Shingles clattered into the snow and walls warped and disappeared exposing hearths and candlelight.

The cold, however, felt dangerously real. The wind cut at her face, the chill seeping into her very bones. She was shaking, her entire being trembling.

An arm wrapped around her shoulder and she was pulled against a warm body. She knew she should pull away, but she embraced the warmth and pressed her face into his sweater.

Teakwood and old books.

She felt him press a kiss to the top of her head and she tilted her chin up wanting his mouth on her own. Even if the comfort she sought was to ease the pain he had brought her, she was desperate for it.

But when she looked up it was into Katie Bell's face.

Hermione blinked. Her eyelashes were wet.

"Are you okay?" Katie sounded so small. She was sitting on Hermione's bedside running a hand over her forehead as if she were a mother soothing a sick child.

"I'm fine," Hermione said, sitting up and dragging her sleeve over her face. She kept one hand clamped over her neck.

"It's okay. I get them too," Katie smiled. Hermione looked at up at the girl, at the kind soft smile she wore. Hermione used to think Katie's late-night episodes were bothersome-understandable but still an obstacle to overcome. A disease to be treated. Now it seemed impossibly rude to think so low of someone.

And to think all her pain may be for nothing at all.

"Thank you," Hermione said, wiping her nose on the back of her hand.

"There's breakfast downstairs," Katie said before patting Hermione's knee and leaving the room.

Alone, Hermione let all her emotions leave her in a large huff.

She was so blind. War was all around her, she'd never be able to escape it in her mind. Yet, she still wanted it.

Her clothes smelled like ancient pages.

Hermione took her time scourging her clothes until they smelled like soap and mint and charming her neck to hide the purple marks that were consuming it.

She went downstairs, grabbing a piece of toast from the kitchen before retreating into the potions closet for the better part of the day. She checked on the bed ridden patients, of course, but those that could walk that needed for something had to knock on her door only to have whatever they needed passed through by a silent hand. She didn't feel like facing anyone.

She didn't think she could look anyone in the eye and not break down.

She sat on a stool beside her cauldron counting clockwise stirs. Her gaze drifted up the shelf to a handful of vials of dreamless sleep. She eyed them, her hand still turning around and around.

Would it be better to not dream at all? Even after everything she leaned and everything, she could still feel curling around in her chest? Was it still appropriate to gather pleasure and freedom from dreams when reality still lingered over her shoulder?

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts. She finished the rotations for the stirring rod and laid it beside the cauldron before cracking the door open.

"Yes?" She asked, prepared to slip a charmed bandage or peaceful draught into the hallway.

"Help." It was a scratchy sound, like a word clawing out of someone. Hermione threw the door open and saw Alicia Spinnet leaning against the frame. She pointed towards the front room where the makeshift medical ward was set up. Hermione took off, her wand out.

A handful of witches and wizards were in her ward. They were all covered in soot as if they'd walked through a fire. Some were bleeding, others had limbs hanging awkwardly as if out of place. She stepped to the closest one and cast a diagnostic. Lung damage, various burns and scrapes, a snapped ligament and dislocated shoulder. She guided him to a chair where she began working on his arm socket. She turned over her shoulder and saw Alicia hovering in the doorway.

"Spinnet- grab some burn ointment and calming draught from the closet please."

The girl turned without another word. Hermione turned back to her work, her mind focused on using her awkward wand to piece back together the wizard's shoulder as quickly as she could. Others could smear cream on a wound or sew together a cut, but this work was for a healer.

Alicia returned soon after, her arms laden with vials. She was out of breath and her face was pale.

"Hand out the draught- one for each of them and take a seat Spinnet you don't need to overexert yourself."

The girl nodded and made a round of the room.

Hermione finished up the shoulder, the wizard she was working on barely noticing the spells cast on them. Alicia shoved a vial into his hand, but he didn't move to drink it. Hermione leaned him back into the chair and uncorked the vial herself holding it to his lips. He blinked

looking at her and seeing her for the first time. He drank deeply, the tension leaving his body as he melted into the chair.

“What happened?” he asked her, slurring the words together. His face was covered in soot, only the whites of his eyes were clean.

“Mione!” Hermione turned and saw Ron limping towards her. His sweater was singed, his red hair covered in the same dark soot.

“Ron, what’s going on? What happened?” she demanded.

“They took George!” he said, his voice hoarse. He coughed, and she saw black dust spurt into the air. “They took him- they took-”

“Ron sit down,” she said, conjuring a chair and pushing his shoulders until he collapsed into it. She threw open a diagnostic. Similar burns as the other wizard, foreign bodies in the lungs, and something with the tendons in his left leg. She’d have to cast a more specified diagnostic to know exactly what. “Relax, it’s going to be okay. You need to be quiet right now, your lungs have been through a lot and talking with only damage them further.”

“They’re gonna kill him,” he muttered. Tears cut through the obsidian dust coating his cheeks. “I just know it.”

Hermione shushed him, grabbing his hand in a pitiful attempt to comfort him.

You’ll all be dead within a year.

She shrugged off the thought and cast a spell on Ron’s leg, examining the tendon damage further in depth.

No one was going to die if she could help it.

Delicious

It took five hours to settle all the fighters down. Each one was in clean clothes, their skin cleaned of every speck of dust. They were all lying in the medical ward silent in their dreamless sleeps.

George and three others were taken. One had died on the battlefield, but there wasn't a body to bring back. Burnt to ash they said. Crumpled in their hands when they touched it. Alicia was asleep curled up in a chair having given up her bed for Ron. She had worked hard through those hours, cleaning faces with the wordless magic she knew and then with a rag for the parts she didn't. Half of the time she was sitting beside a fighter, rubbing circles between their shoulder blades. She had a comforting air about her, one that Hermione felt herself shed long ago. She'd make a good healer, once her throat was healed completely and she could perform more intricate spells. Maybe Angelina Johnson wouldn't be on her back so much if Alicia was away from the danger completely.

Then again, was Hermione away from the dangers of war in her potion's cabinet? The horrors found her no matter where she was hiding.

Hermione stood beside Ron's bed. She knew she should comfort him, whisper something about how it would all be okay. Except she couldn't. She felt hollow. All the spiteful energy from earlier had been chipped away with each collapsed lung and scream of pain as a bone was shoved back into place.

Harry wasn't going to be happy to hear about this. She'd barely seen him in weeks and even when she did, he was a mess. This would be a huge hit to morale. He'd take it personally. He'd feel the need to go after them and fight to get George back.

George Weasley was as good as dead. At least she had put the survivors back together, but she couldn't imagine a world where he was still alive. Maybe it made her a terrible person to think it, or maybe it made her right. People who are right aren't always good. She thought she'd be able to save him when she started this, but after scrubbing dust from tracheas and hearing each rattling cough echo through the ward it felt less and less plausible.

She hadn't seen Fred today, and perhaps that was for the best.

Hermione looked to the clock. It was past midnight. She flicked her wand, dimming the lights of the ward so her charges could sleep in peace. She tip-toed through the room, plucking up empty vials from bedsides before retreating into her closet. She closed the door as quietly as she could, savoring the empty space. She set her wand to cleaning the glass she'd collected, and her eyes wandered, yet again, up to the vials of dreamless sleep. She'd created a significant dent in her supply today with the fighters but there was still a few looking down at her.

If she went to sleep, Malfoy would almost certainly be waiting for her. Did she want to see him? She wasn't sure. Hermione didn't want to trust the primitive part of her that was perked

up at the thought of being with him again. She didn't need hormones now, she needed reason. If he knew something about George would he tell her?

Maybe he didn't know anything, and they could cling together in the backroom of the Three Broomsticks.

Hermione organized the vials and turned to the hallway, leaving the dreamless sleep potions untouched. In either case she needed to see him. She needed information and if he didn't have that, she'd need comfort. It was selfish to even think of such a thing, but she was trying to be honest with herself.

With a final glance at the sleeping forms in the front room, Hermione mounted the stairs. She slipped silently into her shared room, having to wiggle through the crowded beds to her corner lot. She kicked off her shoes and slipped under the sheets.

For a moment she stared up at the ceiling. It was like waiting at a door, she knew once she closed her eyes he'd be there. She wasn't ready to face him, but was she ever fully prepared for him?

She took a breath and closed her eyes.

The roar of people consumed everything. Hermione pushed through heavy robed witches trying to reach a pocket of air that wasn't occupied by someone else. Diagon Alley was always busy, but right before school was always the worst. She searched for her list in her pockets but couldn't find it. She didn't need it anyway; she had memorized everything required.

She started for Flourish and Blotts but stopped.

Her cauldron of books fell from her fingers and clattered against the cobblestones. A few wizards turned at the noise, but most moved with the unseen current.

Her eyes scanned the crowd and was amazed by the mistakes. The sheer amount of people shoved into the dream meant her mind had cut corners- not every person had a face. Some were impressions of people, other drab watercolors of a wizard.

She wasn't looking for half formed witches, she was looking for blonde hair and silver eyes.

Hermione went straight for Knockturn Alley. The darkness of the street swallowed her almost immediately. There was a chill that set against her skin, and the constant dripping of water that followed her the whole way down its length. She shouldered past the facades of shady wizards until she reached a store front. She peered into the dusty window of Borgin and Burkes and spotted him. He stood out from the rest of the dream. Whereas the dreamed people shimmered like an illusion, he was extremely real. His hair painted in bold colors, his suit as black as darkness itself.

Hermione stepped into the shop. There was only Draco and the shopkeeper he was speaking to. The man behind the counter halted his conversation with Malfoy and looked to her. Hermione waved her hand and he vanished into smoke.

Malfoy twisted around. He was young. The fine lines beside his eyes not yet creased from lack of sleep, his jaw unmarked by a werewolf's claw. He looked surprised, his nose wrinkling in disgust. Then something flickered behind his eyes and the years caught up to him. All the familiar marks returned to his face and she swore he grew another inch in front of her eyes.

He didn't say anything. He leaned back against the counter and waited for her.

"Oh, so now you choose not to talk," Hermione laughed. It was a nervous sound and she didn't fully intend to even say the words aloud, but they were already in the stale air between them, laid out with the oddities and cursed items.

"It seemed like you had something to say," he said casually, his fingers motioning to her before resting lightly on his jaw. His index finger followed the trail of his scar. Hermione took a step back, taking in his whole posture. He was leaning as if resting, but his entire body was tensed up as if ready to strike at any moment.

"I do- I have questions-" she started, standing up straight and raising her chin up but was quickly interrupted.

"Then ask them, Granger." He bit out the words. They weren't laden with anger, but something else. A frustration she could not recognize.

"I- uh- well," she tumbled over her words, trying to gather her thoughts together. What were her questions? She looked at him poised like a cobra and suddenly didn't feel like asking any.

"Granger, did you really sneak into my dream to stutter at me all night?" Malfoy cocked his head to the side, as if getting a better look at her. Every movement was careful, calculated and precise. It was unnerving.

"Malfoy, can you be not be an unbearable twit for one moment?" Hermione finally snapped. She had spent the entire night scrubbing lungs and she was having a hard enough time thinking without him snipping at her. He pushed off the counter and stepped closer, the motion as fluid as water.

"Are you asking me to be nice?" He smiled down at her.

"If you're capable of it." Hermione jabbed. She was expecting another hard wit reply and prepped herself for the verbal lashing.

Instead, he laid his fingers on her jaw. Just the barest of touches.

"I can be *persuaded*." The words dripped like honey from his lips and Hermione found herself completely defenseless. His eyes were a sharp silver, but warm. Hungry. She barely pushed herself onto her toes before his lips were on hers. His arms immediately wrapped around her, picking up and holding her against his body. He spun them around leaning her against the front desk of the store while his lips worked nonstop against her own. It was all back- his smell, his taste. Hermione was drowning in it.

It felt good. After a long day full of headaches and carefully controlled movements, it was downright sinful to throw herself carelessly into his embrace. She caught his bottom lip between her teeth. He growled at her, attacking at her with new vigor. His lips were everywhere- on hers, on her jaw and her throat. His hands were roaming everywhere, pushing her legs apart and pulling down the zipper of her jumper. She enjoyed the chaos, her own fingers fumbling with the buttons of his vest.

It crossed her mind that at no point did she think she'd want it to stop. There was no piece of clothing he could remove, no slip of skin he could kiss that would make her not want him to touch her. It was frightening but freeing at the same time.

Suddenly, she realized how difficult it would be to remove all her clothes. She was wearing what she had worn to bed- a hoodie and jeans. The idea of stumbling out of jeans wasn't her favorite and she flicked her hand. The plain jumper Draco had been handling turned black, emblazoned with the Gryffindor lion. Her jeans replaced by a shorter version of her school shirt and knee socks.

"Oh, so you have a thing for your school uniform?" Malfoy said after pausing to watch the transformation. His gaze focused on the slip of thigh between the hem of her skirt and the top of her socks. "How filthy."

"Shut up." Hermione grabbed the front of his vest where she'd manage to only free one button and hauled him back to her, their lips crashing together. She'd pulled him forward so quickly that they missed, his lips kissing her cheek more than her mouth. But it was his mouth on her and that was what she needed. He chuckled, his lips finding their way back hers. Hermione set to work on his buttons with more focus than before. She managed to get every single button freed and began pulling on his suit jacket ready to rid him of the many layers he was hiding behind.

He was moving slowly, his fingers grazing her thighs, his lips moving against hers as if they had all the time in the world. She yanked at his lapels again and when he didn't move to help her, she nipped at his lips again.

"Jesus, Granger," he mumbled before leaning down and lifting her feet off the floor and setting her on the shop counter. Malfoy shrugged out of his suit jacket, throwing it behind him and leaned forward to get back to work but she stopped him.

"All of it." Hermione demanded.

He grinned, shimmying out of his vest and undoing the buttons of his black shirt one by one. With each quick twist of pale fingers another bit of chest was exposed. He slowed down right in the middle, his silver eyes flickering up to grin at her frustration. She groaned and reached out, grasping black fabric and hauling him back to her. She automatically parted her legs to get him as close to her as possible. Malfoy abandoned the task, his hands catching her thighs and moving underneath her skirt. Hermione gasped as warm hands moved against her skin. She slipped a hand into the opened portion of Malfoy's shirt, spreading her fingers out against his chest. She could feel his heart beating against her palm.

His teeth were on her throat, one hand in her curls the other up her skirt. Hermione felt her heart skip a beat. His breath was hot against her skin. Her entire body shifted from jittery excitement to warm anticipation.

She wanted it. His touch, his kiss- she wanted all of it.

His fingers pressed against her and the sensation made her toes curl inside her shoes. It felt different than the last time. Before she was giving in, she was hiding away between bookshelves and pretending it wasn't truly happening. This felt comforting. As if he remembered all the different movements that made her squirm, what had made her moan, and what had pushed her over the edge. Hermione was willing to sit there and let Malfoy play her like a fiddle all night. His tongue worked at a spot at the crook of her neck that made her cheeks blush, his fingers working until she was panting against his shoulder.

This was not a playful tryst; this was something she needed deep within her heart. A desire that beat against her ribs. A need she didn't realize she had been putting off. It was like she was tasting water for the first time in her life.

Hermione moved her hips in time to his hand, needing more friction more movement- more Malfoy. Her fingers moved between them, gripping his belt buckle and yanking the leather from the clasp. His hand stilled hers, his fingers wet. His mouth claimed hers and her task was forgotten.

He kissed down her jaw to her collarbone, shifting her stiff school shirt aside to kiss the tops of her breasts. He looked up at her, his jaw tense. It looked as if he was searching for something. Whatever it was he must have found it because with only a smirk as a warning he pressed his hands to the insides of her knees and ducked his head under her skirt.

Hermione jerked, nearly knocking everything off the counter as his lips made contact with her inner thigh. His teeth grazed tender skin and her knees smacked closed against his ears, trying to control the flood of stimulation that washed over her.

Then his lips were on her, kissing her and nibbling at her. His tongue moved between her folds, sucking and lapping sending a million messages through a billion frazzled nerves. Hermione's hands went to his white blonde hair, trying to find an anchor in wave after wave of new sensations. If his fingers felt like comfort, this was something completely different.

But she loved it. She loved every single twitch of his tongue against her.

It didn't take long before she was moaning his name, her hips bucking up against his face as pleasure hit an all time high.

It felt clipped short, but perhaps it was Hermione that was tightly wound.

He looked up at her, his chin glistening.

"Granger, you taste *delicious*."

“Hermione?” she sat straight up as if she’d been awake the entire time. Blurry vision fixated on the figure in the doorway. It was still dark outside, the other beds still occupied with sleeping witches.

“Hmm?” she mumbled. She was afraid to stand up, her knees might turn to jelly and spill her out onto the floor. She blinked and realized it was Ron in the doorway, leaning against the wall to hold his weight. Hermione threw back her covers, whispering through the soft snores at him. “You shouldn’t have climbed the stairs.”

“I know, but the potions closet is locked and the others are starting to wake up.”

“Next time send Alicia,” Hermione said, pulling out her wand and looking at his leg. Strained from the movement but not terribly worse.

“She’s out. Sleeping like the dead.”

They smiled at one another and Hermione started for the stairs, motioning for him to lean on her. She took his arm over her shoulder and started down to the landing.

“You smell funny ‘Mione,” Ron said, audibly sniffing the air.

“I haven’t had a proper shower in weeks, no one has,” she said, rolling her eyes. He probably hadn’t much more than a scourging either.

“No, it’s something else.” He said, his eyebrows pinched together. “I can’t place it.”

Her cheeks burned. Who knows what he was smelling on her. She hurried them down the rest of the stairs, quickly retreating from his side and putting clean air between them.

“Instead of sniffing me, how about you help me out?” she half joked before quickly walking to the potions closet and throwing it open. She grabbed a few peaceful draughts and shoved half of them into his arms. “Hand these to the ones who are awake, I’m going to check on the sleepers.”

Slowly, the house came alive. Hermione helped put together breakfast and sat in the medical ward picking at a bowl of oatmeal and making sure no one tried to sign up for anymore missions. They were all stubborn and she didn’t put it past any of them to sneak out.

She took another bite of breakfast before giving up and banishing it. It didn’t agree with her. The few who were awake sat calmly in their beds. Alicia was cleaning wounds, and Ron had settled back into his own bed.

The fighters who had been dosed last were starting to stir. There was a great deal of groaning and Hermione made sure to wander to the bedside that was the loudest. Raw lungs and splintered bone were not the nicest sensations to wake up to. She smoothed them, checked their status, and pressed new vials to their lips. Until there was only one left. One of the younger boys Ron had carried in with him. He had been delirious last night, and it took a group effort to get the potion down his throat. He yelped and Hermione was at his side, wand at the ready, to go about her routine. However instead of waking with a groan the young man

sat straight up in bed and slammed his arm around. His wrist connected with her throat and she tumbled backwards, tripping and falling her head slamming against the ancient wood flooring.

The Unknown

She walked through a fog. Brilliant white clouds that twisted and sparkled around her as if she had fallen into a potion vial. The air shimmered like a mist but whenever she reached through it, it parted clearing a path. Bare feet moved across cold stone as she wandered aimlessly through the mist and fog. It was quiet here, but she kept moving waiting for something. Listening for something to happen.

But for what?

She heard metal slam against metal, and she turned, as if she could see through the white clouds that were threatening to drown her world. The sound echoed, twisting the mist making every droplet shiver around her.

Hermione moved towards the sound, floating through the blank whiteness like a ghost.

Another sound, footsteps. She pushed forward and the white mist darkened into a grey. Hermione kept going, moving her hands out to part the fog like a swimmer. Each handful of clouds and sparkling diamonds was darker than the last until she was swimming in night itself. Except there were no stars to guide her way, not even the mist shimmered. It was only black. She could feel the stone beneath her feet, but nothing else.

Her head ached.

“You pathetic little worm,” the voice was far away, but familiar. She reached out for it, as if she could hold a voice in her hand. As if sound was tangible. In this strange place, it just might be.

“I did what you told me!” the other voice felt stranger, and too new to her ears.

“You destroyed everything!” the first voice, it wasn’t supposed to be yelling like that. It was for wit and for mumbling against her skin. This tone it took, it was too sharp. Too harsh. Like a blade honed to an edge so sharp it cut through anything used to clean the blood from its steel. She raised her hands to her ears, trying to block out the harsh static tones.

“But she slept!” the second voice rang out. Desperate. Begging.

“And you put her at risk,” the harsh voice lowered. Hermione huddled in the mist. Danger, her body told her, whoever spoke meant harm. She let the rough point of their voice fill her ears and she pressed her palms to the cold ground beneath her. On her hands and knees she listened to the black cloud surrounding her. Below her, between her fingers, she saw red on the cobblestones. “And if there is one thing I cannot allow- it is risk.”

A bright green light cut through the mist. The clouds melted away and the room opened to her. Dark stone covered the walls and a single candle flickered against the shadows keeping them at bay.

A boy in a yellow shirt laid on the ground, eyes staring up into nothing. Hermione shuddered.

He had bad dreams, that boy, he wouldn't want to be asleep.

She shook her head trying to rid her mind of the cotton stuffed inside her temple. She froze as another figure came into view. Dim candlelight melted across black shoulders and brilliant white fur.

"Draco?" As the soon as the name left her lips he turned. His fur was not fur, but pale skin. So pale she could see the blue hue of his veins in his hands. Hands that trembled.

His sharp features turned towards her and his face contorted. She couldn't find the word for it. Surprise? Desire? Horror? Joy? None of them fit, yet they all did.

"Hermione?" his voice was back to warmth, no longer dangerous no longer too sharp to hold. She smiled. She wanted to touch him, but perhaps she would have even if he was honed to the point. She'd touch him and she'd bleed for it. She stuck her arms out to him, like a toddler demanding to be held. Maybe if he held her it would all go away. The thick pounding in her skull, the fog that crowded the corners of her vision. Black mist swirling around her ankles threatening to encase her again in darkness.

"What are you doing here?!" he demanded. He didn't fall into her arms, didn't embrace her. He stood, shocked. His face was pale- he was always pale- but this time frighteningly so. The muscle of his cheek right below his left eye twitched.

"I'm asleep," she said, her arms still outstretched. This what happened when she slept. Things were strange and unreal until they found each other. Then they would touch, and she would feel his warmth on her and his mouth on her neck and she'd feel grounded again.

"Granger, what have you done?"

Silver eyes- full of fear. She'd never seen him so horrified. Not in her dreams. They were safe in their dreams together.

"Nothing." It was a whisper, but the truth. He closed the gap, his hands raising to hold her cheeks. She expected warmth but they were cold, and they trembled against her skin. Her hands wrapped around his wrists, trying to anchor herself.

The room was made of dark stone and full of stuffy air that clung to her throat. Dungeon air. Like in the halls around the Slytherin common room. That's where they must be. She didn't know that part of the castle well, but it must be familiar to Draco. She's stumbled into his dream instead of the other way around.

"How is this possible?" he whispered. His silver eyes poured into hers and she wondered if she stared long enough if her brown eyes would be encased in molten silver. She giggled, his hands still clinging to her face and moving with her smile.

"Because you dream about me," she laughed, slurring the words together as she stared in his eyes. Bright and gray- they looked like twin moons gazing down at her. His eyebrows

lowered and he lifted his hands from her face as if he had been burned.

“Granger, I’m not asleep.”

She blinked. She heard the words, but their meaning could not stick inside her aching skull. Her mind was too full of stuffing and barbs to take in such a new thought.

“What?”

“Merlin, this is bad,” Malfoy said, pacing the length of the room, his hand rubbing against the scar on his jaw.

Hermione watched him walk across the floor, his black robes trailing behind him like the fog piling around her feet. She shook her head trying to clear herself of this vision, but Draco in his black robes remained.

What is going on?

“If I’m not asleep, where am I?” she asked. This room around her had been only a setting moments ago and now it felt all too real- too important. As if she needed to drag her fingers across the walls to memorize them.

Her head throbbed. She held a hand against her temple. Why did her head ache so much? The slip of the memory passed through her mind and she grabbed it, trying to focus on it. Thoughts came and went so quickly she was having a hard time pinning down anything but this memory she would hold onto.

“Someone hit me,” she muttered, her scalp prickling at the memory of being struck. Malfoy froze, his silver eyes instantly focused on her.

“Who hit you?” his voice was low. Dangerous again. Hermione shook her head trying to hold onto the scraps of memory that were stuck in the rubble of her aching head.

“No, no it was not like that,” she said, struggling to find the moment before now. Before the mist, before the room.

Malfoy was at her side. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and she leaned into him. Relief flooded her body. Hermione leaned her head against his shoulder, her nose bumping against his throat. He smelled like earth right before a rainstorm. He ran a hand through her hair, and she winced as his fingers hit the epicenter of her pain. He froze, rigid beneath her.

“Who was it?” he asked, as sharp as a knife. She looked up to find him staring at his fingertips, they were coated in blood. She raised a hand to the back of her head. She could feel warm blood stuck in her curls. Malfoy’s mouth was against her temple, first pressing a kiss, and then asking again. “Tell me.”

Hermione focused on the blood soaking under his nails. The memory was faint, like an old picture of the event, but she held onto it.

“It was an accident,” she said into his chest. How could she be asleep and yet be so exhausted?

Her eyes fell on the corpse in the room. His yellow shirt caught the candlelight and she could see in his greying skin just how young he had been when his life had been cut short.

“Hermione, you don’t sound well I think-” Malfoy began but she cut him off.

“You killed him.” She felt like a child, pointing out the obvious. The boy who had wrecked her cabinet, Draco had killed him surely as she was standing here. Or was she truly standing there? The sharp voice echoed in her mind. Risk. Her head was stringing together thoughts she could not possibly comprehend. Each new idea made her head ache with fresh pain but she wanted to think- she wanted to work out evidence in front of her. In any case, she had murderer’s hands wrapped around her shoulders but she couldn’t shiver in fear or cry out in disgust. She liked his hands, she needed them. She needed him.

“If it makes you feel better, he was never on your side.” Malfoy said. She was still. In just a few words she felt the carefully constructed rubble within her mind tumble over again and blow up dust in every direction covering everything she thought she knew. She thought her life was disconnected from her dreams. That what did she with Malfoy was separate from the world, except for the occasionally bruise. Now, it was becoming more and more apparent that they were fused together. That their feelings were not reserved for just dreams. There was a time in her life where she rarely thought of Draco Malfoy, and now he consumed almost every moment.

God, her head ached.

“Is there any part of my life you cannot touch?” she asked. It wasn’t meant to hurt. She was merely in awe of his overreaching hand. She pulled away from him just enough to look into his eyes. “You’re in my mind- my dreams. You’re pressed into my skin.”

Her fingers brushed against the bruise on her neck, paling to a light blue but still there. Still marking her. She meant to say more but trailed off. Malfoy’s fingers took her hand, his knuckles brushing her throat before pressing her palm to his chest. She could feel his heartbeat, it was impossibly fast.

“You are woven into every fiber of my being,” he said it like a confession. Like a fact that could no longer be ignored. It sounded like poetry not truth. There was something else- something she did not comprehend. “I touch your life because it is folded in with mine.”

“I don’t understand,” Hermione said, shaking her head which only made the pain within it roar. Black fog crawled up her legs, cold against her skin.

There was a knocking at the door.

Draco took her face in his hands and pressed his lips to hers. She felt a calmness rush over her whole body as if he was a living draught of peace.

“Hermione, you-”

The words were muffled. His lips moved but the sound did not reach her ears. Black fog curled around her arms, wrapping around her waist like a lover's embrace.

"What?" she asked. The chill of the fog set into her skin of her throat and she felt its cool grip wrap around her neck.

"Hermione?!" a hoarse voice called. There was a light in her eyes and a hand on her shoulder. She shifted and stiff bedding moved with her.

"She's moving!"

"Thank God."

Her eyes flickered open and she was back at Grimmauld Place. Alicia looked into her face, her hand on her shoulder while Ginny shined a light at the end of her wand right in front of her eyes.

A weight of bricks settled over her entire body, weighing her down. Her skull was splitting down the middle. The cool touch of Draco and the dungeon was gone replaced by flushed skin and too many warm hands gripping her. It was too much. After so much quiet there was so much *noise*.

Hermione knocked the wand away with her hand and sat up. Her entire body creaked with the action. Her head lolled to her shoulder, too heavy to support. Hermione grit her teeth and swung her legs over the side of the bed.

"Stop! You need to rest!"

"What is she doing?"

"Get Harry!"

She shoved off the arms that held her back, throwing herself to her feet. She stumbled but stayed up right. She wanted to go up the stairs to her own bed. She wanted to leave. She wanted to see her parents. She wanted to be with Malfoy.

What was wrong with her?

A hand reached forward handing her a potion and she slapped it out of their hand, the glass shattering against the floor and spilling lavender goo across her feet.

"Let me go," she screamed. Her voice was hoarse, the words barely coming out, but the fury in her cry was palpable. She only made it a couple of steps before another set of hands were on her, another potion thrust forward. She wanted to sleep in her bed, where her dreams were safe. Where things made sense and she could be anywhere she wanted. Where her head didn't feel like it was going to explode. Where he was.

She didn't want the truth, she wanted to be happy.

"*Stupefy*."

The spell hit her right between the shoulder blades, and she crumpled to the floor.

She didn't dream of anything while she was out. No Malfoy, no dungeons, but also no Hogwarts and no warm kisses.

It was strange when she finally woke to have no memory of what occurred during rest. There was no double life she had just emerged from. Only nothingness.

It was night when she did wake. The medical ward was plunged into darkness, only a single dim lamp was lit, and it was on her own bedside table. Alicia Spinnet looked down at her, worry scrawled across her features. She quickly grabbed a quill and parchment and scribbled frantically.

How do you feel?

Her mouth was painfully dry, and Hermione brought her fingers to her throat.

"Thirsty," she croaked.

Alicia nodded and passed a glass into her fingers. She must have had it ready for her. Hermione brought the rim to her lips and drank greedily. When the glass was completely drained, Alicia took it back and handed Hermione another note to read.

Are you okay?

What a question. Hermione didn't care to think too hard and nodded, waving it off. Alicia bit her lip, looking as if she might push more but nodded. She handed over another note.

Do you need anything?

"No. Thank you Alicia," Hermione said. Her voice didn't sound like her own, but as if she had borrowed one that was used and worn out. Alicia stood awkwardly at her beside before stepping back and slipping out of the ward. She must be sleeping upstairs now seeing as there were people in worse shape. Including Hermione.

She let out a long slow breath. She hadn't been alone in what felt like ages and while many other witches and wizards were around her, they were all asleep. No one was watching, no one was depending on her. She just existed.

The dungeon felt like a dream. Whereas her time with Draco while asleep always tended to feel real the next day, this felt made up. Faded and twisted by time and an abused skull. Had it been a true dream?

She didn't know which side to hope for. If she could visit Malfoy while he was awake that opened so many possibilities for the Order. However, if it was all a dream then the line separating her own desires from the Order's was still somewhat intact.

It was a brutally selfish thought and she threw the whole idea aside. If she had to choose, she chose the Order. She'd been spending too much of her time wishing she was asleep to

fraternize with Malfoy of all people.

Maybe none of her dreams had been real. Could her mind have created the whole thing? Was this Malfoy who touched and kissed her just a part of her psyche?

Was she that touched starved that she would imagine one of her worst enemies invading her dreams solely to pleasure her?

She sighed and closed her eyes.

She was tired of thinking, tired of dreaming. She peered over and found two vials of Dreamless Sleep by her bed. One was already empty but the other was untouched. She uncorked it and drank every drop she could.

The war she was fighting seemed to be in her own mind, but at least she could take a break from it. The others around her were not so lucky.

Ethereal

Hermione woke to sobbing. It was well into the afternoon when she propped herself up to looking for the source of the sound. It was Lee Jordan, curled up into a ball in a chair biting down on the fleshy part of his hand between his thumb and fingers trying to keep quiet. Lupin was beside him, an arm wrapped around his shoulders. The boy was shaking. Lupin was muttering something into his ear. He looked fatherly, his body calm but rigid. He had a lot of practice with control.

“I can’t,” Lee choked out fresh tears spilling down his scarred face. “I can’t do it.”

The werewolf’s claws had torn a new face into his old one. His right cheek was twisted and torn, a gaunt shadow of the rather round face he had as a child. His eyebrow was gashed through, and his eyelid was pulled down. She had tried her best, but the beast had done a number on him. She saw the stretched skin and off-color patches of scars and felt like screaming at herself. She was better than the care she had given him and she knew it, but with her wand broken and so little support it was hard to make even routine healing go well.

Lee looked up and their eyes met. Hermione swallowed hard, deciding it was too late to pretend she had not been prying. She wondered if he held the same disdain in his heart for her that she had for herself. She thought he’d turn away or snap at her. Instead, he focused on her. He didn’t speak, but his hand fell from his mouth, his sobbing coming to a sudden halt. Old tears still clung to the new grooves in his cheeks. He stood, knocking Lupin’s hand away. He was barefoot, dressed in pajamas with a thick blanket wrapped around his shoulders. As far as Hermione knew that’s all he’d worn since the full moon for she had seen him in nothing else.

He reached the foot of her bed, his eyes glistening as he stared into her eyes. She didn’t know what to do but the dreamless sleep made her feel heavy and calm. He had the power and possible motive to hurt her, but she didn’t feel in danger. Uneasy, but not in trouble. She sat cross legged on the bed watching him, waiting for him to find whatever he was looking for. Snot dripped from his nose but he didn’t move, just stared at her with haunted, unblinking eyes.

“Are you okay?” she finally asked. Her head was foggy, but no longer aching. She didn’t feel like running away anymore, she didn’t feel like doing much of anything other than sleeping. She would be worthless to Lee Jordan as a medic right now, but old habits aren’t so easy to shake. She owed him to at least make his life a little more comfortable. If she had worked faster, hadn’t broken her wand on a foolish mission she might have been able to spare him of a life of pain and exclusion.

If given the choice to go back and either spend the night with Malfoy again or save Lee Jordan she felt a knife stick in her gut. She knew which was the proper answer, but the other one still hung around her neck like a weight.

Lee's fingers curled around the metal frame at the foot of the bed and he leaned forward, eyes still locked onto hers. She wondered if he could see her thoughts, see her still damning him to suffering.

"Lee, you should lay down," Lupin said, coming up behind the young man. He wrapped an arm around him but Lee jerked away, his blanket falling from his shoulders.

"Do you see it, Remus?" he muttered, a finger raising to point directly at her. Lupin seemed uninterested, bending down to pick up the dusty blanket from the floor instead of following Lee's finger.

"See what?" he muttered to the floor.

"She has the moon in her eyes."

Remus stood up; the blanket folded in his arms. He looked to Lee then to Hermione. Her old teacher met her gaze. He narrowed his eyes for a moment before taking Lee by the shoulders and pulling him gently away from Hermione's bed. The pair quietly made their way out of the room and upstairs.

Hermione laid back down, her fingers pressing to the skin just below her eyes. They didn't feel any different, a bit puffy if anything. She closed them, drifting through the cloudy soup of her mind instead of the hard, bright room around her.

Maybe the silver of Malfoy's irises had melted into her eyes, casting the warm brown tones in moonlight.

What an absurd thought.

She stared up at the ceiling, counting the water stains. There were four. She closed her eyes and opened them again.

Still four.

She flicked her hand but the room stayed in place, her clothes remaining just how they were on her frame. No sudden twist into the Gryffindor common room or rush of school robes against her skin.

Hermione swung her legs over the side of the bed. She could not sleep anymore; she couldn't chance another dream.

Shoeless, she shuffled into the hallway. The house was quiet. Perhaps the able bodied were on a mission and Lupin, with it being so close to a full moon, was tasked with watching the sick and weak. Making the poor man turn into a wolf and babysit felt cruel. Not that she knew for sure, no one told her much of anything. She was out of sorts, but even before reality seemed so grey. Reserved for matters of health and potions and dismissed for anything pertaining to battle.

So, she retreated to the corner they forced her into: her potions closet. She pulled the door shut softly behind her, the hinges screeching with the motion.

Alone, the tension eased in her neck.

She sat beside a cauldron bubbling with green smoke, propping her feet up on a step stool. She hadn't started anything new, but perhaps Ginny had started one while Hermione was asleep. She leaned over pulling out her ledger and flipped it open. If anyone had added to the supplies, it would be written there.

She squinted at the words, most of the ink in her own hand, and yet she could not read it. She brought the paper so close to her face her nose brushed the words.

She couldn't read it.

Hermione busted through the closet and ran upstairs to where the large grandfather clock announced each hour. She looked at the time. Five past three. She turned away and looked again.

Ten til nine.

She couldn't breathe.

"Do you want me to stop?" Malfoy spit out. She turned and found him standing in the hallway, scarf hanging from his neck. Snowflakes danced around him, piling on the floorboards like salt. "Or do you want me to tell the truth?"

"You're not real," she said, turning away and walking towards her shared bedroom. However, he was standing in the doorway, leaning on the frame in his school uniform. The white sleeves rolled up to his elbows and the button at his neck undone. White fabric against pale skin and white hair. A ghost blocking her path.

"Are you sure?" He wiggled an eyebrow at her.

She whipped around, taking the stairs two at a time to get back to the first floor. She was watching her feet, making sure her toes hit stairs and not air when she smacked into something hard and warm. Hermione fell backwards, the edge of a stair striking her spine. She gasped, arching as the pain jerked through each nerve from her back to the ends of her fingers. Her hands balled into fists just to have something to channel the agony into.

A growl silenced her suffering.

A large creature loomed over her. Muscles rippled under white fur, large fangs dripping with saliva, claws tearing into the wooden banister beside them. And silver eyes leering at her, so bright that pupils were a pinprick of black against a full moon.

She moved, trying to drag herself up the stairs to put distance between her and the creature. Its pupils blew wide, claws wrapping around her ankle, biting into the skin. She kicked at its hold only for it to drag her whole body down the stairs so that she was consumed by its shadow. Surrounded by bristling fur and thick muscle.

She kicked and twisted, but its claws gripped her throat holding her in place and cutting off all calls for help. Her fingers scratched at its paw, pulling out fur as its grip grew tighter and

tighter. A single claw caressed her cheek breaking the skin. Blood poured from the wound and she tried to scream despite the weight on her throat.

She woke with a gasp. Madam Pomfrey was at her bedside, wand in hand. Her face was pale, a new scar Hermione didn't remember marring her fingers. Red tendrils that wrapped around her hand like a burning vine. The former Hogwarts healer was at a safe house by the sea near France, as far as she knew. Why would she relocate?

Oh god, she was still dreaming. Hermione pinched her arm so hard it drew blood hoping to pull herself to reality.

"Hermione dear calm down," Pomfrey said, pulling her hand away and pressing her back against the pillows. "You had a nasty fall and I need you to keep still."

She waved her wand, and bubbles of color filled the air. There was a lot of red and spatters of orange. Not a great sign. Pomfrey, however, had a wonderful poker face and never appeared concerned at anything she saw hovering above Hermione's head.

"It'll be okay," Harry said, reaching over to hold her hand. Hermione couldn't believe she hadn't noticed him sitting there before. It was weeks since she'd seen him last. He gave her a small smile which did nothing to soothe her worries but he was trying. That was enough.

"Harry?" He was here, he was *truly* here. He came to see if she was alright. Hermione felt warmth building behind her eyes. How pathetic to cry at the thought of your friends caring about you and yet it didn't feel entirely true. It felt like a dream.

"You're going to be fine," he said.

"Are you real?" she whispered. It hurt to ask, but she had to know. He seemed real. His skin was warm, his face didn't waver or flicker as her brain forgot the details of it. But she had no reason to think he'd waste his time at the bedside.

"Of course, I am, why?" He looked at Pomfrey and the pair shared a worried look.

"I'm right here!" Hermione snapped. "Don't pretend I'm not. Tell me what's wrong."

There was a pause.

"You have a concussion," Madam Pomfrey said carefully.

"I can feel that," Hermione said. There was something else, something Pomfrey was holding onto.

"This is the most cogent you've been in days—" Days? Did she say days? "You've woken screaming or crying or begging. We're worried about you and we want you to rest."

"I know you want to help, but you need to rest." Harry said, squeezing her hand. Hermione watched him waiting for the scene to change, for the walls to melt away to reveal it was all a dream. But nothing budged, and that made it worse.

“Okay. I’ll rest,” she said. “How long will it be?”

Pomfrey took a moment and sighed.

“At least two weeks.”

“Two weeks?” Hermione sat up, yanking her hand from Harry’s. “People could die in that time.”

“People have already died.” Harry’s voice was quiet. It wasn’t accusing but it tore through her like a curse melting skin and bone.

“What do you mean?” she asked. Now she really might cry.

“They keep finding us. Every time we think we have someone cornered three more appear. I- we’ve lost more than a few duelists since you went under.”

Hermione felt herself falling out of her body. Surely this could not be real. They were always fighting up in this war. Scrappy underdogs that would push through with the power of good. Now, looking at Harry, it felt like losing.

“I don’t want to lose you too,” Harry said. He looked pale, his forehead shining with sweat. Was he sick? If he was sick why wasn’t he resting?

“You won’t,” she said immediately as if it would help. As if she could promise such a thing.

“I’ll be here to help with your duties until you’re well enough to cast,” Pomfrey said, running a hand over Hermione’s forehead.

“I can cast,” she muttered. Pomfrey promptly plucked the borrowed wand from Hermione’s bedside and tucked it into her apron.

“I’ll be the judge of that. Get some rest.” The woman gave her a smile and moved on to the others in the room. There were more than she remembered. Not just the fighters with soot coated lungs but people with broken bones and blood-soaked sheets. The war had taken a turn for the worst and she had slept through it all. If anything, she’d been a liability through all the chaos. She was useless.

“Hermione,” Harry said, bringing her back to green eyes. “Stay with us.”

“Of course.” It seemed like a silly request and she answered it immediately. Harry shook his head. He let his fingers fall from her hand and left.

Hermione leaned back into her pillows. She was exhausted but could not imagine sleeping. Not when she finally felt like the world was solid around her.

Alicia came to her bed with a glass of water. She had an apron around her waist with bandages and small potions in it; it seemed Pomfrey had taken her under her wing. Hermione felt a pang of guilt. She should have done more when she was able to, she should have taught people more- done more work.

Alicia handed her the glass and Hermione drained it immediately.

“Do you need anything?” Alicia asked, her voice soft and hoarse but present. She was growing stronger every day and finding her place in this war.

Hermione almost envied her.

“Actually, could you bring me some parchment and a quill?”

Hermione laid on her stomach, scribbling on the parchment carefully stacked on a book so her quill didn't poke through and stain the sheets. She kept the paper close to her chest, anxious someone might ask her what it was.

She divided the paper in two with a single line. On the left side she wrote “R” for real and on the right “D” for dream. Right now, the Real side held a jumble of notes:

- Potions cabinet wrecked
- Ginny
- Alicia and Katie Bell Always
- Pomfrey
- Ron
- Soot lungs
- Harry ?

The Dream side held an even longer list:

- Hogwarts library
- Potions class
- Hallway
- Honeydukes
- Borgin and Burkes
- The ledger and clock

She chewed on her quill for a moment before adding “The Shack” to the real side of events. She was almost positive these events were organized correctly, although Harry being anywhere nearby seemed like a dream enough for her to question it.

She drew a line three quarters of the way down the page and labeled M for Maybe:

- Lee Jordan
- Dungeon w M

She chewed on the quill tip, ink dotting her lip. She felt that anything to do with Malfoy should be under Dreams- all but the shack that had to be real. It happened so long ago, before the dreams even began. Lee Jordan staring into her eyes she could find out easily enough by asking, but she didn't want to answer any questions that came along with it if she had dreamed the entire thing.

She took the quill and struck out her time with Malfoy in the dungeon and added it to the dream side. She had to make a decision one way or another and there was too much wrong with it for it to have been real. The smoke, his touch- it was all fake.

She paused before writing DM under dreams in large letters underlining it over and over.

Draco Malfoy was not sharing dreams with her. She was ill and overworked and creating fancies- fancies that had escalated enough that she no longer trusted anything around her. She needed to face reason- anything Malfoy said could not be considered truth because all of it was said in a dream. Malfoy in the shack had never kissed her, but her neglected mind was so hungry for affection she dreamt of him to get some relief from the war they were both in.

If she met him on the battlefield she doubted he would give her a second glance.

It was easier this way. Easier to live with the truth than hanging onto a fallacy that couldn't hold water. However, that meant Hermione had to let go of all the moments of reprieve the last few weeks. Her time in her dreams had been the few minutes of rest she'd had in months. It had felt so good to release the tension in her body and turn into a puddle in his hands. Hands that did not exist how she knew them.

She had to give up the idea that someone wanted to touch her and be touched back.

She swallowed hard and folded her parchment, tucking it under her pillow.

Pomfrey came by later with a potion for Hermione's persistent headache.

"I'm impressed Ms. Granger," she said, taking the empty vial and tucking it into her apron. "You've been awake and present today more than the last couple of days combined."

"Please, can I see the closet. I won't started brewing anything and I won't cast. Let me take inventory- just let me feel useful." She felt the desperation in her voice but could not stop it. She couldn't sit in this bed for weeks watching her side of the war fail right in front of her. Not after the loses of the past few days. She'd pull some information out of a few fighters to figure out exactly what happened.

Pomfrey pressed her lips into a line, looking her up and down.

"Who won the House Cup in 1992?" she asked. Hermione blinked. It would have been the end of her first year at Hogwarts and she remembered it like it was yesterday. She hadn't wanted to go back to London to her parents. She missed them of course, but she had discovered so much and made new friends and she couldn't imagine suffering through a summer at home. And yet she had. She was thankful was she able to go back those summers and spend time with her family even if they no longer remembered her.

"Gryffindor."

"Alright, go take stock but please sit and if your vision starts to blur call for me or Spinnet at once." The older woman kept an eye on Hermione, perhaps expecting her to slip up.

“Of course,” she said, slipping out of bed as quickly as she dared. She padded out of the room, looking over her shoulder at Pomfrey before slipping into the hallway where she ran into Lupin.

“Hermione?” He seemed surprised. “You’re allowed out of bed?”

“Just given permission,” she smiled. “But only for a short time.”

“Good to hear it.” He said. He looked exhausted.

“Can I help you with anything? Perhaps some sleeping draught?” she asked, opening the door to the potions closet.

“Thank you but no. I have to keep an eye on Jordan. The closer we get to the full moon the worse he gets. He’s not ready for his first one, but then again no one is.” He slumped against the doorframe, thankful for the moment of peace. Hermione paused, looking to him.

She shouldn’t have these thoughts; she had just promised herself to banish them and yet here they were clearing the confusion fogging her mind.

“Do you ever get odd dreams?” she asked. It was vague enough she could run away from the conversation without him thinking much about it.

“All the time. Dreams, they get more vivid once you’re bitten. It’s what’s troubling Lee. Not even Dreamless Sleep can help him,” he said it all so casually. Like it wasn’t the most interesting thing she could have learned. She kept her face still as if it was something she already knew; however she didn’t remember reading anything about it in textbooks. Then again schoolbooks focused on the werewolf’s impact on society and not necessarily the impact on the werewolf themselves.

“If the potion isn’t working then is he dreaming?” she asked.

“Granger, what are you on to?”

“What is he dreaming about?”

“He’s worried about his family; he says he seems them a lot. Says they’re in danger.” He said, considering her. “Why the sudden interest?”

“I’ve been having some awful dreams as well and I know how... all-consuming they can be. I’ll work on a potion for him to settle his nerves.” She smiled, a bright fake grin.

“Thank you, Granger.” Lupin pushed off the wall and headed for the stairs.

Hermione quickly shut herself into the potions closet, twisting the metal muggle lock behind her.

Lee Jordan was attacked by a werewolf and now was dreaming of his parents who were, supposedly, in danger. Draco Malfoy is injured by a werewolf and... dreams about her?

She thought she had something, she truly did. Hermione felt herself coming to a dead end once again. It all came down to Malfoy's nature. He did not like her; he thought her kind as scum of the earth which he made abundantly clear in school. There was no earthly reason why he would want to spend any time in her presence. A single night in a shack together where he didn't hex her to death was so out of character she created a monster within her mind.

In the end he was a Malfoy. The Dark Mark was branded on his skin and he fought against them. There were no feelings to be had for such a creature but disdain, even if his visage appeared in her dreams.

She paused, leaning against the shelves.

It'd been days since her last dream of him where they touched. Since she'd felt his tongue against her core and his fingers pressing into her skin. Her hand slipped into her jeans, fingers working against her panties building warmth within her with each stroke.

Despite of all her promises to herself, she thought of him. Of his lips and how they felt on hers in her mind. Of his hands holding her, and his body pressed against hers. She wondered if he felt like that in real life, if his hip moved the same way.

She wondered how his hips would move with him inside of her. Her fingers sped up at the thought, her breath coming out in quick labored gasps as she twitched and twisted reaching for her pleasure. Her eyes were closed, her mind focused on the friction and warmth between her legs. On the idea of Malfoy between her legs. Her whole body shook under her touch, moving in time with his invisible body.

"You know Granger if you needed to get off you could have just asked."

Her eyes snapped open, the hand coming to an abrupt halt. He was there in her potions cabinet. It smelled like night air crackling with lightning before a thunderstorm. He was right in front of her dressed in black robes, his mask hanging from his belt.

She quickly pulled her hand out of her pants, hiding them both behind her back.

"You're not real." She said closing her eyes and opening them back up again to find him still standing there watching her.

"Granger-"

"No, stop you're not real. You're not here." If she chanted it enough her mind would finally listen.

"Hermione." His voice was soft. God, she wanted him to be mean. She wanted him to spit at her and hate her. Instead she felt his hand against her cheek and she turned into it, savoring the warmth of his fingers.

They stayed like that for a moment. She could feel him close, his breath ruffling her hair and his other hand holding hers. Her fingers were limp, expecting this vision to vanish at any

moment but he held on. Even with her eyes shut she could feel him there. His smell, his touch, his warmth.

She hated all of it, and she hated how much she needed it.

A tear slipped from under her lashes and she felt it trail down her cheek until it hit Malfoy's fingers. He ran his thumb across her cheekbone, smearing the it away.

"I don't know if I'm asleep or awake." Her words came out in a stuttering sob at first until she could control her lungs enough to push them out. She kept her eyes closed. Lee had found the moon in her eyes and he'd surely find Draco in them if she let him in. "I don't know if you're real or if you're all in my head. I don't know what to think."

"Breathe," he urged, his hand leaving her face to push her curls behind her ear. His fingers lingered, grazing her throat. She took a trembling breath, letting the air fill her chest and pushed it out with all the emotions building inside of her ribs. She was tired, but she could not say she was asleep.

Hermione opened her eyes.

"This is real," he said before pressing his lips to hers. He tasted like the raindrop chocolate she'd had in Honeydukes. Simple and sweet. He melted against her and Hermione's hands were on his face, feeling the sharp angles of his cheekbones and long straight plane of his nose. She pulled her lips away to press one against the scar on his jaw. He shuddered under her touch and she smiled. She pressed another one to the hollow of his throat and his fingers curled in her hair. "We're real."

A teardrop fell from her chin, soaking into the black fabric of a Death Eater's robes.

"I wish we were."

Wolf Pack Promise

One moment she was clinging to him and the next he was gone. If he was a figment of her mind wouldn't he have stayed? It's what she desperately wanted and yet it was pulled away from her. Every time Hermione wanted something it was yanked away like a string dangling in front of a cat.

She slammed a fist into the shelves sending the vials clinking together like dominos ready to fall. She grabbed a vial of Dreamless Sleep, hungry for that deep numbness that slides over the mind as it touches the lips, and almost uncorked it.

She didn't want to sleep anymore, but she also didn't want to dream. She wanted to live in the present, in reality. Hermione pressed it back on the shelf, instead taking an empty glass bottle and throwing it to the closet floor. It shattered sending shards of glass over the wooden boards and her bare feet. She grabbed another vial, smashing it down as well. She could feel the impact vibrate through the floor. The cracking sound loud and sharp in her ears. Her feet stung, her arm aching from slamming them down over and over again. But she knew she was alive. She knew she was real.

The door flung open revealing Pomfrey with Alicia looking over her shoulder, their eyes wide.

"Granger!?" she gasped. "What is this?"

She had no answer. What could she possibly say that would make a slip of sense? She looked at the pair, just staring.

"Granger answer me!"

"I-" she began, pausing as Lupin stepped into view. He didn't look horrified like they did, more concerned if anything. Whereas Spinnet's mouth hung open his was pressed firmly closed, his eyes merely looking at the scene instead of being surprised by it. She knew- he must have seen far worse. "I needed to feel real."

She looked to Lupin. He was watching her, focused. Pomfrey pointed a wand at the floor, clearing the mess.

"To bed with you. Miss Spinnet please make sure Miss Granger stays in bed for the rest of the day she will need to be-" The older woman pushed into the closet, pushing Hermione out and waving her wand around to clear messes Hermione did not remember making. There was green sludge on a shelf, when did that get there? Had she made that mess? Surely not.

"Poppy." They all froze, Alicia with her hand out to lead Hermione away. They looked to Lupin standing in the hallway, calm. "I'll keep an eye on Hermione upstairs."

A pause. Hermione looked to Pomfrey. The woman mulled it over, looking between them. She ran her tongue over her teeth.

“Alright. Spinnet with me.”

Hermione stepped into the hall holding out her wrist as if Lupin might shackle it.

“I trust you can make your own way upstairs,” he said with a smile before starting up to the second floor. They didn’t stop to grab her shoes; she went as she was. They walked past the large grandfather clock.

3:30pm

Look away. Look back.

3:30pm.

Good.

They walked past the girl’s room, that Hermione hadn’t slept in in days, to the door at the end of the hall. Lupin pushed it open to reveal a rather boring room. It was smaller, mostly storage. Large dressers were pushed against the walls, vases and knick-knacks cluttering the surfaces. A large grey rug laid out in the center on the only clear floor. Lee Jordan sat on it, legs crossed as if meditating. There was only one window that wasn’t covered in thick black curtains, and it let in a shaft of warm light right on the young man’s shoulders. He looked like an angel.

“You can sit with us for the evening,” Lupin said, his voice as soft as ever. Lee’s eyes snapped open and his pupils caught on her. He stood, walking over to her to stare at her again.

Or maybe this was the first time.

He leaned in, sniffing her jumper.

“You smell like wolf,” he said. It didn’t sound like an insult. His lips broke into a smile, the scarred tissue contorting the right side of his mouth so that one side tilted up and the other down. A smile and a frown at the same time.

“You say you’re having bad dreams?” Lupin asked from behind her.

“That’s an understatement,” Hermione said.

“Mhm. And it’s getting worse?” He walked up beside them, leaning against a dresser while Lee inspected her face. He never touched her, only looked. His large brown eyes seeing far more than she ever could.

“Yes,” she croaked out. It all felt too intimate, as if Lupin knew exactly what dreams had been clogging up her waking hours. Lee Jordan staring into her eyes like a legilimens didn’t help either. She felt the two men reading her thoughts as if they were scribbled out on her skin for all to read.

“When did the dreams begin?” he asked. Hermione looked over him. His face was like a mask, perfectly impassive.

“Uh, about a month ago,” she said. She could have said the shack, but Lupin and Lee had been busy that full moon. Lupin had been in his safe house and Lee had been rather unlucky and neither were concerned with Hermione staying the night, supposedly alone, in the forest. She hadn’t been bitten, she did not wear that night like a curse.

At least, she thought she didn’t.

“I was right, Remus,” Lee broke out into laughter. A joyful noise so strange to her ears that Hermione herself broke into a smile. “She has seen the moon and she knows its power.”

“Hermione you can be honest with us in our little room,” Lupin said, his eyes motioning to the door. “I’ve enchanted it, no one can hear a thing outside. Everything said here stays here- isn’t that right Lee.”

“Everything said here stays here,” Lee repeated, sounding more present than he had in weeks. “Wolf pack promise.”

The young man raised his hand in the air as if taking an oath. Lupin smiled and raised his hand as well. Hermione looked between the two men before mirroring them.

“Everything said here stays here. Wolf pack promise.” She felt like she was back at school, hiding under Harry’s invisibility cloak to sneak out after curfew.

“Now, with that said, what happened last full moon?”

Hermione swallowed hard. She had not told a single soul in the world what had happened. As far as everyone was concerned she found that shack and fell asleep. No Death Eaters, no dreams- nothing. She had no wounds, no sign of struggle or attack so no one thought to double check her story. Why would Hermione Granger lie? She looked up at her companions and found, for the first time, that she actually wanted to speak about that night. She was worried, of course, that she’d be misunderstood but she was in the room of The Misunderstood. If she was ever going to spit out the truth, now was the best time to do it.

“I was out with the rest, one of the few missions they took me on. My wand broke. I tried to apparate but a Death Eater grabbed me. We pin balled between locations before finally dropping into the Forest of Dean- there my wand went completely dead. I ran, they pursued. Then a- a werewolf came out of the shadows and suddenly we were both running. We found the shack. It seemed to be a place set up for this kind of thing. I think whoever had turned that night built it to keep people in the forest safe. It had lights inside and was heavily warded.” It felt so weird to speak it all out loud. No one had ever asked her the details. No one had cared.

“Someone was with you?” He wasn’t accusing. He wasn’t upset she had neglected to mention it. He was simply interested. She felt a weight lift from her shoulders.

“Yes. A former student of yours actually,” she smiled, taking a seat in the warm circle of light on the grey rug. It was soft and cushiony beneath her. Lee sat beside her.

“Oh, let me guess.” Lupin said, setting a finger against his chin. “Let’s see a Death Eater I’ve taught. Now Goyle has the blood to do it but I highly doubt he’s earned a mark. Everyone else is far too young so I suppose it was our dear friend Draco Malfoy.”

He spoke as if he’d thought of it before. Hermione shivered.

“Correct, Professor. Ten points to Gryffindor.”

“I haven’t been a professor in a while, Granger, no need to address me as such.” Lupin sat down with his former pupils, leaning against a dresser. He stretched his legs out, crossing them at his ankles. The bottoms of his loafers were worn dangerously thin. “Now, you’re stuck in a shack with Malfoy. You came back with no injuries, no curses, no hexes. How is that possible?”

Hermione shrugged, suddenly enthralled with picking a piece of lint off her shoulder.

“He didn’t seem interested.”

Lupin raised an eyebrow.

“H-his wand was outside. He’d have to go through a werewolf to get it.” For a moment Hermione wondered what if Malfoy’s wand had made it inside the shack? Would she still be here talking about it with Lupin? Or would she have vanished in a flash of green weeks ago? Or would he have drawn it out, making her give up secrets as he twisted curse after curse into her flesh.

“No wands, but could he have overpowered you?” Lupin asked. Hermione cocked her head to the side as the new thought bloomed in her mind. Draco was certainly large enough to. He’d grown since school, towering over her and while he had a lean frame it was strong and well-muscled if her dreams were any indication of the truth. Hermione had been regulated to handing out potions and intricate work with tissues and bones, not the sharp slashing of a duelist or the running of a fighter on the battlefield. She hated to admit it, but if Draco Malfoy had wanted to hurt her it was well within the realm of possibility.

“He could have,” she said. “But he was hurt. The werewolf, it clipped his face.”

“Like a scratch or a-,” Lee spoke, making a motion to his gnarled face. Hermione gave him a weak smile. Draco’s scar was nothing in comparison to Lee’s disfigurement.

“Like a scratch.”

“Shame!” Lee said, slapping a hand against the rug underneath him. “Shame, shame- a wolf should wear scars not a pretty face!”

“You think him pretty, Lee?” Lupin chuckled.

“He *is* pretty. Like a bird. Granger could break bird bones,” Lee said. He almost sounded like his old self, but his eyes never focused on anything close- always looking into the middle distant except to examine her face. His fingers hovered in the air, as if a songbird was perched on his knuckles. She wondered if he could see them- birds or Malfoy in a waking dream as she did.

“I healed it for him. I didn’t want him turning while in the shack with me after all,” Hermione said, trying to push the story along.

“He let you?” Lee asked, as if that was the most surprising part of the whole story. His brown eyes turned on her, inspecting her thoughts through her irises. Every dream she had since the shack seemed like so much more evidence against her heart, she did not think that this simple story would bring up so many questions but here they were. Why didn’t he hurt her? Why did he let her heal him? Touch him.

Why had she allowed him to touch her since?

“Well, yeah.” Hermione shrugged, trying to downplay how the moment had felt. His skin hot under her fingers. She hadn’t touched Malfoy since at least school, and if then only by accident. Her fist connecting with his nose may have truly been the last time. And now, with both of them grown and scared and alone it felt entirely different. Lee was right, Malfoy was pretty and he had shown no hostility towards her. She was weak, her heart desperate and alone- begging to be seen to be held. “It was small, I didn’t think it’d leave a mark but it’s scarred anyway. Had to do it wandless so it wasn’t top notch work.”

“It scarred?” Lupin asked.

“Yeah,” Hermione said, pressing a finger to her jaw. “Right here. If anything, it compliments his features.”

“What an ass,” Lee said, falling back to spread out over the rug as if making an angel in the snow.

“So, you healed his wound and then what?”

“I fell asleep.” Hermione said. “And I dreamed.”

“Of what?”

“Of werewolves.”

“Then what?”

“I woke up. Evidently, I had screamed in my sleep. He... he offered to take the nightmares away.” The memory of the night began to fade the further along she went in her story. When adrenaline wasn’t pumping the pictures were blurry, her mind unsure. Her dreams felt more real than true events she knew happened.

Or, could it be, she had been alone all night and even Draco in the shack had been a fog of her mind?

“Legilimency?” Lupin asked.

“Mhm.” She nodded. No, it had to have been real. As real as Lupin and Lee were now. “He grabbed my face and looked at my dream. It was... embarrassing and he didn’t take it. Only watched. I passed out afterwards and when I woke up, he was gone.”

“Hmm,” Lupin hummed nodding as she spoke. “Sounds like an ordeal.”

“It could have been worse,” Hermione said, a weak attempt at a joke that only Lee Jordan appreciated. He gave a haughty laugh from his spot laid out on the floor, his finger tracing on his own face where Hermione had described Draco’s scar.

“So, when did you see his scar?”

“Excuse me?” Hermione asked, unsure if she heard him correctly.

“You said his wound scarred. If he left soon after, when did you see it?” Lupin asked. He was leaning forward, his eyes watching her with the same intensity as Lee Jordan. Searching, and yet knowing all at once.

Hermione’s heart jumped into her throat. She should have watched her words more carefully. The shack felt fine to talk about, but the rest of it? She wasn’t even sure it was real and to describe it to Lupin of all people felt entirely wrong. She couldn’t tell him about her desires, of the deepest recesses of her mind where she kept Draco in his school uniform hidden between the shelves in the library. Her cheek burned.

“I- I- I’ve dreamed about him since,” she finally admitted, choosing to be as vague as possible. Lee Jordan sat up sharply, like a vampire rising from its coffin. Lupin leaned further forward, both of them fixated on her.

“About or with?” Lee asked, his voice soft. Hermione looked at the boy. He was sincere. She looked to Lupin whose showed no sign of confusion at the younger man’s words. Did they have these dreams as well? Was it the curse of a werewolf that bridged minds and connected dreams? How else would they think to dream *with* someone? Even in the realm of magic and witchcraft it felt impossible. Yet now they both stared at her as if she’d been asked whether the sky was blue or red. An obvious answer but one she did not know.

“Answer him, Hermione,” Lupin edged on. Hermione looked between the men and felt her eyes prickle. She wanted to be truthful with them but she didn’t know what answer was true. She could feel what they wanted to hear but could that be the reality she lived? For once she wished she could our truth serum down her throat and know for sure. But would the magic only use the evidence in her mind? If she didn’t know the truth could the serum choose it for her?

She blinked back bothersome tears and looked to Lupin.

“I don’t know,” she confessed. Lee Jordan reached out, the sudden touch of his fingers on her cheek making her jump. His skin was cold and clammy, but she let him turn her face to him. He pressed his palms to the sides of her head, the chill sinking into her skull. His eyes dove

into hers but it was different from Draco's legilimency. He just looked at her like, like a muggle actor in a movie might do. She sat still waiting as he hummed to himself, his thumb pulling at her eyelid as if to see more clearly into her pupils. She watched as his concentrated expression melted away and terror grabbed his features. His eyes brimmed with fresh tears, his fingers trembled against her cheek.

"Worse. Much worse," he whispered, a tear falling down his jagged cheek.

Hermione inhaled; the air smelled like the first drop of a thunderstorm.

The beam of light they'd been sitting in was suddenly blocked out, Lee's face covered in shadow as the room went almost completely dark.

"What do you see?" Lupin asked, his concern audible in his voice.

A hand gripped Hermione's shoulder. Instinctively, she grabbed it and found it not bare, like Lee and Lupin's hands were, but gloved in smooth leather.

When Lee spoke, it was as a sob.

"He's here."

Lightning in a Bottle

The air crackled around them, snapping with energy as if lightning could strike within the walls of the room.

“Lee?” Lupin frantic voice called over the hammering of her heart. In the dim light she could see Lupin kneel beside them, his hand resting on Hermione’s knee. The grip on her shoulder tightened, the leather of his gloves squeaking. In front of her was Lee, his bewildered, horrified gaze glued to her. His lips were moving but his voice too soft to understand. All she could hear was a mumbling stream of sobs. “Lee Jordan!”

Fingers shook against Hermione’s cheekbones, but the young man couldn’t seem to move. Frozen in place, too terrified to look away. Thunder shook the floorboards.

“Lee! You have to let go!” Lupin yelled. A cold wind hit them, tossing Hermione’s curls across her face. Lee’s shirt snapped around his neck, the wind carrying a tear away from his cheek.

Robes brushed her arms and then pooled on the floor as the figure kneeled behind her. His hand digging into her shoulder.

“He should have known better,” Draco said. His voice sounded different- sharper. Hermione wished there was a clock to look at, a needle to prick her skin, anything to make her wake up. Lightning filled in the room, casting shadows across Lee and Lupin’s terrified faces.

She needed to stop this. But she had no wand, no words, and her mind were lost in Lee’s eyes. A blank darkness that stole her voice and made heat build behind her eyeballs. She felt the hold on her shoulder grow tighter even as she felt her mind fall further forward.

She blinked and suddenly she was in a quiet sitting room. It reminded her of her grandmother’s house. Old, overstuffed yellow couches with blue pillows drowning in lace. A witch sat curled up beside the fireplace, wrapped in a dark green robe. A book floated in front of her face and she flicked a manicured nail to turn the page. She had dark brown skin; her tight curls clipped close to the scalp.

“Tea?” a man’s voice called from another room.

“Yes please,” she called before returning to her book. Hermione looked to the picture frames crowding the mantle. Lee Jordan smiled back her, face unmarred. One in his first Hogwarts robes, still unmarked with a house sigil. The picture smiled up at her, his hands twisting together in his school clothes. In another one he is small, maybe 6 years old, his father’s large hat falling over his brow. He lifts it up only for it to slide back down again. It’s silent but his father’s mouth is open in a large belly laugh.

Hermione’s vision blurred. She wondered if her parents were happy. Were they safe in their small town in Australia, with empty frames where her baby photos used to be?

She felt a tug in her chest and the sitting room warped. Lee's fingers dug harder into her cheekbones, his nails cutting into her flesh.

"JORDAN!" Lupin's voice yelled. Remus' hands were over Lee's, trying to pry them from her face. Lee was screaming, the whole room was shaking. The forgotten furniture clattered against each other, drawers rattling from their holds and crashing to the floor. A wand pressed against Lee's throat. A simple dark one, held by a pale hand. Hermione wasn't even sure it was real as lightning flickered it seemed to waver and vanish only to reappear in the next flash.

"Don't," she whispered. It was a drop in the ocean of noise around them.

He froze behind her.

"Please," she added.

His wand lowered and he was gone. The wind came to a halt and all the force Lupin had been put into pulling on Lee was unleashed. The pair fell back on the floor.

Light filled the room again, the sun warm against her shoulders. She touched her cheek. Warm blood pressed under her nails, sticking to her skin.

A flood of exhaustion fell over her like being doused in ice water. Hermione's whole body shuddered and she started to fall, her body incapable of holding her up. Lupin dove forward, catching her shoulders and cradling her head before it hit the ground. He lowered her the rest of the way, brushing her curls from her face and tapping his wand on the gashes Lee had left. Her skin itched as the spell did its work. Hermione looked to Lee laying close by. His eyes were closed, but his fingers still twitched. Her eyes felt heavy.

"I'm sorry," Lupin muttered, smoothing down her hair. Her skin still tingled with his spell. Was he sorry he healed her? How odd. "I didn't know."

"Know what?" she mumbled before the room faded in blackness.

Hermione opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling of Lee and Lupin's room. It was early evening, and an orange glow filtered in through the window. A crack ran the length of the ceiling. She trailed with her eyes, noting where it curved and where it snapped back towards its destination. Her mouth felt like cotton, her throat was sore, and crust had formed in the corners of her eyes. She ran her hands over her face, her fingers felt heavy.

She realized, as she wiped the sleep from her eyes, that she had not dreamed.

"Hermione," she turned towards Lupin's voice. He had been seated in a chair by one of the dressers, a candle lit beside him. He pulled out one of the chairs stacked against the walls and came to kneel beside her. He'd moved both Lee and her to lay on the rug and laid a few blankets over them as well. Surprisingly, it wasn't the worst sleep she'd had. "How are you feeling?"

“Awful,” she croaked. Her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth when she spoke. Remus chuckled, reaching into his jacket pocket and handing her a square of chocolate. A sad smile pulled on her lips. Chocolate would not solve her problems, but it was a fine placebo. She took it and bit off a chunk. She let it sit in the middle of her tongue waiting for it to melt instead of chewing.

They sat in silence. Hermione taking her time with her chocolate and Lupin watching Lee. The boy would twitch in his sleep and whenever he pulled the blanket from his shoulders Remus would move to his side and pull it back into place.

Finally, when warm evening light had given away to cooler tones, Lupin spoke. He stood beside a candle, tapping his wand against the wax and enchanting it to burn brighter.

“Granger,” Lupin began. He sounded rehearsed, as if he had been thinking over what to say for a while. Hermione sat up, wrapping her blanket around her shoulders. “You said Malfoy was only scratched in the forest?”

Hermione pulled the blanket closer around her shoulders, but the cold seemed to seep into her bones.

“Yes.”

“Not bitten?”

“No. It was small, like from a claw not a tooth,” she said, thinking back on the silvery scar that ran across his jaw.

“But did you see it?” Lupin pushed further. He stepped away from the candle and his face fell into shadows.

“See what?” she asked.

“See him get wounded?”

“No... No, I was running and then it was there.” Her brow furrowed, trying to remember the exact events of that night. She tried to pick the dreams out of the truth like sorting dust from cobwebs.

“So, you didn’t see if it was actually a bite?” Lupin pressed.

“No,” Hermione sighed. Pain throbbed behind her left eye. She wondered if there was any potions downstairs for it or if she’d broken them all. It wasn’t out of the realm of possibility. “But I cleaned it. I... I healed him.”

“But he was here, Hermione!” Lupin’s steady searching tone broke. Frustration and confusion replaced his calm. As if catching his outburst, he turned away. Hermione watched his shoulders shudder.

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand,” she said. Lupin and Lee spoke of dreaming with someone as if it was commonplace and yet when Lee looked into her eyes, he saw nothing but horror. She

saw comfort and peace in his. Worry gnawed at her stomach. Was something wrong with her? “I thought this was normal.”

“None of this is normal.” Lupin was trying to control himself, she could tell, but emotion bled out in every word.

“It sounded like you both dream with people too, I thought-” She was just beginning to funnel her thoughts into words when Lupin whipped around.

“Dreaming with people and what happened in here is completely different,” Lupin said, his voice hard. “When I am worried about Tonks, I can sometimes see her dreams and she can sometimes see me in them. Lee dreams with his parents every night trying to see if they’re okay, if they’re safe. I’ve never seen someone dream themselves into a room through a conscious person.”

“What does it mean?” she asked.

“It means he’s a lot more powerful than we thought,” Lupin said running a hand through his hair.

Hermione looked down and pulled at a loose thread at the edge of her blanket. If Lupin and Lee’s dreams were powered by worry did that mean Draco worried about her? Or did it follow a different strain of logic? They had formed some kind of bond with one another either through a werewolf’s curse or their own powerful magic.

And yet she kept wondering, why she was caught up in this at all. Her body was exhausted, her magic feeling faint and weak when she had hardly even used it. She’d been a conductor for something else. Everything this past month felt like it was running through her not coming from her. Like she was being thrown around in a storm. Damaged, hurt, and for what? Because the earth ebbs and flows and nature cannot be controlled. But Malfoy was not nature.

“What does this mean for me?” Hermione asked, staring at her hands. The nail on her right middle finger was jagged and broken. Perhaps that’s what pulled the thread from its place.

Lupin’s shoes scuffed the floor as he stepped closer. She looked up and found his eyes full of pity.

“Oh,” she said, with a nervous laugh. “That good, huh?”

“In truth, I don’t know. I’ve never seen anything like this before. I have no idea how it may affect your magic, or your mind for that matter,” Lupin said, sitting on the floor beside her.

“It’s okay,” Hermione said, giving him a weak smile. “I’m... learning to live with it. Slowly.”

“If it helps- right now all of this, me and Lee, we’re real,” Lupin said, patting her on the back.

“That’s what a dream would say,” Hermione said. Lupin’s gentle smile wavered.

“Let’s go downstairs. Poppy could use some help.”

Hermione felt less than useless downstairs. She sat in an armchair in the corner of the ward, knees pulled up to her chest holding on to a roll of enchanted bandages. Alicia came by every so often to snip a part off but quickly disappeared. The ward had different faces than she remembered. More cuts and slashes, but also tricky stuff. Internal boiling and bone melting kind of wounds. Things Hermione would usually leap at a chance to solve but instead sat on the sidelines, wandless and clueless. She could see her borrowed wand in Pomfrey's apron pocket but even then, she didn't feel like she could do anything with it. It wasn't hers; it had called to some other witch who was either missing or dead. Hermione tore off a piece of the bandages, wiggling her fingers and casting under her breath until the edge caught fire. Not a burst of heat, but a single lick of flame. Like a birthday candle.

She smiled. At least she could control something.

"Miss Granger," Pomfrey called from the other side of the room, holding a wizard down by the shoulders while Alicia examined his eyes. "No flames in the hospital ward."

Hermione blew out the fire with a huff, watching the smoke curl into the air and vanish.

She leaned her head against the red upholstery, twisting the roll of bandages around as the ward lived on without her. Got a moment she was thankful that all of this- this dream business she didn't completely understand- had happened now and not in school. Hermione could only imagine how her grades would have suffered and that she could simply not recover from. She looked around the ward at all the people she could be helping and felt the same pang of guilt in her gut at the sight of a low mark.

She wasn't doing her best. If she pushed herself she could do better- help more people. Yet, she was drained. How could she help others when she couldn't help herself?

She closed her eyes with a sigh, focusing on the scent of burnt plaster. The smoke faded into something earthy, like rain-soaked soil.

Her eyes snapped open.

The forest was dark save for the dim starlight that filtered through the trees. A stiff wind blew through the branches, sending a shiver up and down her arms. She hugged her jumper closer, but nothing could halt the chill that settled into her skin. Leaves danced around her, sticking in her hair and piling around her ankles.

Warm hands gripped her hips from behind. She savored the heat, leaning back into the warmth of the body behind her. The hands moved, pulling her curls back and tilting her head. Lips touched the exposed flesh of her throat, kissing and nibbling up its length. She moaned, suddenly aware of how much she needed more of the hot mouth pressed against her skin.

"You're mine," a voice growled against her skin. It was him. He was behind her hidden from sight, but she could tell. From the way his hips pressed against her backside and the familiar gruffness in his voice. He sounded different when spoken into her skin. She could smell a storm brewing and she wanted it to rain down on her. She moaned as his teeth nipped the skin of her throat, pressing hard enough to make her toes tingle. "Say it."

His hands wandered, sliding up her torso to caress her breasts. Her back arched, pressing further into his touch. He nipped at her again.

“Say it.”

“I’m yours,” she whispered. He wrapped his arms around her waist, bringing her back tightly against him. She gasped, surprised by the abruptness. She had known his touch in her dreams, but this was different. It was rougher, but not unwelcomed. It was a far cry from a kiss between the bookshelves.

“Say it louder,” he begged before licking the length of her neck.

“I’m yours,” she repeated, lost in the sensations of her body. Whereas his soft touches had made her blush and her mind fuzzy, these strong claims made her whole-body shudder. She felt worshiped. She felt seen. She felt *needed*.

“*Louder*,” he growled.

“I’m yours!” she shrieked. His teeth pressed down, the pain and pleasure of it all clouding her mind. The only thing she could think was how much she *liked* it.

She opened her eyes just as the forest was flooded with light. His mouth, his hands turned to dust. The forest melted away until she felt only knitted yarn beneath her hands.

Hermione sat straight up. She was laying on the grey rug in their pack room. Beside her Lee was no longer asleep but was crouched beside her, watching. His brown eyes caught the bright moonlight from the window. She was sweating.

“When did-,” she started to speak but he pressed a finger to her lips. Hermione went quiet. Lee moved his hands, twisting her chin up before running the tip of his finger over her throat.

“Bruised,” he said. He looked tired, she wondered when he’d woken up. Had she slept long? Who had carried her upstairs? Had she even gone downstairs to begin with? She felt panic rise in her throat just as Lee looked up from her neck. “Him?”

She nodded. He pressed his palm against her neck. She felt a tingle of magic in her skin.

“The moon affects everyone differently,” Lee said, pulling his hand away. “It heightens instinct and fuels primal wants.”

“Wants?” she asked, swallowing hard.

“I want safety,” Lee said giving her a small smile. “The larger the moon the more I worry. I want my parents to be safe, my friends too.”

“I saw her- your mother,” Hermione said. Lee perked up. “She was safe, she was reading.”

“She’s always reading,” Lee said, more to himself than anything else. “She’s like you in that way.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t read anything in a while,” Hermione said.

“Well, there is a war going on,” Lee smirked. Hermione snorted. It felt good to laugh.

“What about Lupin? What does he want?” she asked, eyes flickering to the door as if he might step in at any moment.

“Lupin doesn’t like to talk about it. But I see it. He wants Tonks to be safe even from himself,” Lee said, also looking to the door to the hallway as if he could see through it and read Remus’ thoughts where he stood elsewhere in the house. “He isolates.”

Hermione bit her lip, turning away from the door to look Lee straight on.

“And Malfoy?” she asked, her throat dry. Lee’s whole demeanor changed. His hand twitched in his lap. He looked on edge.

“I saw him. I felt his soul- like lightning in a bottle,” Lee said, staring off behind her. “Like drowning.”

“What do you think he wants?” Hermione asked again. Lee’s eyes flickered to her face.

“I don’t have to think, I know,” he said, laying down into the pillows Lupin had piled for him.

“What is it then?” she asked, leaning forward. If Lupin’s insecurities and Lee’s worry was exploited by the moon she could only imagine what flaw was magnified in Malfoy. In school he’d been always wanting to prove himself, perhaps it was his ambition that was amplified? But this Draco was not the one who went to Hogwarts. He was older and didn’t seem to care too much for boasting his accomplishments. Perhaps it had morphed into a violent need for power. He had pressed his wand to Lee’s neck as if to end him and only stopped because she begged him. Then there was the forest, but she could not be sure that was real enough to consider. In fact she scratched the whole thing off as entirely of her own making.

In truth she felt unequipped to study Draco. The only time she knew for sure she’d spoken with him was over a month ago and even then the details were looking more and more foggy. She felt like there were a hundred different kinds of Malfoys she had met in the last month and it was hard to pin all of them down at once.

Lee opened his mouth but before he could speak the door slammed opened and Lupin rushed in.

“Get dressed, get your things,” Lupin said, his hair a mess and his eyes wide. His wand was drawn. He wore his coat over his pajamas. Behind him the hallway was full of witches and wizards running down the stairs. The noise of it all- sneakers on wood, shouts to others, and the slamming of chests was too much after peaceful quiet. Lee put his hands over his ears, curling into a ball under his bedding.

“What’s going on?” Hermione asked, as the chaos outside the room grew louder. A sharp knocking echoed through the house from the front door.

“We’ve been compromised.”

Compromise

“We’ve been compromised. Lee get up,” Lupin’s usual careful tone was gone as the frantic energy of the house invaded their room. Lupin pulled Lee’s blanket back, placing a hand on his scarred cheek. “Lee, we have to go. Now.”

Hermione sat frozen beside them; her fingers tangled in the blanket, a thread wrapping around a broken nail.

“Compromised?” she asked, her voice weak. She heard something crash in the next room, and Pomfrey’s voice rising from the first floor.

“Death Eaters,” Lupin said, shoving Lee’s wand into his pocket and shoving the man’s shoes under his arm. He shook the boy’s shoulder. “Lee Jordan, we have to go *now*!”

Hermione’s heart added to the orchestra of noise, thumping in her ears as a drum to the orchestra of cries creeping up the stairs. The music swelled and her mind clicked into place.

“I need a wand,” Hermione said, snapping the blanket off her and jumping to her feet.

“Hermione- Wait!” Lupin called after her, but she was already out the door and into the madness.

Barefoot in the jeans and jumper she’d been in for a week, Hermione rushed down the corridor. The girl’s room looked ransacked, with trunks thrown open and belongings everywhere. Katie Bell ran out of the room, her hair in a tangled mess, wand in hand. Hermione followed her down the stairs to the first floor. A loud knocking slammed against the front door. Everyone was up and moving. Half dressed, delirious and afraid.

“They’re on the front step!” Angelina Johnson yelled, fear and anger cracking her voice mid word.

“Where’s Harry?” a voice called from the group collecting on the first floor. Everyone was clinging together unsure of where to go.

“How are we supposed to leave if we can’t get to the front step!” Angelina screamed before leaning over to brace herself on her knees. Alicia appeared at her side, enveloping the girl in an embrace and placing a hand on her cheek.

Hermione pushed past them, bumping wizards who all had similar questions. No one pointed them at her anymore.

Pomfrey was in the closet throwing potions and supplies into a bag of holding.

“Poppy,” Hermione said, reaching her hand out. The woman turned revealing eyes wide with panic. “My wand?”

“I don’t have it, Granger,” she said quickly before returning to her work. Hermione sagged. A knocking reverberated through the whole house again. She needed to do something even if she had no wand. Hermione stepped into the closet, reaching for a bottle of skele-grow to throw in the bag. Poppy’s hand caught her wrist before she’d lifted it from the shelf. Hermione froze. Did she not want to bring skele-grow? They would no doubt need it in a few hours. However, the look in Pomfrey’s eyes told her everything she needed to know.

The last time she’d been in the closet she’d shattered weeks’ worth of potions. It was not about what they needed; it was about who they needed to handle it.

And it was no longer Hermione.

Hermione released the bottle, biting her tongue to keep her words back. Another knock shook the house.

Even in such a dire circumstance, she was not to be trusted. She turned- Pomfrey tried to say something after her but she didn’t listen- and went to the kitchen. The room was empty, everyone choosing to gather around the front door to confront the enemy. Hermione threw open the drawers, trying to remember which one the spare wands were kept in.

A sudden boom, like a shock of thunder, shook the house. Dust fell from the ceiling covering everything like a fine blanket of snow. She heard yelps and the flash of curses threw light against the hallway wallpaper. Hermione slammed open the last drawer only to find rusty cutlery. She went to her knees and began throwing open cabinets.

The sound of dueling crawled through the hall into the kitchen: the whiz of curses, the cries of the injured.

She threw open door after door finding only old rags and dusty biscuit boxes until she reached the cabinet under the sink. There she found the small box of wands. The cardboard was damp from a leak in a pipe no wizard ever thought to check on. She pulled it out, knocking a few wands on the floor in the process. They rattled against the floor, rolling under the dining table. She frantically began picking them up, one by one, looking for one with a length like her original one.

Cracks hit the air like popcorn at a muggle movie theater. They were abandoning the safe house. Curses still flew but those who were able were leaving. She fumbled with the wands, grabbing one of vine wood like her old one but found it much too long. She picked up another, shorter than the first but as soon as she touched it her fingers sizzled. She dropped it and kept moving.

Footsteps crept down the hallway, spells knocked over furniture. People’s voices grew louder and desperate. She felt she might drown in her own panic.

She picked up wand after wand, tossing them to the floor as they backfired. Her fingers wrapped around a wand of hawthorn wood. It fit in her hand like her original wand, balancing on her fingers as it had in charms class years ago. It didn’t spark or burn, it called to her.

She held onto it tightly, finally armed and looked up.

Time slowed to a stop. A Death Eater stood in the doorway. Her throat went dry as the familiar etchings of his mask aligned with the memories ingrained in her mind. She was frozen, kneeling on the floor with her new wand while he stood in the way of her exit.

He pulled the mask back revealing a pale face with silver eyes and a scar notched along his jaw.

Her first instinct was to run to him, to throw her arms around him and bury her face against his chest. To listen to his heartbeat and feel his lips on hers. Then came the dread. It filled her stomach and clawed up her throat. This couldn't be real. She'd seen him in the safehouse before and he vanished like smoke every time. Hermione closed her eyes, her fingers clenching around the wood of her new wand. She reopened them to find him still standing there. He moved; the floorboards creaked under his boots as he stepped forward.

"Hermione," his voice was low and rough, like her name was a confession. Emotion bubbled up in the back of her throat and she tried shutting her eyes once more but every time she looked up he was there. There was no clock in the kitchen. No way to doublecheck her lying mind.

"I'm going mad," she whispered. A curse ran into the hallway floor, melting the wood and leaving a hole in its place.

She hated how as the words left her lips her mind felt clear. She felt as grounded as she had in an entire month. The wand in her fingers, the floor shaking underneath her, the sizzle of hexes in the air, and the scent of rain after a long drought soaking the earth. She felt awake and alive. She felt like the same girl who sat in the library in Hogwarts and knew everything the book she was reading told her.

For once, her head didn't ache.

"Hermione!" a voice called from the fray. It was Lupin. "*Hermione!*"

She went to stand, and a black gloved hand wrapped around her wrist.

"Wait-" he began but she gently pulled her hand from his grip.

"You're not real," she said with a weak smile. Her magic swelled up inside of her, focused with her new wand and with a crack the kitchen twisted into nothing before spitting her out in the room upstairs she had run down from. The parlor was empty. Hermione ran out into the hall and saw Lupin, with Lee's arm slung across his shoulders, standing on the stairwell landing searching the chaos below them. Hermione rushed forward, taking the stairs two at a time but froze as the scene downstairs revealed itself.

They weren't fighting Death Eaters downstairs; they weren't even fighting people. About a dozen small black balls were floating and whizzing through the air. They spun around and rushed at the nearest wizard, firing a hex at them. Alicia Spinnet was trying to hit one with a curse, but it would dodge the shock of color at the last minute, the spell flying past and

hitting the stairwell. Angelina Johnson grabbed a thick medical book from a table and smacked it out of the air and against a wall. The metal crunched and it fell to the ground sparking and smoking with a blue hue of spells yet unused.

Hermione was sure this was all a dream but two quick glances at the grandfather clock beside her told her the truth.

It was two in the morning and this was very, very real.

“Hermione!” Lupin shouted, reaching a hand out to her. She ran down to the landing, wrapping Lee’s other arm around her shoulders and helping them down the stairs. Lee was awake, holding on to them both and muttering under his breath. She couldn’t make out what, but he was trembling.

They charged through the hallway where the metal domed objects descended on them. Hermione cast a shield charm and the hexes bounced off. Lupin targeted one and cut it right in half with a well-placed curse.

“Hurry,” Angelina Johnson snapped at them, nodding to the open front door. Others were stepping out and vanishing with loud cracks. Johnson held her newly found weapon in front of her, swiping at any of the objects that threatened to get close. The trio shifted, to get through the narrow door frame. When they turned around Hermione saw him.

Standing at the other end of the hallway where she had left him. Black robes, blonde hair, and silver eyes that made everything else disappear.

“Remus,” she asked. Lupin turned, his wand in hand ready to apparate. “Do you see him?”

Lupin followed her gaze, looking down into the bowels of Grimmauld Place. The little metal balls had stopped firing and instead were floating off to the sides, parting as Draco walked towards the front door. Towards them.

“Hermione, we have to go,” Lupin said gravely, his voice clipped.

“Wait,” she said. She shifted Lee’s weight and he mumbled, falling onto Lupin’s shoulder. She stepped forward, her feet cold on the concrete step.

He was real. He was *here*.

All of it was real. The good, the bad- all of it. The fear, the wand at Lee’s throat- but also the kisses and caresses. The need that seemed to fuel her very core.

It was all real. She wasn’t mad.

She stepped forward as Angelina and Alicia jumped ship with the rest of the order. They crackled around her like firewood as they vanished.

The same clearness came over again, soothing her battered mind. All her questions melted away. Her confusion carried off on a breeze.

She knew what she wanted, and it was in front of her.

He smiled at her and her stomach flipped over. She reached out for him and he moved closer, his arm outstretched.

“No!” A voice shouted behind her. It sounded a thousand kilometers away, but the hand clasping her wrist was dangerously close. She turned to find Remus holding her arm like a vice. She fought his grip, but they were already being pulled through space. She twisted away to reach for Draco but it was too late. Light twisted and stretched until they fell to a damp forest floor with a nearly full moon hovering above them.

“What did you do!” Hermione cried, climbing up out of the leaves. Her feet and clothes were covered in mud, and her face flushed. “He was real! He was actually there!”

She was shouting, her voice ricocheting off the trees and scaring birds from their nests. Her lungs burned and her heart ached in her chest. Her head was being consumed by fog again and she fought against it, holding on to what she knew was true.

“It was all real! It was-”

“Granger!” Lupin snapped. She stopped. Lee was leaning against a tree, blinking awake and Remus stood over him, his face red and his teeth on edge. “He’s the enemy!”

He was seething. She’d never seen him so angry before and it made her heart drop.

“He’s cruel! He’s a killer!” Lupin said, his voice cracking as he went on. “He’s dangerous, Hermione. You can’t give into this- you’re better than that.”

“But it’s-,” she started, feeling terribly small. In the open woods with no shoes and no supplies other than her new wand. She had been happy for a brief moment to find out all of her confusion was melting away only to be replaced with new problems. Her eyes stung just as they had when she lost points for her house or she was caught after curfew. Guilt and shame pulling her under.

“Hermione you have to shut him out,” he said, slicing his hand through the air as if to show her how. “You have to push him out of your mind.”

“He’s not in my mind-,”

“But you’re thinking about him right now! I can see it! You put everyone in danger- you’d betray everyone and for what?” He was hurt and disappointed and she wished she understood why. Tears spilled over, running down her cheeks.

“I don’t understand! I’d never betray the Order, I’d never do anything to-,” Hermione begged him to understand and Lupin turned on her with just as much rage.

“You already did.” His voice was quiet and collected and it made it hurt worse than she could ever imagine. It hit her in the stomach like a hex, knocking the wind from the lungs. “You led him to an unplotable place- the safe house is lost to the enemy now. What else have you told him?”

“Nothing,” she muttered, trying to think of everything she ever told her dream visitor. Nothing important, right? Nothing that would hurt them in the war.

Right?

“Hermione, I wanted to help you, but I can’t,” Lupin said. She could see the pain he felt in every word he spoke and breath he took. He turned away. His knuckles pressed to the inner corner of his eyes.

“Please, Professor, I don’t understand. If there’s something I can do, I’ll do it-”

“It’s too late Hermione,” his voice was quiet. “The damage is done, and the bond is all but sealed.”

“Bond?” she echoed. The word was heavy on her tongue.

“You bonded with a werewolf, Granger, and not just any werewolf. A freshly turned Draco Malfoy,” he sounded tired more than anything.

“I did no such thing!” she said, trying to stand tall in a pile of muddy leaves amid serious accusations.

“Why do you think you dream with him, Hermione? Because you’re old friends and he wants drop in to catch up?” he said bitterly.

“I-” Hermione blinked, trying to connect all the information put in front of her. It was too much and she felt a headache coming on. She pressed her fingers into her temple, trying to ease the ache. She took a breath, calming the anger bubbling inside of her. “Lupin, I know you are upset with me, but I need you to explain what has happened. I am unsure how I have earned your anger and want to see how I can correct myself.”

He looked at her sadly shaking his head.

“Werewolves... they feel very deeply,” he began, trying to fall back into his teacher voice and failing. “They bond with their mates, a magical bond that touches every aspect of the person. At some point last month in that shack alone with Draco, just as the curse was settling on him- you two formed a bond.”

“That’s unfair,” Hermione said, fighting back tears. “How can werewolves just bond with anyone and they have to deal with it?”

“They don’t,” Lupin said. “You bonded with him because you wanted to. Magic doesn’t work against nature.”

This whole month, every dream every supposed fantasy- it was not just a bond of circumstance. Not wild magic at play. The connection she felt with Draco was not the result of the strange bond but the cause of it. She kneeled in the leaves, trying to steady her rioting mind.

All of their dreams were this bond magic trying to break through, trying to reunite them. When she had seen him and realized he was real, standing there in the flesh- she would have gone. Would have left it all behind if she hadn't been pulled away. Was that her true nature? Or had this bond worn her down over the month to make her willing to? Made her abandon everything else to calm the tenuous thread that connected them?

"You can't blame her," Lee said from his spot curled up beside the tree. He was more lucid after the chaos of the ambush shut him down. He hugged his trainers against his chest but kept a watchful gaze on Lupin. "Just because you berate yourself for getting close to people doesn't mean you should yell at her about it."

"I'm not-," Lupin began but Lee shot him a look and he stopped, his argument extinguished. He let out a sigh. "We need to move. We can't sit out here all night. There's a cabin just west of here."

Silently, Hermione and Lupin helped Lee up and started for their destination. Lupin was up front, but Hermione lingered in the back taking her steps carefully to avoid stabbing herself in the foot. Lee walked beside her, his shoes still in hand.

"You could put them on, you know," Hermione pointed out.

"I can't stand shoes without socks," he admitted with a shrug, as they both stepped into a puddle of mud.

Hermione fiddled with the sleeve of her sweater, piecing together the conversation.

If what they said was true then it was always there, or at least the potential was there. She didn't know if she should be happy that she wasn't losing her mind- that her dreams had been for a reason and had a cause and wasn't her slowly spiraling into madness. However, that didn't change that the root of it was... undesirable?

She didn't know if that was the right word.

They reached the cabin. The door lacked a handle, but Lupin taped his wand against the wood, and it swung open. Hermione tried to clean her feet on the front step, but Lee walked straight in tracking mud across the floor.

The cabin was small but well equipped. There were four beds each with a trunk with a heavy lock and a shelf built in the wall beside it. Each shelf had a few more storage spaces and a rod with hangers for clothes. There was also a door in the back with WC label on it.

Lupin went straight for the bed in the corner. It had clothes on its hangers. He opened the lock on the trunk and threw it open revealing food and other supplies.

"Is this where you come for-" she stated carefully but even a calculated tone was not appreciated.

"Yes," Lupin said, searching the trunk before pausing. His shoulders sagged for a moment before he looked up at her. "I'm sorry, Granger. Yes. This is where I come for the full moon."

We were planning on Lee coming here today since this will be his first full moon, but necessity called us here early.”

Remus pulled out a pair of his boots, sturdy and solid. He flicked his wand against the soles, and they shrunk in his hand. He stretched out his arm, handing them to her with a pair of thick wool socks.

“Oh. Thank you,” Hermione said, taking them and retreating to an empty bunk. She used her new wand to scourge the bottom of her feet before slipping them into the socks. They were warm and not nearly as itchy as she thought they would be. She put on the boots and found he’d adjusted them perfectly. Hermione pulled the laces tight and watched Lee slip into socks and abandon his shoes on top of his trunk. He yanked a blanket off a bed beside what she presumed to be some clothes Remus had preset for him for the coming full moon. Lee wrapped the red knit around his shoulders like a cape and crossed over to her, plopping down on the mattress beside her.

“So,” he said, wiggling his socked feet against the floor. “We should talk.”

“No.” Lupin and Hermione both chimed in before looking at each other.

“She needs to know,” Lee said matter-of-factly, peering at Lupin as if trying to read his thoughts.

“Know what?” Hermione asked. “Is there something I don’t know yet? Can we please put everything out in the open? I’m tired of learning things bit by bit.”

“Yes, you were always one to read the whole textbook instead of waiting for assigned reading,” Lupin muttered standing up from his trunk. He ran his hand across his face before looking at his two charges. “Walk me through what you know, and I’ll fill in.”

Hermione hesitated but the pupil inside of her leaped at the opportunity. She spread her hands over her lap before starting. She wished it was simply facts about a spell, or the history of the moving staircases. That would have been easier, but after the last few days she decided it was worthless to try to be coy around Lee and Lupin.

“A month ago, Draco Malfoy was bit by a werewolf. Werewolves, to my understanding, create deep bonds with their family and mates. One of those bonds was... was formed between us,” she looked to Lupin whose face remained impassive. She rolled the events around in her brain. “It manifested itself in shared dreams and a strong connecting between minds.”

She took a moment, chewing on her bottom lip.

“It became so strong that he was able to appear in Grimmauld Place through my own magic. That revealed its unplottable location to him, and he showed up to...” she trailed off thinking about the event. He came with no other Death Eaters, only those odd little objects. He didn’t come to take the safe house for Voldemort, he would have brought others with him. No this was a solo mission.

She never even saw him draw his wand.

“Lee said that the full moon heightens emotions- worry, anxiety,” she said, more to herself than to the others at this point. “But he’d be...”

“Possessive,” Lee chimed in, looking at his hands. He looked serious. He had said he’d seen into his soul when he appeared in the pack room. *Like lightning in a bottle.*

She had asked Lee what Malfoy wanted but it was always apparent. In everything he’d said, everything he’d done. In the hand he had reached out for her just moments ago and that she had tried to take.

“Oh,” she said as it bloomed in her mind. Lupin shifted uncomfortably.

“Hermione,” Lupin said softly, sitting on his bed across from then. “I apologize for my emotion. As someone who tries very hard to stay out of other people’s way, I’m not exactly thrilled at the idea of someone, especially a werewolf with such strong magic, claiming someone in such a way.”

“Claim” made her heart flop in her ribs.

“He’s not going to stop,” he said, and she already felt it. She felt it as she was pulled from the front step of Grimmauld Place- the determination. The need to see her again. “Lee and I, we’re not going to be much help today. The moon makes us cagey not-”

“Not like the Terminator,” Lee said. Hermione raised an eyebrow at him. “What? I like muggle movies, they’re very creative.”

“Sure,” Lupin said, waving at Lee, the reference well over his head. “My point is, we need to get in touch with the rest of the Order. Put you with people who aren’t going to turn tonight and can put some distance between you and Malfoy. Maybe after his moon he’ll, I don’t know, calm down a little.”

“Did you?” Hermione asked.

“Did I what?”

“Calm down?”

Lupin frowned. She took that as a no.

“We don’t have much time. I don’t know where everyone else went but I have an idea,” Lupin said standing up and pulling out his wand. “I’ll send a Patronus and see who has room.”

The moon would only heighten need. It would not stop because he had turned, and it would not stop after he turned back. She felt it inside of her, the need the want grinding against her mind. Wherever she went she’d be putting them in same danger as she had Grimmauld Place. She would be a target anywhere and destruction would follow her every footstep.

She couldn't put anyone else in Draco's way. She couldn't use the Order as a shield.

"No," Hermione said. She didn't move, but her voice was forceful enough. Lupin froze.

"We don't have much of a choice, Granger. You can't stay here it won't be safe," Remus said, a crease forming between his eyebrows.

"I won't be staying here, but I'm not going to a safe house either," Hermione announced, chin raised. Of all the choices laid out before her, reducing the stress on the Order was imperative and if she could do that then it was her duty to. They weren't letting her heal or handle potions, she wasn't allowed on the battlefield. The least she could do is get a possessive werewolf off their backs.

"Hermione-

"Remus. I appreciate your concern, but I can't put the Order in any more danger. I can't hide behind you all forever," Hermione pointed out.

"Granger, you haven't seen a werewolf-

"I've seen you," she said sharply.

"And me," Lee chimed in.

"Yes, of course. You saw me but you haven't seen others. They... not everyone is kind Hermione. People who are nasty get nastier. Closer to the moon they're violent and follow a different moral code," he said, the words struggling to come out. He was dredging up memories he'd rather not relive, and she could see it in the tension of his body as he paced back and forth in front of them. "And this is not just any werewolf- this is a Death Eater. You can't trust any of them- even if you were able to bond with one. Bond magic is complicated, and I don't want to get into it, not after the night we've had. I just-"

He stopped, his hands in hair. He looked absolutely unraveled.

"I just want to keep you safe," he said quietly. "I need everyone to be safe."

Hermione held his gaze for a moment, ready to refute him, but bit back her words. He needed this. She sighed.

"Alright," she said.

"Thank you, Hermione. You'll see that this was for the best," Lupin smiled before stepping outside to cast his patronus. When the door quietly slapped shut Lee turned to her.

"You lied to him," he said, not offended not surprised. Just stating it.

"I did," she replied, equally matter of fact.

"Good," Lee said, rising from the bed, his knit blanket wrapped tightly around his shoulders. "You should leave soon. Your wolf will only grow more persistent."

She watched Lee walk over to his own bed, lying on top of the sheets in a little ball of red wool. Hermione looked down at her new wand. It was the same length as the one she got from Olivander's so many years ago, but its wood was different. Hawthorne. She wondered what the core was made of. It had worked for her surprisingly well since she got it and she hoped it wouldn't fail her now.

"Hey Lee," she said. He looked up at her, his face framed by his blanket. "Take care of yourself."

"Only if you do the same," he said with a wink before settling back down into a nest of pillows.

In her borrowed boots, Hermione walked down the length of the cabin to the front door. Lupin turned, still on edge.

"I'm here to help," she said, holding a hand up in surrender. "It'll go faster if we send multiple messages. Just tell me where."

Lupin almost sent her back inside, she could see it in his eyes, but he gave in.

"Actually, could you send one back to Grimmauld Place? People may have returned there, and I don't want to miss anyone."

"Of course, Professor," she said, stepping aside to get some more work room and pulling her wand out. "And I wanted to thank you."

"For what?"

"For all of this. I know this hasn't been easy for you, but I appreciate your patience in helping me," Hermione said. She meant it, every word of it.

"I'm sorry you have to go through this, Hermione. Honestly, most people would have gone mental by now, but you've always had a sturdy head on your shoulders," Lupin said, the muscles in his shoulders relaxing. He shoved a hand into his pocket, his wand hanging loosely by his side. "After the full moon Lee and I will meet up with you. We won't abandon our pack mate."

It was a genuine promise. Her stomach flipped.

"Wolf pack promise," he added, throwing his hand up in a salute. Hermione copied it, trying to give him a smile but not quite managing it.

"I'm sorry, Professor," she said. With a crack she vanished just as the sun peered over the horizon.

Mine

Grimmauld Place was deserted when she arrived. The door hung open, still unseen by the muggles that walked down the sidewalk in front of it. She peered down at the muggle watch she had taken from a convenience store down the street. She didn't feel great about stealing but hadn't a single thing on her to pay with. She did, however, make a note of how much it had cost so when she did come into some change she could pay the shopkeeper back.

The digital display blinked 8:16 AM. She closed her eyes and looked at it again. 8:16 AM.

The floorboards creaked under her weight when crossed the threshold. The hall was littered with the metal balls that had been spitting out spells. None of them floated anymore. The ones that still worked must have been taken away, only the dead ones remained. Hermione kneeled, picking up one that had been cracked open. The metal was perfectly smooth, and it fit in the palm of her hand like an orange. It wasn't terribly heavy, and the insides held small chambers connected to a single cylinder in the middle.

She carried the weapon with her, walking from room to room looking for any sign of life. Everyone was gone. The hospital ward was a mess of tattered linens and burn marks on the wall. She didn't see any blood and if anyone was injured during the assault, they were able to make it out. The potions cabinet door hung open and she peeked her head in to look at the lean shelves. A few vials remained but everything important had been grabbed.

Hermione continued her tour, leaning on the door frame of the kitchen and looking at the overturned box of wands on the floor. Her fingers fiddled with her new one in her pocket. It had engraving on it, but not like her old one. Not the familiar raises of vines wrapping around its length. She pulled it out, staring at the wood. It looked like runes. Some of them looked familiar- she recognized the rune for guidance, but her mind was foggy. She'd have to look them up. Hermione stuck her wand back in her pocket frowning. She used to remember everything she read and now she couldn't hold onto a few runes.

"Anyone here?" she asked the empty house. She was greeted by nothing but silence and the front door creaking on its hinges. She crossed to it and pulled it closed.

She went upstairs, listening to the loud tick tock of the grandfather clock. She went through the girls' shared room, picking out new clothes from the open trunks. She was sure they wouldn't mind, if they ever found out.

In the bathroom she shed her jumper and trousers, thankful for a bath with real warm water instead of just a hastily done spell. She hadn't even been able to cast one on herself in weeks with her borrowed wand tucked away in Pomfrey's apron. Sometimes the muggle way was just better, she thought to herself running her fingers through her damp hair. Sometimes you need a moment to yourself engulfed in steam and lavender.

However, a wand was better for tedious tasks. With a quick flick her hair dried. It was still a large halo of curls around her head, but she didn't mind.

She pulled on a red dress she'd found in a trunk, whose she was unsure. It was made for summer weather not the cold winds that were blowing now. Small yellow flowers dotted the fabric and it made Hermione think of spring. She pulled it on, fiddling with spells when she couldn't reach the zipper in the back.

After too long with her wand jammed down her back, she pulled Lupin's borrowed socks back on, rolling them up to her knee, and laced up her boots again. She'd found a sweater in a pile, a thick shawl neck kind with wooden buttons up the front. It was warm, even if it scratched her neck.

She inhaled slowly. The air was cold inside, the charms set to keep the house comfortable gone with its occupants. She wouldn't need to set any, she wouldn't stay long.

The only thing she did set was an illusion on the front door. If any Order member came looking the first floor would appear as it had to her when she arrived- abandoned in haste. She didn't need anyone trying to get her back now.

She walked into the pack room, hardly touched by the chaos from a few hours earlier. She sat on the large gray rug and pulled her knees up against her chest. She looked to her wrist again, watching the green numbers flicker at her.

8:55 AM. She shut her eyes, counting to three before reopening them. 8:55 AM

Hermione laid back and stared at the ceiling for a minute before finally closing her eyes.

The blue fabric fluttered around her with every movement. She clung to Viktor Krum's arm as they made their way into the great hall. Everything dripped with crystals and snow. The usual warm browns of the castle were cast aside for pure white.

She hadn't realized it, but she had been smiling the entire time.

The champions took their turn on the dance floor. Hermione held on tightly to Krum's shoulders as they spun across the floor, her skirt swirling around her legs. Faces were a blur all around her and all she could feel was the thrum of the music and the frantic pace of her heart. By the time the orchestra swelled and resolved she was red in the cheeks and out of breath.

"Come, another song," Viktor asked. His eyes glimmered and she felt her cheeks redden more. He'd been the perfect date in every way. Kind, considerate, and entirely invested in her. On top of it he was handsome and the object of desire for more than a few of the students watching the TriWizard Tournament. She couldn't say that having something everyone else wanted didn't thrill her.

But as much as she had loved sending him letters and reading about his life in Bulgaria she had stopped.

He was perfection and yet it still felt wrong.

“I’m going to sit down,” she said, slipping her hand from his and hurrying into the crowd of students that had formed around the dance floor. The eager couples had already taken to the floor, ready to hold each other close where a teacher would not berate them, and their friends could not make fun.

The music swelled but her heart was louder. She pushed through the students, searching.

She stopped at the edge of the crowd when she finally spotted him. He stood near the double doors leaning on the large frame with his arms crossed. He was in his dress robes, his light hair slicked back, but had no company, a strange sight for him during school.

Hermione took a breath before walking towards him. The music faded as she walked away from it, all the tables and chairs lined up on either side empty as their occupants pressed close to the band.

“I thought you’d be dancing,” she said as she reached him. She was still out of breath from being spun around like a top by Viktor, but the burn in her lungs felt good. It reminded her of a time before gray skies and foggy minds.

“I was going to say the same of you,” he said, silver eyes flickering to the crowd behind her.

“I needed a break.”

“It looks like you’re trying to make an escape,” he said, his tone cool.

“Maybe I am.”

The slightest smirk touched his lips and then it was gone. He shifted, stretching out a hand to her.

“Before you run off, may I have the honor of a dance?”

“Do you deserve one?” Hermione lifted a brow. He chuckled, his cool mask breaking. He looked to his dress shoes, but she could see the smile stretched across his cheeks even from this angle. When he looked up again there was a scar carved into his jaw.

“Definitely not.”

She slipped her hand into his. He led her not to the dance floor but out the massive double doors into the corridor. The dazzling snow effects and white decorations did not touch the hall. It was simply warm candlelight and muffled music from the party happening nearby. Even so, he pulled her close to him and fell into a simple step. It was one McGonagall had taught the Gryffindors before the ball, something so simple any student could do it.

His hand pressed into the small of her back, holding her close against him. Her heart skipped a beat, and she nearly tripped over her own feet trying to fall back into the rhythm. They continued, carving their own dance floor as they swept across the stone corridor. She slipped her hand around his neck, bringing them even closer.

When she danced with Viktor, she thought nothing of the closeness. She was lost in the steps of the dance, and of the spectacle of being picked up and spun around before the school. Here, in their private ball, she thought only of his touch.

She'd been avoiding his eyes, focusing on her feet or the elaborate buttons on his dress robes. She could fight it no longer. She tilted her chin up and found his eyes already trained on her. The air left her lungs and it was all she could do to cling to his shoulders as they swept through the empty corridor.

"Draco," she said softly. Their dance came to a stop beside the staircase leading down to the lower levels of the castle. The candlelight was dim here, no one expected anyone to be walking this way with the ball still in full swing. Their feet had stopped moving but they still held each other. Hermione hooked her fingers into his pale hair at the back of his neck. "Draco, I'm coming for you."

He smiled.

"I'll be waiting."

She opened her eyes to the flaking ceiling of Grimmauld Place, a smile glued to her lips. The clock in hall chimed ten times on the hour. Hermione sat up and looked out the window. It was overcast and it smelled like rain would soon fall. She took in a deep breath, letting the scent fill her mind.

It was a wonderful smell.

The front door swung open with a slam. Hermione jumped from her spot by the window and raced to the stairwell.

"Hermione?!" a familiar voice called out. Hermione leaned over the banister and saw Ginny on the first floor. She had what was obviously Harry's jacket thrown over her shirt. The blood left her cheeks, panic rising in her throat. For a moment she thought she could pretend she wasn't there but Ginny straight at her, having already checked for wards in case of enemies. She should have known such a simple trick would never fool an experienced fighter. "You're alright! Lupin sent a message. We were all afraid you'd been taken."

Her heart sank. More lies to tell.

"Is that mine?" Ginny asked, looking at Hermione's dress.

"Uhh, maybe," she looked down at the dress. It didn't seem like something Ginny would wear but she hadn't paid much attention to the trunks she was raiding. "Do you mind?"

"No, you look good. It wasn't my color anyway," Ginny said, tucking her hands in her jacket pockets. Hermione stayed on the second floor, her fingers wrapping around the banister. She didn't know what to say, not yet anyway. Her wand felt heavy in her sleeve. Ginny looked up at her, a slim smile at the dress slowly drooping as the grandfather ticked a minute by.

“Hermione, are you okay?” Ginny finally asked, concern etched into her freckles. Hermione felt her heart splinter in her chest.

“This last month has been... so weird. I’m sorry I haven’t been with you through it. I... I care about you and so do Ron and Harry,” Ginny said, her gaze falling to the floor. She kicked at a floorboard with the toe of her trainer. “I can’t say I know exactly what you’re going through but I know... I know what it feels like to not trust your thoughts.”

Ginny looked back up and her eyes shimmered with tears. Hermione bit the inside of her cheek. Everyone remembered Ginny’s first year at school. It had been long ago and no one talked about it much anymore, but she could only imagine how much it haunted the young woman. To have trusted someone, especially as a young witch, and to be completely deceived and controlled.

“I just want to say that I love ya and... and I’m here for you,” Ginny said giving her a small smile.

Hermione descended the stairs, wrapping the girl in a hug. She was thin from months of war and she smelled more like Harry than anything else, but she was real. She was a friend.

“Thank you, Ginny,” Hermione said softly, holding the Weasley close. Her fingers trembled as she pulled her wand from her sleeve. “And I’m so sorry.”

“Why-,” Ginny started to pull back, but Hermione held her tight. Tears pricked her eyes as she pressed her wand against her friend’s neck.

“Stupefy.”

Ginny crumpled into her arms. Hermione fell to her knees dragged under the Weasley’s weight. She held her close, her cheek pressed against her head.

“I hope you can forgive me,” she said, but there was no one to hear.

Hermione couldn’t just leave her friend on the floor. She took her upstairs and laid her across the bed she rarely used in the girl’s room. She pulled a blanket over her shoulders. And yet that still didn’t feel like enough.

She stood on the doorstep of Grimmauld Place, wand in hand ready to leave. Instead she flicked her wand, an otter swirling to life beside her on the step.

“Tell Harry that Ginny is here, and she could use his help,” she said. The otter swept off the step vanishing into a blue light. She had done all she could.

Hermione closed her eyes, her wand holding her wand tightly. She inhaled before space warped around her stealing the breath from her lungs just as quickly as she had captured it. With a crack the countryside came into view. It had just begun to snow, and the dull green autumn grass was coated in a dusting of white. She pulled her sweater tight around her shoulders as she walked up the stone path towards the giant looming house. Nothing surrounded it, only a few trees and rolling hills, however it was large enough to have an entire village within its walls. She approached the front gate. It was made of thin bars of

metal swirled together like ripples in a pond. She reached her hand towards it and paused. Hermione remembered reading about old wizard families and their homes. There were often wards attached to them to keep their property safe. If she touched the bars would it alert Draco or Lucius? Narcissa? Would the entire family know of her arrival?

“Hermione.”

She whipped around pulled from her thoughts. Malfoy stood in black robes, the snow settling on his shoulders. She only took a moment to look at him before she was crossing the fresh snow. He met her halfway and they crashed together. He captured her in his arms, holding her tight against his chest.

Solid and real. She peeked at her watch.

10:45. Blink. 10:45.

Real.

She took his face in her hands, his cheeks warm against her chilled skin. Hermione ran her fingers over his cheekbones, her thumb worrying at his scar. Tears flowed over onto her cheeks, but she couldn't pull her eyes away from his face. She wanted to memorize everything so that even if this moment was taken from her too, she'd at least hold it in her heart. Hermione raised up on her toes and Malfoy eagerly lowered his mouth to hers. They met gently at first, a hesitant touch barely a brush of contact. But as his taste filled her mind and the smell of a thunderstorm sparking in the air enveloped her, she slid her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. His hands held her tightly against him, his mouth hungry for more as his lips moved over hers. They stumbled back, Hermione's shoulders smacking into the front gate of Malfoy Manor the metal clattering beneath her. Draco's lips wandered from her lips, pressing kisses across her jaw and down her neck. He pulled at her sweater, yanking the fabric off her shoulder to press his lips against the exposed flesh of her collarbone. Heat pooled between her legs. Hermione threw her head back against the gate, exposing more of her neck to his mouth. He accepted her offering, his teeth nipping at her throat.

His body pressed desperately against hers, one hand on her hip the other clutching the metal bars behind her caging her in. Her fingers weaved into his hair and she pulled his mouth back up to hers. His kiss was sloppier and more demanding, his arm slipping beneath her sweater to caress her breasts before sliding down the skirt of her dress to yank up at its hem. Every touch urgent and desperate. His fingers brushed across her thighs before pressing against her knickers. She was burning up under his touch, moaning against his lips as he worked his fingers against her. She was wet for him, no doubt he could feel it.

He pulled his hand away. She whimpered feeling cold without his hand under her skirt.

“Hold on,” he said, gripping her waist. The snowy countryside vanished, and she was pulled into the dim candlelight of a room. It was luxurious with a large four poster bed pressed against one wall and a fireplace surrounded by plush couches at the other end.

She had barely enough time to realize they had moved indoors before his lips were on hers again. He held her as if he was afraid she might vanish if he took his hands off her for a

single second. She curled her hands into his robes, deepening their kiss.

She'd been corralling a flame inside of her for so long. Trying to keep it down and contained and now she was able to let it burn with all the rage and fury it desired. She let the heat that had been building within her flare and consume her whole being. His hands drifted from her waist lower and without any prelude he lifted her off the floor. Hermione wrapped her legs around his waist, their lips never parting.

He had to tilt his head up to kiss her now and despite the intoxicating taste of him on her lips, she pulled away to look at him. Hermione didn't often get to look down at Draco so she savored the moment. His chin was tilted up, his neck exposed. His eyes were trained on her face, his pupils so wide his eyes looked more black than silver. His lips were red from her less than gentle kisses.

A rush of heat filled her veins settling every thought fluttering around in her mind. Thoughts of the Order, of Lupin and Lee, of Ginny and Harry and the rest all fell away. The war was light-years away, there was only one word she could think of. Her toes tingled at the thought of it.

She slid her hands through Draco's hair, pulling his head back to tilt his chin up even further. He grunted but let her move him. The firelight threw a warm glow over his pale face.

"Claim me."

It was instant. One moment she was held up looking into his face, the next she was lying on silver silk sheets with Malfoy leaning over her. He looked down at her, his fingers working at his belt buckle. Hermione found herself enchanted by the movement, sitting up to watch pale knuckles work against a silver buckle. She caught herself licking her lips but didn't stop herself.

She had been trying to tame herself for far too long and just like the dreams she had shared with Draco before, she was willing to give over to a more primal side of herself. She laid back into his sheets, spreading her legs.

There was the thud of his belt hitting the floor and then his lips were on hers. His scent surrounded her- the sensation of a thunderstorm brewing under her fingertips. His mouth fell to her neck where his kisses grew rough, catching tender skin between his teeth. She gasped, arching her body against him. He wrapped an arm around her, his hand pressed against the small of her back to keep their bodies close. He bit into her skin harder and she cried out. It was a delicious kind of pain, one that made her toes curl inside her boots.

Draco shifted, his hands moving under her dress to yank her knickers off. The fabric was soon replaced by his fingers, massaging and circling her.

She closed her eyes lost in her other senses.

The smell of parchment and earth. The pain throbbing in her neck. The sweet taste of Malfoy lingering on her lips. His breath coming quick and desperate in her ear. His fingers slipping through her slick and building more and more fire inside of her.

She'd be burned alive under his touch and she'd enjoy every second of it.

His lips traveled over her collarbone, laying kisses anywhere skin was exposed.

"Hermione," he whispered into her skin as if setting a ward into her flesh. A finger slipped between her folds, pressing into her. She shuddered, her body yearning for more of him.

Her dreams had been only an inkling of what his touch could be. In life, with his hands actually touching her, it was so much more.

His shifted, his fingers slipping out of her to pull at his trousers. His hands gripped her thighs, pressing them further apart. His eyes met hers and Hermione curled her fingers into the sheets as he pressed himself into her. She threw her head back, moaning as he filled her completely. He fell over her, his teeth on her neck. She angled her hips, searching to take him even deeper. Her legs wrapped around his waist, her hands clawing at his shoulders- anything to get him closer, to get more of him.

He thrust into her, his hips slamming into her own and sending every thought in her mind into a whirlwind. His teeth sunk into her shoulder and she cried out- a strangled moan of a scream.

"Mine," he growled, bucking his hips and pressing her further into his sheets. "*Mine.*"

New World

Everything looked so crisp. It's the first thought she has that isn't of his touch. Curled up against his body, the sheets tangled around her naked legs, Hermione stares at the other wall taking in every detail. The golden frames of the hanging portraits- the brush strokes of the paint raised just a little off the canvas.

Everything had been foggy and grey for so long it was like she had discovered a superpower. A new form of magic allowing her to see things others didn't. But she knew it wasn't nothing new. These details were always there, and others could see them, but the curtain had been within her own mind. But it was still amazing to notice. The little particles floating in the air, caught in the light spilling in from between thick emerald curtains. The rug spread out across the hardwood, the tassels on the end folded under itself where someone had tripped over it. The wood crackling in the fireplace at the other end, the logs splintering and shifting under the wavering flame.

Magic folk didn't tend to care for movies, except for Lee. Their world was so different from the muggle one that the problems presented didn't seem interesting, and the magic was laughable. However, even through her transition into the world of witches and wizards Hermione had kept the Wizard of Oz close to her heart. For obvious reasons it may seem. A young girl, misunderstood and bored, brought into a colorful world where she holds an incredible power. There are bad witches but there are also good ones. And good men too.

This was like the film shifting from sepia to color in a single swing of a door. She pulled her hand up from the sheets watching her knuckles flex underneath her skin. She could see blue veins beneath pale skin, her fingertips pink. She snapped her fingers and a flame hovered over her thumb like a lighter. Bright, hot, but fleeting.

Draco shifted against her, nuzzling his face closer against her neck. The flame went out on her hand and she curled into his touch. He had an arm wrapped around her waist holding her tightly against him. She ran her fingers over his arm, tracing the muscles in them. He seemed stronger now than he did a month ago. Maybe it was the moon, or maybe it was because she was actually seeing him. The last time they had truly met face to face she wasn't able to see his build behind thick robes, but she remembered him being lean. Hungry was the word she wanted to use. He didn't look like that now.

She was afraid to let go of him. She kept waiting for a moment where her mind would be pulled back to Grimmauld Place and she'd have to mourn their night together. But it never happened. He was solid and wouldn't dissolve in her grasp.

Her body was warm and sweaty from his touch. Her neck aching from where his teeth had broken the skin. It wouldn't heal, not properly and not ever. Wounds from werewolves, transformed or not, never did. If should have treated it when it happened. Silver and dittany would have closed it up, but in the moment she hadn't wanted it to heal. She wanted to feel the pain, to wear the mark proudly so everyone knew she had been claimed. An animalistic sort of urge, but one she had savored.

He was pleasant to watch. His chest rising and falling, the pink lines from where her nails had dragged across his shoulders, his blonde hair ruffled and sticking up from where he had shoved his head into the pillow.

She ran her nails across his skin and watched goosebumps raise against his skin. He shifted, his arm turning to avoid the tickling sensation. She was confronted with black ink on pale skin. Her eyes ran across the details- the little scales on the snake's body, the fangs protruding from its mouth. The grimace the skull seemed to wear. The black eyeless sockets burned into her and she stared back. For a moment she thought she saw the snake squirm, ready to leap off Draco's forearm and sink its inky fangs into her throat.

"What time is it?" Draco mumbled against her neck, pulling his arm up to sling across her shoulder ending her staring contest with his mark. Hermione wiggled to look at her watch which, of all things, managed to stay on her body.

"Five," she said. She glanced away and back at the clockface just to make sure.

"I have to go," he said, not moving. Hermione stared up at the canopy above the bed. There was a small burn mark in the middle of it, probably from a spell gone wrong.

"Where do you go?" she asked. "Do you have a safe place?"

"I have a place."

"A safe one?"

"I'll be safe."

Hermione turned onto her side to look at him.

"And after tonight?"

"I'll come back here, to you." His arm tightened around her.

"Then what?"

"Then I..." he took in a sharp breath. "I'll keep you safe."

"But you'll still be fighting."

"I will."

Hermione knew, for the safety of the Order, that following her instincts had been right. That the pressure she had taken off them was invaluable and yet she felt shame slid down her throat and settle like a stone in her gut. She usually looked ahead, but so much had changed in a month. She felt like a different person. The haze was receding, and she was left with pieces to fit together.

He sensed her discomfort. Draco pressed a curl back from her face to hook behind her ear.

“There isn’t anywhere I can go.”

Her first instinct was to deny it. To grab her things and march to the library and find a way. But Hogwarts was a war away, and any book she needed burned or behind locked doors. She didn’t know where she stood now. She had left one side and while not necessarily joining the other side, she had fraternized with it.

She should have thought of all of this before but there was a burn in her gut and a fog in her mind that wouldn’t leave.

She’d figure it out. There was a solution to everything, and she’d find it.

He left just before dark. He stood at the gates dressed in black robes with the harsh silver mask tied to his belt. Hermione had convinced him to take a change of clothes like Lupin and Lee had stored at their cabin.

They didn’t speak much but she couldn’t blame either of them. All of their conversations had taken place in their dreams where everything was perfect, and they knew they were alone. Here in the world there was the cold biting at her skin, and the full moon hanging overhead waiting for night to fall. Every word they had exchanged in the real world was either sharp or neutral. Now, without the urgent need to be close and the heat in their veins they were left with... well each other.

He was still handsome. The scar on his jaw was flattering and brought a roughness to his fragile features that aged him a little. The physical element felt real- the want to kiss him, the need to touch him. But the casual part was lacking. So saying goodbye felt like an impossible task.

“I’ll be back in the morning.”

“I know.”

She held her jacket close around her body, but the cold still slipped through it. Draco reached for her but stopped himself.

“No one else should be back at the Manor. I suggest you stay here,” he said, the cold turning his pale cheeks a shade of pink.

“Be careful. Stay away from populated areas,” she said. He looked away before quickly stepping forward and pressing a kiss against her cheek.

He vanished in a flurry of snowflakes. Hermione hadn’t reached the front door before she felt the fog tickling the edges of her mind again. It wasn’t a rush of confusion, nor was it as thick as before. But it felt like a reminder that he was gone. That she could easily sink into the same haze.

Malfoy Manor was an endless expanse of rooms and halls that could easily rival Hogwarts. While the staircases didn’t move, there seemed to be a never-ending supply of wings and

hallways. The fact that only three people had lived in it seemed like a crime. What did they do with all this space? Let it rot away collecting dust?

In any case, she knew a house of that size must contain a library if only to assign a room a theme.

She found one on the second floor. Every wall was covered in shelves from the floor to the ceiling. There was no ladder to reach the topmost books but calling them down seemed like an easy enough task for her new wand. She didn't trust it to stitch a tendon back together, but it could pull a book down without completely shattering it. Although, searching the titles would have been far easier with a ladder. Instead she pulled volume after volume down looking for the right area. She collected a few texts about bonding curses on a desk set in the middle of the room, and then a few more about magical creatures that had sections about werewolves. She hadn't gotten her hands on volumes like this in at least a year. It was good to stroll through the quiet study, taking books down and feeling their binding against her fingers. The gold letters printed into the covers, the smell of old parchment.

It was like being in a dream again.

She sat at the desk and pulled a magical creature book open. It seemed someone had beat her to it. A couple of pages had been dogeared and when she opened one a detailed illustration of a moon hovering above a tree line stared back at her. In decorative letters the chapter was spelled out:

Lycanthrope

She started skimming the first paragraph- general information about werewolves she already studied and didn't need a refresher on- when the door to the study creaked open. She paused, looking up to find a woman in a neat black suit watching her. She had white blonde hair styled into a bun at the back of her head, and deep red lipstick outlining her mouth. She had the same sharp cheekbones as Draco, but pale blue eyes peering out from underneath perfect dark lashes.

"It's you," Narcissa Malfoy announced. It wasn't cruel, just a realization. Hermione's eyes flickered to her wand where it sat on the desk and the woman gave a soft chuckle. "Calm down, dear."

She stepped inside, black heels silent against the plush rugs, and shut the door behind her. She kept her distance, gloved hands clasped in front of her.

"I wish I could say I was surprised, but I'm not." She had a cold voice, as if reading from a list and not speaking from the heart. Her blue eyes inspected Hermione- following where her curls spiraled out around her head.

"He said no one would be home." It felt lame to say, especially when the opposite had been proven, but it was all she could think to say. She didn't want her to keep talking as if Hermione wasn't present. It made her feel like a portrait instead of a person.

“Because I wanted this time with you,” Narcissa said with a small smile. “I knew he had someone here. I knew he’d been wrestling with something all month. I’ve read the books; I know about the magic between you two.”

Hermione felt exposed. She had just begun to understand the magic herself. Like when an aunt comments on your womanly shape when you still thought of yourself as a girl.

“And I know how it changes the heart.”

“Changes?” Hermione asked, clutching the edge of the desk.

“Well, you’re a normal person and suddenly this magic pulls you towards someone else with so much force that everything else bends to its will. Your body, your mind,” Narcissa said, walking closer. “It’s scary and all consuming. It’s a lot like love in that way.”

Hermione’s heart twitched at the word.

“And finally, you give into it and now you’re different.” Narcissa gave her a curious glance. “You sure did put up a fight.”

“A fight?” Hermione echoed. Her fingertips felt numb.

“From what I’ve been told it usually takes a week maybe two before the two can’t resist each other anymore. A month, well, it must be some kind of a record.”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione stood up, knocking her book closed. “Is there something you want to say to me? Because if you know this much then you must know that the last month has been... hard and I don’t need more vague answers.”

“Apologies, dear. My intention was never to be rude. I wanted to welcome you,” Narcissa turned away, fiddling with the thin black ribbon tied into a bow on her glove. “Draco is... very special to me and by extension that now means you.”

Narcissa looked over her shoulder giving Hermione a knowing look.

“This is not an easy time for a bond like this to be forged, but you know this.”

“I didn’t exactly choose it,” Hermione said.

“You have to promise me something, Hermione,” Narcissa said, turning to her. It was odd to hear her name in Narcissa’s mouth, but she must have known it. Still it felt too familiar- all of it too intimate. Narcissa took her hand, clasping it between two silk gloves.

“I don’t think I can-” Hermione said, trying to pull away. Narcissa held on, stronger than she appeared.

“Keep him safe,” she whispered, her grip growing harder around Hermione’s hand. “They’re using-”

She felt something yank in her chest- a sharpness that felt like her ribcage was being pulled apart. Hermione gasped, pulling away before collapsing onto her knees. She pressed a hand against her chest expecting to feel organ and bone but her fingers met intact skin. Still pain rippled through her body, straining at her shoulder blades and pulling at the edges of her mouth. Sweat dripped from her forehead as her frame trembled but nothing was wrong- what was happening?

Narcissa was kneeling in front of her, a silk covered hand pressed against her cheek.

“-doesn’t stop- the moon- he feels you-” her voice cut in and out as Hermione’s mind began to float away from the library. Her ears felt stuffed and even as Narcissa’s mouth moved she couldn’t hear all the words. The floor tilted and she shut her eyes hoping it would stop.

But it only got worse.

She couldn’t smell the rain falling around her, or the dirt of the forest floor but she could see it. She didn’t control the swing of her head or the direction her gaze landed. She was a passenger on a ride she could not pull away from. She struggled to pull her eyes open but they were stuck staring through this other being, her mouth opening only for sound to be stuck at the base of her tongue. Her eyes that were not her own searched the ground before looking up at the moon through the leaves above. A howl tore at her throat echoing through the trees before she took off through the trees running for the lights in the distant.

For a brief moment she saw Malfoy Manor again, Narcissa’s clear blue eyes staring down into her own.

“It’s so strong,” Narcissa whispered, seemingly more to herself than Hermione. She ran a bare hand across Hermione’s cheek. “Avoided for so long and yet already rooted so deeply.”

Hermione shut her eyes again to see a neat picket fence around a cottage. A few other builds were scattered behind it. She could hear panting and a shiver ran through the body she peered through- a desire she couldn’t place. A hunger.

The door to the cottage swung open and a roar scratched at her throat. She pulled away from the scene, waking up to find herself spilled out on her stomach on the library floor with Narcissa hovering over her. Her mouth was full of saliva. Bile rose in her throat.

“I have to-,” Hermione muttered as she struggled up to her knees. Narcissa’s hands wrapped around her shoulders, the pointed ends of her perfectly filed nails cutting into her skin. Her head was woozy, when she blinked she saw a dark cottage again- a man peering up at her with fear in his eyes. “Something is wrong I have to-”

“You’re home now, darling,” Narcissa said, her voice as smooth as her silk gloves. “You’re not going anywhere.”

Hermione shook her head. Pain radiated from her jaw and her hands, like someone was pulling at her fingernails. Someone was pulling at her- Narcissa was jerking the neck of her dress to expose part of her neck.

“I have to find him-,” Hermione snapped, yanking out of Narcissa’s hold. She stumbled to her feet and started for the door, pulling on her dress back into place. The crawling sensation of pain didn’t go away and she tugged at the fabric again and again trying to rid herself of the pressure and burning that seemed to seep into every muscle. Hermione started for the door but didn’t make it.

The curse hit her right between the shoulders and she was out before she hit the floor.

Distance

Her entire body ached. A pain throbbed in her temple from the second she was aware of the warm sheets beneath her and crackling of a fireplace. She opened her eyes only to be met with the darkness of the bed's curtains drawn closed. Only a sliver of light peeked through. Hermione laid perfectly still. She didn't want to get up. If she got up she was going to have to face all of the questions she had.

And yet after a few minutes her mind had already begun rattling. She pushed away her pillows and sat up. Her fingers rose to the wound on her neck and found something sticky sitting against the skin. A salve of some sort. It soothed the pain that had been troubling it earlier, but she didn't like not knowing who applied it.

Narcissa. She knew what was happening, she needed to talk to her again just to clear her understanding. The magic brewing in her felt familiar after a whole month but that didn't mean she trusted it.

Hermione yanked back a curtain and jumped out of bed and was surprised to find she wasn't alone. Across the room near the fireplace Draco sat reading a book. A strangely domestic task considering the war. Hermione was surprised by the heavy emotions that slammed into her upon seeing him.

The first was the overwhelming need to slip into his lap and kiss him until her lips were swollen. The second was that she had no idea what to say to him.

She considered climbing back into bed and hoping he didn't notice her but that plan was quickly ruined when his gaze turned from his book to her.

"Good morning," she said, unsure of what else to say.

He had a cup of tea next to him on a small end table and a woolen blanket thrown over his shoulders. There were scratches on his face, fresh ones, that dragged across his cheek. They looked like they came from fingernails.

"Morning," he said, his voice raspy.

Hermione gave into her impulse and went to him, sitting on the couch beside him and peering at his reading. He quickly shut the book and pressed it between his side and the couch out of view.

"Hey-"

"Granger, if you see what it is you'll want to read it and I'm not about to lose my reading," he said as if he had planned out the move since before she was awake.

"That's not true. Unlike you I learned how to share," Hermione said, pulling away.

Silence hung in the air. She didn't like the distance it seemed to place between them. Her entire life had been flipped completely upside down and now to have her reward be an unsure existence was less than ideal. At least everything was still bright and real. After weeks of living in a hazy world, the sharpness of Malfoy Manor was welcomed. And Draco was right, she felt like reading. She felt like studying and practicing and...

She felt like seeing the Order again. She'd spent so much time escaping them and now what? She had one night and she wanted to switch sides again?

They wouldn't take her back now. Between Lupin and Ginny they'd know the whole story. She'd lied and literally cursed her friends in the back and left them. Hermione wouldn't let her back either.

She swallowed back her thoughts and glanced at Draco. He was taking a sip from a dark marble teacup, its lip and handle painted gold. Even mundane things in this house seemed to cost a fortune.

Up close, her suspicions of where he got his scratches felt confirmed. Four lines dragged down his cheek deep enough to draw blood but not deep enough to warrant any immediate medical care.

"I can fix those for you," Hermione said motioning to his cheek.

"Go ahead."

Hermione grabbed her wand and sat up on her knees beside him. She tilted his chin up, inspecting the wound in depth before even beginning to bother with her wand. They'd heal on their own with time but if her visions in the library were an indicator, she figured Draco may not want a token from last night.

The memory of iron on her tongue and pain blooming in her chest stole her thoughts. Whatever scratched him had to be dead now, or worse.

Her heart felt heavy as she worked. Hermione had to go slowly with her new wand, but it worked with some encouraging. She let her mind drift, thinking of anything else besides where the wound came from.

"Done," she said, sitting back on her heels. Draco peered into a hand mirror, admiring her work.

"You're talented," he said.

"Oh, did you not know?" Hermione replied. He gave a small smile before setting the mirror down.

The silence came in over them again and Hermione revolted against its oppressive weight.

"What now?" she asked, her eyes trained on her fingers fiddling with her wand.

"I'd be lying if I said I knew," he replied, his gaze on the far wall.

“Everything feels clear now,” she said. “Is it the same for you?”

He paused for a moment.

“Painfully.”

The weight of the situation threatened to pull her down. In smokey hazy any decision feels right. When you have one desire everyone else falls away until you get it. And now they had what they wanted. The bruise at her collarbone throbbed and she wondered how much she had given away for a brief taste of satisfaction.

She felt like crying.

“I’m going to the library for a bit,” she said slipping off the couch. Draco didn’t answer as she pulled on her boots and left.

Hermione peeked into the library but found it empty. The books she’d pulled were on the desk but now she realized that Narcissa had already gone through them before she’d arrived. She wandered through a few wings of the manor, asking a few portraits where their mistress was. Most were cold, but a few pointed her in the right direction until she happened upon Narcissa in a small tea room. It had large windows that took up the entirety of the walls so they had a clear view of the gardens all covered in a blanket of snow.

“Good morning,” she said with a habitual smile before sipping from her cup, a white china painted with small pink blooms. How many sets of teacups did they own?

“We need to talk,” Hermione said, taking a chair across the table from Narcissa. The woman set down her teacup and pushed its saucer away.

“I thought as much.”

“You cursed me,” Hermione said. It was the first line of business on her list of questions.

“Yes, well it was more of a charm than anything. I was worried about the pain you might go through seeing through Draco’s eyes,” she said simply as if it was as clear as day. “Can’t have you going mad under my roof, can we?”

“Okay. I... accept that,” Hermione said. Narcissa’s tone was unsettling. Every action was measured and thought out. It was like watching a play, well rehearsed and with a great production budget. “Tell me more of this... bond Draco and I have. I understand it somewhat but it sounds like you’re a bit of an expert.”

Narcissa smiled at the flattery.

“I simply want what’s best for my son. Sometimes a little research is required,” she said. It must be easy to do that when you have every magical book every published at your disposal. “It wasn’t easy. There aren’t volumes published on the subject. It’s fairly rare and even then it’s considered taboo to discuss. Would you like some tea?”

“No, thank you,” she said, eager to hear more of the magic and less pleasantries.

“Please, I insist.” Narcissa snapped her fingers and a small house elf appeared with a new teacup with yet a different design, this one covered in roses and gold flakes, and poured from a fresh pot. Hermione bit her lip as she wanted the elf. She knew the Malfoy’s must have one but it still made her feel sick to her stomach to watch one serve her. She would have refused but something told her it would have been seen as refusing Narcissa, and she needed to be on her good side for at least a little while longer.

“Thank you,” Hermione said to the elf before it vanished with a small pop.

“I read a story,” Narcissa began. “Of a werewolf, a powerful witch, who after being turned by her wife formed a similar bond. I believe they terrorized the countryside together for a while. Another of a werewolf whose desire was so strong that he devoured his lover.”

Hermione’s stomach twisted.

“But neither of those explain you,” Narcissa said, leaning across the table to eye her. “I admit I thought you might have turned last night but you never did. From what I understand I’ve never seen a bond quite like yours.”

“That’s not very helpful,” Hermione said without thinking.

“You’ve been around rebels too long, you’ve lost your manners,” Narcissa said, folding her hands in front of her. Hermione waited for more information but if Narcissa knew more she wasn’t going to reveal it.

“I’ll make sure to brush up,” Hermione said, rising from the table. She should have known it would have been a useless effort. She should have read through the volumes herself- in fact that was what she would do right now.

“Wait.”

Hermione paused, looking down at Narcissa. The woman had regarded her with cool disinterest all morning but now there was a tinge of desperation in her voice.

“Yes?” Hermione asked with a forced pleasantness, settling back into her seat.

“I wish I knew more, but please be aware. The bond between you is strong and affects you both very deeply. I-” Narcissa paused as if considering not speaking at all before continuing in a hushed voice. “I fear what may happen to Draco if something happens to you. So please, if only for his sake, keep yourself safe.”

“Don’t worry Mrs. Malfoy. I’ll make sure I don’t get myself killed, I can’t imagine the stress that might put your son under,” Hermione said, her tongue tart. She rose and gave the woman a smile so fake it might as well have been plastic. “Thank you for the tea.”

Hermione sat in an empty wing of the manor, watching the portraits shuffle around and whisper about her. The longer the hours stretched the clearer everything looked. Narcissa was

never concerned by Hermione but that wasn't exactly surprising.

When she fled Grimmauld Place it felt like shedding extra weight. That was freeing both herself and the Order of a great burden. Now she was beginning to realize how much she had lost.

She didn't miss the part of Narcissa's research where both known occurrences of a werewolf bonding was with people they were already in love with. It didn't apply to them and she knew it.

Did it even apply now?

Hermione pulled her knees close to her chest. She thought being with Draco would solve everything but now it was beginning to feel like just another problem for her to contend with.

A problem she was going to have to talk to eventually.

She sighed, leaving her little hallway and gossiping portraits back up stairs to Draco's room. It was empty when she arrived and she was both disappointed and grateful. She kicked off her boots and fell back onto the couch beside the smoldering fire.

Hermione, what have you done?

She stared up at the ceiling noting the ornate, if a bit gaudy, crown molding when she noticed the sound of running water. The moment she realized it had been running since she'd stepped into the room it stopped. Hermione sat up, looking at a door beside the fireplace that had light spilling out from underneath it. It swung open and revealed Draco in nothing but a towel slung around his waist.

"You're back," he said. He sounded tense.

"I am," Hermione said. His eyes ran over her form on the couch, a muscle in his jaw tensing. She started to rise. "I can leave if you'd like to get dress-"

"No, it's fine," he said, moving to the wardrobe across the room. She had already seen every part of him, there wouldn't be anything new. And yet she was drawn to the plain of his shoulders as he searched through his clothes. The flex of each muscle in his back as he dug for more black clothing to hide behind.

A part of her wanted to stop him. To pull off her dress and demand more of his touch as if they were in a dream again. But she kept quiet, hiding behind the back of the couch as he dressed. Still, she wanted to talk to him. He had been her confidante for a whole month, and whether it was by way of some strange magic or not she had come to lean quite heavily on him. She sat up when the wardrobe doors slammed shut.

"Do you think-" she began, but was quickly cut off.

"I have to go," Draco said without a glance in her direction before vanishing with a booming crack.

Wards

It was anger that kept her moving. Tearing through the shelves of the Malfoy's library and pulling out any volume that hinted at bonds or lycanthrope. She gathered the books she'd pulled the day before and sat on the floor flipping through each page and writing down anything that caught her eye- anything that might explain what was happening. She ran into the stories Narcissa had told about werewolves and their ill fated futures with their bondmates. There was even a few more mentioned but none of them involved a werewolf and an unturned partner that lived. They were either both cursed or one died. Anxiety settled in her stomach, tightening it into a stiff knot.

Hermione searched through the numerous rooms in the manor gathering as she went like a bee hoping from flower to flower. She collected a sack that she threw the most informative volumes into. She found a dress in a back room, moss green with long sleeves and buttons up the front. She wiggled out of the dress she'd borrowed from Ginny, tired of messing with magic simply to work the zipper between her shoulder blades. She pulled on the new dress and evaluated herself in the mirror. It was soft against her skin and warm, the skirt reaching to her calf. It would fair better in snow if she'd have to walk than the flimsy red thing. She thought about leaving it but slipped it into her bag as well. An offering of sorts when she arrived.

After filling her bag with everything she might need, Hermione threw it over her shoulder and went straight for the front door. She wiggled the handle but the lock didn't bug. She pulled out her wand tapping it against the metal but it still stood in her way.

New wands were hardly reliable.

She crossed the manor to the large french doors that opened on the gardens but they were also locked, even after a few flicks of her wand.

Panic crept up her throat but she pushed it down. It was just a house, she could leave a house- she'd left many houses. She went into the tea room she spoke with Narcissa in. She glanced around the room and then plucked a smooth stone the size of her hand from a plant's vase. She hurled it at the large windows that made up the walls only for it bounce off the glass like a rubber ball and drop to the floor.

Wards. She took out her wand, inspecting the magic held within the walls. They were old and intricate, many layers of new rules laid on top of each other like multicolored threads in a great weaving. Old ones for safety against strangers, but newer ones banishing certain individuals specifically. A fresh one laid at the top of the pile glowing red and angry against the window panes.

She couldn't leave. He'd locked her in.

Hermione sat on the edge of Draco's bed, her feet tucked cross legged and her boots and bag of supplies on the floor. She had nowhere to go but she didn't feel like getting comfortable.

Instead she stared at the door to the bedroom, her fingers fidgeting with her wand in her lap. She glanced at her watch and while the time never changed between blinks it did tick by hours and hours until it was nearly three in the morning. She should be exhausted but instead she was furious and terrified.

Finally, the door creaked open.

Draco stepped across the threshold, his movements slow and careful as not to wake her. His silver mask hung at his side, catching the dim light of the room. Bile rose in her throat.

She'd looked past so much but it was all in crystal clear focus now.

He paused when he found her very much awake.

"I thought you'd be asleep," he said.

"You locked me in," she said. Hermione had thought of many lines to spit when he slithered back but her fear had overwhelmed her angry musing.

His gaze flickered to her bag on the floor and then up to her.

"Where were you going?" His eyes flashed possessively. Hermione felt a fresh wave of fear run down her spine.

"You left me in a cage," she said flatly, brushing past his question.

"I said I'd keep you safe," he said.

Hermione swallowed hard.

"I don't feel very safe right now."

Her words hung in the air for a moment. A muscle in his jaw twitched.

"What do you want?" he asked, his voice even despite the tension in his neck.

"I want you to lift the ward on the house keeping me here," Hermione said, raising her chin.

"So you can leave." It wasn't a question.

"Freedom is the nature of humanity," Hermione said.

"You're not leaving," he said bluntly, crossing to a low table beside a couch and tossing his mask onto it. He pulled at the high collar of his robes, loosening its hold on his throat.

"You brat!" Hermione spit, jumping off the bed and following him. "You don't know what I had to do to get here. You don't understand what I've given up-"

"You think they'll take you back now?" he said, whirling around to glare down at her. "You think they'll forget all yours lies and pull you into a hug and say 'It's okay you left us for the enemy, Granger.' You think it'll be that easy?"

Hermione felt something in her chest give, a string pulled too tight and suddenly snap.

“You’re a traitor, it’s better to accept it than to pretend it’s not hanging over you,” Draco said, his anger simmering in each word.

“You’re wrong,” Hermione said stubbornly.

His hand shot out, grabbing the fabric of her dress by her shoulder and pulling it aside exposing the purple bruises around his bite mark.

“You asked for that,” he said, his fingers driving into the skin of her collarbone. “You’re mine because you *begged* for it.”

Her hand caught him in the jaw. The sting of the blow rippled across her palm as red bloomed across Draco’s pale skin. His hand fell from her shoulder.

The silence stretched out between them. When Draco finally spoke it was barely above a whisper.

“I knew you’d hate me. The second everything became clear I knew you wouldn’t be able to stand me,” he said.

Hermione hesitated. It wasn’t as simple as that. It wasn’t as if she’d awoken from a love potion and was horrified by everything she’d done. They were decisions she had made. The feelings she’d held in her heart for Draco had not evaporated, they were still there. But her feelings grew in dreams where the world didn’t matter and now standing in Malfoy Manor everything did matter. The Order, the war- everything. It’s easy to love someone in a dream, but in the world it’s more nuanced than that.

“I don’t hate you,” she said quietly. He looked at her, his silver eyes open and vulnerable. She thought of the lovers in those werewolf stories, had they said something similar before they were consumed? She thought of the lonely nights in a crowded room at Grimmauld Place. How she could be surrounded by so many people and still feel like an island. He’d given her something to anchor herself to. “And I know I can’t go back.”

Her voice caught on the lump in her throat but she pushed through.

“I know I had to come because it wasn’t safe or fair to them. I was worthless when I left. No wand, no focus. I was deadweight. They didn’t trust me when I left and I doubt they’d trust me after coming back.” The words burned as she spoke. The truth felt good but it still stung. “I just... I don’t know what to do now.”

Hermione felt unbearably lost. Adrift on a vast dark ocean with no land in sight.

Draco walked past her to the window that looked over the grounds. He pulled out his wand and tapped it on the stone frame. He turned and looked at her with a sad smile.

“The ward is gone,” he said. “I’m sorry, it shouldn’t have been there in the first place.”

Hermione’s chest swelled and she couldn’t stop the smirk that touched her lips.

“An apology from Malfoy? Truly, an honor,” Hermione said, her voice nasally from tears unshed.

“Yeah, well don’t get used to it,” he said, his words lacking any bite. His eyes drifted to the floor and he looked more defeated than anything. A sadness that was evident in the slope of his shoulders and the bags beneath his eyes.

She closed the distance between them and slipped her arms around his waist. She laid her cheek against his chest listening to the thunder of his heartbeat. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, his own arms winding around her.

“I don’t know what comes next, but whatever it is I think it has to be with you,” she said against his robes. They pulled apart just enough to meet each other’s gaze.

Slowly, Hermione brought her mouth to his. It wasn’t a desperate kiss fueled by magic or hazy and unreal in a dream. It was soft, real, and extremely normal.

What an odd word after the past month.

His lips were warm and receptive. His arms held her closer, his taste filling her mind. If it could feel this splendid to kiss him outside of all the mess of bonds and curses of dreams and nightmares, then maybe it would work. Maybe, they’d figure it out.

Hermione wiggled from his grasp, taking his hand and leading him to the bed. He sat on the edge of it and she looked down at him, at the bruise forming on his jaw where she’d slapped him and the pink flush across his mouth from her eager lips. She straddled his lap, pressing her body flush against his and claiming his mouth again. It felt familiar and safe in his arms, unlike everywhere else as of late. Her fingers went to the buttons at the front of her dress and suddenly his hands joined hers. He made quick work of them, pulling open the fabric to lay a kiss between her breasts.

“If you want to go, you can go,” he whispered against her skin. “But know it’ll be impossible for me not to follow.”

Hermione took a hold of his chin, bringing his lips up to meet hers. It was easier to feel him than to speak, to kiss down his throat and pull off his robes than to put all of her thoughts into words. They came together easily, Draco’s mouth finding just the right spot at the crook of Hermione’s collarbone. Her fingernails scraping against his scalp and earning a moan in reply. They knew each others’ bodies better than anything else and in the warmth of moving together it felt like they might know more. Like they might be able to learn just how to find the words.

Homework

Hermione had woken well before dawn but was reluctant to leave the blankets despite her restless mind. She'd laid beside Draco watching his chest rise and fall and wishing, despite herself, that she could slip into his dream. They'd both fallen asleep soon after their toss in the sheets and now she wished they hadn't. Now she wished she could have fallen asleep in his arms.

She lit a candle beside the bed and dragged her book bag up next to her. She pulled out a volume and started to go over the pages she had planned to read at an Order safehouse. She silently cursed herself for thinking they'd ever let her inside one again.

She found one of the stories Narcissa had referred to. Two witches who had been together for years before one was turned, the bond had taken hold and the other wife was turned soon after. The pair had not terrorized the countryside as Narcissa had said but had purposefully positioned themselves outside of a landlord's house on a full moon with the intent to kill him and free his tenants of his unfair practices. Of course, she was sure Narcissa did not see the justice in such a situation.

Still, it did little to answer her questions. Hermione scribbled a few notes in the candle light but they were of minimal use. Neither woman had been interviewed and the writer was referencing material published in a now lost book about lycanthropy. People were more interested in ways to prevent lycanthropes and protect their property from them than learn how they may love differently.

Hermione paused at the word love. Did she love Draco? Her eyes moved to his sleeping form beside her and while she couldn't say yes she couldn't say no either. It was more complicated than that.

She flipped through the book but found nothing else that was of any use to her. She tossed the book aside and picked up the next volume.

"What are you doing?" Draco muttered beside her, an arm thrown over his eyes to block out of the dim flame of the candle.

"Research," Hermione answered. Draco let out a groan.

"Granger, you're not in school anymore," he said, sitting up. The sheet fell to his lap exposing the pale lean muscle of his chest. Hermione quickly looked away hoping the darkness hid her blush as if she needed to be coy when she was the one who had undressed him in the first place. She pulled the blanket up closer to her neck, hiding her own nakedness. Draco scooted closer, casually throwing an arm over her shoulder and leaning in to peer at the book. "I've read this already. It's not that helpful but it's the one that goes into the most detail of how it feels."

His other hand came to flip through the pages and turn them to a chapter that had already been marked up.

Hermione peered at the words, mindful of Draco's warm skin against her own.

"Are you sure?" she asked, frowning at the words. "This seems to be more about the hunger of a werewolf."

"It's a kind of hunger," Draco said casually. "Merlin, what time is it?"

"I'm not sure," Hermione said, more focused on the words in front of her. Draco slid out of bed and stretched with a yawn. Hermione let her eyes wander to admire the muscles in his back before he stepped into the darkness of the room outside of the range of her candle. She listened to his footsteps and then the door of the wardrobe open.

She pushed through the next paragraph until he reappeared at her side of bed. He had pulled on a dark long sleeved shirt and sweatpants and held out a bundle towards her.

"I'm not sure if I have anything that fits you," he said. Hermione took the bundle and unfolded it. It was a school jumper with the Slytherin crest sewn into it and trimmed in green and grey. From the cut and size she figured it was from around sixth year.

"Thank you," she said, pulling it on. She awkwardly held the sheet to her collarbone to keep from exposing herself despite the futility of the action.

"Was it not a hunger for you?" Malfoy asked, tapping the other candles at the bedside with his wand and lighting them up.

"Not really," Hermione said. "It was... an absence. A greyness that covered everything. Like not having any feelings at all except for an unbearable loneliness."

Draco paused, as if not expecting her words.

"Oh, I didn't know that," he said quietly, slipping into bed beside her again.

"Tell me more about the hunger," Hermione said, moving the conversation away from herself.

"It was always there, every second of every day, pulling me towards a point I couldn't see," he said, his eyes on the book in front of her and not Hermione herself. "It was like being possessed. I only wanted one thing more than life itself. I felt... out of control."

"This is going to sound like a dumb question so stay with me," Hermione said, shifting up to place a quill against parchment. "Did you love me before all this? In the shack a month ago?"

"What?" he said, raising an eyebrow.

"Look I'm trying to make sense of this. The only recorded phenomenon of werewolf bonding like this has been with couples already together. I'm holding onto common threads," Hermione said.

"No, I didn't," he said. Hermione made a note of it. "Did you?"

“What? No,” she chuckled.

“Well you certainly had feelings, that’s for sure,” Draco said with a smirk.

“I can’t believe you did that,” Hermione muttered, her face going beet red as she looked back down to her notes. “You had no right to push into my mind like that.”

It felt like a decade ago sitting in the shack in the woods with Draco. He’d promised to take a nightmare away from and despite her refusal he’d slipped into her mind anyway.

“If it makes you feel any better I was trying to find information for the war but got distracted,” he said. “So really your wet dream helped your cause.”

Hermione tensed. It didn’t make her feel better, in fact it horrified her. She’d been so close to divulging Order secrets and would have been powerless to stop it. Draco seemed to notice her change in mood.

“I wouldn’t do that now,” he said.

“I don’t know any Order secrets anymore anyway,” Hermione said bitterly. “I lost their trust pretty quick.”

Hermione looked down at her notes and felt farther and farther from the truth.

“Okay we need to focus. I need brutal honesty, which you should be good at,” Hermione said. “We need to go through every step of that night. Whatever triggered the bond happened then.”

There was a long pause before Draco spoke.

“I know I just said I wouldn’t, but reading your memories of that night may be useful,” he said.

“Draco-” Hermione began.

“I’d show you mine too. It wouldn’t be like then. I was... that was wrong,” he said.

Hermione chewed on her bottom lip for a moment and back at her notes that led nowhere.

“Okay,” she said. “What should I do?”

“Come here,” Malfoy said, sitting up on his knees and leaning over. Hermione pressed herself close to him and couldn’t keep her breath from hitching when his fingers pressed to her temples. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” she said.

In the warm candlelight his silver eyes felt cold as they met hers. It was like being doused with ice water and she struggled to find air as Draco started pulling at her memories.

He skimmed past all the double glances at clocks, all the empty time of staring at the wall at Grimmauld Place, and all of their dreams. He paused at one memory: her list of what was and wasn't real she had tried to assemble. He then dropped it back into place as quickly as he'd picked it up and moved back in time until he finally found the hours she spent watching him.

He pulled the memory up letting part of it play. He looked horrific in the memory. Dark circles under his eyes and his skin was gaunt and tight on his face, almost skull light.

There was a flash of blue and suddenly his memory was beside hers. She was looking at herself through his eyes. She looked like someone else. A young girl with curly hair pacing back and forth in a shack, a broken wand shoved in her back pocket. She looked tired.

There was an emotion tied to that memory of her walking back and forth. A nostalgia that made her smile. Had he been happy to see her?

Draco pulled from her mind and she gasped at the sudden change.

"I know that's a lot," he said, a hand on her shoulder.

"Did you miss me?" she asked looking up at him.

"What?"

"That night, all the emotion in your memory, you enjoyed seeing me," she said looking up at him.

"Granger... you want me to be honest?" he asked.

"Of course."

"You reminded me of a simpler time. When my biggest concern was scoring higher than you on a test and making sure the first years stayed in line. When all this competitiveness felt like a game," he said. "I would have given anything in that moment to go back to writing potions essays."

Hermione tapped a quill to her lips.

"Perhaps it isn't love that caused the bond but a common want. A desire to go back to a simpler time," Hermione mused. She went to write it down but paused, her mind reeling from its memories being shuffled. Draco gently took the quill from her hand and added the thought to her notes without her having to make herself dizzy from staring at the page. "The injury you'd gotten from the werewolf had fresh magic in the air and my... interesting dream probably played a part as well."

"*Probably*," Malfoy chuckled.

Hermione thought it all over. Two people, with a common past, meet again after a long time apart. A fresh werewolf wound is turning an individual and while they don't have a romantic relationship they do both have a platonic bond. This magic gets twisted and misconstrues this bond and turns it into, well, what they got.

“Is this rubbish?” Hermione asked, looking over Draco’s shoulder at the notes.

“No, no it makes some sense,” he said.

Silence fell between them as the information sunk in. They had no way of double checking as this was all uncharted territory, but the longer Hermione thought about it the more it made sense. Narcissa said it was surprising how long they’d resisted it, but their bond was working backwards so no wonder it was different.

“Do you still feel that grey loneliness?” Draco asked.

“No,” she said, leaning against his side. “Not when I’m with you.”

There was a long pause where he didn’t respond and she only felt it polite to inquire about him.

“Do you still feel the hunger?” she asked. There was a pause, too long for her to not take notice of. Then Draco was getting out of bed leaving her alone in the mess of sheets and books.

“It’s nearly dawn, I’m going to grab some breakfast for us,” he said with a pasted on smile that didn’t reach his eyes. Then, before she could say anything, he was gone.

Teacups

Words were still difficult. Hermione felt every time they tried to speak she said the wrong thing. They continued reading but found little and whatever they did discover they didn't discuss. It was clear that the effects of the bond had been hard on both of them and despite the connection between them it was easier to live with it unsaid. As each day became clearer and her mind began to function again she realized just how frightening the last month had been. In the moment she was simply living through it but looking back she was someone else. A gray reflection of herself suffering and sorrowful.

If she left Draco's side would she revert back to that shadow? Was she forever doomed to always wander back to Malfoy if she wanted to think clearly? The chances were high seeing as Draco's side of the bond didn't seem to back down even with her present.

It started out slowly, a touch here a caress there. After a week and a half in Malfoy Manor Draco was basically draped over her. She slept in his arms, read with his head in her lap one hand lazily brushing through his blonde hair. His lips found hers often, his hands sliding into her curls before they tumbled into bed or onto the couch.

Draco was voracious. Hermione could hardly read a chapter before he was nuzzling against her throat again. Some days she rarely left the bed, his strong arms tugging her back into the sheets.

It was easy to lose track of time beneath him, in the taste of his tongue and rhythm of his hips. Her heart leapt at the pressure of his hands pinning hers to the mattress signaling what was about to come.

Despite the frequency she never tired of him. So much of their time had been in dreams and with him inside of her she could pretend she was in a dream again. Nothing existed outside of the two of them, their books discarded on the floor as the bedframe knocked into the wall.

One morning she woke to a kiss pressed to the tip of her nose. Her eyes fluttered awake to find a room still bathed in darkness. Even the windows let in minimal light, the sun far from rising.

"I'm sorry," he groaned against her neck, pressing a kiss to her throat.

"For what?" she asked, still groggy from sleep.

"I want you," he whispered against her ear, the pain and desire clear in his voice. Hermione shifted to pull him into her arms and found his skin hot to the touch, almost feverish.

"Are you okay?" she asked, her eyes adjusting the dimness but still unable to see his expression.

"It gets worse every day," he rasped as if fighting against himself to speak.

“I can fix this,” Hermione said, unsure if she truly could. Her mind lit up and she twisted away, reaching for their pile of notes on the floor beside their bed. “Whatever this is I can work on a charm, or a potion or—”

“No.” His voice was almost a growl. Draco caught her waist and yanked her back to the middle of the bed and against his chest. The sudden movement nearly knocked the air from her lungs and she froze in his embrace, afraid.

As if realizing what he had done his hands vanished from her skin as if burned.

“I’m sorry,” he gasped. “I thought it would get better, but it hasn’t.”

“The hunger?” she asked the darkness.

He didn’t answer but she knew she was right. She took a deep breath, the cool night air calming her mind.

“What exactly do you need?” she asked. Draco’s hand was on her hip, as if unable to go without touching her another minute.

“Your taste,” he said, spoken like a great admission.

She reached for him in the dark, finding his cheek. Leaning into the darkness she clumsily pressed her lips to his. He answered greedily, pressing her back into the pillows as his tongue swiped across her lips and delved deeper into her mouth. But she could feel the tension that still ran through his entire frame, a kiss was not enough.

Hermione tore the sheet from them and Draco immediately traveled down her body, pushing the sweater she fell asleep in out of his way as he licked and nibbled down her throat and across her collarbone. He kissed along the valley between her breasts and down her stomach. His arms hooked under her knees, pulling them up onto his shoulders. His tongue found her clit, the muscle wet and hot against her skin. She jerked, her fingers clutching the sheets as his mouth worked against her. There was no respite from his touch, his mouth constantly sucking and licking fanning a flame deep inside of her that twisted her stomach into knots and curled her toes to the point of cramping.

He brought her to the brink of pleasure and when she came on his tongue he licked her through it until another orgasm shook her body and sent her hips twitching under his hands. He kept working her through it, sending aftershocks through her body until she finally could stand no more stimulation.

“No more,” she gasped. “I can’t.”

Draco obeyed, sitting up and catching the first rays of dawn slipping through the window. His chin was shiny with slick, his hair ruffled from her fingers. He looked like an animal, but one sated. He dropped to the bed beside her and was finally asleep just as the sun began to rise.

The air instantly felt cold. A chill gripped her stomach freezing her organs to the point of pain. Even without a dark mark seared into her skin, Hermione knew his presence. She looked up from the book in her lap to Draco, his sleeve pushed up to his elbows and the serpent swirling along his forearm.

It was as if Hermione had been staring at a dot for years and suddenly stepped back to see the painting it was a part of. Her focus on the bond and Draco had consumed everything and the war had become secondary. Bile rose in her throat. The Order wouldn't take her back not because she had run to Malfoy, but because she was a traitor to everything she had ever stood for.

Draco was up in a flash, flashing a silent "stay here" look and left their bedroom.

Hermione sat alone, straining to hear what was happening outside the room. She could hear voices but could not make out who they belonged to. Adrenaline flushed her body and she stood, trying to calm her shaking limbs.

She looked to the ornate bedroom door. It had white paint with gold detailing, more handiwork than any door had any right to have. Fear fueled her heartbeat, pushing it faster and faster until she thought it might explode.

She cracked open the door, slipping out as if she was sneaking out of the common room back at Hogwarts. The danger of being caught by Filch seemed so small now.

Her bare feet made no noise as she tiptoed across the hall carpet to the banister that overlooked the foyer. She dropped to her hands and knees, peering through the railing at the scene below.

Draco was there, forced down to one knee. Before him were a slew of Death Eaters all dressed in black robes, their faces unmasked. Bellatrix. Lucius who, despite being in his home, looked uncomfortable and on edge. Narcissa had come from the other half of the house to stand beside her husband, her blue tea dress out of place among all the charcoal and jet. A flower standing among charred ashes.

However it wasn't these other people that drew her attention. The figure that commanded the space stood before Draco, pale arms sliding out of dark sleeves to clutch at his shoulder. He looked like a skull, his face smooth where his nose should be. Like a snake had fused with a man. Even from up high Hermione could see the veins criss crossing under his translucent skin, purples and blues so dark they were grey.

"Draco," Lord Voldemort crooned, his long fingers cupping Malfoy's chin. "You have surprised me. Your new appetite for victory is welcomed."

Suddenly Voldemort's head twitched.

"You didn't tell me you had company."

The blood drained from Hermione's face. She pulled back from the railing but it was too late, she had been seen. Her hands shook as she pressed a palm over her mouth as if her silence

might make her invisible.

“Come down,” Voldemort beckoned. Hermione paused, thinking of her wand still sitting on a nightstand in the bedroom. She could never reach it in time, not with all the Death Eaters at the ready just below her.

Against every instinct in her body, she stood up peering down at the enemy below her. All eyes were on her as she descended the stairs and paused on the last step. She couldn’t convince herself to get any closer, not when waves of evil were rolling off the creature before her.

He swept across the marble floor, brushing past Draco to examine her. With the last step under her feet she was at eye level. She swallowed hard, jerking her chin up. Voldemort crowded her, his eyes roaming her face. She was expecting an insult or a blow but neither came. Instead she felt a darkness that seemed to emit from his pores, a horridness that threatened to choke off her air.

“His magic is all over you,” he said, interested. Hermione resisted the urge to shudder. His attention felt worse than his ire. “It’s strong. How strange.”

He grabbed her cheek and suddenly his mind was staring into hers, every memory flashing by at a nauseating speed. His gaze burned as he stared into her head, pressing flames against the back of her eyes. When he finally let go Hermione dropped to her knees, falling off the final step and spilling onto the marble floor. Her skull ached as if it had been shattered and then glued back together. She could hardly remember how to breathe as she curled against the cold floor.

A deep chuckle reverberated through the high ceilings, bouncing along the corridors and sending the ancestors hanging along the walls hiding out of view of their frames.

“How delicious,” the man said, almost to himself.

Voldemort’s robes dragged across the floor in front of her, brushing against Draco’s boots. A pale hand pressed against Draco’s shoulder, not a reprimand or a threat but as if they were posing for a portrait. Her stomach wrenched into knots.

“You may be of use to me yet, young Malfoy.”

Hermione sat at Narcissa’s tea table, still trembling and weak from the Dark Lord’s touch. A teacup sat in front of her full of lukewarm tea and no sugar. A house elf had served it and she had no desire to drink it.

“You’ve looked better, dear,” Narcissa said, sipping from her own cup. She didn’t look rattled at all by Voldemort’s visit. In fact she seemed to be quite happy.

“Are you not worried about your son?” Hermione asked. Draco had left with Voldemort and the Death Eaters, leaving the two women alone in the manor. She wouldn’t admit it to

Narcissa of all people, but to watch him vanish without so much as checking on her had left an ache in her chest that seemed reluctant to heal.

“Draco is in the perfect position,” she said with a smile, her lips painted a dark shade of red. “The Dark Lord is pleased with him. All I want is for him to succeed.”

Hermione looked down at the clean white tablecloth. The teacups had black roses painted on the sides, the napkins embroidered with the same motif.

“What has he done to curry favor?” Hermione asked.

“He’s proven his worth,” Narcissa said. “He’s rendered Grimmauld Place all but useless, the Order is scattered across England. It’s only a matter of time now.”

Hermione kept her mouth shut but she was thinking of the Order. She hoped Harry was safe, that Ginny and Ron were somewhere outside of the Death Eaters’ reach. She thought of Remus and Lee Jordan. Hopefully they got through the full moon and had reunited with some Order members, but maybe they were alone too.

Hermione pressed her fingers to the roses stitched into the napkins. She had come to the manor hoping to keep a Death Eater away from the Order but it seemed that the damage she helped cause had been too much. Draco found Grimmauld Place because of her, and Voldemort was rewarding him because of her.

In this week and a half she had been lazing around the manor enjoying Draco’s touch, how many of her friends had died? How close was the war to ending, and how badly had she condemned her side? Or did she get to claim a side anymore?

“How wonderful for him,” Hermione said, the words lifeless on her tongue. “You must be proud.”

“Draco was always meant for great things,” Narcissa grinned. “With you here he’ll be unstoppable.”

“Me?” Hermione asked.

Narcissa hesitated, as if reconsidering her words before she reached across the table and pressed a hand on top of Hermione’s.

“You’re a very bright witch, Hermione. The only one who could ever best him,” she said. “I think that’s why he was so drawn to you. A muggle born girl with an inherit gift for not only magic, but learning. That hunger for knowledge about things that most witches and wizards take for granted.”

She took her hand away, taking a sip from her tea cup before pressing the napkin to her lips. Not even a speck of lipstick came off onto the fabric.

“This bond, while accidental, is the best thing to have happened. He was a good student before, but connected he’s so much more.”

Hermione's heart jumped into her throat.

"He doesn't realize this of course," Narcissa said as Hermione's vision began to swim. "You know how men are, they think of their power as inherently their own. But it's better this way."

Hermione watched the woman in front of her drop a sugarcube into her teacup, her manicured nails danced above the cup to charm the spoon to stir.

"He's siphoning my magic?" Hermione asked, breathless.

"You make him sound like a thief, dear," Narcissa laughed and it sounded like the tinkling of crystal glasses. "Think of it as lending."

It all clicked into place. Her mind breaking down, reducing her to mindless grayness near madness while he only grew stronger. Strong enough to use this connection to materialize at Grimmauld Place. Strong enough to invade an Order safe house by himself. Strong enough to be seen as an asset to the Dark Lord.

"You knew this whole time."

"I had made some assumptions," Narcissa said casually. "This magic is still unruly and unpredictable."

"Why tell me now?"

"What are you going to do about it now?" Narcissa asked with a smile. "There is no known way to break a bond of this kind."

Hermione's heart twisted around in her chest. She cared for Draco, was comforted by his presence and desired his touch. Was all of that artificial? Was it all planted in her mind by this bond to make her more open to a parasitic relationship?

No, whatever was between her and Draco had to be real. Yet so much of it was mired in confusing, aggressive magic.

"What do I do now?" Hermione asked, swallowing back her fear. Tears were forming in her eyes but she blinked them away, she doubted they'd do much good in front of Narcissa.

"Stay here, of course," Narcissa said. "Read, walk the gardens. Keep Draco company. He will help end the war, with your help, and then we can hold a small ceremony. Perhaps welcome a few grandchildren."

She picked up her teacup but stopped before it reached her lips.

"Don't worry about your blood, dear, I'm sure we can make an exception for this case," Narcissa said.

Hermione wanted to rage. She wanted to toss her teacup straight into Narcissa's face. She wanted to break all the saucers, to scream and destroy. Instead she pressed a smile to her lips.

“That’s comforting. I wouldn’t want it to become a problem.” Her throat burned but she kept her smile intact.

The second their tea was over, Hermione was taking the steps two at a time up to the bedroom. She grabbed her bag still packed from her last escape attempt. It had been kicked under the bed and she had to shove its contents back into it: Ginny’s red dress, a few potions from the cellar, her books about werewolves and volumes about magical bonds.

She grabbed her digital watch she’d stolen from the muggle shop, latching it around her wrist. She threw a coat on from Draco’s closet, some Quidditch wear branded in Slytherin colors.

Hermione threw the bag over her shoulder and raced downstairs to the french doors that overlooked the snow covered gardens. Her hand was on the handle when her mind caught up to her body.

She was leaving but she had nowhere to go. The Order would not take her back, she knew that and she wouldn’t hold that against them. But she couldn’t stay here either. She cared for Draco, or at least she thought she did, but she had to value her own safety. Her own freedom.

If she stayed she would be a glorified vase. A pretty thing to hold magic for someone else. An accomplice.

Something tugged at the edge of her coat and Hermione nearly jumped out of her skin. She took a step back to see the house elf from tea holding a worn looking book.

“Miss Granger should take this with her,” the house elf said, holding out the volume.

Hermione blinked at the elf. She hadn’t expected anyone to see her off. The elf pressed the book closer and she leaned down to take it. The small creature reached up and grabbed the door handle, tugging it down and letting the door fall open behind her. Cold winds blew in, scattering snow on the rug.

“Dilly wishes Miss Granger safe travels.”

“Thank you, Dilly.”

Hugging the book to her chest, Hermione stepped out into snow. The wind beat against her cheeks, the cold air a shock to her lungs. She turned back to look at the manor but Dilly had closed the door. Hermione drew her wand.

With a loud crack she left everything behind, again.

The Private Thoughts of Edwin Smith

The world twisted and spat her out into the underbrush. Hermione brushed the snow from her clothes, looking up the hill she sat at the foot of. There was a village up ahead and more importantly a railroad track. It was a nicer kind, the kind that took muggles into the city for work. She had ridden it plenty of times as a child and in the summers when visiting her parents. She felt it was safer than apparating everywhere.

No pureblood wizard knew how to truly function among high muggle density areas and she had to use it to her advantage.

She stripped the few leaves that still clung to a branch and gathered pebbles into a pile. With a twitch of her wand all the pieces transfigured into paper muggle money. Was it ethical? She'd think about that later. Hermione shoved the money into her pockets and walked up to the station, purchasing a ticket to London at the counter.

The train arrived not even a few minutes later and was nearly empty when she boarded. She wondered what day of the week it was to have a train car quite so deserted.

Hermione dropped into a window seat, shoving her bag into the seat beside her to dissuade any strangers from sitting beside her. Her stomach was still twisted in knots as she focused on the scenery outside. The trees melted into buildings and she had arrived.

She spent some of her transfigured money at a café for a cup of coffee and chugged it before heading down to the Tube. She took the central line east and from her stop it was only a short walk to the Bethnal Green Library.

Inside the heat by the door was broken and the cold crept through her coat, but as she walked across the varnished checkerboard wood floor the warmth deep in the novels became a comfort. She walked through the shelves until she found a desk hidden among the volumes that was empty. She looked down at the book Dilly had given her. It was bound with strong rope instead of glue and leather. When she tipped it open the first page gave the reason why.

The Private Thoughts of Edwin Smith

Flipping through the first few pages it appeared to be a diary. Hermione settled into the chair and set about reading it.

Edwin Smith was a young painter living in England in the late 1630s. He wrote a lot about painting, and the various people that sat for portraits for him. Rich women with yappy dogs, young newly weds who saved up for a nice wedding present. He wrote about drinking too much at night and sleeping in well into the afternoon. It was interesting but did nothing to help her situation. She wondered if Dilly had simply seen her love for books and gave her a parting gift. A kind gesture, but not as useful as she assumed.

5th of February, 1638

Today I had the pleasure of painting a most peculiar young man. Mr. Albright comes from a

long line of money but his house has the most interesting secrets. I swore I saw a broom move on its own in the hall with no maid to attend it. When I seemed surprised by it he simply laughed. He asked why I was so surprised and I informed him I have, nor have I ever heard, of any object moving on its own. He asked if I had ever asked an object to move on its own. I have to admit I have not. I did not finish his portrait today and will see him again tomorrow and have been sitting in my room all night speaking to a paintbrush to convince it to move. I can only tell these papers this story for no one else will believe me, but after considerable work the brush did twitch!

Mr. Smith appeared to be a muggle born wizard, or perhaps an orphan unable to be contacted by the magical world. He was well into his twenties at this point, but perhaps the owl system wasn't as reliable back then.

6th of February, 1638

Mr. Albright has the most troubling eyes. They are pleasant to look at but impossible to capture on canvas. They are, at times, a deep warm brown but then the sunlight catches them and suddenly they're glowing like amber. I'm afraid the longer I spend in his presence the more I feel like an insect captured forever in honey hued rock.

Hermione flipped forward, skimming the next entries. Mr. Albright becomes Edwin's patron, funding his paintings but also spending an extravagant amount of time with him. Albright introduces Edwin to the concept of wizards and after a week of confusion and awe, Edwin accepts it. There is magic in Edwin, that much is clear, but he's reluctant to get a wand and learn anything beyond what he knows.

My weapon is the brush, I cannot imagine myself holding anything else.

The two fall quickly for one another, that much is clear. And then there are months when there are no entries at all, the author becoming too busy with his company to write about it.

20th of August, 1638

Thomas and I are going on holiday to the country. He is a great lover of nature and plans on hiking through the trees. I have never cared for walking but I am interested in the challenge of capturing the landscape. I'm afraid my paints will not do it justice, but I will never know if I do not try. At least if I fail Thomas will be there for me to paint instead.

The next entry looks odd. All the other writing has been smooth and controlled, what she would expect from an artist. But the next one appears choppy and jagged as if his hand was shaking while holding the quill.

24th of August, 1638

It is impossible to comprehend the last day, much less describe it. Thomas and I woke early yesterday while the full moon still reigned in order to start out on our walk to the lake before the heat made it unbearable. Yet almost as soon as we left our cabin a creature of fur and teeth resembling nothing I have ever witnessed descended on us. Thomas knocked me back into the cabin, slamming the door closed between us and I could do nothing but listen to his screams of pain and his demands to stay inside. The creature's snarls will not be forgotten, as long as I live.

This went on until the sun rose over the horizon and the snarls and huffs turned to groans and a yelp of pain. I threw open the door to find not the horrid creature I saw before but a woman, naked as a babe, and covered in mud and blood. Thomas was beside her, unconscious with a bite mark taking up his entire shoulder.

The woman looked dazed but when she saw Thomas' body she unleashed an unearthly wail. She kept repeating the same words over and over "No one was supposed to be here."

I gave her my coat and through her tears she said there was a woman who could help Thomas, down in her village. I held Thomas in my arms and followed her through the woods into a small gathering of buildings. She led me into one that had smoke billowing out of its chimney where an old woman with gray hair and glassy blue eyes took one look at Thomas and began barking orders. I worked in tandem with these strangers. We cleared the table and set Thomas atop it. The young woman and I tore jars off of shelves the older healer demanded. Wrinkled hands ground plants and who knows what else into a paste and gave it to us to pack into his wounds.

He was breathing but it was weak. Even so the healer shooed me away, saying my worrying would only taint the air. I followed the young woman, who others referred to as Ylfa, to her home where she had two small children and her husband setting about their morning chores. The man embraced her but when he saw me his face fell. I wonder how often this has happened.

Ylfa let me rest in their home and I found myself overtaken with the strangest dream. I was back in the Albright sitting room, painting a portrait I'm sure was complete months ago. Thomas is there, his shoulder bleeding and his face cut up along his cheekbone, but he smiled at me. He was in no pain and when I stepped closer his hand grabbed my wrist and pulled me tightly to him.

28th of August, 1638

Thomas has healed well and we set off back to the city. Ylfa and the healer gave him a basket full of strange herbs and potions and when I asked about them he waved me off. I am still plagued by dreams but I find they ease when I am near Thomas, so I try to sleep beside him whenever possible.

2nd of September, 1638

I worry every day for Thomas. He is unlike himself, using magic in front of the muggles he has told me again and again is forbidden. I find that he rarely needs his wand anymore. He slams doors with a snap of his fingers and eats his meat raw and bleeding. His hands which were once gentle and loving are demanding and urgent. His kisses have teeth, his nails scratch at my skin and I wonder if it is truly Thomas I have brought home from the country.

3rd of September, 1638

My head aches. Painting is impossible. The colors look dull.

7th of September, 1638

Thomas left on business three days ago and every night my dreams are more life-like and he is in every one of them. Kissing me in an alleyway, pulling me into the shadows of the theater to reach into my clothes. Even in my own mind he cares little for my mind only for my body.

9th of September, 1638

Thomas is home and while my nights are safe I fear my days. This morning while making love he bit my neck so hard it drew blood. When I cried out in pain he simply lapped at the blood and tried to finish his own pleasure. I shoved him off and demanded he leave. He was angry. I have never seen Thomas so enraged. I wonder what happened to the honey-eyed boy I met in the spring.

12th of September, 1638

I have no money left to my name. I haven't been able to paint since the incident and Thomas has revoked his patronage unless I let him inside my residence which I refuse. I can see him on the street below my window, waiting for my resolve to weaken. Waiting for me to throw open the window and call to him. He comes to me in my dreams now, begging me to let him in. He's strong enough to kick down the door, I know he is, but he wants me to want it. It makes it worse.

13th of September, 1638

I can no longer see color. Everything is grey. I try not to sleep but I drift off and he's there. I'm weak after these visits and I'm too scared to venture outside for food. I have only a crust of bread and whatever lingers at the bottom of liquor bottles left. How could something I loved so fiercely turn so sour? I long for his true soul, the one I fell in love with. I am met only with sorrow.

The book held only one more entry, the rest of the pages blank.

15th of September, 1638

I wish he would simply kill me. Then I'd be rid of this pain.

Bethnal Green

A tear slipped down her cheek. For Edwin Smith and his life cut too short. For Thomas Albright and the magic that consumed him. For Draco, who must be warring against this pain far away, and for herself who was stuck in the middle of all of it. She wiped the droplet from her cheek. There would be no more tears, not with work to be done.

She grabbed some muggle notebook paper and a ballpoint pen lying nearby intended for scribbling down authors' names or a book's designation and began taking notes.

Edwin, although weak and not practiced, had magic. It was clear that Thomas had been taking Edwin's magic, using this extra strength to cast nonverbally and without normal modes to channel magic. Edwin did not have much magic to draw on, but Hermione did. That must be why she is still alive. Edwin never saw another full moon but she did. She was a trained witch, who was far away from the other end of her bond for most of that time. The space and her skill had taken her this far, but how much farther would it carry her?

The connections formed were strong and just as Draco appeared in her dreams she could appear in his. Edwin didn't seem to be able to control that at all, at the mercy of Thomas' whims. If the bond was a two way street, as she originally suspected, then what was stopping her from using Draco's magic for her own? What was stopping her from finding Draco as he had found her in the upper rooms of Grimmauld Place? If he was with Voldemort, could she not slip in and find where they were and tell the Order?

She was getting ahead of herself. Information useful to the Order would only work if they would listen to her and the chances of that were low. But there was only so much she could do by herself. Even now she could feel the gray cloud settling over her mind. She didn't have much time before she was weak again and eager to fall into welcoming arms no matter how much harm they may cause her.

Hermione didn't enjoy making rash decisions but sometimes they were needed. She stuffed her notes into her bag and went to the restroom. She locked the stall door and pulled out her wand. She had wanted to keep magic to a minimum to keep a low profile, but there was a ticking clock hanging over now. She closed her eyes, hoped she didn't knock too many books from the shelves, and apparated.

Snow covered the countryside and she wondered if this was where Edwin had gone on that doomed holiday. Hermione knew this hill held a safe house months ago but it may have been abandoned like Grimmauld Place, she couldn't know for sure. She couldn't see the cottage anymore, but she doubted she would. She wasn't one of them, their charms worked against her.

An old clothesline stood nearby with no house nearby, nothing hung from the line but snow. Hermione reached into her bag and pulled out Ginny's red dress and ripped off a piece of the paper she took from the library. She scribbled a note and pinned it to the crimson fabric

before hanging the garment on the line. It was a bright dot of red against the white landscape and if anyone still checked this old place they'd see it.

She only hoped they'd want to listen to her.

It was around dinner time back in London. Hermione sat outside a café at a wrought iron table sipping coffee. She was exhausted but refused to entertain the idea of sleep, instead she was reading through Edwin's journal again. The apparate trip back to the city had sent her head swimming and she was afraid of doing any more complicated magic until she rested. She was on the last page again reading the last few entries of Smith's diary when something moved in the corner of her vision. She glanced up and saw a familiar freckled face framed with bright red hair.

"What do you want?" Ginny demanded. She stood by the table, arms crossed. Her long red hair had been chopped short to her chin. Other than that and the bags beneath her eyes she looked just as she had when Hermione left.

"Ginny," she said, almost as if she couldn't believe she was there. She glanced at her watch.

6:50pm. Blink. 6:50pm. She was real.

"I don't have time," Ginny said roughly.

"Sorry, I... I'll keep it brief," Hermione said before realizing she had no idea how to condense everything into only a few minutes of explanation. "I don't expect forgiveness or anything like that, but I think I can be of some help to you."

"I've already had a taste of your help," Ginny said sternly. Hermione fought the sting in her nose that told her tears were on the horizon.

"I know. I... There's something wrong with my magic and it's connected to..." she trailed off unable to say his name. The clouds collided with her thoughts as if specifically targeting complex thinking. Hermione winced as the pain filled her temples. "I'm sorry, it's hard to think."

She thought Ginny might walk away but she didn't. Her eyes grew softer and she took the chair beside Hermione.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

It all came out. The shack, the dreams, the greyness, Draco, Narcissa's tea confession, Edwin Smith's diary—all of it.

"If I—if I could just find a way to reverse it, to use his magic as he used mine I could locate him. Know their movements," Hermione gasped, trying to get through all her thoughts before they vanished. She clutched her notes from the library afraid she'd forget something.

"Hermione, come back with me," Ginny said softly.

“No, I can’t,” Hermione shook her head, her curls dancing around her shoulders. “He’ll find me wherever I go, I need to stay in neutral territory.”

“I can’t leave you here like this.”

Hermione always thought of Ginny as so much younger than her but she was only a year below her brother, and now she felt like the wise one. The concern in her eyes was clear.

“This is your magic,” Ginny said, gripping Hermione’s hand. “It’s yours to wield and control, no one else’s.”

“I know. I don’t give it willingly, or consciously. It’s all blurred by fog and these headaches,” Hermione said, cringing through another wave of pain behind her eyes. Ginny took her cheek, pressing her chin up and forcing their eyes to meet.

“I won’t let this take you.”

Hermione didn’t have the heart to tell her it might have already consumed her whole.

“Thank you,” she said, pulling Ginny’s hand from her cheek. “Please, just pass on what I told you and if I can help, let me know.”

Ginny nodded, standing up but lingering beside her chair.

“I wish you had told me,” Ginny said. “I would have helped earlier.”

“I didn’t know,” Hermione said quietly. It’s easy to look back and say what you may have done but Ginny’s anger at the beginning of this visit said it all. She may have sympathy now, but doubted there was any in her heart after waking up alone after being cursed. Only now when Hermione truly understood the danger could anyone have any empathy for her. “I’ll be at the Bethnal Green Library if you need me.”

Ginny nodded and walked down the street turning into an alleyway out of sight.

Hermione returned to the library and her tiny nook in the corner. It would be closing soon but she decided staying in one place would be best if Ginny came looking for her. She cast a charm on her corner and every muggle librarian that came by looked right past her. The lights were switched off and with a jingle of the keys the doors were locked for the night. Hermione examined the ceilings, the only cameras were at the entrance and she wouldn’t be wandering close to them. She ventured outside of her charmed area, examining the spines of the books nearby. She used to visit muggle libraries during her summers before the war. She’d read popular muggle books and wonder about all the kids she knew at her primary school. She had not made friends easily there but she enjoyed reading and spent recess with the librarian, an older woman with a wide smile and white hair kept in neat braids. Did that woman miss her?

The windows at the top of the walls let in starlight and stray beams from the streetlamps outside. Her mind was so tired from fighting. The last day had felt like an eternity, starting

with Draco waking her up well before dawn. She thought of his mouth against her and had to stop herself.

She went to the display showing off popular, newer novels and loaded her arms. Sleeping would only give him access to her mind and she couldn't handle that now. She'd read every book in the building if it kept her awake.

The first book went by quickly. It was an easy read meant for young adults about a boy sent to some kind of American prison camp and forced to dig holes. She read it within two hours and moved on to the next one, a thicker novel that would take more time. She glanced at her watch and found it a little past midnight.

Her focus began to drift so she opened three different novels on the desk, bouncing between them when one began to lose her interest. One was about Chernobyl, an incident in Ukraine that no wizard seemed to care much about, that managed to keep her hooked longer than she imagined. It was an interesting read but full of so much misery that she had to take breaks. She would then move on to the latest Stephen King novel—yet another famous muggle that wizards didn't know about—but as the main character began to have nightmares she shut it and set it aside.

She tried to focus on whatever books she picked up but it was becoming harder and harder to keep her eyes open. She'd start to fall asleep and awake with a jolt, grabbing wildly at the nearest book to focus her mind.

She was reading a first hand account of a firefighter from Chernobyl and the next thing she knew she was blinking awake, her cheek pressed to the page. Hermione jerked up, shaking her head as if that might loosen the exhaustion from her skull. She grabbed at the top of her book pile and opened it.

The Private Thoughts of Hermione Granger

Her heart skipped. She flipped through the pages and found detailed accounts of her time in the Order, of her time spent with Remus and Lee Jordan. Being kept awake by Katie Bell crying in her sleep. Sitting in the makeshift medical ward summoning flame to her thumb as if it were a muggle lighter. Finding her potion cabinet completely destroyed. Wolf pack promises. She kept flipping and found her time at Malfoy Manor described in excruciating detail. Every kiss, every touch. She kept going.

11th of February, 1998

I am sitting in a muggle library trying fruitlessly to keep myself from falling asleep...

She stared, shocked at the page.

“Hermione?” a voice called through the library. Hermione stood up so quickly the chair fell to the floor with a loud thud. Footsteps echoed through the empty building, closing in. Hermione dropped her journal and darted through the shelves away from the noise. As she ran the muggle titles on display twisted and melted into wizard ones. The shelves grew taller and the books shelved themselves, flying around her head. Candles roared to life on either side of her as she pushed through the maze. There was no end and no other path but the one

set out in front of her. The shelves would shift and make her turn but there was never another path to take.

“Hermione?” the voice called again. She tried not to hear it. She looked at her watch and found the digital display blinking all sorts of numbers none of which resembled a time.

She took a corner and was met a large charms textbook trying to find its home on a shelf. The heavy volume caught her in the temple so hard she lost her footing. She landed hard, the air knocked from her lungs. Hermione was still struggling to blink the stars out of her eyes when a figure stepped over her.

“Hermione, are you okay?” Draco asked, a crease in his brow. He kneeled over her, a hand touching the mark the book left on her head. Her heartbeat was a drum in her ears. “Where are you?”

She stared up at him, her tongue frozen. His fingers brushed a curl behind her ear, before he pulled her into his arms. Draco clutched her to his chest and she couldn’t resist slipping her arms around him too. He smelled like books and the air before lightning strikes. Like home. It made her chest ache.

“I’ll bring you home, Hermione. Tell me where you are,” Anger began to creep into his voice, his arms tightening around her as if he might carry her out of this dream with only his bare hands.

She thought of Edwin Smith and of the powerful few months he had with his love before he realized he’d catch his death in those arms. She wondered if he had a moment like this, in Albright’s arms when he realized that he might not be able to be in them again. That if he wanted to survive, he couldn’t have everything.

Something deep inside of her broke.

“I can’t.”

“What?” he pulled back, his hands still gripping her arms but leaving enough space for their gazes to meet.

“I can’t tell you.” Her eyes stung and she cursed herself for being too quick to tear up. She had grown to find comfort in the depth of his eyes and the warmth of his arms and now, with him so willing to give it, she had to refuse it. The pang of a headache forming in her temple made her flinch.

“Who is doing this to you? If they’ve hurt you, I’ll rip them apart I’ll—” There was a desperation to his voice, exasperated by the hand that came to hold her face. His fingers trembled as they fanned over her cheeks. Her heart flipped.

“You don’t know.”

“Know what?”

Tears blurred her vision and she tried to blink them away to no avail. She had run from him and he didn't know why. Of course he was worried, of course he was clutching her so tightly. Nothing had changed from that morning for him when the world had been utterly upturned for Hermione. All the fear and pain inflicted for Draco's sake, and the universe didn't even have the courtesy to let him know.

She couldn't be the one to tell him. She opened her mouth but her tongue refused. She couldn't deny him her love and also admit how his had poisoned her.

"Ask your mother about Edwin Smith," she said instead, disappointed in her own cowardice.

His eyebrows knit together in confusion and his lips parted ready to ask another question. She blinked and he was gone. Hermione was seated at her desk in the corner, a page of *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future* stuck to her cheek. The lights were on and patrons milled around her, her charm still raised and hiding her mess of books. Her watch read a little past eight in the morning.

She stood, stretching the aches in her muscles. Despite the sleep she'd had her mind still felt exhausted. Her eyes were still wet with the tears she'd shed and it felt as if she could still feel his warm embrace pressing through her coat. She grabbed her belongings and when the readers in the aisle left she stepped out of her charmed square and took her books back to their display, carefully setting them up on the empty stands.

Her stomach rumbled and she started out the door ready to grab breakfast and more coffee for the day. They got a fresh layer of snow in the middle of the night but the morning commute had churned most of it into a wet mushy slurry. Hermione paused on the stairs, buttoning the collar of her coat tightly around her neck to ward off the cold.

"Granger." Remus Lupin stood by the entrance, a worn brown coat hanging on his frame. He had long trailing scabs across his lower jaw, pink tender skin twisting beneath them as his body tried to heal. "We need to talk."

No Man's Land

A park stretched out behind the library and Hermione and Remus walked along a worn path as the city woke up around them. Hermione wished she had anything other than Draco's coat on her shoulders but it was too cold to shrug it off. She could feel Remus' frustration. He was not a man that was able to hide his emotions very well and she could see the betrayal etched into the lines of his face.

"Ginny spoke to me," he said, his eyes straight ahead, his voice even. "I'll be honest, my first instinct was to ignore her. But if this bond is truly how you describe it then I owe you an apology."

"Sir?"

"Magic is funny. Especially feral magic where werewolves are concerned. There are not many of us and we scare people. There aren't libraries full of every known abnormality caused by werewolf bites or the change in magic they cause. I liked to think of myself as an expert, but there are things even I don't know. Things that have clearly hurt you and shutting you out would only make it worse."

"I understand the impulse. I thought I was knowledgeable but the last month and a half has made me feel as ignorant as a child," Hermione admitted.

They walked in silence for a while, letting the morning wash over them. Hermione didn't realize how happy she'd be to see Remus again. He was a comforting presence no matter his mood and she wished times were simpler.

"How is Lee?" she asked.

"Fine. His first moon went about as well as they can go," Remus said.

"He's safe now?"

"Yes. I plan to collect him before the next full moon," he said. "It was deemed safer to keep the pack separated."

Hermione felt a tug at her chest. The little attic room with Remus and Lee had been a safe haven when her life began to fracture and she missed it the most. She had fractured their group and now the pieces can't even stay together.

"Do you think it's possible?" Hermione asked. "Switching the flow and using Draco's magic for myself?"

"I do," Remus said. "But I also think he'll notice it. He's had more time to practice with your magic, and you've been operating at limited power for weeks now."

Hermione's lips twisted into a frown. From Lupin's tone it was clear he thought Draco was doing this deliberately. Hermione could admit Malfoy had flaws, he had chosen the wrong side of the war and could be unbearably cruel as a schoolmate but he wouldn't do this. She had felt his love and his pain in their dream just minutes prior. If Draco had any hand in this she would be incredibly surprised.

"I don't think he knows he's doing it. If he has any skill it's subconscious."

"Hermione, he is still the enemy."

"I know," she said. The young woman had gone from being called bright to being immediately corrected. She didn't enjoy the change. "But if any good can come out of this connection I want to put it to work."

"I agree," Remus said. "Be honest with me, Granger, how are you?"

Her brain short circuited. She hadn't expected such a simple but loaded question.

"I've... been better," she said. She felt she'd experienced the highest high and lowest low in the matter of a week. It was hard to feel anything but numb after that.

"I need to ask you a question. I don't want to ask it and I won't put any personal judgements or emotions on the answer but it's something I need to know, for the Order and for the war," Remus said, his hand fidgeting in his pocket.

"Go ahead," she said.

"Do you care for him?"

Her heart swelled. Just as the moth is drawn to the flame, Hermione was pulled to Draco. She couldn't say for sure if this bond was triggered by deep uncovered thoughts or if the bond itself built what they had, but he mattered to her. His happiness, his well-being. Hiding things from him hurt, but she would suffer more if she let everything continue. She cared enough about Malfoy not to see him consumed by this magic, to meet him on neutral territory and find the words that had escaped her for so long. She wanted to learn how he took his tea and what his favorite book in his parents' sprawling libraries was. She wanted to show him muggle novels, take him to a movie and watch him scoff at it but deep down enjoy it. She wanted so much more than life had given them.

"I do."

"Do you think that may affect your usefulness to the Order?"

"You already know it has," Hermione said. "I'm not asking to learn any secrets, or even to be allowed back. I'm simply offering a service. I'll stay here, out of the way."

"You were never one to stay out of anyone's way."

"It's been a while since I've been your student," Hermione said, her gaze falling to the ground. She wasn't the precocious child she once was, she knew when she was complicating

things. She had erased her life from her parents' minds to stay out of their way, had banished herself to this cold corner of London to stand in a no man's land. Hermione had lived in limbo for far longer than anyone had realized. "Things change."

"I know." Remus said. "We're all a little different now."

Lupin left without any solid promises. He said he'd speak with the rest of the Order but she doubted much would come of it. Ginny had clearly pressed him, but she wasn't so sure Lupin would fight for her in the same way. At least he came by to talk and hadn't completely written her off. He can be as upset with her as he wanted, just as long as he heard her out.

Hermione took her time walking through town, grateful for her charmed boots that kept the melting snow from soaking through them.

She found herself wanting to fall asleep. To lay across a park bench just for the chance to see Draco again. She chided herself for being weak. Edwin Smith didn't write down his tragic life only for her to repeat it.

Her dream had rattled her more than she wanted to admit. She didn't want to talk to Draco in a hazy liminal space, she wanted him in flesh and blood but as of now she had no way to. The thought of her life laid out like Edwin Smith's journal made her heart twist in its cavity. She was still living, it wasn't done yet. Books aren't printed until they're finished.

She thought of all the details her mind had slipped in. Her headaches, the sense of uselessness that enveloped her. Days sitting in the medical ward unable to actually help anyone, rendered a patient instead of a healer and playing with fire like a heedless child.

Fire. She'd been wandless then, her replacement tucked away by Poppy for Hermione and everyone else's safety. Even in the midst of the worst part of this bond's haze she had been able to cast without a wand to speak of. With her new borrowed wand still stuck in her bag, Hermione paused on the sidewalk and looked up at the nearest tree. The branches had no leaves on them anymore, it's limbs hanging low with melting snow. She focused on the slender tip of a branch. With her lips sealed and her hands shoved in her pockets a single bright red cardinal popped into existence out of a twisted twig. It hopped down the branch, turning its head to the left and right before taking wing and flying off over the park.

No words. No wand. No twitch of her hand. Was it her own power, or was she stealing Draco's? She'd only know if she went bigger. It wasn't safe to do anything else here in such a public area. Too many muggles and too many things that could go wrong.

Her stomach rumbled and she was moved again by her body's constant need. She wandered down the street until she found a small place jammed between shops where she bought curry and rice. It was delicious and warm enough to make her forget the dreary weather. She considered buying groceries to take back to the library, after all she didn't know how long she was going to be staying there, when something caught her eye.

If she hadn't been a lone witch in the midst of muggles she wouldn't have noticed him. A figure in dark robe-like clothes loomed on the other side of the street. He would have been

just another wizard in Diagon Alley but in London he stuck out. She kept moving but turned her head slightly trying to get a look at him. He had leather gloves and greying brown hair. The melting snow dripped from the rooftops and slid off the shoulders of his velvet coat leaving no trace of their path on the fabric. Enchanted.

Hermione kept moving and the man followed. She could feel him behind her, his boots tapping against the walk slower than the steady pace of everyone else around her trying to get back to work as their lunch breaks came to a close.

She reached the entrance of the park beside the library and the man paused at the gate, watching her. She pulled her wand from her bag and stood directly in the middle of the path facing her pursuer. There were no muggles despite the sun stretching out from behind the clouds, only them.

He stared at her, a man maybe in his fifties. A layer of stubble covered his jaw, his skin well creased from grimacing. He looked familiar, but not enough to place if he was a friend or foe. By the way he was looking at her, she assumed foe.

He moved quickly, a wand sliding down his sleeve and firing off a spell that blew past her ear. Fear clutched her stomach as she settled into a dueling stance and fired off a jinx of her own. She wasn't thinking, not about where she was or even what she was casting. It was survival. She missed her first offense but landed a second one, a jinx that caught him in the legs and brought him to his knees. He growled, firing off a curse that caught her in the side of the head. The spell exploded, sending a ringing deep into her ear and searing the skin on the left side of her face.

Hermione hissed, her eye stinging from the magical heat, but she focused and shot a stunning spell into the man's chest. The burning in her skin didn't let up and she grit her teeth through it as she cast a muggle repelling spell on the park grounds. She was in the middle of London with no safe house to speak of, but she couldn't leave a wizard alone in the street.

She grabbed a hold of the man's collar and looked around the park. It was full of fields and benches not holding cells. There was, however, a small shack at the edge of the property. A shed for a groundkeeper's tools. She dragged the stunned man across the gravel and grass to the building, spitting a spell at the lock and knocking it clean off.

It was a cramped space that held lawnmowers, fertilizer, and other muggle items that were all redundant to magic folk. With a flick of her wand she tossed the man onto the bags of fertilizer. She leaned over him and grabbed his wand from his frozen grasp. She pulled at his left sleeve and exposed the heavy black ink of the dark mark.

She whispered a few spells loosening the man's limbs enough for her to charm a length of thick rope around them. When she felt he was sufficiently restrained she tapped her wand against his nose, unfreezing him, before slamming the tip of hawthorn wood against his jugular.

"What do you want?" she demanded, struggling to keep her left eye open as the pain sunk further into her flesh.

He spit at her, the glob of saliva hitting the collar of her coat. Hermione pressed her wand further into the man's neck, hard enough to bruise.

"Reconsider that."

"Not what I want, what *he* wants," he said, his mouth curling up in a smirk. His pale watery eyes moved up and down her body. "You're more useful than you look."

"What use?" Hermione asked, looking back and forth between the man's eyes as if one pupil might confess more than the other.

"Werewolf bait!" he laughed.

Her heart skipped a beat and before she could respond her wand was firing off a hex into the man's neck. He howled in pain as boils began spewing up across his flesh. It started off slow, just a few painful oozing sores and then they swelled, obscuring his features until his face was a swollen blob. It wasn't her intention to do it, it just happened. Second nature, like breathing; but she didn't stop it either.

Hermione backed away from him, pressing her back against the shed's door. More sores bloomed on his skin and he wriggled across the fertilizer bags as the pain grew. She hadn't meant to hurt him, not like this anyway.

Kill him she thought *He deserves worse*.

The thought frightened her. She never had an itch to kill anything. Defend herself, of course, but kill? She was supposed to heal. She was supposed to study and give back, not take.

She grabbed him by the arm and with an excruciating crack they were on a hillside far south of London. She dropped him, letting his bound body fall down the steep hill. She watched until he landed in a muddy pile of leaves at the bottom, groaning as the pressure ruptured the boils sprouting across his body oozing blood and pus across the fallen leaves. He peered up at her, just a sliver of eyes looking through swollen flesh. Hermione met his gaze and held his wand out in front of her, snapping it into two. The pieces fell into the underbrush and she didn't watch where they rolled to, she was already back in the shed at Bethnal Green.

The quick apparition trips combined with the pain still blooming across her face turned her stomach and her lunch reappeared on the floor of the gardener's shack.

She leaned against the wall, trying to catch her breath in the dim stuffy room. For a month the war had felt so far away and now she was drowning in it. Her little slip of London was no longer neutral.

Visite Du Père

Hermione gripped the sink inside the Bethnal Green Library's tiny bathroom, in the streaked mirror she examined the tender skin of the side of her face. Her left ear, parts of her neck, her cheekbone and up across her forehead were all covered in the Death Eater's curse. It was a burn but nothing she cast to mend it worked. The most she accomplished in two hours was a numbing spell to ease the pain and a combination of desperate attempts that resulted in the exposed under layer of flesh turning into a crisp mess of scabs. It was protection at least, but if she was going to fix it she'd need help. Without access to the Order's potion cabinet or even a book to search through it would be difficult to treat on her own.

The skin pulled whenever she moved any part of her face and sent a shock of pain that pierced through the numbing spell. Whatever hex had hit her was a nasty one.

She spent the rest of the day ignoring it as much as she could by pacing around the library and park and marking a protection circle. It was a complex shield charm that wouldn't deter muggles—she needed the library open after all—but would prevent witches and wizards from entering. This meant locking out the Order as well but they of all people would appreciate another layer between them and Hermione.

She circled the area well into the evening after the library had locked up for the evening. The last few workers were still inside, the backroom light still visible from the outside. She wanted to wait until they left to start hexing locks but they seemed to be taking their sweet time.

With her shields in place and her body on the verge of breaking down, she went to the field closest to the library's back door and sat down under one of the large trees at its perimeter. The lights along the park's walkways had turned on and the one beside her kept flickering, its muggle bulb on the verge of dying. She watched it, thinking of all the items she had used as a child that were nothing to her now. Her parents had years of schooling for problems that were wished away by magical folk.

Hermione glanced at her watch. It was nearly midnight and the library's closing staff still had not left. The window was visible from her spot and she could see their silhouettes as the two librarians chatted with each other. She was on the verge of walking in and obliterating memories when the flickering street lamp finally died.

Her little area of the field was bathed in darkness, thick clouds covering the stars and stealing the moonlight for themselves. The only light was the warm glow spilling from the single light on the library and the green haze from her watch. She thought about moving to sit beside a functioning street light to inspect Edwin Smith's journal again only for the next lamp down the sidewalk to switch off. Then the next one. Hermione watched as one by one every lamp in the park switched off, not with the flickering struggle of a dying bulb with the finality of a switch.

There was nothing but the whistle of the wind and the drumming of her heart. Her head pounded as blood rushed through her temple and she examined the empty darkness around her. She grabbed her wand and reminded herself of all the spells she had set into the ground. No one should be able to cross, not yet.

A scent hit the air, the sharpness that comes right before the first droplets of rain fall.

“Draco?” she asked the night around her.

The only answer was the droplets of a winter storm. Rain fell harder, bouncing off her coat but sinking into her hair and rolling down her wounded face. She hadn’t realized how badly she wanted it to be him until it wasn’t, even if it was dangerous.

Lupin was right to question her. The fondness she carried for Draco was a threat to the Order and herself.

The door to the library finally swung open with a creak and the two remaining employees scurried out under a shared umbrella.

She watched them until they vanished out of sight and then stayed a few moments longer taking in the smell of fresh rain hitting the soil.

The following week was miserable. Hermione managed to get shallow sleep in her enchanted corner in the fiction section or laid out on the bean bag chairs of the children’s area after the building closed. Her stomach had a constant rumble and her brain seemed always on the edge of slumber.

She had emerged from the library the morning after her encounter with the Death Eater to find another black robed figure standing on the other side of the protection circle. Despite the hunger that tore at her stomach she slipped back into the rows of books rather than risk it. Yet when she’d peer out a window she could always spot at least one person in a dark coat lingering at the edge of her spells, waiting and watching. The muggles passed through, but the suspicious figures stayed put on the sidewalk outside the park’s perimeter.

Hermione spent her days using her magic to steal snacks out of the vending machines and reading muggle novels. She kept an eye out for Remus or other Order members but the only magic folk she could spot were the Death Eaters lying in wait for her.

Her face was beginning to heal but slowly. If she had not studied wounds for the war she wouldn’t have noticed it but it was there, working under the scabs trying to repair the damage done. A mixture of her immune system and her magic fighting infection and the hex. The muggle books the library held about burns were not helpful, but informative. She ended up glamoring her face so as not to attract attention from the muggles. She had already earned a few lingering looks and whispers for being in the library so often and she was afraid of overstaying her welcome, but she was more terrified of what was waiting for her outside. It was after four days in the library that she began to charm the librarians. A small version of obliviate that simply erased her from their minds. The same spell she’d used on her parents but it was far easier to scrub a stranger from a mind than a child.

She read books about Australia and dentistry, mystery novels and anatomy textbooks. Anything that caught her eye that would give her mind some calm even for a short time.

Her dreams were lonely. Every night she expected a visit and every morning she was disappointed. She reminded herself not to panic, strong emotions would only lead to mistakes.

She sat cross legged on her hidden desk and forced herself to focus on a thick fantasy novel, yet every time the silver blonde hair of one of the protagonists was described she found her mind wandering.

How much had he learned? Was he simply not sleeping or was he purposefully avoiding her, throwing back dreamless sleep potions like she had?

Her days were even emptier than they were at Grimmauld Place and the familiar stifling sensation of greyness was folding around her mind. The tired weight that laid itself across her shoulders and weighed her down.

Hermione hauled herself outside on a dreary Monday afternoon. She had spent the majority of her hours inside in the library away from the eyes of the Death Eaters, but she was bound to go mad if she didn't get any sunlight. Not that there was much outside anyway.

Cautiously she walked along the paths of the park, keeping an eye on the perimeter. She kept moving towards the back of the park near the shack she had dragged her attacker into, a nervous hand fidgeting with the end of her wand where it stuck out at the end of her sleeve. It was an especially cold day and she was thankful for warming charms and the thick coat she'd taken from Draco's closet. It didn't smell like him or Malfoy Manor anymore and she couldn't quite capture the scent to press it back into the threads with an enchantment. She had the feeling that gripped her heart and the shiver that ran up her spine but none of the right words to make it. The longer the days dragged the more she lost her words.

She paused by a lamppost and leaned her aching head against the cool metal. Hermione wanted to go home. To her parents, or to the Order. Anywhere where she could sleep in peace and not worry about the next day. No such place existed but it didn't stop her from wanting it.

She peered out at the street and the cars that ambled down the way parallel to the park and saw a flash of white blonde hair.

She was moving before the thought had fully registered, sprinting across wet grass until she hit the fence that stood as the marker for her charms. On the other side was a tall man in a black coat with a high collar and unmistakable white hair.

"Draco?" she gasped, her hands wrapped around wrought iron.

The figure turned and her disappointment was swallowed by fear. The face that looked down at her was framed with a long curtain of blonde hair that fell to his shoulders, creases from frowning pressed in close beside his mouth. There were dark bags beneath the older man's eyes, a stark violet against his pale skin.

“Afternoon, Miss Granger,” Lucius Malfoy said. “I did wonder how long it would take for you to venture out.”

Hermione untangled her hands from the fence and drew her wand.

“This is an interesting little charm you’ve set up,” Lucius said, motioning to the nearly invisible shield between them. “Remarkable work.”

He looked at her again, an eyebrow raised.

“Lost your voice?”

“You’re not wanted here,” she said sternly.

“I’m afraid I have no choice,” he said, his voice betraying an exhaustion that went deeper than a few restless nights. Hermione took a step back and Lucius pressed in close to the fence, his fingers unable to reach through it due to her charm. “Lower the circle, Granger, it’ll be easier for everyone if you do.”

“And why would I do that?”

“You can come with me, or you can wait for Bellatrix to knock your wall down and drag you back.”

“She couldn’t break my charms,” Hermione said.

“No, that’s not exactly her talent,” Lucius said, before pressing a finger to the shield. The wall rippled under his touch and she could feel the spell waver. “But it is mine.”

Hermione swallowed hard but kept her face as still as stone.

“What do you want?”

“You are needed for the Dark Lord’s plans,” he said as if the words left a bad taste behind on his lips. If the first Death Eater’s visit was for the same reason it had to do with Draco and their bond. Using it and manipulating it.

It had been over a week since she’d had any contact with Draco and despite knowing better than to ask such a question it spilled from her lips before she could stop it.

“Is Draco okay?”

“He’s finally made himself useful,” he said, his voice cold.

“You don’t think very highly of him do you?”

“It seems you’ve found your voice again, Miss Granger. How about you use it and take down this silly tent.”

Hermione didn’t move.

“Don’t act like you haven’t already switched sides. Did you think I’d forget you’ve been living in my house, eating my food and distracting my son? Not exactly the kind of business the Order dabbles in. You can either come in as a friend or as a foe.”

“You’d never have me as a friend,” Hermione said.

“Are you speaking of your blood or your attitude? One of them can be fixed, you know.”

“This has been a fine chat but I have other matters to attend to,” she said, turning away from the fence and starting back for the library.

“You’ve wasted enough of my time, girl,” he called out. Hermione kept for the library but paused when the earth shook under her feet. She looked over her shoulder to see Lucius, wand drawn, concentrating on the protection circle she had erected. The charms directly in front of him had melted and as he worked the rest of the magic began to drip away. All her hard work was dismantled. She’d been so careful, no weak spots, no loopholes, but it was becoming clear that when the Dark Lord wanted something it came to pass.

She watched as tiny fragments of the dome fell, vanishing into nothing as they collided with the ground. Then a giant crack ripped through the entire spell, splintering every piece and dissolving every painful minute she had put into it.

There was nothing now, no protection, no shield, no muggle illusions, just thick London air.

Fear hit her veins slowly, like a medicine just beginning to break down in her bloodstream. She stood in the shadow of the library, so close to its doors but knowing its walls would provide no protection. Edwin Smith’s journal was still inside.

She looked over her shoulder to see Lucius striding across the grass, wand in hand and brow furrowed. There was a desperation in his eyes, something she would have originally assumed was anger. Here, without the majesty of magic she could see it. In the gray light of muggle London she could see a pain behind his eyes that no enchanted candle could illuminate.

What could hurt him so?

A light began to grow at the end of his wand and despite her curiosity Hermione had no desire to see what he planned to cast.

With a desperate jerk of her wand and a loud crack she left the library and Lucius behind.

No Rest for the Wicked

The world slammed back into view just in time for her feet to snag on a tree root and send her tumbling into a pile of leaves. She gasped the cold forest air and tried to orient herself as she laid at the base of a hill, upside down. She stared up through the bare branches to the grey cloudy sky above and the sun that gave little heat to her chilled skin. Her blood still screamed fight or flight but she'd already made her choice. She was fleeing far too often as of late for a Gryffindor to be proud of.

She had her wand and her freedom and that was all she could celebrate. Edwin Smith's journal had been abandoned in Bethnal Green Library and she was without friends or safety. She began to sit up only for every muscle in her body to object. She groaned, forcing herself to sit up only to find she was not as alone as she thought she was.

Lee Jordan sat across from her leaning against a tree trunk, a flannel blanket wrapped around his shoulders.

"Lee?" she asked, glancing at her watch to confirm she was awake.

"How've you been, Granger?" he asked. She stared at him unsure of what to say.

"Fine."

"What happened to your face?"

Hermione touched her cheek and realized her glamour must have fallen. There was no reason to reapply it, the wound had already been seen.

"Death Eater."

"You don't wear it as well as I do," Lee said with a small smile, the expression pulling at the maze of scars across his own face. Hermione gave a soft laugh more out of amazement than true humor. It was so odd to be talking to Lee like normal. All around them in every direction was nothing but empty forest. Unless he had taken up residency with the birds she wasn't sure why he was here.

"What are you doing here?"

"I had a feeling I needed to be here," he said, patting the ground beside him. "You have leaves in your hair."

Hermione ran her hands through her mane of curls, pulling the twigs and leaves out as best she could. She stood up brushing the rest of the first off herself before looking around. It was just as cold here as it had been in London, only here there was no cover. No buildings to break the wind, only trees.

Lee stood up and pulled off his blanket and wrapped it around her shoulders. He paused, his hand lingering on the collar of the coat she wore. He examined it, rubbing the green fabric between his fingers.

“Is he dead?” he asked.

“No, why would you think that?”

“Then we should get moving.”

Lee dropped his hand and started walking through the trees. Hermione had to take two steps for every one of Lee’s and ended up scurrying behind him like a churchmouse.

“Have you heard he’s dead?” Her voice betrayed her fear.

“Nope.”

“Then why ask?”

“Just didn’t think he’d let you go anywhere,” Lee shrugged.

They walked in silence for a distance but there seemed to only be forest stretched out before them forever.

“Have you spoken to Ginny or Remus?”

“I’ve never really been someone Ginny talks to,” Lee said. “As for Lupin, he’s been avoiding me.”

“He said he thought it best to keep the pack separated.”

“You’ve spoken with him?” Lee asked.

“Yes. I needed to communicate with the Order and he... I thought you knew?”

“He hasn’t spoken to me since the moon. I expect I won’t see him until the next one in a few days.”

“Few days? How long do we have?”

“Around three days.”

“That’s not enough time,” she said, more to herself than to Lee.

Hermione couldn’t help but feel she had wasted this month. She had learned of Edwin Smith and then lost his journals. She understood the magic connecting her to Draco and then failed to explain it to him. Now she hadn’t heard from him in a week and he could be hurting. She was already living on borrowed time and she couldn’t help but feel there were only a few grains left in her hourglass.

After an hour's worth of walking the forest broke and the cabin Remus had taken Lee and her too a month ago stood atop a hill. Hermione paused at the treeline.

"Is anyone else there?"

"Just Order folk."

"I can't."

Lee looked from the cabin to her.

"I'm sure they won't mind."

"You won't mind, they will."

"Either they'll mind or they won't," Lee said with a shrug before starting up to the cabin. Hermione paused, unsure whether to follow. Lee seemed extremely confident, but she knew he was different among the Order. Remus had been kind enough to see her, but he had not trusted her and she didn't blame him.

Evening was stretching overhead and she didn't have anywhere else to go.

She followed Lee up the hill and peeked through the cabin door. Candles burned on every shelf and more cots had been set up between the four beds that were here when Hermione last visited. The once tidy cabin had become cluttered with personal items and more people than it had been built for. What struck her the most was how young everyone was. It's easy to forget your age when you're working but after being away she realized it was practically a child army. An army that was out of their depth.

"Granger?" a voice asked. Alicia Spinnet stood in the cabin, looking relieved. Hermione was speechless and stood frozen on the front step as Alicia rushed forward and pulled her into a hug. "We were so worried."

"Your voice is better," Hermione said, noticing how easily the girl could talk. The last she'd seen her she'd been recovering from a slashing hex to the throat and was still healing. Now she seemed perfectly fine.

"A lot better," Alicia laughed, taking a step back. Her big eyes roamed over Hermione as if not believing she was really there. Hermione caught sight of her throat, there was barely a scar anymore. "This cot over here is free, you can rest there."

Alicia led her to one of the extra cots at the end of the cabin nearest the bathroom. It happened to be beside Lee's bed and she shrugged off his blanket and laid it across his trunk.

"Oh, I'll get you a blanket. We have plenty," Alicia said before stepping away to search for one. Hermione sat on the end of her cot, poised and ready to run if she needed to. Alicia returned with a blanket and Katie Bell at her side. Bell handed over a cup of warm tea.

"I didn't remember how you take your tea," Katie said.

“It’s alright, this is fine.” Hermione gave a weak smile. Both girls wore kind smiles, ones Granger didn’t feel like she deserved. The rest of the cabin seemed tense, but followed Alicia and Katie’s lead. Hermione wondered if the two girls knew where she’d been, or just what she’d done in the time she’d been gone. She wondered if they’d have given her tea and a place to sleep if they knew the whole truth.

“Your face,” Alicia said, sitting on the cot beside her and pressing her curls behind her ear to inspect the scabbed over flesh.

“Caught a bad spell,” Hermione said, looking down into her tea. “It’s healing but it’ll be a while.”

“We don’t have much here,” Alicia said. “But we might have some ointment that could help.”

“Keep it,” she instructed.

Alicia gave her a pat on the back of her hand before leaving with Katie to check on other patients.

Hermione was thankful when they left her alone. She stretched out on the cot and found it was far more comfortable than the makeshift mattresses she’d been using at the library. She set her mug of tea down on the floor beside her intending to only rest her eyes, but found once she set her head down sleep came all too easily.

She stood in Hogwarts’ Great Hall, alone. All the tables and chairs were gone and there was nothing but the stone floor and the candles floating above. Each step she took echoed through the enormous room.

Fog began to roll in, gathering around her ankles and coating the floor. She turned, trying to find the source of the sudden change when she caught sight of another figure. A young man with short silver hair with his back to her.

She paused, unsure if it was truly him. She wanted it to be him, of course, but it had been weeks since she’d seen him dream or otherwise.

Dream. She looked at her watch to find it blinking the number 3 when she looked away and back at the display it was cycling through letters. She watched E, R, I, fly by before she decided it was definitely a dream.

She took a step toward him, her shoes announcing the movement in the painfully empty room, but he didn’t respond to it.

“Draco?” she asked. No response.

She walked around him to see his face. It was just as it had been, his scar digging into his jaw and his hair laying just so over his forehead. He looked rested, relaxed even.

“Draco,” she said again, reaching for his hand. His fingers were limp in her hand, warm but unresponsive. She squeezed his hand only to earn nothing in reply. She let go of his hand and

it fell lifeless to his side.

Her heart began to race. Something was wrong here.

“Draco?” she asked again, fruitlessly. She went up on her tiptoes, pressing a hand to his cheek. He was breathing, his skin warm to the touch, but his eye stared out at nothing. Her fingers slipped to his neck and felt the slow and steady pulse of someone asleep.

If he was asleep he’d be here with her, so why wasn’t he?

She peered into his eyes, looking for any sign of life but found something peculiar. There was a reflection in his eyes but it wasn’t of the room around them. Instead of the Great Hall it seemed to be a dark room, much smaller than the one they were in. Bright bursts of color danced along the reflection. Hermione twisted around to find nothing of the sort in their phantom hall.

She turned back in time to see a flash of green that made her stomach twist. She cupped his cheeks, pressing her face closer in an attempt to see what he was seeing. Another eerie green glow began to bloom, but it was clear it was coming from the tip of his own wand, one that he didn’t even have drawn in this dream with her.

Hermione drew her wand, pressing the tip gently against Draco’s temple. She whispered a spell, a healer’s eye that might tell her what was going on, nothing invasive. Only when she cast it, she was knocked backwards. As if dynamite had exploded under her feet, she was sent flying. Her wand fell from her hand as she crashed into the polished floor of Hogwarts. Pain reverberated through her ribs, the fog clawing at her throat as she gasped for air. She clamped a hand to her side and forced herself to sit up. Draco was gone when she sat up, replaced by a tall figure with grayish skin and a face with slits for a nose. Long dark robes trailed behind him, his bony fingers folded in front of him.

Lord Voldemort stared down at her with an expression that seemed more amused than anything else. He flicked his hand at her as if shooing away a fly. The world shifted and the room around her disintegrated leaving her falling in a black void. She screamed, reaching out for something to catch herself but finding nothing. It was nothing but darkness.

This is a dream she told herself change the world yourself.

She focused on the darkness below her and thought of a soft bed to fall into. She thought of this for a few long minutes and when she was sure nothing would happen a weak light began to blink below her. It grew and a display of cushions and pillows appeared below her and she crashed into a land of blankets and comfort.

She woke with a jerk, still wrapped in the blanket Alicia gave her. It was well into the night now and all the candles had been blown out. The sound of snoring filled the room and she shifted, suddenly uncomfortable in her skin. She untangled herself from the blanket and went to the bathroom.

She couldn’t forget the way Voldemort had looked at her, as if she was a toy and not a person. Not even something to loathe, but a pet for entertainment. She shivered, washing her hands

and trying to scrub the crawling feeling out from under her skin.

A loud bang rang out, muffled by the bathroom door. Hermione's heart jumped into her throat and her wand was drawn as she opened the door to the main room. The front door hung open, night air disturbing the warm solace that had been created. The already full room was now beyond maximum. There were people everywhere.

Alicia Spinnet, still in her pajamas, kneeled beside a girl whose skin was coated in a burning hex. Katie Bell was carrying a young man to her bed, his right leg gone from below the knee. It was pure chaos and without thinking about it Hermione joined in.

There were dozens of people piling in in various states of injury. Hermione summoned a hair tie and pulled her curls back before triaging the scene. There were others with burns, although on less parts of their bodies, and more missing limbs. Some were already dead when they arrived, their faces pale and their friends holding them shell-shocked. Hermione passed by the cold ones, ordering the worst of the burns to be laid down. Those with limbs lost above the waist were set in chairs and on trunks. Whatever spell was used to sever the body parts must have taken them too because no one came in with a spare hand or leg. There would be no reattachment tonight.

Alicia focused on the burns and Katie whirled around the room moving beds and summoning more cots and chairs for the weak to sit in. Hermione kneeled beside a cot with a young man on it, his left ankle a bloody stump.

Hermione had always found comfort in school work that was repetitive and this was the same way. Stop the bleeding, scourge infection, enchant the skin to grow over the end, check by later. There were no potions for the pain, so it was imperative they worked quickly. Over the next few hours more people spilled in, but Alicia and Hermione worked with a steady rhythm. Alicia had her own dance for the burns and Katie was passing out tea as quickly as she could make it.

Hermione's stomach twisted as the young nameless faces became ones she knew. Angelina Johnson, her left arm covered in burns and missing a few fingers. Fred Weasley, uncharacteristically quiet, while she worked on the end of his right hand where it ended at his wrist.

No one said anything to her, only accepted her help. For a moment it was like before the moon, before the shack. When she was fighting the war and she was useful and life was a little less complicated. It wasn't Hogwarts or safety, but it was something.

She kept moving, healing cuts and trying to set breaks. She was holding a boy's arm as Katie Bell helped her pop his shoulder back into place when a hand grabbed her wrist, ripping her away from her work.

"What are you doing here?" It was Harry, his face covered in soot and blood. His hair had grown since she'd last seen him and he looked thinner, weaker.

"Helping," Hermione said, trying to move back to Katie's side.

“No.” Harry stepped in her way, using his height to bully her away from the boy’s side.
“They might not know but I do. Remus told me.”

Hermione’s heart dropped. So they didn’t know. Alicia and Katie thought she’d been, what, on a sabbatical? Or maybe captured? Perhaps that’s why they were so gentle with her, so willing to let her help. Remus may disapprove of her choice but she was thankful he had not told everyone in the Order of the crimes, but it didn’t matter who knew and who didn’t if Harry was taking a stand.

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said, her eyes on the boy’s face as Katie popped his joint back into place. He screamed, jerking off the cot before falling back, exhausted.

“That’s all you have to say?”

“What do you want me to say?” Hermione said, looking up at her friend, too tired to fight him. She had always been the one berating him, nagging Ron and Harry into doing the right thing. She didn’t quite like being on the other side.

“You came here in his clothes?” Harry said, more hurt than angry.

“It’s too cold to take it off,” Hermione said, frustration building in her chest.

“Do you know what he’s done?”

“I am aware, I’m doing the best I can, Harry,” she said, her voice breaking. She took a step towards the door to get fresh air but her feet kept going, leading her out into the early morning darkness. Harry followed, running down the steps after her.

“You have to decide which side you’re on!”

“I have!” Hermione snapped back. “I’m on yours! I’ve always been on your side!”

“Then why are you still holding on to that, onto him?”

It was clear Remus had not told him everything, or he might actually understand.

“It’s not as black and white as you think, Harry. There’s a lot of magic at play and I’m—”

“He did this!” Harry shouted, pointing back at the carnage inside the cabin. “He came into the safe houses and he killed people.”

Hermione froze. She was still trying to process his words when a crack broke the silence beside her and people fell to the dirt at her feet. Ron, Remus, and Ginny all fell to the ground out of breath and battered. Ginny had a bruise blooming around an eye socket, Remus was gripping his ribs as if they were broken, and Ron’s was coughing blood onto the ground. His whole body shook, his chin covered in dark crimson.

Draco did this? He was capable of many horrible things, things she wasn’t even aware of. Was it that much of a stretch? Was he avoiding dreaming so he wouldn’t have to face her?

Hermione knelt beside Lupin, ignoring Harry for the moment, and trying to locate exactly where his injury was.

“Hermione,” his voice wheezed as if a lung had been punctured and she started to cast a diagnostic spell to see the damage. “Granger, stop it.”

Remus grabbed her wrist, halting her wand. Up close she could see his lip had been busted open and a cut had slashed into his forehead close to his hairline, dripping blood down his brow. Guilt weighed down her stomach.

“I know I said I wouldn’t get in the way but I—” she began.

“It’s over,” he coughed, his fingers digging into her arm.

“What are you talking about?”

Remus winced as the pain rippled through his chest, doubling over into the dirt. She knelt next to him, her mind stretched between all the suffering and pain around her.

“The war,” he struggled out. He finally let go of her arm to wrap his hand around his middle. A cough shook his shoulders and blood dribbled down his bottom lip. “Even with you away they found us. Every single house, every safe place. This is all we have left.”

Remus shook his head and a tear slipped down his cheek.

“We’ve already lost,” he whispered. “We’re already dead.”

Unforgivable

It was not until late that afternoon that there was any amount of calm. It took both Harry and Hermione to get Remus inside the cabin and into Alicia and Katie's care before Hermione could turn to Ginny and Ron.

She kept her hands busy, her mind on the pain in front of her and not her own.

She'd done as much as she could and now everyone was saving their energy. Hermione had given up her cot to Ron whose cough had stopped but was visibly weak. Ginny said a curse had hit him in the stomach and the diagnostic spell had not been good. He'd live but it wouldn't be an easy life if they didn't get more help soon.

The cabin was mostly quiet. Everyone was either asleep or too tired to speak. Katie and Alicia had finally fallen asleep after hours of helping, Katie in a corner with no more than a blanket and Alicia curled up beside Angelina Johnson on a cot.

Lee Jordan passed out tea silently, a blanket draped around his shoulders and dragging across the floorboards like a cape. Remus was asleep on Jordan's bed and Hermione checked on him every hour. He'd need skele-grow and a dozen other more potions she didn't have.

She searched for something else to grab her focus, opening the small lock box of medical supplies for the third time. She was still disappointed to see only bandages and ointment sitting in the bottom.

"Is this really all we have?" Hermione asked Lee.

"I have one serving of Wolfsbane in my trunk, but that's it," Lee said.

Wolfsbane was a helpful potion to have seeing as the full moon was coming but with two werewolves under one roof it was more of a problem. Hermione chewed on her lip. Maybe if she got the Wolfsbane to Draco...

No, don't think about Draco.

She set the box down, disgusted with her own thoughts. Even now she was trying to steal from the Order to help him. He did this to her friends and she was still thinking of him.

Her eyes scanned the cramped cabin. How could he have done all of this? He was a talented wizard, but this was apocalyptic damage.

Hermione thought that she was only one Draco Malfoy was a danger too, but she'd forgotten exactly what he was capable of. What side he had chosen.

She could feel Harry's eyes on her, even with her back to him. He didn't say a word when she was helping Remus but he'd kept watch over her as if expecting her to slip poison into

someone's tea. As if she was the enemy. She'd been avoiding his corner of the cabin for hours, hoping that maybe this anger would dissipate but it never did.

She turned around to find him sitting on the floor, his shoulders leaning against the wall behind him, and his eyes on her. Ginny was asleep, her head in his lap and his hand running through her hair. Her eye had swelled over the hours and Hermione doubted she'd be able to see through it when she woke.

They were going to have to talk eventually. After all the running she'd been doing she was determined to face this one head on. This was not Lucius, this was her best friend.

Hermione slowly walked over to him, careful to keep quick movements to a minimum, and kneeled in front of him.

"Do you believe Remus? That it's over?"

He looked down at Ginny and stayed silent. Anger flared in her chest. After years of friendship and in the middle of the war Harry would rather ignore her than have a discussion. She felt as if they were fifteen again, arguing over petty classroom drama.

She took a breath. This wasn't an overblown argument, it was real life. This was war and if she was standing in Harry's shoes and knew only what he knew she might hate herself too. In different lights, facts can appear wildly inconsistent. She couldn't be upset with someone who didn't know the whole story, but she didn't know if he'd listen.

"You have every right to be upset with me," she started. She couldn't look at him, instead she watched Lee Jordan on the other side of the room enchanting a teapot to pour more mugs of tea. Her fingers fidgeted with the sleeve of her stolen coat, pulling at a loose thread. "And I don't want to give you any excuses for my behavior. I know what I did."

She thought of the joy she felt standing in front of Malfoy Manor in the snow. Of the relief of Draco's arms around her. She had wanted it more than air, and she had wanted it until a few hours ago when the proof of his cruelty showed up at her doorstep. How could she had ever found solace in such arms?

"The night in the shack, I left with a curse." She watched Angelica Johnson take a tiny sip from a mug with Lee's help then twist back into Alicia's embrace. Hermione had never felt so cold. "I'm still trying to figure out all the details but it seems to be connected to lycanthrope. He's... always there. It's a compulsion, one I didn't even realize I was fighting. I don't think this will change how you see me and if you still want me to leave then I'll go. The compulsion goes both ways and I could end up being a big X on the map right to us. But he found you at safehouses I've never been to and he'll find you here too."

She cut herself off, she was babbling and despite her promise not to give excuses they still left her lips. Instead she shortened her words to a simple plea.

"All I ask is that you let me help the worst of the injured."

Waiting for his response felt like her skin was being grated off by a dull butter knife.

“Compulsion?” he echoed. His brows were knit together and there was concern in his eyes. She wanted to collapse next to him, to tell him every part of the last two months that had haunted her. The headaches, the confusion, the raw power she could tap into. But they were still taking baby steps, and she didn’t want to burden anyone else with her pain.

“The whole world turns into a grey blur and the only thing that fixes it is—” She couldn’t finish it, not while his eyes were on her. Guilt weighed her down her stomach as heavy as a stone.

“Him?” Harry finished for her. She nodded, twisting her lips to hide the frown that pulled at her mouth. She watched Harry’s fingers slide through Ginny’s red hair for a few moments. “No offense Granger, but that doesn’t sound like mysterious dark magic.”

Her heart dropped. He didn’t believe her.

“I found a journal, a couple centuries old, about a couple this happened to before. The werewolf ate his lover.”

“So you are a couple? Lovers even?”

“I’m trying to explain myself.”

“You’ve made yourself completely plain. If you want to be with him so badly, go ahead.”

A piece of her heart had been chiseled off. She knew it would be a lot to explain but she thought eventually he’d understand. He always did before.

Hermione looked at the floor, blinking to disperse the moisture settling in the corner of her eyes.

“If I find some skele-grow or something for their pain will you have a problem with me coming back?” she asked.

She met his green eyes and found them hard and unyielding.

“I think it’d be better if you left well enough alone.”

Hermione left without a word to anyone. She had no belongings to gather, no respects to be paid. She simply stood up and left before someone could see the heartbreak written across her face.

She crossed the clearing and was in the cover of the trees when the tears finally came. Her feet kept moving, intent on keeping her promise and putting as much distance between her and the cabin as possible. She didn’t trust herself with her wand, not right now. In this state she was bound to splinch herself.

He’d been there when she couldn’t tell reality from a dream. Had sat by her bedside and held her hand, and now he was turning her away. And the worst part was she couldn’t muster any anger at him for it because he was right.

She walked until her knees gave out. She caught herself on her hands and knees in a mud puddle. Cold, alone and choking on a sob.

It was over and it was her fault. If they still had 12 Grimmauld Place they wouldn't be flushed from their safe houses and stuck in the woods. If she had been awake and present she could have healed people, if she had stayed she could have fought.

And the worst part was that if given the chance to do it again she couldn't say she'd choose differently. Knowing everything she did now Hermione didn't know if she was strong enough to fight the magic that screamed in her blood. That no matter what she was destined to die like Edwin Smith did, scared and alone, killed by the thing he loved the most.

She ran her hands over her face, trying to wipe away the tears. Her fingers grazed the scabbed over mess on the side of her face and winced. Her numbing spell had worn off and the pain was back, deep in the skin and crawling into her bones. She grabbed her wand, trying to concentrate on casting the spell but failed. Everytime she went to cast it gave a small spark but fizzled out. She threw the wand down and collapsed into the mud.

Before this moment she had felt lost, like she had no place left, but that wasn't true. She had run to Malfoy, and then to muggle territory, and then when that was unsafe she went back to her friends. Even when she thought there was nothing there was still a safe haven. Now she was truly lost. Harry would tell everyone what she had done and there would be no corner of magical England she'd be welcome in.

She thought of her parents and of the childless life she had given them. Of the love she had given up for the greater good only to lose both.

She curled up against the cold and cried. Every tear she had been holding back was released until there was nothing. Until she was coughing and dry heaving over the ground trying to release the emotion stuck in her chest but unable to. It was cemented in place and nothing she could do would loosen it. She stayed there until the sun hovered close to the horizon, warning her to find shelter.

Hermione stood, not bothering to scourge the filth from her clothes, and held her wand. She tried to think of a place to apparate but nothing came to mind. Her library was overrun, as was Grimmauld Place. There was only one place she could think of that had not taken a side in the war and was far from anyone she might hurt.

The world twisted and spit her out on the doorstep of a wooden shack stuck in the middle of the Forest of Dean. She could feel the wards placed into the wood, basic spells to keep magical creatures out. A haven for those stuck in the forest after dark.

As the sun set she stepped over the threshold into the warm light of enchanted candles. The three little wax pieces hovered near the rafters, never melting but always burning. It was empty, just walls and a floor with a single window set in the wall.

She spilled onto the floor, exhausted and completely empty.

Remus' voice echoed in her mind "*It's over.*" He'd repeated it while they carried him to a bed until the words devolved into wheezes and coughs. Cornered and weakened, there was nothing left for the Order. Would they all wait in the cabin for black robes to show up? Surely not. Ginny and Harry could run for a few more days, their injuries weren't that bad. Ron maybe, but not Remus. Lupin would be lucky to survive the full moon if he got to it.

A full moon was what caused all of this. This shack and that damned moon.

Hermione tried to sleep but it wouldn't come. Her own mind had cursed her to lay awake and think of all her transgressions.

She flipped over and watched the candles float overhead.

Even now he was at the edge of her thoughts, pulling at and prickling her mind. If he was going to command so much of her mind then he should be willing to face her. Yet for weeks there had been nothing.

Hermione focused on the tugging sensation Draco left on her mind, touching the magic and following it.

She reached for him, like he had done to her in the wolf pack's attic room. If he could touch her why could she not do the same? Just like Edwin Smith she was compelled to stare through the window down at the street where the predator and protector paced outside. She'd risk the danger if it meant she'd get an answer.

She closed her eyes and let shared sensations wash over her. The smell of books in the library. Running across the courtyard, climbing the ever-changing staircases. Sitting through charms class, rolling her quill through her fingers. The feeling of new robes against her skin. The wonder of a new magical candy on her tongue. The sensation of arms around her. The warmth of a crackling fire. The gentle beating of rain against a windowpane. The sharp smell of a storm before it rolls in.

Hermione stretched out over space, using the bond as a guiding line. Threading her magic through the extra well of power. Awake and conscious, she reached out until she hit something. It was solid, like colliding with a brick wall.

"You again." It was a low hiss that sent a shiver up her spine. She tried to push through but something was blocking her from going any further. The shack shifted around her, the walls fell away until there was nothing but a void around her. Mist curled around her, looping around her wrists and coating her arms.

Voldemort stood before her again, hands held behind his back and his head cocked to the side. Her stomach flipped.

"Haven't you tired yourself out trying to reach him? Come and see him with your own two eyes," he said before taking a step forward and peering at her wounded face. "Or have you lost one?"

Hermione didn't flinch. She stared up at him and kept herself from wavering. She had reached out to Draco twice now, once unconsciously in a dream and now. Both times she met Voldemort instead. He was blocking the bond, but how?

"Where are you keeping him?"

"I don't keep him anywhere, he's with me always," Voldemort said. "A constant companion, a loyal follower."

She thought of Draco's hand in her last dream. Warm, alive but limp. Eyes seeing but not engaging. The memory of her watch blinking flashed behind her eyes. Lucius' pained expression, the decimated safe houses, Voldemort's presence in the bond.

Why hadn't she seen it before?

An unforgivable curse. The Imperius curse.

Hermione's stomach twisted. It made sense but didn't feel quite right. Draco was not any run of the mill wizard. He was a talented and skilled magic user, theoretically he should be able to defend against the Imperius easily. Unless his magic was being used by another.

Hermione had been controlling a massive amount of magic. Creating shields, apparating around London, healing her wound, fighting the Death Eater, and then healing the Order in the cabin. She'd been pulling from their shared well, and what if she didn't leave anything left for him to defend himself? Had she declawed him in an attempt to save herself? Or was Voldemort strong enough to overpower even the brightest wizards?

If Voldemort held Draco under his will then he could use his magic anyway he wanted, and when the full moon hits, he could guide him to a specific spot and unleash him on innocents. On the Order.

Every time she did something for herself she hurt someone. Harry, Draco, they all got hurt no matter what she did. She couldn't let anyone else get hurt because of her actions. The war was already bloody without all the mistakes she had made and now she had to correct them.

"You can try to resist the magic that compels you, but it will always draw you back."

His eyes were blood red and stared right through her. For a moment she wondered if he could read her very thoughts as he examined her.

The mist clawed up her arms and curled around her throat like fingers. Hermione swallowed back her fear and met the crimson haze leveled at her.

The past two months had been entirely about her. She had spent ages trying to relieve her own discomfort, to control her own destiny. No one holds their own destiny, if they did everyone would get everything they ever wanted. Hermione had nothing she desired after clutching at her own for so long. What she did have was someone else's.

"It calls to you even now."

She closed her eyes. The headache she had been nursing for months was gone, the greyness that hung over everything was nowhere to be seen. It was not the magic that called to her now, but him. The desire to see him safe. The hope of saving at least one thing in this war.

When she spoke it wasn't with the nasally voice of a girl who'd been crying, but the steady tone of a determined witch.

"Have your followers meet me."

Allies

Hermione appeared on the steps of Bethnal Green Library half after one in the morning. She didn't bother hiding her magic as the building was closed for the night and nearly every streetlight on the road had mysteriously burnt out. A cloaked figure was waiting for her on the sidewalk, his mask doing little to hide the long white hair that flowed behind it.

A gloved hand removed the silver mask as she descended the steps. She stopped on the third one from the bottom, leaving them at eye level with one another.

He twisted his wand hand and Hermione's wrists were snapped together in front of her, bound. He pulled her wand from her sleeve, pocketing it in his own robes. He wrinkled his nose.

"You're filthy."

Hermione didn't answer. The man cast a scourge spell of his own on her. The mud lifted from her clothes, the leaves fell from her hair and in a matter of a few seconds it was like she had never been in the woods. Her eyes were still swollen, her cheeks still tear stained but evidently that was deemed permissible to meet the Dark Lord.

Lucius grabbed her arm and with a sudden jerk they were twisting through London. Lucius was either not a smooth traveler or purposefully made the ride bumpy. Hermione felt as if she might splinch at any moment until they arrived at the doorstep of a townhome. Lucius landed on his feet quite gracefully and Hermione fell to her knees, but with her arm still hooked into the man's arm. With her own wrists bound together, she hung awkwardly until she was able to get her feet underneath herself. Lucius gave an impatient tsk and yanked her up from the ground. He tapped his wand against the front door, going through a ward set in the lock.

Hermione whirled around, trying to figure out what party of the city they had landed in. It wasn't a neighborhood she was familiar with and the longer she looked at the rows of houses and neatly groomed trees along the street she wondered if this was a magic area. Some part of the city that was hidden from muggle view for the rich pure blooded wizards to live in.

Lucius didn't allow her enough time to inspect it, instead he yanked her into the dark hall and slammed the door shut.

The building was cold and dim. There were lamps set in the wall but they gave off very little light. What enchantments that had been set into the walls to keep the occupants warm felt old and clearly needed to be retouched. That or this was how the Dark Lord enjoyed living and everyone else simply had to deal with it.

They stood in a narrow hallway. On her right was a doorway that led to a neglected kitchen and empty dining room. On her left was a wall decorated in portraits. Most of the occupants were gone leaving their frames empty, but one remained. An older woman with white blonde hair pulled into a twist at the back of her head. She was wearing a high neck dress with a

broach at the base of her throat. Her face was all angles, with high cheekbones and a long narrow nose. Her light eyes stared at Hermione curiously.

“This is your house?” she asked Lucius. He caught her looking at the portrait and yanked her forward down the hall and beyond the curious portrait. As they passed he gave the woman a withering stare.

They passed a staircase that led upstairs, and two narrow doors before twisting into the threshold of a crowded sitting room. A set of couches and chairs filled the room, a fireplace set into the wall held no fire and the chill of the season was apparent in it. Lucius shoved her towards a loveseat and Hermione fell into it. The cushions were stiff and she struggled with her bound wrists to find a way to sit comfortably.

“Where is he?” Hermione asked.

“The Dark Lord has more important things to do than deal with you,” Lucius said sharply.

“I meant Draco.”

He paused.

“He’s working.”

“He’s cursed.”

Lucius’ gaze met hers, his eyes hard. “I’m aware.”

“And are you also aware of the long term effects of the Imperius spell on—”

“Silence.”

Hermione stopped. Lucius turned his back to her. Maybe she was putting too much weight on the single glance she saw at the library days ago. Perhaps Lucius was not the caring father she thought he might be. That deep down he truly didn’t care about Draco’s well being or what Voldemort did to him.

One thing kept bothering her, though. Voldemort didn’t have a history of using controlling curses on his followers, that’s why he gathered followers. The Dark Mark was enough to keep them in line, that and their own desire to follow him. Why, out of the blue, curse a follower to have him under complete control? If he doubted Draco’s loyalty, why not just kill him?

Hermione watched Lucius. His shoulders were tense and he stood by the mantelpiece, ripping his gloves off and shoving them in his pocket. There was a frame above the fireplace that had been empty when they entered, now it was occupied by the woman from the hall. This frame was bigger and Hermione could see the details of the painting more clearly. The pattern of her lace collar, the dusting of blush across the woman’s cheeks. She was beautiful, and so clearly a Malfoy. The woman stared at Lucius beside her but didn’t say a word.

Lucius slipped a hand through his hair before he caught the painting staring at him.

“Leave me,” he snapped at the painting. The woman didn’t budge, but continued to look at him. Lucius gave a low noise of frustration before grabbing a tablecloth off a small side table and throwing it over the ornate frame. His guilt was as apparent as if he had stated it out loud.

“You did it,” Hermione said quietly. “You put your own son under that curse.”

Lucius glared at her before letting out a low whisper.

“It was only supposed to be for an hour just until he returned to his senses.”

“Senses?”

“Don’t play stupid with me, Granger,” Lucius hissed. “Whatever you cursed him with was going to get him killed.”

“I haven’t done anything.”

“You’ve ruined *everything*,” he said.

“I’m not the one who used an unforgivable curse on him!”

“But you’re the reason why I had to,” he said, leaning over the couch and getting into her face. “You convinced him he was dangerous. You and Narcissa and that journal. I couldn’t have him distracted, he needed to focus on the war. It was only supposed to be for a short time. Just long enough for him to forget about you and that fable Narcissa told him.”

Her stomach twisted. He’d been following her advice, had found Edwin and Thomas’ story and had been punished for it.

“Then why is he still under?” Hermione asked, her voice soft. Lucius studied her face, curious about her concern.

“Because the Dark Lord found him more useful as a puppet than a person,” Lucius said. “But with you here, his original plan can fall into place and he’ll free Draco.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

Lucius’ jaw twitched but he said nothing. He stood up, fixing the collar of his coat and crossed to the doorway to peer down the hallway. He did not have an alternative plan, this was his one chance at freeing Draco. It was clear to her now why he’d wanted her at the library so badly, he’d trapped his only child on a path to madness.

Hermione glanced at her watch. It was barely two in the morning and while she felt exhausted there was no way her mind was going to allow her to rest. She was bound, wandless and surrounded by too many threats to think of closing her eyes.

Lucius tapped his wand against his thigh, his usual cane holder discarded. She doubted it helped much when there was so much dueling to be done, but he looked odd without it. He didn’t hold as much gravitas as he did when she was a child. A looming man with long white hair that looked magical. Most wizards blended in with muggles but Lucius could never.

Maybe that was why he was so frightened of losing his status of pure blood: he wanted to keep feeling special. He didn't seem excited at the prospect of the war's end despite what it would mean for him.

She didn't know the man well, but she knew that deep down he cared for Draco. His guilt for hurting him was as visible as his trademark white hair.

"It's okay, you know," she said quietly, testing out the waters. She didn't believe putting anybody under such a curse was appropriate, no matter the case, but she needed someone on her side. Lucius had a common goal and so far he was her best bet. "Doing what's best for your child."

Lucius glanced at her over his shoulder.

"What would you know about parenthood?"

"Nothing, but I understand children don't always know what's best for them," she said. "And it's important to admit when you've made a mistake."

"Don't speak to me of mistakes, girl."

"I can help with yours," she said. He waited a moment before turning around, his nervous fingers finally still at his side. "My magic is still connected to Draco's despite his state. If he isn't released from the spell I think I can pull him out."

"You think?"

She winced. She should have kept her words strong.

"I think it's highly likely."

"That's only if he doesn't keep his word."

"Is the Dark Lord known for keeping promises?"

"Not to blood traitors," he snapped.

Hermione grit her molars together. She was tired of stubborn men.

"Narcissa is a very kind woman. She told me my blood wouldn't matter. That the magic I lend Draco is enough of a gift," Hermione said.

"Do not speak as if you know my wife."

"I know how much she cares for Draco. And I know that there is no future in which she ever forgives you for letting his mind degrade under a curse."

He stared at her before sucking at his teeth and turning back towards the hall.

"This will mean nothing if he frees him, which he will."

“Speaking it aloud doesn’t make it true.”

Lucius whirled around, crossed the room and bent over her, his nose inches from her face.

“Watch your tongue, mudblood.”

Hermione kept her head high. It was becoming clear that this man was too broken to be a threat to her. Maybe before the war, when he was in his prime and she was still learning the unsaid rules. Not now, not with the power she held behind her. Not with the sorrow in his eyes.

A boom shook the house, sending the chandelier trembling. Lucius swept out of the room to the front door.

Alone, Hermione pushed down her fear. She had to think now. A clear mind would be her best ally, emotion would only clutter it.

She sat for a few long quiet minutes, listening to distant muffled voices. Then the tap of shoes against the hall floors grew louder and they were there.

Voldemort, in the flesh. His dark robe reached the ground, his snake Nagini slithering around his feet. The air in the room grew cold and she found it hard to hold onto her composure. She wasn’t as scared as the time they met in Malfoy Manor. She knew he was coming this time, and he’d already poked around her mind. She knew what to expect.

Voldemort entered the room with Lucius behind him. Another figure stepped in from the hall.

It was Draco. He looked so unlike himself, his body held in a formal attention that he never did naturally. His eyes were so light it was hard to tell there was a grey cloud over them, but Hermione knew.

“Thank you Lucius,” Voldemort said, tossing the man a weak compliment. “Prepare yourself for tonight.”

Lucius hesitated.

“Leave us,” Voldemort hissed. The man nodded and backed out of the room, clearly wanting to stay. He caught her eye before disappearing into the hall.

Without Lucius, Hermione found it hard not to focus on Draco. Looking at Voldemort felt wrong. It twisted her organs and made her throat itch with nausea.

“It’s a hard compulsion to resist I’m told,” Voldemort said, settling into a chair. Nagini wrapped around one of the legs, crawling up to wrap around the back, her face nuzzling against her master’s neck.

A cold sweat broke out over Hermione’s forehead.

“Extremely.”

“I’ve always thought of werewolves as helpful friends, but a bit unpredictable. It is a comfort to know I have one now that can be directed to an exact spot. If only they all came that way.”

Hermione stayed still, keeping her eyes on the wallpaper just above Voldemort’s head rather than meet his scarlet gaze.

“I know where you’ve been.” His breathy voice slithered around the room. “Tell me, are they scared? Are they in tears knowing what is to become of them?”

Her eyes flickered down to his and were stuck in the crimson mire of his gaze. Her breath stopped and she was helpless under his stare.

He made an amused noise before his eyes moved from hers, roaming around her face instead. She gasped for air, trying to calm herself after that moment of frozen horror.

“Disappointing. I thought you were stronger than that,” he said. Hermione held her tongue as the man draped Nagini over his shoulders like a shawl. “You won’t have much use after tonight anyway. Lucius?”

The man appeared back in the doorway, his features carefully neutral.

“Yes, my lord?”

“Take her out of my way,” Voldemort said, punctuating his words with a wave of his hand. Lucius was at her side, dragging her to her feet and yanking her towards the hallway. He hesitated, his fingers digging into Hermione’s skin. Voldemort noticed the man lingering and turned his red gaze on Lucius. “Lost, Lucius?”

“No, sir. I was awaiting the next step in your great plan.”

“Does that step concern you?”

“My son, Draco. I hoped to speak to him.”

Voldemort turned his gaze from Lucius to the quiet spectre of a person in the room. It was Draco’s body but Hermione couldn’t say he was truly there. He was as present as the curtains or the chair collecting dust in the corner. An object, yes, but not alive. His eyes didn’t move despite his name being announced. No twitch of his face or jerk of his hand, only the slow subtle rise and fall of his breathing signified he was alive at all.

“I’ve changed my mind. There is much to be done before the full moon rises.”

Lucius’ breath hitched.

“Yes, my lord,” he said through gritted teeth. He bowed, a stiff awkward movement, before slowly turning to the hallway as if expecting Voldemort to announce he had a change of heart. He did not and they silently moved down the corridor. Lucius pulled her up the narrow staircase past two floors before settling in a large finished attic room. It was nicer than the one at Grimmauld Place, and had clearly been lived in at some point. The wallpaper was a creamy yellow color with delicate roses painted in rows across it. The trim was white as was

the wood of the floor, covered with a soft grey rug. It had a large iron bed with bedding that matched the wallpaper, and a fireplace left empty like the one downstairs.

Lucius closed the door behind them. Immediately he drew his wand, the end pointed right at her. Hermione yelped, her hands instinctively raising to cover her face. A spell caught her wrists and the bonds that had been holding her disintegrated.

No hex, no curse, a simple freeing spell. Hermione stared at her own unmarred flesh before looking to Lucius.

He pulled out the wand he had taken from her and paused, his light eyes on the wood.

“Have you always welded a hawthorn wand, Miss Granger?” he asked, inspecting the weapon.

“No. It’s a new development.”

“I can’t lose him.” Lucius gave the wand a few more lingering glances before twisting it around and offering her the hilt. Hermione took it, half expecting him to snatch it away and cackle. But he didn’t. Lucius Malfoy wasn’t the boogeyman, he was an imperfect man. A father who had made many mistakes but now was trying to right at least one wrong. Hermione respected him for it, she too was trying to clean up her numerous messes. “Do what you must.”

Waxing Moon

It is easier to move than to sit perfectly still, to use energy than to give it away. The same applies to magic. Hermione sat on the edge of the bed in the attic focusing on the magic she was pulling from Draco. If she could identify it she could give it back, theoretically. However, this was proving harder than she first thought.

There was magic all over. With a flick of her wand she could see the different strands flowing through her. Her own magic subconsciously easing the pain in her face, but it was interwoven with a different thread: Draco's magic. He was everywhere on her: keeping her headaches at bay, easing the pain in her joints from the cold. The tiniest little aches caused his magic to move in and to heal. It was normal for a magic user to subconsciously use a small part of their power, but it was something else to be doing it with another's magic.

As she was focusing on the different woven threads and trying to untangle them from one another they suddenly vanished. For a few seconds she was alone with only her own magic and then Draco's returned, soothing the pain in her head.

It happened so fast she had no time to prepare for it, but she also barely noticed its absence. If she had not been looking at the tendrils of magic it would have gone by unseen. How many times had that happened? What was Draco suddenly pulling away for?

"Did they leave?" she asked aloud.

"Yes," Lucius answered. He stood beside the small circular window in the attic, staring down at the street below them.

"Not to—"

"Your friends? No." He kept his eyes on the street, his hands clasped behind his back. For the first time since she'd seen him on the steps of Bethnal Green he looked almost calm.

"He's using Draco's magic for something, I don't know what," Hermione said.

"There was a group of witches in Ireland. Not the Order but still in opposition."

Hermione tried to ignore the implications of Lucius' words but it was difficult. Voldemort was puppeting Draco everywhere, saving his own strength for tonight.

"It's cloudy today," Lucius said. The sky was crowded with thick clouds blocking out the sun and threatening to spill rain over what would most likely be the last clash of the war. "There may be no moon."

"There's only been one recorded instance of a sky so clouded over it kept werewolves from turning and it was centuries ago after a volcanic explosion," Hermione said.

"Where is the nearest volcano?"

“Italy.”

“Vesuvius?” Lucius asked. Hermione nodded. He turned back to look at the window. “I took Narcissa there the summer before Draco was born.”

“You can take her there again,” Hermione said, her eyes on the threads of magic and not the lie that so easily fell from her tongue. She didn’t know why she said it. It was the kind of thing mothers said to their children to calm foolish fears, not actual comfort. She didn’t need to soothe Lucius’ feelings and yet she did anyway.

“Are you speaking of a world where he rules, or one where I am miraculously not locked away in Azkaban for the rest of my life?”

Hermione paused her work to look at him. For a man who was so insistent on appearances he had let his degrade. His hair was greasy and splitting at the ends, his lips chapped.

“You’re helping me right now,” Hermione said.

“Are you saying you’ll speak at my trial?”

“If you speak at mine.”

“There will be no trials if he wins.”

Hermione spent the better part of the morning watching the different strands of magic working within her. Occasionally Draco’s would disappear only to reappear a few moments later. She tried to isolate how she felt when it happened. At first there was no variance at all but as the hours rolled by and they happened more often the little differences began to reveal themselves.

Pressure behind her right eye. A coldness that stretched through her bones. The sensation of forgetting something.

And then his magic was back and they all dissolved.

A few times, as his magic vanished she tried to offer her own as well. If they were connected he should be able to call on hers as well, but it never worked. Voldemort was in control and while he could block the communication aspect of the bond, he could not control the power aspect of it.

If Voldemort couldn’t control Hermione’s power and Draco took his own magic from her when he was casting under the curse, then why couldn’t he also use it to resist the curse in the first place?

Lucius sat on a stool beside the door pretending to be on guard duty. He leaned back against the wall, his eyes closed and breathing slowly for the last half an hour. She thought about waking him but they’d been awake since before dawn. They’d all need their strength for tonight.

Her decision was made for her when a knock came at the door. Lucius jerked up, immediately at attention. Hermione slid her wand up her sleeve, pressing her wrists together in front of her. Lucius shot a loose binding spell at them before opening the door.

A Death Eater in his mid-thirties was at the door. He had deep frown lines and a bandage wrapped around his forehead holding a cotton pad to his right cheek. Other wounds peppered his neck down until the collar of his coat rose to conceal them.

“What do you want, Selwyn?”

“Meeting downstairs, Malfoy,” the man said with a jerk of his head. His eyes turned to fall on her.

Recognition sparked. She knew him. It was the man that had come to the library, the one she had thought she’d left for dead in the forest covered in boils. The one she’d hexed within an inch of his life.

A smile spread across his thin lips as he stepped into the room and it was not pleasant. Lucius paused for a moment.

“You won’t be much of a guard without a wand,” Lucius said.

“I’m following orders, Malfoy,” Selwyn said. He was watching his tone around Lucius but the twist of his lips betrayed his true feelings for the senior Malfoy.

“So be it.” Lucius stepped out leaving Hermione alone with Selwyn who shut the door and twisted the lock into place.

“I heard they had a little bird caged upstairs, but I didn’t think it’d be you,” he said. “Imagine my luck.”

Hermione remained perfectly still. The half-hearted spell Lucius had put on her wrists could be torn away as easily as paper, but she didn’t want Selwyn to see that. From Lucius’ kind comment she knew he was wandless, an easy mark if it came to trading blows.

He kneeled in front of her and left hardly any space between them. She could smell the wound she had cut into his face. It had not been cleaned properly and the irritated red skin beyond the bandage told her it was infected. It seemed the Death Eaters did not have a very good healer to take care of their fighting force.

His hand reached for her and she resisted the urge to pull away. Let him scare her. He was no threat to her with a wand, much less without one.

He pushed back her hair, his fingers brushing against the hard scab forming over her forehead and cheek.

“We match,” he laughed.

His hand trailed down her cheek and grabbed her chin.

“Shame you’ll be gone tonight,” he said, his eyes roaming over her lips. He yanked her chin up, forcing their eyes to meet. “Even with your face burned off you’re worth a ride.”

His other hand began to move, the destination unknown. Hermione didn’t want to find out what Selwyn had in mind. In a second her wand was in her hand and a flash of light caught Selwyn in the temple.

He stumbled backwards, his hands trying to ease the burning blooming in his skin. Hermione stood up and shook Lucius’ bonding spell from her wrists. Selwyn’s already beaten and infected face was being consumed by a blistering red burn. His lips opened to scream but Hermione shot off a jinx. It slammed his jaw closed and he could only mumble as the burn crawled over his skin.

She caught him in the shoulder with a sleeping charm. He started to fall and she cast a levitation charm to keep his body from slamming into the floorboards. She lowered him gently to the floor not for his comfort but to keep from alerting everyone downstairs.

Her hands were shaking but her mind was focused. There were hours left until evening when the full moon took over and Draco would be unreachable by anyone. She tore Selwyn’s black robes from his shoulder and stole the metal mask from his belt. The garment smelled awful but she forced it on anyway. The hem dragged the floor but the hood hid her curls as she opened the door and stepped onto the stairs.

There were more people downstairs than before. They were muttering and whispering to themselves and filled the dim house with noise. The wood creaked with each step she took down the staircase, adding to the cacophony.

At the bottom, half shielded from the hall by the walls covered in aging wallpaper, Hermione surveyed the scene. Across from the staircase the portrait that Lucius had snapped at looked at her curiously. Light eyes seemed to pierce her mask to see the young woman hiding beneath it.

Maybe this was a bad idea. If a portrait could see through her then she could head back upstairs and wait. Lucius could have an idea for later. Panic rose in her throat. There was no time for later. Each minute that ticked by was another minute wasted.

Suddenly the front door swung open. Voldemort, flanked by masked followers, stepped across the threshold. Pale grey light flooded the hall. All conversation ceased and Hermione’s heart stopped. The crowd parted, filling the narrow doorways and pressing against the walls to make a pathway for their lord.

A few pushed her back up the stairs, filling the bottom steps to make sure they were out of the way. Hermione craned her neck around the corner, trying desperately to see over the heads that blocked her way.

The front door was slammed shut, cutting off the light from outside and returning the house to the same dim as before.

“The dawn of a new world is upon us,” Voldemort announced. He wasn’t yelling and yet his voice filled every crevice of the house. “A world where magic reigns supreme.”

The Death Eaters behind him had their hoods raised and masks on, hiding who was behind them. Yet, each one gave a sign of a life. A shift of their weight, a twitch of their hand. Only one remained perfectly still. The man at Voldemort’s right shoulder never wavered and never moved. He barely seemed to breathe at all. She knew it was him.

“You will all be rewarded after tonight. After the wait is over and a new age has begun.”

Hermione closed her eyes and thought about Draco. She followed the magic that tied them together like a sailor pulling at a rope. She followed it, dragging their minds closer together until they met.

For the third time she stood in a grey misty room. It was Hogwarts and the Manor and her own childhood home she’d abandoned. It was Grimmauld Place and Honeydukes. It was a charms classroom and the Quidditch pitch. A library in the middle of London and a shack in the woods. It was grey, shifting but familiar. And he was there, alone.

Voldemort’s voice faded away as Hermione pressed through the mist and fog of the bond to meet Draco where he stood as still as a statue. His eyes were still glassy, still fogged over by the curse.

Cautiously, she took his hands. She met no resistance, his hands hanging limply in her grasp like a corpse.

Her heart twisted in her chest.

“Please.” It was a thought, spoken only in her mind but it burned her throat even so. “You can break this. I know you can.”

She could hear the mumble of the great speech being told but it felt lightyears away.

Hermione squeezed his hands in a weak attempt to wake him. Holding hands does not break curses but she had nothing else.

“Don’t worry what comes after. Free yourself.”

No answer came. His eyes stared straight ahead, unseeing.

Desperation clawed up from her stomach, tearing at her throat. She let his hands fall, instead gripping his face in her hands. Her thumb ran over the length of the scar that had been carved into his jaw. The attack that had left traces of strange magic in his blood and had bound them together.

“Stay with me,” she begged. “I need you. I...”

A tear escaped down her cheek. She had no more words. If he couldn’t be freed from the curse then he’d dissolve under it. By the time Voldemort freed his mind there’d be nothing left of the man she knew before. The hunger the bond gave him would be stronger without

his mind to hold it at bay. Either she died before he'd wake, or he'd wake to kill her. There would be no happy ending, not for them.

It was dangerous to loiter in this liminal space. Voldemort's consciousness was right at the edge of her own and he'd discover she'd been poking around again. But she couldn't bring herself to leave.

Instead she stretched up on the tips of her toes and pressed her lips to his. It was a short simple touch, just a brush of lips.

She pulled away ready to close the grey hall and return to the world around her. She gave him a final lingering glance.

His eyes, which had been covered in grey and coated in dark magic, seemed to clear. He was still, but for a moment it was as if he was truly seeing her. Her heart vaulted into her throat. She began to reach for him when everything splintered.

A screech broke through her mind and suddenly she crashed out of the bond and onto the floor of the Malfoy's town home. Selwyn's mask fell, sliding across the floorboards, exposing her face and the tear tracks left down her cheeks.

She began to sit up when a boot slammed into her shoulder, pinning her to the floor. A yelp escaped her lips as the heel of the shoe dug further into her skin, the full weight of an adult behind it.

"Playing dress up?" Bellatrix taunted over her before twisting her heel further into her shoulder. Hermione grit her teeth moving to grab her wand. A spell caught her in the hand sending the hawthorn wood flying. She watched it tumble through the air out of her reach and land at the feet of Lucius across the hall. She met his eyes for a split second before he turned away.

The reality of the situation fell over her like a bucket of cold water. Every Death Eater in the country was staring down at her. She was unarmed in the lion's den.

Bellatrix shoved her wand under Hermione's chin.

"What should we do with her?" the woman grinned.

Her heart beat as hard as a hummingbird's wings, filling her ears with a buzz that drowned out everything else.

Voldemort was about to speak when Lucius pressed in close to the man's side. He was whispering something into his ear, his hand covered his lips. His other hand held her wand.

Voldemort looked at the man and considered his words for a moment.

"An acceptable exchange, Lucius."

It was the last thing she heard before Voldemort's Imperius curse hit her, painting everything grey.

The Full Moon Rises

For the first time in a long time Hermione felt at peace. There was no head to ache, no pulse to race. There was no war for her in this grey world, only peace.

Neutral. Calming. Nothing. Like floating on a cloud without gravity to pull her down.

She did not think about much, she had no need. Everything was taken care of here. Any fear was taken away, all worries carried off on a breeze.

Pleasant. Soft. Nothing.

Yet there was an itch at the back of her mind. The world was a soft cloud but for a single thorn that just barely broke the skin.

Something was wrong, but what? Everything here was perfect. She was happy. Not as happy as she had been wrapped in warm arms, but happy enough to live this way. To not protest. To follow orders.

Her body was moving. She had not noticed it before, but she was walking somewhere. She didn't know where, and she couldn't stop her limbs from moving.

Panic flooded her stomach only for that same calming nothingness to wipe it away again. The anxious feeling was gone, but she was not completely content anymore.

She tried to hang onto her fear but it became harder to hold.

A question scraped at her mind, like a trick question on an exam. She knew the answer and yet it wouldn't come. She was supposed to know this, so why couldn't she remember? Why couldn't she move, why couldn't she think straight?

There was something in her hand, a quill? No, a wand. But Lucius had her wand. Bellatrix's heel had dug into her shoulder and then...

A wave of calm crashed into her mind. Another one followed until her mind was submerged in a vat of molasses trying to slow and sweeten her thoughts.

Life had never tasted so sweet before, and she refused to believe it now.

There was a prick at the back of her neck and suddenly a warmth flooded her whole body. It slid through her skull and down her collarbone across her ribs and through to the tips of her fingers. Then, like a rubber band pulled too far, her mind snapped back into place.

Hermione stood in the middle of a clearing surrounded by the shadowed silhouette of trees reaching up towards a cloudy evening sky. The sun was retiring but a few stubborn rays held firm, painting streaks of orange across an indigo sky. Night was close, bringing a chill that bit at her skin.

She had lost the cloak she'd taken from Selwyn, but her wand was in her hand and it was raised.

In front of her was the cabin she'd left barely a day prior. The door was shut, but there were people standing in front of it, their cheeks gaunt and eyes ringed with purple. Ginny and Harry were among the few able to limp out of the cabin to defend it, their wands raised to meet her challenge.

Her eyes went to her wand. Why did she have it pulled on her friends?

Immediately she let her hand go slack. The wand dropped to the damp grass at her feet. She put her hands up, her fingers splayed out in a gesture of surrender.

No one moved to lower their weapon, their eyes still trained on her. Hurt began to twist through her chest. Did they think so little of her, even with her only defense abandoned on the ground? She looked to Ginny, knowing that of all the people in the Order she would understand. However, Ginny's pale gaze was not directed at her at all, but something behind her.

A choked scream rang out from behind Hermione, echoing through the clearing. Slowly, she looked over her shoulder.

At the other end of the clearing, near the tree line was a row of Death Eaters in their full regalia. Metal masks caught the last few rays of sunlight as night conquered them. They had their wands out, ready to converge on the cabin and overwhelm it.

There were a few figures without masks. Voldemort's pale skin seemed to glow in the growing darkness. He had his hood down so everyone could see him. Beside him was Lucius, his long white hair exposed and his mask thrown to the ground. He was saying something, no he was begging.

Between the line and the cabin was a figure laying on the grass. It was from this shape that the scream had emitted. Bellatrix stood beside it; her wand drawn. Suddenly the figure twitched, throwing his head back and exposing his face.

"Draco." His name escaped Hermione's lips like a breath, quiet and only for her. His face twisted with pain and her heart ached.

"Stop being so insolent!" Bellatrix growled. She was trying to cast something but despite the spell connecting it wasn't taking root. She let out a scream of frustration.

Hermione took a step forward but a hand caught her wrist, yanking her back.

"No." It was Ginny, her voice commanding and stern. She pushed her body in front of Hermione's, her wand held in a dueling stance. "Run."

"But-"

"NOW!"

Hermione stumbled backwards, intent on following Ginny's order, but suddenly her feet stopped. She couldn't pull her gaze from Draco's pained expression; her ears couldn't block out his tortured screams. Was it the cursed bond in her veins or was it something else that froze her in the middle of danger?

Ginny was shoving something into her hand—her wand.

“Get her out of here,” she yelled at someone else.

A hand grabbed Hermione's elbow and began to drag her around the side of the cabin. It was Alicia Spinnet, her grip urgent but too gentle to truly hold her. Hermione pulled out of her hold only for the small girl to grab the collar of her shirt and yank her back. She fell to the dirt, the air knocked from her lungs. Hermione twisted around to see Alicia's wand on her.

Her heart was as loud as a drum in her ears as she tried to focus on his eyes. She hadn't been in control of her mind in hours and now it was sluggish to respond to the quick thoughts she wanted to enact.

“You have to leave, Hermione,” Alicia said through gritted teeth, the tip of her wand trembling.

“Wolfsbane. Lee has Wolfsbane.” Lee had told her he had one serving of the potion at the cabin, if she could get it to Draco before the clouds revealed the moon then the worst of the bloodshed could be avoided. It would be cutting it close, but it would save lives. It'd let them focus on the Death Eaters at the tree line. “If we can—”

“It's gone,” Alicia said.

“What?”

“Lee took it.”

“Where is he?”

“With Remus somewhere along the coast. Lupin's too weak, he probably won't wake after this moon. Lee went to be with him.”

Her heart sank. There had been so much time to plan before and now hopelessness threatened to drown out every thought. It was too late now, everything had fallen into place exactly how Voldemort wanted it to.

Hermione sat up, unbothered by the wand Alicia still had trained on her. She looked across the field as dusk inched in. Bellatrix was kneeling over Draco, her wand shoved against his throat. Despite the stance there was a worried expression on her face. Lucius was gone from the Death Eater's line, his light hair nowhere to be seen.

She had so much time to prepare and yet it all had fallen apart anyway. Her fingers dug into the damp ground around her, mud imbedding itself under her fingernails.

In a matter of minutes the moon would rise, Draco would turn, and the war would end. She closed her eyes and could feel his wild pulse in her throat as if it were her own. She could taste his fear and feel his pain.

Hermione stood and brushed the dirt from her clothes.

“It was nice knowing you, Spinnet,” she said with a sad smile. Alicia nodded and while her wand never wavered, she didn’t cast anything when Hermione turned her back on her and walked back towards the front line.

Ginny was yelling something at her back but Hermione ignored it. She broke into a run, crossing the field until Bellatrix stood, her wand pointed at Granger. Hermione froze.

The sky was almost completely dark, the sun just a whisper in the west.

Bellatrix had her boot pressed over Draco’s throat. There was blood spilling from his nose and he looked exhausted. The sight of him, bloody and bruised, flooded her heart with anger. Without thinking of the consequences, Hermione moved to shoot a jinx. However, Bellatrix was faster and a spell caught Hermione in the wrist sending her wand flying over the grass and rolling into the darkness.

“You’re not of any use now anyway,” Bellatrix sneered. The tip of her wand began to flicker with a green light.

Hermione’s breath stilled in her lungs, too shocked to scream or even gasp. The last few stray beams of sunlight died and a dark indigo sky took over. The moon’s light, no longer outshined by the sun, spilled over the clearing.

With nothing to defend herself, Hermione raised her arms over her face. A foolish instinct that would do nothing to stop what was coming. The green light grew, casting a ghoulis light over Bellatrix’s harsh smile.

A bloodcurdling scream rose from the ground. It was Draco, his voice strained and broken. In the moonlight he began to jerk and convulse. Bellatrix realized what was happening a second too late. She looked down only to be thrown across the clearing, the spell dying on the tip of her wand as it landed among the trees.

The Draco that rose from the ground was not the one she knew but the monster she had been dreading for a month. Its fur was a light grey in the moonlight, its muzzle covered in its own blood as Draco’s face had been.

It was impossible to find air to fill her lungs. The beasts’ silver eyes turned on her. He huffed, steam curling from his nostrils before baring his fangs. Hermione stumbled backwards.

The muscles in the beast’s body tensed up and she knew it was about to strike. Without a thought as to where she would go, she twisted around and took off running. Away from the cabin and the Order. Away from Bellatrix and the Death Eaters. She sprinted across the meadow and didn’t pause as she crashed through the treeline. Slender branches slapped across her arms and face, gnarled roots threatened to trip her, but she kept going. Like a

locomotive on a track, she barreled through the underbrush, her lungs burning and her muscles aching.

She could only run so far and then it'd be over. She wouldn't know who won in the meadow only that she had lost.

The crashing behind her spurred her forward. She could hear the beasts' panting, the snap of his jaws, and the pounding of his paws against the forest floor. She didn't dare look back.

Hermione had spent the better part of the last few months not running or dueling but curled up in a library or loitering in the corner of the medical ward. Every new breath of air brought a wave of pain to her chest and as she pushed further into the forest her knees threatened to give way at any moment.

But the longer she ran the more time Ginny and the others got. The longer she survived this pain the more she could spare them from.

She kept going until suddenly the trees broke and she stumbled into a garden. She came to a stop in the middle of the plot having realized she trampled a few rows of winter cabbages. She looked up to see a small cottage, warm light spilling from the window. Beyond it were other little houses. She'd led him to an entire town. Her heart dropped.

She turned around to see the large smoke colored beast tear through the branches and enter the garden. It paused, its silver eyes only on her. Werewolves might be mindless but not ones affected by a bond. She stared into the beast's eyes—Draco's eyes—and saw the deep seated hunger behind them. Drool dripped from his jowls. Fear slithered down Hermione's spine.

Then, she twisted, running across the garden's neat rows parallel to the forest. She ran as fast as her tired legs could carry her, veering off into the trees and away from the town. It worked, she could hear him pursuing her, but for how long?

She kept moving, but her body ached. She wasn't as fast as before, her feet stumbled with each new sluggish step. Hermione struggled onward until her legs could hold her no longer. It started with a missed step and then she was on her hands and knees in the dark, the growing sounds of her pursuer closing in.

His footsteps slowed down as he spotted her, fallen and vulnerable.

Her arms collapsed and she fell face first into the undergrowth. Fear clutched her heart and she could do nothing but close her eyes and brace herself. There were no tears in her eyes, but there were plenty of regrets in her mind. Words stuck on her tongue.

The beast pressed himself close to the ground, sniffing the ground around her before leaning over her. She could feel the heat rolling off his skin and his hot breath ruffling her hair. She peeked through her lashes to see a paw planted against the ground beside her head as the werewolf pressed closer to her. Fur rubbed against her arms, his nose pressed into her hair.

His nudging became more insistent and suddenly a paw grabbed her by the shoulder and she was flipped over onto her back, staring up at grey fur and sharp fangs.

The last time she'd truly spoken to Draco had been in the library. The last little dream where she'd pulled away from for her own safety. Since then all she had thought of was him. Now she would die without saying her goodbyes.

She thought of the lycanthropy books she'd read over the past few months. He may not be in control right now but he'd remember it all later. He'd live with the memory of killing her, of the taste of her flesh. She didn't want him to live that way. It may be a cowardly thought, but she didn't want to die either.

She wished she could see him, the real Draco, one last time.

Without thinking, she raised a tired hand to the side of the beast's face. He tensed as she slipped her fingers through his fur.

"I missed you," she whispered. Tears pricked her eyes but she was too tired to fight them. She should have fought Bellatrix the second she had come to. She should have spoken to him before the curse had taken him. Then at least she wouldn't feel so empty and disappointed.

She trailed her fingers through grey fur. In the moonlight it almost looked silver.

"I love you," she said, her voice breaking on the last word. She opened her mouth to say more but she couldn't. Her throat was dry, her mind exhausted. She squeezed her eyes shut, let her hand fall to her side, and waited for the inevitable.

The peak of each tooth pressed against her flesh as he stretched his jaws around the junction of her neck and shoulder. With one bite it would all be over. Instead of a bite, his warm tongue licked from her collarbone up to the pinnacle of her shoulder. His tongue retraced the path over and over again. Then his teeth sank into her skin. She heard a woman's scream and realized it was coming from her.

His jaw relaxed and pulled away but the stinging in her skin remained. He dragged his tongue over the wounds. The beast nudged her with his nose as if to coax her up from the ground.

She opened her eyes and saw her blood on the end of the sickening curve of the beast's fangs. He nudged her again and she finally moved to sit up. His tongue returned to her collarbone, lapping at her blood.

Her head felt dizzy. She wished she'd grabbed her wand but Bellatrix had sent it flying into the darkness. She could clean the wound and prevent...

Her eyes went to Draco, unrecognizable under the full moon. He was still crouched over her, his tongue on her skin, his claws pulling at her collar and ripping it. His head bumped into hers nearly knocking her over again. He was nuzzling her.

Her skin tingled and a hunger she had never felt before clawed up her throat. Her limbs began to tremble until her bones began to ache. She grit her teeth, blinking back tears as aches seemed to consume her from the inside out. As if the very marrow of her skeleton was trying to reach out through her skin and touch the moonbeams scattered across the first floor.

There was fur against her, hot breath on her face and a tongue lapping at her cheek. It was comforting but it didn't stop the pain rippling through her body. Her fingers curled into his fur as a scream ripped itself from her throat.

She thought she'd die. Edwin Smith had died and that had been the only proof she had that the bond existed.

Yet as her heart began to beat faster and faster and her vision was overcome with blinding white light, she realized there was a fate other than death awaiting her at the end of a werewolf's fangs. She should be sobbing with grief as her blood became something new and cursed, but all she could think about was how she may see Draco again and that gave her hope.

Repaired

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Of all things it was the chirping of birds that finally broke through her slumber.

How odd she thought. Had she left a window open? Hermione shifted and found every part of her body ached and the stick poking into her back wasn't helping. She groaned. It felt like the worst hangover she'd ever had. The left side of her face that had caught the Death Eater's curse back at Bethnal Green ached worse than ever before, seeping into her cheekbone and scraping at her mind.

She carefully opened one eye and winced at the bright sunlight. She could see the bird that had woken her hopping on a branch above her, shaking out its feathers and bobbing its head from side to side.

The forest canopy hung over her, leafless from the cold. Snowflakes fluttered down from the clouds settling on her cheeks.

She forced herself to sit up and nearly passed out from the pain. There was a sharp pain creeping up her rib cage that took her breath away. She pressed a hand to it and struggled to her feet.

There was blood all down the front of her clothes. She pressed a hand to her mouth and found it sticky with dried crimson stuff as well.

Memories slid back into her tired mind.

She was alive. That alone was a big enough surprise.

She looked around the forest but found herself alone with only the trees and the songbird above her.

What was the world like now? What had happened in the clearing? Had she helped? Or was the blood on her skin a friend's?

Her stomach turned. If she had hurt anyone, she wouldn't be able to forgive herself. She had caused enough problems for them and to be the final blow would simply be too much for her bruised heart to take.

She crouched down close to the ground unable to catch her breath. The hypotheticals cluttered her mind and her inability to remember the night clearly made her even more frustrated. There were flashes of things, sensations that felt so real they could be happening to her right then and she wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

Cold air. Wind against her face. Her teeth sinking into someone's jugular and warm blood filling her mouth.

Bile rose in her throat and she puked onto the forest floor in front of her. Her stomach heaved until there was nothing left inside and then heaved a couple more times for good measure. Her whole body shook from exhaustion as the inevitable dread of discovery sunk deep into her gut.

She needed to move. She needed to find who was left and know the truth but after weeks of hiding she didn't know if she was strong enough. She clawed into the earth, gathering leaves and wet dirt into a fist. She was alive, but what if she wished she was dead?

The bird chirped overhead and took wing, flying through the branches before lifting up over the tree tops and soaring away. If only it was that easy.

A limb cracked as if stepped on. Hermione jerked her head up, scanning the forest. She heard the rustling of someone walking and a voice calling, but it was too far away to hear properly. Hermione, unsure of who it might be, reached for her wand only to find herself empty handed. She searched the ground until she found a rock, large enough to hurt but small enough to fit in her hand. The person was coming from the north. Hermione slipped behind a tree clutching the rock to her chest.

"Hermione?" the voice called. They were looking for her. Her throat tightened. The footsteps grew closer. Their voice was high and feminine. "Hermione?"

Recognition struck her. She knew that voice. Hermione dropped her rock and peeked around the trunk. Alicia Spinnet stood nearby, scanning the trees. Her brow was creased in worry. Her right cheek was scraped, as if she'd fallen to the ground. Her hair, while brushed and braided, looked unwashed, and her clothes carried the soot and dirt of battle. Her hands were clean while her sleeve cuffs were stained red. But she was alive.

"Alicia?"

The young woman turned and her face lit up. A relieved smile spread across her lips and she closed the distance between them, pulling Hermione into a hug despite the blood and grime clinging to the witch's clothes.

"Thank the stars," she murmured, clutching Hermione tight. Hermione wasn't expecting that kind of response. She stood stiffly in the embrace before lifting her own arms around Alicia.

"Did we..." she couldn't finish, too many thoughts were stuck in her throat.

"It's over," Alicia said, as if it was obvious. "He's gone. Voldemort's gone."

Hermione was thankful Alicia still had her arms around her or she would have collapsed to the ground. She held Alicia tighter as the tears began to flow.

The war was over. Despite everything, they had won. The weight she'd been carrying for the past few years dissolved in an instant.

"Come on, let's get you back with the others. I'm sure you're exhausted," Alicia said, sliding an arm under Hermione's shoulders and leading her back the way she had come. You could

always count on Spinnet to play the nurse, no matter the circumstances.

Hermione was able to walk without her friend's help as they moved further into the forest towards the cabin and the clearing where the final showdown happened. Hermione felt a bit ashamed that she hadn't played a part in the victory, nor that she could remember what happened. She'd happily celebrate their success but could not claim any credit for it.

The closer they got to the clearing it was clear the battle had been large. Trees bore large holes straight through them where spells had impaled them. A few had even been felled. The two women helped each other over one particularly large fallen tree, its end burned to ashes from a powerful spell.

As they grew closer the chatter of voices grew until the clearing burst out in front of them.

A fire had been built outside of the cabin sending a lazy pillar of smoke into the sky. It'd been a long time since they'd been able to make something like a campfire without charming the hell out of it. There was no reason to hide anymore and it brought a smile to her lips.

A few people were huddled around the fire, drinking from mugs, their shoulders laden with blankets (certainly Alicia's work). Many people were bandaged or sported bruises or cuts on their faces but it didn't seem to bother them any.

"Hermione!" Ginny's voice cut through the chatter. The girl jumped down the stairs and caught Hermione into a hug. This time Hermione was quicker to respond, returning the embrace. "I was worried."

"I'm glad you're okay," Hermione said. She was truly thankful to see her friend had made it through.

As more faces appeared at the doorway and a blanket was placed over Hermione's shoulders, she began looking for one face in particular. She didn't know if he'd be allowed here or if he had even made it through the long night but she still searched for it. She felt part of her was missing without him, but she kept that thought to herself as Ginny and Alicia led her up the stairs into the cabin.

The cabin was warm and full of people. Some were resting from their wounds on the cots, others slept simply from exhaustion.

"Sit here, Granger," Alicia said, kicking a stool out for her. "You look a right mess."

Hermione followed her instructions. She pulled her blanket closer around her shoulders and despite Alicia's grip on her chin as she scoured her skin and assessed her cuts, Hermione's gaze kept wandering around the room.

"I wish I could do more for this," Alicia said, her fingers assessing the cursed skin on Hermione's left cheekbone. "But we don't have anything for it now. Later when the cities and stores are back open, when Hogwarts is secured, we can heal it in a flash."

"I'm used to it," Hermione said absentmindedly.

She didn't find the face she was looking for but a lot of friendly ones came up to her. Katie Bell and Ron, Angelica Johnson who mostly came to talk to Alicia. They offered kind smiles and words that Hermione tried to reciprocate but she was an outsider in this warm haven and she felt she wasn't entitled to their joy. Even Harry approached her stool as Alicia was finishing up cleaning the bite mark on Hermione's shoulder.

He leaned against the wall; his arms crossed. Quiet. He looked exhausted but probably wouldn't admit it. Hermione had a burning question on her tongue, one that Harry would no doubt despise so she asked the second one on her mind.

"Is Lee back?"

"No, but I've gotten word from him."

"Is Remus?"

"He's fine. Weak, of course. Too weak to travel, but with the war over they're sure he'll make a full recovery. Thank Merlin Lee was there to take care of him."

Hermione leaned back against the wall and relaxed for the first-time in a while. She had been worried about her wolfpack, and the last time she saw Remus he had not looked good. He had been such an important person to her these last few months and while they disagreed on many things, she was so incredibly thankful to hear he was okay. Maybe once she found her wand she'd apparate to them and stay with Lee and Remus. She was changed now, and there wasn't a lot keeping her here. In fact, there was a lot pushing her away from it.

Alicia finished up her work and moved on to her other patients leaving the two alone.

Hermione toyed with the end of her sleeve. Harry's last words to her were still heavy in her mind and despite his calm tone, she knew he couldn't possibly be happy to have her here.

"Thank you for letting me in," Hermione said. "I know I'm—"

"So, you really don't remember a thing?"

"What?"

"That's what Lee told me. That you don't remember what happens during full moons until later, and then most of the time not at all."

Hermione looked up at him dumbfounded. What an odd question to ask. Was he testing to see if she remembered any pain she had caused? She thought of the blood rushing between her teeth and soaking her tongue, of the pinch of iron and the tough texture of neck muscle.

"I don't remember anything," she said as fear began to pull at her heart. "Why?"

"Nothing," Harry said. A small smile touched his lips and it looked odd against the background of his war worn face. He leaned in close to whisper just to her. "He's at the back of the room."

Her heart leapt into her throat. She looked at him, half expecting it to be a trick but Harry only nodded.

Hermione launched off her stool and walked between the rows of beds. She felt like she was floating as she moved through the happy but weary witches and wizards until she reached a corner that was curtained off at the back of the cabin. Hermione hesitated.

What if Harry was talking about someone else? What if the curtain was up because he was a prisoner? Or worse, what if it was just a cold body on the other side.

A million horrible thoughts threatened to take over her mind when Katie Bell stepped out from behind the curtain and saw her waiting. The witch set down a basin on a nearby trunk and wiped her hands on a towel on her belt. When she spoke her voice was low.

“He’s been in and out. I’ll warn you now, they took a chunk out of him but he’ll live,” Katie said.

Hermione could hardly breathe, her eyes focused on the cream-colored fabric hanging between her and Draco.

“Also, I wanted to thank you,” Katie said, laying a hand on Hermione’s forearm.

“For what?” Hermione asked, truly surprised. She had far more thanks to give than to collect from the people around her.

Katie’s brow creased and then a realization dawned on her. She patted Hermione’s arm.

“I’ll tell you later.”

Katie went to help Alicia and Hermione was left alone.

She took in a deep breath and through the smell of the campfire and antiseptic potions she caught his scent. Parchment. Teakwood. The smell of earth right before a thunderstorm. She pressed a hand to the fabric, savoring the moment before stepping inside.

It was a small closed off corner. A candle was set on a crate beside his bed and it cast a warm glow across his face. The blanket covered him from the chest down but what was uncovered was badly injured. A burn covered the side of his neck, crawling up his face to where his right eye was covered in a bandage. There were cuts on his shoulders, bruises across his collarbone and his hands were a mess of purple and red.

Hermione knelt beside his bed, afraid to make a noise and wake him. Instead, she simply looked at his face, taking him in. It’d been so long since they’d been together. She slipped her hand into his, mindful of his injuries, and rubbed her thumb across the back of his hand.

There was nothing to fear anymore and his presence only brought her comfort.

Draco stirred and opened the eye that was left uncovered. He stared at her, his hand moving from hers to touch the side of her face. His fingers trailed across her cheek as if memorizing it.

“You’re real,” he whispered.

Hermione could hold back her emotion no longer. She leaned across his bed and wrapped him in her arms. He surprised her by pulling her into the bed with him, his arms a vice around her. His mouth found hers, his kisses sweet and soft.

She settled into the bed curled up beside him, her head resting on his chest as Draco ran his fingers through her hair.

“I can feel it,” she whispered, her hand running over his chest. “That thread between us.”

“It’s different now,” he said.

“Yes. Better.”

She pressed her palm down over his chest and felt the beat of his heart.

“What do you feel?”

“Content,” he said.

She smiled.

“I do too.”

He pushed her curls back from her face and pulled her chin up to his, planting a kiss on her lips.

“They’ve told me we were quite a force.”

“Oh?”

“I don’t remember a thing, do you?” he asked. Hermione shook her head. “They told me we came back to the battle.”

Hermione’s stomach tightened and she immediately started going through the catalogue of faces she’d seen since walking in. Who was missing, who had they hurt?

“They told me you ripped out his throat,” Draco said.

“*His?*” Hermione questioned.

Draco shifted and extended his left arm showing off his forearm. The tattoo that had once been as black as the night was now faded and gray.

“He’s gone,” Draco said.

Her hand went to her mouth feeling the lips and teeth that had ended one of the most powerful wizards there’s ever been. Of course, it was not her own teeth that had done it, but the beast that lingered in her blood who had taken the killing blow.

She'd been scared of what the full moon brought for so long, but it had been working with her the whole time. It was part of her, just as it was part of Draco. He had not meant to kill her, but to bring her home.

Perhaps Thomas and Edwin could have had this too.

Hermione nuzzled her face against Draco's neck breathing in his scent.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

Long term, Hermione had no idea. Perhaps they could go back to Hogwarts and finish their schooling. There was plenty of rebuilding to do, and lots of wolfsbane to brew.

"Right now? We should sleep," she said, exhaustion already pulling at her mind.

Draco ran his fingertips across her cheekbone and when he spoke it was with a soft reverence that made her heart sing.

"I hope I dream of you."

Chapter End Notes

A lot has changed since I started this fic back in 2018 but I'm so glad I pushed through and finished it. Thank you for all the kind comments you've left, I read every single one and there were times when I really needed them. Thanks for reading 💜

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