

## THE AUCTION

Bellatrix dismounted, and Hermione scrambled to the side, stumbling into the wall. Her eyes darted to the bathroom with the door that she could barricade, but it was on the other side of the bed.

She held her arm close to her chest and looked up to see Draco in the center of the room, watching his aunt. He wore his trunks and a vacant expression. His eyes didn't search for her, he didn't move toward her. He just smirked at his aunt.

"Bella, you of all people know the importance of breaking in a toy. You'll ruin my process."

Hermione swallowed, her breath coming in sharp gasps, dizzying her. The wound... There was something wrong with her.

Bellatrix slid off the bed. "It's for your own good, Draco. She's poisoned the Malfoy name enough."

He stared back at her coolly. "The Dark Lord isn't finished with her."

Bellatrix pouted and whispered something against Draco's ear. Hermione felt like she couldn't hear normally; maybe her blood was pounding too loud. Draco said something in return, and Hermione watched as Bellatrix's palm slithered across his bare chest, dragging her nails over the skin. She slipped past him and hummed a happy little tune as she danced to the door.

The room spun, and Hermione braced herself on the wall.

Bellatrix said something to him in the doorway. Some mumbled melody. But Hermione stared down at her arm, blood starting to bead.

There was a squiggle and a dash. And she wished Bellatrix had thought of something important to carve. She had to look at it forever now. Just like the other marks Bella had made.

The wall behind her zoomed forward, smacking her in the head, her back solid against it.

She looked up to tell Bellatrix to come back and finish it. It wasn't fair to her to leave her with just a squiggle. But she was shutting the door behind her, and then Draco's bare skin was all around her.

## CHAPTER 7

he'd written mail to the author. This didn't shock her too greatly; she'd found his name in more than a few of the fiction books she'd check out of the library. But this was...

She was now itching to read them again. But she couldn't take the red copies. They were too precious. She could break the spines and smudge the lacquered covers...

She stepped back, turning to the upper landing. She couldn't even see the back wall of the library, but there was a large sunny window to the right, warming the entire room. Hermione climbed the six stairs and turned around a stack to find rows and rows of books. She gasped, loud in the quiet hum.

It must have been hours that she browsed. Mippy popped back with a tray of tea, sandwiches, and biscuits. She conjured a table and placed the tray down in the middle of the stacks.

"Mistress tells Mippy to tell Miss Hermione to take as much books as Miss wants."

Mippy left. She had only pulled down two books, so she set them on the little table next to the biscuits. Hermione had been trying to limit her selections, afraid of imposing, and despite what Mippy said, she assumed "as much books as Miss wants" was not the proper thing to do. She would probably ask for a bed to be installed in this corner if she was really to take as many as she wanted.

She plucked a strawberry tart, nibbling on the end carefully, wondering what Madam Pince would think of serving tarts and biscuits and tea around the books.

Madam Pince was probably dead. And Hermione was living in a small fantasy.

The scone suddenly tasted like ash. She placed it down on a saucer.

What was she doing? Sifting through priceless first editions and turning the pages of long lost copies when her friends and Order members were dead or dying. Hermione looked down at her teacup. Maybe there

*was* something in the tea after all. Some kind of complacency drug.

Hermione turned to the shelves, her source of comfort and truth, and dove in, pulling down dark tomes that she'd never seen in her life – each one humming against her fingers, trying to get her filthy hands off of them.

She found chapters on Horcruxes in record time. The first book she grabbed was cited as a source in much of her Horcrux research. She wished she could cross reference with the book finder, but she didn't want a trail of Horcrux research leading back to her. She didn't know exactly where the Malfoys stood. How much did they know about Voldemort's plans – his power?

And how could she find out if Nagini was still alive?

Hermione had just turned to explore the back wall when she heard the doors to the library open. Narcissa must be back. She wondered what time it was.

She reshelfed the three dark books she'd pulled down, memorizing their locations, and went to her teacup, flipping back through her wizarding fiction books and peering between the bookshelves to the library doors.

A pair of shoulders and a trim waist under a black jumper, black trousers and boots, and short blond locks that did not belong to Narcissa Malfoy. She slapped her hand over her mouth, watching as Draco hummed something to the book finder.

She hadn't seen him this close since the Room of Requirement. Since the hallways after Harry died. His hair fell over his eyes as he waited for the book finder to glow. A book on a shelf three feet from her slowly pulled into the aisle, hovering, waiting to be plucked. Hermione watched between the stacks as Draco turned towards the upper-landing, long legs carrying him quickly in her direction.

She clutched her books to her chest, waiting, breathing. It was like a car crash. A flying accident waiting to happen. She should say something.

picture. They just want to dip their wicks."

Hermione felt like maybe she was missing some kind of opening here. Some way to sympathize with her, gain her trust, and then run. Before Hermione could think of a possibility, Bellatrix pounced. She clawed at her scalp, pulling her hair back into the pillow, yanking her chin to the ceiling.

"But you... still untouched. What an embarrassment." Something wet and warm on her – Bella licking her face from jaw to temple. "You don't taste expensive." She cackled. "Do you think you're safe, Mudblood?"

Hermione's eyes could only see the headboard, her lungs dragging in air through a crooked windpipe.

"I don't want you getting a big head about this. You know your place, don't you?"

And then Bella wrenched her left arm away from her body, pushing her wrist into the mattress so she could read her scar properly.

"Don't you?!" she screeched.

"Yes," Hermione wheezed, fingers scrabbling at her throat.

"Do you need to be reminded?"

"N-no!"

A cackle. "Ohh... I think you do."

The edge of a blade caught the moonlight, and Hermione's chest locked in horror as the tip pressed against her skin.

Hermione thrashed wildly. Bellatrix laughed and moved one knee onto her chest, the other pressing her upper arm into the mattress as her blade dug into her arm.

She couldn't breathe. She screamed, knowing no one would hear her.

No one—

"Aunt Bella," said a calm voice. "What are you doing?"

A wave of Bellatrix's hand, and the candles lit in her bedroom. She turned over her shoulder and smiled. "Draco, darling. Come to play?" Hermione felt her pulse in the wound, her blood gathering.

"Hello, darling," Bellatrix hummed.

Her heart stuttered in her chest, freezing her veins and tightening her muscles. Her legs thrashed, kicking to get away, but Bellatrix cackled and slithered over her. She sat on her hips, pinning her elbows to the bed, grinning down at her.

Hermione's throat caught around the word, "help," choking in her chest.

"Ah, ah, ah!" Bellatrix clucked. "That won't do. It's just us girls." Her nails cut into Hermione's arms until she whimpered. "Such a pretty little prize you make, Mudblood. And expensive, too."

One hand grabbed her jaw, bony fingers turning her face to look her over. Hermione thrashed, her free arm fighting to push and roll out from under her. Bellatrix's hand dipped down and tightened, pressing heavy on her throat. Hermione scratched at her, pushing up on the weight against her neck as spots clouded her vision. She concentrated on her breath, coming in slow, measured rattles.

"So expensive, makes me wonder if your cunt is golden, too." Her hot breath hit Hermione's face, the putrid stench suffocating her as much as the grip on her throat. "Not that anyone's found out yet, isn't that right?" The mocking lit to her voice shot straight down Hermione's spine.

"Do you want to know why the Dark Lord values me, Mudblood? Why I am permitted at his right side after all these years?" She smiled down at her, her eyes glittering black. "Because I don't let my cock get in the way of what's truly important."

She cackled, and Hermione shuddered. Bellatrix swiped one of Hermione's curls away as her face twisted, dark and petulant. "Like father like son." She scowled down at her, and Hermione watched her eyes burn. Bellatrix sat tall suddenly, her hand lifting from Hermione's throat.

"That's the problem with *men*," she hissed. "No fucking *loyalty*. No sense of *duty*!" Bella twirled her wand in her fingers as she looked over Hermione's head at some far distant memory. "Can't see the larger

Announce her presence. Maybe drop something—

He turned the corner, swiveling toward her, and she saw the exact moment he registered her presence. Like an electric shock, seizing all of his muscles. Her tongue was dry as his mouth opened in a silent gasp. He braced himself on the bookcase nearest him.

And then very quickly it all went away. His mouth closed, his shoulders dropped, and his eyes shut off. He stared at her.

She felt her chest begging for air, the covers of the books pressing into her fingers.

"Your mother brought me here," her voice breathed, barely audible.

He took in her white jumper and denims, then back to her eyes.

"Have you finished with all of your other books?" he asked, voice hollow and low. He lifted a taunting brow.

She didn't know what he meant for a moment. She brought no possessions with her. Clearly he remembered this.

"The books in your room," he clarified, sending her a look that she recalled from Hogwarts whenever he needed to explain something to Crabbe or Goyle.

"N-no." That was all she said, watching him scowl at her. He shifted, like he was ready to run. He moved swiftly to the center aisle, grabbed his book from the air, and pivoted away to the landing stairs. Before he disappeared, she burst out, "What am I expected to do?"

He turned around to face her. His fingers twitched. "Do?"

"Yes," she said tightly, feeling a familiar headache behind her eye that only Draco Malfoy could bring on. "Should I... join the elves in the kitchen? Work the grounds? Or maybe assist your mother with... whatever it is she does?"

She listed all the things she hoped for. The things that she could stomach doing for the rest of her life. He continued to stare at her, and she wondered if she was supposed to suggest other tasks she could be doing.

"You want homework, Granger?"

Her cheeks heated and she narrowed her eyes at him. “No,” she snapped.

“You want to pick up after the peacocks? Make my meals?”

She huffed. “No. I *want* to throw the covers over my head and pretend I’m not living this nightmare, but—”

“Great,” he said. “Do that.” And without another glance at her, he swiveled and left.

She watched him take the stairs in two long strides, cutting sharply for the door, and yanking it open before vanishing.

*Of all the idiotic—!* Hermione huffed. *Picking up after the peacocks? Really?*

She took a deep breath, coming back to herself, coming back to her situation. It wouldn’t do to rile herself up over such a small annoyance. Given her circumstances, her first interaction with her new master could have been much different. She should count herself lucky.

But what was the point of buying her if he had no opinion on how she spent her days? Would no one tell her why she was here? Each Malfoy had a different agenda it seemed, and her mind groaned under the pressure of these riddles.

About half an hour of agitated wandering later, Narcissa came to check on her, teased her lightly for only having three books, and offered to show Hermione the way back upstairs.

She really should have paid attention to memorize the path. She was allowed to visit the library again on her own, but her stomach twisted at the idea of running into Draco again.

Narcissa told her she would have the elves send up dinner in a few hours. There was a question Narcissa asked, but she didn’t concentrate on it, instead, letting her mind drift over something Draco said.

Narcissa closed the door, and Hermione looked to the bookshelves.

*Your books.*

She ran her fingers over the spines.

midafternoon, when she came to escort her downstairs for lunch, she had deduced that Hermione’s skin was as sensitive as her muscles, and therefore stopped looping their arms together. She cast Cushioning Charms on the wingback chairs before they sat to take their dinner. When Narcissa asked Mippy to draw a room temperature bath, Hermione almost smiled at her.

It was as if she had a particularly nasty sunburn over every inch of her skin, and any extra contact sent her shivering.

Once she had toweled off, she pulled on the soft silk nightdress that Narcissa had left for her on the bed. She fell asleep that night wrapped in silk, with a cooling charm on her sheets.



Her consciousness lifted from her dreams in slow waves, a weightless floating back to the surface. Every time she dipped back into dreaming, Harry was there.

Untwining her wishes and memories, Hermione felt a pricking across her skin, her body dragging her back into her bed at Malfoy Manor, where Harry was dead. Her arms shivered, and that familiar sensation of eyes on her washed over her.

A tug at her hair, a curl twisting softly away, tickling at her neck.

Her lashes fluttered, and she opened her eyes to her dark bedroom. She tilted her head to the door, certain for a moment that she hadn’t been alone. That fingers had threaded through her hair, a gaze steadily watching over her.

Maybe Narcissa had come to check on her.

Or maybe...

She blinked away her silly thoughts, twisting her legs in the sheets, and turning over to her other side to snuggle in.

A shadow in the darkness. And fingers twisting her curls. And eyes like the devil looking down on her, resting behind her on the bed.

year, for reasons of his own. He's been using a replacement, but during the Battle of Hogwarts, it finally gave up on him. Cracked."

"Oh," was all she could say. She stared at the curtains behind him as she realized Lucius Malfoy had followed her down a hill, lifted her into his arms, and carried her back to her bedroom.

She wondered if he'd run, or if he'd just let her body writhe and sizzle at the bottom of the hill.

Nothing this family did made any sense.

She caught Draco's eye. He'd been staring at her, she realized. She was weak, immobile, and in bed before him. He could do anything he wanted to her. Swallowing, she tested her arm muscles, trying to flex them. Barely responsive.

The movement caught his eye and he looked away. "Mippy," he called out.

The elf popped into the room. "Miss is awake!"

"She needs food and water," Draco stated, moving toward the door. Her head was too heavy to follow him. "And another muscle relaxing potion in an hour. Please tend to her."

The door closed, and she stared at the spot in front of the windows where he'd stood as Mippy bounced around her.



Narcissa helped her out of bed the next day and assisted her with stretching her tight muscles. Hermione pressed her lips together and let her, wondering if she knew what her son had planned for her. They made it down the stairs for a stroll along the Manor's ground floor.

She didn't see Draco or Lucius for the day. Narcissa apologized for not showing her the boundary, offering to take her on a walk, but Hermione declined. Her muscles still ached. And she didn't need a reminder that she was bound here.

Narcissa was the most observant person Hermione had ever met. By

*Your room.*

She looked at the bedroom suite. At the deeply comfortable bed. At the bookshelves. At the closet full of clothes exactly in her size.

Hermione felt foolish now for thinking this room would be taken from her at some point. For thinking someone else's clothes just happened to fit her nicely. There was so much she still didn't know, but at least she'd solved one problem. She moved to the bathroom and stared at the tub.

Her tub.

She had at least two hours before Narcissa said dinner would arrive.

Hermione took off the jeans, folding them nicely over the counter, pulled off the jumper, and brought a towel over to the edge of the tub. She started the taps. She turned on the bubbles.

And she washed it all away in her bathtub, in her suite in Malfoy Manor.



Breakfast appeared the next morning along with Narcissa Malfoy. She escorted Hermione out to the balcony while Remy set up the breakfast tray and the tea service. She eyed the grounds, looking for weaknesses as Narcissa talked.

After a lull, Hermione thought she'd take a chance.

"I... I'm not sure you can answer this request," Hermione started, "but I was wondering about my friends."

Narcissa turned to her. "Yes?"

"Where are they?" She hesitated before asking, "What state are they in?"

Hermione sat still as stone as Narcissa Malfoy lifted a brow, opened her mouth, and stopped herself. "Hmm. Yes, I see..." she muttered.

"I only ask because I was unconscious for the Auction," Hermione said. "Up until my... bid." She looked down at the wide lawn.

"Yes, of course." Narcissa's eyes slid over her. "Naturally, you would be curious. I will do my best to get that information."

Hermione smiled in thanks, and when her eyes returned to her cranberry scone and tea, she felt nauseous with guilt.

What was Ginny having for breakfast today? When was the last time Luna had a cup of tea?

Where was Ron?

She spent the rest of her Sunday afternoon reading, looking out the window, in the bathtub. Just after Remy arrived with her dinner tray, a knock rapped on her door.

"Come in," she said, standing for Narcissa like her mother taught her

She blinked, laying useless on the pillows.

"No. But now that you mention it, I'd appreciate my belts and scarves back."

He narrowed his eyes at her and paced across the carpets once before coming back to the same spot in front of the windows, his lips tight.

"I should have given you a tour of the perimeter upon your arrival and cautioned you of the consequences," he said. "Tomorrow, when you can walk again, we'll do that."

She gave a sharp laugh, and her stomach muscles protested. "There's no need to walk me. I'm a slave, not a dog. I think I have the idea now." She hissed through her teeth as she shifted her legs, hating the way she lay prone before him like a ragdoll. "Why is this recovery worse than the Cruciatus Curse?"

"I believe the barrier was created with Cruciatus in mind. You may not have been subjected to Cruciatus in extreme lengths of time." His eyes drifted away from her, and she had the distinct impression that he had suffered these exact symptoms before. "Crossing the barrier should shock the tattooed person and give them a chance to withdraw themselves from the perimeter. Father said you jumped through the barrier, your entire body beyond it. You landed and rolled down the hill."

She swallowed. Yes, that seemed right. At least she'd learned something. Weaknesses in the wards were irrelevant as long as she had that tattoo on her arm. Lucius had been telling the truth.

"By the time he recovered you," he continued, "you'd been outside of the barrier for two minutes."

She frowned. "Certainly took him long enough."

His face turned back to her, lifting a brow. "Lucius doesn't have his wand at the moment. He's having it replaced."

She blinked at him. This knowledge was startling. The possibilities swirled in her mind, and she tried to find the advantage.

Draco read her face easily. "The Dark Lord requested his wand last

steam. His other hand in his pocket. Dark trousers, but a cobalt blue jumper. Out of uniform.

She stared at his back as she tested her muscles, curling her toes and shifting her arms. He was almost as tall as Ron now. Always taller than Harry. His shoulders had broadened with maturity or with muscle-training, she didn't know, but even through his jumper she could see the shape of him. Draco's clothes were always perfectly fitted. Probably had the jumper handmade, just for him.

The thumb holding onto his saucer bore the Slytherin class ring that had cut her lip the night before. The emerald stone winked at her, teasing her.

Her eyes dropped down, taking in his legs and backside. Perfectly tailored there as well. He stood tall on both legs, never one to lean on a hip unless provided with a wall or a pillar to rest on purposefully.

She used to watch Pansy's hands drift to his hips, either in class with a quick pinch to his thigh, or in dark corridors past curfew where Hermione would either interrupt the couple and take house points or walk away briskly with the image of green-painted fingernails sliding down his back to squeeze at him.

Like summoning his eyes, he turned to look at her just as her gaze moved to more acceptable locations.

His eyes were soft and distant. And then a flicker. And then grey and absent. Like a reptilian blink.

He faced her fully, vanished the teacup and saucer, and slid his other hand into his pocket. "Can you move?"

"Barely." Her voice was ragged, like it had been grinded down. Perhaps she had screamed.

Behind him she could make out the sun setting. She'd lost the entire day.

He scowled at her, and before she could wonder why, he asked, "Were you trying to kill yourself?"

to.

Draco Malfoy opened the door.

Her heart suttered against her ribs as his eyes skated across her face and shoulders.

So much taller than she remembered him. His skin was still pale and thin like sixth year, like he'd still not gotten a decent night's sleep. He wore black. Not his Death Eater uniform, but another black jumper. Black trousers and large boots. It was so similar to the outfit he wore in the library, as if this was his off-duty uniform.

His eyes roved over her room, landing on things she'd disturbed. The pile of books at the base of her bookshelves, waiting to be reshelfed. The shoes she'd worn yesterday on her walk with Narcissa, now sitting next to her armoire. The rumpled way she'd left her bedsheets, even after trying to make the bed.

Hermione stood, hand on the back of her wingback chair, dinner half-eaten on the end table. His eyes finally landed on her again. She watched the quickest of flickers down to her Muggle denims and socks, fast as a blink.

"Mother says you have questions."

No. No, no, no, Narcissa. This was not what she wanted.

She swallowed, and the first question poured from her without thought. "Where is Pansy?"

He looked about as surprised as she felt. She wished she had a plan. Some way to ask the right questions.

He looked at the fire, slowly dwindling. "I gave Parkinson to Blaise Zabini. As a token of thanks and loyalty. She is in Italy now, under his watch."

His inflections and dead eyes meant to suggest that Blaise was the one receiving a gift for his loyalty. But maybe he didn't know Hermione had witnessed Pansy's rescue.

She nodded. One off the list.

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“Ginny Weasley went to Avery?”

His eyes returned to hers, and he nodded.

“And Ron?”

He stared at her, unblinking. “Macnair purchased him. And shortly after, the Dark Lord requested him.”

She took a slow breath. “And is he alive?”

“For now.”

He watched it land on her, shivering her skin. She clenched her jaw and nodded. She wanted to ask more, to feel out how many of them had fallen in the courtyard. To maybe ask about Nagini in some way.

He began, “If that’s all—”

“What about Arthur and Molly Weasley?”

He blinked at her. “Dead.”

She suspected this. It didn’t bring her peace, but at least she could nod, accept it, and deal with it later.

“Neville?”

He rolled his eyes in that very put-upon way he used for effect when he was younger. “Do you want me to make you a list, Granger?”

“Yes,” she answered immediately, disregarding his sarcasm. “If you please.”

He glared at her for a heartbeat, and then conjured a scroll and quill. She watched him perform a very complex spell to send his thoughts directly onto the page – the spell that had inspired the Quick-Quotes Quill. It required a trained mind whose thoughts could be directed and reduced to only one thing, instead of the extraneous thoughts one’s brain floats to them. She’d only seen Snape use it before.

She studied him while his eyes concentrated on the page—exhausted, with dark circles and dry skin. The angles of his jaw and chin cut through his cheeks and neck, sharpening him like a blade. The lips she’d memorized were dry and cracked, but pulled into the contemplative pout she’d seen in class. He still held his shoulders back, arrogance and good posture

## CHAPTER 9



“What happened?” A panicked voice burst into her mind, waking her.

She swayed, rocking, walking.

Still in her father’s arms.

Her eyelids fought against the paste that closed them together.

“Father! What happened?”

“Your Mudblood decided to take a walk, Draco.” The voice rumbled from the furnace against her ear. A low vibration, lulling her back. “Perhaps you should explain to her—”

She drifted out to sea again.



A hedge maze, several stories high. A rabbit in front of her, hopping away, looking back at her with Harry’s emerald green eyes.

He disappeared around the corner hedge, and when she followed, he was gone.



Her body ached. She felt every limb spark to life, but they only twitched when she tried to move them.

Her eyes snapped open, and she stared at the canopy of her bed, the cream curtains draped so elegantly.

It was like she’d been immobilized. Her muscles were weighed down, and even her eyelashes worked too hard.

She could see the low sunlight from her windows bouncing against the ceiling.

Turning her neck in a slow rotation, she found a figure standing against her windows, staring at the grounds. Draco. He held a cup and saucer in one hand – tea gone cold, she could guess, with the lack of rising



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harméd, Miss Granger.”

She blinked at him. He was nervous—she was certain of it. And what else could be the cause but the thought of her escaping?

A breeze rustled the tree branches above them, and sunlight freckled his face, reflecting off his eyes.

The birds had stopped singing.

It was worth a try.

If she was wrong, she’d be with Luna again. Harry. Draco couldn’t stop her this time.

With an agility she’d learned from a year on the run, Hermione spun on her heel and leapt out of the lane, into the field.

A spark of fire in her arm, burning, crackling, sizzling up her nerve endings. She crumpled to the soft grass as the fire spread into her entire body, frying her from the inside. An echo of a yell behind her as the pain surrounded her mind and plunged her into a spinning darkness.



Rocking. Swaying. Like her father used to do when she injured herself.

Wrapped in a blanket, pressed against his chest.

Her mind floated up, thoughts attaching to memories.

She’d been outside. She’d been beneath a canopy of branches.

She’d wanted to follow a rabbit down, down, until she found her haven.

Lucius Malfoy had stopped her.

Her eyes fluttered. And she remembered the pain. Her body quaked, and her father’s arms pulled her closer.

No, not her father.

Someone held her to their chest, walking, swaying, rocking her back to sleep. Her skin hurt.

Footsteps echoing off marble.

She fell back into the blackness, like blinking.

## CHAPTER 8

slithering through all the cracks in his facade.

Her mind warred with itself, one half pitying him and looking for a way to comfort him, and the other wondering if his fatigue would give her an advantage.

The quill disappeared. He grabbed the scroll from the air and held it out to her. And it all came back to her. He was handing her a list of her friends’ fates.

Neville went to the Carrows. Cho Chang and Seamus Finnigan to Mulciber. Oliver Wood to the Notts. Ron and Angelina Johnson to Macnair.

Her eyes skipped over the page, feeling there was something missing. She looked up at him. “Luna Lovegood isn’t on this list.”

He stood frozen, no expression crossing his face.

“Lovegood is dead.”

Hermione felt her heartbeat in her fingertips. A pair of pale blue eyes behind her lids every time she blinked. Blood-soaked teeth smiling at her, telling her to make the sacrifice.

She swallowed. “How?” Her voice cracked.

Draco looked over her shoulder, out the window behind her at the sunset. “She jumped from the roof of Macnair’s estate. They found her body yesterday morning.”

Her mind tumbled and swirled.

Macnair. She went to Macnair.

Luna was dead.

She should have let her die in the Ministry.

*Remember? He said it would be better this way.*

She looked back to Draco. His eyes were distant, staring out her window to the pond.

“She jumped because you told her to,” Hermione hissed.

He turned back to her, his gaze cold. He didn’t deny it.

“You told her that if there was an Auction, she should kill herself,” she

snarled. “Kill herself instead of fight.”

His lips pressed together. “You seem to forget that Lovegood was a Ravenclaw, not a reckless Gryffindor.” His eyes withered her. “She couldn’t be talked into anything that didn’t make absolute sense to her.”

“*Absolute sense?*” Hermione repeated, feeling tears of grief threatening to spring. “So should I take myself to the tallest tower in Malfoy Manor as well? Maybe twist my sheets into a noose? Or I could always refuse to eat. Refuse food and water until I wither away—”

He stepped toward her. “I dare you to try.” He sneered at her. “If you’re really so miserable in your private suite, in your Muggle denims and jumpers, with your meals delivered three times a day—”

“Oh, *thank you*, Malfoy. For *rescuing me*—”

“Then be my fucking guest, Granger.” He stepped into her again, and she felt the back of the tall chair pressing into her spine. “I have it on good authority that Macnair didn’t brutalize Lovegood before she jumped. Better take your chances now before your circumstances change—”

Her hand was up, poised to strike before she stopped herself. Hitting him would be the most ill-advised action she could possibly take in her situation. His eyes glittered, scanning from her hand to her face, sizzling into her eyes and dropping down over her lips before sliding back.

“Are you stupid enough to do it, Granger?” His eyes flashed at her, something warm and daring.

Her fingers curled slowly, and she dropped her arm. She glared at his smug face, his eyes dripping over her and his lips pulling a slow grin.

She tore her gaze from his lips and said, “And *will* my circumstances change?”

She watched his eyes freeze over, like a glaze in a kiln, something opaque. A smirk that didn’t reach his expressionless eyes.

“Play your cards right, Granger...”

And then his fingers drifted mockingly across her ribs. She jerked and slithered away from him. “Get out.”

telling her to run and tumble down.

A different, darker impulse telling her to run as well.

She stepped forward.

“I would stop there, Miss Granger.”

She spun. Lucius Malfoy – impeccably dressed for the hour in the morning – stood with his hands clasped behind his back, staring at her with grey eyes.

Had he Apparated to her? She hadn’t heard him approach in the narrow lane. Was she past the Apparition line?

She remembered herself, quickly closing the robe and pulling it tight to cover her modest nightclothes. No sash to tie it closed.

“Why?” she asked. “What’s beyond this?”

“Nothing much of anything, really.” He stepped forward, and she was reminded of the way her aunt would try to corner one of her playful cats. “The grounds extend another few acres, but it’s mostly fields.”

“I like fields.” She wondered if she’d pay for the insolence in her tone. The corner of his mouth twitched, like his son’s whenever he hid a smile in class. “Yes, don’t we all,” he hummed in a condescending growl. “But I’m afraid you’ve reached the line you cannot cross, Miss Granger.”

She stared back at him, examining him. He leaned forward on his toes, ready to pounce. She wouldn’t notice it if she didn’t already know that Malfoys lean back on their heels, waiting for the world to come to them. His hands behind his back – perhaps his wand between his fingers. Following her.

Lucius Malfoy didn’t want her crossing this line.

Her skin pricked. Perhaps the weakness was here.

“I assure you, there’s nothing but plains of grass,” he said, reading her distrust. “A few excellent spots for Quidditch”—he nodded over her shoulder—“if such a thing interests you.” He frowned at her when she didn’t move and sighed. “The Manor grounds stop here for the purposes of that ink on your arm. If you cross the line, you will be grievously

last thing on her mind when choosing the locations she'd dragged Harry and Ron for the last year. And yet, these grounds were clearly made to be seen. Admired. It almost felt mocking, given her circumstances. She imagined this field was quite useful for garden parties and large receptions.

Did the Malfoys even have family friends anymore? Or were they just all Death Eaters. Who did Narcissa Malfoy entertain?

She reached the edge of the rounded hedges, facing a pathway cutting down a dark lane lined with trees with delicate branches, leaning over to touch each other. A sparrow sang to her children.

It was idyllic. Too idyllic. Distractingly so. Perhaps the weakness was somewhere down this lane. It extended forever, disappearing into morning mist and the shadows of the trees.

She stepped through, feeling much like Alice in her looking glass, waiting for another world to morph before her eyes. Nothing. No tingle on her arm. She continued her walk, eager to find the end of the Malfoy property.

Something the birds sang echoed in her head, a kind of melody that sounded familiar. A few notes that strung together and reminded her of a song her mother used to sing in the mornings. She wondered if Monica Wilkins remembered that song. If some mornings she woke up humming it, trying to place a melody she'd long forgotten.

She'd never been so thankful for her foresight than her choice to Obliviate her mother and father. If she had to add her parents to her growing list of worries in this new world, it would be unbearable.

Hermione stretched her arms out wide, fingertips barely grazing the leaves on several unruly hedges on either side. Perhaps Hix was shirking his duties. Her robe opened in the wind, air rushing to meet her warm skin. She threw her head back and stared at the splashes of sky through the tree branches.

The lane ended. It opened wide into another field.

Hermione stopped, staring at the sloping hill, a childish impulse

A low chuckle as she turned to face the windows, dismissing him, smoothing out the wrinkled scroll held tight in her left hand.

"The Dark Lord requests an audience with you this evening."

A chill trickled down her spine, like ice water dumped over her head.

"Tell him I decline. But thanks." She spoke to the windows so he wouldn't see the way her eye twitched.

She heard a short breath of a laugh, and then, "I'll expect you downstairs in half an hour."

He didn't make a sound as he crossed the carpets, and it wasn't until the door clicked that she even knew he left.

Half an hour. That's all she had.

She memorized the scroll of her friends' names as the sun set on the Manor.

How does one prepare for an audience with the Dark Lord?

Her question was answered twenty-five minutes after Draco left when Mippy knocked on her door.

"Master Draco says you is to wear this."

Mippy held a scrap of black silk over her outstretched arms. It looked like a *négligée*. Lace across the bottom and top, short and low with thin straps.

When Hermione pulled the silk from the elf's fingers, Mippy twirled her ear and waited by the door.

"Thank you, Mippy." She didn't recognize the sound of her own voice.

The elf stayed in the doorway, shifting from foot to foot. "Mippy is to stay until Miss is changed. Then we is to go downstairs."

And just when Hermione thought she could get away with being obstinate.

Hermione marched into the bathroom, snucked her jeans, ripped her jumper off, and slid the silk over herself. It was as short as her gold shift dress, if not shorter. So, she *was* his whore. The mirror reflected the scowl and narrowed eyes of a sex slave. Her eyes caught on a fluffy robe hanging

from a hook, and she considered flouncing downstairs completely covered. Or perhaps not going at all. Make him come back and drag her.

“Miss!” The elf was knocking, her voice plaintive.

Hermione frowned. Would Mippy be punished? Simply because she tried to delay the inevitable.

She took one last glance in the mirror to make sure she was covered, and then followed Mippy out of the room, fuming, down the stairs and into the Malfoy entryway.

Draco waited at the fireplaces for her. His eyes took in her attire as she descended—a quick glance at her bare legs, and then back to her face.

Perhaps he *did* want her. Perhaps something about her had attracted him.

He pulled at his sleeves, concentrating on the cuffs, and said, “You’ll need to remove your bra.”

Clinical. Like a doctor would.

She felt the blush rise in her cheeks. Her teeth parted to bite back, but she saw he was in his Death Eater robes. And just as *he* had changed into his uniform—his costume—it seemed she must as well.

She reached behind herself and struggled to unclasp and remove the bra under the silk. He concentrated on the stones below his feet as she handed it to Mippy.

The elf disappeared, and then it was just them again. But instead of feeling exposed, she felt ignored.

He moved to the front doors, not waiting for her to follow. She trudged behind him like a petulant child, down the steps, into the brisk air, and down the stone path as the cold pricked her skin, pulling her breasts into peaks. She glared at the back of him, covered in thick robes while she was forced into a scrap of silk. Holding onto that irritation, holding onto the cold so she wouldn’t think about what was going to happen next.

He stood at the gates while she caught up, and then said, “Your left

If she happened upon Draco she would give him a piece of her mind, that was certain. She clambered down the marble stairs and out into the chilly morning air, breathing in the freedom.

The other side of the Manor was the unexplored land. Staying close to the walls, she walked the edges, taking in the morning fog. Rounding the corner, the gazebo rose from the mists, sunlight bouncing off its elegant roof, casting patterned shadows on the grass before it. The waters shuffled on the lake, trembling as the fowl landed and bobbed.

A warming charm would be helpful about now. Hermione frowned, hoping that she’d acclimate to being non-magical soon. Then she’d remember to put on a jumper the next time she went for an angry morning stroll.

The lawns spread out for acres, and she considered how far the property went. Perhaps they had even more than this, but the Manor’s grounds stopped at a certain point. She looked down at her arm, wondering at what point the estate would bar her exit. The two letters inked into her skin caught the morning light, a hint of gold shown through, just over the top of the white lettering Bellatrix had given her.

She peered back at the windows, checking the third floor for her room and finding the door to the balcony thrown wide. She counted. She was the second balcony in on the right, facing northeast according to the rising sun. Handy details, if she could ever find someone who could use them.

A short walk through the countryside. That’s what it could have been, in another life. She faced the sunrise, now dappling the trees along the edges of the lawn, and began to wander.

Cutting across the grass like a lone sailboat on a lake, she headed northeast. *Find the chinks in the armor.* There was a faint hum of the grounds waking, birds stretching their voices wide, the hedges bowing to the sky.

It was startling to be surrounded by beauty again. Scenery had been the

the distance.

*I'll get out*, she told herself. There was always a weakness somewhere. A pressure point she could exploit.

Pulling open the balcony doors, intent to peer around the sides of the Manor and below, she moved to step out, but something stopped her.

She looked down at her feet, planted close to the doorway. She couldn't lift them. She stepped backwards just fine. A barrier spell of sorts.

She'd been able to sit on the balcony yesterday, having tea with Narcissa in the morning. What had changed?

A chill from the morning breeze wound its way around her skin.

Luna.

She stared at the horizon as the sun's half-circle rose over the trees.

*So should I take myself to the tallest tower in Malfoy Manor as well?*

She'd goaded him. And while they were gone last night, he had wards set.

Curiously, she reached her hand out. The wards stopped her before her fingers could cross the doorway. Her cheeks heated. How dare he. He was carving away her options, narrowing the walls of her pretty little cage.

Hermione spun, thoughts crashing around her mind like waves in a storm. She ran for the curtains hanging from the canopy and tugged them into knots, but a noose wouldn't hold. The fireplace burned low, and she stomped over to test another theory.

Like warm water as she plunged her hand into the flames.

She threw open the wardrobe, and found that all of her belts and sashes had been removed.

*I dare you to try*, he'd said. Reminding her that her life wasn't hers to take anymore.

Brushing away her tears, she stared at the sunrise, and then shoved her feet into boots, tossed open the bedroom door, and then took off in her robe.

She marched down the hall, wondering if anyone slept in these rooms.

arm.”

She held it out to him, and he wrapped his fingers around his signature. They walked through the gates, and she felt a burst of heat through her arm. And then it was over.

They walked to the top of a hill, his hand still on her arm, and then he Apparated them.

The gates of Hogsmeade popped into view first. A chilling cold crawled through her throat, clawing across her ribs and seizing her muscles.

Dementors.

She looked up, and found *thousands*.

She could just make out the moon past them, but they occluded the light, casting the grounds in darkness.

Draco held her elbow, gripping painfully as one Dementor swept down, dropping like a weight over her.

“Stay still,” Draco demanded.

The Dementor swallowed the air around her, sucking at her essence. It turned to Draco, reaching a bony hand out for him.

He stared up into its hood, immovable.

With one last tug at her soul, the Dementor wafted away, joining its companions. Draco guided her forward, and she guessed the Dementors had cleared them.

A dozen of them hovered as they walked through the gates and turned onto the Hogwarts grounds.

The Forbidden Forest had grown outwards, creeping towards the castle as if the magic holding it back had died when they lost. The grass was dry and some places were still burning. It wasn't until they passed the fires that Hermione recognized the smell.

Burning bodies.

The corpses were unrecognizable, and she thanked Merlin for that. She shook the image loose from her head, the smell sticking to her like smoke.

## THE AUCTION

Death Eaters in pairs of two walked broad circles around the forest edge, some of them nodding to Draco. He kept his eyes straight forward, hand wrapped around her arm.

As they walked the grounds, closer and closer to the castle, she felt her pulse spinning, pushing back any happy memories she had of the different landmarks.

A pair of two hooded robes stood at the entry steps. She turned her eyes down.

The sound of lips puckering. Kissing noises, and it took a moment to realize they were directed at her.

“Nice legs, Mudblood.”

She didn’t look up. So, that’s all she was now. A pair of legs.

The doors to the Entrance Hall peeled open, and Draco pulled her inside behind him.

They marched into the Great Hall, and she was thankful that it looked nothing like it did in her happiest memories.

It seemed like Voldemort had torn apart every piece of the castle that would interest him, and redeposited it here.

The remains of the basilisk swept in a broad circle around the walls, serving as seating for the Death Eaters in attendance. Nagini hissed at her ankles as they passed, and Hermione tried not to let her mind linger on how to kill her.

Lord Voldemort himself sat in a throne of bones, carefully collected and magicked into structure. He twirled the Elder Wand between his fingers, red eyes glittering at her and Draco’s approach like rubies.

Draco walked her to a spot on the floor dark with dried blood and dropped to his knee, dragging her down with him. He bowed his head, but Hermione defiantly stared the Dark Lord in the eye, the darkness drawing her in. She could feel the strain of it on the stones, and she pushed back, refusing to bow to him.

“Hermione Granger.” The sound of her name sliding over his tongue



So, George was on the run.

It must have been during the Auction itself. He was onstage with Ludo when the girls began to fight. At least they’d won something during that moment.

She sat in her wingback chair, watching the sun rise through her windows. It was her third morning in Malfoy Manor, though she hadn’t slept the night before, content to stare at the walls while her brain mended itself.

Several times she thought she should call for an elf to grab her a potion, but the headache kept her focused. She wouldn’t be complacent in whatever they’d planned for her.

Her cheek throbbed, a bluish bruise blossoming over her the corner of her mouth where she’d bled. She could have sworn she’d felt the outline of a gemstone against her cheek last night, but it was nowhere to be found this morning. Perhaps he’d only struck her face to save his own. Surely one of them needed to be punished for her smart mouth. She pressed her lips together, hardening to the memory of his healing hands at the gates last night.

If he thought Hermione Granger was going to go quietly, she had a surprise for him.

The sunlight popped over a tree, the first rays intruding upon her space, lighting up her walls. She stood, wrapping her robe tightly around herself and moved to the window, watching the grounds light up.

There were no gates on this side of the estate, just large hedges and ponds. And with the daylight, she could finally make out the gardens in

give. The small shift in power buzzed through her.

She slipped away from him, moving toward the Manor, and tossed over her shoulder, “Anticipation is the sweetest torture, isn’t it?”

Marching away down the stone path, shivering in her *négligée*, she almost smiled.

shivered her skin. “Welcome to my castle.” He chuckled.

She breathed deep, the rotting air thick in her throat. When she gave no greeting, he continued.

“You fetched quite a price at the sale. The... Auction. Yes, that was it. But I see now you are no great beauty.”

Hermione nearly sneered. Of all the things she thought Lord Voldemort would have to say to her, insulting her looks never made the list.

“And still my followers jockeyed for you.” He tilted his pale hairless head at her. “How grand it must be to have befriended Harry Potter.”

A deep rumbling chuckle chorused through the room. The Death Eaters chortled.

“Stand,” he commanded, and then Draco was dragging her to her feet.

“Young Malfoy.”

“My Lord.”

“You gave up quite a lot to obtain her.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

“Why?”

“We were adversaries at school,” Draco said, eyes still downcast. “She never quite learned her place. And also”—he lifted his eyes to Lord Voldemort, a small smirk pulling at his lips—“I’m always drawn toward the most valuable possessions.”

The Dark Lord grinned. “And is she everything you paid for and more? I heard she was untouched. I assume you’ve taken her.”

“Not yet, my Lord.”

The Death Eaters shifted, whispering. She felt a dozen eyes turn on her. Lord Voldemort’s brow lifted. “And why is that?”

She looked to Draco. *Why was that?*

He glanced at her, his eyes slid over her neck, down to her breasts.

“Anticipation is the sweetest torture, is it not?”

Hermione swallowed. Voldemort laughed. A high cackling of glee. “Your father was too soft, Young Malfoy. But you’re learning.”

Hermione felt her blood screaming. He was playing with her. Maybe they all were. A beautiful suite with a bed and bath of her very own. Tea with Narcissa. Access to the library of her dreams. Even Lucius was civil. It would all come to an end soon.

"Tell me, Mudblood Granger," Voldemort's crooning voice interrupted her spiral. "What do you know of George Weasley?"

She blinked. She couldn't hold back her surprise before Voldemort saw it.

"What?"

Draco's head snapped to her. "You will address him as My Lord," he hissed, eyes burning into her.

"George Weasley. His safe houses. His distant family." Voldemort leaned forward in his throne. "What does he care about?"

Hermione stared into the glittering eyes searching her. And then she understood.

George had escaped.

And for some reason, Voldemort was threatened by that.

A fire burned in her gut, something that she'd thought had been extinguished the moment she spotted a small body in Hagrid's arms.

"George Weasley was one half of the cleverest, trickiest pair I'd ever encountered," she said. "Even if I had an idea of where he'd go, I'd be wrong." A slow smile spread up her lips. "I'm quite pleased to inform you that if George Weasley escaped, you'll never see him again."

Red eyes narrowed at her. She anticipated the Cruciatus Curse.

Something slammed into her face, stinging her cheek and snapping her neck to the side. She stumbled, gaining balance and pressing her hand to her face. Her eyes rocked in their sockets.

She looked back, searching for the weapon, preparing for another strike. Her eyes refocused as Draco lowered his hand, a ring on his thumb glinting at her. Her lip wet with blood.

He'd backhanded her. He'd hit her, and she was bleeding.

and dancing along her bare skin.

Maybe she could tell him. It was nothing really. *I had a crush on you at Hogwarts*. It would be simple, and there would be no weight to it any longer. She could shrug and laugh.

*Anticipation is the sweetest torture.*

But this wasn't Hogwarts. This was a hellfire of distrust and danger, laced with her impending rape and sprinkled with moments of hollow kindness. She couldn't tell him the truth.

She couldn't tell him anything.

"Don't worry, Malfoy. Voldemort didn't find anything in your head to incriminate you. Feel free to proceed with your plans to break me." She looked at the hedges to her right, blinking as the fury in her chest gave way to despair.

A warm hand on her cheek. She snapped her head back to him to find him staring down at her lips. Hermione's eyes widened, lips parting.

A whispered spell. His wand at the corner of her mouth, sewing the skin back together from where his ring had split her lip.

She calmed her thundering heart, waiting for his hand to drop from her jaw. Instead he said, "Were you relieved when you learned you were coming here? Is that what it was? Do you think of me as the lesser of two evils?"

She searched his eyes, wondering which memories and thoughts Voldemort shuffled through if Draco was this intent on finding out.

"No, not really," she answered truthfully, remembering the long walk down these hedges just a few nights ago. "I thought I might be a gift for your father."

His hand twitched against her face, like he'd been electrified. It dropped, hanging down by his side.

"Then what was it? Tell me what he found." He swallowed as the wind slashed across them.

There was something Draco Malfoy wanted that she could refuse to



year whenever she'd have to tear her eyes off of him. It was disgusting really. To want him.

And a thought drifted through her: if she had any doubts about how Draco saw her, how he felt about her, at least Voldemort had given her reason to squash those doubts. He didn't feel anything for her. If he had, Voldemort surely would have found it.

She tore her eyes from the red ones, and he laughed again.

"Take your time with this one, Malfoy," Voldemort said. "You can torture her for years without lifting a wand to her."

A shaking voice to her left whispered, "Yes, my Lord."

Voldemort chuckled. Not even with Harry dead at his feet did she hear him this gleeful.

Draco yanked her up by her elbow, bowing to the Dark Lord, and dragging her along behind him.

They passed the guards at the doors, still sucking their teeth at her. They moved through the lawn of Dementors, and Hermione felt no change inside her chest. They cleared the gates, and a sharp tug Disapparated them back to the hills of Malfoy Manor.

She kept her eyes on the ground as if Voldemort was still there, bearing down on her. And maybe he was — inside her mind. Crawling and feeding on her. Perhaps he'd never leave.

The gates opened for them, and before Hermione could sludge through them, Draco's hand on her elbow pulled her back.

His grey eyes searched hers, frantic movements across her face. "What did he find?"

She looked away from him and shook her head, her eyes stinging. "It doesn't matter. He was pleased. That's all that matters." She turned to move away before he pulled her back — his grip firm, but nonviolent.

"Whatever it is, he thinks I'm complicit," Draco said, voice barely loud enough over the wind. "Tell me."

The wind wove through them, casting his cloak in twisting patterns

"Watch your mouth. You are addressing your Lord."

His voice shivered her, and she looked away from his icy eyes.

Voldemort chuckled, a sound like stinging knives. "I'll just take a look for myself, Mudblood."

He stood and slithered toward her. She stood frozen as he circled her, coming around to her front again and leaning into her face. She looked into his red eyes, pulled to them almost inexorably.

And then there were daggers in her brain, sinking into her eyes and twisting deep. She couldn't breathe as memories floated through her head, yanked forward and pushed back.

She saw George with a sharp stinging pain. His head bleeding where his ear had been, smiling up at his twin.

Like a rubber band snapped inside of her, and then George was thirteen, smacking Bludgers with his brother on the Quidditch field.

A ricochet to the Burrow, and Molly Weasley stood before her, washing dishes.

"My Aunt Muriel—"

And like a whip cracking across her mind, she jerked to see Ludo Bagman speaking to the twins at the Quidditch World Cup. Hermione sat with Harry, staring around at the other tents and parties.

A moment of stillness as Voldemort's consciousness slithered through the moment, twisting around Ludo Bagman and examining him. In pause, Hermione turned her mind to Harry, watching his easy smile from years ago—

Wrenched through waves of memories and images, and then Hermione was in the Quidditch pitch at Hogwarts, running down to the stands as Harry held George Weasley back from launching at someone.

She saw Draco, sneering and laughing on the field. And then he was tackled to the ground as George and Harry dove for him. A tangle of limbs, and Hermione ran down the stairs, cringing at the sound of knuckles against jaws and eyes.

She felt a dark joy swimming next to her as Voldemort watched Draco, Harry, and George scuffle. As Madam Hooch separated them, Hermione remembered checking Harry and George for injuries first, and then her eyes sliding to Draco, curled in on himself, fighting for air.

And even knowing that Draco had purposefully provoked the fight had not squashed Hermione's interest in his well-being. She watched as Harry and George were carted off the field, and lingered to see if someone was checking on the bloodied body on the grass.

He looked so small. Still trying to crow at Harry's back as they left. And when the back of his hand swiped his brow, wiping blood from his eye, Hermione had gasped before looking away and running after the Gryffindors.

Before looking away—  
—running after the Gryffindors—

But she stayed. Frozen. Like someone had paused the film.

She stared down at the Quidditch pitch, hands squeezing the railing, and looked down on a pink-faced blond cradling his arm.

She should be turning and leaving.

A cold breeze settled across her, like a snake's tongue slipping in through one ear and out the other. And it almost felt as if Voldemort stood next to her at the railing.

If she could turn her head, maybe she would see him there. Watching her... watching Draco Malfoy.

Like a hook around her waist, and then she was on the Quidditch pitch again, staring at a twelve-year-old Draco, sneering at her—

"Filthy little Muddblood."

And later that night as she cried in her dormitory—

In the library, glaring at him as he read her favorite book. He smiled at all the best parts—

And then a waltz played across her ears, and she spun in a circle to find him in front of her. The memory slowed, and Voldemort watched her

curtsey in her periwinkle dress, watched her hand raise to Draco's. And like his face was resting just over her shoulder, the Dark Lord turned with them as they danced at the Yule Ball.

Voldemort could hear her heartbeat, feel the shiver across her skin, and watched as Draco scowled down at her—

And with an abruptness that echoed of breathing air after drowning, she was alone in her mind. And Voldemort was before her in the Great Hall, the bones of her comrades scattered around them. He tilted his head, slanting eyes examining her like she'd presented an unexpected problem.

Her head felt the absence of his like a brain freeze, something so chilling filling the plates of her skull.

He released his magical hold on her, and her body crumpled to the ground, legs bending in odd directions. It hurt to keep her eyes open, but she stared up at him as a slow idea formed in his eyes, a realization.

He knew that she fancied Draco Malfoy.

His hand shot out and Hermione could only catch her breath as Draco gasped and zoomed forward like a puppet on a string. His jaw stretched into Voldemort's hand. His legs lengthened to stand on the stones.

Voldemort turned his red eyes on Draco's, and suddenly it was very quiet while Voldemort searched Draco's memories and thoughts for her.

A drop of sweat rolled down Draco's jaw, as Voldemort performed a thorough examination.

She didn't know how long she had been examined, but this felt longer.

Draco grunted, breath shallow.

And then Voldemort released him, dropping him to the floor next to her. Draco caught himself on his knees and stared up at the Dark Lord.

Voldemort smiled. Pleased.

He turned his gaze back on her prone body. And he cackled. She flinched as the sound of it bounced around the Great Hall.

She fancied her captor and soon-to-be-rapist. A familiar boiling in her gut rose up and choked her—the same feeling she used to have in fourth