

THE AUCTION

The mediwitch cast a diagnostic over her. Hermione read the results backwards, finding no fresh scarring or bruising, internal or external. There was something glowing red, like a blinking stoplight. The girl frowned, and moved to open the back of her gown. A soft exhale against Hermione's neck as she saw the nicks across her skin. An incantation, and then they were healed.

The young witch picked up her left arm carefully and examined Bellatrix Lestrange's handiwork. She looked up at Hermione, making quick eye contact before looking away. She paused over a few of the scars she'd obtained in the past year on the run.

Remembering her question from earlier, Hermione checked her arm. Yaxley's signature was placed just above her *Mudblood* scar. They had made sure the scar was still visible.

"When was the last time you ate?"

Hermione shook her head.

The witch blinked at her. "A lot of your nutrition levels are low. She should—" The girl looked quickly to Dolohov, then snapped her jaw shut. "My recommendation is that she eat more. Proteins especially."

Dolohov rolled his eyes. "Yes, you say that every time." He stepped off the wall, and came closer to the table. "And the other spell?"

The older mediwitch frowned, and the younger one's eye twitched. She turned back to Hermione and said, "Lie back, please."

Hermione took a deep, silent breath, and scooted until she laid back. Staring at a ceiling again.

She tilted her head up to watch as the younger one muttered a spell that Hermione didn't recognize. A warm feeling, at the top of her head and at her toes, then scanning downward and upward. It was like a scan. The warm waves met in the middle of her, and low in her belly she felt a quick pressure.

And then her stomach glowed. Like a ball of light had pushed out of her bellybutton. She watched it, glowing so white, it looked blue.

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heard Dolohov walking toward her, and she concentrated on the floor.

Something was thrust in her face. A hospital gown. She frowned at it and took it from him.

“Don’t have all day.”

She pulled the gown on over the towel, and let it drop to the floor. Dolohov scourgified her clothing, charmed it to fold and jump into his hands, her knickers landing on top. He plucked them up, swung them around his finger, and smirked at her.

He led her down the hall, still dripping. She thought she maybe should try running again. A wandless shove, maybe disarm him.

Barefoot and wet. Silenced. Running through the Ministry in a hospital gown.

Hermione kept her eyes on the ground.

He brought her into the room she’d ran past before, the one the medi-witch had peeked out from.

An exam table and two medi-witches. He shoved her inside. Her heart beat fiercely, but she tried to remember that none of the others were worse for wear after their medical exams.

One of the women in white turned to greet them, and she paled as her eyes landed on Hermione.

“Come in,” she squeaked.

Hermione shuffled toward the exam table, dripping still. The witch cast a drying charm on her, and Hermione nodded in thanks. The other witch blinked several times when she turned and saw Hermione. She was older with greying hair, a plump figure. She quickly returned to what she was doing.

“The full work-up. Detailed.” Dolohov crossed his arms, standing in front of the door.

Hermione slid up onto the exam table, holding her gown closed.

“Any chance you’re pregnant?” the younger witch asked.

Hermione swallowed and shook her head “no.”

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She kicked off her trainers. Slid down the zipper on her hoodie. Peeled the jacket and jumper off. The razorblade spell he'd hit her with had sliced through her layers, leaving little nicks in all her clothing. She faced the spray, watching the steam rise, twisting like fire.

She popped the button on her jeans. Tugged down the zipper. She shucked her knickers and jeans together, stepping out of them quickly. Ripped her shirt over her head, tugging the dried blood off her back. Clicked open her bra.

She stepped under the water and imagined her shower at home in Hampstead. Her mother's shampoo on the corner of the tub. Her father's razor in the soap dish.

She pulled her hair over her shoulder, keeping her back towards the door. Stinging pricks against her back as the water hit the wounds. Opening her eyes to the tiles, she found a little bottle of wash on a ledge.

Her mother used to sing in the shower. And it smelled like raspberries. The body wash in her palms, and she pushed it around her skin.

They had a dog when she was younger. And they always washed the dog in the tub, making a mess. The dog had run away or gotten lost when she was nine.

Smart dog.

"You cleaning everything?"

She was back in the Ministry showers, with Antonin Dolohov watching her under the water. The first man to see her naked.

She knew what he meant. How was she supposed to... with him here. Her shoulders were tight, up to her ears.

"Clean that pretty cunt, Granger, or I'll do it myself."

She closed her eyes again. And reached down between her legs to scrub quickly.

She wished the water was hotter. Burning.

She turned the tap, and stepped out, trying to keep her back to him still. She took the towel from the hook, and wrapped herself tight. She

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muscles in her arms and legs shaking from fighting the petrifying curse. Her lip trembled.

“How does that sound, Miss Granger?” Yaxley whispered into her ear. She refused to turn to face him, still staring up at the ceiling like she was still petrified. “I need a verbal response. Or I’ll need to just leave you here until Friday.”

“Yes.” She didn’t recognize her voice.

“Wonderful.” Yaxley stood tall and pointed his wand at her. “That’s the last word I ever want to hear from you. *Silencio*.” She was grateful. Now she could scream.



Yaxley and Dolohov escorted her to the showers. She didn’t know how long she’d been in the conference room on the table, but there was no one else in the showers when she arrived. The other girls from her group were gone by now.

What other girls. She chuckled darkly. Half of them were dead.

Yaxley left to prep the medical team, and once the door was closed, Dolohov leered at her again, letting his eyes slide down her body. He handed her a towel. She waited. Praying he would turn and leave her.

He gestured to the showers. Tile boxes without doors or curtains. She didn’t remember the other girls talking about a lack of privacy during the showers. Just that they were too brief.

She looked back at Dolohov, then to the door, raising her brows.

“Can’t leave you alone, love.” He winked at her.

She swallowed. She looked to the shower, and then handed the towel back to him. She would choose not to. He didn’t take it.

“Oh, you’ll wash,” he said. He stepped closer to her, and she lifted her chin. “Or I’ll do it for you.”

He lifted a hand to touch her, maybe her hair or her shoulder. She jumped away and moved to the shower, starting the spray.

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stood tall next to her shoulders.

“I’m thinking about returning the favor, Muddblood.” His finger at the top of her thighs. “After the first time I fuck you, maybe I’ll erase it, so every time will be the first time for you.” His full hand slithered between her thighs, cupping her, pressing against her. “Warm already.”

“I expect you’ll be paying me for this, Dolohov?” another person asked. And Hermione had never known relief like the warm joy of hearing Yaxley’s voice.

“Just getting a taste,” Dolohov replied.

“Seeing as that’s my name on her arm, I’d suggest you release her. I could decide not to sell her at all.”

Dolohov removed his hand, stepping back and muttering. Yaxley moved into her sightline.

“Miss Granger,” Yaxley hissed. “Lydia Baxter is dead. Parvati Patil is dead. Gwen Mortensen is still with the Healers.” He leaned down on his elbows, bringing his face closer, adopting a conversational tone. “That was a very expensive coup you just staged. As I am your current Holder, I now have the great pleasure of paying for your sins.” He nodded over his shoulder. “Ted Nott may waive the Baxter girl’s fee for me. But I’m sure Macnair will not be as understanding.

“But I do find it interesting that the Lovegood girl is still alive,” Yaxley said, voice catching at the end in a strange imitation of Lucius Malfoy. “I guess the others’ lives were not as valuable to you.”

Like Yaxley had timed it, a tear slipped from the corner of her left eye, sliding down toward her ear.

“Oh, don’t cry, Miss Granger.” He chuckled, and her skin shivered when he brushed his finger across her cheek to wipe the tear away. “No one else will be hurt due to your incompetence. You just need to behave until this Friday evening.”

He whispered a *Finite Incantatem* and she gulped air like a vacuum, her lungs pressing into her ribs until they felt like they cracked. The



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“The Auction” by LovesBitc8
https://archiveofourown.org/works/1910153?view_full_work=true

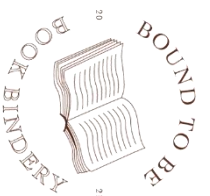
Fandom: Harry Potter
Relationship: Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy
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Trigger warnings may apply

In the wake of the Dark Lord’s triumph over Harry Potter, the defeated must learn their new place. Hermione Granger, former Golden Girl, has been captured and reduced to human chattel. Sold to the highest bidder as the top prize at an auction of Order members and sympathizers, she is thrust into the rabid, waiting hands of the Death Eaters. But despite the horrors of Voldemort’s new world, hope—and hope—seem to arise from the most unlikely of places.

Typeset by



grabbed them, they had been taken to Malfoy Manor. Luna had been kept there for months before that. Was Lucius Malfoy in charge of this prisoner project?

And what did that mean for Draco?

He hadn’t identified them that night. Recognized them, certainly, but was reluctant. Not that Hermione remembered much. She’d been preoccupied with Bellatrix’s blade.

Did they write Yaxley’s name over her scar? She made to lift her arm to look, and remembered she was petrified.

Footsteps. And this time she did recognize Dolohov’s heavy, flat feet.

The door crunched open, and she counted her heartbeats. Dolohov moved slowly into the room, crafty enough to stay out of her sightline as he walked to the other side of the conference table she lay on.

“I told them you were special,” he muttered. “Said from the beginning you should be kept separate.” He growled a laugh. “They’re listening to me now though.”

He stood somewhere near her feet, her eyes strained to find him. She counted five of her own quick exhales before he spoke again.

“Didn’t know you had Wandless like that though. That’ll be fixed soon.”

Before she could ruminate over the possibilities of what he could mean, a light pressure appeared over her right ankle, freezing her brain.

A finger dragging up the inner seam of her jeans, over her calf.

Her throat contracted with nerves, and she felt herself drowning, choking.

“You Obliviated me. You remember?”

The ceiling blurred, and he reached her knee, passing it.

“I don’t, of course.” He chuckled. “I was told later about what happened. The Dark Lord had the whelp torture me for it.”

Up the inside of her thigh, wedging between her two locked legs. And his chest and face came into focus, looking down at her from where he

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a slow seeping wetness across her back, cold in the marble room.

She tried not to mourn Parvati or the Baxter girl. She didn't know the fate of the fifth one. Just like how she tried not to mourn Harry or McGonagall. None of it had to be real yet. She just needed to survive the Ministry holding cells, and then take it a step at a time.

She remembered the plans she made as soon as Harry's body appeared in the courtyard. Leave the castle, find the younger students and anyone who hadn't joined the battle, and then hope to find everyone else. That felt like years ago. She could have done something similar if she had let Luna die. If she had found something dark inside of her, connected to that green light.

Harry had never fired a Killing Curse once, always content to disarm.

Harry was dead.

The thought crawled over her still skin like ivy. Harry was dead. He'd failed. And what chance would *she* have against Lord Voldemort, even if she could get free?

Harry had warred with himself: Hallows or Horcruxes – which was more important? Perhaps he'd chosen wrong?

She heard footsteps, loud clopping sounds of a man who wanted everyone to know he was coming.

They paused in front of her door. She stared at the tiles on the ceiling, waiting for the door handle to turn.

She counted to ten, breathing slowly. Then to twenty.

The footsteps moved down the hall, quieter as he left.

She knew Yaxley's quick pace, like a shark in a small pond, ready to dart, ready to swerve. Dolohov rested his weight on his heels, making him a clumsy runner. She didn't know Macnair. He wasn't at the Department of Mysteries, and her interactions with him were sparse.

Who else was involved in this? What other names were scrawled with ink across those girls' arms? Who was in charge of this Auction?

Lucius Malfoy's smug grin flashed in her mind. When the Snatchers



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morning tea.

Draco was staring past her, glaring at Ron.

No. He probably wasn't paying an ounce of attention to her.

Never in the way she wanted.



They put her in a room all by herself. It could have been an old meeting room. Large enough for a table and twelve chairs. It was empty now. The shadows of where portraits used to hang on the walls, rectangles of unblemished wallpaper.

They left her petrified. Face up. It was a blessing actually. She couldn't hyperventilate when all she could physically do was breathe.

Luna had been able to walk by herself when they locked the door, stumbling along behind Yaxley. She gave Hermione a small smile as the door closed, and Hermione spent the first ten minutes of her isolation trying to decipher it.

Was it a thank you? Was it meant to say, it's alright that you didn't listen to me?

Hermione stared at the ceiling, waiting for what came next.

So, Pansy was right. An Auction of sorts. Yaxley mentioned the cost of the bodies he'd killed, and Dolohov was under the impression that the signature on her arm would change to his, probably with an exchange of Galleons.

It explained why Yaxley had bothered to heal Luna. They were more valuable alive.

How valuable, she wondered.

Pansy said 5,000 Galleons for virgins. That sounded like an awful lot for a one-time experience.

It took a while for Hermione to realize that the curse Dolohov hit her with was still bleeding. She'd stopped the spread of the razor blade nicks with her *Finite Incantatem*, but did not heal the skin. She lay there, feeling



So far, she was quite pleased with Professor Slughorn. All in all, he was a much friendlier presence than their previous Potions instructor.

He'd welcomed them into the classroom, and she and her classmates had gravitated towards four cauldrons bubbling in the center of the room. Polyjuice was clearly boiling in one. She peered into another and found Veritasum, without a doubt. She scrunched her nose in disapproval that he would allow such dangerous potions within clear reach of students.

She inched closer as Slughorn gave Harry and Ron spare copies of the textbook, standing on her tiptoes to inspect the swirling silver potion in the cauldron closest to her.

She gasped. Amortentia.

Slughorn asked for each of the potions to be identified, and her hand rocketed into the air every time.

"It's the most powerful love potion in the world!" she said, bouncing on her toes when Slughorn asked her.

"Quite right! You recognized it, I suppose, by its distinctive mother-of-pearl sheen?"

She nodded. "And the steam rising in characteristic spirals. And it's supposed to smell differently to each of us, according to what attracts us, and I can smell freshly mown grass and new parchment and —"

Honey. Honey dripping into a teacup.

Her jaw snapped shut.

It was innocuous, really. Just honey. Her eyes drifted to a pale blond, wondering if he would have even associated her almost-confession with his



Harry Potter is dead. He was killed as he ran away, trying to save himself while you lay down your lives for him. We bring you his body as proof that your hero is gone.

The battle is won. You have lost half of your fighters. My Death Eaters outnumber you, and the Boy Who Lived is finished. There must be no more war. Anyone who continues to resist, man, woman or child, will be slaughtered, as will every member of their family. Come out of the castle now, kneel before me, and you shall be spared. Your parents and children, your brothers and sisters will live and be forgiven, and you will join me in the new world we shall build together.

Hermione fell to her knees.

Harry Potter is dead.

She was cold. There was blood on her face, stiffening her skin. She didn't remember if it was hers. There was dirt beneath her nails and bile in her throat.

She heard Ron speaking to her, some nonsense. Something about continuing to fight.

If Harry was dead...

She'd had nightmares about this moment for the past seven years. About what she would have to do next. She'd run through the chain of command. First McGonagall. When McGonagall fell, then Kingsley. Then Remus. But behind them all, she and Ron would need to be the new faces of the revolution.

Your hero is gone.

She staggered to her feet. Ron helped her up.

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She shouldn't have kissed him. She shouldn't have pretended there was normalcy in her life. The world was ending.

McGonagall screamed. Hermione turned toward the entrance to the castle, and saw Hagrid carrying a body.

He looked so small, his hair still sticking out in all directions.

She felt a yell from her own lips as Ginny ran forward, screaming his name.

She watched Ginny's face, wondering at the feeling of seeing your love lying dead before you. And her eyes turned to the faces of the approaching Death Eaters, searching...

A blond head moved quickly amongst them. Hermione's heart pounded, following the figure. The blond slid through the ranks, until finally breaking away and heading to a side entry. It was Narcissa Malfoy. Hermione looked around and found all eyes on Hagrid laying Harry's body down at Voldemort's feet.

No one saw the willowy woman dart away through the castle. No one but Hermione.

She turned. Ron held onto Ginny, tears streaming down his face. McGonagall stood tall, wand at the ready. The remaining Weasleys were behind her. Kingsley's eyes roved over the Death Eaters, counting, it seemed.

If Narcissa Malfoy was planning something, she needed to be followed. Hermione couldn't let her get away.

Voldemort was still floating, preaching to his gathered crowd. She slipped to her left behind several students, creeping toward the stone wall. One last look at Harry's body. She looked to Ron and Ginny, preparing to fight.

Just as she was about to make a break for it down the hall, Neville ran forward. Voldemort stunned him backward with a bang.

All attention on Neville, and Hermione made her escape.

She tucked herself back into the crowd, tracking the silky blonde hair

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"You're not so smart after all, are you, you little swot?" Dolohov aimed his wand at her head. "Feisty though. I'll enjoy that once you're mine."

He reached down, grabbed a fist full of her hair, and dragged her frozen body down the stones.

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Luna's chin.

She could kill them both. It may take some fighting but she could do it. And grab up Dolohov's wand and go back for the girls. Or push through the halls without them, looking for an exit.

And then what? Who was left?

"Miss Granger?"

She could conjure that hate. Take out Dolohov. But not before Yaxley's knife ended Luna.

She could kill Dolohov, then Yaxley as Luna's body dropped.

And then she'd be alone.

"It's okay, Hermione."

She looked back to Luna. The girl smiled and there was blood on her teeth. She nodded her head, like telling her she could step in front of her at the drinking fountain. The movement pushed the blade into her skin.

"It's okay," Luna said. "Don't think of me. I don't mind." Yaxley squeezed her, and the blade cut her just enough. "Remember? He said it would be better this way."

Draco.

Draco told her it would be better to die.

But despite her attachments, she still had no reason to trust him over her instincts. And her instincts started to scream as the blade moved across Luna's throat.

Hermione dropped to her knees, skidded the wand down the stones, and moved her hands to her head.

She watched as Yaxley scooped up his wand, as Luna's hands scrambled for her throat. Dolohov moved toward Hermione, and Yaxley turned his wand on Luna's neck, knitting the skin back together.

"*Petrificus Totalus*," from Dolohov.

Her arms snapped to her sides, and her body lengthened, bringing her face-first along the stone floor, smashing her nose. Dolohov kicked her over. He leaned over her, smiled, and spit on her face.

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as it swayed through the Death Eaters to the side door. Hermione watched the door close behind Narcissa.

Screaming from behind her. She hated that she could identify the sound of Neville's crying. Her own memories wrapping around the familiar rhythm of Bellatrix's cackle.

Hermione slipped into the empty Entrance Hall, and looked into the void of white sheets in the Great Hall. Madame Pomfrey looked up at her, the only living soul amongst the bodies.

"What's happening out there, Granger?" Her voice shook.

"Harry is dead." She heard her voice leave her lips.

Pomfrey paled.

"I believe we are about to fight," she continued. She watched as the mediwitch's lips shivered.

Hermione blinked. And turned around, walking in the direction Narcissa Malfoy had slipped inside.

It must be shock. She let her mind turn this over—Harry was dead, and she was chasing Narcissa Malfoy around the empty castle.

Hermione turned down an empty corridor, rubble pushed into the corners. She'd never seen the castle this ghostly.

Dead.

Voices down a side hall. Hermione pressed herself against the wall, cold stones against her back, and peeked around the corner.

Two blond heads.

She snapped back, her skull hitting the wall behind her in her haste to hide. She pulled her eyes tight and listened through the pounding in her head.

"...time to go. We'll meet your father... to France with ..." Narcissa's quick whispering floated short phrases to her.

"I'm not leaving." Draco's voice was strong.

A soft warmth intruded Hermione's panic as she realized that Narcissa Malfoy had no master plan. She was simply risking her life to look for her

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son.

"Where are you going?"

"You didn't see her in the courtyard?"

"I was looking for you." Heavy footfalls. "Did you hear me?" Narcissa asked. "Potter is dead."

"Yes, I heard you." Draco's voice was closer. He was coming her way. Hermione darted back the way she came, finding a small broom closet to duck into.

She couldn't hear much more of what the Malfoys said over the sound of her heartbeat. Draco's quick legs carried him past her door, Narcissa right on his heels. Hermione peeked out of the closet, watching him walk away.

Things were about to get exponentially more difficult. She would have to return to the Entrance Hall now. She would have to take stock of who had survived while she'd run after the Malfoys, pretending it was for the cause. She would have to comfort Ginny and Ron, and attempt to let them comfort her – that is, if she could find them.

What if she'd missed it? Missed it all. What if she returned to the Entrance Hall and the bodies of her friends lay there, waiting for her to join them.

Maybe she didn't return. She could meet up with the students who had been forced from the school before all of this began. Try to get as much information as possible, and if they were all that was left, she would have to organize them. And *if*, miraculously, some of her friends survived what was happening, they'd meet somewhere in the middle.

She stared down the hallway Draco Malfoy had disappeared, heading back toward the courtyard probably, looking for whoever had made him disobey not only his mother, but also his Dark Lord. She pressed her lips together.

He'd spared her at Malfoy Manor, spared all three of them. Of course he'd recognized them. Just as she could pick him out of a crowd of

flowing behind her, yelling over the sound of Luna's whimpers.

Dolohov had recovered. He pulled himself up, slashing his wand through the air, and something cracked inside of her as Luna screamed again, voice breaking and fluttering over Parvati's shouting.

"Avada Kedavra."

It left her lips like a kiss. A green jet of light pouring from the wand in her hand, but stopping short, just a foot before Dolohov's tense face.

They stared at each other, listening to their breath and the grunting from the hallway. Neither she nor Dolohov had expected her to cast it.

And that's why she hadn't meant it.

She summoned the image of Harry in Hagrid's arms. Ron's face as he looked upon Fred for the last time, the sound of her mother calling her downstairs, Sirius's warm brown eyes, and she aimed her wand and opened her lips.

Yaxley appeared in the hallway, dragging Luna by the neck. He propped her up in front of him, just like with the Baxter girl. Who was now gone.

Hermione kept the wand on Dolohov, and watched Luna lift her head and meet her eyes. Blood dripped over her left brow, and her lip was swollen. A red strain was spreading between her ribs.

"Let's try this again," Yaxley panted against Luna's hair. "I already owe Ted Nott and Walden Macnair a few thousand Galleons for your little stunt, Miss Granger." He grinned. "Antonin won't mind this one going to waste, I'm sure."

Hermione watched Luna's ribs drag in air, thinking.

Baxter was dead, and now he was saying Parvati was too. The fifth girl possibly dead. Luna here, about to die. Fifty unarmed girls locked in a room several hallways back.

Harry wasn't here. Or McGonagall or Kingsley. Or Lupin. Or Dumbledore.

"Drop the wand, Miss Granger." Yaxley raised his bloody knife to

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She had no idea anymore which way was out. Curses and hexes smashed through the corners she wound around.

She skidded down a hall to her left. And it was empty. A dead end. No doors to disappear into.

She spun on her heel just as Yaxley slid into the hall, Dolohov behind him.

“*Crucio!*”

She jumped out of the way of Dolohov’s curse.

“*Expelliarmus!*” she bellowed. He blocked her.

She needed to disarm Dolohov first. Then focus on Yaxley.

“I thought she was supposed to be clever,” Dolohov hissed. “The Mud-blood’s got herself backed into a corner.” He smiled, lips peeling away from yellow teeth. “*Flipendo!*”

She let the jet graze her ear so she could send a Stupefy. He blocked, and she aimed at the wall next to him.

“*Aguamenti!*”

A solid stream of water hit the marble wall, bouncing and spraying against his face, into his eyes and ears. Dolohov stumbled and just when Hermione had a clear shot to disarm him, a small body with wild blonde curls crashed into Yaxley, disappearing them both around the corner.

Luna.

“*Expelliarmus!*” she cast, but the momentary distraction was enough time for Dolohov to block her.

Dolohov used her technique against her, and ricocheted a spell off the wall behind her. It struck her right between the shoulder blades, and she screamed as what felt like small razor blade cuts spread across her skin, dancing down her back and curving around her ribs.

Mustering something within she howled a jinx at him before swiping her wand to end the nicking spell on her back.

A scream from around the corner that she recognized as Luna. And then Parvati’s dark figure sprinted past Hermione’s hallway, raven hair

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hundreds, she knew he could do the same. She had her hair and her “snotty” posture.

She knew the length of his strides. How stunned she’d been in fifth year when he had grown, almost as tall as Snape. It was like memorizing him again.

She knew the shade of his blond, of course. A beacon in darkness, but after seeing him with his parents, at the Quidditch World Cup and a handful of other times, she could choose his colors from between the three of them. He’d gotten the exact shade of blond from Narcissa, but the quality of Lucius’s.

The quirk of his eyebrow, just before he delivered a fatal, witty blow was written across her veins. The slant of his lips before he smirked haunted a dark corner of her mind. The lifeless quality in his eyes, only recently developed, was sketched into her subconscious. Like he didn’t have a soul. At least not one she was allowed to see.

And then only a handful of smiles. True smiles. Opening packages from his mother at the breakfast table. A truly divine Quidditch play. Something Blaise Zabini whispered into his ear during Potions class. She felt like it had been years since she’d seen one of those.

For her own sake, she hoped that he and his family *would* run to France. If she found his boxy shoulders beneath Death Eater robes, casting curses against her and her army, she wasn’t sure if she would be able to—

“*Stupefy!*”

And her final thought, before crumpling to the familiar stones of her old school, was that she should have known caring for him would end here. Distracted, disarmed, and destroyed.



Hermione woke to the sound of crying. Her eyes snapped open, and it was like her heart turned on, fluttering viciously in her chest. Her lungs grabbed for the stale air, tasting fear on the back of her tongue.

There were bodies all around her. The sounds of sniffing and crying. A warm light kept the room from total darkness. A cold marble floor beneath her she almost recognized.

“Hermione!”

She looked up. The room was moving. And she realized the bodies around her weren’t soulless. The entire room — fifty people began crawling to her. Her lungs cramped, and she pressed back into the wall she woke up against.

“Hermione,” said a familiar voice. She turned and Ginny was there, climbing over the people, grabbing her shoulders, tucking her into her chest, and saying, “You’re awake.”

Hermione looked past her red curls. The room was full of familiar faces. She could see Luna and Parvati. The bodies that had slithered to her were her friends, eager to hold her, not to attack.

Ginny pulled back, her hands on her Hermione’s face. “Where did you go? Where were you captured?”

Captured. It came down to that word. Hermione opened her lips, cracking skin, and coughed at the sandpaper feeling in her throat.

“Water!” Ginny called. Four or five girls scrambled. “Are you hungry?”

Ginny asked.

Hermione frowned. *Food? Water?*

hallway. Her fingers plucked it from the ground.

“STOP!”

She spun. Yaxley was up. He had a knife at Baxter’s neck, poking into the flesh. Parvati was silent behind her, and she chanced a look. Dolohov pulled her up by the scalp, holding her to his chest as a shield, wand trained on Hermione.

Her heartbeat in her fingertips. Sweat dripping down her spine.

“Drop the wand,” Yaxley hissed.

Hermione turned to hold defense against Dolohov. Luna’s body on the ground behind him, slowly coming back to consciousness. The fifth girl was out cold.

A whimper, gurgling.

She turned, and Yaxley’s blade had pulled across Baxter’s throat. Blood sprayed as her fingers scrambled to staunch its flow. Hermione’s jaw dropped and a small scream popped through her lips, her skin buzzing.

Yaxley grinned at her. “Now, if only I had my wand to heal her.”

Baxter fell to her knees, holding the slice across her neck. Hermione met her eyes as they dimmed.

Hermione shot a hex at Yaxley, now without a human shield. He jumped out of the way just in time, but a Disarming Spell from Dolohov hit the wall behind her head.

“Hermione! Run!” Parvati screamed.

She turned back and ran down the hallway toward the exam rooms. Heavy footfalls thudded behind her, and she turned and shot curses over her shoulder. A head poked out of a brightly lit room, a mediwitch hat on. Hermione sprinted past, turning right at the end of the hall. It was at least the same direction as the main door they had wanted to exit through. She heard the Death Eaters follow her around the corner, and she blasted a door open.

Supply cupboard.

She kept running, heading toward the end of the hall. It was a maze.

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follow. Hermione eyed Yaxley as he locked the door and turned to bring up the rear.

Her heart thudded a dull beat.

They turned left.

She stared at the back of Baxter's head. She didn't know her. As her arm swung back she could just make out the word *Not!*

They turned left again. A long hallway with a door at the end. Midway was a door on the right, which according to Ginny would lead to the showers. A hallway sprouting to the left to take them to the medical exam room.

She focused in on the hum of magic in her blood. And she spun and reached out, focusing on the spell, and pushed Yaxley through the air.

She opened her eyes when she heard a shout. Yaxley's body hung by his ankle. Baxter joined her, hands outstretched. Their magic synced, a force of wind and desperation. Yaxley's wand flew from his hand. Her eyes followed, heart hammering. Without the grace and delicacy of wandwork on the *Expelliarmus*, the stick just zoomed across the hall.

A commotion from behind them, possibly the other three attacking the first Death Eater, and she felt the power slipping from her fingers, distractions everywhere and her mind spinning circles. Yaxley dropped, falling in a heap.

Get the wand. Get the wand.

A scream behind her.

She spun, and Parvati was on the floor, writhing.

The Death Eater's mask had slipped off in the attack. It was Dolohov. His wand trained on Parvati in what must be the Cruciatus Curse. Hermione gasped for air, searching for the wand as Luna jumped on his back. He swatted her away with his wand, her little body flying backward.

Hermione was useless in a duel without a wand. Her eyes darted, searching. There, in the corner that lead to the exam room: Yaxley's wand. She dove for it, as a fresh round of screams from Parvati poured into the

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A paper water cup forced its way to her lips. Hermione sipped, and looked up to thank the person there. It was Cho Chang.

Everyone was alive. Had they surrendered? Where were Ron and Neville? She blinked.

Only girls. Young girls. She looked at each of their faces. When her eyes landed on Luna, the blonde girl smiled gently and said, "They're keeping us separate."

"Separate and unharmed?" Hermione rasped. A plate of fruit passed over heads and appeared in front of her face. "And fed?"

"It's not poisoned. We've all been eating," Ginny supplied. Hermione just sipped her water.

"How long have we been here?" she asked.

"Four days," several voices chorused.

"You arrived yesterday."

Hermione snapped her head to look at Ginny. She scanned herself. No injuries. But there was something on her arm.

C. *Yaxley*. A tattoo of sorts. Magical. It was his signature.

She felt the blood drain from her head.

"That's who captured you." Parvati nodded at the tattoo. Hermione's eyes drifted down to Parvati's arm and saw *W. Macnair*.

She swallowed. "Is that who owns us now?"

Ginny pursed her lips and several girls looked away. "We're not sure," Ginny said. "They haven't said much to us, just kept us fed and kept bringing girls in." She took deep breath. "It's possible that—"

"I've already told you stupid chits," came a sour voice from the corner. Hermione craned her neck, and found the one body that had not clamored to greet her when she woke. Sitting against the corner wall, knees to her chest in a lazy way, not a hair out of place.

Pansy Parkinson glanced over at them all. Hermione shivered at the intense eyes boring directly into her.

"It's for the Auction."

Ginny rolled her eyes.

Hermione couldn't look away from Pansy. Couldn't understand her presence. There were other pure-bloods here, but they were blood traitors.

Why keep them all alive? The room spun as Hermione calculated the possibilities, all boiling down to only a few likely scenarios that made her ribs cave in, crunching and gnawing at her lungs.

She drew in a rattling breath. "The Auction?"

Ginny glared at Pansy before stepping in front of her, blocking her from view. "You need to eat." She started pulling fruit together for her, peeling a banana. "Where were you captured, Hermione? I didn't see you at the battle in the courtyard."

What did they need a room full of young girls for? Where were the boys?

"Ron—" she croaked.

"Hermione." Ginny's voice was firm. "Tell me where you were captured."

"I—I was in the castle. I thought I saw..." She drifted, not sure what she should discuss with Pansy Parkinson there. "...someone worth following. But I got stunned in the back."

"Did you see anyone? Or anything useful?" Cho asked.

Hermione looked over at Pansy. Would she care to know that she'd seen Draco? Was she worried about him at all? Hermione wondered whose name was tattooed on her arm.

"No one on our side, no."

"And then where were you taken?" Hannah Abbott asked.

"Here?" Hermione supplied. "I guess."

A collective gasp.

"You've been unconscious? Or you don't remember?"

"You haven't had water in four days?"

"Where were they keeping you?"

"We need to check her body—"

chance. They take you left around two corners, and then there is a door at the end of the hall before they take you right and into the showers." Ginny drew imaginary lines on the wall for a visual aid, and Hermione was reminded of Ron, and the way he strategized Wizard's Chess. "I think I've been in these halls before with my father. I think those are the main doors."

"They lead to the courtrooms," a black-haired girl said. "My father was on the Wizengamot. I think I know where we are."

Ginny nodded. "Yaxley and another guard led us to the showers. I'm thinking *Levicorpus* and *Expelliarmus*." The girls agreed. The others who had not yet gone for exams had gathered too. "Just get Hermione a wand. Don't come back for us."

More than thirty heads nodded.

"What?" Hermione frowned. "No, we'll come back, get you all out, and then all fifty of us will storm through that door—"

"Don't be an idiot, Granger," Pansy said from her corner.

Ginny pressed her lips together. "Hermione, you have to get through that door as quickly and silently as possible. The mediwitches will be waiting on the next group."

"Why would five witches with a maximum of two wands be better chances than fifty?" she argued. "We're ten floors deep underground."

"Fifty unarmed witches fighting in the lifts is better?" Pansy sneered.

The *bang* of the doors unlocking again. The girls scattered, looking innocent.

Yaxley returned the five freshly bathed girls.

"Baxter, Lovegood, Patil, Mortensen, and Granger."

She stood. And wondered for the first time where the other Patil was. Parvati moved quickly to be at the front of the line of girls, giving Hermione a nod. Luna stood behind her. The other girls filed in and Hermione stood at the back. Yaxley led them out, holding the door to lock it. Another Death Eater waited in the hallway, and gestured for Parvati to

standing, some shrinking back.

Another *bang*, this one Hermione recognized as doors opening.

"It could just be food. Or another girl dropped off," Ginny whispered. Hermione stood, leaning heavily against the wall, regretting her empty stomach.

A lock clicked, and a masked Death Eater entered the room. He was without food and without a new girl.

"Medical examinations today."

It was Yaxley. She looked down at her arm, expecting... something. A tingle or burn? Or the letters glittering when he was near. Nothing.

"Five at a time," he said. "Parkinson, Abbott, Clearwater, Forbes, and Harding. Follow me."

No one moved.

"Now," Yaxley said.

Penelope Clearwater was the first to separate herself and move to the front. Pansy stood and followed. The five exited the room. Yaxley looked around, promising pain behind the mask, and closed the door as he left.

An hour later, they were returned. The gash across Hannah's head had been healed. And they smelled better.

He took Ginny this time, and four others. The rest gathered around the five that returned and hounded them for answers.

"Where are we?" Hermione asked Hannah as Penelope answered questions about the showers and the medical exam.

"I think the Ministry."

The black marble floors. Of course.

When Ginny came back, she pulled a group to the corner, taking Hermione and Luna. She explained the hallways, the showers. The number of Death Eaters guarding them.

"Is anyone good with wandless magic?" Ginny looked around. A few of the older girls nodded. "Whoever is in Hermione's group should try to overpower the guards before reaching the showers. This may be our only

"Yaxley. I wouldn't put it past him—"

"Stop." Hermione nearly shouted it. The room went quiet. A few girls who were gathering water cups and spare pieces of bread turned to look at her. She steadied her voice and said, "I don't remember anything after I got stunned."

"Hermione," Ginny said carefully, eyes wide and searching. "We should check you out. See if you have any markings. See if you feel anything... between your legs."

Hermione looked at the fifty or so girls around her. She could only watch as they scanned her intently, already searching her skin for markings. All but Parvati, whose eyes had drifted away, looking at the marble floors as if she would give Hermione privacy. As if she already knew how intrusive this was.

Hermione's eyes drifted back to Macnair's signature on her arm.

"There's no need," Pansy scoffed. Heads turned to glare. Pansy kept her stare in front of her, bored. "She's too valuable. No one would touch her."

Ginny looked like she was actively biting her tongue to keep from mouthing back at her.

"Besides," Pansy said, twisting her head to smirk. "You're a virgin, aren't you, Granger?"

Hermione felt a stab to her chest as half the girls turned to look at her with eager eyes and the other half started cursing at Pansy.

"What?" Pansy laughed. "I'm just saying it would be a waste of 5,000 Galleons. No need to check her out."

"Shut up about that damn Auction, Pansy," Ginny snarled. "No one believes you—"

"What Auction?" Hermione looked to the Slytherin girl. She supposed houses didn't matter much anymore, did they? "What are you talking about?"

Pansy smiled. "Just what it sounds like, Granger. The pure-blood elite are going to put a price tag on us, strut us about, and bid." She bit her lip,

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lifting a joyful brow. “And if you’ve been saving yourself for Weasley all these years, they’ll give Yaxley another 5,000.”

The smell of the banana and the oranges... ripe as the bodies sweating nervously around her. She could taste it all in the back of her throat. Hermione was going to be sick.

“And how did you find yourself on the wrong side of all this, Pansy?” she asked.

Pansy looked away. “Wrong place, wrong time.”

“Don’t listen to her,” Ginny said. “Let’s just check you out right quick. Just me and Luna, okay?”

Hermione nodded, already wishing she was asleep again. The girls gave them some space, Parvati and Cho creating a bit of privacy around them.

“Is this what you were wearing during the Battle?” Ginny asked. Hermione looked down at herself. Same clothes, but they were clean. Scourged.

“Er, yes.”

“Good.”

They unzipped her jacket, checking her neck and shoulders before helping her take off her shirt. When they confirmed she had no markings on her back, Hermione finally asked, “Where’s Ron?”

Ginny’s eyes looked to her, then away. “He was alive, last I saw. Same with Neville. Kingsley and McGonagall were killed in the courtyard.”

Hermione thought maybe she should have gasped. Should have started crying.

“Pansy thinks there are males to be Auctioned too, so maybe Ron and Neville will be there,” Luna whispered melodically.

“There is no Auction, Luna.” Ginny hissed through her teeth. “It’s just Parkinson playing games with us.” She ran her fingers across Hermione’s scalp, pressing for injuries.

“I don’t know,” Luna said. “Draco mentioned it to me, too.”

Hermione looked at her, and the fingers in her hair stopped.

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“An Auction?” Ginny said.

“Draco?” Hermione asked.

“Mm-hmm.” Luna rolled up Hermione’s jeans, looking at her ankles and calves. “When I was staying in his dungeons.” She mentioned it like it was a holiday she’d taken last year. “He would come and talk to me. Tell me what was going on at school. And a few days before I left — before you and Harry and Ron came, Hermione — he told me there might be something like this.”

“What did he say?”

“Just that should I survive the war, and should the Dark Lord win, I should try to kill myself if I couldn’t escape.” Luna rolled Hermione’s pant legs down.

Cho Chang turned around, eyes wide on Luna.

“Because of an Auction?” Ginny asked.

“Something like that,” Luna shrugged. “All he said was that he wouldn’t be able to buy me. He had to save for someone else.”

Hermione swallowed. Draco Malfoy being kind – compassionate. She’d always thought she was the only one who’d seen it. She’d heard a bit from Harry last year, about Myrtle in the girls’ bathroom just before he’d sliced him open.

Hermione looked across the room again. “Pansy,” she said. Cho turned to look at Pansy, and Ginny’s eyes followed. Hermione watched the dark haired girl close her eyes and lean back against the wall in her solitary corner, secluded away from everyone else. “He knew Pansy would end up here. Months ago.”

Hermione turned to Ginny and Luna. “Whose names are on your arms?”

Luna pulled up her sleeve, and Ginny turned her wrist. Both of them had the same signature.

Antonin Dolohov.

A loud *bang* from outside the room. All fifty girls jumped, some