

searching for the Queen in Australia, but it would confirm whatever suspicions were in his mind. She couldn't trust the secret with anyone else. Her *own* mind was hardly safe from prying — she couldn't hand Draco Malfoy the key to her parents just by asking the question —

He looked away from her. "The Dark Lord isn't interested in pursuing Muggles beyond the ones in Edinburgh. Politicians, royals... commoners. They hold no interest for him right now."

Her heartbeat drummed in her fingertips. She could breathe again. She could think clearly.

She wrote these answers down on her mental checklist, stowing them into a tight corner of her library of shelves.

"You touched my tattoo as we crossed the threshold. Does one need to be escorted by a Death Eater to enter and exit Edinburgh?"

He nodded, and she tucked the information away for a future escape plan.

"What is the purpose of the collars?"

"Aesthetic, ownership, and hierarchy," he replied. "The Gold Collars have access to the entire castle, with the assumption that the Death Eater is keeping a careful eye on his Lot. The Carrow Girls are allowed everywhere except the private parlours in the west building. With the exception of Charlotte, of course."

Her ears perked up, and she tilted her head. "And what happens in the private parlours?"

"Official Death Eater business. Conversations with foreign dignitaries." He glanced down at the floor, and twisted his ring around his thumb. So that was the real purpose of these parties, then. Entertaining and seducing government officials.

"You said the silver collars are owned by the Carrows," she confirmed, and he nodded. "I thought Neville was bought by the Carrows. Where is he?"

"Longbottom was traded away. Given to Rookwood in exchange for

Edinburgh's skyline. It was a clear night, and they were hundreds of feet above sea level.

Dark windows and empty streets as far as the eye could see. Had Edinburgh been massacred? Or evacuated?

A faint sensation of fingers on her lower back, and she shivered as Draco brushed past her. After a moment, she followed, struggling to keep up with his long strides.

She could hear the growing noise of a party as they walked closer to the grey structures jutting into the night sky. He finally turned a corner and led her into a large courtyard, where about fifty men were socializing. She swallowed, trying to conceal her shock as she considered the numbers. It had to be a gathering of Voldemort's elite, but she'd never known him to have such a large inner circle. Were all of these men truly Death Eaters? Or were they simply revelers, delving into their darker impulses now that the Order was gone? She opened her mouth to ask, and realized again that she couldn't.

They moved toward the tall buildings to the left, away from the crowd outside, but his feet turned abruptly, as if he'd just remembered something. She stumbled to keep up with him as he took her elbow and dragged her to the solitary lamp still flickering in this part of the courtyard. Once he was illuminated with ambers and golds, she watched him breathe deep and stare at her with cold, dead eyes.

"I'm showing you how to behave," he murmured. His eyes dipped towards her chest. "Nod your head."

Her heart thundered, and she refrained from looking over to the crowd they were playing for. She nodded at his shoes. "How am I to behave?"

One hand reached up, and she held her breath when he tucked a curl behind her ear, tilting her face up with his hand on her jaw. A different mask had clicked into place. His eyes flickered with heat as he breathed over her, dancing along her clavicles and neck.

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“Obedient, but not broken.”

She blinked quickly at him, feeling the warmth of his fingers behind her ear, watching his eyes storm, and the Malfoy smirk slowly return over his features.

“Oi! Malfoy!”

The call from across the courtyard startled her. She tried to turn around but Draco’s hand on her face held her firmly in place.

He lifted his head and called out, “Evening, Bole,” before dropping his hand to her elbow and dragging her to the buildings they were headed for.

She heard a faint smattering of “Is that her?” and “Finally!” behind her shoulder as his pace quickened.

The gap in the buildings led to another large, dimly-lit courtyard. Four blocky buildings bordered the area, a clock tower climbing high from the one to their left. It was eerily quiet in the summer air, but she still felt like hundreds of eyes were on her.

His hand rose to her lower back as he pushed them onwards, and she jumped at the contact before settling into the warmth of his hand. He steered them towards one of the blocky buildings, about three stories tall and as long as the entire courtyard.

She wondered what kind of sordid debauchery awaited her inside the walls. How many of her friends would she find in chains, beaten and broken? How many familiar faces would she find abusing and raping the innocent? The courtyard answered her in silence.

They reached the entrance, the wooden doors heavy and foreboding. A pause, and then Draco pushed open the door for her.

Music, lifting above the stone floors and into the wooden arches overhead. A soft jazzy tune she remembered from her Muggle life. A bustling of laughter and clinking glasses.

She tried to peer around the edge of the entryway to see more, but a girl appeared, blocking her view. She held a tray of champagne glasses and

CHAPTER 16

Battle of Hogwarts. They took over the Muggle city of Edinburgh a few hours later, but most of it had already been evacuated. The Scandinavian Ministry had an emissary there, and she acted quickly. This was a few days before the Apparition Line was finished.”

Hermione blinked, trying to keep her focus on getting all the answers she needed.

“And what’s the fallout of this?” she said. “Surely the Muggle world has noticed that Edinburgh has been extinguished from the map.”

“There was a confrontation once the Dark Lord’s forces caught on. The papers reported a terrorist attack, a nuclear explosion. The Muggles aren’t concerned with the comings and goings of Edinburgh any longer. Not until Muggle scientists have examined and decontaminated it. The Muggle government thinks it will be years before it’s safe.”

She felt her heart in her throat as she asked, “And why the castle? Does he have plans to seize other castles and estates?”

“No. Edinburgh is his experiment.” A pause as Hermione tried to think about what he meant.

A memory of the Ministry’s newest statue rose in her mind. Muggles, gnarled and twisted, their faces turned in blinding admiration towards the wizards above them. *Magic is Might*.

A jolt down her spine that set every nerve ending on edge.

“But whatever’s left of the Order didn’t want to take any chances,” Draco was saying. “The Muggle Prime Minister escaped the U.K. shortly after the Battle, and the Dark Lord installed a new Prime Minister, under Dolohov’s Imperius Curse. We have it on good authority that the Queen and young princes are either in Canada or Australia.”

Her eyes flickered once before she settled a mask over her face, a lake with still waters. *Australia. Her parents*.

Draco’s gaze was on her, and he blinked once, eyes narrowing to examine the reaction she failed to hide.

She needed to ask. She needed to know if the Death Eaters were

yourself—”

She scrambled for the clasp, feeling it fall away under her fingers, clear air returning to her lungs. She tossed the collar at his feet.

“You better clear your afternoon, Malfoy,” she hissed, and slammed the door behind her.

Once the slip was off, she threw it on the floor, feeling like she could breathe again. She turned the bathwater to scalding and dripped several potions in the tub, letting the aroma cleanse her head as her body sunk into the burning waters.

She compiled her list. She simmered in the possibilities. She stared at the bathroom wall until the waters were cool and still, both in her mind and against her skin.

When she woke in the morning after only a few hours’ rest, she entered the routine she’d established the week before — plucking books from the library and tacking them to the Conservatory. Every hour or so, she took a break to meditate. Tuck away the memories from last night, like books on a shelf. She couldn’t let her emotions run away with her again. She’d been careless last night. As the clock ticked toward twelve, Hermione was certain Draco was going to avoid her.

But at noon on the dot, the door to the Conservatory pulled open, and she looked up to find him strolling toward her, wearing a pale grey button up and dragon leather shoes — out of uniform. He looked as if the hours of space between them hadn’t done any favors for him either.

She stood from her bench and wrapped her cardigan tighter around herself in the humid chill of the morning. As she prepared to ask questions, she realized that Draco had managed to strengthen his mask overnight. He stared at her, a slight tilt to his head, with eyes cool and grey.

That’s just fine, she thought. I’ve strengthened mine as well.

“What happened to Edinburgh?”

A slight expansion of his ribs, like he was taking a deep breath but trying not to show it. “The Death Eaters seized the castle two weeks after the

wore a short slip that shimmered like the bubbles in the flutes. She wore a silver collar around her thin neck.

The girl looked up at them, eyes landing on Hermione with a flicker, before turning a coquettish smile on Draco.

“Good evening, Master Malfoy.”

“Charlotte,” he greeted, lifting two champagne glasses off the tray. He silently offered Hermione one, and she stared down at it until he pushed it into her chest.

She clutched the crystal between her fingers as Charlotte stepped aside for them, and Draco guided her into the room.

It was a hall, maybe half the size of Hogwarts’ Great Hall. People mingled, glasses sparkled, and conversation bubbled up to the arched ceiling. Her eyes struggled to capture everything. Chandeliers hung over the room, burning low and casting shadows over the suits of armor and coat of arms lining the walls. Her eyes flew to a looming fireplace across the room, its pale stone reaching high towards the vaulted beams. Perhaps an escape route if she could find Floo powder, assuming it wasn’t charmed against her tattoo.

The men standing about sipping champagne or swirling tumblers of scotch weren’t in Death Eater robes, but still had a stiff uniformity about them, as if they could be called away at any moment. She scanned, recognizing Jugson, Crabbe Sr., Runcorn from the Ministry, and Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestrange. And just after she caught sight of Mulciber, she found Cho Chang looking at her from where she dripped off of his arm like wax.

Hermione’s breath caught, and she heard sound in a vacuum as Cho turned away, sipping her champagne as if they didn’t know each other. Cho smiled sweetly at something Mulciber said, leaning in and looking up at him through her lashes, her long hair swaying down her back. She didn’t flinch as his hand slipped down to rub her backside.

A chill pressed over her. “Dolohov?” she whispered.

A quick shake of Draco's head, and Hermione felt the knot in her stomach unwind.

Her eyes flitted through the rest of the room, desperate to discover more of them. Sally Fawcett in a corner with a much older man, her neck tilted to the side as he brushed his lips across her skin. Hannah Abbott in a slip even shorter than the others', her limbs skinny and pale, holding a full glass of champagne with haunted eyes. Alicia Spinnet with her arms slung around the shoulders of an unfamiliar man, swaying to the music with a listless smile on her face. Some stood tall and proud at their captors' sides like a treasured concubine, whereas others shrunk into themselves, like used and beaten toys their owners would one day tire of.

Draco sipped his champagne as they moved forward, his arm slithering around her back, his hand landing on her opposite hip. She leaned into the embrace for the benefit of any watchful eyes, a shiver passing over her skin.

"Malfoy!" Blaise Zabini swaggered toward them with Theo Nott on his heels. Blaise smirked and slid his eyes over her. "Finally let her out of her cage, I see."

"Of course," Draco's voice lilted. He threw back the rest of his champagne glass. "She's been ill. Disgusting to look at, really."

Blaise's lips twitched, but he said nothing. Theo snorted and sipped his champagne.

Hermione looked past them, trying to catch a glimpse of Cho again, then froze — aware of a drop in the room's volume. They had caught the attention of half the hall. Eyes turned to her, Lots and Death Eaters alike. They murmured in low voices to each other, whispering and nodding toward them, and she felt her cheeks burn as unfamiliar gazes traced her knees, her chest, Draco's hand on her hip. A slight squeeze, and she looked up, refocusing on what Zabini and Theo were saying, as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

"We're already set up in the suite," Theo said, a casual insolence in his

"It *matters* because you're telling me that my presence alone tonight made it worse for those girls. It *matters* because while I've been locked away in Malfoy Manor, other girls had to suffer through that — that vile display—"

She choked, her throat closing as a single tear betrayed her by rolling down her cheek. She slapped it away, furious with herself.

Silence for a few moments as he studied her. She glared back, lifting her chin.

"You're letting your exhaustion and experiences this evening cloud your reasoning," he said simply, sounding like Snape, and she hated that he'd read her like a book. "You should sleep and regroup your thoughts."

Scanning his perfectly impassive features, she wondered for the first time where he'd learned Occlumency — wondering how strong it was.

Fairly strong, if she had to guess. It was like looking at a mask.

She pressed her lips together. "I have more questions."

"They can wait."

She blinked up at him. "You'll answer any question I have tomorrow?"

He stared at her blankly, and said, "Yes."

"Eight in the morning," she demanded.

"Noon."

"Nine."

"Granger, it is after one. You will be up for another two to three hours writing a list of things to ask, and you will spend your morning Occluding and meditating," he said, his eyes grey and empty. "You will sleep."

She narrowed her eyes at him, feeling her heart pound with anger at his assumptions, and irritation that those assumptions were correct. He was treating her like a child. Or a slave.

Her hands flew to her neck, yanking her hair to the side and turning around to offer him the clasp of the collar. "Get this fucking thing off of me," she snarled.

He paused. "Now that I've activated it, you should be able to remove it

burned inside of her.

"Borrowed.' Like a cup of sugar," she hissed. She watched it land on him, like an arrow finding the center ring. His eyes jerked up to her, and she continued. "And did you take them to the Lounge. Did they properly *thank you* for giving them a place to 'be who they truly are?'"

"No." His eyes were hard. "Things aren't usually so intense in the Lounge, at least in our circle. I think your presence... excited them." He rolled his shoulders back, jaw tight. "When I've had a girl before, I've kept it limited."

She glared at him as the heat and anger unfurled in her chest. The boys had acted out more than usual that evening simply because she was there.

And in the past, when she was hidden away in her ivory tower, Draco had another girl on his at his side, forced into that room. Threading his fingers through someone else's locks, rubbing another set of legs. It had to be her anger and disgust that made her demand, "Who?"

He tilted his head.

"Who have you kept it 'limited' with?" The words boiled out of her, like a sludging potion that couldn't be suppressed. "Which of my friends — your classmates — have served your wine, and sat on your knee, and listened to your disgusting friends boast about how their inaction won them a war?" she spat.

Draco stared at her, mouth open. A new feeling bubbled in her stomach — shame.

She was jealous. Of some poor, faceless, terrified girl. Her breath rattled in her chest and she felt black spots in her vision as his expression cooled.

"It's late, Granger. I'll send up a Calming Draught—"

"I don't need a Calming Draught—"

"—and some Dreamless Sleep, and we can talk in the morning."

"I want to know who you pulled in your lap and groped while I had *Dragon Pox*—"

His eyes flashed. "You want an itemized list? What does it matter?"

tone. "You're almost late."

"But I'm not, am I?" Draco snapped with a quick smile. Hermione felt her skin prickle at the mention of a suite. "Collect your girls. I'll meet you there."

"For someone so concerned with timeliness—"

"Do fuck off, Theo," Draco cooed. He grinned at Zabini as Theo glared and steered Hermione between them, making sure to knock Theo's shoulder on his way.

Hermione felt her legs turn to jelly as they swept through the crowd of people staring at them.

"Suite?" she whispered.

He waited until they passed a pair of older men sipping scotch before answering, "Do not speak to me in this room."

She flinched when he said it, like a slap against her skin. But her logic whispered that she should hear something else. *You may speak in a different room.*

Perhaps the "suite."

Her control slipped, mind running wild with thoughts of a hotel suite with a luxurious bed where she and other girls would be forced to do unspeakable things—

She blinked, zeroing in on her new focus. Cho.

The dark-haired girl didn't look in her direction as they approached. Draco took the lead, nodding at unfamiliar faces while Hermione's eyes kept darting back to Cho as covertly as possible. Her chest stung with the desire to call to her. To rip out of Draco's hold and run to embrace her. Instead she dug her nails into her palms, forcing a look of neutral disinterest at everything she saw.

Perhaps Cho felt the same. Maybe that's why she simply tilted her face away from Mulciber as they passed, a deep swallow of her champagne, and a flicker of her fingers against the glass.

Draco led her towards the other side of the room near the fireplace,

and she scanned briefly for a vase of Flou powder before focusing on who they were headed towards.

Avery.

Hermione felt her heart in her throat. This man owned Ginny. She was probably stashed away at his estate at this very moment.

"Aron," Draco greeted. Avery turned from where he was laughing with a dark-haired woman. He held a cigar between his teeth, and Hermione coughed lightly as they passed through a cloud. "My father sends his regrets that he missed your celebration last weekend."

"Draco." Avery took Draco's offered hand in a firm shake, his gaze quickly skimming over Hermione. "Of course, not a problem. I know he's off.. where is it again?" He leaned closer, eyes twinkling as he inhaled a deep puff of smoke.

Hermione felt the hand on her back stiffen. "Unfortunately, I couldn't say. The mission was between my father and the Dark Lord."

Avery nodded, his smirk fading a bit around his cigar. He gestured to the woman to his right, and Hermione noticed she was not wearing a collar. Her dress was long and elegant, sweeping to the floor, her hair twisted in a low chignon unlike all the collared girls.

"Madame Minister, may I present Draco Malfoy."

Hermione eyed her carefully as Draco kissed her knuckles with a bow. This woman was the Greek Minister for Magic — Eleni Cirillo. Her chest tightened in anticipation. Minister Cirillo was a pureblood, the promise of her family lineage dating back for centuries in Greece and Italy. Her policies and offhand comments had always carried a tinge of blood supremacy — something she'd vehemently denied to the press in the years before Voldemort's rise.

"Malfoy?" she asked, arching one perfect brow. "Lucius's son?"

"Yes, Madame Minister. Please accept my apologies on his behalf that he couldn't escort you himself."

Avery stared at Draco, eyes narrowing as he took a deep sip of his glass.

She swayed on her feet, the memories of the 'entertainment' still fresh in her mind.

"And the girls in gold collars," she said, feeling the weight of it on her neck. "They are owned by Death Eaters," she inferred, leaning a hand on the doorway.

Draco's eyes flickered over her. "You should sleep."

"I will. Later. Gold collars?" She began to take off her shoes. His eyes caught on the movement.

"Yes, they are owned. Generally, they were the ones Auctioned. But some Gold Collars were caught later and sold to private buyers. The less valuable ones became Carrow Girls."

Hermione sucked in a breath. She needed to keep her mind focused — ignore the rage she could feel brewing beneath her skin. If she lingered too long on her emotions, she would lose this opportunity to squeeze answers from him like a sponge.

"Every one of those boys owns a Lot? At the dinner table?" The colors of the collars swirled and mixed in her mind until she couldn't remember who wore what.

"Flint owns Clearwater, Pucey owns his girl. Bones belongs to Travers, but Goyle has spent almost every Sickle in his vault to rent her every Friday evening."

"Rent her," she muttered to herself, shaking her head. The bile in her throat bubbled again, and whenever she closed her eyes she saw Susan's hands shaking as she opened Goyle's trousers. A slow chill spread over her shoulders, like and ice cube sliding down her spine. She looked up to find Draco's eyes still fixed on the floor. Suddenly her blood felt white-hot again. "And how did you manage when your Lot had Dragon Pox? I assume you still had a girl on your arm?"

His throat clicked. And his eye twitched infinitesimally as he said, "I used a Carrow Girl. Or I borrowed from someone."

The fire she wanted breathe onto the entire castle of Edinburgh

eyes shut, struggling to calm her breathing. She could feel his eyes on her, waiting, but the questions she needed answered felt too intimate and still too large for the Malfoy Manor entryway.

The faintest of touches on her lower back, and he wordlessly led her up the stairs.

The horrors of the evening floated up as they ascended. She shoved the disturbing images aside, forcing away all the questions that felt unimportant and too personal.

How could you just look the other way?

So you just sit there while your friends force those girls to open their mouths and thighs for them?

And the most shameful one, tugging at her chest —

Who was in your lap before me?

They'd reached her bedroom. Hermione pushed the door open with her fingertips and paused, turning around. Draco stood a few long paces away, staring at his shoes. The carpet. Anywhere but her. She took a deep breath and steeled herself, closing the doorway from her heart to her lips, focusing only on the cold questions in her mind.

"Who were all of those girls? I didn't recognize all of them from Hogwarts or the Auction."

Draco tucked his hands in his pockets, and she watched them shake once before stilling. He seemed resigned to answering her questions.

"Some are Muggles from Edinburgh. Some are from prominent families who have challenged the Dark Lord's rule. Some are young witches who were found assisting George Weasley."

Her eyes widened, but she soldiered on. "And they belong to the Carrows?"

"The Carrows have been assigned as the keepers of Edinburgh Castle. They maintain the grounds and host any gatherings like tonight. The girls in silver collars are Carrow Girls. They host the Lounge and are available for... entertainment."

"Please send my regards to your father. It's been ages." Draco politely inclined his head while the Minister turned her eyes on Hermione. With a sultry dip of her gaze to her chest, the Minister said, "And who do we have here?"

"Hermione Granger," Draco said, and she could hear the smirk in his voice. "My Lot."

"Indeed?" Minister Cirillo's eyes glittered. "The Golden Girl I've heard so much about." She stepped forward and reached a delicate hand to twirl one of Hermione's curls between her fingertips. "Well, isn't she stunning." She dropped her curl, brushing the backs of her fingers against Hermione's breast. Hermione gasped.

"Young Malfoy has been rather ungenerous with her," Avery said, his smirk returning as he sucked on his cigar. "This is the Mudblood's first visit to Edinburgh."

She felt Draco's fingers tighten against her hip. The Greek Minister tasked.

"That won't do, Malfoy. Who would deprive such a pretty plaything from our festivities?" She gestured widely at the chandeliers and the champagne, the laughter and the lazy smiles. "I would love to escort her this evening, if you'll allow it."

"An excellent idea," Avery leered. "What say you, Draco?"

Hermione's eyes snapped to Minister Cirillo, certain she'd be no safer on the Minister's arm than on any other Death Eater's.

"My apologies, Minister, but I'm under strict orders not to let her leave my side," Draco quickly replied. "Not after what happened with Avery's Lot last month."

Avery's eyes turned icy as Hermione's heart thumped wildly.

Ginny didn't play nicely with others. Something had happened. Minister Cirillo gave a trilling laugh. "Ah, yes. I heard I missed quite the drama! I confess I'm disappointed I missed the chance to meet the Dark Lord's favored pet. Perhaps in the future, Aron."

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“Perhaps,” Avery gritted out.

The Minister turned to Draco. “Very well, then. But I do hope you reconsider at some point, Draco. The girl deserves a bit of the fun as well.” She paused, and Hermione could feel her appraising eyes on her figure even as she stared at the floor. “Mulciber leant me his girl last weekend, and I can assure you that she had a splendid time. Another beauty, is she not?”

Hermione’s breath caught and she glanced up, scanning the room for Cho again. She found her running her fingers through the long locks of another girl, pressing her hips into her side as Mulciber eyed them lecherously. Hermione swallowed, quickly looking away.

Her attention came back to Minister Cirillo as she stepped closer to Draco to whisper against his cheek, her clear blue eyes straying down Hermione’s chest again. “No need to keep the girl so tightly wound.”

Hermione blinked and stared at the ground again, processing. Was she doing so poorly already? Her chest flushed, suddenly angry at Draco for not giving her the proper information to play this game.

“A fair point, Madame Minister,” said Draco, and she knew a wink had accompanied the lazy drawl.

“She’ll be around more often then?” Avery asked.

“When she’s a good girl, she’ll get to come out and play,” Draco said smoothly.

His hand slithered across her back, dragging along the silk until his warm palm ran up her ribs. Her breath caught as his fingers slid up her jaw, and she turned her eyes to him when he tilted her head back, just as he had outside under the lamp.

“She’s not always good, though,” he said with a smile.

She heard chuckling, a shiver around the room. More eyes were on them. Draco’s gaze dipped to her mouth, and his thumb dragged across her bottom lip, opening her lips.

A heartbeat when she thought he’d kiss her.



There was a ringing in her ears as Draco stood from the armchair, taking her elbow and muttering his goodbyes. The boys were heavily distracted by now, and let them go without too much of a fuss. Hermione popped the grape into her mouth as Draco turned her around, suddenly terrified that someone might see and discover her secret.

She allowed him to drag her through the room, her eyes darting wildly to take in every girl on a lap, every girl on their knees, every girl laughing and drinking. Cho didn’t glance at her again. Charlotte had moved on. She swept the room looking for more eyes, more fire, more grapes.

Not alone.

She’d used grapes to spell out those words on the Ministry floors once. To give a shred of hope to the fifty terrified, bruised girls that had crowded around her, preparing to live out their worst nightmares. But had it been a coincidence? Cho knew what the grapes meant, but how could Charlotte? Had Charlotte truly meant to offer her a symbol of hope? Hermione didn’t remember her from the Ministry. Who was she?

Draco led her to a large fireplace, and a jar of Floo powder materialized before them. The flames turned green as he announced, “Malfoy Manor,” and with a yank on her arm, the noise from the Lounge snapped out of existence, and she was in the cool, moonlit entryway of Malfoy Manor, with nothing but her heartbeat in her ears.

She breathed heavily, her mind spinning with the questions she needed to ask, the images she wanted to forget.

Draco dropped her arm softly. It fell limply to her side. She screwed her

“Anything to eat?” Charlotte asked, long lashes batting slowly at her, her arm lowering to offer Hermione the basket of fruit. “Grapes, perhaps?”

Hermione stared down, finding a vine of thick, burgundy grapes — calling to her from another lifetime — something that used to mean something.

Her mind cleared like a shock. She looked up with wide eyes. Charlotte plucked one and extended it to her with a soft smile.

Hermione took it, tucking it away quickly in her hand, as though hiding a stolen good. Her heart hammered against her ribs, a memory of her shaking fingers spelling out with grapes against the Ministry floors what her voice couldn’t express.

She searched for Charlotte again, but she’d moved away.

Across the room, Cho Chang met her gaze for the first time, her arms wound around Mulciber’s shoulders as he kissed her collarbones. Cho pushed a plump, ripe grape between her painted lips, her eyes burning with the fire of a revolution.

“When I’m back next month, I hope to see her again,” Minister Cirillo said.

Draco’s hand dropped away. He excused them, shook Minister Cirillo’s hand again, and guided Hermione back to the front of the room. They passed a young girl, no more than fifteen, standing in the corner with Jugson while he socialized. The girl’s olive skin was drained and pale, and her eyes were shining with tears when she looked at them. Hermione felt a fire burn in her belly as Draco pushed her along, fingers itching to hex off the greedy hand that stroked the girl’s waist.

Apprehension swallowed her anger when they turned the corner, meeting a dark corridor. Draco took her elbow and guided them through a carved door, opening to the clock tower building. Several people in corners speaking lowly with each other paid them no mind, and he turned toward a winding stone staircase, not releasing her elbow. As if she would fly away with the breeze if he did.

A boy she recognized from the year below them stood at the top of the stairs. Harper, she thought his name was. He stood tall once Draco’s head bobbed up the steps. He greeted Draco and reached for the door.

“Harper,” Draco chafed, in the same tone he used for Crabbe and Goyle when they were being terribly dense.

Harper jumped, as if his hand had been burned by the doorknob.

“Right. Sorry. I just recognized you—”

“That doesn’t matter,” Draco sneered. He extended his left hand, and Harper’s wand tapped the emerald ring he wore on his thumb. A class ring of sorts — something she’d only seen on the Slytherin boys. The ring that had cut her lip the night Draco slapped her.

The end of Harper’s wand turned green. With a nod to Draco, Harper turned to her next, and his eyes slid to her gold collar. He pressed the tip of his wand to the metal, and eyed the warm golden light now emanating from it. Another nod before he turned the doorknob for them.

Uproarious laughter met her ears. Thick, deep voices — some familiar

from her childhood — ricocheted through a small room decorated in lavish patterned wallpaper and dark woods. When the door opened, nine heads turned to them from around a long table, their conversations trailing off.

She blinked, struggling to register every person in the room. The boy at the end of the table stood, his chair knocking back, and smiled at her with greedy black eyes.

Marcus Flint.

“Miss Granger,” he crooned. “We’re *delighted*.”

In a disturbing shadow of chivalry, every person at the table came to their feet, all eyes still locked on her. She recognized Zabini, Nott, and Goyle. Adrian Pucey stood to Flint’s right, and Montague on his left. Three boys in the center of the table she struggled to place. And lining the walls were nine girls in collars.

One of them looked up to meet her eyes before blanching and dropping her head down. Susan Bones. The rest of them kept their eyes down. Penelope Clearwater stood behind Marcus Flint’s chair. Mortensen from the Ministry holding cells stood behind Pucey, and she thought she recognized one or two more classmates, but the rest were unfamiliar to her.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, gentlemen,” Draco said, stepping forward to shake Flint’s hand. “The Greek Minister took an interest in my Lot.”

Hermione waited in the doorway, pausing for instruction as Draco greeted his friends.

A girl with strawberry-blond hair looked up at her from across the room, and the calculated interest in her eyes made Hermione look away, ashamed. She could only imagine what they must think of her. The privileged Lot.

She turned her gaze back to the table and found several bottles of wine decanting, some already half-drunk. A pig roast lay in the center of the table, an apple in its mouth, looking like he had been caught on the wrong side of all this as well.

his trousers.

“Come on, Granger,” Flint crooned. “Don’t be such a spoilsport.” His fingers started unbuckling his belt, and Penelope set down her champagne glass, crawling to the floor between his knees with a blank expression. “Let Draco know just how much you *appreciate* him.”

Hermione jerked her eyes away, her breath tight in her chest as she found Warrington’s girl turning to straddle his lap. Her stomach squeezed, and vomit pumped into her throat. She swallowed it down and stared at a wall.

Draco dropped a hand on her knee — a quiet warning not to move. “I prefer my appreciation in private. Besides, I’d hate to distract your birds with the size of my cock.”

She listened to Flint laugh, his breath thin with excitement from the things Penelope was doing to him.

She watched Charlotte offer fruit to the boys that weren’t currently forcing oral sex on their slaves.

She smelled the cigar smoke and heard the sound of laughter and clinking glasses and gasping and moaning.

Her true nature, he’d said. As a Muggle.

Draco whispered to her that they would leave shortly, and she blinked slowly at the carpets, eyes glued to the knees of a brunette she hardly knew as the girl sat before a pure-blood boy who believed she should thank him for the opportunity.

A pair of champagne heels attached to tan legs crossed into her view. Charlotte with the tray. She offered to fetch Draco a drink, and he declined, saying they were leaving soon.

Hermione barely heard them, slightly swaying on her perch. An overwhelming exhaustion pushed at her eyelids.

“Miss Granger?”

Looking up to find Charlotte still hovering, her vision clearing when she blinked. She frowned, confused to be directly addressed.

a couch facing Theo and his date, and dragged Penelope down to his side. Penelope looked like she'd finally arrived at the moment she'd been dreading all night as Marcus slung his arm around her shoulders and played with her curls.

Draco started to direct her towards a different set of couches, but Flint grabbed the arm of a large chair and dragged it closer, gesturing for Draco to sit. Draco smiled thinly and folded himself into the cushions, pushing Hermione to sit on the arm of the chair instead of his lap. She wasn't sure it was any better — from this perch, she had a vantage point of the entire room.

"Miss Granger," Flint lifted over the thrumming music. "How do you like The Lounge? Is it everything you dreamed of and more?" He smirked into his glass, his eyes locked on her.

Hermione tore her eyes away and stared at her lap, pressing her lips closed. Afraid of opening her mouth, like the anger and bile would come tumbling out of her in waves if she did.

"I'd say they really should be thanking us," Warrington called to Flint from the next couch over, his Lot in his lap, her lips on his neck.

"Thanking you?" The scornful reply left her throat before she could catch herself. Draco went very still next to her. Her heartbeat fluttered amidst her growing sense of panic.

Warrington leveled his gaze on her. "That's right, Mudblood. Thanking us for giving you such a fine hall. For inviting you to dinner and pouring you champagne."

She looked down in a show of obedience, heart thumping madly.

"You Muggles are all the same," Pucey drawled. "It's in your true nature. You don't have to deny it any longer, Granger." He leered at her, and she felt her skin crawl. "Look how much they all enjoy it!" He turned and gestured to the slaves — the dancing two giggled, another moaned as she ground her hips on a man in a chair. And on another couch, Cho Chang kissed another girl slowly as Mulciber watched, rubbing himself through

Gregory Goyle hadn't taken his eyes off her legs since the moment she walked in, so she felt the pit in her stomach loosen when Draco guided her to the other side of the table to stand behind the only empty chair — the head, across from Flint.

Draco took his seat, the conversation easy and boisterous again. The moment he sat, the nine girls around the table stepped forward, reaching for the wine bottles. She watched as they poured the russet wine into the glass of the boy in front of them. Several eyes turned on her as she stared at them, doing nothing. Were they expected to play their parts as menial servants as the boys had their fun? Even though all ten of them had full use of their wands?

"Come on, Granger," Draco taunted. "Do keep up."

Stepping forward on trembling legs, she reached around Draco's shoulder for the decanter of wine next to his glass, filling it. The girls had stepped back, blending in with the wallpaper, and Hermione quickly followed their lead. She let out a shaky breath as she leaned into the window-sill behind her, letting the cool glass press against her shoulder blades.

Draco lifted his glass. "To the Dark Lord's power. May he reign forevermore."

The boys chorused his toast, and Hermione saw Penelope Clearwater's lip tremble out of the corner of her eye.

The clamor of ten boys chatting and drinking washed over her, and she tried catching onto snippets of conversation where she could.

"Cass, what did your father say about—"

"—hear about the incident at the Bastille?"

"What did I tell you! It was a *two* laceflies, not three—"

"Think they'll still play this year? I missed the last World Cup."

Hermione reeled, her dizzy mind trying to narrow down what she should be focusing on. Which of the conversations? She couldn't follow all of them at once. Or was it what existed in the silence, in the glances and bullying? She glanced at the other Lots for cues, but they were staring

fixedly at their heels. Except for the strawberry-blond girl, who looked more attentive than the rest. What was she staring at?

And through it all, Marcus Flint kept grinning at her.

"Malfoy," Flint called across the table, and the room dipped into silence. "Dragon Pox?" He gestured to her with his soup spoon.

"Not Dragon Pox after all. But she was disgusting. Pocks and puss."

Draco made a face, and when he turned over his shoulder, he glared at her. "You tired? Can't stand straight?"

Every eye turned on her. And she realized that every girl was standing tall, waiting to be called upon. She pushed up from the windowsill.

"No, sir."

A chorus of chuckling trembled the room. And she remembered what he'd said.

Obedient, but not broken.

"I'm just not used to wearing heels. *Sir*."

The room held its breath. And then Draco's eyes flashed at her while the table erupted with laughter.

"Have quite a handful with her, don't you?"

"Pour her a glass of wine!"

"You gonna tell the Headmaster on us, Granger?"

"Tell you what, Granger," Blaise Zabini said with a smirk. "You can have a break from your footwear if Draco allows you to sit on my lap for the rest of the night."

The boys howled, and Blaise winked at her. Draco cleared his throat, scowling. "She will do no such thing." The laughter petered out, though the corners of Blaise's mouth twitched behind his glass.

"Merlin's sack, Malfoy," Theo Nott murmured. "Why bring her?" He leered at her and chuckled. "Oh, how the mighty have fallen. I was so looking forward to Granger being *Head Girl* last year." His innuendo landed on her skin like ice water. "We should give her a chance to earn her title."

It was like a brothel with elements of a Muggle strip club. Transactions were either out in the open or hidden away in private stalls; it seemed to depend on the man's preference. Hermione saw a girl bouncing on top of a young man in a way that was clearly penetrative. Her cheeks burned as they passed the couple, acutely aware of Draco's presence next to her, the girl's pants and breathy moans echoing in her ears.

Flint led them deeper into the room, and Draco's hand on her back pressed her close to his side. She knew he'd done his best to avoid bringing her here, to "The Lounge." They had barely been able to look at each other for the past few weeks — ending up here tonight was probably the last thing he wanted. There was no easy way to manage the situation. They'd simply have to survive it.

They turned a corner through a large archway and into another room, the left half obscured by private booths. Several more doors on the farthest wall; the other side filled with plush velvet couches and chairs. A roaring fireplace on the right wall, sending ambers across the room, and a blue sphere of light overhead, casting shadows on familiar faces. Two girls in silver collars danced on a cleared platform near the center of the seating area, similar to a stage at a club, while men lounged and chatted in chairs facing them.

Her lungs filled with air, steadying her. Apart from the dancing, there was nothing she hadn't seen in the other room.

She found Charlotte moving through the crowd with a tray of hors d'oeuvres and fruit, another girl following her with drinks. The men's hands would pass over their backsides and up their thighs as they served, and Charlotte sent each a wink and a smile.

The olive-skinned teenager was being dragged by the arm into a private booth as they passed, her eyes red and her cheeks streaming with tears. Hermione blinked, looking away. Somewhere in her mind's eye, there was a lake. A clear lake, the water still and unmoving—

The party halted, shattering her concentration. Marcus plopped onto

wouldn't allow it."

Hermione stared at her, filing that information away as Draco pressed another glass of champagne into her hands. The Carrows were involved here. And in charge of some of the girls. Her eyes fell on Charlotte's silver collar as the pretty girl batted her lashes at Draco, then Blaise, as she glided down the line with her tray.

The music swelled when they finally passed through the curtains, entering a large room with deep blue walls and dark woods. Dozens of couches and armchairs facing each other in intimate seating areas, stretching in every direction. Low candlelight and thick clouds of smoke overhead. Hermione's eyes widened, darting around the room.

Men on couches with girls in their laps. Silver-collared girls walking around with crystal platters of cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, heels higher and slips shorter than hers. A door flung open to their left and Hermione jumped as a man stumbled out, buckling his trousers. Staring into the small room, she could see a girl standing next to an armchair, straightening her dress with a practiced smile before Draco pushed her onwards.

She swallowed the acid in her throat, eyes struggling to take in every corner. A gambling table to the right with several men gathered, a few girls on their arms cheering them on. Nott Sr. at the head, tossing dice with a leggy blonde at his elbow. Hermione jerked her head in the opposite direction, afraid to catch his eye.

On one couch she thought she saw a man sleeping peacefully, but then realized his head was thrown back in bliss, a girl on the ground between his legs with her mouth on him. She quickly averted her gaze, throat burning again, but it was like she'd opened Pandora's box. No matter where her eyes darted, she found others in similar positions — out in the open like that.

A blonde girl in only knickers and a bra passed in front of them, leading an older man towards a wall of doors on the left. He was already unbuttoning as he followed her into a small booth.

Montague snorted into his wine, and Flint's fingers danced along the rim of his glass.

"A shame indeed, Theo," Draco said smoothly, "seeing as I've heard rumors that you were a shoe-in for Head Boy. You could have shared the 'head' duties quite nicely."

Blaise spit up his wine, laughing into his sleeve. Flint and Pucey giggled drunkenly. Theo glared at Draco. "What the fuck is that supposed —"

Draco stood suddenly, cutting him off. "Pucey? Will you do the honors?" He nodded to the pig in the middle of the table. "I'm starving."

Adrian Pucey stood with a smirk, and produced a carving knife. Hermione listened to the boys chat while each girl approached Pucey to take a plate to their escort. Susan Bones retrieved Goyle two servings, and he thanked her with a tweak to her nipple through her thin dress. Hermione moved around the table to Pucey's side when it was her turn; she could feel him watching her as the conversation continued, eyes raking her body.

"She looks pampered, Malfoy," Pucey said, twirling his knife, Hermione's heartbeat quickened as he began spinning the blade on his thumb. "Do you have any fun with her at all?"

They laughed. And she glanced to Mortensen, who stood behind Pucey's chair peeling an orange for him with her eyes glued to his knife as it spun.

"You know how much I paid for her, Adrian," Draco drawled. "Of course I bathe her in milk and lavender every night."

Flint laughed. But Pucey's eyes were darting across her skin. Hermione drew in a slow breath, trying to think about how she should react. It was true that she was at a healthy weight. She had limited sunlight these days; all freckles from her year on the run had vanished —

Quick as lightning, a glint of metal, and then Pucey was a breath away, his knife between her skin and the strap of her slip. He tugged on it.

"She's a *Mudblood*, Draco. She only needs to lay on her back." His crisp white teeth flashed at her, his breath hot on her face. "Besides, I always

heal them afterwards.”

She froze in horror as the knife cut through the strap, her heart fluttering wildly and her eyes bulging to the only exit — her dress slipping down her chest —

The knife zoomed away from her skin, spinning through the air to pierce the wallpaper as Pucey jumped backward. Her strap repaired itself, and she turned to see Draco pocketing his wand, hot rage simmering beneath his cool facade.

“I’m not sure how many more times I need to say it,” he whispered, and the room was barely breathing. “That Mudblood is mine. Her mouth is mine, her cunt is mine, her skin is mine.” His teeth bit through the words, and he met eyes with every person at the table before saying, “You will not touch her, under any circumstances. I purchased her. I do what I please with her.”

Her skin tingled where she could still feel the ghost of Pucey’s knife. Her breath was shallow as she watched Draco glare at them, still a statue until he was satisfied that he was heard.

“Now bring me a bloody plate. I said I was hungry.”

A grumbled sigh, and then Pucey was piling a plate with food and handing it to her. She moved back to the head of the table on jerky legs, and Draco took his seat as she set his plate before him. Before she could move back to the windowsill, his arm wrapped around her waist and dragged her down to his lap. She struggled not to squeak as she landed oddly across his thighs. His hand pressed on her stomach to keep her close, and he picked up with fork with a sophisticated twirl.

“Now, what were you saying about the Chudley Cannons, Warrington?”

The air was still dense in the room as the boys around the table drifted back into friendly conversation, but Hermione wished they could prop open a window. The heat from Draco’s chest and thighs, the feeling of his ribs rumbling into her own whenever he spoke, the puff of hot air across

was deceptively casual.

A quick pause, and Hermione wondered if he was trying to figure out the time. “Half-past twelve. So we—”

“Plenty of time!” Flint clapped Draco on the shoulder, as if the deed was done. “Just a little tour.” His eyes raked over Hermione’s chest and shoulders. “I want to see what the Golden Girl thinks of our little club.”

His hand was tight on her back, sending tension up her spine. “I suppose we have twenty minutes.”

“Twenty minutes is plenty of time for me,” Pucey said with a wink. A laugh burst from his chest as he dragged Mortensen out the door. A gentle push on her lower back, and she was propelled forward.

Hermione memorized the path they took back down the stairs, trying to quell the growing panic in her ribs. Harper followed after her and Draco as they fell into step with Flint and Penelope, his hand on her backside as he chatted with Draco about his recent trip to Brazil. They retraced their steps back through the hall past several people still mingling in corners, having hushed conversations over sloshing drinks.

Pushing through a door on the other side, Hermione felt the low thrumming of a bass drum, the music rhythmic and sultry. She closed her eyes as they waited, summoning what was left of her control. *Think of a lake with still waters.*

The curtains parted, revealing the girl from the beginning of the night — Charlotte — with a tray of champagne and scotch.

“Gentlemen,” she greeted with a wide smile. Her lips were still vibrantly red, her hair still falling in perfect waves. Probably glamourous to stay that way.

Flint plucked a scotch from her tray. “Charlotte, dear,” he cooed. “You look ravishing. When are you finally going to come home with me?” He pouted and stroked her arm.

“Flattery will get you everywhere, Marcus.” Charlotte winked at him and turned to offer the tray to Draco. “And you know the Carrows

Lounge, gentlemen?”

Pucey and Montague quickly rose from their chairs, taking their girls by the waist. Goyle was jostled from where he was falling asleep against Susan’s shoulder.

Hermione remembered what Flint said earlier. *That’s for the other room.* What Goyle did to Susan was acceptable in the next room.

Surely Draco wouldn’t take her there. The other room was clearly intended for much more than “minor contact.”

Her heart started to pound again, and she breathed in, searching for a lake with still waters.

One by one, the boys gradually led their girls from the room. Draco hung back, taking his time with draining his second glass of wine. Relief began seeping into Hermione’s veins. He was stalling so they could make an easy escape. She stood silently by his side, eyes fixed on the floor as Zabini murmured to his girl on their way past.

“Draco.” Hermione looked up to find Flint stopped in the doorway with Penelope, Pucey and Mortensen behind them. “You’re coming, of course?”

Hermione’s breath hitched. Draco passed a hand through his hair and said, “I’m afraid not. I have an important call with my father this evening.” His hand drifted to the small of her back, ready to guide her out.

“I knew he wouldn’t,” Pucey slurred in Flint’s ear.

“Come now, Draco!” Flint gestured dramatically. “I’ve already won ten Galleons from Montague. He bet you’d never bring her to dinner.” He smiled and pointed his thumb to Pucey. “This one says we couldn’t get her into the Lounge.”

The way they grinned at her, the way “the Lounge” rolled off Flint’s tongue — it made Hermione’s stomach churn. Draco forced a smile and fiddled with the ring on his thumb.

“Perhaps another time.”

Flint sauntered towards them. “What time is your Floo call?” His tone

her neck whenever he laughed were inescapable. She tried to concentrate, tried to listen in for clues about the world outside, but she was distracted by Draco’s hand on her stomach, stiff and warm. She tried to shift away from him, to make herself more comfortable, but his hand jumped to her ribs, holding her, keeping her from twisting about.

The other girls stood by the walls, stepping forward to fill the empty glasses. Ten minutes after conversation resumed, Penelope Clearwater stepped forward and reached for Flint’s wine. He caught her wrist smoothly and pulled her down to his lap as well, and she stumbled as Flint pulled her blonde curls to the side.

Hermione felt guilt boiling in her gut when Goyle tugged down Susan Bones to his lap, wondering if she and Draco had started this trend, or if the girls normally fell into their laps after dinner. Theo Nott was the first one to offer his girl a bite of his cheese. And when she smiled at him in thanks, Hermione wondered if this was simply the second part of the evening. When the slaves ate the scraps from their masters’ tables.

Two of the girls began clearing plates, and Hermione watched the table settings disappear entirely once they were taken to the credenza. Elf magic here as well, but she wondered at the distinctly Muggle task of clearing dishes, something no wizarding family did without magic. When one of them reached for Montague’s plate, he stabbed at them sharply with the tines of his fork, and then made a show about eating one last bite. The intricacies of the power dynamics stunned her.

From the boisterous conversations in the middle of the table, she started to place the other three boys. Cassius Warrington, Terrence Higgs, and Miles Bletcher. The entire Slytherin Quidditch team, spanning over several years. The rings made more sense to her. Higgs seemed the least entertained with the evening, barely enjoying the blonde that had dropped into his lap.

The girls started reaching for their own cheese and fruit as the boys got drunker, several of them smiling and pretending to enjoy themselves. She

caught snippets of conversation, something about Pucey's aunt in Liverpool, Bletchley's second home in Germany, Nott's injury last month. But nothing stood out as particularly important.

Draco kept to one glass of wine, but she watched the other girls drain the decanters into their masters' glasses. Hermione kept her hands folded in her lap and her eyes down, finding that when she looked around the table she would always catch the eyes of one of them.

"Draco," Flint called across the table, his cheeks flushed with the wine and his fingers playing with Penelope's curls. "Since we won't be getting a taste, tell us a bit about Granger. Is she just as fiery in the bedroom?"

A guffaw or two, then the table went silent. And Draco's fingertips twitched against her ribs. She felt the press of them as her breath exhaled slowly. She heard his throat click as he swallowed.

"What do you want to know?" He lifted his wine glass, draining it. Hermione felt her heartbeat against the champagne glass she held tightly between fingers.

"She just as swotty in bed?"

Laughter clattered against the spoons, and she lifted her head to find every eye on her, hungry with lust or cruel amusement. She blinked down again, her cheeks burning.

"In the beginning," Draco said finally, a low hum through her back.

"Now she knows how to relax — to avoid punishment."

She felt a shiver at her shoulder blades, spreading outwards and sinking into her skin.

"What's her cunt like?" Montague asked, biting back a smirk.

"Delicious."

There was stillness, and Hermione thought perhaps Draco had said the wrong thing. Because it wouldn't be necessary to... it wouldn't be something that he'd... that they'd—

"You make her come?" Goyle asked, voicing her concerns with a grimace.

"Think your Mudblood is too good to do our cleaning, Draco?"

"I do, actually. I don't usually let 65,000 Galleons drop on the floor." Hermione looked back and forth between them. Every other girl had gone to their knees, beginning to clean while the boys watched and started drinking again.

"She's still just a Mudblood," Flint said slowly, a smirk parting his lips to reveal his perfect, new teeth. "Right, Draco?"

There was a challenge in his voice, and Draco stared him down. She watched Blaise pop a bottle of champagne with ease, his eyes on Flint and Draco with an air of indifference.

Draco released her wrist. She quickly fell to her knees, relishing the first time in hours that there weren't thousands of eyes on her. She crawled forward, feeling glass digging into her palms and knees, and savored the pain of it. She had to be strong — for Ginny, for Ron. For Harry. For all of the slaves who were suffering horrors and fighting battles Hermione could only imagine.

But while plucking up pieces of cheese and bread and siphoning out the glass, the laughter started again, threatening her resolve. Tears filled her eyes once more, and she sniffed, barely holding them at bay.

Her hand met another under the table. She looked up and found nine girls staring at her with weary eyes, holding hands with each other. Her breath rattled as the strawberry-blond grabbed her other hand. Barely a heartbeat passed before the nine of them continued moving, gathering food and pulling glass out of their knees.

These girls had survived the past two months and would continue to survive. She could survive one night and a fraction of the horror. Putting a stopper on the overflowing bottle of her emotions, she came to her feet and stood next to Draco's chair. She focused on a bookshelf, and imagined the pages filling with the images of this evening until they snapped shut and slid into forgotten dusty shelf.

It wasn't long before Flint stood and said, "Shall we move to the

"Now *there* was a pair of lips I'd like around my cock," Montague continued. "Wish Avery would have given me a turn when he was done with her—"

Goyle's glass shattered — a spray of crystal shards across the dinner table. Fruit and cheese exploding outwards and bouncing away. The boys scattered to their feet, and a pressure released in her chest as Draco spun her body away, his wand already in his hand.

Looking down at his hand in amazement, Goyle flexed his fingers, glass and blood in his palm. Susan crawled out from under the table.

Hermione breathed deep.

Her magic.

Draco looked down at her in shock, his chin bumping her nose. He sat her upright, his arms releasing their grip.

Marcus Flint was the first to start laughing. "Merlin, Goyle! Don't get *too* excited!"

Pucey and Montague joined, jostling Goyle — ribbing him for squeezing his glass so hard that it shattered.

"You'd think he'd never been sucked off before!"

"Serves you right for starting the fun too soon."

Goyle smiled as he adjusted his trousers, assuming responsibility. Blaise reentered with arms full of bottles, and laughed as he took in the scene. Flint, with a smarmy grin, turned to the girls around the table and said, "Ladies. On all fours."

Draco's fingers twitched on her ribs, and he glared at Flint.

"I want every piece of glass picked up, every bit of food gathered, and every boot kissed," Flint said, grinning at Draco. Several of the girls had already dropped to their knees, gathering glass.

Hermione tried to calm her racing heart. Losing control like she just had was too dangerous. She pushed away all thoughts of Ginny and tucked them into a corner of her bookshelf. Standing to start cleaning up, she was stopped by Draco's hand on her wrist.

"Usually more than once," he said, as if he'd been asked about the weather. "Not in the beginning of course. And if she's misbehaving I don't bother."

Hermione chanced a glance up and caught the eyes of another Lot before the girl looked down shamefully, as if Hermione had just discovered her own secret. Perhaps it wasn't as unheard of to make their partners orgasm.

"With the potion or without?" one of them asked dubiously.

Her eyes flicked up to Penelope. The potion — the one Marcus Flint had administered to Pansy and Penelope. Before tonight, Hermione only had an idea of what it did. Now she understood.

"Without," Draco sneered. "It's so much more satisfying — no offense, Marcus — to have them moaning and begging for it all by themselves, don't you think?" His hand lifted off her ribs and reached for a curl, twisting it lightly. "And the sounds she makes," he hummed. She could feel his breath on her cheek. Her ribs refused to expand, holding to hear what he had to say. "When she's close, it's just like she's back in class, anxious to get an answer right. Can't stop moving, can't shut her mouth." She stared down at the tablecloth, struggling to breathe. Her stomach was tight as his fingers threaded in the hair behind her ear, tilting her face to him. "I'd rather slide into her when she's wet, and hating herself for it."

She kept her eyes on his collar, unable to meet his eyes. *It's just a game*, she told herself. *He doesn't mean any of it.* The wine brought a flush to his neck, the pink splotches attached to his throat as he swallowed.

He'd played his role well. It wasn't until Zabini spoke that she realized the boys were deathly quiet.

"I have to say, I'm the same," he said, an air of levity in his tone, as if he was politely changing the subject from something particularly nasty. "Never been one to use sex for punishment, myself. But" — he nodded to Flint — "I do appreciate that potion some days." Zabini raised his glass. "To Marcus' ingenuity."

They roasted, and Flint grinned. "I'll have a fresh batch next week." He turned a calculated smirk on Draco and said, "I'd be honored if Miss Granger would partake. On the house, of course."

A tense pause. Eyes on her, eyes flickering between Draco and Flint. Draco tilted his head, and she could feel the breath he drew before replying, "You're too kind."

Marcus Flint winked at him, and drained the rest of his wine glass.

"I find that once they've had the potion, they're more amenable the next time," one of them said.

Another agreed.

And she listened to them trade stories about the girls in their laps or girls in the past, as if they were all back in the Slytherin Quidditch changing rooms. The laughter started again. Montague told a particularly nasty story about a girl he'd been with at Hogwarts and he bounced the girl on his lap in a crude imitation of it, jostling her until she spilled her champagne glass.

Hermione tried to focus on the girls, the exits, the sharp cutlery — anything but the horrendous display of masculinity and sexuality. Or the way Draco's hand stayed in her curls, threading and twisting softly. Warington had begun to run his hands over his girl's hips and stomach, and Hermione saw a sliver of her knickers as her dress slid up. One of the girls passing out fruit and sweets smiled demurely every time a wandering hand squeezed her backside or drifted up the side of her thigh. Marcus Flint's lips traveled along Penelope's neck in between conversation with his friends, and Susan Bones looked as if she might be sick as Goyle turned her to straddle him in the chair.

Hermione felt acid in her throat, burning away at her lungs. If this is what happened in public, she couldn't even imagine what the private affairs consisted of. Not even the slow rub of Draco's thumb behind her ear could distract her from the tightness in her chest.

The boys were talking over each other, louder and louder. She felt

Draco laugh when Nott made a joke, bellow when Pucey dared Flint to chug the rest of his bottle, chuckle when Blaise went to grab more wine. As her eyes followed Blaise out, they landed on Goyle pushing on Susan's shoulders, urging her down to her knees.

She gasped, choking on the air. No one batted an eye. One more glance showed Susan's shaking fingers unbuckling Goyle's trousers, her face pale but resigned.

She couldn't breathe. This was their fate now — reduced to whores at a pure-blood party, serving their food and wine and smiling while they were groped and raped. Her eyes blurred as tears sprung. She understood now why Ginny couldn't "play nice," despite what it must have cost her.

Draco's hand moved to the back of her neck, sensing the tension in her body, the change in her breathing. Disgust and guilt dripped into her veins like poison, sickened to think that she felt safe with him while the rest of them were forced into this.

She felt him freeze the moment he discovered what had disturbed her. "Really, Goyle?" Draco hissed, cutting through the noise and laughter. Hermione jumped with the sound of it against her ear. "Not at the dinner table."

Several of the boys chuckled as realization dawned, leaning over the table to watch.

"Wanted dessert," Goyle muttered, head tilting and eyes rolling back, his wine glass clutched in his hand.

"You know that's for the other room, Greg," Flint said disapprovingly. His free hand reached down, grabbing Susan's hair. "Almost done."

Hermione bit back the bile rising, shaking her skin and twisting around her like ink. She still couldn't breathe. Even with Draco's hand on her neck, telling her to be calm, she couldn't drown out the sounds as Susan gurgled and choked.

"Wonder if Bones gives it as good as Weasley did."

Her eye twitched. Her shallow breath felt like ice in her chest.