

She had to go and ruin everything with her face. She's always ruining everything with her fucking face.

She looked at me like she didn't even fucking know me.

And I don't know how to deal with that either. I hate that.

I hate that.

And then she said —

Fuck, I just want — I need to —

Melvin's fucking deformed right tit, what the fuck am I talking to you for?

January 11th, 1999

AFTER SEARCHING THE GREAT HALL, THE COURTYARD AND EVEN THE BLOODY QUIDDITCH PITCH, SHE'S DECIDED SHE HAS TO ACCEPT IT.

He's gone to the worst place he could go. The place she's most afraid to follow.

And when finally she's mucked up the courage to walk to the end of that corridor, even the Fat Lady gives her a strange look. In the grand scheme of things, it probably has little to do with the gossip and more to do with her frazzled appearance, but in this moment Hermione's fractured state of mind can't differentiate between the two — and it sends the first in a series of tears down her face as she croaks out the password.

She stands in the dark hall between the portrait hole and the common room for several, seemingly endless minutes. Can hear voices — Ron's specifically, and Seamus's, but she can't piece together what they're saying.

She knows how badly this will hurt. It doesn't take a Boggart to remind her how afraid she is of pain.

Still, she also knows the longer she stands here, the more likely she is to lose

"I smell smoke," Draco grumbles suddenly, surprising her, and he reaches up a lazy arm to tap his finger against her temple.

"Sod off," she hisses, glancing sideways at him. His eyes are still closed.

"Does anyone worry as much as you do? Do they offer positions in worrying?"

His words are slow and careless, possibly still half asleep. "You should look into that." But his finger stops tapping and starts drawing little circles and swirls on her cheek.

Definitely half asleep.

"I have things to worry about," she whispers, ignoring the pleasant tingles his touch is sending to her brain. "I'm losing friends left and right."

Now he does open his eyes. Blinks slowly at her, gaze tracing over her face. He drops his arm — wedges the other beneath his head to prop it up a bit. "I'll be honest, though you won't like it. But part of me gets off on seeing you like this."

Her brow furrows.

He elaborates. "Seeing you lose things. Struggle. Suffer. It's immensely satisfying after watching you and the Wonder Twins triumph for so many years."

"I'm sure it is," she says after a long silence, feeling an ache blossom beneath her collarbone. She tries to assess why she isn't furious at his words. Why they don't set off alarm bells in her head. And yet all she can say is, "The Wonder Twins. Another Muggle reference you should know nothing about."

Draco's eyes flit between each of hers. He bobs his free shoulder in a shrug.

"Full of surprises."

She manages an unhappy smile.

"However," he adds after a moment, adjusting his knee between her legs. Her breath hitches. "I will say that Weaselby's going to have a very rough term."

She squints at him. Is so distracted by his words that she doesn't really register his hand as it glides its way down over her hip. Only notices when he starts unbuttoning her jeans.

She tries to stop him, pulse jumpstarting, but he pushes her hand away and slides down the zip, leaning in to brush his lips over her throat.

"I don't like what he said."

Her words come out broken — disappointed by the way his hand dips beneath the plain white edge of her knickers. "That...that I'm a traitor?"

Draco shakes his head, nose brushing against her earlobe. "Mm-mm."

Her voice wavers. "That I'm nothing?"

He bites her neck suddenly. So hard she jolts, the pain unexpected. "Yeah," he says against her skin, then laves his tongue over the abused flesh, like an apology. "That."

A shaking exhale is her only response.

Draco draws a slow finger up and down against her, making lazy circles and sending shockwaves through her nerve endings. "What's worse is you almost seem to fucking believe it." Then he pulls his hand away abruptly, the sudden loss of sensation a pain all its own — only to make her watch him slip that same finger into his mouth. Suck on it.

A strangled noise fights its way out of her throat. She flushes bright pink.

"Which is fucking absurd," he continues, sliding the wet digit free of his lips and guiding it smoothly back between her legs.

She gasps. Her hands find his shoulders, fisting in the damp fabric of his shirt. "Pisses me off," he says, fingers finding a comfortable rhythm — gliding against her and making her hips jerk up to meet them. "But not as much as he does."

She buries her face in his chest. Can't bear to have him watch her while he does this to her.

"I want to hurt him," he purrs, words not matching his tone. Not matching anything as he teases her entrance, swirling his callused finger around it. "Fuck, I so badly want to hurt him." And then he slides two fingers inside.

She muffles her cry against him, fingernails digging into his shoulders.

"Will you let me hurt him?" he murmurs in her ear, even as he pumps his fingers in and out, each time finding that odd, perfect spot she can't describe. The one that makes her toes curl and her legs squirm.

"Don't," she squeaks — weakly, barely.

the last eight years — no the last eighteen years — has anything ever gone the way I've wanted it to? The way I've asked for it to?

Therefore, fuck Granger and her fucking grand gesture. I thought maybe I could handle it. I thought maybe those fucking Patil twins or the Weaslette would come back from holiday and bounce around with joy for her, at least.

But Granger fucking enacted herself for me.

And then suddenly it was my move. My turn to prove something. My turn to prove I wasn't everything she thought me to be. My turn to sacrifice something. To lose something.

And I didn't know how. I still don't.

So, fucking excuse the hell out of me while I try to find some semblance of what's comfortable. What's familiar. What I'm used to.

At least my feelings about Weasley are fucking consistent.

Melvin, you should've seen his face. I want a portrait of that face to hang over my mantle for fucking eternity. It was everything I'd hoped for and more. Every ounce of 'Yeah, Weasley, watch me. Watch me fuck her. Watch me fuck the girl you thought was always meant to be yours. She's not yours.'

It was fucking flawless.

But then her face.

Nobody fucking taught me.

Nobody sat me down and explained. Explained how the fuck I'm supposed to feel. What I'm supposed to do. How I'm supposed to act.

Mother and Father never told me, 'Yes, Draco, this is how much it's going to hurt,' and 'This is how hard it'll be to trust,' and 'This is what you should never do. Never. Ever.'

No one ever drew that fucking line for me.

No one ever fucking prepared me for the way it was going to feel. For how little fucking sense anything was going to make.

For the way she started looking at me and talking to me and seeking things from me.

Like comfort. Like safety.

What the fuck was I supposed to fucking do with that?

Seriously. Seriously.

I asked her to fucking prove it, and then she fucking did.

The fuckery here is twofold.

A. This is fucking Granger. Granger, who never fucking does anything out of her fucking comfort zone unless it's for Saint Fucking Potter. Granger, who would never put herself or her reputation on the line for me in a million fucking years. I couldn't have taken bets on it.

But then also, B. I'm fucking me. When the fuck, in

"Please, please, I want to hurt him." His voice is rough. He increases the rhythm of his hand to match. "Let me hurt him."

This is wrong. She knows this is wrong.

But knowing that does nothing to stop the oozing, aching pleasure from building up between her hips.

"No," she whimpers, and he thrusts in a third finger in response, twisting so he's almost laying on top of her. Leaning over her. Driving into her.

She can't hide from him this way, and his lips capture hers with a bruising pressure. Bite. Suck. Hard. "I want to make him bleed. I want to cut him open with a Muggle knife."

She writhes against him, both in protest and in earnest. Craving. Needing. Terrified.

"Say I can. Say you'll let me."

She can only shake her head, eyes squeezed shut, biting down on her tongue.

She's so close. Too close.

"Even if you don't, I think I'll do it anyway."

And with that, he's done talking. He hitches up her waist with his free arm, belting it under her to bring her closer. Tilt her, so the angle of his fingers is unbearable. And they drive in and out, in and out, so consistently — so mercilessly, until she's balling his shirt into fists and convulsing against him. Crying out against the skin of his throat as the orgasm explodes through her almost angrily. Vengefully.

Her hands are shaking when she finally manages to let him go. His shirt is wrinkled and creased. His lips are swollen.

And his gaze is savage. Delighted. Wickedly delighted that he managed to do this to her.

She trembles, breathing out loudly in the sudden silence. Her shaking fingers find the smooth planes of his cheeks.

"Don't — don't hurt him. You don't have to hurt him."

He dips down. Kisses her too sweetly for what he says.

"I won't make you any promises."



January 4th, 1999

“GET A LOAD OF THIS RUBBISH.”

She shoots up off her back with a gasp and kneels Draco in the thigh, and then he’s awake and cursing, and they’re both rushing to do up buttons. Both trying to make sense of Theodore Nott taking a seat on the couch between the two of them.

Hermione quickly charms herself — banishes her matted hair and any evidence of their inappropriate behavior. She hadn’t meant to fall back asleep, and she’s glancing around nervously for any onlookers in the common room.

But it’s just Nott, and he seems completely uninterested in their indecent state. He’s got the Daily Prophet in hand — throws it down on the table in front of them — and Hermione catches a glimpse of one of the lower headlines.

LETTING BYGONES BE BYGONES?

WITCH WEEKLY’S THEORIES ON HERMIONE GRANGERS TRYST WITH FORMER
DEATH EATER

She sighs, reaching out to turn to the corresponding article, but Nott slaps her hand away.

“Not that one,” he snaps, annoyed, then yanks open the Prophet with such force it tears about an inch on both bottom and top. “This shite.”

There’s a moving photograph of Draco and Narcissa Malfoy exiting the Ministry with their solicitor on the day of their appeal. It then switches to Pansy Parkinson walking through Diagon Alley with a hand in front of her face, warding off the press. Then to Nott with his solicitor, at some point during his appeal,

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His eyes are tight when he slides them over to her again.

“You are *sick*,” she breathes, feeling her blood boiling beneath every inch of flesh.

“Twisted and sick.”

She’s unsatisfied and unfulfilled by the violence. She isn’t sure anything could satisfy her in this moment.

But the slight flicker in his expression — the crack in the stone — is a start.

Even so, it’s painful just to look at him.

She can’t. She needs to leave. She needs to *run*.

She — Ron. Ron is the priority.

Ron.

Malfoy’s still fucking talking.

“Maybe so, Granger.” He shrugs again.

Again.

And the poison bubbling up in her veins seeps out. Curls her lip and lashes out like a whip on her tongue.

“I hate you.”

And no. No, that’s not enough. Won’t hurt enough. Needs to *hurt*.

Needs to hurt as much as she does.

“You’re *nothing*.”

That’s it.

That’s the pain she needed to see.

The way the breath exits his mouth and the way his shoulders deflate with it.

The way his jaw slackens and his sharp eyes go dull.

The way he blinks.

It gives her legs the strength to move.

And she’s running.

*January 11th, 1999
Diary.*



January 11th, 1999

HE DOESN'T MOVE. Not an inch.

His eyes are cold and hooded and masked — she can read no expression in them.

“You knew. You *knew*. You planned this.”

His warming charm fades away, and an icy gust of wind sweeps up against them. She barely feels it.

“Planned is a strong word,” he says, no emotion in his voice, either. Nothing. Emptiness. “But you can always count on Weasley not to finish his work on time.” He cracks his knuckles. Rolls his shoulders. Casual. Always fucking casual.

“So, no — less of a plan and more of an educated guess.”

“You already finished that project,” is all she can manage to say, deadpan.

He has the nerve to shrug.

She thinks she's going to be sick. Right here. On the floor. Feels the bile rise up in her throat. But no — *no*, she isn't going to let that happen. Isn't going to be that pathetic. *Refuses*. No, she doesn't need to be sick, she needs to...she needs

—
Hermione takes one step forward and musters as much force as she can.

Backhands him across the face.

His jaw is a cold, hard slab of stone against the sensitive, thin skin of her knuckles. Stings, the pain hot and sharp. And the resounding crack is loud in her ears.

Malfoy doesn't make a sound. What force she managed has swept his neck to the side, and for a moment he stays facing that way, allowing her to watch the angry scarlet bloom across his cheek.

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showing him massaging his temples. Then to Blaise Zabini showing his way through other members of the press while trying to enter King's Cross Station. The headline reads:

SIX MONTHS & WAR CRIMINALS STILL WALK FREE

“Have you ever even heard of this fucking organization? Or at least that's what they're fucking calling it?” Nott is asking Draco. “Crusaders For Justice?”

Draco shakes his head and rubs his tired eyes, squinting as he leans forward to get a better look at it. “Reckon they want us all in Azkaban.”

“No, mate.” Nott jabs his finger angrily into the paper. “They want us fucking dead. I read the bloody article. Here. Read this line.” He tears it some more ripping it back off the table, handing it to Draco and stabbing at the sentence in question. “Read it. Read that.”

Draco yawns and sleepily reads it aloud. “Since October of last year, the organization has been amassing major support and growing in numbers, advocating a zero-tolerance policy for accused Death Eaters and their allies. Dawlish, former Auror, founder of C.F.J. and champion of the cause, calls for a re-evaluation of sentencing, arguing offenders should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Read his fucking quote.” Nott jabs the paper some more.

Draco's lazy intonation fades as he speaks. “What use is a Ministry of Magic that cannot carry out justice where justice is due? These are witches and wizards responsible for the torture and murder of hundreds — whether they decided to get their hands dirty or not — and they are being protected by respectable institutions such as Hogwarts, Durmstrang and St. Mungo's. Protection they do not and will never deserve. C.F.J. will be submitting a motion to reopen all closed cases against these individuals, citing an infringement upon the rights and safety of wizarding society. We intend to place a particular emphasis on what we and

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countless members of this community consider to be true justice: the De-mentor's Kiss."

His voice is unsteady as he reads the last sentence, and Hermione glances up to see he's gone pale. Sees him try to laugh it off.

He tosses the Prophet back to the table. "They're just trying to sell papers. Next week it'll be buried beneath another compilation of Potter's best Quidditch maneuvers." And he massages the nape of his neck, sitting back against the clammy leather. "It's illegal, anyhow."

"No, it isn't," Hermione murmurs, and for a moment she doesn't realize she's said it aloud. But both of them turn to stare at her, and she wishes she could bite her tongue. She sighs. Looks away, talks to the black marble table instead. "Muggles are protected by a law that prevents them from being tried for the same crime twice. Wizarding society is not. Because the safety and secrecy of this world is paramount, anyone can be retried on the basis that their current sentence allows them to pose a threat."

There's a drawn out silence.

Then Nort huffs. Blurs out, "Well, fuck," and yanks a bottle of Firewhiskey toward him. It's seven in the morning. "See? We're all going to die."

"I'm not saying it will be easy for them to prove it. I'm only saying it's...well, it's possible," she adds feebly. Something thick and poisonous slithers into her gut. She isn't sure what it is.

In her peripheral, she sees Draco snatch the Firewhiskey out of Nort's hands. He takes a deep swig, and she wonders if any of them are ever truly sober.

"What do we do, then?" he asks. She hates that he asks. Hates that she's expected to have an answer for everything. Hates that, in this moment, she wishes more than anything she had a better one. A different one.

"There's nothing you can do. Not until—" She breaks off. Feels an intense and painful pang of guilt and quickly corrects herself. *"Unless. Not unless you're called to trial."*

They sit in more silence, all staring straight ahead. The dappled early morning light is tinged teal by the Black Lake against the windows. A pair of Second

hope for some semblance of advice, of a plan. Of comfort. Of anything.

But what she sees makes her nauseous.

Abruptly and physically *ill*.

She takes in his passive gaze and his stony expression with horror. Can't understand. Can't fathom. Can't breathe.

"You *knew*."

his scalp — their disjointed pants are echoing through the tower — and she starts to feel that pressure build, fold in on itself, rise — and he's not stopping, not slowing — and she's encouraging him, *encouraging him* — saying things she'd never say — has never said — *please and don't stop and like that, yes, please, yes, just like that* — and he's *listening*, he's incredible — and his tongue is tracing continents on her skin, and she's so —

Something loud hits the floor. Heavy — a deep thud, like books. They both jerk. Draco's rhythm cuts off abruptly. She gasps. And his teeth free her so she can whip her head to the side.

She can't understand it.

Can't comprehend it.

Can't fathom that it's Ron.

It's Ron.

Standing at the top of the stairs. His book bag is on the floor and his mouth is agape and his eyes are — they're wide and horrified and disgusted and disbelieving and so many things — too many fucking things at once.

They're frozen. All three of them.

There is no conceivable way to hide what they're doing, and yet her frazzled thoughts are still wondering if it's possible. If there's some excuse she can make, some lie she can tell.

“Ron...” she rasps out, voice broken. A croak.

He doesn't pick up his bag. Just puffs out a short, furious breath as his tortured eyes flit between them once more. And then he's gone. Down the stairs as quickly as he came. Quicker.

There's a wrenching, deafening, colossal moment of silence.

Draco pulls out of her — a strange, conflicting sensation that doesn't match anything else she's feeling. He sets her down. Holds her until he seems convinced she can balance on her own.

Her eyes haven't moved from the stairs.

“Oh my god...” she whispers, and there's no tone to her voice. Just air.

Her chest throbs and she forces herself to look away — to look at Draco and

Year girls clamber noisily down the dormitory stairs, though none of them turn to look.

She catches broken pieces of what they whisper as they make their way out of the common room, tripping over one another and gawking at them. “ — *Granger* doing in Slytherin — ” and “ — Malfoy's shirt's all rumpled — ” and “ — do you think they... — ” and then “ — all *three* of them?”

Their giggles fade away as they disappear through the false wall, and all she can think is, *Marvelous. More gossip.*

“Give me that bottle, please,” she says.



She waits until breakfast is half over before sneaking into Gryffindor to change into her robes —

Sneaking into Gryffindor.

What a perfectly horrible and utterly ridiculous concept.

She feels distinctly unwelcome, even in the emptiness of the dormitory, as she does up the buttons on her blouse. Ties her tie with trembling fingers, the red and gold almost taunting her — feeling like a sick joke.

And when she reaches the Great Hall, with perhaps twenty minutes left of breakfast, she has no notion of what to do.

Her gaze shifts nervously to the Gryffindor table, finding Harry, Ron, Ginny and the others in their usual spot, though the typically high-spirited conversation is nowhere to be found. They're talking in low tones to one another, expressions minimal. Measured. It seems obvious they know where she slept last night. The mood of their little section is dark. Divisive.

She can tell even from where she hesitates in the entryway.

And she can't sit there.

She *can't*. She can't.

Her eyes slide desperately in the other direction when Harry catches sight of her, and maybe it's those few sips of Firewhiskey swirling around in her otherwise empty stomach, but she finds herself walking towards the Slytherin table,

legs numb. Gelatinous.

Nort and Zabini are arguing about that same article in the Prophet over pumpkin juice. Pansy is leaning against Zabini, bored as she braids her hair, plate untouched. And Draco is scribbling in the diary, as usual.

She ignores the absurd, almost audible thudding of her pulse as she shakily swings her legs over the bench. Takes the seat across from Draco. Next to Nort.

And every pair of Slytherin eyes at that table zeroes in on her instantly. She thinks she hears Ron's voice kick up above the morning chatter, tumultuous — "...got to be *joking*..." although perhaps she's imagining it.

Pansy is the first to manage a reaction.

"Oh, *wonderful*," she hisses, rolling her eyes and dropping her braid to stab into her egg whites. She chews them furiously and doesn't make eye contact again for the rest of those twenty minutes.

Nort raises an eyebrow at Hermione. "Fully committing to this traitor thing, then, are you?" he asks, and his voice is wry. Mocking. It isn't friendly. But it isn't exactly *unfriendly*, either.

And Draco...

Draco says nothing as he looks up from the journal.

But the expression on his face — the look in his eyes — is the clearest and most obvious one he's ever displayed to her.

A look of pure, vicious satisfaction. Victorious, as though he's just won some long-winded competition. The way his lip pulls crookedly up over his teeth is — it's evil, it's *evil*, that's what it is.

Because he knows now, for certain, that he's destroyed all her friendships. Ruined her reputation for good.

And he is ever so pleased.

She wants so deeply to hate him for it, too. Part of her does. The same part of her that has been and always will be against this — this *thing* between them, whatever it is. But another part of her cannot help but see the honesty in that expression.

Because Draco will never be good. He knows that. He sees to it.

A nervous laugh bubbles out of her throat. "You sound like a surgeon."

"Yes, well — you've never done it like this before. Unless, of course, you lied about being a virgin."

She laughs again, breath coming in ragged puffs. He doesn't warn her again. She wasted the first one.

And suddenly he's there.

She gasps. Her head smacks back against the stone, a pain she doesn't notice — won't notice until tomorrow. Because he's *right*. He's so, so right. This is different. The angle. The depth. It changes everything.

It *hurts*.

But it also simultaneously quenches the thirst brought on by that horrible emptiness. That need. Addresses it like a prescribed medicine. And the *sound* he makes — the way his head drops down onto her shoulder...it makes the pain fade.

"Fuck," he hisses.

"*Please*," she whispers, because he's not moving. Not taking care of that extra itch. That throb deep and low that still needs attending.

His hands are trembling, too. They shake against the exposed skin at her waist, sliding up beneath the fabric of her blouse to grab hold.

And slowly — too slowly — he starts to shift her against him. Starts to guide her hips to move, to invite him in, expel him out — over and over.

She makes some ridiculous sound. It might be a word, might not. She doesn't know. Only knows the perfect pressure. The violent pleasure of that one spot he always seems to hit.

She tenses at the sensation. Accidentally squeezes some foreign muscle group, and whatever it is, it gets a strong reaction out of him. Makes him jerk and groan and adjust his grip to push her back tighter against the stone, so he can shift up the rhythm. Speed up. Thrust deeper. Harder.

She gasps. Slides a hand up to tangle in his hair just as one of his hands abandons her waist to slide along the outside of her thigh. Squeezes and hitches it up further, driving deeper still.

And his teeth are latched onto her throat — her fingernails are scraping at

just wants more. More, *more*, impossible amounts of *more*.

"I want to hear what it sounds like on your tongue."

Her cheeks are stained red, and she doesn't think she can say it, but it must be the way his hand slides up her inner thigh. Delves between her legs and gives her a taste of what it'll feel like to relieve all of that tension.

"I...I want..."

"Come on, Granger," he growls, dragging a finger up and down against her. "Be brave."

She sighs into his mouth. Shifts her nose against his, eyes falling shut. Her voice comes out raspy and foreign. Doesn't sound like hers at all.

"I'm not going to say it."

And she's proud of herself. Proud to be able to resist, if only in the weakest form. Proud not to give him everything he wants.

He groans loudly against her tongue, "Of course you aren't." And she feels his hand fist in her knickers. "Because when have you ever not been so —" He yanks them. "*fucking* —" Rips them. "*difficult*?"

The elastic strains. Bruises her hips as it snaps and falls away.

"Come here. Spread your legs," he demands, and a shockwave of anticipation shoots through her at his words. At the realization that he's not planning on taking off his shirt, nor removing her skirt.

It's the sort of sordid fantasy she hasn't really allowed herself to have.

She does as he says, more instinctively than intentionally, arms folding around his neck as she parts her thighs and allows him to hitch her legs up around his waist. He presses her back against the pillar for balance, and she finds she loves this angle. Loves being a little taller than him — looking down on him, her lips against the sharp plane of his cheek. Her breaths disturbing the blond wisps on his forehead.

The pink glow of the contraceptive charm paints the backs of her eyelids. She tries to steady the trembling in her forearms — knows he can feel it against the nape of his neck.

"Take a deep breath," he murmurs against her jaw.

He will never *try* to be good.

And she's sort of fine with that. She almost needs that. Almost...almost *craves* it.

And she doesn't think she'll ever understand why.



Over the course of the day, she has scalding hot Pepper-up Potion spilled down her shirtfront by Parvati — "Sorry, you know me. So clumsy..." — which continues to sting even after a cooling charm; she watches Neville bite back on a question in Defense Against the Dark Arts, as though he's been specifically instructed not to speak to her and has only just remembered; someone hexes her with something rather creative that prevents her joints from bending for a half hour, and someone else actually *pulls her hair*.

It's petty. Juvenile. All of it.

And she convinces herself that it's not worth worrying over. After all, it's Ginny who casts the cooling charm and Ginny who unlocks her limbs and even though she remains at Harry and Ron's side throughout the day, she repeatedly sends reassuring glances her way.

Glances that suggest she intends to help her through this, even if just now isn't the right time.

But it still feels like a wrench in Hermione's gut when she feels the need to cast protective wards around her four-poster before crawling into bed.

And she doesn't think she sleeps at all.

January 4th, 1999

Diary.

Seeing as it is now a distinct possibility that I might die anyway, I'm no longer going to answer your asinine fucking prompts. You can report me to whomever you bloody like, but I fucking refuse, yeah? I'm done.

I'm going to write whatever I damn well please.

My solicitor sent me an owl yesterday — he's been contacted by Dawlish's fucking people. Millions, more like. Says he's trying to pursue every loophole that might allow me to avoid a retrial.

But he's a fucking rubbish solicitor, yeah? So I figure I'm going to fucking trial, and then eventually I'm going to fucking die.

And you'll probably be glad you don't have to read this filthy handwriting anymore.

Happy for you.

In the interim, I can tell you it's still immensely gratifying to watch Granger's life fall apart. Practically fucking orgasmic.

I did warn her I wasn't her type.

Or maybe I just warned you.

Still, every time I see her fight back tears, I feel fucking vindicated. I think back to all of those beatings I took from Father after we lost the fucking House Cup or I lost to fucking Potter in Quidditch — the ones that ended with him hexing my mouth shut for two days, sometimes three, until I ran the risk of starving to death — and I'm so fucking glad she's getting a fucking taste of it. I hope it's sour as vinegar.

But I also want to stop those tears before they fall. Want to kiss her eyes dry. Want to fuck away the pain until the only hurt she feels is that ache between her legs after I've had her again, and again, and again, and *afucking* again.

I don't care if she doesn't trust me.

I don't trust her.

But I love that it's hurting her so much to earn me.

waist and hears it clink against the flagstone when she tosses it aside.

A sharp breath breaks free from his lips and gusts against her ear. A domino effect that makes her jolt once more and then grind her hips into his.

He shoves her hard against the wall, taking away her power, her leverage, and grinding roughly against her instead. Forcing a whimper out of her throat.

"What do you want?" he asks again, pulling away from her neck to look her in the eyes. He takes her chin in hand and squeezes tight, tilting her head up towards him. "Tell me what you want."

She feels bold. Electrified by the incendiary craving between her hips. Allows one of her palms to whisper over the front of his trousers.

"This," she breathes.

She's rewarded by the searing flash in his eyes. The way his lip curls up, aggressive — predatory.

"This?" he echoes, squeezing her chin tighter, bringing his lips in close — so close, but not close enough. Ghosting them over hers as he rolls his hips.

"You," she amends, gasping and nipping at him. Pushing against his grip, unable to kiss him fully.

His eyebrows jolt up, almost like a challenge, and he nuzzles his nose against hers. "Me?"

"Yes," she whispers, moaning when he loosens his hold on her chin the faintest bit. Allows her to open her mouth against his lips. He drags his tongue up along hers, wet — filthy. Her knees are shaking.

"Yeah?" he says into her mouth, both hands finding her hips. Yanking them tight against him. "What do you want me to do?" But he seems to have a very clear idea, fingers curling around the backs of her bare thighs. He pries her legs apart with them, and she can't help a muffled little shriek.

"Please."

"Mm-mm...no, Hermione." He shakes his head against her kiss and her toes curl at the sound of her name on his lips. "I want you to tell me. Tell me what you want me to do to you. I want to hear you say it."

He gives her tongue another filthy lick, saliva dripping down their chins. She

He doesn't let go of her tie, even as he crowds her up against the stone pillar beside the railing. He tangles it tighter around his knuckles, using it to pull her — force her chest to mold against his.

Her breath hitches.

His free hand snakes up along the curve of her shoulder. Creeps around to the back of her neck to delve into her curls. And he forms that tight, tight fist she's grown to love — the one that almost stings, strained strands yanking at her scalp.

She makes a little noise she can't really define as his chin slides into the crevice between her throat and collarbone, almost like it was made to fit there.

"Is that a sufficient excuse?" he whispers against the shell of her ear, and she can't help but buck against him. Her nerve endings are raw. Exposed.

Too many days have passed since he's last touched her.

He laughs low at the way her body responds, and the deep vibration of it sends another tremor through her.

"Well?" he asks, tongue daring out to trace her earlobe, then sliding up along the arch of the cartilage. "Is it?"

She hisses out another breath, hands unconsciously splaying out over his chest. Kneading. Grasping at fabric, trying desperately to reach the skin beneath.

"Yes," she gasps, because he's released her tie, and his fingers have traveled low to toy with the hem of her skirt.

"Mm," he hums as he suckles her earlobe. That pulse in her abdomen doubles. Triples. She quickly becomes aware of an aching emptiness she's not quite familiar with. Has a vague idea of how to be rid of it.

Her hands, still moving of their own accord, find his belt buckle.

"You seem as though you want something, Granger," he says. Taunts.

She yanks at his buckle, and his hips collide with hers. The teasing lilt in his voice makes way for a groan, and she bites down on her lip as the hard outline of him presses against her thigh through her skirt.

"What do you want?" he breathes.

She manages to unfasten his buckle — tears the belt out from around his

No one's ever had to fucking ease me before.

It's also become quite clear that there's no need to cut weaselly into little pinprick strips. The way his face screws up when she so much as speaks to me is so fucking hilarious — looks like it hurts so much — that maybe there's very little I have to do.

Very, very little.

Draco



George and Elmer

“Wasn’t this due ages ago?” she asks, watching as Draco lazily charts Canis Minor, one arm draped over the telescope. “Before the holidays?”

He makes a guttural noise — nods. “Tomorrow’s the last day to turn it in for partial credit.”

She hugs her knees a little closer. Glances sideways past the railing she’s sitting against.

It’s a gorgeous night.

The sky is cloudless and black as ink, the stars glistening like luminescent freckles on its sable face. The chill of the air only occasionally brushes up against her, breaking through Draco’s warming charm. It’s a pleasant contrast.

She tries not to ruin the view by thinking of Dumbledore.

Though she can’t help but wonder how Draco feels about being up here.

Says instead, “I thought you kept up with your studies,” to take her mind off of it.

Draco takes his eye away from the telescope, raising an eyebrow at her. “Judgmental, are we?”

She tries not to let her eyes linger on the rather hypnotic ‘V’ created by the top two undone buttons of his shirt. Shrugs. “Simply making an observation.”

He jolts that eyebrow once more, then takes a final peek through the telescope, jotting something short and jagged on his chart. Next she knows, he’s rolling up the parchment. Tossing it aside with the quill before she thinks he’s given the ink enough time to dry.

Then he’s stalking over to her, and when he’s a few feet away, he’s cast completely in shadow, the feeble light of the tower’s torches unable to touch him. He stops when the toes of his shoes knock against hers. Looms.

She stares up into his dark face, unable to snuff out the small, squirming burst of something low in her abdomen.

He reaches down. Lifts the bottom of her tie, then starts to twist it around his hand. “Yes, well, I’ve been...” He yanks, and her hands break apart around her knees, legs struggling to push off the ground as he drags her up. “...disfracted.”

“So, WHAT THEN? DO YOU FUCKING LIVE HERE NOW?”

Hermione looks up from her Potions essay. Pansy is spreading out on her usual chaise longue, the fire behind the hearth casting bright orange flickers over her pinched expression, her pursed lips. She’s in another fancy, lace-trimmed nightgown, hair tied up in a tight bun.

“Hello, Pansy.” She glances back down. Tries to remember how the rest of the sentence she’s writing is supposed to go.

“I asked you a question.”

Hermione bobs one shoulder. It’s all she can really manage. “Most of you don’t seem to mind.”

She’s been doing her studying and spending most of her free time in Slytherin over the past week, only returning to Gryffindor to sleep. She can’t focus with all the eyes on her — all the whispers. Can’t think straight having Ron and Harry in the same room, while feeling they’re so very far away.

Nott and Zabini seem to find it almost funny every time they answer her telltale knock. When one of them lets her in, she’ll usually sit with them in the common room — study, read, practice charms.

When Draco answers, things are more complicated.

She hasn’t really spoken to him since that morning — since that look at breakfast. Isn’t sure how to feel around him.

But he’ll let her in, and they’ll sit together in the common room, too. Exchange complicated glances every now and again, when one of them catches the other staring.

Her grand gesture — a gesture which has proven to be more horrific than

But she doesn't want to push her luck.

She returns to Slytherin that evening, like always, afraid if she charges into Gryffindor now, she'll shatter whatever fragile neutral state they've created.

She knocks.

Wonders idly if she'll ever be given the password — and then wonders whether that would actually be a good thing.

She has herself duly prepared for Pansy's usual fiery glare or Nott's mocking grin, but it ends up being one of the rare instances in which Draco answers.

"Granger," he acknowledges.

She realizes he only calls her Hermione when they're — when he's...

She flushes. Tries to hide it by pretending to scratch an itch on her cheek. "Malfoy," she replies, in the spirit of fairness.

And then she spends another useless minute preparing herself for another one of their usual, inordinately tense study sessions by the fireplace before he surprises her again.

"Have an Astronomy project to finish," he says, edging his way gracefully around her — and indeed, she sees he has a roll of parchment in his hand. A quill in the other.

"Oh," she says stupidly as her eyes follow him. Watch him start to make his way down the Dungeons corridor. "Right."

And she feels her chest fill up with this ridiculously pathetic sensation that she *refuses* to accept as humiliation.

He's almost disappeared around the corner, though, and she's almost finished deciding she'll spend the next few hours wandering aimlessly, when he tosses back at her, "Are you waiting for an invitation?"

A sharp, cut little breath exits her mouth.

A little of the tension in her shoulders smooths out.

She follows.



grand — has had a...*convoluted* effect on their relationship. She's proven what he needed her to prove. Proven she isn't ashamed. And she wears the pendant every day.

But they aren't an item. Aren't a couple.

Aren't even what she'd consider to be *lovers*.

In fact, it seems her grand gesture has done more to sway Slytherin House as a whole than Draco himself. Nott and Zabini seem less wary of her. Even people she rarely sees like Pucey and Bulstrode are growing more comfortable with her presence. Have stopped giving her dirty looks. As though they recognize what she's given up. What she's done to herself.

But with Draco...with Draco, it feels like he's testing her.

Waiting for her to go running back to Gryffindor crying. Waiting for her to pretend she didn't mean it.

Perhaps he doesn't understand the permanence of it. The permanence of that moment when his lips touched hers, immortalized in black and white print.

"I mind," snaps Pansy, and Hermione is pulled from her thoughts. Looks up at her again and studies her carefully.

"Why?"

And she's truly, truly curious.

Pansy Parkinson is an enigma. Weeks and weeks ago, Hermione had thought she had her all figured out. Thought she was little more than a bitter mixture of blood prejudice, House rivalry and general envy, all hidden beneath an almost synthetically pretty mask. Thought she'd clung to Draco's arm all those years for the status and the potential inheritance, like Draco had said.

Now, though, she isn't so sure. She certainly didn't get a real answer out of her the last time she asked.

Because Pansy Parkinson seems to hate her so much, she almost acts as though she's afraid of her.

Like now, in the way she fidgets as she splutters out, "What do you mean, *why?*" In the way her face goes bright red and her nostrils flare.

"Like I said," Hermione answers, working to keep her tone even. Calm. "You

and I, specifically, have never had an altercation. And my blood?" She sets her essay aside. Sits forward a bit to stare Pansy down, her dark eyes seemingly bottomless. "I don't think that really matters to you."

These eyes go wide and wild for a split second, and then Pansy's sitting forward, too. Spitting out her words, "*You put my parents in Askaban.*"

"You know I didn't. Not me. Not personally." Hermione feels her hands bunch into fists. Struggles to keep that steady tone. "When the gavel came down, they were simply on the wrong side of things."

"*Fuck you*, you filthy little—" Her sharp voice echoes through the empty common room, but Hermione cuts her off before she can finish.

Asks what she's really wanted to know all along.

"Are you in love with Draco?"

Pansy chokes on the word 'Mudblood,' which feels almost poetic in a way. Sends an absurd surge of glee through Hermione's bloodstream, but it dissipates quickly as she then watches Pansy go very, very pale.

"What?" she deadpans.

"Are you in love with him? Really, truly in love with him?" She can't stop now that she's started. Has to see this through to the end. "I thought for a long time that you weren't, but now I'm realizing I may've been wrong. It seems to be the only reason I can think of — the only reason you'd hate me as much as you do."

Pansy is frozen in a state of bewilderment for what feels like a full minute, her perfectly symmetrical face wiped clean like a slate.

Then her expression breaks and she huffs, sitting back, the movement so sudden it startles Hermione.

"As the brightest bloody witch in our year, I would've expected you to be more creative."

And this, from Pansy, is almost a compliment.

But she can't really focus on that because she's — she's saying no. She's saying no, and Hermione is *confused*.

More than anything, she thinks, she hates being confused.

She writes only one sentence.

Please understand that this is not something I could change.

And she pads off to the boys dormitory, pushing the folded parchment beneath the door. Hoping beyond all hope that they'll try — just try — to see her side.

She hates hope, she realizes.

Hope is going to ruin her.

January 11th, 1999

THEY KEEP GLANCING HER WAY, AND NOT, SHE THINKS — PRACTICALLY PRAYS — WITH THEIR USUAL MEASURE OF FURY.

She's purposefully seated herself next to Pansy today, so she can face the Gryffindor table, though this comes with both Pansy's noxiously powerful perfume cloud and her obvious disdain.

Even so, Hermione is less leery of her since the other night.

Feels she at least knows a bit about what makes Pansy, *Pansy*. And she's much more conscious of the way her eyes follow Nott. Everywhere. Like searchlights on a beach.

It is well and truly a *wonder* she never noticed before.

But Harry and Ron have captured her full attention now. They've read her note and she thinks possibly — maybe, just maybe — *perhaps* that they might be willing to speak to her.

Ginny's furtive glances and indistinct nods tell her she's right.

And when the lot of them stand and make their way out of the Hall to head to classes, she's almost elated.

Progress, however infinitesimal, is still progress.

Ron's turns out to be little more than a paragraph of furious, illegible scribbles, with only a few words she can make out. Namely, "fuck," and "you dare" and, darker than the rest, "why?"

Harry's hurts more.

Hermione,

This doesn't seem like you.

I don't know what's happened or what Malfoy's made you think of him, but you need to know that he's wrong for you — and this isn't just about Ron.

Malfoy's not a good person, Hermione.

I've seen things you haven't.

This is dangerous. You need to stop before it goes any further.

Write me. Please.

Harry

She squints her eyes painfully, squeezing back tears where she sits cross-legged on her four-poster. The curtains are drawn — they're always drawn, now. And Harry's handwriting is smearing as the ink runs with stray droplets.

She doesn't know what she was expecting — what she was hoping for, after that day in the Great Hall.

Possibly just one word of understanding. Just *one* word.

Roughly, she wipes her cheeks dry and pulls out a clean sheet of parchment from her nightstand. Clears her throat and addresses it to both of them.

"You're not?" she breathes, brows drawn in tight. Tight enough to cause a tension headache.

Pansy huffs again and kicks back in the chaise lounge, sprawling out her long, bare legs and crossing them at the ankles. "No, stupid girl. I'm not."

"Then why—"

"I hate you because I know exactly how easy it would be for you to ruin their lives." She makes a sweeping gesture to encapsulate all of Slytherin House. "My friends. My family for the past eight years. I hate you because you've wormed your way into our midst and they're all too stupid not to trust you, but I can see right through you. And I know. I *know*. One wrong move from any of them, and you'll use that fucking golden pedestal wizarding society put you up on after the war to eviscerate them."

Hermione ruminates on this for about ten seconds.

And then she shakes her head. "No."

"I beg your fucking pardon?"

"No. Again, I simply don't believe you. Maybe months ago, that would've made sense. But you've seen the way I look at Draco. And you've seen the way my House looks at me, now." She doesn't know how she's so certain, but she is. "You're lying. It's something more."

"Fuck you."

"You're in love with him," she says again — states it like a fact, and Pansy's jaw goes tight.

"Fuck you."

"That's what it is. You're in love with him."

"Shut the fuck up, Mudblood!" She's up out of her comfortable sprawl, leaning forward again, purple-faced and white-knuckled.

"Just admit it."

"Shut up! Shut up!"

"Say it. Say you're in love with him—"

"Fucking shut up!"

"You'll feel better once you do—"

"I swear to Merlin, I'll—"

"Say it!"

"Fuck you!"

"Say it!"

"I'M IN LOVE WITH HIM!" Pansy shrieks, and she sweeps an arm across the black marble table, sending crystal goblets flying against the hearth. Shattering them into thousands of tiny pieces.

Hermione sits back. Gathers a shaking breath, trying to pull herself down from the fever of moments ago.

The common room is deathly silent. It's half past eleven. She wonders who they've woken up.

Pansy runs trembling hands against the sides of her bun, smoothing out what's come loose in her rage. She sits back almost daintily, folding her hands in her lap, as though she hasn't just been screaming.

"I'm sorry," Hermione hears herself say. "I'm sorry that you are. But I'm glad to know the truth."

And that's when Pansy lets out this little peel of tragic laughter.

So forced and so obviously holding back tears. "You don't know anything," she says around the laughs, sniffing and running a finger carefully below her eye. Preventing any smudging. "It's not him."

Hermione blinks at her.

"I'm not in love with Draco."

And her fragmented brain rushes to piece together the new information, scrambling and unscrambling previous thoughts, knows becoming unknowns. Unknowns becoming knowns. The memory of her first night in the common room flashes through her head.

"I'm not in love with Draco," Pansy says again, completely composed, wiping at more stray tears. "I'm in love with—"

"Theo." Hermione finishes for her.

And it all suddenly almost, *almost* makes sense.

Pansy releases a slow breath through her nose, face tight. "Theo," she finally

forces herself to say. Finally confirms.

And Hermione realizes how painfully obvious it should've been. The looks she gives him. The way she hung around that night, with Nott and Zabini. The horror on her face when she heard about Romilda Vane, who — come to think of it — had been mysteriously hexed the next day.

It even makes sense that Pansy would drape herself all over Draco.

Hermione had spent too many nights in the girl's dormitory hearing Parvati talk about making boys jealous — about how it was the only surefire way to get their attention. She'd thought this was absolute bollocks at the time — still does, but apparently Pansy had been similarly misinformed.

And all of that — it all makes sense.

But...

"Theo has nothing to do with me," she says.

And that's when Pansy's face goes from solemn to feral in what must be record time. "Oh, yes he does, Granger. Don't play dumb. He's Draco's Crutch. They're practically conjoined at the hip. By getting involved, you've already managed to get Draco sent to the Hospital Wing twice. Almost to Azkaban."

She stands. Towers over where Hermione sits like a skeletal mannequin.

"But if you do anything — *anything* to hurt Theo, I will kill you. Do you understand me?"

Hermione can only stare.

"I will *kill* you."

And for once, it's perfectly clear she isn't lying.

January 10th, 1999

SHE READS TWO OF THE LETTERS.

Decides she can't put them off any longer and chooses the two she expects will be the most painful, so she can rip them off like band-aids.

Harry's and Ron's.