As the dust settles following the Battle of Hogwarts, Draco's confidence, belief system, and world are shattered.

In an attempt to mend his broken pieces, he turns to vials that take the pain away. But once the high's are no longer so high and the lows get so much lower, Draco has to start a journey of healing and redemption that often hurts more than it helps.

This has been in the works awhile and I hope to supply you with regular updates and lots of delicious angst for your dark heart.

The biggest of all thanks and shoutouts to PartyLines, my alpha/beta/cheerleader. This is all garbage if not for her!

Also, huge shout out to SweetLilBullet because maybe a year ago now, we played around with this little plunny and while it has evolved into something entirely different, I still know the bones are there that we talked about all those months ago! I hope I do it justice.

You will notice all the chapters have a song title as their chapter name. I encourage you to give the song a listen either before, after or hell, during. I listened to them on repeat while writing, even while driving and daydreaming about the words I was going to write. So I think you'll enjoy the undertones of each song!
See the end of the work for more notes.
As I stand there – knobbly-knees trembling from lack of sustenance and nerves - I realise just how fucking pitiful I am. I exist only in shades of gray: never fully embracing darkness; never stepping into the light.

He’s here. It doesn’t matter how many times I lay eyes on grey, rotting face and scaled skin, I feel a wave of panic spread down my spine. Dark magic billows off him in waves tainting the air in his wake.

He announces Potter’s death and I feel… something; something I never intended to feel. Maybe I thought I’d be relieved, or even joyful.

I’m terrified.

That megalomaniac bastard has won.
He’s going to burn this entire world to ash and I’ll either be dead or cowering in his shadows. He’s making a speech now; asking his true followers to join him. I know I should join my parents. My father steps forward and beckons me to cross the divide, and I’m filled with disgust. It’s not until my mother steps forward that my foot twitches and I consider standing next to her. Even in the darkness she’s always been my light.

I hesitate too long.

My mother is dead on the stones between us in a matter of moments. Her blood doesn’t spill; she doesn’t gasp for breath. There’s no fancy spell or a flourishing of wand. She’s just… gone.

Everything moves in slow, silent motion for the next few minutes. Longbottom’s heroic speech belies his cowardly nature, but it’s muffled. I hardly hear it. It’s not until his long sword slices through the neck of the giant beast that the world begins to crash in waves around me.

Potter is, of course, alive. We were so stupid to think anyone could put that fucker in the ground. Magic pulses against my skin as action crashes all around me; explodes under my feet. I know that if I’m ever going to decide my loyalties, it’s now.

I stare down at my long, pale fingers clenching my mother’s wand; the wand she’ll never hold again.

The battle rages around me as my eyes fall upon dead bodies – giants, house-elves, children, and old men – and jets of coloured magic that litter the ground.

What am I doing?

I feel a set of eyes on me.

Granger.

She grips her wand but she’s not aiming at me; not yet. She seems to be waiting to see what I might do; waiting for me to make a decision.

Yeah, me too.
I nod and roll my eyes, aiming my wand at the back of a faceless Death Eater and firing a succession of stunners. He falls on his face and I add an Incarcerous for good measure.

Looking at her again I see a smile turn her lips; as if she’s known all along I might defect.

“Have a drink and you’ll feel better,” the twin that didn’t die says to me. He offers me a bottle of cheap swill that I wouldn’t have entertained in my third year.

He’s always meddling; always hovering and trying to be fucking chummy. I don’t want to be chummy with a Weasley.

I snatch the bottle from his hand and give him a weak sneer as I tip it to my lips.

I don’t really have anywhere else to go, now do I?

The Manor has been requisitioned for the foreseeable future and finding a place to let might prove to be difficult with the Death Eater mark still fading on my arm; the Malfoy blonde bright on my head.

Molly Weasley found me after the battle; insisted I come here to await news from the Ministry. For some bloody reason, I listened to her, and here I am.

The Ministry doesn’t seem to care too much about my involvement for now - bigger felons to try. It just means that other than taking me home and telling me to behave, they don’t pay me a lot of mind.

The Weasley’s haven’t been too bad. They feed me and don’t bother me much... except for George… or Fred… whoever the fuck he is: the tallest one who always wants to sit by the fire and talk about our fucking feelings.
That’s not quite fair, I suppose. He doesn’t really want to talk about feelings. He wants to get drunk and bitch about Quidditch and nonsense, but that’s still too familiar for me.

The pain-in-my-arse Weasley is gone for now. Austria? Australia?

Who the fuck cares.

He’s not here so I’m currently in the twat’s room, if that’s what one cares to call it. There’s no real walls…the bones of the house are bare to the world; cold and wind seeping through each crack.

I haven’t been warm in weeks.

I still don’t leave his room if I can stand it; not until I’m sure everyone else has gone to bed. Sometimes then I’ll sneak down by the fire’s warmth to stretch my legs.

The twin is always there.

Waiting.

I expect it and still I go. He’s someone at least, and he’s not half as bad as Ron.

“Want a hit?” his eyes are glazed over as he stares at the flames licking the chimney.

“A hit?”

“Potion. Takes the edge off… Inhale sharply and feel the edges of your brain melt away, mate.”

In Fred or George’s lazy hand is a small blue vial.

I snatch it like I’m greedy for it, even though I’ve never hit a potion for a high in my life. Firewhiskey and beer always seemed sufficient... until now.
I bring it up to my nostril and whiff the harshness of it: burnt rubber and gas. I flinch and the twin laughs.

“Do it fast. Like this,” he brings his forefinger up to one nostril, effectively plugging it, and then snorts through the free one.

I nod like it’s nothing; like I do this all the time and just needed a refresher.

I hit it and my brain indeed melts. The sharpness of loss, guilt, and betrayal give way to an easy euphoria. The way the fire flicks and licks the air is mesmerizing and I forget my company as my limbs melt - from heat or from drugs - into the chair I’m sitting in.

Gods, this feels good. Too good. What is it? Why haven’t I done it before… or more? I should do more. More is better. More has always been better.

The mantra seals my fate.

I keep doing it because it’s there. It’s not because I’m an addict. No, it’s just… convenient.

George, as I’ve come to be confident in calling him, always seems to have more and he’s fucking generous with it.

Eventually, he starts working again; Arthur too. Molly starts cooking and cleaning in what are totally foreign behaviors to me. They seem to reanimate as if they never stopped. Everyone’s moving and shuffling forward, one foot in front of the other.

Not me.

No. I’m sitting in the room of my childhood enemy - staring at his stupid posters and sleeping on his lumpy mattress - snorting what George calls Nebula several times a day. The highs are waning - I can tell. What had at first launched me into a complete whirlpool of melted elation now merely hazes the edges.

I need… more. A higher high or a lower low, I can’t tell which, but I fucking need it.
Maybe they have sufficient lab materials around here…

Probably not.

I could order some from the one Gringotts account I still have access to, although it’s tricky to fuck with potions like that… I could break it down easily enough but testing the new batches of tampered potions would be haphazard at best.

I settle for asking George who his dealer is, and he seems to understand; seems to know my plight. He says he’s working on something stronger and it’ll be ready in the next week or so and we can take a trip together. He says that part with a wink and it makes me flinch.

Too familiar. Too close.

A week isn’t soon enough.

The other Weasley returns when he’s been gone almost eight weeks, and I can hear the ruckus downstairs. Everyone’s fawning over him and fucking Scarhead.

Do they know I’m here?

That answer would be yes.

It’s fast and furious as Weasley bounds up the stairs towards me and my new-found haven. His fists land on me wherever they can, especially in my ribs, and once, along my cheekbone.

I can’t fight; can’t move. I’m stilled by the haziness of the Nebula not yet gone from my blood.

Scarhead pulls him off, pining his arms behind him, while Ron growls like a fucking animal. The Mudblood kneels beside me as a let out a cough and blood splatters on the floor between us. Pure blood, I think and let out a scoff.
Lot of good it’s done me.

She fusses over me and I wince away from her touch.

Her hands persist – wiping and tugging at me as mutters something under her breath. I try in vain to push her hands away but they are effectively useless, limp in their pursuit.

What’d she say? Tells me not to be a… ‘bloody prat’?

I chuckle as my head lolls to the side, my eyes rolling briefly towards the back of my skull before I regain my strength of them.

I struggle to sit up, pushing up on my palms but I can’t support my weight and crash into a heap again. Granger lifts me by my underarms and I lay my head back on the bed, groaning at my injuries.

My eyes find her face— focus on her through the haze of high. I haven’t looked at her in a while.

She’s pretty, I notice absently. Prettier than I remember. The curves of her face are delicate, and her brows are low in concern over her toffee-coloured eyes.

She’s worried about me, I realise suddenly, and it makes me laugh again.

“Not to worry, Granger. I’ve survived worse,” I gargle over my spit.

“’I’ll fix it,” she says, her voice dripping with undeserved worry and her hand reaching for her wand.

“Unnecessary.” I wave her off and reach into my pocket for a vial of the swirling icy-blue liquid I’m constantly craving. I pinch it between my thumb and forefinger and rattle it back and forth, until I’m sure the vapors have awoken.

She watches with a confused twitch of her head as I pull the cork out with my teeth and bring it up to my nostril, giving one sharp snort. The vapors from the vial work instantaneously, the feeling of pain dissipating as I melt into the mattress.
“Jesus—” she whispers with a shake of her head, she’s disappearing slowly into a shimmering fog. “You really are hopeless.”

I find the strength to give her a humorless chuckle: my specialty.

“You have no idea, Mudblood,” my lip curls up and I try for a sneer.

I don’t really mean it, but it’s familiar where everything is foreign, and I cling to it.

“Dear, you should eat.” Molly fusses after me, constantly bringing food when I can’t stand the smell of it. “You look like you’ve lost more than you can afford.”

I laugh a deep belly laugh and she stares at me.

“That’s the truth of it,” I mumble to the window in the attic, the place I’ve been reassigned since Weaselbee returned.

“I’m worried about you,” she says in a low voice, her hands resting on her apron clad hips. It reminds me of my mother: a current of love flowing under an unyielding exterior.

I feel a twitch in my neck, an ever-present reminder that it’s been too long since I’ve been high.

“Is George back?” I ask abruptly, and the question surprises her.

“George? He should be at the shop. He’s moved back into his flat just above it. He should be back Sunday for dinner – hopefully,” she shrugs casually as she readjusts the thin-bare quilt on my cot.
She continues to move about the room, poking at things to try and make the fucking attic seem more homey.

I’ve got maybe two days of vials left.

“Can I Floo there?” I crane my neck, stretching the tendon that’s been so tight I’ve thought it may snap.

“Where? The shop?”

I nod.

“Oh? Are you sure you’re feeling up to--”

“Do you have a Floo?” I clarify sharply, unwittingly.

“Are you quite alright?” Molly’s eyes study me too closely. She’s probably noticing the hollow to my cheeks or the black rings around my eyes. If she looks close enough she can see my cuticles bleeding from picking at them incessantly and the slight shake to my hands.

“Quite. Just had something we were meant to talk about,” I run my hands through my hair, scratching at my scalp. “Maybe I could use the fresh air.”

“I just --.” She pulls at her fingers, “I’m not sure how you’ll be received is all. I wouldn’t want--”

“For me to be treated like a Death Eater?” I spit icily.

She gulps decisively – mustering all that lioness courage her lot is known for – and fixes her stare on me.

“Yes.”
“Why do you care?” I sigh heavily.

I can’t look at her. I return my lazy gaze to her unruly garden out my window instead.

“I can’t help but wonder what your mother would do if she came across my Fred,” Molly said after a moment, her eyes trained on the knotted floorboards.

My eyes flick involuntarily towards her. I hadn’t expected that.

“She wouldn’t help him,” I say with a shrug, “That’s not who she was.”

“I thought as much,” Molly’s shoulders shrug slightly and I study her face. “But, there’s something out there… after death. And if, in that place, Narcissa Malfoy comes across my son? Maybe she sees me caring after you – maybe... well, maybe she might look after my Fred.”


I need a hit; need her to leave.

These fucking Weasley’s. This fucking house. These walls feel like they are going to collapse and cave in on me at any moment.

She leaves, and I pace – back and forth, back and forth – until I’ve almost worn a hole in the floor.

I need a hit but George isn't due back yet and I don’t have enough.

I can go to him; risk being hexed and maimed in the streets – hell, I risk that going down the stairs.

My feet bring me to the bathroom they created up here for me and I stare at my reflection a moment in the mirror.
I look fucking ill.

A rage builds before I know how to tamper it back down but my first finds the reflection in the mirror and the glass shatters into dozens of jagged pieces at my feet. A guttural, foreign scream escapes my throat and I fall to the floor, glass cutting into my bare feet as my head collapses against the cheap door.

I need a fucking hit. Badly. It’s all I can think of.

“Have a drink and you’ll feel better.”

The first words the twat ever said directly to me.

I summon a bottle of Firewhiskey he gave me once and drink it hungrily, hoping it will take the sting of the ache away.

It doesn’t.

I still need a hit.

I’m caged here, and I can feel my insecurities clawing through the iron bars. The sheer disappointment of my life overwhelms me and I want to cry – want to scream.

I claw at my face, simultaneously relishing and hating the pain of my nails against my skin. My breaths are too sharp as they tear up my throat.

I throw the Firewhiskey against the wall and the bottles shatters; the glass shards join the ones from the mirror.

I don’t give a shit as another raw scream rips itself through my throat, my fists slamming into the tile, bruising my knuckles.
I roll the vial between my long fingers, the potency is weak and I should save it. Save it ‘til I can’t stand it another minute.

I can’t stand it now, I tell myself. My blood is boiling, a fire licking at my muscles.

I’ll talk to George. I’ll get more. I can have this now.

My reasoning is weak and somewhere deep in my subconscious I know that I’m making the wrong choice. I’m always making the wrong choice.

I take the vial out and hit it hard, too hard maybe. I feel the effects immediately and smile as I feel blood leaking out from my feet onto the cheap tile.

“Hello?”

 Fucking hell.

“Malfoy? I thought I heard… Oh my god…” I can hear the blood draining from her face and I smirk.

My spine gives out and I hit the tile. Hard.

It doesn’t hurt but I can’t right myself.

“Where is this blood from? Just your feet?” She asks, moving into action.

I feel like I could give up now. If I had any strength at all I’d pick up a shard and slice through the grey skin of my forearm and end it once and for all.

But I can’t.
No, I really can’t. I physically can’t move my limbs— but I also can’t give up. Not yet. It can’t be the worst yet. I think I’ll save my grand finale for the worst.

She moves my legs and I feel her magic lick my skin as she heals the cuts on my feet. As if they matter.

“You’re high,” she mumbles. She’s disappointed.

I gargle a sound that isn’t close to English.

“Do you remember when you’re high? After, that is. Can you remember this?” she draws her knees up and rests her elbows on them.

Do I?

I’ve never thought about it. I think I do… I remember talking to George. Right? Or is it Fred? Fuck. I can’t concentrate.

She cleans the mess around me, still fussing. Just like Molly. Like I’m in a need of someone to fucking tend to me.

I drift out of consciousness for a moment or an hour— there is no way of telling. I blink and see the shimmer of reality.

Someone is talking.

Is it Granger? What does she want?

“You’re messing this up, Malfoy. You’ve got a real chance here… and you’re messing it all up.”

I think I’ll tell her to fuck off.
“Fffffshh.”

She sighs unhappily.

“Mobilus Corpus,” she flourishes her wand and I feel my lifeless body move. She hovers me to the small twin bed they’ve rounded up for me.

She lays me down gently and I wish I could roll my eyes at her or make a snarky comment. I can’t.

She looks down at me, but it’s missing the sneer I would expect.

“Do better, Malfoy,” she says sadly.

She’s gone.

She’s gone and I’m high and it’s not what I want to be anymore.
So let the wind blow ya across a big floor
But there's no one around who can tell us what we're here for
Funny in a certain light, how we all seem to look the same
And there's no one in life you can remember ever stood
For you, so
Shame, shouldn't try you, couldn't step by you
And open up more
Shame.

Shame by Matchbox Twenty

“You should try not to hit the vials so hard, mate. I know you’ve had a shit run of things lately, but it’s getting better out there.”

“Out where?”

“Outside this bloody attic,” George says with a trace of laughter in his voice, gesturing wildly to the world outside the window.

Poor sodding fool. He still believes in happy endings. No one has told him how any happy ending is just a plot device leading to someone else’s tragedy.

“I’m just buying my time until the end, mate.”
“You’re not as horrible as you seem to think you are, Malfoy. There’s still hope for you.”

I snort loudly.

“Get clean, mate. At least of this,” he tosses two vials down on my tattered bed covering and I sigh in relief – terrified of the thought he was getting ready to cut me off. “Get clean and come work for me.”

I laugh so loudly I surprise myself. It feels good.

“What?” My eyes widen in amusement. “You want Death Eater Malfoy as the face of your joke shop? Are you high now?”

“The face? No. I’m not fucking stupid. I wouldn’t put that ugly mug on a trash can,” George’s lips curl slowly up into a jeering smile. “I could use your help with product development – balance the books because Merlin knows I’m shit at that part of running this business. It was always Fred’s--” he closes his eyes and swallows thickly. “He handled that part.”

I shut the thought down. I don’t need this little beacon of hope he’s offering; don’t want it either.

When he’s gone – only offering a simple “think about it” over his shoulder – I can’t help but entertain the thought.

I envision my life working on Diagon Alley – little things like grabbing lunch and popping through the cheerful shop on the way to my desk in the back. I think of the normality of it and I don’t know why he even offered it in the first place.

I’m worthless. I’m also fairly certain I’m now considered a drug addict, which is disappointing. Why would he let me have any part in his business; his livelihood?

I eye the vials, thinking maybe I can last a little longer before my next hit.

The tendon in my neck starts to twitch and I groan; every thought consumed with the lure of numbness that Nebula offers. My feet pace in front of the only window, wearing the floorboards thin
until I’m vibrating with a need I can’t rein in. I need something – something to keep my mind from going there.

I’m grabbing a vial not but one minute later.

One last time.

I lie to myself so easily, it surprises even me.

“Malfoy?”

Her small, nervous voice reaches me from my corner in the attic.

“Malfoy?” she calls again, and I make a noncommittal noise to let her know where I am.

Hermione turns the corner and finds me there, buried in the weight of my self-loathing.

“What, Granger?” I sigh in resignation. I’m tucked into the small alcove by the window, my shoulders slumped in shame and head lolled to the side, staring blankly out at the gray sky. My thumb is picking at my cuticle again; the pain keeping me grounded in reality.

“Molly wanted me to bring you up some scones. Fresh out of the oven,” she smiles sadly at me and it feels like I’ve been stabbed in the gut.

“Why don’t you lot just let me rot up here?” I scowl.

“I imagine the smell would get rather bad.” She says without missing a beat and I chuckle to myself. She’s funnier than I remember.
Her dainty little fingers pinch off a piece of my scone and pops it between her lips, making a soft little moan as it touches her tongue. I bristle, a sneer pulling at my mouth and I want to reprimand her rudeness, but I don’t. She’s humming to herself and sucking on bits of scone and I find scolding her to be too much work.

“Have you gotten high today?” she asks casually, her brows lift and her eyes are clear of judgement – like she’s just asked for the weather. Her long legs are crossed in front of her and my eyes cling to shape of her denim clad thigh and I immediately force my gaze on her face. Something about her eyes make me feel vulnerable, naked even. To combat it I make a putrid face at her, my lip curling in a disgusted grimace.

“A better question would be, ‘have you allowed yourself to come down from a high yet today?’ To which, the answer would be no.”

Truthfully, I haven’t gotten high yet, but I’ve allowed myself to avoid the shakes and nausea that often accompany withdrawal by keeping the vapors close and constant.

“Do you want to?”

“Want to what?” I snap. Her presence is annoying– a fly relentlessly whizzing around me – but she’s the only one who really visits. Even if it’s only briefly, it’s some human connection; something that keeps my brain from shriveling in on itself. Molly tries, but she doesn’t talk much. She’s all business and food and cleaning charms.

Granger sits. She brings books– once even some muggle puzzles in a paperback book called Sudoku. Took me forever to figure out the rules, but I finished the book in two days.

If she comes and I’m high she doesn’t talk as much. She’ll move me to my bed and maybe read to me or sit quietly by the window. She doesn’t leave until I’ve fallen asleep.

I wish I could figure out her motives for visiting me. She doesn’t seem the type to want money or anything of value. I’m the first to admit I’m shit company on my best days and I know the attic of the Burrow is not a big draw for most people. It’s walls are naked to the rest of the room and even through all of Molly’s charms, there a sense of dirty disarray everywhere. The corners of the room are black and endless– often when I’m high I’ll find myself staring into the abyss and working my way into an anxiety fueled high.

But despite the dampness and the cold– she keeps coming back.
Why does she keep coming back?

“Do you want to get high?”

I don’t snap this time— surprisingly – my temper more passive in nature as I stare out the window.

“I always want to get high, Granger.” I confess with a long breath, the window fogging in its wake.

“Then why haven’t you?” Her voice is still clear of judgement, merely conversational in nature.

I consider the question; consider telling her to piss off. I’m speaking before I realize I’ve thought of an answer.

“I wonder if I need to feel low to make the high worth it.” I’m not really speaking to her, more wondering idly aloud. “The longer I’m high, the less good it feels. Maybe I need to experience the pain, to enjoy the relief.”

She scoffs and I sneer, eyeing her dangerously like the intruder she is.

“Something funny, Mudblood?”

“I’ve just never heard such a philosophical take on addiction. What a poetic tragedy you are up here in your hightower.” Her eyes roll so far back in her head it looks briefly like she’s lost consciousness.

“Are you mocking me?” My voice is a low rumble of vocal cords and if I was an animal it would be my warning growl. I suppose it still is.

“I’m just making observations.” She shrugs and stares out my window, though I doubt she can see much from her vantage point.

“Well, why don’t you make them somewhere else. Filthy Mu--”
“Mudblood?” Her brow arches and her lips press into a flat line. She looks... unimpressed. “It’s hardly offensive anymore. Congratulations, you’ve officially desensitized me to it.” Her shoulders give the smallest of shrugs and she picks another piece of scone between her fingers and tastes it.

“I’m sure I could think up some fresh insults if you give me some time,” I drawl, she’s beginning to bore me. Maybe no company is still better than Granger.

“Sure, sure. Take as much as time as you need, I know that brain sloshing around up there isn’t firing as quick as it used to… and it never fired as quickly as mine.”

My head snaps to her and I’m about to rip her head off when I notice the way her teeth are biting into her bottom lip. She’s trying to keep from smiling. She’s teasing me.

“Has anyone ever told you how bloody annoying you are?”

“Not today,” she actually smiles this time and I almost smile too. “Here.”

She reaches into her satchel that must be charmed because she pulls out three books that would never fit in there without magic.

“I brought you some books, if you’re interested.”

I stare at her outstretched hand and the books she’s gripping. Truthfully, I want them. But I’m not sure I want them enough to sacrifice my last semblance of pride. My instinct is to slap the books from her hands and scream something vile about something unimportant—maybe her blood status or hair.

Instead, my eyes move up to meet hers. They’re impossibly kind and fringed with worry.

I don’t take the books from her, keeping my dignity in tact— or so I delude myself. I simply return my gaze to the window.

She drops them dramatically, the resounding thud startling me and leaves the attic without another
word, only an exasperated sigh echoing of the bare walls.

The next time she comes I’m lying in vomit.

I’m trying to will myself to move; remove my face from the bile that’s spilled from my mouth.

I think I may have wet myself – my trousers are warm and they stick to my thighs. If I was less hazy, I’d be mortified, but it’s taking all my focus just to move my face.

I can feel the warming magic of a *lumos* shining in my eyes as she shines her wand light at my pupils. They must not be cooperating, because her face is worried and ashen.

She scourgifies the mess but I wretch again and can hear her whimper.

She leaves and part of me’s actually surprised.

*It’s official.*

The last person on the planet who may have given a damn if I died or rotted… left.

I feel her magic surrounding me as my limp body is lifted and pulled into the bathroom and if I could feel anything at all, I’d be so strangely relieved that she’s stayed. She lays me down gently and lifts my shirt from my shoulders before working on the buttons of my trousers.

*What the fuck is she doing?*

“Fmprmph–” I try and the bile rises in my throat.

She leaves my undergarments on and I’m still panicking until I realize the water is running.
She’s putting me in the bath.

I feel the cool water envelope me and I hear her murmuring spells around me. Her small palm presses against my forehead and I try to press my face into the simple touch. I realize starkly how long it’s been since someone’s fucking touched me. Large black circles appear in my vision – shrinking and enlarging – blacking out my sight until I feel my body go limp.

I wince as my brain tries to clear the fog of my high-gone-wrong. I want to flog myself for hitting that vial like I did.

Flashes of jagged memory assault my vision and I remember vomit and a fever– maybe sweating and piss; the ever present self-hatred.

When did the highs start to feel so bloody horrible?

I push myself up to sitting and wince, there is a pain deep in my bones, seeping into my flesh. I can feel the endless emptiness of my stomach, my constant companion – not for lack of food, but lack of appetite. I rub at my face; at the stubble rough against my shaking hands.

To my left is a bowl of steaming broth and a few crackers. My mouth fills with saliva while simultaneously my stomach churns. I wonder if she left it for me. The simple kindness rubs against me like a needy cat; comforting and annoying.

I look towards my depressing little window alcove and see a mess of curls and limbs curled up. She’s snoring lightly, her head bobbed up to the side and lips parted.

There is an open book slipping off her lap and she looks… peaceful. The word is almost impossible to name because I haven’t seen peace since I don’t know when but that’s as close I can reckon.

Seeing her innocence shatters something inside me and I realize – desperately – I want to be better. I don’t want to be found dead in this fucking attic surrounded by piss and vomit.
I clear my throat and it feels like I’ve swallowed sand.

“Granger,” my voice hoarse.

She stirs, and her eyes blink open, taking in her surroundings. She suddenly jumps into action, her eyes alert and her hands frantically searching for her wand.

“Malfoy,” her worried gaze darkens on me and I wonder how shitty I must look. “I didn’t mean to drift off. Are you okay?”

“I’m ready,” I rest my head back against the naked wall; holding it upright is just too much work.

“Ready?”

“To get better.”

“What do you need?”

“Help me .”

Hard doesn’t even begin to delve into the impossibility of sobriety.

It fucking hurts .

My skin crawls as if small insects have been planted in my muscle and I want nothing more than to scratch away the feeling until I’m just muscle and bone.

My brain feels like someone is pushing pieces of jagged glass into my brain, slowly and endlessly.
One long piece finds a home and another begins it’s slow rape of my mind.

I feel nauseous and shaky, vomiting until my throat is raw and blood spills into the toilet.

For some reason I don’t understand, Granger is there.

She silences the room and keeps wet rags on my neck and forehead. She helps me into the bath when I’m reeking of sweat and stomach bile.

I beg her to kill me. I plead for more drugs.

At one point during an intense hallucination – when I swear I can see the bugs under the skin on my forearm – I claw at my Dark Mark until I bleed, and when she finds me with blood flowing down my arm, she cries.

George comes too. I pull at his trousers for drugs and he shakes his head sadly at me. Says he’s clean.

_Bloody brilliant._

Later I yell at her for giving a shit. Accuse of her ulterior motives and shove her sharply into a wall. Her head cracks against the wood and she slides to the floor with wide, horrified eyes.

My hands move towards her, an apology waiting in my fingertips and she flinches. I flinch harder.

_What a fucking monster I am._

Hermione hasn’t been back since. It’s Molly now: fussing, bringing me food and keeping me comfortable. It’s Molly rubbing my back through the tremors and drowning me in hand knitted blankets when the cold sweats descend.

After days or weeks… maybe a month, I wake and my eyes are clear.
I blink frantically at the attic as though I’m seeing it with fresh eyes. The light streaming through the single window brightens the space more than I remember and everything has been tidied; it’s no longer the chaos it was during the withdrawals.

On weak, wobbly legs I shuffle to the bathroom, resting my gray hands on the edge of the sink.

I’m terrified to look at my reflection.

A breath rocks my body when my eyes finally realize that the gaunt man in the mirror is me is harsh and unsettling. My hair is too long, hanging loosely over my brows and is now a shade of dirty, un-Malfoyish blond. My stubble has grown into a short beard and my palm runs against the length of my jaw as I twist my head back and forth, still inspecting myself in the dirty mirror.

I barely recognize the person who is staring back at me: dark circles and new scars.

“What have you done to yourself?” My voice is a hollow echo against the tile of the bathroom.

I turn towards the barely there knock reverberating off the naked walls and am unsurprised to find Granger there. She’s always quiet in her approaches while Molly’s presence always seems to take up the space in the room.

I turn my face just over my shoulder, my brows raising in way of a greeting. “You came back,” I murmur and feel heat stain my cheeks.

She clears her throat and from my peripheral, I can see her spine straighten. “Well, of course.” She’s annoyed with me and I can’t help the smirk pulling the corner of my lips up. “I just... I thought maybe you didn’t want me here... during .”

*What a ridiculous thought.* I snort and return my gaze to the window.
“How are you?” Her voice is timid in the dark spaces of the attic. Maybe she’s scared of me now that I’ve cracked her head against a wall—I wouldn’t blame her.

“Brilliant,” I mumble and run my hands through my too-long hair. It’s gotten far longer than I ever allowed it before and it’s constantly falling into my eyes.

“Do you–?” she pauses to shift her feet and gulp. “Would you like me to cut it?”

I look over at her, pushing my hair back again and eyeing her wordlessly.

“Your hair.” She gestures to my head with a nod. “I’m not very good,” she admits with a laugh. “But I’ve cut Harry’s–”

“That idiot has the most god-awful hair I’ve ever seen.” I snort.

“Well, that may be true.” She hides a smile. “But it’s always been like that! I can’t be blamed for the years of mess he sported only for a brief stint.”

“You’re quite the saleswitch.” My lips pull up into a lopsided smile. “But I’ll still pass.”

“Oh, come on! You’ll feel so much better after.” She moves confidently into my space, sitting opposite of me on the alcove bench and tucking her leg underneath her–I stiffen at her casual proximity.

“Look at your hair, Granger. How could there ever be any trust between us when you allow yourself to walk around with that mane?”

She gasps, a laugh trickling past her lips and she reaches forward and pinches me on the arm.

“Ow!” I declare, rubbing the spot where she’s assaulted me.

“Oh, you’ve always been such a baby.” She pulls her wand out and with a click swish and flick, she’s transfigured a pillow from my cot into a stool and summoned a pair of shears and a comb.
I tug nervously at my new locks and my face pinches up as I look at her brandishing the scissors, clipping them open and closed excitedly. “I don’t know…”

“Listen, you can’t look any worse than you do already,” she shrugs and my face flattens in annoyance but my feet are moving me towards the stool.

I plop down with a grunt and her fingers are immediately in my blonde hair, goosebumps spreading eagerly across my skin.

She’s pulling at the length and inspecting it before using her wand to mist my hair.

“How long do you want it?” She’s standing in front of me and combing the front of my hair until it’s annoyingly in my eyes and I’m blinking at the encroaching fringe.

“I don’t care, Granger. Just get it out of my eyes.” I swipe at it and she huffs, returning it to the state she’d just combed it to.

“I think cropped a bit shorter, like it was in sixth year.” She bends down so she’s eye level but she’s staring at my dirty hair and not me; I don’t think she’s realized what an odd thing she’s just said.

My face pulls up into a teasing grin. “I’d no idea you were keeping tabs on my hairstyle, Granger.”

She fixates on me with a miffed glare and my smile brightens exponentially. “That isn’t what I meant.” She bristles. “I simply meant you weren’t as ugly in sixth year as you were in previous years or as you are now, for that matter.” She stands with a huff and marches to the back of my head, giving a punishing tug at my scalp and I let out a snicker under my breath.

“So you could say that you found me the most attractive sixth year.” I run my tongue over my teeth and she slaps me lightly on the crown of my head.

“Draco Malfoy, I will butcher this haircut on purpose if you don’t stop it right this minute.”
“Just admit it. I won’t blame you or anything, I’m devilishly handsome and I had that whole bad-boy thing going. I just never knew, is all,” I reply offhandedly. I’m fairly certain I’m taking this too far and that at any moment my face is going to explode into pus-filled boils but I simply can’t stand the lure of ribbing her.

She groans but surprises me with an actual answer. “Fine, Malfoy. You were the least visually disgusting during our sixth year. If you would like to twist those words into the year you were most attractive, then fine. Take it how you want.”

“Wow…” I gape. “I can’t believe you thought I was hot in sixth year.”

Another smack but I just laugh when she swats me and begins to rake her fingers through my dirty tresses.

Granger works confidently and decidedly as she snips off ends of my hair. She’s silent and almost studious in the way she pushes it back and forth and my eyes flutter closed as she drags her fingers across my scalp.

It’s not that I’ve never imagined shagging Granger–quite the opposite, really. Somewhere around fifth or sixth year she started getting rather fit, and despite her blood status, I imagined fucking her now and again.

When her warm breath fans over me, my eyes snap open and I realize I’m staring directly down her shirt—I flinch.

Granger lets out a low curse under her breath and withdraws her touch, drawing her forefinger into her mouth and sucking on the end, a whimper escaping.

“Granger?”

“It’s fine,” she replies, lips still around her finger. “I just nicked my finger with the shears.”

“I just need to heal it,” she murmurs to herself. However, upon reaching for her wand she comes to a quick realization that she’s cut her wand hand and her eyes fill with panic.
I groan, as if she is in some way inconveniencing me and make my way to my nightstand to grab my wand from the drawer.

“Are you sure you know how to do this?” she asks pointedly.

My eyes flash up to hers and I stare dully at her. “This from the girl who convinced me she could manage a simple haircut and then nearly cut her finger off.”

“I slipped because you flinched!”

“Well I flinched because–” The words stick in my throat, my brain working overtime searching for an excuse. I can’t very well say that I was staring down her shirt and so I fix my face with a sneer instead. “Because you’re rubbish at cutting hair.” A weak comeback at best, but it’s what slips out. “Just shut it, give me your hand.”

She releases her finger from her lips and she places her palm in mine. Blood drips from the cut, which is actually surprisingly deep and a few rogue drops spill onto my hand. She tenses as I mutter the healing charm, watching my magic curl around the slice and mend it in an instant. I cast a *Tergeo* to clear the blood from us both and release her hand, my heart pounding inexplicably.

The moment feels… intimate and almost electric as our magic pushes against each other. Stepping back I feel the tension release, I give her a grim smile and toss my wand on the cot.

“Thank you,” she says softly as I return to my seat and her to her spot in front of me.

She finishes the rest of the cut in silence and I keep my eyes closed and my thoughts to myself. I recite wand movements in my head, my new past time when I’m avoiding thought.

“Okay,” she announces with a cheerful tone. “All done.”

I hear her cast another Transfiguration spell and she hands me a handheld mirror.

I’m actually quite surprised as I turn my head back and forth, she didn’t do a bad job at all. Despite the gray skin and sunken hollows of my face, I look the more like myself than I have in years.
“Wow, Granger,” I say from the corner of my mouth.

“See! I’m not all that bad,” she states proudly, coming to stand in front of me with her arms crossed over her chest and a triumphant grin spread across her face.

“Well, what I was going to say is that you must have spent a lot of time pining over me sixth year. This haircut is almost identical.” I can’t help but chuckle to myself as her jaw goes slack.

She scowls and mutters something about what an ungrateful prat I am before turning to leave my corner of the Burrow, but not before I catch the playful look on her face.

“Thanks, Granger!” I call after her, laughter still trickling out.

She raises her middle finger to me over her shoulder but continues her march out of the attic. I don’t understand the gesture, so I return to my reflection in the mirror with a wry smile.

My loneliness feels heavier in sobriety and after hours of staring at the same walls, my shaking legs lead me down the countless staircases of The Burrow. I can hear sounds of life drifting from the kitchen and I round the corner—wincing at the natural sunlight streaming through the countless windows.

Molly is at the stove, fluttering about the kitchen preparing a meal and the aroma’s filling the kitchen make my mouth water. I clear my throat and she startles, twisting towards me with her wand raised.

It seems I am not the only person still suffering from the aftermath of the War.

“Draco, dear,” her jaw goes slack—chest heaving, “I don’t know the last time I’ve seen you outside the--”

“Yes. Well, I was feeling a little stronger today. I thought I might…” I raise my chin, trying to swell
some pride, “Thought I might try to get some fresh air.”

“Are you sure you’re up for it?” She eyes my unsure legs and the grip I have on the back of a kitchen chair.

My instinct is to lie but I feel like I might topple over onto the chipped tile at my feet. My fingers find the worn wooden chair in front of me and I cling to it, trying to ground myself. It’s very possible that going outside might have been a little too ambitious for today.

She senses my internal conflict and flourishes her wand. A moment later a worn wooden cane flies through the air and she snatches it.

She inspects it in her hand and my breath catches when she extends it to me.

Brilliant flashes of memory sear my mind: my father prodding my spine sharply to get me to move faster as a child, cracking it against my legs as a teenager, handing me my own after I was assigned my mission.

The steel tipped cane is still outstretched to me and as much I understand that she is simply extending a tool; it brings me back to a darker place.

I wince and close my eyes. Breath finds me too quickly and my hand twitches towards the pocket where I normally keep my vials. I want to make everything fade to black— I want to be numb.

My legs start to give out and I can hear the walking stick crash to the floor and feel Molly all around me: one arm around my waist and the other slinging my arm around her small shoulders.

I begrudgingly lean into her and try to breathe through my nose.

“How about this,” she offers warmly. “You sit and eat a bit, get a bit of strength back. I could use a walk outside myself. Maybe we’ll go together after some lunch. Alright?”

My instinct is to sneer; to spit something snarky and condescending out of my mouth before I can comprehend what it is I’ve said.
It’s only when I look at her blue eyes and think of my mother that I pause. It aches deeply; I hadn’t been aware those depths existed.

“Okay.”

The word hangs between us and I don’t know who is more surprised that I’ve agreed, her or me.

While I’m ravenous when I sit down to eat, I find I can barely stomach more than a few bites before I feel full to the point of sick.

She takes my arm and ignores the walking stick on the floor while we make our way out into the backyard. The crisp air burns as it fills my lungs and I can’t help but let out a small laugh when I feel the wind glide through my hair like a caress.

When was the last time I was outside? The Battle at Hogwarts?

Surely, that can’t be true… it’s been months.

“What date is it?” I croak.

“September,” Molly says sadly. “It’s September fourth.”

“It’s been four months since I’ve come here?”

“I’m afraid so, dear.”

“Why didn’t you kick me out?” I ask her, my voice ghosting over her skin and thick with disbelief. I shake my head at her, not believing that anyone would take a chance on me.

Looking down at her I can’t make sense of the small, round woman. She’s covered in flour and her ruby curls are tucked back into a messy bun at the top of her head, frizzy ends escaping everywhere.
“I know about what happened last Easter at the Manor and Harry told me all about your mom in the Forbidden Forest—”

I cut her off with a rage searing through me, “We aren’t good people! We don’t deserve what it is you’re trying to canonize us as. My mother did what she did that night to save me and I did what I did trying to save my own arse. It was entirely self-preservation, can’t you see that? The world is full of ulterior motives. I didn’t want Harry to bring down You-know-who to save the Muggleborns, or be the Bringer of Light and Goodness and Cuddles to the world.”

“Oh shut it,” she chastises me and sounds so much like Ron Weasley that I almost laugh. “Do you think I fought He-Who-Must-Not-Be-named to bring cuddles into the world? I sliced Bellatrix LeStrange down because she was about to harm my daughter. I fought for a world where my children would be safe. Where my Grandchildren might only learn about this horrible time in a textbook and never know about the realities of war. I believe in what we fought for, but I was motivated into action by the love of my family. We,” she gestures to the space between us, “aren’t so different.”

“It’s not the same,” I reply flatly with a shake of my head.

“Maybe,” she shrugs and conjures a bench and a blanket, “But it’s awfully close, isn’t it?”

I lower myself down onto it and she drapes the blanket over my legs. She surprises me when she leans down and plants a motherly kiss on the top of my head and slaps me on the back.

Molly starts back towards the Burrow and calls over her shoulder. “Just shout if you need help back in.”

I stare out into the Gardens and think about Good and Evil and all the space between; think about Hogwarts and my mum and how Nebula could make it all go away.

Chapter End Notes

All the biggest and most beautiful thank you's to PartyLines for beta’ing the shit out of
this chapter for me and for listening to all my late night musings! You are my queen!

She also just posted a new war fic, Seven Letters and it's AMAZING. Please go read, review and shower her with love. She deserves all of it.

Also big shout out to CourtingInsanity for helping me out beta'ing the intimate scene in here that I added last minute and helping me get this out to you guys!

She is in the process of finishing her fic, Necessary Evil (if I ever stop bugging her for Beta skills...) and it's one of the best fics I. HAVE. EVER. READ.

Thank you all for reading and I'll keep working away at new chapters and I'm trying to bring you an update weekly!

Please let me know your thoughts, they make my day!
The biggest, fattest, most monstrous of shout-outs to my Beta, PartyLines. This is all just trash with way too many commas without you.

I really hope you like the song pairing for this chapter. The song is about a couple breaking up, but there is something about it that sticks with me in the wake of Draco's recovery.

I hope you'll be patient with me over the next few chapters. I in no way want to sweep Draco's recovery and addiction under the rug and I hope that is not the vibe you get when reading.

Okay, enough babbling.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

From throwing clothes across the floor
To teeth and claws and slamming doors at you
If this is all we're living for
Why are we doing it, doing it, doing it anymore?

I used to recognize myself
It's funny how reflections change
When we're becoming something else
I think it's time to walk away

Everything that's broke
Leave it to the breeze
Why don't you be you
And I'll be me

Let It Go by James Bay
The attic feels suffocating more now than it ever did before.

I find myself wanting to wander as my strength returns. It’s becoming easier to eat and my skin seems to be losing that sunken gray I’ve been sporting lately. The books Granger dropped off all those weeks ago are finally finished. I read them in two days – devouring each word – my brain dehydrated of actual thought and screaming for sustenance.

When I finally feel up to Apparating again, I practice: small spaces first, then across the room; down a floor. She yelps, throwing her hands in the air and swats me out of the kitchen, a trace of laughter in her voice.

Later that night I Apparate to the garden and find her sitting on the bench, wrapped in a giant knitted blanket and drinking a very large glass of red wine. When I sit, she looks at me with sad eyes–bloodshot in her drunkenness. For a long time there is only silence and the ambient sounds of the Burrow’s backyard. Eventually, she speaks.

“The summer after the twins turned seventeen, they used to startle me around the house – Apparating from here to there just for the hell of it,” she pauses to take a long swig of wine. “Oh, they drove me mad. It was the summer after they started inventing those things. I was always their test subject.” She smiles at her lap, lost in a memory thats uncomfortable to bear witness to.

“I hated those stupid pranks,” I admit, my elbow propped on the back of the bench and my ankle slung over my knee. “I was on my fair share of the receiving end. I didn’t leave my dormitory for two straight days – not even for meals – once.”

“What’d they do to you?” she asks with a grin.

“Pimples the size of sickles,” I roll my eyes. “Amongst other things. I’m rather vain, in case you hadn’t deduced.”

“I laughed today – after you startled me in the kitchen. Merlin, it felt good to laugh again…” Her eyes are trained on a point on the horizon I can’t see – I’m not even sure it exists and there is a blankness in them that haunts me.
“Then you felt guilty,” I say easily and her head snaps to me, life returning to her eyes. This relationship we’ve developed these past months is startling. She might be the closest thing I have to a friend.

“Yes,” she breathe the weight of a confession.

“I didn’t know Fred but George is... He’s an alright bloke.”

“He is… even if he did get you hooked on that awful potion,” her face flattens in disappointment and I feel the sting of a blush crawl under my skin.

“It was my fault--”

“It was both your faults.”

We’re silent again for a long time; long enough that Arthur comes to collect her for bed. She leans into her husband – buckling with the weight of so much unspoken emotion – and I wonder if she feels physically heavier from all the grief she carries.

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I stand in the attic for over an hour, constantly second guessing myself and on the very serious verge of splinching myself across the United Kingdom. I had resigned to do this days ago and then that day passed-- then another and another. Today is different. Today I am dressed in my best robes which arrived in a trunk after the Manor had been requisitioned.

Today, I am Apparating to Diagon Alley.

I am.

There is no question. It’s just a matter of when.

If I’m being honest, I want some fucking drugs. I want to get obliterated to the point that I can’t think
straight but since I’ve been sober from forty-two fucking days, so I won’t.

Not today at least.

I crack my neck and without another self-deprecating thought, set Diagon Alley in my mind—feeling my magic vibrate at my feet before swallowing me whole. The cobblestone beneath me; my chin tucked into my chest and my eyes sealed tightly shut – I’m here.

The sounds hit me first – the clattering of people bustling along the stone – and I’m taken back to countless times chasing after my parents, ducking away from them into the toy shoppe and begging for ice cream at Fortescue’s. Opening my eyes, I’m surprised that no one yet has noticed me. I’ve been waiting for hexes or insults, perhaps trash flying at me. Nothing.

There are only two locations in my mind today and the first is just to my left. I duck quickly into Flourish and Blotts and feel my heart pounding. I don’t realize until I draw blood that I am picking deeply at my cuticles and by then my breath is coming too rapidly and I want to double over.

“Malfoy?”

Her small voice slams into me and I want to throw up.

“Gr-Granger?” I stutter, my head feels too light and I brace my palm on a bookshelf to try and steady myself.

She’s behind the counter, her hair pulled up and her eyes hooded in disbelief.

“What on earth are you doing here?” I stammer.

As she rounds the corner of the counter, I’m surprised by her clothing. She’s dressed like a Muggle and I wonder if everyone thinks she looks as out of place as I do.

“Dying, apparently.” I wipe the sweat off my brow and try to shut my brain off as it’s yelling for drugs. One small hit and this pain would cease and the anxiety would fade to black.
“Here,” she touches me gently on the elbow and leads me towards the corner of the shoppe where two large armchairs are waiting. “Have a seat for a minute. Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I reply with an errant nod but my heart is still racing. “First time out in a while. Wasn’t prepared for—” My hands are wringing each other red and raw and I can feel the slippery sweat at my hairline. The buttons of my shirt are choking me and my fingers rush to undo the top two buttons. “I guess, I just wasn’t prepared for all of it.” I confess now that I can breathe. I lean forward and rest my forearms on my knees and hang my head; trying by sheer force of will to slow my breaths and calm my mind.

“It passes,” she says after a few long moments. “I felt that way too, in the beginning. We spent so long hiding that coming back into view is terrifying. I was waiting for someone to hex me in the back or kidnap me or--,” she breathes heavily, and I peek up at her. Eyes trained at the ceiling, she exposes the long lines of her neck. “--waiting for an Avada. Sometimes, I hear a door slam, or a kid scream at their mum for Ice Cream and I’m back there. But it gets a little easier, every time we do it. Sometimes, I go all day without a flashback.”

I don’t reply, just focus on my breath.

“You look good,” she offers, “Clear, I mean. Your eyes don’t look so,” she pauses while she chews on her thoughts, “cloudy.”

“Forty-two days.”

I stay in my hunched position but I’m feeling a little more steady.

“Wow,” she breathes, and I feel it fan over my cheek. “Draco, that’s incredible. I’m really proud of you.”

Draco.

How odd.

“Thank you,” I cough out of sheer awkwardness. “Thank you for everything you did during my--”
She lifts a hand to silence me and I’m so fucking grateful she won’t let me go on, I let out a sigh of relief.

“It was nothing.”

Nothing.

She doesn’t realize that to me it was everything.

I sit back finally and find it’s impossible to look at her. I’m so fucking ashamed of the state she saw me in. Flashes of the countless times she helped me wash the vomit and piss off myself stab into my mind and I clench my eyes shut trying to drive them back out.

Maybe I can find someone on Knockturn who has some Nebula. It can’t be that hard to track down. If I just did it enough to get through this– I’d stop after that. Just one more time and I’d stop.

Fuck, I’m pathetic. I’ve been out of the Burrow for five minutes and I’m already rationalizing a fix.

“I’m hoping to find some new reading material. I was finally able to read the books you lent and after the fourth time of each, I’m think I’m ready to expand.”

“Of course! Do you want me to leave you to browse? Do you need any recommendations?”

“Is there a fool alive who turned down book recommendations from Hermione Granger?”

I give her a small, lopsided smile and I don’t miss the way she blushes. I don’t miss the way it makes me feel human again either.

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We talk as she struts through the book shoppe, pointing out her favorites. Well, she talks. I do very little other than nod along and ask a question here or there. Heat rushes to my cheekbones when she recommends Hogwarts: A History, claiming it’s not as dry as it sounds. She doesn’t know the nights
I stayed up reading it under the covers the years before I left for school.

I’d imagined everything going so much differently once I’d arrived at school—imagined the freedom, finding my way, Hogsmeade and Honeydukes, feasts and girls.

What a fucking joke.

Granger tells me about how she took her NEWTS over the summer; how she did fucking excellent at them. Tells me about her trip to Australia to track down her parents and her face crumples when she admits she couldn’t reverse the memory charm. There’s a stab of guilt that I can’t place the origin of, somewhere deep in my belly that reminds me I’m part of the root of her hurt. I shake the feeling away, banishing it with the other topics that make me feel shameful and listen as she talks about how she received a few job offers. How deadlines came and went but she never had it in her to accept a desk job.

Instead, she came here – looking for something to keep her hands busy and they offered her a job on the spot. Granger insists it’s just short-term, but she walks the aisles with such reverence that I wonder how she’d ever do anything other than this.

Granger stuffs the books in a bag and holds them out to me. Our fingers brush.

My feet carry me from the store in a rush, and I barely grumble goodbye before I’m out in the Autumn air again. The chill sobers me and slows my breath.

I’m leaving with five new books including Potions in a Modern World, Liam Macdonald’s: Rise to the Quidditch Pitch, the History of Goblin Made Weaponry and even some fiction that Granger insists is better than the leaf makes them sound.

Eyes trained on the pavement— I make my way towards the end of the Alley; towards that giant Ginger head over the top of the purple-bricked building. I keep to the sides of the street, eyes on the pavement and praying that I don’t feel a hex or worse—hear someone call my name.

I’m almost there – maybe twelve paces from the front door when I hear it.

“Draco! Draco Malfoy, is that really you?”
I freeze. I’d recognize that voice anywhere.

My heart is threatening to escape and I feel slick sweat break out over my palms.

“Hey, Pansy,” My eyes flicker closed and when I open them she’s staring at me.

“What the fuck!” She laughs and gives me a playful shove. I try not to roll my eyes back into my skull. “Where’ve you been? We’ve been worried sick about you. I’m so sorry about your mum, she was such a lovely woman. It wasn’t your fault, you know. I’m so proud you didn’t join him when he asked. Especially since Potter won... Oh Merlin, can you imagine!” She’s prattling, and I’m chanting in my head that it’s never acceptable to hit a witch. Father was always a piece of shit– could land his walking stick on my shin without a thought– but he never raised his hand to my Mother. I wonder if he would have reconsidered this stance when standing toe to toe with Pansy Parkinson.

The black-haired, mischievous grinned witch in front of me has never had the social graces that tact requires. She’s a menace at best.

“Well?” Her eyes are wide and it’s clear I’ve missed the last of her little tirade as I’ve no idea what she’s waiting for. She sighs and rolls her eyes, “Where’ve you been?”

“Oh, I, um... I’ve been staying with the Weasley’s.”

My chin rises slightly as my pride takes the hit.

Pansy’s face is blank as her eyes study me, looking for the joke. Finally, she erupts into a fit of laughter, clutching and clawing at her torso. “Oi! You almost got me, Draco!”

She pushes her perfectly manicured bob back from her face and wipes at the corner of her eyes demurely.

“I wasn’t joking,” I reply flatly with an arched brow. As always, I’m growing quickly tired of Parkinson.
“What?” she spits in a low hiss, her face twisting in on itself in horror.

“They offered me a place to stay after the Battle. It wasn’t like I had many options, as you can imagine.”

“You, Draco Malfoy, have been staying with the Weasley family since May?” she says the name like an insult and I narrow my eyes at her, my lip curling up in disgust. “Why didn’t you just owl me? Of course, you can come and stay with us. Do you have things you need to collect? I’ll have my elf pop over, I doubt they have an elf of their own—”

“Shut up!” The words are a snarl and she flinches, her eyes wide. “Some things never change, Pans.” I sneer and brush past her into Weasley Wizard Wheezes.

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Feeling the anger vibrate through my limbs, I sneer as the small bell over the door announces my arrival. There’s so much ambient noise in the joke shop that I can’t fathom the reason for the bell at all and I’m prickling with annoyance when George greets me. I shout at him over the cacophony.

“Why do you have this bloody bell! It’s worthless.”

“Uhhh, nice to see you too, Malfoy. Anything I can do for you on this fine morning? Other than defend my choice of bells?”

“Sorry.” Running my hand through my hair in agitation, I swallow— trying to remember that I’m here for a favor. “First time out of the Burrow and I’m a little—”

“Pissy?” George offers with a smirk and my crankiness eases a touch.

“I was actually going to say overwhelmed,” my mouth forming a sour scowl and my eyes narrowing.

“Same difference to me. Let me show you to your office.” He says offhandedly and turns down a cluttered aisle littered with honking toys and whizzing brooms.
It takes me several beats, as I stand there in shocked silence for a moment, before I’m chasing his heels.

“My what?” My eyes go wide as I should over the ruckus.

“That’s what you’re here for isn’t it? The job?” He continues to shout over his shoulder, barely turning his cheek in my direction.

“Of course not,” My chest puffs up in righteous indignation.

He stops and turns abruptly and I almost slam into his chest. He’s too bloody tall, towering over me with an amused twitch to his brow.

“Oh? Came for some Puking Pestels? Didn’t get enough of that the last few months?”

“Piss off.” I scoff at him with a sneer.

He laughs in my face, but I don’t mind it like I once would have.

“Alright, fine. Yeah, I’m here about the job.” The words fly out quickly and I hate how this meeting, if that’s what you’d call it, is getting away from me. I had a plan.

“Brilliant. It’s yours. This way,” he takes off quickly again and I rush to follow. “We’ll start you slow, I’m about four months backlogged on the bookkeeping. So, I’ll need you to start balancing checkbooks. For pay—”

“I don’t need money,” I supply quickly. It seems redundant to collect whatever measly pay George can offer when I’ve more than enough sitting in an account not being used.

“I can’t not pay you, mate. My humongous ego would suffer. How about… you can let the flat upstairs. It’s tiny and shit, but it’s yours. I’ll also throw in a paltry seventy-five galleons a week to keep you honest.”
“I really don’t—”

“I insist, Malfoy.” He says it firmly and with a roll of my eyes, I decide not to press the matter further.

“Your office is here,” he points up a small set of stairs where – tucked in the back of the shoppe – is a closet that has somehow been masquerading as an office this entire time. The door creaks open and I find a desk and chair, but the rest has been cleared of everything but dust. “You can start tomorrow. I’ll get some supplies in here and drop off the first set of ledgers. Any questions?”

With a shake of my head, I dismiss him, although I’m sure I have a hundred questions and to be fair, I’m actually quite rubbish at standard mathematics.

“Right. Well come on, I’ll show you the flat.”

He’s gone and I’m still standing there staring at my new closet-office. Unnamed emotion coursing through me, but it’s something like pride and I pause to let that feeling soak into my bones for another minute.

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The flat is a joke. It shouldn’t even be called that honestly. It’s just another closet. This one is slightly larger and has a bathroom and kitchenette attached. No bedroom.

There was a witch I can’t remember who Mother used to call on for her interior design work and before my mind can pull at that thread and think of her, I slam my boundaries back up.


Those are the places I can’t visit.

Instead of dwelling in the empty closet-home, I Apparate back to my attic. As the surrounding room settles in my vision, my heart stops when I see Weasel sitting on my small bed, his back to me.
“There you are,” he stands up at my arrival, slapping his hands on his thighs – his face an accusation.

“Weasley.” I try for annoyed passive aggression, but my voice is shaking. My nerves are shot after my trip to Diagon and I’m not ready for anything of this prat’s mouth. “Something I can help you with?”

“You can get out of my bloody house.” His jaw clicks and his rage is billowing off him in waves.

“Alright, Weaslebee. But only because you asked so nicely.” I roll my eyes.

“I don’t like you being so chummy with my family. I know you all too well, even if you seem to have fooled everyone else in this house. I want you gone—”

With a raise of my hand, I cut him off sharply, “I’m leaving okay! Piss off.”

“Oh you’ve just decided to leave? Where are you going?” his eyes narrow suspiciously.

The resulting smile spreading across my face is too sweet to keep to myself, as I turn to let him witness it.

“Well, it seems George needed a little help at the shoppe. I’ll be working with him and he generously offered the other flat.”

There is something oddly satisfying about the shade of crimson that his face reaches when he’s this irate. It doesn’t matter how old I get, I’ll always find simple pleasure in pissing this particular Weasley off.

“That’s… well,” he stutters idiotically; his eyes doing the thinking for him as he darts them about the room, “That’s just not bloody happening,” he’s saying it slowly, almost to himself. “I want you out of my life Malfoy.”

“And I you,” My head tilts empathetically, “However, it seems the gods have deemed it fit to intertwine our paths for now. So why don’t we do each other a favor and stay out each other’s way?”
My neck twitches as the nail of my forefinger is digging mercilessly into the cuticle of my thumb– an odd comfort when my anxiety is spiking.

Weasley’s eyes grow a little darker and his chin tucks into his chest as he glares up at me, his teeth pulling back into a snarl. “I want you out of my fucking life. I’m not making room for you in it, you filthy fucking Death Ea--”

“Ronald Weasley!” Molly screeches from the door and her face is full of shock and rage that even I take a step back.

“Mum--” Weasley blanches.

“How dare you speak to a guest in my home like this. What on earth has gotten into you?”

“Can’t you see he’s playing you?” Weasley’s eyes are sharp, his voice is thick with disbelief. “He’s after something.” He whips his head back towards me and he’s accusing me.

“Of what, exactly? Is he after our money? Our fine goods? I don’t know what has gotten into you since this blasted war has ended but you need to remember who you are when you step foot into this house. Out there you may be Ronald Weasley, War Hero but here? Under my roof? You’re still my son. My son who was raised to respect every person from the Minister himself to a beggar on the street with the same courtesy.”

“Not him.” His shaking pale finger points at me and I want nothing more than to deck his sorry ass but that’s not the answer – not right now at least.

“Molly, it’s fine. I’m here to tell you that George offered me the position and a place to stay, so I’ll be leaving anyway.”

“Oh dear, I’m so happy for you!” She smiles brightly at me and her eyes are so kind that it disarms me. “However,” her face falls into is earlier ire, “that does not excuse your behavior, Ronald. Apologize to Draco this instant.”

Ron snorts unattractively and rolls his eyes. “Well, that’s not bloody happening. What is this Molly-
Draco bullshit all about?”

A shrill screech escapes Molly’s lungs and even I flinch.

“OUT!” she points towards the door, “You may return when you’ve regained some of your long-lost humility.”

Weasley gives me one last snarl and stomps past his mother and I hear him grumbling and cursing down the long staircase.

There’s a long moment of pregnant silence in this too familiar attic. These are the moments I hate – ones where someone should probably apologize or hug or some other loathsome Hufflepuff-esque activity that would be deemed reprehensible in Slytherin house.

She’s just staring at me with sad, wide eyes and I can tell that she feels guilty, although she’s no reason to. “Ron shouldn’t have said those things,” she finally offers.

“I stopped caring what Ron Weasley has to say a very long time ago. I’m sure he feels the same. You didn’t need to stick up for me, I mean, he is your son.”

“He was wrong,” she shrugged. Simple as that.

My mother always had my back, even to a fault. Especially to a fault. Had she not had such blind love and loyalty towards my father and I… had she just…

No. Not now.

I recreate the walls around her memory, so that I can make it from this moment to the next. That’s all I hope to do anymore.

“Er,” I stammer uncharacteristically, “Thank you, for everything.” I can’t stand to look at her. “I’m sorry if I made a mess of things by being here.”
“You did nothing of the sort. This house has often been a place of healing for me. For many, actually. I’m proud that it could be for you too.” There’s pride and courage in her voice and if there was ever an archetypical Gryffindor, it’s her: the lion who opened her den to the snake – never worried for her cubs because she knew that in the end, she was always far more fierce.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, as always for reading! Your reviews make me smile :D (Seriously, I’m an attention-starved Hufflepuff and my love language is Words of Affirmation...)

I'm over on Tumblr sharing pretties, so if you're on there check it out for story updates and aesthetics.

Until next time,

LadyKenz
Train Wreck

Chapter Notes

So, I put on my Tumblr that the next chapter would be At My Weakest. OOPS! Wrong! I messed up a bit haha that will be NEXT chapter.

Big thanks to Ravenslight for beta'ing this! You're a gem!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unbreak the broken
Unsay these spoken words
Find hope in the hopeless
Pull me out of the train wreck
Unburn the ashes
Unchain the reactions, I'm not ready to die, not yet
Pull me out of the train wreck

Train Wreck by James Arthur

I’m staring at page upon page off numbers that don’t make sense. There’s a box full of invoices in front of me, and a small black device engraved with numbers and runes is sitting on top of it.

From my limited understand of bookkeeping, I need to add up the numbers in column one, subtract the numbers from column two, and the result would be the shop’s profit.

Easy.

The problem was that all those numbers have to be verified somewhere, and George wasn’t kidding when he said he was shit at this. There is absolutely no rhyme or reason to how he’s listed expenses
or income. The invoices are tea stained and wrinkled; the receipts are crumpled or lost altogether.

I let out a groan and yank at my hair until my scalp burns.

“Knock, knock,” Granger’s cheerful voice calls from the crack in the door.

I shoot to my feet clumsily, smoothing my hair down now that I’ve made a nest of it.

“Granger!” I accidentally shout at her in way of a greeting, and she gives a shy smile as her eyes study my sad desk. “I, er,” stammering uncomfortably, “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Are you ever?” she chuckles wryly. “I’m here because I’ve brought you something!”

She reaches elbow deep into her clearly charmed bag and produces a small plant. I wrinkle my nose at it and, with a nervous hand, reach out to take it from her.

“What does it do?” My brows are knitted together as I stare at the little leafy intruder.

I’m worried the innocuous little fern might reach up and take a bite out of me, but she just laughs and rolls her eyes.

“It’s a Muggle plant. You can relax. I didn’t bring you a carnivorous house-warming gift.”

“Oh. Well, thank you.” I shrug. What an odd thing to do.

“I also brought you this.” She reaches into her bag again, this time producing a book.

I read the title silently to myself and sneer up at her. “Accounting for Dummies?” I scoff and try to hand it back to her, refusing to accept it. After a few moments, she drops it on my desk with a loud thud, and I grumble to myself.
“I’m not trying to call you a dummy, so you can take your shields down, Malfoy. It’s a Muggle series on how to do things. They cover all sorts of topics: photography, writing, how to change your oil. I just thought it might help you.” She shrugs and leans against the door frame.

There is something unnerving about the gifts. It makes my skin feel raw against my shirt to think about someone caring about me enough to want to bring me things. I shift uncomfortably and hide my hand where my finger is slicing into my thumb.

“Thanks,” I mutter, still staring at the book cover. When did eye contact become so intimate? I swear I used to make eye contact with strangers, but now I feel like everyone who looks at me is staring at a window into my private shame.

Well, it’s not that private.

“Do you need any help?”

My hand flexes into a fist at her request; the majority of me desperately wants her to leave. The minority, however, needs her help.

I run my tongue over my teeth and crack my neck. Whatever pride I had died long ago, but I still feel its presence like a phantom limb.

“I do have one question, if you don’t mind.” I try to say it casually, but I’m shite at casual. It slides through my clamped jaw, but she cheerfully agrees and summons a chair, dragging it up opposite of me at my small desk.

Does she have to sit so bloody close?

I can smell her perfume, light and floral. It reminds me of my mother’s gardenia bushes, and my eyes flicker closed for the briefest of moments while I remember my mother in her garden pruning.

Fucking stop.

“Right, what is this?”
I hold out the device that was laying on the invoices, and she inspects it before chuckling to herself.

“It’s a graphing calculator,” she says simply with an arrogant brow raise, as if I have any fucking idea what that means.

I refuse to ask any clarifying questions based on the principal that I shouldn’t have asked one question to begin with.

I snatch the calculator back from her hand and with a tight purse of my lips and manage to mutter an ungrateful “Thank you.”

She pauses and turns her ear to me – as if she’s waiting for me to do something.

I steel my jaw and arch my brow. I imagine I look rather formidable – even if my insides feel like jelly from the prolonged eye contact.

“Doooo you want to ask me to show you how to use it?” she says with a playful look in her eyes.

My face flattens into an annoyed scowl.

“No,” I answer truthfully and start stabbing my finger into the runes on the calculator.

She scoffs at me while I bare my teeth a bit at her self-righteousness.

“You’re doing it wrong,” she announces proudly, a hughty brow perched high on her forehead.

I still refuse to look up at her and continue my irritated button-mashing.

“Oh, you stubborn prat. Just give it to me.” She reaches for it, but I find not all my reflexes have dulled, and I snatch it quickly back over my shoulder and out of her reach.
“Tsk tsk, Granger. You shouldn’t grab what doesn’t belong to you.”

“So you’re just going to do it wrong then?” she replies, exasperated. She’s almost charming in her anger, and I admire the dainty pout of her lips and the way her brows stitch together in frustration. My cheek flinches in response, almost pulling up into a smile.

“How can you even tell if I’m doing it wrong? You don’t know what I’m trying to accomplish,” I quip back at her, but we both know I’m doing it wrong.

Her eyes narrow, and she looks at me as though I’m intentionally trying to rile her.

Which I am, but that besides the point. There is never a time when Granger doesn’t need to be properly riled.

She takes a deep calming breath through her flared nostrils, trying to centre herself before she lashes out in ire. I chuckle darkly at how easy it is to get a rise out of her.

“I can tell you’re doing it wrong because you aren’t entering any numbers into the equation. I saw you hit the factorial key and equal before you even entered a single number!” Her voice is rising in pitch, and I lick my lips to keep from laughing, even biting down in my bottom lip, but my shoulders are shaking. “Hand it to me, and I’ll show you how to use it properly.”

She stamps her foot once for good measure and reaches out her palm expectantly. I stare at it suspiciously for a minute before shaking my head.

“No,” I counter, and she almost snarls at me as she jumps to her feet and lunges for it. I push back on my chair and hold it farther from her grasp. She’s growling at me as she rounds the desk and makes her final attempt. Once I’m on my feet, she doesn’t have a chance. She fixes me with a final menacing glare and gives her largest leap into the air, her fingers falling inches short of her prey.

I’m full out sniggering now at her aggravation.

“Why won’t you just let me help you?” she huffs, and the question sober me.
My mind drifts briefly, visiting the last time she’s helped me. The weight of the moment shifts and realigns. It’s heavy again, at least for me.

I drop my hand and swallow, staring at my feet. She can see the shift in my demeanour, and her face falls, her brows low in concern, and she takes a step back, thankfully.

“What’s wrong?” she asks sincerely.

I chance a look at her face – it’s unnerving. She has a rawness about her that’s striking; she doesn’t hide behind falsehoods or guarded eyes, and it’s too real for me.

“Maybe we can meet up another time to go over the calculator? I have a decorator coming by to work on the flat.”

It’s not a lie, but it’s close to one. The decorator isn’t coming for a while yet, but the playfulness of the moment has left me feeling uncomfortable.

I can’t place why, but I do know I’m not ready to be friends or whatever she’s trying to be. I’m certainly not ready for people who like to drop off plants and enter my personal space.

I want to get fucking high.

But it’s been 43 days, so I won’t.

“Sure,” she says uneasily, sensing the shift in the room. She turns and picks up her bag, giving me a shy smile before reaching for the door.

“Granger!” I blurt without thinking.

“Hmm?” she hums back over her shoulder.
I didn’t really think of what to say; instinctively, I had just reached out for another moment with her. She stares at me, studying my face as my chest rises and falls with a thousand words I should probably say.

“Thanks,” I settle on lamely. “You know, for the ordinary plant and the ridiculous book.” My lips twitch into a crooked half smile.

“You’re welcome, Malfoy. I’ll see you around.” She returns the smile, and I nod as she disappears through the door.

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I work tirelessly for the rest of the week, barely stopping to eat or leave my desk. Everytime I think I’m getting the hang of this bookkeeping business, it eludes me again.

The bright yellow book Granger has brought me has been read through twice and flagged with sticky notes, various bookmarks, and dogeared edges. I am loath to admit just how helpful the novel is, but it’s been my constant companion the last few days.

There’s a knock on my door, and I begrudgingly tear my eyes from the ledger in front of me to glare at my newest intruder.

George’s mischievous grin is peeking through the door, and I nod him in wordlessly.

“I think I’ve got our newest product!” He swings the door open dramatically, and it crashes against the lone guest chair in my tiny office. He ignores it and squeezes in despite his size.

“Yeah?” I don’t like the way he says our, as if I’m some type of replacement for what he’s lost. This isn’t my business; he isn’t my brother. “Exciting,” I reply, my eyes back on the ledger.

“Don’t you want to know what it is?” George’s voice is positively brimming with unbridled excitement, but it’s failing to rub off on me.

“Is it a chocolate that makes you shit your pants?” I drawl, smoothing out a receipt from a
manufacturer in Croatia who seems to have sold George five hundred low-grade love potions.

“Noooo,” he teases with an eager grin.

“Could you maybe just tell me then? I have a feeling I’m going to be shit at listing all the troublesome products your brain might come up with.” I wave my hand dismissively, hoping to end this exchange quickly.

“Well, it’s still in the earliest stages of development, of course, but what do you think of Never Ending Shampoo?” He lets out such a string of uncontrollable laughter so infectious that I finally look up at him with wide, disbelieving eyes. I feel the side of my mouth pull up into an unintended smile and shake my head at him.

“Surely shampoo can not have you this bloody thrilled,” I reply with a raised brow.

“Can you imagine?” he manages between fits of laughter. “Imagine being in the shower at Hogwarts and someone switches out your soap, and there you are, lathering and rinsing for hours and hours.” He slaps his knee and throws his head back as he breaks out into a new fit of squeals and howls, and blast it all, but now I’m laughing too – not at the horrible idea he’s had but at his disarming joy over it.

“You’re ridiculous. And might I add, you’re far too fond of your own shitty ideas.” I roll my eyes.

His laughter finally dies away, and he wipes happy tears from the corners of his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Anyway, I need your help on the development—”

“What?” I hiss. “I’m up to my bloody ears in your backlogged ledgers. I can’t formulate a shampoo.”

“You don’t have to formulate it from scratch, Malfoy. Get your knickers out of your arse.”

I let out an exasperated groan and rub my hands over my tired face. “What is it that you need from me? Plainly. And quickly – I’ve got shit to do. I’ve got your shit to do, actually.” I make a show of
gesturing to the ledgers he’s dumped on my desk.

“Ah, those can wait – they waited this long,” he says with a shrug, and I’m about to boil over with irritated rage when he continues, “This,” he signals the space between us, “This is what I really need. I need someone I can bounce ideas off, someone to help with the product packaging and test groups. I need a right hand—”

“I’m not your fucking brother!” I snap at him, my face hard in its irrational anger.

His eyes go dull instantly, and his brows fall lower over his eyes. Even his hands seem to go limp in his lap.

I am panting, anxiety twisting in my gut.

I expect him to punch me, to flip my desk at the very least.

But he doesn’t.

He just stares at me with hurt pooling in icy blue eyes, and I watch as his Adam’s apple bobs once in his throat as he swallows his anger.

“I’m sorry.” I shake my head and look back at the ledger. “I shouldn’t – of course, I should never have said that. I’m just bloody exhausted—” I almost tell him how much it’s hurting me not to be high, how much I need to feel nothing because nothing has got to better than this. “—but I shouldn’t have said that.”

Ther stretch of silence between us feels heavy on my chest.

I’m about to lose this joke of a job, about to lose that flat I just spent far too much money decorating, the one I haven’t yet spent a night in because the attic is the only place that seems like home anymore.

“Forget it, mate.” George surprises me and lets out an exhausted sigh. “I know you’re not Fred, alright? But when I asked you to come on, it’s not just because I thought you could use a job or a flat
or seventy-five galleons a week. I asked you because I thought we’d work well together. I remember you bring an utter prat at Hogwarts, but your brain was sharp and your wit unparalleled. I’m not sitting here asking you to fill Fred’s shoes, no one – not even my actual brothers – could do that, and that’s why I didn’t ask Ron to jump in. I asked you because I thought you’d be a good fit. You can shove me away and keep your nose in the fucking ledgers all you want; they’ll keep coming. But when you’re ready for a bit more, I’ve got more for you.”

George pushes to standing, exiting without another word.

I let my head fall back, yanking at my hair until my scalp burns.

*Why do I keep fucking everything up?*

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I’m standing outside of the door to my new flat holding my wand to the doorknob. The charm to unlock it is tricky: a flick to the top right, a curl down towards the starting point, and a final flourishing swirl that has never been my strong point when it comes to wand work.

But the charm isn’t what’s keeping me from going in.

If I’m being honest with myself – which I rarely am – I’m bloody terrified of being alone.

Not that I’m not alone in the attic, but there’s always someone at the Burrow. Someone would notice if I didn’t eat the meals they left or would smell the putrid aroma of my decaying body lofting downstairs.

Here I could easily die alone. I suppose it’s another reason that I shouldn’t pick up another vial; one hit too hard and I’d rot for weeks before anyone knew. I suppose after a few days George might notice my absence.

I close my eyes, letting my instincts manage the intricate wand work that unlocks the door and step in. My eyes shoot up in surprise as my eyes rake over the work of the interior decorator. It’s all clean lines and modern furnishings topped with frosted glass and deep cherry wood. There’s a small partition up that separates the area I’m going to sleep in from the rest of the room, which consists mainly of a small couch and a lounge chair, both cloaked in plush gray velvet.
It’s much more *me* than the fucking attic I’ve been calling home these days.

I walk around, lazily dragging my hands across the counters and the back of the sofa. It’s much smaller than I ever imagined, but it’s mine.

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The first few nights in my flat are so fucking quiet that I don’t sleep.

The irony is not lost on me.

My mind is constantly tripping over thoughts that I refuse to explore, pulling me in directions that will undoubtedly lead me towards Nocturne Alley where I can drown in Nebula until my eyes are rolling back in my skull.

It’s been 47 days, so I won’t.

The next morning, I’m falling asleep at my desk. I’m sincerely considering popping back to the Burrow for a nap when I’m interrupted. The creak of the door opening catches my attention, and I direct a half-hearted nod at George.

“Hey mate,” George raps his knuckles on the door frame of my closet-office after his greeting, a habit of his that drives me insane. “Mum wants to make sure you’re coming this weekend.”

I stare at him with hazy, lidded eyes – he might as well be speaking Chinese.

“Explain yourself,” I yawn. “But also, speak less.”

George tenses in the door and studies me with a cautious eye, his glare studying the sleep deprived lines of my face.
“Malfoy.” His voice is dry. I blink several times and then drive my palms into my red-rimmed eyes. He steps in and closes the door quietly behind him; although, by doing, so he takes up every inch of spare space. “I don’t want to ask this. I really don’t want to fucking ask this… But are you hitting the vials again, mate?” His eyes are studying me with an attentiveness that confuses me until his accusation slams into me. “You can tell me. We’ll get you clean again—” George is rushing the words out, and I sigh and lean back in my chair, pinching the bridge of my nose.

“No, I’m not bloody high.” I feel an eager twitch in my neck as I consider getting high, but I rub at furiously until it’s just a dull ache. “I’m exhausted. I haven’t slept in days. I don’t know what’s wrong with me but the flat is too—”

“Quiet?” George finishes with a knowing flick of his brow. “Yea, that happened to me too.” He falls into the seat across from me. “You don’t realize how much ambient sound a person gives off until they’re dead. And the silence that’s left? It’s fucking oppressive.”

Exactly, I think to myself, offering him only a nod, my lips drawn into a tight smile.

“Anyway.” He slaps his palms against this thighs. “Mum says dinner’s at five o’clock sharp on Sunday, which means to be there at four-thirty.”

“What do you mean by dinner? I’m not going to any bloody dinner…” My face screws up into a lopsided scowl.

“’Fraid you are, mate. Unless you want to be the one to tell Mum, ’cause Merlin knows I’m not doing it,” he says with a mischievous grin. He pauses in the door frame, speaking over his shoulder before walking out. “Mum likes flowers – and she said to dress nice. Don’t forget something for Granger.”

“Granger?” My eyes flash up at him.

“It’s her birthday dinner.”

For a reason I can’t fathom, my stomach lurches up into my chest.

George smirks at my reaction, though I’m not sure why.
Chapter End Notes

Hope this chapter wasn't too boring for you guys :/ It was kinda filler... again. BOO! I loathe filler! LOATHE IT! But, it's necessary so alas, here it is. I swear next chapter things start to get shaken up. I love hearing from you and I promise to get the next chapter up ASAP!
At My Weakest

Arthur Weasley isn’t bad company. He certainly has moments where his incurable giddyness can be a bit overwhelming, but he seems to fall into my lap when a persistent problem presents itself.

What a world this had come to, that I was enlisting the help another Weasley to assist me – this time in finding a gift for Hermione Granger.

After George’s insistence that I bring a gift for Granger, I panicked. Mother had always chosen any gift I’d given, and this is another painful reminder that she’s not here.

I was standing in Madame Malkins, staring at a rack of robes when Arthur bumped into me with a huff and a clap of my shoulder. In all the months I’d stayed at the Burrow, I had the least interaction with Ginny, followed closely by Arthur.

“I’m looking for something for Granger’s birthday,” I admitted, my eyes trained on my expensive shoes in an attempt to conceal my blush.
“Oh, dear boy.” Arthur almost seemed to pale. “You can not buy a witch clothing for her birthday. Especially not a special witch like Hermione. No, no, this calls for something special.”

I throw my hands up in frustration and let out a low growl. “I can’t very well stroll into Flourish and Blotts, can I? She bloody works there. Jewelry seems a bit much – ‘Happy Birthday, thanks for cleaning up my vomit when I was high off my arse. Here’s a necklace.’

Arthur’s brows knit closely together as he considers this. His face brightens suddenly, and a conspiratorial grin marks his face. “I know who can help! We’ll need to stop at Gringotts and convert some Galleons first—”

“Convert them? Convert them to what?” I ask with a confused shake of my head.

“To pounds, my boy.” His eyes twinkle with glee. “We’re going to Muggle London.”

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I’ve never stepped in a store like Harrods. It has the largest selection of goods I’ve ever seen, and they seem to range from home goods to finer Muggle clothing. I try not to gape as I pass the bustling shoppers who are ignorant to our awe, only stopping to stare briefly at Arthur’s clothing.

We’ve transfigured our robes; I’ve opted for dark denims, a long sleeve shirt, and a light jacket. Arthur on the other hand is wearing a deep purple suit with a green oxford and an odd Muggle hat with a feather sticking proudly out of the side.

He bounces through the shop and stands at the foot of a set of moving stairs. My eyes go wide as I stare at the Muggles carelessly jumping on and being lifted to the next level.

“Do as I do, son.” He grins, excitement evident on his face, and he throws me a wink.

The term of endearment stabs deep into my chest, and I panic. It feels too close, too familiar. Before I can say anything, he’s hopped on the stairs, turning over his shoulder and offering an enthusiastic thumbs up.

I look around nervously as I step up to the first step and let my foot hang over the rotating steps, watching them appear from beneath the floor, before I finally set it down and am lifted effortlessly. I’m stunned Muggles have achieved this without magic as I watch the new floor come into view.

I stumble off the stairs when I reach the top, and Arthur catches my arm. “Quite the head rush, isn’t it?”

My lips quirk up in an amused smile. I wish everyone could experience simple joy the way Arthur Weasley does.

He marches off to the counter where he speaks in a low voice to the clerk. Before long, the elder woman is nodding along and then bustles off, leaving him unattended.

I’m searching the surrounding products, but nothing quite seems to scream ‘Granger’ at me. It’s a lot of makeup, perfumes, luxurious pocketbooks, and high heeled shoes. Perhaps there’s a trainer and denim section I’m not seeing.

“Mister Weasley!” A bright, young girl rounds the corner, a genuine smile painted on her face.

“Tracy! How are you, dear?”
“I’ve been good. School is kicking my arse, but it’s my final term.” Tracy’s eyes flicker over to me, and I don’t miss the way her eyes rake over me, her lips pulling up in a flirtatious smirk. “Who’s your friend?”

“Draco.” Arthur grins. “He needs help finding a gift for a mutual friend, and I knew you’d be the one to steer us in the right direction.”

“Draco?” Her face falls slightly. “What a unique name.” She muses while I inwardly panic. Perhaps I should have used another name, but she shrugs it off quickly and returns to making eyes at me.

“Well, tell me about your friend.” She smiles and leans slightly on the counter, pulling her silky, chestnut hair over her shoulder.

I fluster at the unwanted attention and crane my neck nervously, “Uh, well, she’s a new friend, kind of. I’ve known her for about a decade actually but, well, it’s complicated.” I look at Arthur, who is giving me an encouraging, if not somewhat dopey, smile. “She’s very bookish, not overly into appearance, although she is quite pretty.” My face flushes at the admission, and I skim past it with a shake of my head. “Her hair is always sort of large.”

“Large?” The brown-haired girl’s face pinches.

“Well, it’s curly, but it’s just—” both Arthur’s and my hands move up to our heads, pantoming a large, unruly mane of hair simultaneously.

Tracy giggles into her hand and rolls her eyes, “I understand. I think I have just the thing.”

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I’m resting my hands on the back of my sofa, staring at the innocuous rectangular package on my coffee table.

I’ve spent days agonizing over the gift Arthur and I have chosen, constantly warring with myself if I should just give her the backup gift I purchased in Diagon Alley.

The fact that she would at some point open the gift – and possibly around other people – adds a new layer of anxiety to the already strenuous situation.

The tendon in my neck – the ever present reminder of my addiction – is throbbing, begging for attention and I press the pads of my finger into it, willing it to cease.

There is a clock screaming at me from the wall over the mantel, and with every obnoxious tick of it’s hand, four-thirty draws nearer. The pit in my stomach trembles as I push up from my hunched position over the back of the couch and begin pacing instead.

There’s no logical explanation why I’m so bloody nervous. I’ve lived in their house for months, and I’ve spent enough time with Granger over the past few weeks that it’s not unheard of that I would attend her birthday party – still, as if they are indifferent to my logical reasoning, the nerves remain.

There have been moments recently where Granger has looked at me a certain way or touched me casually and I’ve thought… well, I’ve wondered about the possibility of more – of an us – but as soon as the notions threaten to take over my thoughts, I banish them.
Granger is good personified. Me? Well, I’m a newly reformed Death Eater and attempted murderer with a very recent drug addiction and a shitty no-bedroom flat; I’ve nothing to offer her. And even if she didn’t care about all of that, I’m still stuffed in the head with more issues than I can sift through. The idea of even attempting to touch any one of the subjects that I’ve deemed ‘off-limits’ sends me into a deep anxiety ridden panic.

My eyes dart towards the clock and I gulp: 4:34pm. With a groan, I grab the gift off the table and march towards the Floo, my stomach fluttering like a bat trapped in a cage in broad daylight.

Granger’s not here yet, and I can feel Weaselbee’s annoyed stare at every turn. George gives me a nudge with his elbow and hands me a beer. I take it, staring at the innocent little amber bottle in my hands.

I hadn’t thought about if I should – if I could – drink. Just because I haven’t since I stopped using Nebula doesn’t mean I can’t. Surely I’m strong enough to remain clear-headed. Before I can come to my sense, my nerves get the best of me and I’m tipping the bottle to my lips a few seconds later, swallowing it greedily.

I won’t get drunk. I won’t.

But a few pints won’t hurt, and it would certainly help to ease some of this anxiety that’s rippling through me.

“Ron’s going to punch me before this night is over. I can just tell.” I’m leering over my shoulder to find Ron snarling on the sofa next to Scarhead, who’s been surprisingly pleasant.

“Nah,” George says, swallowing. “Mum warned him; she put the fear of Morgana in him.” He’s laughing easily and leaning down to speak only to me, and I can see Ron’s gears grind harder at the sight of me being chummy with his brother. “He won’t mess with you tonight.”

“At least not where your mum can see,” I challenge with my brows raised.

“There you go, mate.” The tall redhead slaps a palm on my shoulder. “Just stay next to mummy, and you’ll be just fine.” He laughs and walks away but my jaw clicks.

He’s offhandedly referred to Molly as my mother, and the words crawl under my skin and rub against my flesh incessantly. I’m still too fucking tense, and so I let the rest of the beer slide down my throat and head to the kitchen for another.

Molly is putting the finishing touches on the cake – a monstrosity of a dessert with several lopsided layers – and asks for my hand in setting the table for dinner. I nod and withdraw my wand, effortlessly casting the charms that will move the plates and cutlery from the cabinet to the table. I light the candles and levitate them and finally, by hand, I rearrange the chairs to make room for everyone.

Tonight, it’s the Golden Trio; Ginny; George; and the eldest, Bill and his wife, who I remember vividly from fourth year but still can’t understand a bloody word she says.

As I finish with my chore, Ron walks in and freezes midstep, his eyes narrowing as he spies me.
“Need any help, Mum?” He’s talking to Molly but sneering at me.

“Ronald Weasley, you always did have an incredible talent for showing up when all the work is done.” Molly rolls her eyes and pats her apron down, flour flying up in a cloud. “I’m going to change.” She stands on tiptoes to kiss her son on the cheek, and then, as she passes by, she squeezes my elbow. “You two play nice.” Her eyes settle on Ron, who fixes a fake smile on his ugly face.

There are a few beats of uncomfortable silence, and I’m feeling a snake of cowardice curl around my spine; Slytherin’s are known for self-preservation, after all. They’re certainly not for blind courage when staring down an irate, ill-tempered Gryffindor.

I manage to draw a little strength from somewhere deep in my gut and turn towards him with a knowing smirk on my face, standing tall as I wait.

“How’s work been, Ferret?” Ron’s eyes are locked on mine as he twists open his beer and tosses the cap in the sink.

“Brilliant,” I reply easily. “Remind me what it is again you are doing?” The words are pleasant enough but the edge in my voice gives me away, just as I want it to. I know he’s taken the Junior Auror position at the Ministry even though Harry was expedited straight to a full Auror. I also know just how much it tarnishes that fat ego of his.

His eyes flash dangerously, and he steps towards me. My instinct is to step back – protect my face at least – but with a steely expression, I remain rooted to the spot.

“I don’t like you here, Ferret,” Ron warns out of the corner of his mouth, and the muscles of my neck are dancing so violently that I’m surprised he’s not staring at them while he talks.

“I get it, Weasel. Life’s hard for you these days – looked over for a job by your own brother, still playing second string to Potter… say, do they let you do his paperwork? Or do you just grab his coffee for him?”

He bares his teeth as he takes another challenging step to me but my smirk only widens.

“And I really hate to bring this up, but weren’t you and Granger almost a thing there for a while? I’ve noticed you aren’t any more. Lost the girl too? Tsk tsk tsk.” I click my tongue, and I can see the rage firing behind his icy blue eyes.

“You fucking—” he snarls but the front door swings open, and his eyes flicker over my shoulder. His face pulls into a smile, and he gives me one last look. “This isn’t over, Malfoy.”

“Can’t wait, Weasel.” I turn on my heel and give a small nod to the birthday girl.

“Happy Birthday, ‘Mione!” Ron greets her brightly, like he wasn’t just ready to rip my throat out with his teeth, and I scoff as he wraps her in a tight hug.

“Thanks, Ron.” She smiles and then looks at me with a knowing smirk as she leaves Ron’s embrace. She steps up to me, and I’m panicking that she might expect me to hug her – bloody hell. Am I supposed to hug her? Does she want me to hug her? Why didn’t I think about this before I showed up?

“Happy Birthday, Granger.” My mouth settles in a firm line as I reach out and awkwardly wrap my
arms around her and pat her back firmly; hell, it’s basically a slap, and I cringe. She giggles and gives me a sincere hug, wrapping her arms around my waist before I release her as though she’s made of fire.

Ron is staring at us, but, before she turns, he stomps from the room, mumbling under his breath.

“I wasn’t sure you’d come,” she says easily.

“Yes, well, I wasn’t stupid enough to refuse Molly’s invitation. So, here I am.”

“Here you are.” Her eyes sparkle playfully, and she’s biting into her lip.

“Hermione!” Molly coos, “You’re here! Happy Birthday, my dear.” The Weasley matriarch wraps her in a suffocating hug, and I hear Granger let out an “oof.” “Hungry?” Molly steps back, keeping Granger at arms length.

“I wouldn’t dare arrive to the Burrow in any other state.” Granger laughs with a shake of her curls.

Molly calls everyone for dinner, and I grab a seat on the end next to George, but I stiffen when Hermione pulls the chair on the other side of me.

Dinner is filled with polite conversation, although I rarely join in – not unless someone forces it by asking me something directly. Potter seems to be trying, though I’ve no idea why. He asks about work and my flat but seems to flounder when he realizes that that’s all I really have going for me these days.

The dishes are cleared with a wave of Molly’s wand, and then we are singing around a cake crippled with candles and buckling from the weight or ill-construction – I’m unsure which.

Next, Molly announces it’s time for presents, and my heart sinks to my gut. The gifts materialize on the long, worn table, and I’m desperately plotting a plan that allows me to steal my gift back without anyone noticing.

As she opens a handmade scarf from Molly and a bottle of perfume from Harry and Ginny, my mind is racking my catalogue of spells for a summoning spell that won’t obviously have it whizzing towards me. A vanishing spell? No, that won’t work; the entire pile would collapse.

She opens up some love potion from George, who waggles his eyebrows at her, and finally reaches for my gift. I think I’m dangerously close to hyperventilating as I wonder what in the actual fuck I was thinking to purchase the tool that stupid bint, Tracy, suggested.

I look at Arthur’s maniacal grin, his excitement bubbling over as he lifts his thumb to me in way of encouragement.

I feel like my lungs are overinflated and someone has pressed a needle between my ribs, the air only leaving in a short, concentrated stream. My fingers are tingling as she pulls the obnoxious pink ribbon and lifts the lid of the long rectangular box.

I close my eyes in horror as she peers into the box and cocks her head to the side.

“What is it?” Ginny asks curiously, and I feel my mouth spreading into a grimace. Draco Malfoy, you fucking tosser.

“It’s… well, it’s a hair straightener?”
I peek through clenched lashes at the guests surrounding the table: Ginny’s jaw is slack, and her eyes are wide with amusement, laughter threatening to bubble over, and Molly is kind and reassuring. Bill’s wife seems interested enough in the little tool, and Arthur is shaking with unbridled anticipation.

I’m too terrified to look at Granger, but when my eyes finally rest on her face she’s studying me closely, but she, too, looks like she wants to laugh.

“Mine next! Mine next!” Arthur exclaims, and I stifle a groan with my palm. He pushes a smaller package in front of the birthday girl.

The gift bag is adorned with a tabby cat wearing sunglasses, a find that had made the dolt so bloody ecstatic that he almost squealed. With an amused smile, she pulls the gift bag open. She pulls out a brush and stares at it.

“It’s a special brush to use with the straightening device. The shop lady was very persuasive, wasn’t she, Draco?” Arthur’s grin spreads infectiously, and his eyes are bright as he leads me back into the conversation.

“Fucking hell,” I mutter under my breathe, and I can see Ron shaking with laughter near Harry.

“Thank you,” Hermione says with wide eyes, a smile playing on the edge of her lips. “Both of you.” She fixes her gaze on me and conveys a meaningful look at me. My lips tighten into a forced smile and as soon as the attention refocuses off of me, I snag a beer from the tin tub and make my way out into the garden.

Molly has planted a permanent bench where I used to sit with her, and I take my seat, rubbing my face with my palm as I curse myself again and again.

The overgrown yard has been decorated with twinkling garden lights and a constant warming charm, for which I am thankful.

I take a long swig of my beer and lean back with my arm draped across the back of the bench, visibly cringing everytime I remember the look on everyone’s faces when Granger opened my ridiculous gift. That stupid girl at the shop… Muggles.

My mind is chasing after a dozen different thoughts – thoughts that require me to explore feelings that I am in no way ready to broach – so I slug from my beer bottle again, wincing at the bitter taste on my tongue.

I can feel the familiar dullness at the edges of my mind, and I want to chase the feeling. I want to take it higher or lower or whatever will take me away from myself.

I hear the door creak open and consequently slam shut. Footsteps crunch toward me, and I tense as Granger curls her leg under herself to take a seat on the bench. Does she know she always sits like a cat? Curled into a ball of comfort.

“Brought you this,” she says with a wry smile and holds out another beer. A third might be pushing my fragile sobriety, but my nerves are thrashing under my skin, so I take it eagerly and clink it against hers when she offers.

After I finish half the bottle, I attempt an apology. “Sorry – about the stupid gift.”

She giggles at her lap, her thumb scratching at the label on her bottle.

“I actually thought it was rather sweet.” Her lips pulled into a cautious smile.
I snort indelicately, my brow perching quizzically. “Sweet?”

“Well, you clearly went to Muggle London. I don’t know.” Her shoulders shrug, barely rising and falling. “It’s kind of adorable to think of you in a Muggle department store for me. I appreciate the sentiment.”

My eyes soften in amusement as I watch the wind carry wayward curls off her shoulders. “You might be the first person to use the word ‘adorable’ to describe me, Granger.”

She chuckles, and her eyes lock onto mine for one striking instant before she returns her gaze to her lap.

“For what it’s worth, I actually prefer your hair like this.” I gesture to her unruly waves, and she smirks. “Not that my opinion matters much. Just”—I pause, considering my beer drenched thoughts — “throw that ridiculous gift away. I got you something else anyway.”

My hand would be trembling if my muscles weren’t laced with confidence imbued by alcohol. I reach into my robe and produce a small velvet bag and hold it out to her.

She pours the contents of the bag into her palm, and I want desperately to seem aloof, so I lean forward and rest my elbows on my thighs as she inspects the necklace I’ve tucked inside.

“Draco,” she breathes, and it’s like a kiss against my skin. “It’s beautiful.”

I peer over as she touches her fingertips to the tiny solitaire ruby dangling from the rose gold chain.

“It’s too much.” She shakes her head.

I scoff and straighten my spine. “Well, I know it’s nothing in comparison to everything you’ve done for me. But I saw it and thought of you.”

Her teeth bite into her lip as her cheeks tug into a smile. “Did you think of me when you saw the straightener?”

I let out a harsh laugh, and I feel my cheeks warm. “No.” I smirk. “But I—” I’m about to say that my mother has always chosen the gifts I brought to parties or dinners, that I felt clueless and overwhelmed and listened to the ramblings of a ridiculous little Muggle and Arthur-bloody-Weasley, but I don’t. “I just wasn’t sure. Last time I listen to a Muggle.” I say the last bit with a snarky edge to my voice, praying she doesn’t notice that I’m struggling to keep it together.

Her gaze catches mine again, and I feel my chest constrict, feel my breath stick in my throat. There is something horribly disarming about her chocolate-coloured eyes and the way they look at me like I’m not a complete fuck up – the way she sees something in me other than the man who pissed his pants and vomited on her jumper.

“Why didn’t you give it to me earlier?”

I could say that I didn’t want Ron – or anyone – to see. That it feels more intimate, and any form of intimacy is terrifying.

Instead, I shrug.

“Here,” she hands the necklace over to me and scoops the curls off her shoulders, exposing her neck, and her scent is stronger suddenly, wrapping around me until I’m almost suffocating in it. She turns her back to me, and it’s clear she wants my assistance.
I gulp as I work the clasp and drape the chain around her neck, my fingers barely brushing the soft skin at the nape of her neck, and I watch enraptured as gooseflesh spreads along the exposed skin.

She drops her curls and turns back to me, her fingers ghosting over the gem.

“Thank you,” she says, and I’m staring at the necklace, then at my lap, then at the garden – anywhere but at her eyes, which are locked onto me.

I gulp as the tips of her fingers find my chin, a panic spreading through my skin at her touch. She turns my face to meet hers, and I’m drowning. She could be my new drug. I would happily run back into addiction as long as I was slave to only her.

“Thank you,” she repeats after she pulls away, and I wonder if I’ve just hallucinated the way her eyes flicker towards my mouth.

The moment lasts only a breath but it feels to stretch on far past that, only ending when her fingers drop from my face as the back door opens and closes.

“Draco?” Arthur’s voice interrupts, and I release a held breath as her eyes leave me.

I turn over my shoulder as Granger fidgets in her seat like she’s been caught.

“Sorry, didn’t realize you had company out here. I just wanted a minute to talk to you before the night is over.”

“That’s fine, Arthur,” Granger says with a smile. “I should head back in anyway.” She turns to me, and the coy turn of her mouth stirs something deep in my belly. “Thank you again.”

She leans in and rests her palm on my knee and kisses me briefly on the cheek, like she’s done with every other guest at the party – but it’s new to me, and it sets my chest on fire.

I can’t speak for fear of my voice squeaking like a pubescent boy, so I nod with a firm set to my mouth.

Arthur is replacing her on the bench and the feeling in the air shifts suddenly. He slaps a hand on my shoulder and gives it a firm squeeze.

“I’ve received some news from a colleague at the Ministry.” He’s staring up at the stars in the clear night sky, and he lets out a long, exaggerated breath before speaking again. “The Auror Department and Wizengamot have finished some of their investigations into the,” he pauses and tilts his head back and forth, considering how to phrase it, “low-tier Death Eaters.”

His eyes find me, and I know what he’s going to say before he says it, although I’m surprised I can hear it over the whooshing of blood in my ears.

“You should be expecting a trial date, Draco.”

Chapter End Notes

Would love to know every passing thought you may be having. But I'll settle for a "Hi" too ;)
Chapter Notes

Ravenslight. You Beta-Master. She’s the real MVP and you should close this chapter immediately and run to her page to devour her work.

All mistakes are mine because I can’t leave well enough alone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now I’m seeing red, not thinking straight

Blurring all the lines, you intoxicate me

Just like nicotine, rushin’ me, touching me

Suddenly, I’m a fiend and you’re all I need

It’s you, babe

And I’m a sucker for the way that you move, babe

And I could try to run, but it would be useless

You’re to blame

Just one hit of you, I knew I’ll never be the same

Never Be The Same, Camila Cabello

6 Weeks Later
It’s been almost 10 minutes of tension fueled silence – the only sounds are coming from the ticking of the clock and Dr Brenner’s quill nib tapping idly against his clipboard.

Dr Brenner.

He’s fairly young, maybe just a few years younger than my father, but his face is free of torture and lessons hard learned. He keeps his glasses perched mid-way down his nose – he peers over them at me with a raised brow – and he’s slouched casually in his high back chair, ankle slung over his knee. His hair reminds me of Potter, intentionally messy and sticking up in odd angles that are supposed to be trendy but come off to me as slovenly.

I suck my cheek between my teeth and lick my lips, letting a tense breath release between us. I am alternating between staring at the artifacts and certificates of his office and trying to gain the dominance of this meeting with eye contact – I am not succeeding. There are several accolades from institutions I don’t recognize and I realise suddenly he’s a Muggleborn.

The information annoys me. Not because I mind he’s a Muggleborn, but because I’m sure the Wizengamot assigned me to him in order to shame me for my actions during the war. Surely, having to discuss my feelings in the attempted genocide of his kind has further punishment for my war crimes.

Finally, he takes a heavy breath in and begins, “Why don’t you tell me why you’re here, Mister Malfoy.”

I shift nervously in my seat and pick non-existent lint from my trousers. “We both know it’s court ordered,” I reply flatly, cocking my head to one side condescendingly.

“And what do you hope to gain from therapy?”

“To be lifted from probation.” I shrug my shoulders, knowing it’s not the answer he wants – but it’s the truth.

His eyes narrow over his thick-rimmed glasses, and he smiles tightly at me. “Why don’t we begin with your trial?”

I flinch visibly and try to regain my pride with a deliberate shake of my head. “I don’t want to
discuss my trial.”

“All right, let’s talk about your childhood.”

I run my tongue over my teeth and my eyes crinkle with agitation. “I’ll not be discussing that either.” The words are acid on my tongue, and he huffs loud enough that I know he wants me to hear his displeasure.

“Okay, let’s talk about the war or your last serious relationship. Or we could talk about your mother or your addiction. We can also discuss any hobbies you have, your plan for sobriety, or how you seem to have reformed so quickly from your perceived thoughts on blood purity and our caste society. Do any of those seem of interest for you to discuss, Mister Malfoy?”

My heart is thudding so loudly in my chest that I can hear it, and I want very much to cross the six or seven paces to his chair and knock his teeth loose. “You see, it doesn’t much matter where we start,” he offers with a shrug. His nonchalance is maddening. “Because we will indeed be touching on all these topics over the coming weeks. My job, as is ordered by the Wizengamot, is to ensure that you are a healthy, mindful member of society.”

“And you seem to think that you need to discuss my childhood in order to secure this information? I can assure you that I am—”

He raises a condescending palm to me, and I bare my teeth as he interrupts. “Your assurances will not be necessary, Mister Malfoy. What will be necessary is for you to be an active participant during your sessions. Let’s begin again: why are you here today?”

“Same answer,” I manage through a tight jaw.

The disheveled counselor’s eyes close briefly, and when they reopen, they are amused by my resilience.

“Why don’t you tell me about your trial?” He repeats, staring at his notebook. “It says here you had quite the roster for character witnesses: Arthur Weasley, who works at the Ministry; his wife; their son, George; and hmm,” he hums to himself, shock coloring his face, “Hermione Granger; and Harry Potter.” My brow lifts as I settle back into my chair with a raise of my chin. “That’s quite the lineup. What were you charged with?”
“It doesn’t say in my file?” I lash out – he doesn’t react. He simply settles his easy stare on me, and his lip quirks up faintly.

“It does. But the point of this session is not for me to read you your file, so – what were your charges?”

“I was charged with the Use of Unforgivable Curses, Attempted Murder, Conspiracy for Criminal Trespassing, The Possession and Misuse of Illegal Dark Artifacts, and – to top it off – Treason.” The words are bitter on my tongue, but I mask my features into an icy glare.

“And after all that, you’ve been released with two years probation. I’d say that’s quite lucky.”

I snort loudly and roll my eyes. I can tell he’s becoming increasingly annoyed with me.

“Not many people describe me as lucky.” My eyes flicker to the clock. I still have forty minutes of this torture. “Not anymore at least,” I mutter under my breath.

“You seem to have good friends, if they would come to your aid during a trial and stand in front of the Wizengamot for you. You’ve a job and a flat… you’re doing considerably better than many other Death Eaters that stood trial, if I may be so bold.”

Death Eater.

The tension in my neck spreads to my shoulders, and I’m stretching the muscles in an attempt to appease it.

“Does that term bother you?”

“What term?” I retort with curled lip.

“Death Eater.”

My throat tightens, and I want to wring his fucking neck until his face turns purple. Violent flashes of
my father and his masked comrades spring to life behind my lids. I can see jets of dark magic and countless bodies writhing in pain. I hear can hear rape and taste blood, and I don’t realize for several minutes that I’m trembling. I can smell death; I can feel their pain.

I have never wanted to be lumped in with those savages; and this man sits across from me and paints me as one of them without another thought.

I’m a savage too, I suppose.

I was guilty of every damn thing I was charged with and escaped serious Azkaban time by only the grace of the Weasleys and most of the Golden Trio.

“It doesn’t bother me,” I sniff.

His eyes flash with something akin to pity, and he sighs deeply. “Let’s call it for today, Mister Malfoy. I’m going to request that you leave your sample with the receptionist for your randomized drug test, and I’ll see you next Thursday. I will also remind you that your participation is required. If, at your next appointment, you still find you are… unable,” he speaks the word gently but with a warning that I don’t miss, “to discuss the terms of your probation and the reasons why it is necessary, then I will be forced to make note in the weekly file sent to your caseworker.”

He sets his quill down and motions towards the door without standing. *What a hoity fucking prick.* I give him my most disdainful sneer and leave the door hanging wide open behind me.

The cold early November air sobers me, and, without thought, my feet are carrying me forward, my hands jammed in my robe pockets and eyes studying the warped cobblestone.

I’m not sure what I expected walking into therapy today, but discussing the trial hadn’t been it. From the moment Arthur told me that my time was up, I had assumed I would be rotting in Azkaban in a matter of days.

The Aurors never came. Just an owl with a trial date and the contact information for a court-appointed solicitor.
Once Granger heard, she was always fluttering about. She’d pop by with lunch or insist that I needed a home cooked meal and make food at my flat. She brought books on law and case files from the Ministry Library that established precedent. At first, her incessant presence was overwhelming but soon became oddly comforting. These last few days, it was a rare occasion if I didn’t see her bushy head once a day, and, for this very reason, I found myself pulling the door open to Flourish and Blotts.

“Well?” Her voice drips with worry as she rushes around the counter.

“Well, what?” I shrug, making my way to the arm chairs near the back wall. It’s where we sit when I visit, so she can see the counter and front door, but we won’t be subject to prying eyes or camera lenses.

“How did it go?” She’s practically vibrating with anxious energy, and my lips quirk up into a smile.

“He’s a prick.” I shrug, slinging my ankle across my knee. “Looks like Potter and acts all high and mighty like him too. I don’t like him.”

Granger’s toffee colored eyes narrow at me. “You haven’t even given him a chance, Draco.”

“I don’t like him,” I repeat with a huff.

“You didn’t like me at first either.”

“Who says I do know?” I peer at her from the side of my eyes, and she gasps before reaching out and pinching my arm.

“Prat.” She smirks. I’ve come to realize that this is part of our dance, part of our charm. I say something snarky and she responds with a flirtatious reprimand. I don’t bloody know how it works, but it does, and I crave it.

I’ve come to crave her instead of drugs, and it makes me desperate for her when she’s not around.

“Dinner?” I ask with a raised brow.
She gives it some false consideration, tilting her head back and forth before grinning. “Fine. But it’s my choice, and you’re paying.”

“Bullshit!” I exclaim. “You picked that shitty Muggle place last time; it’s my turn.”

She shrugs and returns to the counter without conceding.

We’re sitting at some Sushi place in Muggle London – her choice, not that I put up much of a fight. I’ve found she prefers to travel into Muggle London more often than any Witch or Wizard I’ve ever met and while at first it’s odd, it’s slowly becoming our normal.

She’s trying to convince me to play some silly Muggle game for the last piece of unagi, but the rules are ridiculous and based solely on luck and not skill – my least favorite kind of game.

“It’s called Rock, Paper, Scissors.” Her hands are forming crude representations of the objects, and she’s explaining wildly with her hands how each beats the other. I already understand the rules but let her continue while I make vague confused glances at her hands.

The longer she explains the rules, the more frustrated she becomes, and I laugh into my sake cup. Just as she begins a third round of explanation, my shoulders tense at a familiar ditzy voice calling out my name.

My eyes land on the silky haired Muggle from Harrods, Tracy. The hot sake hits the back of my throat, and I sputter out a few violent coughs, pounding on my chest.

My eyes flicker nervously between Granger and Tracy, as though I have something to hide from both of them.

“Tracy, is it?” I straighten my spine and nod at her. “Nice to see you again. This is Hermione Granger.” I gesture toward my amused tablemate.
“Oh! She must be the one you were shopping for.” She eyes Granger’s hair speculatively, and I grimace at the forgotten gift from hell.

“You’ve quite the memory.” Granger speaks with an edge to her voice, and I can’t help but think it’s laced with jealousy. My lips quirk at the thought. “Unless – are you two well acquainted?”

“Oh, no.” Tracy holds her hands up innocently. “He’s just hard to forget.”

I blush furiously, and Granger’s eyes twinkle with playful mischief.

“It’s nice to see you again.” I give her an awkward smile, and she returns it.

“You also. Maybe I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Tracy retreats with a wave, and I snag the unagi without winning the game. Granger doesn’t say anything about the sushi; she’s too busy studying me, tapping her chopstick against her soy sauce dish.

“She’s cute,” she says with a shrug, her voice overly bright, and I smirk at my plate.

“Yeah? I didn’t know you were into girls. Maybe I can set you up.” I capture our servers attention and raise my sake decanter, signaling for a refill. I’m still avoiding eye contact, but her gaze hasn’t left me.

“You two seem friendly, is all.” She bristles slightly out of the corner of my eye, and finally I look at her. I don’t know what it is, but it doesn’t matter how much I see her – whenever I look at her, I am disarmed.

“Friendly as in she sold me a shit gift that embarrassed me to no end, and I barely remembered her name.” I roll my eyes, but she leans her elbows on the table, and her nose crinkles.
“Ah, but you *did* remember.” Her voice is honeyed, and her eyes are wide.

A laugh trickles past my lips, and I chase it with another gulp of sake. “But barely,” I reassure her. “You almost sound jealous, Granger.”

She scoffs, straightening her spine and peering down her scrunched up nose at me. She’s trying to act affronted, but it’s a piss poor effort at best.

“Jealous?” Her voice is several octaves too high. “That’s just preposterous! I’ve nothing to be jealous of that slimy bint for.”

A full belly laugh rocks my body, and I realize the alcohol is having a lovely warming sensation on my fingers and ears. “‘Slimy bint’? You’re right, Granger.” My face breaks out in a full smirk. “That hardly sounds like a jealous witch at all. You know, if you want me all to yourself, you only need to say so.”

The look on her face nearly sober me, and I blink, the flirtatious tease vanishing from my expression like a bucket of cold water pouring over me.

*Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.*

“Another round?” I gulp, once again avoiding her eye contact.

“Sounds good. Another.”

I can still feel her stare, examining every inch of my face, looking for clues or weakness. I gulp and return my attentions to my drink.

When one doesn’t have anything to look forward to, the weekends become a rather dull affair. I don’t have much to occupy my time other than work and Granger, and since Granger is busy at the book shoppe, I head to my office downstairs.
The ledgers are finally getting close to being as up to date as they can get with George always losing shit or waiting until the following month to hand over invoices, and I’ve actually begun working on some of the newer product development with him.

I was apprehensive at first, but it gets my mind working in new ways, and I find I look forward to the chance to stretch those muscles. George sent the shampoo off for testing, and I’m currently looking over a formulation for a nearly invisible trinket that can be pinned onto someone’s robe and lets out the sound of passing gas at random intervals. It’s brutish and immature, but if I’m going to do something, I refuse to let it be half-assed.

I can hear the shoppe in full force this Saturday morning, but I rarely silence my office.

The white noise is calming; the silence is damning.

As I’m just starting work on the most recent product, a knock raps against my door.

“You know, if I hadn’t seen it, I wouldn’t believe it.” Blaise. “The office waiting for you at your father’s business is probably, what? Six times the size of this hole?”

My face pulls up into a grin, and I raise from my cramped desk to give him a firm handshake and a slap on the shoulder.

“What in the hell are you doing here?” I’m bloody thrilled to see him; he’s a reminder of the times before. Before war.

“Ah, the British Wizengamot’s reach is far and wide, my friend.” His wry smile leaves me breathless, and I blanch.

Blaise didn’t have much to do with the war effort; his only actions were ever because I dragged him into it. He has no Dark Mark staining his skin, and he never attended a meeting of the inner circle – there’s no reason he should have to stand trial.

“When’s your date?” I ask with a solemn set to my jaw.
“Just now, actually. I stopped here after–”

“After!” I exclaim. “Why didn’t you tell me? I should have been there.”

“It was pudding.” He waves me off with his ever charming smile. “Three months of probation and a little community service. What about you, mate?”

I snort. “Two years probation and court-ordered therapy.”

Blaise makes a pained face and clutches at his chest before laughing it off and relaxing into his too-small chair.

“I can’t say I’m not surprised at what I’m coming home to though, mate. Working with a Weasley, Sunday dinners at the Weasley’s house, dating the Weasley’s Mud–” My sneer stops him from continuing and he gives me that sideways smirk again. “My apologies. Not sure when we stopped calling her that.”

I try to remember that he’s been a close mate since before I could ride a broomstick and take a few deep breaths.

“I’m not dating Granger,” I manage through a tight jaw. I can’t really speak to the rest of his accusations, as they are all true.

“Pansy says you guys are awfully chummy, that you visit her at work, take her out to dinner.”

I scoff and push the papers I have to the side. “What the hell does she know?”

“Pansy Parkinson? Um, everything. She knows everything. Anyway, I’m not here to judge. We all slum it from time to time.”

My fists ball tightly, and I’m trying not to fucking deck him. As if he knows anything about the lot of them – as if he know anything about what I’ve been going through.
“I’m taking over Mum’s old flat in Muggle London. My P.O. says I need to stay close for the duration of my probation. Don’t be a stranger, yea? Let’s grab a drink soon.”

I nod once and feel my lip pull up into a forced smile that doesn’t touch my eyes.

Blaise stands to leave, the chair scraping on the scuffed hardwoods. As he leaves, he tosses over his shoulder a final, “Give Granger my best.”

And I can’t explain why it puts such a pit in my stomach.

Chapter End Notes

I love all your thoughts and would squeal in delight if you shared them with me.
Endless thanks to my Alpha and Beta, MHCalamas and Ravenslight for all their tireless work on this chapter and on me and my insecurities!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I live here on my knees as I try to make you see
That you're everything I think I need here on the ground
But you're neither friend nor foe though I can't seem to let you go
The one thing that I still know is that you're keeping me down
You're keeping me down
You're on to me, on to me, and all over me

Something always brings me back to you
It never takes too long

-Gravity, Sara Bareilles

The same incessant tapping of Dr Brenner’s quill nib echoes in the room again as I strain my neck to stretch the tension that’s settled there.

“Would you like to start?” Brenner offers with an arched brow. I grit my teeth until they are on the verge cracking.

“I really don't know what you’re expecting of me here, Doc. I’m not the kind of person spills all their deep, dark secrets and insecurities. I’ve never been that kind of person, so I’m not sure why you think I’ll do it now.”
“Tell me about that. Why don’t you think you’ve ever been able to share those feelings before? Has there ever been someone that you’ve felt comfortable talking to?” His square jaw tilts to the side, and the empathy in his eyes enrages me.

“No.”

“No?”

“Yeah, mate. Fucking no. There has never been anyone in my life I’ve felt comfortable talking to. There’s nothing else to say about it.” I can feel magic sparking off my skin – there’s a tingle from the wand in my pocket.

“You seem a bit more angry today,” Brenner remarks. “Any idea why that is?”

My hands close into fists at my side, but I remain silent.

“I told you, Mister Malfoy. I need you to participate in these sessions or I will have to relay the information to your caseworker.”

I take one sobering breath, letting it fill my lungs almost to the point of pain. I try to focus my attention on the cuticle that’s dripping blood from where I’ve picked it raw, and I can hear the sharp scratching of his quill against a small book of blank parchment.

“I’m answering your questions,” I respond after a long moment. “You are asking me to invent emotions and issues that I don’t have.”

“I don’t think that’s the case.”

“Enlighten me, then. Since you seem to know so much more about myself than I do.” I sneer.

Brenner appraises me, reading me in a way that makes my skin crawl because as much as I don’t want to admit it, I know I’m fucked up.
“I think you got a shitty hand in life, and you’re not really sure how to reconcile your current situation with the image you’ve painted of yourself since a young age.”

“Which is?” I spit.

“Mister Malfoy, you were once a very privileged young man who had the upper hand in life due to your wealth and social standing. I think you’re struggling to find your new place in this world that doesn’t hoist you up for the reasons you stand out – no, instead, it shames you for it. What once caused you to raise your chin high now causes you to look down at your feet.” He leans forward thoughtfully, and his gaze misses nothing. “I think your parents have a good deal to do with your struggle, and the fact that you will never be able to set things straight with them is going to be something that weighs on you for a very long time.”

My jaw might as well be wired shut. I heave deep, haggard breaths through my nostrils as I glare at him through slitted eyes.

“If you have this all figured out, then do you care to tell me why I have to be a part of this little charade?” I challenge with a tick of my jaw.

“Because I want to work on healing the damage done – on helping you move forward. I don’t want to just rehash your past.”

“Then why!” I jump to my feet and begin pacing frantically. My tenuous control over my emotions has severed, and I feel panic and anger in every fiber of my muscle. “Why are you bloody rehashing it?! Tell me what I’m supposed to say that will fix whatever it is that you deem so broken about me – because believe it or not, I’m not here for the fucking company.”

His eyes are full of a sadness that makes me feel sick, “I can’t fix this, Draco – you can. And yes, we need to begin in the past; it’s the root of your beliefs, what led you here. From the root, we can find how things grew wayward, and then we change it’s growth path.”

“I just think this entire thing is fucking bullshit,” I hiss and move to his window, leaning against the alcove that suddenly reminds me of the attic at the Burrow. A calm washes over me.

“Let’s start somewhere easy: tell me about your work.”
I grumble under my breath, about to spit some more venom at the unkempt doctor in front of me. I sigh instead and tell him about my job.

I don’t go to Flourish and Blotts.

The session stirred something in me that isn’t a side of me that I want Granger to see, and so I head to the Leaky instead. I drop myself onto a wobbly bar stool and signal for a Firewhisky, a harder spirit than I normally allow myself, but I’m pissed, and I desperately need to get pissed.

I think it’s around my third glass that Blaise appears. He pays for the bottle, and the bartender leaves it between us – I’m not far enough gone to ignore the feeling in my gut telling me that shouldn’t have another glass.

I do anyway.

In my alcohol addled mind, I spill about Dr. Brenner and the drugs. I tell him about the trial and how it made me sick to hear the Weasleys and the rest of them say such wonderful things about me. They don’t fucking know me, I explain. They don’t know the way I hated them, the way I wished them dead. They don’t know this bottomless void in me that I can’t seem to fill with booze or drugs or therapy – it’s fucking endless.

He doesn’t say much, just nods in the right places and keeps my glass full.

I’m hunched over my glass and staring down into the amber liquid when I feel his palm come down hard on my shoulder.

“Your girlfriend is here,” he says with a knowing smirk, and my brows furrow as I clumsily look over my shoulder.

*It’s Granger.*

It’s Granger, and I’m drunk off my ass, and I desperately want to vomit on the floor between us.
“Draco?” her voice is dripping with worry, and her small hand is on my back. “Merlin, Draco. Let’s get you home.”

“I don’t know that we’ve properly met,” Blaise purrs at her, and I want to tell him to piss off, but I’m far too drunk to do so now. “Blaise Zabini,” he stares proudly.

“Oh, erm… yes. I remember you. Hermione Granger,” she replies cautiously, her worry and attention still focused on me. My vision doubles, and I sway in my seat. “Oh, Malfoy…”

I remember that tone of her voice, and it makes me flinch. It’s the tone she used to use on me when I was high. She’s disappointed again, and her disappointment stabs in my gut until I feel unwanted tears prick at the edge of my vision.

“Home,” I slur, and Granger’s arm is snaking under my mine and helping to lift my weight. I’m stumbling out of my seat when Zabini’s arm joins hers around my middle. Through my haze I can feel Granger’s fingers tight on my waist and I rest my forehead on her curls, breathing her in.

“I’m going to have to Apparate, Malfoy,” Granger says with a sigh.

“Nononono,” I protest with a sloppy shake of my head. “I’ll… sick.” I wince at the thought but raise my face to greet the cool night air, letting it wash over me.

“You’ll get sick either way, Malfoy,” Granger scolds. “Might as well avoid dragging your drunk arse down Diagon Alley while I’m at it. Thanks for your help, Zabini.”

And we’re gone in a swirl of her magic, and I can’t tell where one of us starts and the other one ends.

In moments, we are standing in the hall of her flat, and she doesn’t waste a second as she summons a bucket. It’s a good thing she does, because I fall to my knees and wretch.

I wake on the couch, and the sunlight flooding the room causes a low hiss to pass my lips. I drag a throw pillow over my head and curl in on myself.
The night before is a haze – Firewhisky burning through the beginning, middle and end. I groan and claw at my face as the pit in my stomach expands. The shame is overwhelming as shards of the night before flash behind my closed lids.

The pillow that’s been shielding me is yanked off my head, and I’m cursing at the morning and kicking out at whoever has decided it’s their day to die for disturbing me.

“Good Morning, Malfoy,” Granger chimes as she hovers above me. It’s less of a greeting and more of an accusation.

“Granger.” I gulp and peek up at her through squinted eyes. “Good of you to stop by.” I push up with a cringe and see a bucket at my side. The sight is mortifying but also a relief – I may need it soon.

It’s then that I realize I’m not in my flat. It’s missing all the mid-century modern furnishings, and instead it boasts stacks of books and several pieces of well-loved furniture. There’s an ugly orange cat curled up in a sagging purple armchair and pictures of her loved ones scattered about.

None of me, though I don’t expect there to be. I try to ignore the jealous roll in my stomach, blaming it on the after affects of alcohol and not the desire to be counted amongst those close enough to grace Granger’s walls.

“Remember, when I asked you to teach me the wand work for your lock? And remember how you explained that Gryffindors are not to be trusted with such sensitive information?”

I drag a rough hand over my face and swallow the bile that makes a surprise jump into my throat.

“I do.” I chuckle darkly, remembering how pissed she was.

“So you remember that I said in the case of emergency, someone should be able to enter your flat – and you replied that I should, in such a case, call the Aurors?”

I can hear her foot tapping; the unsaid curses she’s bouncing around in her mind are nearly audible, and it makes me smile even though I’m being thoroughly lashed.
“I recall that as well.” I smirk, one of my eyes squinting shut – a cheap effort to make the room stop its spinning.

“You shouldn’t have gotten that drunk, Draco.” She collapses onto her coffee table, shoving her hands between her knees and staring at me. I peek up at her and nod.

“I know, Granger,” I agree without a snarky retort.

“What if–” She shakes her head. “You could have relapsed.”

I scoff and let my eyes roll back.

It’s been ninety-five days, so I know I won’t. I’m stronger now. I barely think of it unless shit gets bad, and even then, I’m better now.

“You scared me,” she confesses, and I gather the strength to look up into her concerned eyes, wide and round and looking at me as if I matter to her.

The thought is simultaneously comforting and horrifying.

I swallow and lift my hand to a single curl that’s hanging from her hairline. I tuck it behind her ear, and I don’t miss the way she presses her cheek into my palm for the briefest of moments before turning from my touch.

“I’m sorry, Granger. Won’t happen again.”

“Promise?” Her voice is small and hopeful, and I fix her with a lopsided smirk, trying to reassure her.

“Promise.”
Would love to hear your thoughts! I'll be back next week with another chapter for you!
Consequences

Hesitation, awkward conversation
Running on low expectation
Every siren that I was ignoring
I'm payin' for it

Loving you was young, and wild, and free
Loving you was cool, and hot, and sweet
Loving you was sunshine, safe and sound
A steady place to let down my defenses

But loving you had consequences

-Consequences by Camila Cabello

TRIGGER WARNING: This scene references a sexual assault. It is not graphically depicted.

There’s another dinner at the Burrow, and apparently once you’ve attended one, you’ve made a blood oath to attend every one for the rest of your life.

George pulls out a flask and offers it to me with a lazy nod. My gaze fixates briefly on the dewey exterior, but I shake my head. With a shrug, he stowes it safely again.

I don’t need drinking like I think I do. It was an easy numb, but I don’t crave it like I do Nebula. Like I do the company of a certain bushy-haired witch.
Ron’s absent, thankfully and I find I’m far more at ease when he’s missing – I’m able to move about the cluttered Burrow like I used to until I find myself in front of the fire.

I’m staring at the flames as they climb up the chimney, so I don’t hear her approach.

“How’s work been?” Molly releases an exhausted grunt as she lowers herself into the armchair next to me – George’s chair.

“Decent.” I nod, my lips pressing into a flat line. “Getting the hang of it, I think.”

“Please tell me you’re trying to dissuade that crazy child of mine from any truly terrifying inventions.”

“You know I always try, but I think we both know how well that works.”

From the corner of my eye, I see her cheek tug up into a small smile.

“How’s Hermione?” Molly asks. Like it’s nothing. Like it’s not the oddest thing in the world that I would know.

“I don’t know,” I rush out, guilt or shame – or both – coloring my words.

She chuckles. “You sound like Ron.”

I fix her with a disbelieving glare. “Unlikely,” I clip.

“Oh, he used to be so crazy over that girl. He’d write home constantly complaining about her. On holidays he talked of nothing but her. But if we so much as asked about her, his walls would go up.” Molly sniggered, and she shook her head before resting it back against the gifted chair.

A defensive rage swells in my chest, and I’m suddenly angry that Weasley ever thought she might be
“Did they date?” I manage in an offhand tone. My eyes are still trained fiercely on the fire.

“Nothing serious. I think maybe they tried after the war – but too much had happened. War is no time for young love,” Molly muses, raising her feet to rest on the mismatched foot rest.

“The war is over.”

“She barks. “The battles aren’t over. The fields have changed; the enemy is different, but it’s not over. Here we are in the foggy aftermath of loss, fighting against our own consciousness, our minds, our fears. There are still stigmas and prejudices left to shatter. Look at you.” She gestures in my direction. “Look at me. Look at any of us, and tell me we aren’t at war still.”

“I think I’m too tired to keep fighting,” I confess into the safe space Molly always creates.

“Me too, child. Me too.”

Knock, knock, knock.

My eyes fall low over my brows as I open the door and find Granger there with a brown bag clutched in her arms. A French baguette peeks out the top.

“Hello!” she sings and slides past me.

“Uh, hello, Granger. Can I help you?”

With wide eyes, I watch her strut over to my counter and start unpacking her bag of groceries.

“I’m craving lasagna.” She shrugs and now opens my cupboards, removing my unused mixing bowls.
“I see. And your flat caught fire?”

“No.”

“Your oven is broken?”

“Nope.” Her head tilts, a smile ghosting over her lips as she opens up some grated parmesan cheese.

“You missed me terribly?”

“N–” she pauses and finally meets my gaze with a crinkled nose. “Maybe,” she concedes with a shy smile. “But mostly, it’s impossible to make lasagna for one, so you’re going to eat it too.”

Warmth blooms in my chest as I close the door behind her and cross the floor to the counter.

“Weasley busy?” I cringe even as I say it. It reeks of jealousy, and it’s not a look I wear well.

“Who, Ron?” Her face scrunches up.

“Yea, aren’t you guys dating?”

What in the bloody hell am I saying? I know they’re not dating. I know this. Yet the words keep tumbling out of my mouth before I can stop them.

She slowly turns to face me, and her chocolate eyes are tinged with confusion. “Um, no? Did I let on that we were dating?”

Our eyes lock, silver on brown, and a moment passes that feels heavy and important. I look away quickly, eyes unable to hold her gaze for another moment.
“Just gossip.” I shrug, my fingers fiddling with the ingredients on the counter.

“Ahhh.” I can hear her smile. “Gossip.”

“Gossip,” I repeat with a stiff nod.

“Well, to clear up any other salacious gossip circulating – I’m not dating anyone.”

I peek over and watch her cheeks turn a rosy hue before I quickly return my gaze to the eggs, smirking.

She clears her throat abruptly and then pulls a small notecard yellowed with age from her bag. The edges are curling, and the words are stained with red sauce. She places it on the counter between us, and my eyes began to tick off the ingredients, followed by instructions – just like a potion.

“So you’re making me lasagna because you don’t want to eat an entire pan yourself?” I ask with a snort.

She fixes me a pointed stare and then, surprising me, sticks her pink tongue out at me, her nose scrunching up.

“Just shut up and brown the meat.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I salute and reach across her for the package of wrapped meat she’s brought. My chest brushes against her while her curls tickle my cheek. She stiffens, her eyes flickering up to mine before settling on my mouth.

If I dipped my head just a few inches, I could catch her lips with mine. I could wrap my arms around her slender waist. I could show her all the things I’m horribly incapable of speaking.

It would be nothing.

But I know that’s a lie – it would be everything. I’m not sure I’m ready for everything.
One of us breaks the long moment of shared breath, and we move back into motion as if the moment had never happened in the first place. Grating cheese, cracking eggs, the sizzle of the beef and sausage mixed in the sauté pan – sounds but no words.

She studies the card with a reverence I’m not sure I fully understand – it’s just a pasta, afterall – and when she pulls the soft elongated noodles from the cool water, I see her jaw quiver.

I let out a long sigh. “What is it, Granger?”

“Hmm?”

“Why is the noodle making you cry?” I tease, but I’m sure I should be. A better man would ask with an earnest kindness, look into her eyes, and listen. I’m not that man. I don’t even know how to ask without a snarky retort.

She spreads the first layer of marinara and follows it with noodles. “It’s my mum’s recipe.”

*Mum.* Her parents. She’s mentioned them before – their significance – but I can’t place it now. Maybe I was high, which would be horrifying because this is probably something I should know.

“Ahh,” I reply with a nod, unsure what comes next.

“Before I obliviated them, I took just a handful of things from my home: a photo album, my father’s favorite book, my mother’s perfume – and this.” She nods to the recipe between us.

I gulp, my fingers twitching towards her, begging to comfort her, but I stall them before they can touch her skin. “And you… you make it when you miss them?”

“That was the idea.” She adds the cheesy mixture and then another layer of noodles. “I used to help her make it all the time, ever since I was little. I thought if I could make it, I could remember her. But I haven’t yet.” She turns to me, eyes rimmed with unshed tears. “I couldn’t.”
“You don’t need this to remember her,” I say softly.

“I know. But I just didn’t want to be alone the first time.” She pauses, and her chocolate eyes burn into mine. “I wanted to be with you.”

She may as well have punched me with how hard her confession hits me in the gut. It’s overwhelming and oppressing – flying and drowning all at once.

*She wanted to be with me.*

I give her a small, sad smile, and uncharacteristically, I open my arms to her. She moves into my embrace without a second thought. I can feel her tears against my shirt as her shoulders shake softly. My hands run smooth lines down her curls, down her back, and I rest my cheek against the top of her head.

I let her cry until the shaking stops and her breathing steadies. I don’t really *want* to let her go – I could carry her to the couch and hold her like this for hours – but she takes a step back and looks up at me, a few wayward tears still streaking down her freckled cheek.

My eyes roam her face as my thumbs swipe away the remaining stubborn tears, and my breath catches when her eyes flicker to my lips again. I let my hand slide from her cheek and rest at the back of her neck, threading through her curls, and my heart soars as her lips fall open.

I dip my face a breath closer, still waiting for the punch. I’m waiting for her to shriek and run from me, hexing me on the way out.

She doesn’t.

My lips hover just over hers, and through my hooded lids, I see her smile before she closes the distance, pressing her lips softly against mine. It’s cliché and obnoxious, but a fire ignites behind my lids as her lips move against mine, timid at first and then almost hungry as her hands wind up to rest on my thin shirt, her fingers curling into the fabric and drawing me closer.

My hands respond on their own, the one in her hair gripping her harder, turning her head slightly while my free hand pulls at her waist, encouraging her back to arch into me.
I feel her tongue dart out and run the length of my bottom lip, and my eyes shoot open.

Gryffindor.

I give what she asks freely, opening my mouth and meeting her tongue, letting it slide along hers, swallowing the soft moan that escapes from the back of her throat. I feel one devious hand move up to cradle the back of my head, fingers running through the fringe there. I step into her until her lower back is pressed against the granite counter, and she impossibly deepens the kiss, her head twisting to allow me more, and I can feel a familiar twitch in my groin.

She can’t want to go there. I try to reason with my cock, willing it not to shame us both as she arches into me once again.

My arms wind around her, my fingertips tracing her spine, and she pulls me deeper still, giving me a throaty moan that I swallow greedily.

We both freeze as we hear the snap of the lock on my door, and when it pushes open in a way only George does, I jump back panting.

My eyes roll when George strides in, all arms and legs and stupid red hair.

He takes in the sight of Granger pressed against the counter, hands braced, hair messed, and panting. Then his eyes flick to me, practically snarling at him. My eyes are dangerous, and my cock falls limp in my pants.

His lips twist up wickedly, eyes darting between the two of us.

“Oh,” he says, his mouth pursing and his eyes glinting.

“Don’t,” I warn, and Granger clears her throat, returning to the half made and totally forgotten lasagna on the counter.
“Sorry to interrupt.” He’s still grinning and I want to punch him in his ugly mug.

“You’re not,” I snap.

“Does that mean I can join? Draco, I’ll have to admit you’re not totally my type. But you do at times have a bit of a feminine air about you that I can appreciate – something about your hips, I think.”

I suck in an angry breath and pinch my face into a tight grimace. “How much money to make you shut up and leave?”

“You can’t afford it,” he challenges with a devilish smirk.

“I doubt that.”

“George,” Hermione pipes in, “do you want some lasagna? Should be ready in about an hour.”

“Why, how polite the lady of the house is.” My lips curl, and I’m about to spill some truly heinous insults his way when he claps his hands. “I would love lasagna. And any spare kisses you happen to be handing out.”

She withdraws her wand and points it directly at him. “With a flick of my wrist, I will make your entire face sprout blistering boils. Don’t tempt me.”

George holds his hands up in surrender and moves to the counter, biting down on his laughter.

I chance a look at Granger, and she’s still flushed from the kiss or being caught – I’m not sure which. She peeks up at me, and I watch her teeth cut into her slightly swollen bottom lip.

“How’s your week going?”
I’ve realized the thing I dislike the most about Brenner is that he always stares at his bloody notes while he speaks to me. It’s fucking rude.

“Fine.”

“Still sober?”

“One hundred and twenty-three days.” I nod.

“That’s wonderful. I’ll have you leave your sample on the way out; we haven’t done that in a while.”

*Brilliant.* The highlight of these visits is pissing in a small plastic up to leave with Helen at the front desk.

“I’d like to try a new technique today.” He sets his leatherbound journal on a side table next to a small glass of water and a cactus.

“I didn’t know there were other techniques to your prying. Please, humor me.”

He give me a placating smile. “You’re funny. Funnier than you used to be.”

“Well, what can I say, Doc. You’re growing on me,” I lie with a roll of my eyes.

“Right, go ahead and lie down. Get comfortable.”

“I’m not that kind of bloke.” I snort. “Get your jollies off another way.”

“Are you quite done? Your snarky sarcasm is exhausting.”

Laying down on the chaise I always occupy, I cross my ankles and bring my hands to rest behind my head.
“We are going to try some visualizations today. I am going to lead you through different scenarios, and I want you to explain what you see. Can you manage that without your normal dose of animosity?”

“I can certainly try.” I shrug.

“You’re in a clearing. There’s a forest off to the left and a stream in front of you. What time of day is it?”

As he speaks, a scene comes blooms to life in front of me: the sky is dark and full of rain clouds.

“I don’t know.”

“What’s the weather like in the clearing?”

My brows knit closely together, eyes still closed. “It’s dark. There’s a storm coming.”

“In the distance?”

“Yes.”

“There’s a Hippogriff in the clearing. What’s it doing?”

I see the giant beast, identical to the one that attacked me in third year. His neck is chained low to a tree so he can’t move.

“He’s on a tether.” I hear the Brenner hum, and his quill scratches against rough parchment.

“Now I want you to imagine a box. Describe it to me.”
The box appears in front of me, small and steel, and I describe it to Brenner. Rivets run along each seam. It’s heavy, too heavy to lift without magic and impenetrable.

“Alright, let’s go ahead and move ahead to a new scene. It’s the last time you were home. What do you see?”

My mind follows him without my permission, first taking me to the Burrow, sitting at the fire with Molly, before dragging me to the Manor. I wince, and a shiver runs down my spine.

It’s cold – I’ve read it follows dark magic, and I can feel it everywhere, seeping deep into my bones.

“Describe the room you’re in,” Brenner leads. I hear him shift in his chair, but I barely register it the ambient noise of his office. I’m somewhere else.

“It’s the Grand Parlour. There’s a meeting, but all I can hear is screaming, and I know a Muggleborn girl is being raped. They’ve dragged her pure-blood boyfriend in to watch.”

“How do you know she’s being assaulted?”

My body is rigid and beads of sweat are forming at my hairline. “I’ve learned the difference. Screaming sounds different – it’s easy to tell if they’re being tortured or raped or calling for help.

“They offered her to me first.”

I remember the waves of nausea when they dropped her bound at my feet, black tears streaming down her dirt-stained cheeks.

“Why didn’t you?”

I flinch like he’s hexed me. My voice shaky and weak, not like me. “I– I just can’t. They drag me for it, call me a faggot. And Dolohov says something—”

“What does he say?”
My face pinches harder, seeing his ugly scarred face inches from mine, the sun setting behind him through the grand windows. He reaches down and with a fistful of her hair drags her to her feet, wild-eyed and panting. Through broken ribs, I can hear her rasping, tears painting horrified streaks down her cheeks. Despite the dirty gag and her bound wrists, she’s begging me for help she know I can’t possibly give her. Dolhov wraps his filthy arm around her shoulders while she thrashes, stilling her and I see a light go out in her eyes, I see the moment she gives up. My stomach lurches as he drags his stubby tongue along her neck—

“He says he’s going to fuck her until she’s dead.”

Brenner releases a harsh curse under his breath. “What happens next?”

I feel my nails dig into the the fabric of the sofa, my breath becoming shallower by the second.

“I’m punished,” I manage through a wired jaw.

“How?”

“Crucio.”

Hot tears spill down my cheeks, and my body is resisting the memory, remembering the burn in my muscles clearly as my mind.

The vision shifts: I’m on the floor, my body weak and broken, blood and spit spilling from the side of the mouth and tremors rocking my otherwise useless body. My eyes focus on Mother, standing in her macabre robes. Her eyes are veiled with a thin mesh netting sprouting from her opulent hair piece.

I gargle and call for her, my fingers reaching across the marble floor for her, the one person I can always trust.

She’s staring back at me, pain etched into her beautiful features. She doesn’t come to me. Her eyes lower to her feet, unable to watch.
My body is reacting to the searing memory of its own accord, and through my haze, I hear Brenner's voice leading me back, commanding me to go somewhere safe.

“Malfoy, I need you to be strong enough to change this. Bring yourself out and get somewhere safe.” His voice is firm and breaks through the crumbling walls of my consciousness.

I’m taken from the memory and dropped in the attic, sitting in the alcove near the only window. Granger is curled up like a cat on the floor, leaning her head back and smiling at me.

She doesn’t know that every Muggleborn brought into the Manor is her. She doesn’t know that all the screams will always belong to her.

I shoot up from the chaise, gasping for air and clawing at my chest. My eyes lock on Brenner, and I’m on my feet, clutching his cheap shirt between my fingers and dragging him to his feet.

I shove him back until his head cracks against the plaster where all his certificates and degrees hang, one drops to the floor.

“Malfoy, I’m sorry.” He raises his hands, surrendering. “I wouldn’t have taken you there if I had known. Okay? I’m sorry. You can trust me.”

My growl dies in my throat, and I swallow, rage shaking through my limbs.

“I can’t trust anyone.” I sneer and release him. “We’re done. Assign me someone else or send me to Azkaban – we’re fucking done.”

I slam the door, not bothering to leave the cup of piss behind with Helen.

I make only two stops on the way home.

It’s an hour later when I’m seated on my couch – running my hands through my too-long hair and staring at the object on the coffee table. My mind is still a volatile cocktail of rage and mishandled
trauma.

I reach past the Firewhisky and pluck the swirling vial of icy blue Nebula off the table.

AUTHORS NOTE:

The description of the box during therapy is a japanese personality quiz. If you youtube it, it's pretty fun and alarmingly accurate. I'll post a link to my tumblr [ LadyKenz347 ]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAHl5v7HRRM

Tell me all your thoughts! Xoxo. LK
Shallow

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Tell me something, boy
Aren't you tired tryin' to fill that void?
Or do you need more?
Ain't it hard keeping it so hardcore?

I'm falling
In all the good times I find myself
Longing for change
And in the bad times I fear myself

-Shallow by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper

My mind is chasing thoughts I can’t follow, violently reliving the jagged shards of memory that I need to stay buried deep. My mother turning her cheek seems to be my favorite, replaying often until my chest is tight and I’m clawing at my scalp and neck, angry red trails left in their wake.

I roll the vial back and forth between my fingers, watching the glowing liquid swirl in on itself again and again. I set it next to the Firewhisky and stare at them.

They are my problem.

They are my answer.
They are the way out.

My muscles ache with an urge I don’t think I can quench otherwise, a deep burning and a hideous craving – a need to forget. A need to be numb.

The pit of a high I need to fall into has to be better than this. My ribs are caving in on my lungs as I rake short, angry breaths in through my teeth, a sob following each one.

I slap my face – hard.

Again.

Again.

The pain grounds me, anchors me, tethers me.

It’s been one hundred and thirty-one days. I shouldn’t.

But I need it.

A feral snarl claws from my belly, and I hear glass break somewhere in a fit of accidental magic.

“FUCK!”

With an easy flick of my wrist the armchair crashes on it’s side – hot, shameful tears streak down my cheeks.

Reminders of my withdrawal flash behind my lids, and I know I can’t. It’s all piss, vomit, and sweat... I can’t survive that again.
My tired muscles ache, weary from fighting an invisible foe, but it’s my mind that’s falling apart; the need for release pulls at loose threads until I’m unraveling. My senses are excruciatingly aware of every blasted noise in this apartment and I rush to the clock on the wall, ripping it from it’s home. It shatters against the wall in a fluid movement – another primal yell ripping from my lungs.

“Draco?”

It’s her.

I turn on her, and as soon as she sees my face, she knows. Her eyes travel the counter, then my hands, and then land on the fifth of Firewhisky and the vial of Nebula. Her shoulders slump as she drags a slow breath in through her nose.

She’s disappointed, again.

It’s not like I blame her. After all, I’m a fucking disappointment.

“Draco…” her voice drips a sad sympathy that makes me want to strangle someone. “What happened?”

“Nothing.”

She scoffs and closes the door. “Obviously not nothing, if you’re sitting here with a bottle of whisky and a side of drugs.”

“What are you doing here?” I snap, refusing to look at her. I can feel her eyes trained on me, and it’s an unwanted caress, rough against my skin.

She gestures to the coffee table. “Aren’t you tired? Tired of trying to fill this void in you with drugs and alcohol and never ending angst? You know there are people out there who actually cope with things in healthy ways, right?”

“Oh, really?” I sneer over my shoulder. “Please do fuck off before you to tell me how you cope by making pasta and sobbing. Because no matter how many fucking lasagnas you make – your parents
still aren’t going to remember you exist.”

It’s too low, a sucker punch I shouldn’t fucking take, but I’m not in control now. He is. The part of me who called her Mudblood and who took the Dark Mark.

She sucks in a shocked breath, her fingers tracing her lips as she examines me.

I stomp into the kitchen, my feet carrying me there aimlessly. “You need to go.” I point towards the door.

“I’m not leaving.” Her shoulders square to me and her lips flatten in her stubbornness.

“What do you care? Isn’t there some other pet you can adopt this week – give me a fucking break.” I hear her soft gasp, and a nagging sadness tugs at me, begging me to apologize. “It’s pathetic the way you dote on me. You’re pathetic.” The words are venom on my tongue, but I don’t want them to be taken back. I want… no, need her to see me. The real me. Not the one who eats sushi and sits in her bookshop.

I need her to know me as the monster who destroys everything he loves, even her.

Leveling me with her sternest Hermione Granger stare, she bites back her tears. “I am going to assume you didn’t mean that and it’s your addiction talking.”

I bark out a cruel laugh, rearing on her. “Want to know what I really think? I think you don’t know how to exist without someone desperately needing you. The way you followed Potter and Weasley around through school? Clinging to their idiocy so that you might feel better about your own inadequacies. When they’re through with you – you find me and somehow task yourself with my pitiful existence. What’s so… so broken about you that you need to be needed like this?”

She sucks her bottom lip in through her teeth, a single tear falling from the corner of her eyes. I’m close to shattering her, and I know I should fall to my knees in front of her, beg her to save me again.

I don’t.
“What is it? Some existential crisis? You’re fucking Hermione Granger. Brightest Witch of our Age, Champion of the Underdog – you could walk into any bloody building in London and walk out with a job. But no, you’re stocking shelves like a squib.” I snarl at her, and I can see her rage begin to build – good.

_Hate me._

“I happen to like my job–” she interjects but I won’t give her the moment. Won’t let her calm me.

“Oh, my arse. It’s just another way that you feel better about yourself with minimal effort. You bleeding heart Gryffindors.” I scoff and move towards her, stepping dangerously into her space – I smirk when she shrinks away from me. “And where do I fit into this narrative, huh? Other than your pity-case pet project. I’m not your fucking boyfriend, Granger. What’s your plan? Come around and slum it with a Death Eater? Are you so hard up for human companionship that you’ll lower yourself to my level–”

“Stop victimising yourself. You know that’s not how I think of you!” Her lips are trembling as tears fall freely down her freckled cheeks.

She’s so fucking stubborn, and I’m not even sure it’s about getting her to leave anymore – I just want someone else in this blasted world to feel as awful as I do. I want to inflict pain and I’m wondering what’s so bloody broken about _me_ now.

“Well, then you’re a fucking idiot, Granger.” My voice is a taunt. “Can’t you see what you are to me? A distraction, and one that I’m quickly growing bored with.” I dismiss her with a lazy wave of my hand, but I feel something breaking irreparably deep in my chest. “Get out of my fucking flat, Granger.”

“Goodbye, Malfoy.” Her eyes are tinged with a sadness I can’t believe I caused.

A door slam.

She’s gone.

She’s gone again.
My feet carry to me towards the table… towards my way out.

I pick up the fragile glass, and with a scream that’s horrified and angry, I throw them at the door she’s just left me through, destroying them.

I crumble in a heap, broken sobs ripping through my chest.

*She’s gone.*

Days pass, and I hear nothing from Granger. For as much as a prat as I am to her, she’s never stayed away this long.

She’ll forgive me; she has to.

I doubt she will without a proper lashing first, and I’m not ready for that yet. I’m not ready to tell her how and why I hit the rocks at the bottom, not even sure I want her to know the rocks exist, although I suspect she’s always known.

Knowing her, *really* knowing her, has been like diving. Soaring, plunging, free falling. The free fall ended when I hit shallow water.

I just crash. I hit the rocks. I hit the place where there can’t be anything worse, and I don’t know how to ask forgiveness for something like that. I don’t know how to ask her to care about me when I’m so fucking unworthy.

There have been times when things almost felt good, when I thought maybe I could change… when I’ve craved it. Now… now I’m scared of how fucking self-destructive I’m going to get before I really get better.

Something about this most recent therapy session has awoken memories that were finally dormant,
and it does more than exhaust me… it enrages me. I even take to writing a lengthy scroll about the lack of ethical treatment of probationary patients by the Doctor. I explain that he should have had obtained expressed permission before sending me deep into whatever hallucinations he was able to mind fuck me with.

I sign it and stare at the thirteen inches of ivory parchment, before I sigh and set it on fire with a lazy Incendio.

I throw myself into the ledgers, lock my door, and drown in paperwork in a desperate attempt to keep my mind from traveling. I am violently on the edge of drowning, and I cling to the mundane work; it’s all that keeps me floating.

George must sense my tension – maybe it’s all the growling, cursing and stomping I’m doing on the short walk from my flat to the door of my office – but whatever the reason, I’m grateful because he stays clear of me.

When the day of my appointment with Brenner arrives, I sit in my flat trembling. I’m suffering from what feels like trauma and the horror of reliving those moments, but more so – for reliving them in front of him. Shame is cloaked over me for letting him see me with my guard down, and I’m fucking terrified he’ll do it again – or worse, that he’ll want to discuss it.

But a small tawny owl arrives and saves me.

Mister Malfoy,

For personal reasons, I will be cancelling our scheduled weekly session. I have explained this to your caseworker, and we’ve agreed to allow you an off week.

I know that you’ve requested to be transferred to a new specialist, and I would ask you to reconsider. I know that these violent and horrific memories are painful to revisit, but I do believe we are making progress. Transferring would do you more harm than good, I believe. Starting your care from the beginning would be a setback, and I’d like to avoid any regression if possible.

I would like to see you next week, if you’re amenable, and we can discuss a treatment plan we are both comfortable with. If you, at the end of our next appointment, find you’re unable to continue in my practice, I will release your case.
On Saturday, I head to the Burrow but I don’t go inside. I wait on the bench for her to see me and after what feels like an eternity, I hear the door creak open.

“You’ve gotten yourself into quite the mess,” Molly notes, wiping her flour-caked hands on her apron.

“You heard?”

“O’course.” She clucks. “She came here right after. Poor girl cried for hours. What on earth were you thinking saying those despicable things?”

My head falls forward, and I catch it in my palms. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me, Molly. Why am I so hellbent on destroying everything?”

There is a moment of heavy, important silence while she considers this. “Did you use?”

I lift my head from my hands and shake it once. Her relieved sigh gives me hope that I haven’t completely fucked my life up, that maybe there is still something worth saving since it’s been one hundred and forty days and I haven’t given in yet.

“Well, for that I am proud of you – but you’re not going to like what’s next,” she says with a shake of her head. I manage to lift my tired gaze to her, my eyes arching in a silent question. “You’re going to have to eat your crow. Apologise, Draco. Just… apologise and mean it. Stop dicking around in therapy–” I chuckle at her obscenity. and she smiles back at me in that way only Molly can that has a way of saying “you poor fool.” “Apologise and get your shit together. Yea?”
“Yea.” I nod, my lips flattening into a thin line.

I leave the Burrow and head straight to her place, my hand hovering over her door for the longest moment while I try to muster the courage to face her. I hear Molly in my ear and rap my knuckles quickly.

The blood whooshing in my ears is deafening, and I want to run, but I know that even if I don’t deserve her… she deserves an apology.

The door opens, and I can’t take my eyes off my leather shoes.

“Malfoy?” her voice is timid – confused, even.

“Granger–” I start at the same time that she speaks.

“I’m not sure this is a good time–”

“I know. I know.” My palms raise to her in a defensive gesture, and I step past her into her flat. “I know it’s been over a week, and you deserved this days ago, but… Gods, I wish I knew what was wrong with me. I had this huge fucking disaster of an appointment with Brenner, and he pushed me, Granger. He pushed me too far, and I know that’s no fucking excuse for what I said to you. I need you to know I don’t mean it.” I still can’t look at her, can’t see the hurt I’ve caused her pooling in her chocolate eyes. “I just – bloody hell, I don’t know what. I don’t have any excuse, but I promise, I’ll never –”

“Stop, Draco.” Her voice is firm, and my heart sputters a few times in my chest, feeling weak from my admissions. “It’s, um, it’s fine. Okay? I mean… it’s not, obviously. But I just – it’s not a good time.”

My brows crinkle, and I finally get the strength to look at her, and I’m dazed for a moment. She doesn’t look like her. Her hair is still wild in all its glory, but she’s wearing a dress. It’s black and wraps around her middle with a full skirt barely kissing the middle of her thighs. Her face looks different too, her eyes more pronounced, fringed by dark, full lashes and her lips painted a rosy hue.
“Wh–”

“I have a date, Draco.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello Lovelies!

It was crickets after the last update and I hope I haven’t lost you all! Would love to know your thoughts!

Thank you as always to my beta Ravenslight. All remaining errors are mine!
Endless Alpha and Beta squees to MHCalamas and Ravenslight, I adore you and every lovely word you write and every comma you delete. I would be lost without you.

Take a look at the end notes, if you don't mind! Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's gonna hurt for a bit of time

So bottoms up, let's forget tonight

You'll find another and you'll be just fine

Let her go

It'll be alright

-Be Alright, Dean Lewis

“I have a date,” she rushes, her cheeks flushing the same shade as her lipsticked lips. She’s fidgeting – her heeled feet shifting weight back and forth while she pulls at her fingers.

The blood drains from my face, and as I open my mouth to speak, my throat goes dry, the words I want to say evaporating before they pass my lips.

“He’s—well, he’s due here any minute,” she explains in a low voice. “I’m sorry; I know we should talk about what happened, but it’s just not a good time,” she repeats for the countless time. My eyes pinch closed in bewilderment as my lips form various shapes trying to make words appear.

“Is this because of me? Because you’re angry at me?” I ask.
“What? Merlin, no.” She scoffs and then winces. “Maybe a little, but not because I’m angry—because I’m not angry, Draco. I’m just… I can’t keep waiting for you to get your shit together. I can’t keep waiting for the next time you fall apart. You’re right: you’re not mine to fix. You’re not my boyfriend, and I need to move on with my life.”

“Granger.” I take a quick step towards her, my chest seizing in hope or despair—I’m not sure which. “Move on with me. My shit’s together, okay? I’m going to take therapy seriously. Really, I am. I didn’t use that night. I know I was bloody close, but I didn’t, okay? You left, and I destroyed them. I’m still clean. I’m still... okay.” I’m pleading with her in a way I never imagined I was capable of, and her eyes dart away from mine; I can see her warring with herself. I close the distance between us and bring my face a hairsbreadth from her, our foreheads nearly touching, and I reach for her hand.

She pulls away, and when her eyes find me again, they are brimming with unshed tears.

“It’s just not meant to be, Draco. I mean, we weren’t—we were nothing. We can still be friends, but this,” she gestures to the air between the two of us, “it’s toxic.”

All I hear is “nothing” and “toxic,” and I concede. After all, she’s not wrong. I am those things. In the grand scheme of her life, I will be nothing. A footnote. A passing paragraph on a toxic almost-bad-decision that never happened.

I suck my cheek between my teeth, swallowing the pain climbing from my belly.

Nothing. Toxic.

I let my eyes wash over face, memorising the curves of her cheek and the freckles sprinkled along her cheek bones. I don’t want to forget what it’s like to see her this close, where friends and lovers are invited. She’ll never let me this close again.

“Okay,” my chest deflates. Her eyes flicker ever so briefly to my lips, and the space between us has a tangible presence. I rock forward on my toes, just barely; my fingers are possessed, tucking a wayward curl behind her ear.

For a moment, it’s before. Before I fucked everything up, when she still looked at me like I mattered. Her cheek leans into my palm for a fraction of a second. Her eyes peer up at me through her too-dark lashes, and I think maybe… maybe I could fix this.
'Knock, knock, knock.'

The trance breaks, and I’m cursing as she steps back quickly, the moment lost.

“I’m sorry, Draco,” she says with a sad shake of her head. “My Floo is open; you can use it when I’m gone.”

She grabs her beaded clutch from the side table and opens the door with a bright smile as they greet each other. Granger smiles shyly, tucking a curl behind her ear, and I can’t fucking stand it. My teeth grind against each other.

There’s a twist deep in my gut, and I realise I won’t be using any fucking Floo. Whoever is there can know he’s coming after me.

I step behind her without permission and watch as her shoulders tense, my eyes falling on a tall blond git that I recognize from Hogwarts. He didn’t hang out with the other Gryffindors, so I think he must have been older, but his face is pissing me off, and I’d like very much to clip him once in the jaw… maybe twice.

“A quiet throat clearing and a barely there grimace prefaces her words. “Cormac, this is Draco Malfoy; he was in my year at Hogwarts. He stopped by unannounced,” she clarifies with a pointed glare over her shoulder, but I don’t take my hooded eyes from this fucker, Cormac.

“Right, uh, nice to officially meet you, mate.” Cormac sticks his stupid palm out to me, and I roll my eyes and push past them both, checking my shoulder into the blond prick with a scowl. It’s horribly immature, and I’m probably better than that… but I don’t give a shit.

On the street, I suck in greedy breaths of the chilly evening air until I’m left panting.
A fucking date.

I should go back to Molly’s. She’ll know what to do; she’ll tell me the right thing, and then I can fix this.

I envision the spot in my mind that I want to be more than anywhere and turn on my heel, gone in a crack.

The Leaky is bustling with young twenty-something wizards this Saturday night, and I push my way up to the bar, shoving past the throngs of idiotic twits smiling and laughing with their mates.

“Firewhisky.” I nod to the barkeep. “Double.” A moment later, she’s sliding it over to me, and I respond with, “another,” as it burns its way down my throat.

Granger’s not done anything wrong. I know that. I know that.

I can’t quell the anxiety rubbing frantically against my skin.

They weren’t nothing; she was lying to herself if she could say they were nothing. If Granger wasn’t stacking books, they were together. They shared meals and book recommendations, for fucks sake; they’d just kissed.

And now, this new curly-headed fuck is taking my— my— bloody hell, there’s no words for what she is… but she’s my something.

Cormac.

What a twatty fucking name.

It dawns on me that he’s a McLaggen, a pure-blood on paper, but he doesn’t run in the circles where that might matter. No, a year ago his name was probably used along with the tag blood-traitor.
I believe he’s wealthy; he’s in no way Malfoy-wealthy, but he’s not a pauper – pretty sure I remember him playing a little Quidditch, though I’m not sure he made the team. Bloke has blond hair, probably earned decent enough marks, and obviously sports a hard on for swotty little bushy-haired witches.

I pale when I realise he’s me in another life. He’s me if my parents had wanted anything for their son other than a life of servitude and torture at the hands of a half-dead monster.

I lift the cheap glass to my lips, letting it hover there, my lids fluttering closed as a pain settles deep in my belly. I can’t stop the images playing behind my clenched eyelids: dinner at some new Muggle spot Granger undoubtedly chose, unless maybe she lets Cormac choose for her. Maybe she’ll let Cormac pick up the tab without a bloody argument over who’s turn it is, even though I could buy her dinner for the rest of her life, and it still wouldn’t make a blip on my vault ledgers.

A familiar yet new dagger of jealousy joins the first when I think about them holding hands outside the restaurant, of him tucking her curls behind her ear and kissing her softly… publically. Things I’ll never get a chance to do.

I down the rest of my double and lift a finger, beckoning for a third.

An hour passes, maybe two. My head is swimming delightfully, and I know my inebriation has hit a new level when I’m bopping my head along to the shit band that’s playing in the corner.

“Mate.” A familiar drawl and a hand claps my shoulder. “You look like you’re drinking with a purpose.”

Blaise is sporting a wicked grin, and I squint one of my eyes to make him right himself. A laugh bubbles past my lips, and I nod over my shoulder at him.

“Yea, the purpose is to forget that Granger is probably getting fucked by some piece of shit Gryffindor right now.”

He takes an easy seat next to me and smirks, shaking his head. “I knew you had a thing for her. Poor fool, you shoulda known better than that.”
I scoff and let the whiskey burn my throat.

“You love her?”

The question sobers me, and my breath gets caught in my chest.

“Fuck no,” I answer, but its weak, and his grin widens, perfect white teeth against his ebony skin.

“Let’s get outta here.” He shakes his head and stands, tugging me from my stool.

“I gotta get home,” I murmur when we make our way out onto the cobblestone, my feet tripping over themselves.

“Not yet, mate.” He claps a hand on my shoulder, and with a crack, we’re gone.

I very nearly wretch on his expensive shoes in the alley Ae’s apparated us to.

“The fuck!” I shove him off me.

“Stop taking the piss, Malfoy. I’m only here to help.”

Everything swirls with the affects of my five firewhiskeys, and as we are ushered past a velvet rope into a crowded club, I can hear the deafening noise of house music.

“Where the fuck are we?” I shout.

“The Steam. It’s a Muggle club, but the girls are easy, and the drinks are strong,” he laughs, leading me towards a booth near the back with another rope around it. He shakes hands with a large Muggle with a thick neck and giant arms, and he lets us pass. We take a seat at the reserved table.

“How’d you find this place?” I ask, my eyes raking over the throngs of sweating Muggles gyrating
on each other in the dark.

“Mum’s flat is around the corner,” he replies as a waiter in her underwear and netted tights drops off a bottle of clear alcohol, various juices, and some glasses. He pours us each a glass, skipping over the juice entirely, and when he hands it to me, he throws me a sly wink. “Bottom’s up, mate. Let’s forget tonight.”

With pursed lips, I nod and take a long drink.

An hour passes, and I’m actually starting to feel better. Blaise and I are reminiscing about the days before everything went to fucking hell. He reminds me of the time he had to kiss Bulstrode on a dare and the time Snape walked in on Pansy and I going at it in a broom closet. The more I laugh and Granger slips farther from my mind.

“Draco?” A high pitched squeal comes from beyond the ropes. It’s the girl with the silky hair, and she’s smiling at me, a red-haired friend trailing behind her.

“Friends of yours?” Blaise smiles at the girls.

“Hardly,” I mumble.

“Well, any friends of Draco’s are friends of mine!” He claps and motions to the guard to allow them to enter.

The two girls fall into our booth, giggling and talking about some nonsense while Blaise fills their glasses with more of the clear liquor and red juice.

I’m hardly able to follow their ramblings, all my focus single-mindedly trained on staying awake.

“You boys having fun tonight?” Tracy’s in my ear, her breath fanning over my face, and I almost flinch from the sudden proximity of her.

“No,” I clip.
“That’s a shame, love. Where’s the girl?”

The girl is bold; I’ll give her that. Her small hands slips over my knee, and my gaze locks onto it as she squeezes lightly, her eyes dancing over my face. She’s pretty, full lips and hair you could probably run your fingers through without getting them tangled in a fight for their life. Her skin is more of a creamy ivory, and she doesn’t have freckles… she’s not Granger.

“She’s not my girl.”

Her lips twitch up in a smile. “Well, her loss is my gain.”

I feel almost violently ill at the way she looks at me. There was a time I would have given my left nut to have a pretty girl throwing herself at me like this, but it feels wrong for reasons I don’t understand, and I want to get home.

“I think I need some air.” She slides out of the booth so that I can pass, and I wave a goodbye to Blaise, who’s already whispering sweet nothings in the ginger girl’s ear.

I stumble and push my way through the crowds. Each body that touches me makes me flinch, and I want to start shoving them off. A deep thrumming bass fills the dark club and it’s steady staccato matches my heartbeat. I almost fall to my feet as the night air rushes against me, and I move away from the crowds at the door, clawing at my chest and pulling my collar away from my neck.

There’s a patch of brick just outside the door, and I rest my back against it, letting my hands rest on my knees as I hunch over.

“You okay, love?”

_Fucking hell._

“Fine,” I snap.
“You’re looking a bit peckish; let me see you.” She steps into me, her thighs between mine and I straighten my spine, letting my head lull back.

She’s too fucking close. I can feel her press against me, and her hands are on the side of my face, brushing my hair back that hasn’t been cut since Granger did it in the attic. I’m avoiding looking at her, keeping my eyes on the people passing by.

I want to get her off me, but I’m way too fucking drunk, and the touch almost feels nice. As long as I don’t look at her. As long as I don’t remember it’s her.

My gaze locks on a couple approaching. The curly-haired girl is sucking on a spoon while the bloke next to her looks down at her with a keen eye. She removes the spoon and laughs, and my body tenses.

Fuck.

They’re just a few paces away, and I’ve got Traci between my thighs, hands on my face. I don’t think as my hands find her slender waist and pull her into me, encouraging her back to arch and her chest to press against me.

Her hands twist into my hair, and I crash my drunken mouth into hers, letting her dart her tongue into my mouth, and I feel her everywhere.

Her touch makes me ill.

She kisses like a drunk, but I suppose I’m not much more graceful, and I let my hands wander down to her velvet covered arse and palm her flesh as she makes a breathy little noise against my lips.

She breaks the kiss, panting, her lipstick smudged.

I turn and see her there, spoon stuck in her mouth and eyes wide, staring at the two of us. Cormac is gaping with his mouth open like a fucking fish, and I wish I could clip him in the jaw just once, but I pull Tracy into me again, my eyes tightening on Granger.
“Oh!” Tracy’s voice is like a tinkling bell, and it grates my nerves. “It’s um, nice to see you again.” She giggles at Hermione and then buries her head in my neck, resting it there drunkenly.

Granger pulls the spoon from her mouth and purses her lips, swallowing her ire.

“Nice, Malfoy.” She scoffs with a sad shake of her head. “Nice.”

She stomps off, and I want to shove this little twit off me and run after her, beg her to forget it all. I want to tell her I’m bloody crazy over her and want nothing more than to make it alright again.

Cormac rushes after her and when he pulls her under his arm and kisses the top of her curls, I feel bile and liquor bubble in my throat.

Blaise finds me hunched over a pile of vomit and escorts me back to his flat round the corner, thankfully abandoning the girls, who look put out at having wasted the end of their nights on us.

“You’ll be alright, mate. You’ll find someone else. You’re Draco Malfoy!” he cheers me on as I collapse onto his couch, hugging my middle while I try desperately to ignore him. “Get some sleep. We’ll have you better in no time – party at Parkinson’s tomorrow. That’ll cheer you up, mate.”

“Fshhmph.” My attempt at “piss off” fails, and with a chuckle, he disappears.

My vision fades deliciously to black, and before sleep finds me, I realize that I’ve just fucking ruined everything.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve spoken to a lot of friends who work in or have personal experience with addiction and as I’m sure we can guess, sobriety is a very slippery slope. Fear not! The recovery and healing are coming but there will be hurdles to jump over.

This IS a Dramione. This WILL be a HEA. But I WILL make him work for it.
Please let me know all your thoughts! I'll scoop them up greedily and hoarde them away with all my other precious things!
I've been drinking
I've been doin' things I shouldn't do
Overthinking
I don't know who I am without you
I'm a liar and a cheat
I let my ego swallow me
And that's why I might never see you again

I'm alone in my head
Looking for love in a stranger's bed
But I don't think I'll find it
'Cause only you could fill this empty space

-Empty Space, James Arthur
mothers blush shamefully… but most of our mothers weren’t here anymore.

I can’t bear to let my mind drift to the evening before. Shame shrouds the parts I can remember, and everytime new memories surface, I flinch away from them – as if I could hide it from myself. No matter what I do, I can’t banish the thought of Granger sucking on that blasted spoon when she realized it was me standing outside the Muggle club with Tracy pressed against me.

Someday long from now, when I want to know when I lost my chance with Granger, I’ll be able to pinpoint it to that moment in time. I suck my tongue between my teeth, making a clucking sound while my thumb tears into skin at my nail bed.

“Enjoying the party?”

Pansy.

“Yea. Thanks for the invite,” I mumble, leaning over the banister of the oversized terrace.

She settles next to me, her arm brushing mine, and laughs. “I didn’t.” She peers over at me with a familiar grin, and I can’t help but smile back. Pansy and Blaise are just as much a part of my childhood as Quidditch and temper tantrums – constants in all the chaos. She grabs my firewhisky and tips it to her lips for a dainty sip before handing it back to me. “Heard you got dumped,” she says, turning to lean her back against the glass.

I scowl. “We weren’t dating.”

“That’s not what I’d heard.”

“Well, it’s what you’re fucking hearing now.” I down the rest of my drink and straighten my spine.

“Settle down, Draco. I’m not judging you or anything.” She rolls her eyes, and with a wave of her wand, she summons a bottle of firewhisky through the crowd of strangers in her flat. She takes the first drink and then offers it to me.

I scoff before following suit. What in the fuck could she have to judge Granger about. Fucking hell,
does she still actually think she’s better than them? The thought is preposterous and comical but I’m running low on allies these days, so I keep my mouth shut.

“You know, Malfoy Enterprises is still waiting for you. The board has been keeping up on it, but that spot is yours when you’re ready. You don’t need to stay in that shitty little office with your sad little flat. That’s…it’s not your world, Draco. You belong here.”

I look over my shoulder and see the drunken wizarding elite – born rich, dying somehow richer. I’m not sure what it is anymore that I want from this pitiful life I’ve mostly squandered, but it’s not this. It can’t be this.

Blaise emerges with a mischievous grin on his face and settles next to Pansy.

“You guys ready to take this lame ass party up a notch?”

“Blaise, do fuck off, will you?” Pansy sneers.

“You’ll be changing your tune soon enough.” Blaise reaches into his robe and pulls out a small violet vial, glimmering with what can only be described as stardust.

I break into a fucking panic, my body needing and rejecting the urge all at once. Breath catches in my throat and I can feel a hot sweat break out over my body, beating the chill of the Autumn air.

“What is it this time?” Pansy snags the vial from him and lifts it to inspect it.

“Dealer calls it Vega. One inhale should do it; two will knock you on your ass.” Blaise winks, and Pansy uncorks it.

I can’t fucking breathe, and I stagger back like someone’s pulled a wand on me, my back crashing into the stone wall that meets the neighboring balcony.

“You okay, mate?” Blaise’s eyes travel me in wary confusion.
I swallow, and it’s like there are chards of glass coating my throat, and I realise this is a war I’m never going to fucking win. I’ll be fighting this battle with this unquenchable need to be numb for the rest of my bloody life.

I don’t want to give in, but gods, it’d feel so good to lose the fight for a moment, for a night. I can’t remember the withdrawal or the pain; all I remember is the way I never hurt when I had Nebula.

A hear a trill of laughter float from inside, and it captures my attention. I search the party for her. She’s not here but the sound is so similar that I let myself hope for a minute; she is the only thing that keeps me tethered to my fragile sobriety.

Granger.

I need to just get to Granger. She’s my new drug, even if she won’t have me. Feeling things for her is worth more than being numb to everything else.

“Merlin, Draco. Hello?!” Pansy is waving her hands in front of my face and placing her palm on my forehead. “You’re more pale than usual and you’re sweating.”

“Sorry.” I blink. “I think I’m ill. I’ve got to go, talk to you later.” I rush from the apartment, feeling the pull of that tiny vial drawing me back. As soon as I can Apparate, I’m in Diagon Alley, panting in relief that I’m away from them. The pull of my addiction lessens the closer I get to her, and I storm towards Flourish and Blotts, praying she has a shift tonight. Even if I can just see from the window, even if I can just…

I round the corner and stop dead in my tracks, frozen in horror as I try to make sense of the scene in front of me.

That McLaggen fucker is tucking a hair behind her ear, leaning in to brush his lips against hers – the lips I kissed just a week ago. Nausea rolls in my stomach when I watch her eyes flicker closed and accept him.

I stumble back, into the shadows where I belong. Forever banished to the outskirts of her life, watching and wishing from the wings.

She’s the reason I pulled myself from that balcony, from that attic. She’s the reason I’ve been strong,
and suddenly... it doesn’t fucking matter anymore.

She doesn’t care about me.

She’s his.

My breath leaves me in sharps gusts, eyes clenched and refusing to acknowledge what I’ve just witnessed. I need to get somewhere that I can feel grounded and safe, but I can’t think of anything other than getting fucking high. My fingers thread through my hair, yanking until the strands come lose between my fingers.

And why shouldn’t I get high? What’s stopping me from enjoying a night with my friends? And it’s not like I’m going to start using everyday or anything… it’s just one night. It’s just one night, and it’s not like there is anyone in the world who cares about me enough to want me to stop.

I feel the tendon in my neck come to life, a feral, frantic need that I can’t ignore any longer. With a sharp crane of my jaw, I bring my palm against my cheek hard enough to leave a mark, enough to try and sober me, but my mind is soaked in firewhisky, and my willpower is shot to hell.

With an ugly snarl that claws its way from my lungs, I turn on my heel and disappear in my own magic.

Vega is different. It doesn’t have the harsh burn that Nebula does; it’s softer, and I don’t feel numb. I feel… fucking hell, I feel happy.

I’m rocking on my heels in laughter as we pass back and forth the firewhiskey bottle from earlier. Vivid memories that I had one time banished, come back to me in new color. I can remember the manor again, before it was covered in Dark Magic and death. Visions of hiding from my mother in the rose bushes while she pretended she couldn’t see my white hair behind the leaves dance through my mind, images of my father watching with a smug grin as I summoned my broom for the first time.
I remember the way Pansy looked on the night of the Yule Ball and how I thought I was going to love her the rest of my life when she let me peel her pretty pale dress from her shoulders.

I can see it all, and there isn’t an allusion to the darkness. The darkness is gone. I can even think of Granger, and it makes me fucking feel again.

I feel a stitch in my side as laughter bubbles past my lips when Blaise talks about his little blonde fraulein in Germany who had quite the domineering personality in the boudoir, often taking to making him kneel on all fours while she whipped his arse like an animal. He swears it was the best sex of his life and that I’ve just go to try it, but I can’t think of anything other than Blaise meowing on all fours like a cat. I can’t stop rocking from laughter, and Pansy claws at my arm as she gasps for breath.

Everything is fucking right again, and I should have known that sobriety wasn’t the answer.

Sobriety is the fucking problem.

Maybe it was just Nebula… Nebula wasn’t right for me, too much of a downer.

This. Vega. This is what I need, everything is glowing and good, and Pansy’s touch on my arm feels like a caress I didn’t know I missed.

She’s familiar and there and that’s enough as I wrap her in my arms and kiss her senselessly. Another pair of lips this week, but these aren’t new. These I’ve kissed a hundred times, and when we stumble into her bed, she laughs when my stubble tickles her neck, laughs again when I trip over my trousers and topple on top her.

It’s clumsy and wrong when I enter her… but it’s also so fucking right. It’s right to want to feel this good, and whoever doesn’t want me to feel like this can’t really give two flying figs about me.

Everything about her skin is velvet and cream and when my eyes close, I’m not with her anymore. I’m in a messy little flat with worn tapestries and too many books.

Driving into her, I feel her small hands wind into my hair, and her breathy little pants hit my ear.
Her hair isn’t silken, it’s curls – messy and wild – and I tug at her tendrils to allow myself access to her neck.

“Missed you,” I murmer against the soft skin at the hollow of her neck, peppering quick kisses there between by thrusts, and she hitches her knee up over my hip. “Missed you so much. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay.” A whisper, and I am relieved. I find her lips again, and they feel off, but they’re here, so I kiss her again.

With a shove of her petite hands, I flip onto my back, and she’s straddling me, but I still when I look up at her, my face paling.

It’s not her.

Not Granger.

Pansy’s lost in herself, pleasure etched in her features as she rides me, her head thrown back, and I want to vomit. My hands are shaking on her hips, fingers squeezing too tight, and I know she thinks they are encouraging, that I want her to bounce harder on my cock that’s quickly falling limp inside her.

Before I’m completely impotent inside her, she slips her hands under the hem of the short dress she’s kept on and touches herself, moaning and shuddering on top of me, and I feel nauseous as she collapses on top of me.

“Sorry, love.” Her voice muffled is by the bedsheets. “I didn’t realize you’d already…” her voice trails off, and she rolls off me in a heap.

I gulp, and I’m sure my skin is green, my stomach in knots, and my limbs weak. The glittering spots of the high are shining too high, blinding me, and I clench my eyes shut, digging the heels of my hands into them.

“Oh shit, are you coming down already?” Pansy props up on her elbow, and I can feel her study me. “Blaise warned it was kind of a bitch of a come down. Just sleep here; you’ll feel better in the morning.”
Her shrill voice is on the verge of making my ears bleed, and I need some fucking silence to keep the bile and whiskey in my belly.

“Gods, put me out of my fucking misery.” I moan, my shirt fallen open, and my trousers and pants long abandoned. A merciless pain sears through my head, and I claw at my skull with my nails.

“Ugh, you’re really killing my high, Draco. I’ll get us Dreamless Sleep.” My head snaps to the side and acidic yellow bile leaks from my mouth burning my throat on it’s exit. “Fucking hell,” she mutters, and I feel the mattress shift under me as I gag again. “I’ll get you double.”

Chapter End Notes

I won't lie, I have been terrified to post this chapter. I hope you, my lovely reader, can trust me to bring this all back around. Things will get a touch worse before they are better but I promise you that I am trying my absolute best to keep it as authentic to a true human experience as I can, and those lines are blurry and ugly and at times, tough to stomach.

I would love to know what you're thinking about the story so far! Your reviews brighten my day more than you could possibly know!
Paralyzed

A/N: Endless gratitude and adoration to myy wonderful Alpha, MHCalamas and Beta, Ravenslight.

All remaining mistakes are surely mine.

When did I become so numb?

When did I lose myself?

All the words that leave my tongue

Feel like they came from someone else

I'm paralyzed

Where are my feelings?

I no longer feel things

I know I should

I'm paralyzed

Where is the real me?

I’m lost and it kills me inside

I’m paralyzed

Paralyzed by NF

Morning slams into me and my eyes squint from the early light streaming in.

“Fuck,” I croak, my throat dry and cracking.
A feminine humming sounds to my left, and I jump as Pansy’s messy bob and parted lips come into focus.

The throbbing in my head grows exponentially at the sight of my ex-girlfriend beside me. What the fuck was I thinking.

“Pansy,” I hiss, sitting on the edge of the bed and reaching for my pants. “What the fuck?” My voice is weak from hangover.

“Shut up, Draco.” Pansy grabs the pillow I was just on and covers her face.

“What the fuck did we do last night?”

“If you can’t figure that out, you’re dumber than I thought,” she groans, her voice muffled by the linens.

“I’m meant to work this morning.” I want to vomit on her floor, but something tells me it won’t be the first time I’ve puked in this room. “I feel like shit.”

“Fuck, you’re annoying!” Pansy sits up and reaches into her nightstand, the sound of fragile glass rolling against each other tinkling in the room. She tosses something on the bed next to me and covers her head again, her feet kicking at my bum to leave her bed.

I eye the vial, the same brilliant shade of violet from the night before and everything else fades away. I lift it gingerly and roll it once, twice, three times – waking the vapors.

I wish there was more of a struggle in coming to the decision, maybe an inner turmoil before I uncork it, but there isn’t. The choice is barely made before I lift the vial to my nostril, snort it harshly, and feel the immediate cool rush of relief wash over my mind.

A dry laugh tickles my throat, and my head lulls back. The pain ceases, and I feel a tingling settle into my tired muscles.

I look back in wonder at the now nearly glowing vial, my high escalating every sense. Vega.
I bring it to my lips and kiss the cool glass, pocketing the rest, and with a renewed kick in my step, I leave for Weasleys Wizards Wheezes.

In the middle of the shop, my eyes rake over the brilliant kaleidoscope of colours blooming in my vision. Bubbles of iridescent colour pop against a too-loud orange backdrop, a fury of people around me, and I swear I can feel their breath against my skin.

The air feels tangible, tickling against the hairs on my neck, and I’m craving touch. Any touch. I turn my palms up and rub them along the length of my forearms, the sensations spreading deep into my bones. I nearly moan from how bloody good it feels.

I reach my fingers out and chuckle dryly as I touch the Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder; it’s cold and hard and feels like obsidian in my palm. Holding it tight, I inspect the ebony facets of its edges and, with a curious quirk of my brow, throw it at my feet.

A cloud of thick smoke erupts from the stone and a horrified scream rips from my throat as I drop to my knees, the black fog enveloping me and the few surrounding patrons.

Panic courses through me; my vision is compromised, and I can feel my heart in my throat. I let my hands run along the dingy tile floor. The smooth surface grounds me, and as the fog evaporates, I pant greedily in relief.

I’m resting on my haunches when my breath finally slows and steadies. My eyes catch on a small habitat full of the most incredible creatures, their small round bodies covered in fur of every vibrant color imaginable. My jaw drops, my eyes widening in wonder.

How have I never seen these before? Or have I?

Maybe I have — I don’t bloody know. But I know they’re fucking beautiful, and I pick one up gingerly, letting it fluff in my palm before it nestles against my skin. I sink to the floor again, this time cradling the pygmy to my chest, and rub my stubbled cheek along its long silken hairs, and I can’t help the giggle when it tickles me back.

“Maaaaalfy.” A familiar drawl interrupts my moment with my new tiny friend, and my eyes make a
lazy crawl up the intruder’s abnormally tall body.

“Blood hell, were you always so tall?” I scoff and snuggle against my fluff again.

“Since about fifteen. Stand the fuck up.” His voice has an evil edge to it, and I gape at him, affronted he would dare to speak to me in such a way.

“Have you seen these? Gods, they’re so adorable.” The little pygmy’s eyes go wide as I hold her up to examine her properly, and I swear her fur doubles in size – just like Granger’s might under scrutiny. I break out into a wild laugh, a nasty cramp tugging at my side as I roll onto the floor.

“Malfoy. I’m not going to ask again.” When I look up at him again, I can’t believe how fucking wiry he is; His limbs are too long, and the contrast of colours on his body are bloody frightening. He’s a nauseating swirl of red and blue and fucking pasty white. His clothes are purple and orange, and it’s offensive to my gaze. I squint, trying to make sense of him.

He growls an obscenity and tears the fluffy fluff from my hands, and I cry out, reaching for her when he yanks me up firmly by my armpit, and in a snap of his clumsy magic, I’m on my sofa upstairs.

I let out an impressed puff of air, my mouth hanging open and give him a clap.

“Bloody brilliant mate.” I smile up at him.

“You’re fucking high, you twat.” He sneers down at me. I can’t stand the negative energy he’s emitting, and in a sudden, visceral movement, I shrink away from him. He’s not safe.

“I’m not high,” I lie with a smug turn of my mouth.

“Yes, you fucking are. And you were in my shop, high as a fucking broomstick physically assaulting my Pygmy Puffs.”
“I assure you, it was consensual.” I try to sound serious, but even the vibration of my vocal chords feels like bliss and I giggle into my hand. “Did you want a hit? It’s not the same, but gods, it’s so much better.” I can feel the bubbling sensation of unbridled happiness coursing through my veins and I can’t think of anything but how fucking good I feel. It’s incredible to feel this way again, and I want to share it with everyone. This wasn't meant to be hoarded; it was meant to be experienced.

It can’t be wrong. Nothing that feels this good could ever be considered wrong.

“I don’t feel empty, mate,” I continue with a grin. “I’m full. I’m whole again. I can feel everything, but with this I finally want to feel it. You gotta try it, mate.” I pull the vial from my pocket, letting it swirl in its glass enclosure between us. He has to see that it makes me happy, that this was what it’s always meant to be like, but his features are tight and pinched together.

“You’ve fucked up, Malfoy. Take the day and sleep it off.”

I barely hear him, barely register he’s leaving until the door slams shut, and I nearly jump out of my skin.

I think I need more.

I pull the stopper off and bring it to my nose, letting the smell of my mother’s rose garden and fresh cinnamon scones overcome me before I fall – fully and incredibly – into oblivion.

I wake on the couch, head throbbing and fuzzy. Thankfully the sun isn’t streaming in; instead, darkness presses in on the windows of my flat. I grind the heels of my palms into my eyes then move my fingers to my temples, jabbing them into the hollows there to try and counteract the incredible pressure that’s built up.

“Merlin’s fucking tits,” I hiss to no one, reaching in my pocket for the vial. The swirl is less obvious, less glittery, and I know its vapours are running low.

I take a harsh snort and feel a twinge of relief, but it’s not enough. It’s not even fucking close. I jump to my feet, grabbing my robe off the couch as I rush through my door, muttering the lock behind me.

A rush of adrenaline mixes dangerously with the last of the vial, and I can’t think of anything else but
The shop doesn’t distract me like it did earlier, and I stomp past the chirping little pygmies and the glowing vials of cheap love potion with determination in each step.

“Malfoy!”

I ignore him. He just wants to stop me, and I can’t stand the thought of anyone trying to get me to stop when I’ve just fucking started. That bloody bell over the door chimes, announcing my exit as I make my way onto Diagon and whip my cloak over my shoulders.

“Malfoy!” Another angry hiss, but this time it’s accompanied by his long cold fingers around my elbow. “Where the fuck are you going?”

“Piss off, Weasley.” I yank my arm back into my possession and shove him away with two hands on his sternum. “You’re not my fucking keeper.”

“Yea? Well you bloody well need one. You’re gonna fuck everything up if you go to Knockturn now, do you hear me? I won’t have you in this shop making a fucking fool of yourself day in and day out. You don’t need that shit. Can’t you see that you have all this?” He gestures wildly around himself, at all that’s his, all of his accomplishments that he seems to let me have a part of.

My brain feels like it’s ringing the last of its juice from its flesh like an orange. It’s collapsing in on itself, dry and useless. I claw at my face, feeling the pull of drugs and the inevitable pit I know I’m jumping into willingly. “It’s not like before,” I lie, mostly to myself, “It’s just for a little bit. Just until I can get through Granger out with that–”

“That’s not how it fucking works and you know it. It’s McLaggen today, but it’s someone else tomorrow, and it’s not gonna be you until you get yourself out of this fucking mess.”

I scoff with a nasty turn of my lips, my feet pacing in front of the shop until I’m sure the stones are flat. “And who says I want it to me?”

His ire seems to weaken. “I know you love her. It’s bloody obvious, alright? But this isn’t the way – she won’t forgive you for this.” George’s hands are jammed deep in his pockets, shoulders hunched, and he’s giving me that fucking look again, the look that says he might fucking care about me, and it makes my stomach roll.
A long moment of heavy and important silence sits between us, and I can imagine how I must look: tousled from passing out on the couch, eyes red from withdrawal, and skin already turning grey like it was before.

“I’m not capable of love.”

As he opens his mouth to stop me, I turn on my heel, disappearing into a swirl of my own that lands me at the corner of Knockturn Alley.

With a paranoid glance over my shoulder, my expensive dragonhide shoes clack against the cobblestone and take me deeper into the darkness.

There’s an apothecary with a sketchy shopkeeper just around the corner, and if he doesn’t have it, he should know where I can get it. I crane my neck from the nasty sound of water dripping onto the street, and above the shops I swear I can hear a baby crying, the sound scratching nastily against my skin. I want to tear it all from my body, rip my flesh from my bones until I’m as raw as I fucking feel right now.

The night is oppressive – suffocating – and I can’t imagine a night that doesn’t feel like it’s swallowing me whole.

Finally the dusty little crimson awning comes into a view, and I let go of a breath I didn’t know I was holding hostage. The store is just as I remember it from when Blaise had dragged me fifth year, desperate for a potion he’d heard of that made girls a little more willing to… well willing to do or be anything you wanted. He’d about jumped out of his skin when he left the shop with it, excitedly telling me that it was his year; he was finally going to shag Daphne Greengrass. Even then, I knew it was horrible taste to drug a girl to get her in the sack, but I had just ribbed him about needing potions when I’d already shagged Pansy the year before.

Now, it makes my stomach churn.

“Hello?” A decrepit, possibly decaying, shopkeeper croaks as he emerges from behind a dark curtain covered in a thick layer of dust.

“Hello, yea. I need some… assistance.” I gulp and pull at the collar of my shirt that feels like it’s strangling me even though it has two buttons undone.
His eyes examine me too closely, and I can feel every inch of his glare on my skin, a violent shiver running down my spine. Sweat beads at my hairline like I’ve come down with a fever, and I frantically wipe it away with the back of my hand.

“What’re you here for?” His knotted and age-spotted hands rest on the class counter, and I can’t help the turn of my lip in disgust.

“Vega,” I choke out. He’ll know.

“Tsk, can’t help you boy.” He turns back towards his hole in the wall, and my hands reach out in an effort to stop him, slapping loudly on the glass that separates us.

“Please! I’m…” I swallow a little bit of useless pride. “I’m desperate.” The words are a ghost of a breath, barely there, but he turns just over his shoulder.

“Vega’s backordered, an issue with a supplier.” He shrugs, like it’s nothing, like he hasn’t just gutted me and left me dying in the fucking street.

“I’ll take anything,” I confess, and even I hate the weak tremble in my voice as my heart clambers up my throat.

His head bobs side to side, eyes narrowing a fraction of an inch. “I’ve got some spare vials of Nebula. Not the same high, but it should get you through.”

“I’ll take it,” I rush, and I don’t even realize what I’ve agreed to until they’re on the counter between us, the icy blue of my old, but not forgotten, friend swirling in its case.

I toss the galleons he requests on the counter, the sound an annoying reminder of my failure. I pocket the vials, but I’m barely out the door before I’m ducking into the nearest dark corner and bringing the first to my nose.

Not too much, I warn myself. I still have to get my ass home before I completely sink into my void. The vapours wrap around my mind, and I feel my migraine slip away, followed by the anxious shake of my limbs. I didn’t even realize how tightly wound my body was until I feel it all relax, almost sleepy. My eyes roll gently back, and I let my head dip onto the wet stone wall.
I can already feel the need for more, but I’m at least conscious enough to know that I need to get home. Apparating is out of the question, so it’s up to me to walk the kilometer back. I stumble from the darkness, feet tripping briefly over each other, but I thankfully right myself before I hit my face, a weak chuckle in my throat.

One foot, then the next. Just one foot in front of the other, and I’ll be home in no time. I let my palm run along the stone of the shops, trailing behind me, grounding me so I can be sure I’m still upright, still moving.

I’m sure I’ve been walking for close to an hour; my legs feel weak from their journey, and I slide down the wall, knees almost knocking me in the face. My eyes glance back up towards the sky, and it’s not so scary anymore, still dark, but I can see a few stars peeking through the clouds.

“Fucking hell, Malfoy.”

I squint up, and silhouetted in the yellow glow of the streetlamp is my redheaded colleague.

“What’re you doing here?” My words are slow, and I can feel the effort it takes to get my tongue, teeth, and lips to work together. “You’re here for drugs?” I blink away the sludgey feeling in my brain, one eye closing to make sense of him.

“This is the second time in one day I’m picking your sorry arse up off the ground, and I swear to Circe it better the be the fucking last… ever.” His hands grip me under my arms, and he lofts me to my feet. When I stumble, he catches me. “What are the odds of you getting splinched if you side Apparate?”

“Um.” My eyes flicker closed, and I lean my weight onto him. “Pretty… pretty… what?”

A string of obscenities trickles past his lips, but I can’t make sense of them, only on the feeling of him dragging my partially limp body down Knockturn Alley.

My conscious goes in and out, but somehow my feet keep walking, keep trudging forward through the endless nothingness of this night.
When I hear the click of the lock on my front door, I fall to my knees.

Out of sheer exhaustion or relief – I’m not sure which – I’m just there, on my knees in an empty victory that feels an awful lot of like defeat.

My nails sink into the plush area rug that I’ve paid way too much money for, crawling my way to my couch.

“This is fucking ridiculous, Malfoy.” The strained efforts of George’s words as he hoists me up aren’t enough to make me feel shame. I feel nothing.

Endless catacombs of nothingness beckon me deeper, higher, lower. Nothing hurts; everything is just that: nothing. And it doesn’t feel good like Vega, but it feels right, and I’m not fighting off the darkness anymore. I just am part of it, woven into the blackest depths of a void that is simultaneously purposeful and senseless.

“I gotta close up the shop.” Disappointment laces in his words, but I don’t mind them.

I focus on making my lips form proper shapes, on pushing the air from my belly through my teeth. “Grrranger,” I manage, and it sounds wrong, but it’s all I’ve got left in me.

I hear him levy a heavy sigh. “I’ll call her.”

When the door closes I flinch, the noise grating against me.

Don’t need more. Don’t need more. Need more.

I know I don’t need it, but I fucking want it. I want to melt into this expensive plush until I’m a puddle seeping through the worn wood floors.

With failing, clumsy fingers I push the cork out of the vial and manage a harsh snort.

Everything fades to black. The last thing I register is the sound of the vial smashing against the wood floor.
There’s a frenzy of panicked voices, and something tugs on my face. Tears are running down my cheeks, but I’m aware enough to know they aren’t mine.

Like a lighthouse in a hurricane, my subconscious locks onto one voice, one beacon in the darkness.

Granger.

She’s fucking here, and I want the muscles in my neck to work so I can look at her again up close. I can’t remember if the flecks in her chocolate eyes are more caramel or honey, and it’s something I can’t live another day without knowing.

All my effort goes to my eye lids as I flutter them open, but my eyes are rolling back. My stomach flutters when I feel her head on my chest, maybe listening for sounds of life, but for a moment she’s a lover cradled in my arms, resting for the night.

“Goddamnit, Malfoy.” Her voice doesn’t sound like hate, it sounds like worry and love and her sobs are breaking something in me. “You’ll choke on your vomit.”

I don’t deserve you. You don’t deserve this.

She’s pulling me up, her small hands wrapped around the back of my neck, and I want to help her, want to do whatever it is that she’s trying to will my body into doing, but I fucking can’t. Fucking can’t.


She manages to roll me, and I realized that was her plan all along when I hit the floor with a thud, one arm trapped under me.

The air all around me shifts as she lays down next to me on the carpet, a foot away but face to face. I
fall back asleep to a lullaby of her broken cries and her hand wrapped around mine.

My conscious stirs when I hear Granger and George talking in hushed voices near the door.

“Is he gonna be alright?”

“He’s seen worse,” Granger’s meek voice offers, and I know she’s looking at my broken form, mouth hanging open and drool falling out.

“I’ll stay with him. Go on home.”

“No,” she interrupts in a rush. “No. I’ll stay tonight.”

“I’m across the hall, okay?”

I can hear her muffled cries against his shirt, and I imagine him holding her through her pain. That job was mine over a pan of lasagna just days ago, but I’ve resigned from my post. I’ve given it to those more worthy.

I’m stored with her other lost things now: recipes and perfume bottles, books and photo albums. Memories that hurt too much to face alone.

Weary, I stir from my dreamless sleep. My mouth is dry and coated in a metallic film that makes my stomach churn. I can feel the weight of several bad decisions deep in my bones, and while everything is hazy, one thing is clear.

My eyes peek open to find Granger in her normal state, curled in on herself on an armchair with a
mess of curls on her shoulders.

Guilt slams into me, and it’s heavy on my shoulders, armour I desperately want to shake off.

I push myself up to sitting position and rest my head in my shaking palms, a dry cough escaping my ravaged throat.

She jumps in her seat, wand drawn and pointed at the door. With a few blinks she’s back here with me.

“Malfoy.” Her voice is dazed but drenched in worry.

“Granger. I’m—” My voice shakes, and I purse my lips tightly. I can feel a well of hot tears form at the corners of my eyes, and I hate that she’s about to see me cry. “I’m so fucking sorry. I swear, it’s not going to happen again. I know I’m not coping.” There they are. The traitorous tears are sliding down my cheeks and without lifting my head, I know she’s moving. She’s crouching between my knees, and my hands move to rest on either side of her face, cradling her curls in my unworthy fingers.

My forehead drops to rest on the top of her head, and I can feel her silent cries vibrate through her body. My tears are falling onto her lap, and she lifts her face to examine me, her fingers wiping away the hurt. Even if she didn’t have a wand, I’d know she was magic by the way she can heal me with a look.

“I’m so sorry. So sorry. Sofuckingsorry.” I’m muttering, and it’s almost nonsensical and definitely repetitive as she wipes away the tears that continue to fall.

“Shhh, shhh. You’re okay, Malfoy. You’re gonna be alright.” She’s reassuring me over my sobbing, and I slide from the couch, draping my arms around her and crushing her to me. I’m surprised when her arms squeeze around me, and I feel her rub a soothing pattern against my spine. “You’re okay. You’re okay, Malfoy.” Her mantra.

When I release her and take her cheeks in my hands, I’m purpose-driven and strong. “I’m done. I promise, okay? That was the last time. I know it was a fucking awful mistake, and you don’t deserve it, don’t deserve any of this. I’m going to be better for you. I promise.”
Her eyes flicker closed, and the pads of my thumb push the tears from her freckled cheeks.

“Good. I want–” She gulps and doesn’t meet my eye. “I want you to be better, Draco. That’s all I want. I hope you know that.” She turns her face from grasp, and it’s colder when her touch is gone. “It just can’t be for me. You need to be better for you.”

My eyes tighten as anger flashes briefly across my face, my teeth baring for a moment. “Of course it’s for you. I’d do anything for you–”

“Exactly! You can’t… I can’t have that much pressure on me. I can’t know that I’m the crux of your sobriety, that anytime we disagree or you get frustrated you go might go off the rails. You need to get better, be well, and be whole again. But–” she sucks in a breath that cracks in her chest. “–it can’t be for me. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?” I feel my brain pulsing, angry in it’s need for relief. The spare vials in my pocket are calling to me. It’s like the lighthouse has turned off its light and the Nebula tossed out a life vest, a final attempt to keep my head above water.

“I can’t be here for you like this anymore. You can’t call me when you’re too high–” her words are tumbling out frantically – she’s rehearsed them already. She’s already decided. “I can’t show up to clean up your mess. You were right; there are things about me that are still broken, and this isn’t helping.”

“But I’m telling you it’s not going to happen anymore, Granger. You can believe me! I wouldn’t–” The waves are pulling me under and I’m reaching out for her. She has to know what she fucking means to me. “If I knew we were together, then I would never. I wouldn’t have used this time, but I was so fucking upset about your date, and I just lost it. But I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t.”

“No, Draco.”

“Please!” I cry out, my heart stuttering and failing again and again in my chest. “I need us. It’s… it’s all I have.”

She closes her eyes in pain, her hands traveling up to shield her face. I can see how much it hurts her to have me beg, but I can’t stand to do anything else. I fucking need her. If it’s not her, it’s drugs. There is nothing else.
Her shoulders stiffen and straighten, and she raises her tear stained face to mine. “No. I can’t be all you have. Can’t you see that? It’s not healthy for either of us, and I need to find something other than fixing broken things. I need… I need you to want more for me than just being the girl you call when your high goes wrong.”

My mouth falls open and there are a million more pleading words I want to say, but she’s right. I want more for her than this. More than me.

I nod sharply, and I see her breathe a sigh of relief that I’m done fighting. She clasps her cold hands on my cheeks and leans her forehead onto mine, a farewell.

“Can I tell you something?” She whispers in the quiet moment of our parting.

“Yes,” I croak with a harsh voice.

“I don’t know if it will hurt or help.”

My shoulders rise and fall. “Say it anyway.” I’ll take anything she has to say – even if it destroys me.

The moment stretches on for awhile, and I can see tears stripe her cheeks through my wet lashes. “I think… I think I’m in love you.” The words hang for a moment between us, and the breath I suck in is staggered. It hurts. It hurts more than it helps. Her slender fingers dig into the flesh at the back of my neck, pulling me impossibly closer. “Leaving right now is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do. I don’t know how to leave you after I’ve just found you. But I need you to know that—” She sucks in a desperate breath, pressing her forehead harder against mine. “—that you healed a lot of my broken pieces. Knowing you and loving you… you fixed pieces of me that I didn’t realize were broken.” Her mouth puckers and twists, trying to bite back her sobs and failing. I can see the effort it’s taking her, and I want to take it all away. “You taught me how to laugh again, and I’m so fucking sorry I couldn’t be that for you. I wanted so badly to be the one who could fix you too.”

I feel the pain of her confession everywhere, consuming me, weighing me down until I can’t fight for air anymore. I want to tell her how she’s fixed me – or that she’s fixing me, rather. How she’s the only one who makes all this worth doing anymore, but she’s already asked me to stop. She’s asked me to care enough to let her go – who am I to deny her anything?

There’s hesitation in her touch, but with shaking fingers, she lifts my face. I can’t bear to meet her gaze, and I let my eyes travel along the swell and dips of her mouth. Her lips hover over mine.
This will break me.

Fuck it. It’s all broken anyway.

I let her come to me, let her give me her kiss so I’m not taking anything she can’t afford to give, and her lips are hungry as they press against mine. My hands dig into her waist, bringing her closer, memorising the feeling of her body flush against mine. I wish I could just keep her here. I can taste the salt of our tears on my lips and I wonder if she can taste the drugs on mine. I feel her whimpering in all the wrong ways as we kiss for the last time and it wrecks me.

When she tears her mouth from mine, I keep my eyes trained on the floor between our knees. I’m too ashamed to look up and see all the hurt I’ve caused her. I feel her lips on my cheek, then again on my forehead, but I remain hunched, head hung in defeat.

“Goodbye, Malfoy.” Her words are a whisper against my skin and when she leaves, it’s tangible, clinging to my body like a wet woolen cloak and I’m dragged deeper into the abyss that I’ve spent my entire fucking adult life trying to crawl out of.

For a few moments, I allow the grief to overwhelm me, letting angry sobs claw their way out as I break apart. Eventually, they subside, the crashing waves reduced to gentle swallows.

There’s no hesitation as I bring the vial to my face with a shaking hand.
Lost in a Moment

A/N: Endless hugs, handclaps and internet kisses to my Alpha, MHCalamas + Beta, Ravenslight. They are too good to me! All remaining errors are surely mine.

This may be the last sunset I'll see
So I'll take it in, I'll take it in
This may be the last air that I'll breathe
I'll breathe it in, I'll breathe it in

-Lost in a Moment, NF

The days that follow don’t make sense. They’re broken and disjointed; I can’t make sense of when one ends and the next begins.

I pass out anywhere that’ll have me, and I find that I miss my attic at the Burrow. It was a hole in the wall, but at least I knew where I would be waking up after the next bender. Once, I wake in the Manor and destroy the room with my bare hands. Deep gashes make a home in my hands and forearms, and glass bounces back at me when I bring my mother’s china to rubble at my feet.

Another time, I wake in a toilet stall at the Leaky, my face pressed against a porcelain toilet, and I don’t have time to register how fucking disgusting it is before bile spills out of me, hitting the water and splashing back at me.

The only thing that helps this inescapable longing is that Nebula takes everything else away. If I miss her, the solution is simple. If I think too much, there’s a remedy. The answer is always Nebula, and it’s dangerous how easily I slip back into my bad habits like they’re my favourite robe.

I don’t go to the shop, not even back to my flat. George’s pale, disappointed face would only piss me off, so it’s best I just stay away.
I’m desperately low on vials, but my pocket change is even scarcer. I need to pop into Gringotts, but the nasty tendon in my neck is screaming at me for a hit. Everything about this addiction is fucking angry and visceral, dark and consuming. I want to put my hand into the brick outside of the bank just to fucking feel something again.

That’s the strange thing about the highs: the numbness is terrifying and comforting all at once and I can’t bring myself to come up for air long enough to feel things again – the tremors rock through my body, the nausea surfaces, and I have to dip under the waters again.

With anxious eyes, I make my way through the entry of Gringotts. Everything feels too big, the goblins in their high chairs and the pillars adorned with ornate statues, their blank stone eyes following my every step.

I run a nervous hand through my greasy hair and step up to the first teller I can find, the small creatures startling as he catches a glimpse of me. I might be the first Malfoy in a century to use a booth and not the private teller linked to the higher-end accounts.

“May I help you?” he croaks, peering down a crooked grey nose at me.

“Withdrawal. Malfoy.” I wrap my arms around myself to fight off the cold of the bank, the marble emanating a chill that sinks into my bones.

“Your wand, sir.” The goblin’s eyes narrow behind his half-moon spectacles, and he holds his knobby fingers out for my wand. Panic courses through me, and I’m not sure if it’s paranoia or intuition, but I step back from the desk, my eyes appraising the sketchy little creature. “Sir, it’s policy.”

“What are you on about?” I accuse, my eyes darting over my shoulder nervously.

“Sir?” His beady eyes go wide, and I reach for my wand, though not to hand it to him. I can feel dozens of eyes on me, and I swear I’m about to hex every last one.

Drawing my wand, I point it at the goblin who’s tried to steal my wand and then at every last fucker who dares to watch. I’m trying to think of a spell when I hear someone whisper, “The Aurors are on their way.”
My throat goes dry, and I stumble backwards, falling on my arse with my palms barely catching me.

“Nonononononono,” I mutter, scrambling towards the exit without my galleons. I swear I can hear the crack of Apparition around me and I dip into the crowds, trying to remember how to Apparate. I just need my vials, and then my head can stop fucking pulsing. I’ll be better then.

Shoving through the throngs of people shopping this afternoon, I fall to my knees time and time again.

Almost there.

Almost to Knockturn.

My eyes are watering from the light as my withdrawal swells, ready to consume me. and I vomit outside Ollivander’s, my nails dragging against the cobblestone as I push the emptiness in my stomach onto the gravel.

There are people everywhere, whispering and pointing at me like an animal. When my cheek hits the stone, my mind travels to the circus.

Mother took me once – I sat in the very best seats, eating the very best sweets from the trolley. We watched the magical beasts and the acrobats, the vibrant swirling colors that, to my young eyes, felt unreal. A different kind of high.

Near the end of the performance, a giant Nundus was wheeled out from behind the draped red curtain. The cage was elaborate, and I remember thinking how lucky he was to have such a beautiful home to call his. But the ring leader jabbed him with his wand, and I had flinched as his feral snarl filled the tent.

I am that animal now: watched and prodded by my addiction, answering to it's every fucking whim.

I come to when I feel a rough hand grip the collar of my robes, yanking me up until my worthless feet find ground beneath me, and my knees buckle, dropping until they hit the earth and a sharp pain slices up my spine.
I’m gargling unintelligible obscenities, my eyes flickering open and closed as bursts of light and frenzy settle into my vision.

“Bind him,” a familiar voice calls over my head, and I squint up at the one causing all the ruckus.

I roll my head back to follow a flash of ginger hair. “George?”

He kneels in the dusty earth before me, resting his forearm across his knee, and his icy blue stare locks onto mine. Through sheer determination of will, I force the Earth to stop spinning for a moment so I can make sense of him.

Not George.

Uglier.

“You wish you were so lucky, Malfoy.” Ron snorts in my face, his eyes raking over my face while his lips are curled into a disdainful little sneer. His stubby tongue darts out to wet his lips, and I swear he seems fucking cheerful to be the one arresting me. “You, Mister Malfoy—” He says my title as if he’s doing me a favor, and I want to headbutt the bastard until his feet are just another part of the dusty gravel between us. “—are under arrest.” He leans in closely, his mouth near my ear and whispers only to me, “You have no idea how happy I am to say those words, you fucking prick.” He pushes upright, towering over me with a cocky grin and pockets his wand. “Under the Minister’s Decree of 1913, you are not obligated to speak without a solicitor present. Anything you say will be recorded and possibly presented as evidence in any subsequent trial. Is there anything you’d like to say in your defense?”

The two Aurors tug at my arms, locking my wrists together with a set of manacles that tighten each time I struggle. I bare my teeth as I’m ripped back up to standing. I try to ignore the throngs of people staring at the altercation, instead focusing only on the pleased twitch of Weasley’s lips when I remain silent.

“I didn’t think so. Book him.”

My head throbs, and I swear it’s not possible for the manacles to get any tighter around my bony wrists, but I stay as still as I can to avoid the possibility.
I’m about to be thrown in Azkaban, and I can only think of two things. I never got to get high one last time… and I never got to see Granger again.

The second pains me more than first.

There’s a strange thing about an ending, when the door really closes and you’re forced to turn and walk away. It’s bittersweet. It fucking hurts deep in your bones, a physical cracking in your chest that you can’t ignore. But at least it’s over. At least it’s the worst it can ever get.

I think back to a few weeks ago, when I thought I’d hit the bottom. When I was sure I’d swan dived into the rocks and couldn’t get lower than that… but here I fucking am, strapped to a metal chair in a bland, windowless room unable to move through my withdrawal.

My neck twitches, and my muscles are tweaking. I fucking need to get high. How do they not get it? Why do they think it’s a choice anymore?

Just kill me. Put me out of my fucking misery once and for all. I’ll snog a Dementor at this point, let them rip the soul from my body, if I can just leave this rotten existence once and for all.

The door creaks open, and my frantic gaze falls on the same ugly face from earlier. Ron.

“Hullo, Malfoy!” he chimes cheerfully, depositing a cup of cheap tea in a paper cup in front of me and sipping happily from his own as he takes a seat. His face blanches, but I see the twitch of a smile on his gaping mouth. “Oh, shit. You can’t drink can you? With your wrists bound up like that?” He clucks, his tongue popping against his cheek. “Horribly bad taste to bring you the tea, mate. Sincerely.”

I keep my face impassive, internalizing all the horribly illegal things I want to do to his brutish face.

His teasing grin fades, and he straightens his spine, all business in his cheap matching shirt and tie that I’m sure he picked up as a set from some bargain bin in the bad end of Diagon. “I’m here to explain your charges, Malfoy.” With a flick of his wrist, a hefty yellowed file is summoned between us, and he flips it open near the end. “Are you aware of the parameters of your probation as mandated by your trial in October?”
“Yes,” I manage through a tight jaw, the harsh light over us causing swelling bubbles of white heat as I stare at him, but I won’t let him see me back down.

“You are aware, then, that you are required to stay sober from any illegal drugs?”

“Yes.”

“You are also aware that you are required to attend weekly counseling until your court-appointed healer has released you from their care with a written statement to your caseworker?” He doesn’t look up, just reads the words laid plainly for him.

“Yes.”

“You failed your drug test upon your arrest, and according to Brenner, you’ve not shown up to your scheduled appointments in three weeks, although it looks like the first was excused.” He summons a quill then. “Where have you been for the last two weeks?”

“Getting high.”

His eyes finally drag up and land on me, flashing with amusement for the briefest of moments. “You ready to go to Azkaban, Malfoy?”

“Will you be there?” My voice is raspy from lack of water, sleep, and food, but I manage to kick a little charm behind the words.

“No.” He snorts.

“Then sure. Sign me the fuck up.”

Weasley chuckles and closes the file, sliding it across the table, and he leans across the table at me. “I wish it were up to me. Honestly, I do. I wish I could march you down to Azkaban right the fuck now.”
“Don’t give up, Weasel.” I smirk. “That promotion from Junior Auror must be right around the corner. Maybe then they’ll let you do something other than arrest druggies who are already passed out in the dirt.”

The amused glint in his eyes vanishes, and I can see rage blooming in his bulbous features. It gives me a shard of joy in this nightmare. At least I was able to rile up Weasley one last time, I think to myself.

Weasley runs his tongue along his teeth, the skin around his eyes tightening slightly. “The day is coming very soon that you are going to be marched in the front doors of Azkaban. Hear me when I say that I will be the one handing you over, and I’ll be sporting a grin on my face.” His chair scrapes against the cheap tile, and I flinch from the noise as he grabs my file from the table. “Someone’s here to see you,” he announces as he rips the door open.

My head hangs against my chest for a moment; it stole all my energy to keep my shit even somewhat together in front of that red-headed fucker. I don’t know the last time I’ve had a proper meal, not sure when I last even had a drink that wasn’t Firewhisky.

The door clicks closed, and my head rolls to the side, eyes prying open.

“Mister Malfoy.” Brenner stands just inside the doorway, my file tucked under his tweed-clad arm, his head tilted sadly. “It’s been too long.” He tosses the file on the metal table, and the resounding crash makes me jump.

“Did my fruit basket not make it?” I squint at him before letting my head rest again, but my arms jostle slightly, and I feel the binds close in on my wrists again.

“Funny. Always funny.” The chair scrapes again, and it sets my teeth on edge. “Do you think your particular set of humour will see you through a very long stint in Azkaban? Because I’m sure you realize that your suggested sentence was ten years with a chance for parole after five. Are you prepared to do that kind of time?”

I manage to lift my head, look at him squarely again for the first time in weeks. “What do you want from me?”

He seems to consider the question fully for a moment, and when he responds, he leans forward and speaks with such intensity that I almost believe him. “I want you to get better. I want to help you get
better.” His eyes flash with… hell, I don’t know, vulnerability? And his gaze darts to his hands. “I made some mistakes in your care; I’m humble enough to admit that.” He leans back in his chair, crossing his arms to reveal his suede-patched elbows. “My line of work demands that I leave my prejudices at the door. I’m not sure I did that. As a Muggle-born helping in the rehabilitation of Death–” he lets out a resigned sigh “–of reformed Death Eaters, I have found myself tested in many ways. Not to say I didn’t want to help you, but when met with your particular brand of smug self-righteousness, I think I did you a disservice.”

I gulp as I watch him remove his square glasses and clean them on his wool sweater. “Did you come all the way here to say that?”

He perches his glasses back on his long nose and leans forward again, a smile ghosting his lips. “No. I’m here to vouch for you, if you can believe it.”

“Vouch for me?” My mouth makes the words but I can’t quite seem to understand what he’s saying.

“As your therapist, I have a bit of clout in these matters. I’m willing to professionally recommend that you be released back into the care of your caseworker under certain stipulations.”

I snort. “Of course. And what are these stipulations?”

“They’re not a trick, Draco. I want you to stop using drugs. Really stop. You’ll do a week in St. Mungo’s in their detox unit. After that, you’ll return to work, to your flat, and you’ll resume therapy, this time bi-weekly.”

“Why?” My voice is a mix of disbelief and disgust. I don’t understand what his draw is to help me, and that’s what makes me distrust him.

“There’s more to you than you let on, Malfoy. Our last session, as disastrous as it may have been, revealed more than you know. I think I can help you, and I’m not ready to give up on you. But that means you need to be a participant in your therapy, and I mean really participate in it. You need to follow my plan for your care and stop being so bloody hostile. You need to separate yourself from people who are going to drag you back down to the bottom. Because this? This isn’t the bottom yet. The bottom is Azkaban with no way out, and you’re really fucking close, Draco.”

I swallow thickly as I regard him. “What if I refuse?”
He throws his hands up in surrender. “Then you go to fucking Azkaban, and that’s it. Because even if you go in and last five to ten years, your life will never be whole again. You’ve got a chance right now, and I’m imploring you to take it, to take ahold of your own life for fucking once. For years you have let others dictate what’s best for you; you’ve followed orders and taken the easy way out. This is the time when you get to decide what’s right for you and let go of all that bullshit from your childhood. And listen, I know it’s fucking terrifying, okay? I know that choosing to get better is a hell of a lot more work than letting it swallow you whole, but I believe in you, Draco. And I’m here to help you.”

I stare at his messy hair and somehow still smudged glasses. I can see that he gives a shit about me, but it doesn’t scare me like it did before. It lights the fire in my chest that I was sure had gone out years ago.

“Okay.”

A/N: I covet all your thoughts and would love to know each and every one! Thanks for reading and reviewing, it means the world to me.
Young and Beautiful

A/N: Thanks as always to MHCalamas and Ravenslight, my wonderful Alpha and Beta. I am better when you’re with me!

Will you still love me

When I'm no longer young and beautiful?

Will you still love me

When I've got nothing but my aching soul?

Young and Beautiful by Lana Del Rey

I think about the power of a muscle. About the way a small strip of flesh in my neck has the authority to drive me to my knees, crumbling me until I’m a wreck of nothing. As my mind wanders – eyes closed – I concentrate on the angry twitch in my throat and my finger taps incessantly in my open palm.

“Tell me what’s going on.” Brenner’s voice cuts through my reverie, and my eyes snap open. I want to cuss him out, want to cut him down until he feels like I do, but something inside me stops me. Not only did I make promises, but I also know this is my last chance. There’s nothing but Azkaban after this, and I’ve got to make some kind of change.

I swallow thickly, my eyes trained on his scruffy face. “I don’t know how to describe it. I don’t like talking about this.”

“I know it’s uncomfortable. It’s a common misconception that these sessions are pleasant for me. It’s difficult to watch you be forced into vulnerability, and I don’t enjoy it.”

“Why do you do it?” My voice is clear, pad of my finger tracing the lines of my palm.
His brow furrows in contemplation, and he closes his notebook in his lap. “I believe in the process. Believe in the power of the human spirit and its ability to overcome psychological trauma with proper treatment.”

I snort. “And you think that’s what I have? Psychological trauma?”

“Don’t you?”

“No.” The answer is almost a laugh; I’m in disbelief.

“Tell me.” He leans forward, elbows resting on his knees as he studies me. For maybe the first time, I’m able to meet his eyes. “Why are you here?”

“Court—”

“Court-ordered. Right, but what’s wrong with you? Why do you need therapy?”

My eyes tighten at his words, and the answer is so simple that I’m not sure why he’s asking it in the first place. “Because I’m an addict—”

“Wrong.” He tosses his notebook on the counter, and the resounding smack makes me jump. “No. That’s how you’ve been self-medicating. That’s how you’ve been treating what’s wrong with you. That’s how you forget what’s wrong. Now, dig in and tell me. What’s wrong with you?”

“There’s nothing fucking—” I start to argue, but he shuts me down before I can.

“Stop. Tell me.” He’s almost out of his chair, his words emboldened with desperate passion, and he’s pushing me again, but this time it almost feels like pulling, and I snap. “Admit it to yourself, Mister Malfoy. What’s wrong with—”

“Because I’m fucking broken!” I take no break from my confession, the words spilling out of my mouth before I can even think them. “Every fucking person who was ever meant to love me, to give a shit about me, has used me, abandoned me… died. How am I supposed to think anything of myself when they didn’t?”
“Who are they?” His hazel eyes are locked onto mine, and I’m not sure that safe is the right word, but I feel like I’ve opened a tap that I can’t turn off.

“My parents. My teachers. Granger. They… they don’t fucking care if I end up rotting in a ditch; they don’t care what happens to me at all. Why should I?”

“Stop. Change that sentence, flip it. Why should they care, if you don’t?”

“Because I cared, Brenner! I cared enough about my parents that I almost killed someone, that I ruined the rest of my life and they—they—” I can feel the familiar torment of tears welling up in my chest, my sinuses pinching and a prickle at the corner of my eyes. “Everyone leaves.” I sniff. “Everyone has a limit and that limit is me, apparently.”

Brenner peers over his glasses at me, giving a sad shake of his head as he rests his palm on the table between us. “Your happiness is not conditional on other people.”

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“You owe it to yourself to pursue happiness. You don’t have to ask for approval for it from anyone else. You don’t have to rely on them for it. You are the architect of the rest of your life.”

“Bullshit.”

“Bullshit?”

“Yeah, mate. Fucking bullshit. I can march out of here and snort a vial of Nebula until I can’t form thoughts, then? If that makes me happy?”

“Absolutely. Draco, you are have the beautiful freedom of choice. Your life is yours to command. What you don’t have is freedom from the consequences of those choices. You, just like every other member of society, are obligated to answer to a set of rules established by said society. If you ask me? You’ve gotten really fucking lucky when it comes to those rules.” He chuckles to himself, and even my lips pull up into a smile at his uncharacteristic curse. “I will admit that I am not a man who really believes in a higher power or a universal omnipotent force driving mankind forward. But you?
You almost make me believe.” I snort and my eyes flicker back in my skull. “Seriously. How many chances can one bloke get? Something, someone, wants you to succeed. Don’t disappoint them.”

Having thoroughly drowned me in his words, he sits back, folding his hands over his chest and staring at me like he’s just pushed his queen against my king. Checkmate.

My silver eyes bore into him. My mind travels to the nasty things I could say, to the ways I could rip him down, but I don’t.

“I’m doing my best.”

It’s been almost three weeks since I’ve returned to my flat. My hands are trembling as I stand outside the giant purple building, staring up at the ugly animatronic face of the Weasley twin.

A pop sounds behind me, and I nearly jump from my skin.

“Did you need a tent?” George’s cheerful voice chimes in my ear.

“What?”

“Well, you’ve been standing out here so long I figured maybe you might want to consider sleeping arrangements.” He steps around me, eyeing me down his nose with a scrutinious glare. “How was detox?”

“Hell,” I respond without missing a beat. “I’m—” I swallow the knot of shame in my throat. “I’m sorry. I—”

“I know.” I meet his gaze, and his blue eyes are softer than I ever would have expected.

“Can I have my job back?” I manage, my lips pursed in a flat line. I could turn around and head
downtown. I could march proudly into Malfoy Enterprises and take my massive corner office with one hell of a view. But I’m not there. I’m here. Outside Weasley’s Wizards Wheezes and praying by the mercy of whatever deity has adopted me that I still have a fucking job.

“You never lost it. Gods, do you know how many times would I have had to fire Fred if going on a bender was enough to lose your job?” He shook his head with a sad smile painted on his face. “But this is your last chance, mate. You show up fucked out of your mind again and you’re done. Yeah?” His brows are arched up, and I can tell I’ve vastly underestimated the amount of people in my corner.

“Yeah.” I nod. “Thank you.”

“Ah, don’t stress.” He claps a strong palm against my shoulder in that way he does. “You’ll find a way to repay for me for my incredible kindness and generosity. It might be in closing the shop on Saturday… or every Saturday for the rest of my life. You know, whatever.” His eyes flash with mischief, and his lips tug into a sideways smile.

“Just so happens my Saturdays are clear for the foreseeable future.”

“I would never have guessed.” He grins. “Go on, your ledgers await!” He shouts loftily, and with a turn of his heel, he Apparates away.

“Tell me about your relationship with your mother.”

I feel an icicle form through my vertebrae, straightening my spine with an icy chill. “My mother is dead.”

“What was she like when you were a child?”

“It was—” I rest my forearms against my thighs, dragging my palms over my face. “It was fine.”

“Can you tell me more about her?” He tilts his chin, and I let go of the breath I’m holding.
“She was very beautiful. Charming and vivacious. Everyone who met her loved her, and she just… she had an air about her. Aristocratic.”

“You’ve just described how people saw her. How was your relationship with her? Were you close?”

My lips fall open, about to speak, but the words catch in my throat. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

Truthfully, my mother was the closest person to me that I can recall from before the war. She was the kindest or, rather, the least cruel… but close? Not close like Molly, not like Granger.

“She just was.” I shrug.

“Did you go to her with everyday problems? With large problems?”

“No,” I clip with a shake of my head.

“Why do you think that is?”

His questions are probing and exhausting, but I still feel compelled to answer them. Something about saying the answers out loud seems to heal a little crack inside me. It’s not enough to fill the chasm, but it’s something.

“I don’t think she cared,” I reply after a few moments of silence.

“She was your mother. She carried you, presumably nursed you, raised you. Why do you think she didn’t care?”

“Well, she obviously didn’t care.” I laugh. “The amount of times that the woman watched me get tortured, I think it’s pretty clear she didn’t really care.”
Brenner scratches a few long sentences on the parchment of his notebook as he speaks. “So, you didn’t care when Miss Granger was tortured in front of you?”

A red flame flashes around the edges of my vision. “What?” I hiss.

He peeks up at me over his thick glasses; his eyes are particularly green today in his patchwork sweater, and it’s fucking bothering me. “Is that your line in the sand? If you see someone tortured and do nothing, you don’t care?”

“I don’t understand the question.”

He lets out an exhausted sigh, “Did you care when Miss Granger was tortured in your dining room?”

“Of course.” I huff. “What kind of question is that?”

“Why don’t you believe that your mother might feel the same?”

“She would have done something.”

“Then why didn’t you?”

“Why didn’t I what?”

“Why didn’t you do something?” The question confounds me. I can’t make sense of the scenarios in my head. I know the two are related, but they seem galaxies apart, and I can’t connect them.

“I would have died if I did something—”

“Maybe your mum would have died.” He shrugs.
“I was her son.” The words in the past tense tug at something heavy and shattered inside me that I don’t really to go near but it’s hurts anyway.

He closes his notebook and tucks it between his thigh and the chair, speaking low just to me. “I never met your mother, can’t speak for her or her motivations. But I will be a bit candid, maybe a bit unprofessional. I have a daughter.” He looks over his shoulder and points towards a picture on a shelf behind his desk. The girl is maybe four, straight brown hair and matching eyes. “You feel a new kind of love when you meet your child. It’s suffocating and liberating and all-consuming. There are few things I can imagine worse than watching my beautiful baby girl endure a Crucio time and time again.” His teeth cut into his bottom lip, and a quiver sets into his jaw. “But leaving her? Dying and never getting to know that she came out of that spell, that she moved on and survived? I imagine that’d be worse. Is it possible maybe she couldn’t stand the thought of leaving you?”

My throat goes dry, and I shake my head. “I think you’re reaching.”

“Eh, maybe.” He smiles back at me. “Being a parent changes things. Makes you hopeful where once you were hopeless. There is nothing like a parent’s love. Nothing. It’s impossible to understand even if you’re the keeper of it. I am sorry, though, that you were disappointed by your mother’s actions.”

I nod, unable to tell him that disappointed doesn’t begin to fucking cover it.

It’s Sunday again before I know it. I’m sitting on my little expensive couch, staring at a bouquet of roses and sweating like I’ve just played in the Quidditch World Cup.

Every limb attached to my body is trembling or twitching in some way, and I’m trying to keep my mind from traveling. I don’t want to fucking go; I’m not ready. I was in detox a week ago, but Molly has summoned, and one does not simply refuse an invitation from Molly.

A small knock taps against my door, and I glare at it, confused by the intrusion.

Prying the door open a few inches, I spy her ruby curls tucked into a knot. Her eyes darting down the hall.

“Molly?” I ask, opening the door to greet her.
She looks bloody weird in my hallway. Her flour-covered apron and simple dress don’t make sense outside the Burrow, and I smile at her serious expression.

“It’s rude not to invite me in,” she scolds, stepping around me and appraising all my belongings with a disgusted turn of her mouth. “Who decorated for you?”

“Someone from the Manor.” I shrug.

“They’re pretentious,” she sniffs, poking at my chair.

“Maybe I’m a bit pretentious.” I chuckle, and she peeks over her shoulder with a smile.

“That’s true. Are those for me?” She points to the bouquet of flowers on the table.

“They are.”

“Were you going to come tonight?” Now she’s rearranging my books by color or size, I can’t figure out which yet.

“I was considering it.” There’s a moment of silence as I realize it’s in alphabetical order – her lips turned in a sad frown as she stares at them. “I’m sorry.”

“You should be,” she snaps.

“I’m going to be better.”

“Good.” Her voice is clipped, and she steps away from my bookshelf to fold the blanket I’ve lazily tossed over the sofa.

She moves around my apartment, silently tidying things by hand that could be done my magic. When she makes her way to the kitchen, she braces her palms on the tile and finally looks at me.
“You would be very mistaken to believe that no one cares if you die, Draco Malfoy.” A surge of unwelcome emotion swells in my throat as I meet her eyes, and I want to sink into the floorboards. She sucks her lips in, pursing them into a harsh line as she nods. “Are you ready?” She gives a slight jiggle of her shoulders and moves towards the Floo.

I wish the words didn’t seep from my mouth the way they do, but before I can control them, they are there in the space between us. “Why do you keep giving me a chance?”

She shrugs nonchalantly. “I think you deserve it. Now, dinner is probably burning, so let’s go.”

A/N: A few lines in this were inspired by things I’ve come across.

The Universal Paradox: You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequence of your choice.

&

A line from Beautiful Boy. I for the fucking LIFE OF ME can not find the direct quote. But if you haven’t watched it and have Amazon, you most definitely should. It’s lovely and really a great peek into addiction. It doesn’t shy away from the hard bits and how it affects an entire family. The line is when Nick is talking about his relapse and it’s the turning point for him when someone asks him “What’s wrong with you?” “I’m an addict.” “No, that’s how you’ve been treating what’s wrong with you.” Again, this is paraphrased, and I apologize for that. I will continue my hunt and update this when I find it.

Would love to know your thoughts! Xo - LK
A/N: Hello my most lovely readers. Can’t thank you enough for all your support and kindness as I work on this piece.

On top of my normal praises to my Alpha, MHCalamas and Beta, Ravenslight, I want to give an even BIGGER shout out to MHCalamas. You’ll find some poetry in today’s update and the goddess herself wrote it especially for Sweetly Broken. Thank you my darling friend for lending your talents to my humble work. You are a star.

Enjoy!

I don’t want control, I can dig my own hole
I can make my bed and I can lie in it cold
’Cause I don’t need heat, I’ve been burnin’ in hell
But now I’m back with my own story to tell

Back from the edge, back from the dead
Back before demons took control of my head
Back to the start, back to my heart
Back to the boy who would reach for the stars

-Back From The Edge, James Arthur

“Tell me how it’s been going since our last session.” Brenner is cheerful today. His eyes are a little brighter, and I can see in the way he bounces on the balls of his feet that he has something to be happy about. I wonder what that’s like.

“It’s been fine.”
“Have you experienced any triggers?”

“Triggers?”

“Anything that makes you feel that you’re either revisiting your trauma or that makes you feel like you need to use again.” Brenner flips his notebook open, thumbing a few pages until he finds one suitable for his notes and hovers his pen over the parchment.

I snort and stare out the window at the activity on the snowy Muggle street: passersby commuting to work, tugging children along by their chubby little hands and couples wrapped in each others embrace.

“Everything makes me want to use,” I confess, watching a pair of lovers thread their fingers together, sharing a secret laugh and walking out of sight.

“How are you coping when the urges arise?” I can hear him scratching away, as if what I’ve said was actually worth taking note of.

“Coping seems like a strong word. I’m just surviving them.” I sigh. I’ve found the less abrasive I am towards him, the less of a cunt he is to me, and so I am resigned to play nice.

A moment of silence passes as I watch the snow accumulate on the window sill.

“How are you coping when the urges arise?” I can feel his scrutinious glare on me, and I swallow, sitting up a little straighter. “Christmas is ‘round the corner. Anything you want to talk about?”

“Molly’s asked me over,” I mumble out of the corner of my mouth, watching my finger trace the deep lines on my palms.

“You’re going then?”

I shrug. “Half the family hates my very existence. Seems like a rubbish way to spend my holiday.”
“Tell me about them. When did you start to not get along with them?”

I snort and roll my eyes. He’s seen me be a pretty big wanker, but I’m not sure even he could stomach what a prick I was back then. “I haven’t gotten along with any of them since we entered Hogwarts.” The scratching of his Muggle pen against the thick parchment annoys me, and I crack my neck and continue. “I was a prat to all of them upon meeting them.”

“What was school like for you?”

A smile tugs at my lips as I remember. The first five years of school was when I peaked, honestly. Even with twatty Potter running around wreaking havoc and breaking rules, I had it pretty good. “Pretty brilliant. Played Quidditch, had a pretty girlfriend and lot of friends.”

“But you were a prick? As you put it.” He gestures towards me as though he’s just asked what colour my eyes are, and I can’t help but be amused by the strange bloke.

Laughter bubbles past my lips, and I try to hide my grin as I lean forward, resting my elbows on my knees. “Well, yea. It was expected from me – I doubt anyone was surprised.”

“Do you regret it?” The timbre of his voice lowers, and the scratching of his writing ceases momentarily. I feel the weight of the question on my chest, and I don’t know how to answer truthfully.

Saying I regret it is admitting that even the best years of my life were a mistake, and I feel like I’ve regretted enough. Can’t I just hold onto to the few happy years without remorse?

With a heavy breath, I confess. “Sometimes.” It’s the best he’s going to fucking get, so he better take it.

“Have you told them such?”

I bark out a laugh and stare at him with wide, startled eyes. “What? Tell Weasley that I regret making fun of his hideous fucking hand-me-down robes? Not bloody likely. They were hideous. As is his fucking face.”
Brenner surprises me with a quizzical smile. “Well.” He drops his pen in the crease of his notebook and pinches it closed. “I want you to get through the holiday by not instigating, which I know is particularly difficult for you. Stay away from alcohol and anything else you feel might trigger you.”

My tongue runs over my smooth teeth, and I bite into my cheek. “And what if I do feel triggered?” My voice is quiet in the space between us. Asking for help is more painful than having a giant hippogriff stomp on my arm.

Brenner rubs his palm over his beard, his face crumpling with sympathy that makes me want to vomit on his cheap plastic-looking shoes. “Remember why you’ve been fighting. Remember how long you’ve been sober.” Eighteen days. “Don’t engage if someone else is antagonizing you and remove yourself from the situation as soon as you can.”

“Shouldn’t I just stay home? What’s the point?”

“What do you mean by that?”

My eyes shift nervously from him, landing briefly on the knickknacks on his desk and the plaques on his wall. “She’ll be there,” I admit, my lips pursing as my finger taps repeatedly on my open palm.

I haven’t really allowed myself to think about her. Over the last few weeks, I’ve become accustomed to the hurt that’s settled in my chest, my only reminder that we were something before we were nothing. But if I think about the look on her face when she told me she thought she might love me, when I remember the turn of her lips as she tried to hide her broken sobs – the pain swells and washes over me, threatening to drag me under.

“Are you ready to discuss your relationship with Miss Gr—”

“Absolutely not.” I cut him off before he can even speak her name into this sacred place. “I just need to know how… should I talk to her? Do I ignore her completely? What is the right way to go about all of this because it feels pretty fucking overwhelming if I’m being honest.”

Brenner chews on his tongue for a minute before sighing and leaning back in his chair. “I don’t have the right answer for you Draco. Right now, your number one priority is to remain clean and sober. If you think seeing her is enough to make you relapse, don’t go. That goes for talking to her, too. Protect your sobriety above all else because once that’s more stable, you will have a strong foundation moving forward into the other aspects of your life.”
His words feel like a punch to the gut. The thought of not seeing her again… of not hearing her voice or watching her nose wrinkle when she finds me charming but frustrating – it shatters me. Those aren’t possibilities. And as much as I am loathe to admit it, something about Brenner’s speech makes sense to me.

“Okay.”

“Have you been working on your homework since we last met?” Brenner asks as he gets to his feet, signaling the end of our time together.

The small square of parchment in my pocket feels like it’s burning a hole in my pocket, and I give him a stiff nod. “Started on it, yeah.”

“I know the task seems daunting, Draco, but it’s an important part of the healing process,” he says with a tight smile and swings the frosted glass door open. “Happy Christmas.”

“Same to you, Dr Brenner.”

“I always thought the ‘Doctor’ bit was a tad pretentious. Feel free to call me by my first name,” he offers kindly, his brows arching as I cross the threshold.

I open my mouth to comply, but my words fall short. “I don’t think you’ve ever told me your first name.”

“Oh.” He chuckles to himself. “It’s Harold. Harold Brenner, but I go by Harry.”

My jaw goes a slack, blood draining from my cheeks. “You’re fucking with me,” I accuse, staring at his pale green eyes shielded by smudged glasses and messy brown hair.

“Uh, no. Just Harry.” He shrugs.

Diagon Alley has become too small for me. Ghosts of my addiction and a bushy haired bookkeeper haunt the cobblestone, and I can’t be there. Instead, I’ve taken to exploring the Muggle neighborhood around Brenner’s office.

Here in this quiet little corner of the world, I can breathe again. Last week, I stumbled across a quaint little coffee shop around the corner and it’s become my new favorite haven. Nothing like it exists in the wizarding world – giant overstuffed chairs and quirky local art cover the walls.

I duck in, shaking the snow from my shoulders and stomping icy sludge from my boots. As I let the warmth fan over me, I feel blood rush to my cheeks and step up to the messy counter.

“My man!” The bearded barista shouts from down the counter. He has tattoos all up and down his forearms and wears a slouchy hat most days. “What’s it gonna be today?”

Staring up at the colorful chalkboard I mentally mark off the four drinks that I’ve tried and arbitrarily choose another. “Let’s do a caramel macchiato.”

Edgar slaps his hands together and points cheerfully at me. “Coming right up!” He’s far too happy for his job – how can he possibly enjoy making hot bean water for little to no money everyday? – but somehow he pulls it off.

I slip some Muggle money on the counter, ignoring the smiling young woman who rings me up, and slip into a chair by the window, cradling my steaming cup.

I’ve made it my personal mission to work through the menu, and while the Americano was another bitter mistake in my recent past, this particular concoction is delightful.

Shifting onto my hip, I pull the parchment from my trousers and unfold it gently. All my sins laid bare on a tiny scrap of paper.

_Madame Rosmerta_

_Katie Bell_
I nearly jump out of my skin when a booming voice sounds through the small cafe, and I look around for a witch or wizard using the Sonorous charm. Instead, the bearded barista is standing on a small elevated stand, a small black device held up to his mouth that projects his voice across the room.

“Hello, hello,” Ed grins at the small crowd, and I realize for the first time that it is a little busier in here than it normally is. My eyes land on a few nervous looking Muggles clutching onto notebooks or covered instruments. “Welcome to another Open Mic night at the Dirty Grind. In case you haven’t joined us for one yet, it’s quite the scene. We hold them once a month and there’s a sign-up sheet in the back. Let’s get this started with.” Ed pauses to read off a clipboard. “Bonnie Hector.”

A small girl chewing on her nail beds jumps in her seat. She looks around my age, gingerly lifts a guitar from her case and makes her way up to the stand, soft applause greeting her as she leans against a stool behind the “mic,” as Ed referred to it.

I can’t tear my eyes from her, her trembling fingers lifting to her instrument as she takes one… two… three deep breaths and dives into a breathy melody that makes the fine hair on my arms stand up. There’s something haunting in her low, ethereal voice as she gets lost in her song, and I’m intrigued by this entire process.

It seems Muggles line up to perform in front of a room full of strangers, and while their motivations make zero sense, there’s something vulnerable and disarming about them.
With a proud but small smile, she finally peeks up through her lashes and into the crowd when they greet her with loud applause – hoots and hollers sounding from the back of the café. Apprehensively, I join them in congratulating her. I’m still nervous, still unsure that someone may recognize me here even though I’m dressed the part and sticking to the margins.

The next person is introduced, and a young man with a rich complexion and confident smile takes the stool, no instrument in hand. He throws a cocky wink to a girl near the back of the café but his I notice his hands are tight, clutching to a moleskine notebook like a lifeline. With a flip of his pages, he begins:

*Froth and foam,*

*Espressos and roasts—*

*dark, medium, and light...*

*Single, double, or triple shot...*

*Latte, breve;*

*mochaccino, cappuccino, frappuccino,*

*Tall, grande, venti...*

*Half and single and sugar-free pumps.*

*Soy, nonfat, half-fat, and whole.*

*Decaf, half-caf, and regular.*

*The mind buzzed and whirls*

*before a beverage is even consumed...*

*Impossible complexity,*

*endless decisions,*

*for a simple cuppa...*

The café titters, a quiet murmuring of laughter floating through the crowd, and the young man looks up with a mischievous grin on his face. I’ll be the first to admit that *I don’t bloody get it.* The crowd seems to enjoy it, but I feel he might have just spluttered out random phrases and words until he got a laugh.

“All right, alright. That was just for fun.” He shifts on his stool, cracking his neck as he flips the page
and takes a deep breath. Absently, I shove my delightful caramel beverage away from me and I lean forward, resting my elbows on my knees as I study him. His entire demeanor has changed and the smugness that was painted on his face a moment ago has transformed into a heaviness that burdens his shoulders.

The voices rule.
They reign supreme in totalitarian authority.
They hiss, they howl;
they purr and seduce.

Conniving, contriving, controlling—
seizing and enslaving.

Scoffing and mocking
their puppet on his strings
until they’ve had their way.

A painful clamber wracks my chest as his words reverberate around the room. It’s almost as if he’s talking just to me, and while the tempo of his words mixed with the intricate pauses and wild gestures of his hands don’t make sense… they make complete sense.

Sated and abated,
the voices are silent.

Sleeping off their power-drunk high;
unfeeling and uncaring
of the chaotic destruction
and consuming despair
they leave in the wake of their rampage.

The voices are silent,
and there’s a moment,
a flash, a flicker.

Crippling shame amidst
unapologetic clarity.
Serenity, tranquility

embracing peaceful calm in a tender kiss.

Birthing the bathing warmth of freedom.

The voices are silent.

The time is now!

Crawling, clawing, grappling, grasping.

Needed and hating the calling of the light.

Loathing the pull and tug,

the yearning, burning and boundless desire
to breathe free.

Sweet free, uncontrolling air.

Pushing and pulling,
tugging and yanking,

disciplining every last muscle

into warring submission.

The voices are silent,

but they will wake—

wake and seethe and search.

Freedom is dizzying in its unfamiliarity.

It's empowering and soothing and healing;

terrifying and nauseatingly overwhelming.

And the voices stir.
They stir and howl
at the realization of abandonment.

Cold fear coil and quakes,
and braces for capture.

The man’s eyes flicker closed as he continues, reciting from memory or his soul, I don’t know which.

But freedom is strength;
   it sets the course.
Fortifying perseverance enables weakened will.

The voices have dimmed.
The battles continue,
but the voices have dimmed.
Their power diminishes;
the deceiving message loses its glossy glimmer
over time…

The voices remain,
but freedom is less formidable,
less intimidating,
the longer it reigns.

And the call of the voices,
can’t overcome,
or fill in the broken spaces they did before.

My heart is pounding as he exits the stage, his words plucking at a chord in me that I hadn’t realized
was so tightly strung until it’s echoing in my hollow chest.

I stand suddenly, knees knocking into the low lying table, and my coffee sloshes slightly over the side of my cup. I clear my throat as I excuse myself and find myself gasping in the cold winter air, my coat clutched in my hand and face tilted up to greet the falling snow.

For the first time in a very long time, the tendon in my neck is calm and docile, my hands are loose at my side, and I feel— I choke out a relieved laugh as I shrug my coat on, moving towards the alley where can I apparate away safely.

Peace. That’s what this is. It’s foreign and fucking fantastic.

The plumes of smoke rising from the frying pan should be a signal that my meal is finished, but I know – without checking – that the inside of that chicken breast is pink and raw. My lips curl up into a scowl, and with a wave of my wand, I send the sizzling pan into my sink.

How is this so bloody difficult. It’s simply changing the food from one form to another; it’s heating it over a fire – fucking primordial humans could do this – yet, I can not. I’ll need to grab takeaway again, but before I can decide where, there is a knock at my door.

My heart seizes in my chest, and my brows knit together.

My mind panics, wondering who on earth it could be. George would just walk through the bloody door – he has no boundaries – and that really only leaves one person who might want to visit me. I hate the quiet feeling of hope that blooms in my chest. With a flick of my tongue, I wet my lips, and my hands smooth the haphazard wrinkles from my clothes.

I allow a crack in the door before it’s pushed open aggressively. Blaise steps into my flat and appraises it with a smug grin. My head cocks to the side, my mouth forming various shapes but unable to form actual sound.

“Mate!” He wraps me in a vice-like hug before shoving me off and collapsing onto my sofa without invitation. “That bender must have really done you in.” He smirks at me, his heels banging hard against my grandmother’s coffee table. “Haven’t seen you in a few weeks. I’ve missed you.”
My brows thread closely together as I stare at him. He’s one of my oldest friends, and yet, he’s a stranger.

“Yeah, mate. Shit got bad.” I gulp, and scratch at the stubble that’s taking up permanent residence on my face. “What’re you doing here?” There’s a quiet shake to my voice, and I know I’m showing my cards before it’s time. He lifts his feet and sets them gingerly on the floor, leaning forward until his elbows are resting on his knees, and he stares at me through squinted eyes.

“You’re one of my best mates. I’m here to check on you.” There’s a dangerous edge to his voice that wakes a quiet rage in my chest, and I scoff in his direction. “What? I’m not allowed to check in you?”

“You know, a visit might’ve been nice, Blaise. Maybe when I was vomiting on the street corner, or perhaps when I was in a holding cell at the fucking Ministry. Hell, even when I was shaking my way through a violent detox and didn’t have a friendly face or family member to see me through it. Maybe then it would have been nice to have a fucking visit!” My voice is raising dangerously, and the adrenaline feels like a trigger, feels like I want to tamp down the emotion before it overcomes me.

“You’re overreacting,” Blaise waves me off and stands, poking at the bullshit decorations around my flat.

I swallow the lump in my throat and take a step toward him. “To be fair, you didn’t know how bad I was after.”

“After?” he asks with a quizzical brow, lifting an ornamental owl from the edge of my mantel before returning it with a rough hand.

“After the war. It was a lot different for me, and I wasn’t transparent with you, but I got in a bad way, Blaise.” I’m still hoping I can salvage this friendship, that maybe I can make him see that something in me is so jaggedly broken that I just need someone to be here with me while I heal it.

“Jesus, Draco. Enough. I am so sick of your self-righteous indignation. Sick of the way you victimise yourself in all this. You made some shitty decisions. Fucking deal with it. I deal with it by getting pissed and snorting vapours that make me feel good – if you want to deal with it by hugging Hufflepuffs and spilling your emotions on the floor like a bitch, by all means. But don’t expect me to be here for it.”
I physically recoil from his words, but he doesn’t notice. He’s staring at a picture of my mother and I from fourth year on my bookshelf and tosses it on the couch as he faces me with a lazy turn of his heel.

“You’re letting those… those blood traitors get in your head. They’ve got you thinking there is something wrong with you. It’s bullshite. Not everyone needs to have this deeper— not everything needs to be healed. Sometimes healing is just forgetting. And that’s where I come in, mate.” He holds his arms out to his side like he’s waiting for an embrace, and his too-white smile gleams against the rich tones of his skin.

My brow twitches, and my finger lifts towards the door. “You can go.” I turn back towards the kitchen, my arms shaking with unreleased rage, and my fingers dart up to calm the twitching in the hollow of my throat as I hiss.

“What? You’re gonna throw away almost two decades of a friendship over them?”

“NO!” I shout, my hands slapping against the tile of my counter. “No, Blaise. It’s for me. I’m trying to tell you I’m a fucking addict, and it’s clear you are fucking toxic—”

He barks out a sharp laugh and his eyes narrow as he takes a few dangerous steps towards me.

“I’m toxic? You, my friend, are death. Everything you touch turns black, and you want to blame your shitty life on me? You’ll notice there’s no Dark Mark on my arm, and my probation is up in six weeks. I’m the one with the posh flat and the vibrant social life while you sit in your shitty wannabe Muggle life with a pan of burning shit in your sink. You think because the Golden boy takes pity on you that you are something? Think you can disguise yourself in their little motley crew? You’re a joke, mate. Except you’re not funny.” A mocking smile is fixed on his lips, and I want nothing more than to let my knuckles meet his pompous fucking cheekbone.

“You done?” I manage through a tight jaw.

“Nah. We’re done.”

I flinch as the door slams shut, and my hands thread into my hair, scratching along my scalp. I need to fucking use. I need it. It’s been twenty days, but I fucking need it.
Who the fuck does he think he is?

I can feel the shakes work their way through my body and I crack my neck sharply, trying to appease the dangerous need for drugs that’s settling in my throat.

I snatch my coat from the hanger and rush from my flat, turning on my heel and Apparating as soon as my feet touch the cobblestone.

A/N: I’m leaving for vacation tomorrow morning, so this will be the last update for about a week or so! Your reviews make my world go round! And if you’re interested in seeing some of my aesthetics and manips, head over to Tumblr and chat with me there :)
Suicide

Chapter Notes

Despite the title, there are no trigger warnings for this chapter.

If somebody asked how we died

Please look them straight in the eye

Call it suicide

-Suicide by James Arthur

My knuckles rap sharply on the door of Brenners home office, and I’m gnawing on my lip when he finally wrenches the door open. With an audible pop, my jaw goes slack at how much he resembles Potter in his gray pyjama bottoms and Ravenclaw t-shirt, his hair a mess and crooked glasses perched on his nose.

It’s not all that late, but the frigid temperatures drive people from the streets. When Brenner is able to focus on me in the darkness, he nearly steps out his door, checking around me for any accompanying distress. “Draco?”

My body is vibrating, fingers tapping incessantly against my trousers. “Got a minute?”

He blinks at me, studying the firm set to my jaw and my fidgeting eyes, I know he can see it. It’s plain as day that I’m at my breaking point, and he swiftly steps to the side and gestures me towards his office.

“I’ll be right back,” he mumbles and jogs up the stairs to his home.

Jittery anxiety vibrates through my limbs, demanding I move, and I pace the floor of his office, my
mind jumping from thought to thought.

Brenner reeneters, the sleep wiped from his eyes and a jumper haphazardly shoved on.

“What’s going on?” his eyes are lidded while he crosses the room, leaning on his desk as he watches me pace holes in his carpet.

“Blaise stopped by,” I clip, and I can see from the corner of my eyes that his shoulders stiffen.

“Did he offer—”

“No. I’m not sure he was there for that, but things got heated and fuck!” My fingers are wound in my hair as I yank until I feel pain, focusing my attention there. “I need to use.”

“You don’t,” he reassures me, his voice is low and calming, and I feel it like a tether around me, tugging me towards safety.

“I do. It’s fucking physical; I can feel it everywhere, and there is no way of getting it to stop until I use.” I’m jabbering on and on, explaining something that can’t possibly be explained, and my attention refocuses, settling on the repetitive tapping of my thumb against my thigh.

“When you left detox, the physical part of your addiction ended. You’re clean weeks now, unless I’m missing something—” He is cut off by my sharp glare and holds his hands up in surrender. “Right. Then this part is actually completely in your mind. This is the hard part.”

I snort and resume pacing. “You’ve clearly never gone through detox – it’s fucking terrible.”

“I don’t doubt it is. Let’s take a seat.” He gestures, pushing off the desk and resuming his post.

Following his instructions with a tight jaw, I collapse onto the chaise, wringing my hands between my knees.

“I’d like to try some visualizations with you again—” Before I can protest he holds his palms up,
cutting me off. “I won’t be taking you anywhere unsafe in your current state. It’ll help you calm down if you can keep your mind open.”

“Are you a Legilimens? Wouldn’t it be easier to just put the thoughts in there at this point?” My voice is too sharp, but I can’t seem to manage my rabid emotion. Everything feels tight around me – I can hear every noise, feel the very air against my skin.

Brenner shifts in his seat uncomfortably, his lips pulling awkwardly over his teeth. “It wouldn’t be ethical for a Legilimens to be a therapist. But you can trust me, Draco.”

Studying him, I can feel a twist in my gut as I think about the last words he said.

Trust.

I don’t trust anyone. Call it self preservation or being a cynical prat, but it’s the truth of it. Might as well as ask me to shit a snitch – it just doesn’t fucking work that way.

But as the pain in my throat swells and threatens to close off my breathing for good, I lay down on the chaise with a groan, my eyes clenching shut and my fingers pressing in on the twitch in my neck.

Brenner begins, his voice a low hum in the quiet room. “I want you to imagine a snow globe. It’s larger than most, and you can cradle the ornate base in both palms. Everything in the globe is calm, and a small figurine of yourself is directly in the middle next to a small log cabin and some evergreen trees. There’s a stream running through the center of the globe, icy blue calm waters.”

As he describes the scene to me, vivid pictures bloom behind my clenched lids, and I can see the snow globe in my palms, see the tiny figurine that looks just like me, and in my mind, I follow his instructions.

“Now I want you to lift the globe and shake it as hard as you can. Watch as the glittering snow erupts into chaos. As you watch the snow fall, I want you to move yourself. You’re no longer holding the globe, you’re in it. You’re watching the snow fall heavily around you, and at first, it’s overwhelming—”

An icy chill runs down my body as I stare up at the ominous dark sky, a blizzard raining down around me and collecting on my shoulders and eyelashes. It’s too cold – fucking freezing, honestly –
and I start to chatter, rubbing my hands against my clothes, greedy for warmth. Taking a few tentative steps forward, I can hear Brenner’s voice like a hollow echo, as if he is the one now holding the snow globe, and through the near white out blanket of snow, I can barely make out the stream a few paces in front of me.

“Remember, you’re in the globe now. And at first, the snow falls heavy and frantically, but what happens after?”

My chin quirks towards his voice, my brows falling low over my eyes. When I open my mouth to speak, I can see my breath cloud before me. “The snow slows,” I mumble, a tremor shaking through my body from the frigid air.

“That’s right. Look up towards the sky and watch as the darkness fades into a lighter gray, the snow is falling softly, letting up with each passing moment until it’s dusting around you. What can you hear?”

“The brook... it’s still streaming, and I can see it more clearly now.” My feet pull me towards it, clear, blue water trickling over a rocky bed. I can feel my breath calming, the sharp bite of the air turning refreshing as I suck in deep lungfuls of it.

My eyes flutter closed, snowflakes kissing my cheeks and melting on contact. I can feel my heart rate slow, transforming into a steady rhythm, and the pain in my chest subsides.

“Spend as long as you’d like here. When you’re ready, I want you to come out of the globe and remember it’s been in your palm this entire time.”

After a few moments, I follow his instructions until I’m again cradling the snow globe, watching as soft flurries fall around the tiny figurines. I feel more control over myself from this visual and am able to blink my eyes open, until I’m laying on the chaise in the middle of the night.

Hunched over a contract from a new supplier, I nearly jump from my skin when the door swings open and George’s grinning face pops in.
“Damn it!” I curse, staring at the ink blots on my contract from where my quill faltered. With an accusing scowl, I nod at him.

“Granger’s here to see you.”

Everything freezes. Well, with the exception of my heart, which has decided we are now the star keeper in the Quidditch World Cup, which in turn causes my entire body to break out in a sheen of anxious sweat.

My eyes flicker to him, studying his wide eyes and brows curved high on his forehead.

“Gr-Granger?” I stutter. I narrow my eyes at suspiciously. “To see who? You?”

“You. She’s outside, asked if you might have a moment, but she didn’t want to intrude if you didn’t have the time.”

My mouth tries in vain to form sounds that might resemble words, but nothing comes to mind as I remember the last few weeks since I’ve seen her.

“It’s okay if you aren’t ready, mate,” George reassures me with a low voice. “She’ll understand.”

*She’s not here for that. She’s not here to rekindle anything. She’s moved on… You have to let her move on.*

I’m repeating it like a spell I need to memorise, willing my mind to lock onto it and remember that she doesn’t love me, at least not anymore, if she ever even did.

“No, of course. Of course, I’ll see her.” My lips press into a flat line, and I fidget with my waistcoat and trousers, though they don’t need anything. I pick up my cloak, bobbing my head back and forth as I consider if I should bring it along.

“Look at you,” George coos, “All nervous. It’s adorable.” I throw it at his face, and he barks out a laugh and tosses it at the chair.
“George?”

“Yea, mate?”

“Do piss off.” I give him a withering sneer and press past him.

I work my way through the labyrinth of the shop, sidestepping past various displays and ducking when a charmed dragon the size of an eagle owl swoops through the air.

“Good luck.” I turn back to find George grinning, two long thumbs shoved out at me. With a half-hearted frown, I push the door open and step into the cold December air.

Jogging down the few steps and out onto the cobbled stone of Diagon Alley, I peer at the passing crowd. My brows falling low over my eyes and a sinking feeling pierces in my gut when I don’t see her.

If this is one of George’s oh-so-hilarious pranks that are meaningless and not even partially funny then I swear I’m going to hex his—

“Malfoy?” Her quiet voice barrels into me, and I almost stumble at hearing her say my name again — even just my surname.

Turning on my heel, my breath catches. Gods, she’s more beautiful than I remember. I always thought she was more of an autumn, but seeing her now with her crimson coat tucked around her and her curls stuffed into a matching slouchy hat, I know I was wrong. Her cheeks are tinged a rosy blush, and her round chocolate colored eyes focus on me.

I know what’s she looking for: evidence of my addiction. She’s studying the circles under my eyes and the fill to my cheeks. Her gaze flicks to my hands, steady and balled into fists at my sides.

“Granger.” It’s all I can manage and even that is too much effort. Her name is taboo in my mind and speaking it returns all her power. I want to fall on the warped stone at her feet and grovel for forgiveness, beg her to see that I’ve changed and I’m not the same person… but I’m not sure even I believe that.
I’m still an addict, after all. Just one that’s desperately trying not to be.

“You look good,” she squeaks, taking a tentative step towards me. Snowflakes are catching in the curls cascading from the rim of her knitted hat and on her eyelashes. “Are you well?”

I go to speak but my mouth dries, the words stick in my throat until I cough into the crook of my elbow. “I’m, uh—” Do I just lie? “I’m doing as well as I can. Thanks. How are you?”

Is it too soon to ask how things are going with Cormac? Because that’s what I really need to know.

“I’m good.” With a bob of her head, the silence between us extends. We must look quite the sight, two people sharing a conversation face to face from four feet away. “I’m glad you’re doing better.” She tacks that bit on the end, and I flinch from the forced awkwardness.

“Granger, I’m really—” The apology is almost out, but she cuts me off, her eyes flashing in pain, and she takes another step forward.

“Please don’t.” Her face twists, as if hearing me say that I’m sorry might break her. “I don’t— I just mean that you don’t have anything to apologize for. You are going through something and…” her words fail her, her shoulders rising and falling as she huffs out a puff of air. “I don’t need an apology, Draco. I’m just glad you’re better.”

I want to fucking say something; I want her to just let me make this right between us, but her words echo in my mind.

I need you to want more for me.

In place of an apology, I offer a solemn nod, running my tongue over my teeth and biting down on my lip. As much as I want her to hear me, she’s asked me not to. And who the fuck am I to deny her anything?

Her spine straightens, and a rush of courage seems to course through her. There’s the lioness. “I was just coming to make sure you’re coming to Christmas at the Burrow.”
My face pinches at the thought. “Oh, I hadn’t really decided.”

“Oh?”

“Well, I didn’t know if you’ll be there with Cormac.” I’m spineless. I know this – but I really can’t help myself. I have to slip it in the conversation. “Not to mention Ron did just arrest me about a month ago, and I doubt anyone wants to see my moping about, mucking up their cheerful holiday.”

Hermione’s brows knit together, her fingers tugging on the chain around her neck. “Oh. Cormac and I... we aren’t together or anything. It was just a couple of dates but I let him know I wasn’t—” Clearing her throat and grimacing, she continues, “I wasn’t ready for anything serious.”

Brilliant. Great to know that I lost my handle on sobriety over that fucking twat who didn’t even last a fortnight.

“And don’t worry about Ron,” she adds, “He’ll be on his best behavior or Molly and I will hex his bollocks off.” Her cheeks tug up until she’s smiling at me, and I can’t help but return it with a hollow scoff. “Honestly, he won’t give you any trouble.”

“Why do you care if I go? I assure you the day would be far more pleasant without me.”

“That’s not true, Draco,” she scolds, but it’s light, almost reassuring. “I don’t want you to be alone on Christmas. But if you want to be, that’s fine. Just... don’t go because of me. Okay? Because I’m fine, honestly.” My eyes catch on the necklace she keeps rubbing like a talisman, and I recognize it as the one I gave to her all those weeks ago. “I’m fine,” she repeats, as if she’s now telling only herself.

“Okay.”

“Okay, you’ll go?” Her voice rises a few octaves, and again she moves a step closer to me, I could maybe reach out and brush the snowflakes melting on her cheeks, but that’s not my place anymore.

“Okay, I’ll think about it,” I admit with a smirk. “I’m not sure if it’s a good place for me right now, but if I can manage it, I’ll be there.”
She chews on the thought before giving a nod and extending her hand to me in an oddly formal gesture. With a laugh, I take her mittenened hand and squeeze it, as she pumps our joined hands in a handshake once… twice… three times… then a fourth.

*Gods, this is an uncomfortably long and awkward handshake.*

Her eyes rake over my face, her dark eyelashes fluttering, and I watch as a surprising blush creeps over her cheeks.

“Do you always shake hands this long? I imagine your arms are quite trim if you do. This could be an official sport.”

Her blush deepens, and she yanks her hand back, letting it twist in the ends of her hair and frowning.

“Right. So. Christmas?”

“Maybe,” I allow with a tilt of my chin.

“Christmas maybe. I’ll take it. Good day, Malfoy.” Her hand nearly extends again, but when I eye it with an arched brow, she jams it in her pocket and growls at me.

“Until next time, Granger.”

I watch her as she turns and disappears into the crowds, the fine hair on my arm standing straight, but I’m sure it has nothing to do with my lack of jacket in a snowstorm.

That was something.

That was something where there had been nothing, and as much as I try to stomp it out, I feel a familiar tug in my chest.
A/N: Your reviews make me grin. Thank you for loving this story and endless thanks to MHCalamas and Ravenslight, my Alpha and Beta, respectively. You are the sole reason this story exists. I adore you both.
Snow falls softly onto the cobblestones, and my eyes are trained on my expensive dragonhide shoes, snowfall dusting over the laces. When I finally lift my gaze to take in the village, I feel a nostalgia wash over me.

Gods, how many happy memories have I had on this shop lined street? Crabbe accidentally set a first year’s robes on fire outside of Zonko’s, and Pansy let me kiss her for the first time under the mistletoe in Madam Puddifoot’s. This place was nearly untouched by the horrors of the war… nearly.

I duck into Honeydukes and pull the collar of my robes down a bit, feeling the warmth of the shop on my chest. I can’t help the smile that spreads across my cheeks as I study the shop, unchanged by the Dark Lord in every way.

It’s quiet; most of the students will have left on holiday, and I meander the aisles of the shop picking up a few of my childhood favorites as well a pack of Sugar Quills and some chocolate wands.
“Mister Malfoy? Is that you?”

My shoulders tense, and I turn, a nervous smile tight on my lips. “Ms Flume.” I blush without cause, and she makes her way to stand in front of me, her small, bony hands gripping my elbows as she stares up at me.

“My, you’ve gotten so big. I still remember that little blond boy with too much hair product and a nasty habit for sweets,” she chastises me with a playful glint in her eyes, and I chuckle under my breath. “The sheer amount of money one child could spend on Exploding Bon Bon’s and Chocolate Frogs...” She shakes her head, and a few strands of her thin grey hair fall loose from her chignon. “Your allowance was far too great!”

I smirk down at her and notice the weathered edges to her eyes, the subtle ways that the years have aged her. Ms Flume was possibly the only person to treat me with unwavering kindness through my years at Hogwarts, and it might very well be because I kept their shop afloat with the shameful amount of Galleons I would drop on Hogsmeade weekends. But by some grace or a miracle, she seemed to just like me.

“How’ve you been after… well, after?” Her hazel eyes cloud, her brows falling low as she inspects me.

I feel my words in my throat, and they catch there painfully. She doesn’t know what a piece of shit I am; she only knows the kid I was before. “I’ve been hanging in there. Could’ve been worse.”

“You were just a boy.” She clicks her tongue and straightens to her full height, still barely reaching my shoulder, and I feel my lips pull into a crooked smile. “You just needed someone to steer you a bit, and I know you could’ve avoided the whole mess. You’re one of the good ones, Draco Malfoy.” Her cold hands grip my chin as she scrunches her face lovingly, and I chuckle at her completely misguided view of me.

“I’m glad someone thinks so, Ms Flume.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your parents,” she offers quietly. “I didn’t know them, but… I’m sorry for you.”

I gulp, giving her a firm nod.
“What’ll you have today? Are you here to buy the entire store out?”

“Not today.” A chuckle rumbles in my throat. “Can you put together a gift basket for me? Have it sent to my flat? All your best stuff.”

She jabs a hard finger in my ribs and scoffs at me. “All my stuff is the best stuff. For tomorrow?”

“If possible.”

“Anything for you, sweet boy. It’ll be to your flat tonight. Meet me at the till with whatever else you need and I’ll get you worked up.”

“Thanks, Ms Flume. For everything.”

Her paper thin lips tug into a smile, and she nods, disappearing the way she came.

My eyes catch on a new flavor of Droobles, and I snatch up three packs, adding it to the lot in my arms already.

The stop at Honeydukes wasn’t the point of today but it momentarily eases my anxiety of what’s coming next. Cradling a bottle of chocolate wine and some holiday truffles, I pull the parchment from my trousers and stare at the first name on the list.

Madam Rosmerta

Bloody fucking hell, this is going to suck. There is absolutely no getting around this, but it’s going to be torture.
I step over the threshold of the Three Broomsticks and stomp the snow from my shoes, my eyes searching and landing on her wiping the far edge of the bar. My heart is frantic in my ribcage, and I think seriously about dropping the objects in my hands and sprinting for South America.

*Healing.* Brenner’s voice keeps repeating in my head like some idiotic mantra that’s supposed to see me through this nightmarish time in my life; as if healing is going to somehow help me live a normal life. But it’s Christmas Eve, and I’ve nothing better to do then make a fool of myself, so I trudge forward, my thumb twitching against the cellophane wrapped truffles.

I let out a low cough when I’m standing just a few feet from her, hoping not to startle her, and her eyes flit up to mine, hardening when she realizes who’s standing at her bar.

“What’re you doing here?” Her words are all barbs and hard edges, and I swear they slice straight through to my gut.

With a grimace, I massage the space between my brows and levy an exhausted sigh. I’ve managed one fucking word and it’s already the worst moment of my life.

“I’ve brought you these.” I place the wine and the truffles on the bar top, my lips pursing at the ridiculous offerings, as if they would make the fact that I put her under an unforgivable any easier to stomach.

“Why?” Her face pinches tightly as she scrutinizes the gifts, dropping her bar rag unceremoniously and walking towards me. She rests her palm on the corner of the bar and stares at me. “Did you poison them?”

“No.”

Her chin tilts back and forth. “Explain yourself.”

This is the part I don’t want to do. I’ll shower the witch in gifts everyday for the rest of her life if it would get me out of explaining what the fuck I’m doing here.
My gaze studies the glossy wood finished bar, and my tongue flickers out to wet my lips.

“I’m here to say I’m—” I bare my teeth in a moment of discomfort. “I’m... well, I’m sorry.”

The pretty barmaid throws her head back and a few deep laughs erupt from her. When she looks at me again, tears frame her eyes. “Merlin, is someone forcing to do this? You look as though someone has dragged you in by the heel strap, shoved their hand up your arse, and forced the words out like a puppet.”

My mouth falls open at her harsh language, and a huff of air pushes past my lips. “Of course not! I’m just trying to apologize, for crying out loud.”

“I don’t need your apologies, Or your cheap wine.” She marches down the bar and snags her towel off counter with a shake of her head.

Something near anger blooms in my chest, and I make the few paces to meet her. “Well, I’m not doing this for you, actually. So you don’t need to accept my apology—”

“What kind of apology isn’t conditional on the receiver?”

“This kind.” I snort. “Listen, I got into some bad shit the last few years; that much should be obvious. I’m working very hard to get myself out of this phase of my life, and unfortunately for both of us, my therapist seems to think I need to apologize to the people I’ve wronged in my life. A delightful little form of torture that I assure you I would not think of for my worst enemy. But, here I am. Apologizing like a fucking Hufflepuff, so please spare me your hostility and accept the gifts – I assure you that neither are cheap.”

She lifts her chin, and the eyes hidden behind her clumpy black lashes narrow at me. “I don’t need the gifts. Who brings wine to a barkeep?”

“I figured you liked to drink.” I shrug. Why does she have such a bloody problem with me? I’m apologizing after all, and it wasn’t even the worst unforgivable. Some would even say it was the least offensive of the three.

“You can clear the tables, help me wipe them down, and put the chairs up. Afterwards, we’ll have some dinner, during which you can tell me all about these amends you seem to be making and why
“But it’s Christmas Eve.” There was still one more name on the list I was hoping to get to tonight, but I suppose it can wait.

She doesn’t acknowledge it; maybe she knows I have nowhere else to be and nods at the few dirty tables behind me. “Go on. And no charms. Doing the work by hand is good for you.”

My nostrils flare as I shrug off my woolen cloak, draping it over a barstool and rolling up the sleeves of my impeccably tailored and pressed white oxford.

The work is tedious but far from strenuous, and the two of us work in silence for the better part of the next hour. When the Three Broomsticks is closed for the night, she waves her wand, and two shepherds pies and some bread appear near the middle of the bar.

“Let’s have some of this not-so-cheap wine you brought along then?” She lifts the bottle and inspects the label carefully.

I feel a hot blush stain my cheeks. “I actually don’t drink.”

She eyes me sceptically. “I’ve seen you get pissed drunk at the table in the far corner on more than one occasion, Draco Malfoy.”

My jaw tightens as I stare at the plate of food in front of me. “I’ll amend my previous statement: I don’t drink anymore. Got me into a bit of trouble.”

Realisation dawns on her face, and she nods as she places the wine back on the counter and summons two butterbeers.

“Non-alcoholic,” she mumbles and brings it to her lips, the foam sticking there.

Does everyone’s shame feel like this? Heavy. Like a hot, wet towel slung over my shoulders.
“You’re clean then?”

“I was for awhile – backslid a bit. It’s been thirty-five days since.”

“Good.” She pushes the potatoes around her plate and nods. “Good.”

“I’m sorry,” I repeat again. Although this time I’m not sure if it’s for her benefit or mine – I just know that she deserves it.

She points her fork at me with an accusing glare. “You’re never to use an unforgivable on another witch or wizard again, do you understand me?”

“Yes.”

“Hmph,” she grumbles and begins eating, asking me more simple questions and repeating Ms Flumes sentiments about losing my parents. I notice a quick twitch in my neck, but it’s nothing like it was with Blaise in my flat. In Brenner’s words: I don’t feel triggered. No, I feel calm, like after the poetry reading in the cafe.

As I leave, Rosmerta places a soothing hand on my shoulder. “You did well, Malfoy. Keep up the good work. You’re welcome here anytime.”

“Thanks for hearing me out. Happy Christmas.”

I step out into the snow, and when I turn over my shoulder, Madame Rosmerta is leaning, arms crossed, against the door.

Something in me feels a little lighter, like I’ve left it there on her doorstep, and as I turn to make my way towards the Apparition point, I think there may be something more to this healing thing than I’d originally wanted to let on.

I was wrong.
Fuck healing.

Fuck it all.

I’m sitting with a rigid back in a wingback chair in Crabbe’s childhood home. Calling it a manor would be a bit of a stretch, but it’s not the Burrow either. Walking up to the front door had taken all the strength left in my weary bones, and I’m still not sure how I’ve managed the gall to sit in front of this mourning mother and make amends.

Mrs Crabbe looks… well, she looks exactly like Crabbe. Her face is round and a bit pinched, hair black and oily by nature. The despair etched into the lines around her eyes is enough to make me weak – this is the first holiday without her son.

Crabbe and I were mates since infancy practically. Sure, he wasn’t going to go down in the history books at the most skilled wizard in Hogwarts, nor would he be remembered as the cleverest or the most athletic… but he wasn’t bad stock. He was a good friend, and he didn’t deserve the end he met.

Mrs Crabbe is staring out the window, watching the snow collect on the ledge, and I know there are things I wanted to say – hell, things I’d practiced saying. There’d been a list of things that I needed to hear, but the room is filled with deafening silence.

The weight of my guilt is too heavy to carry anymore, but I don’t know how to keep leaving it at people’s doorsteps. I suck in a quick breath and begin; that’s the hardest part.

“Vincent was a good friend, Mrs Crabbe. I counted him as one of my closest.”

Her lips fall into a tight purse, but she doesn’t speak; the woman only nods as tears well in the corners of her eyes.

“I never meant for him to get caught up in everything.” My chin trembles, and I train my eyes on the floorboards. “He was loyal and funny, and he had an insane way of surprising us.” I give a hollow chuckle. “One night, he beat me at a game of Wizard’s Chess, and I was such a sore loser that I never played him again.” My brows drop low, lost in the memory, still unable to look up at his mother. “I’d sworn up and down he cheated and stomped off to my bed for the night. He apologized. Said he’d cheated. But I knew he hadn’t. He was just better. He was better than me. And I’m sorry he’s gone, Mrs Crabbe. It should’ve been me—”
“Stop.” Her voice is tight, clipped, and I can feel the emotion she’s fighting off, as if she’s shoved it off her and into the space between us.

“I’m sor—”

“You don’t get to apologize to me, Draco Malfoy. Look at me.” She speaks clearly, barely a tremor to her words, and I comply, lifting my eyes to meet hers. “You are not responsible for his death. You don’t get to carry that burden, alright?”

“He followed me, and I was the only one to take that stupid mark, and if it weren’t for me—”

“No.” She slices her hand through the air, silencing me. “You children are not to blame for the sins of your parents. Vincent was failed by his father.” She sucks in a broken breath and continues. “He was failed by me. You were failed by your parents. We should have been better, should’ve known better. You think that Vincent only had influence from you? You were a child – hell, you are a child.” She lets out a cracked sob, her hand shooting up to cover her mouth as she weeps.

“I miss him,” I confess. It’s like I’ve been chained down, and each time I let go, I’m lighter. Each confession releases me from my binds, and I’m grateful for the fucking break.

“Me too. I don’t know that I’ll ever stop.”

“For what it’s worth, I am sorry.” It’s a meager offering at her feet, worthless in the grand scheme of her life, but it’s mine. And it’s true.

“I am too. From the generation before you, I’m sorry. We should have—” Absently, she spins her wedding ring around her finger before returning her eyes to the window. “We should have done it all different. You deserved better. Your mother loved you dearly. Until her last breath, she loved you. I’m sorry she’s not here to tell you herself.”

Her words sever me because as much as I’ve practiced – as much I’ve thought about how this might have gone – I didn’t expect this. She could have taken a sword to my gut because it’s all laid bare now, and I let out a sob that I didn’t give permission to leave me. Its ugly, and it’s Christmas, and I miss my fucking mum…but I can’t say any of that. I can’t even think that because as lovely as it that Mrs Crabbe thinks Narcissa Malfoy loved her son, I know better.
I’m just the kid she was forced to have. I’m just the heir expected of her. I’m just the boy she watched get tortured.

A/N: As always, thank you for all your love and support with this little story. It looks like this will be finishing up around 27 chapters and an epilogue, but who knows. I also thought this story would be between 10-15 chapters... so trust nothing.

As always, MHCalamas and Ravenslight, you are my dear ones. Thank you for everything you do.

I’ve also added a fan cast photo of Dr. Brenner on my Tumblr and he’s mad hot. I’ve had some people ask about his resemblance to Harry, and some who wonder if he IS Harry. He is not. The resemblance really means nothing, other than it being a barrier in their trust early on.

Finally, if you read/enjoyed Fixing What You Broke, I have a Charmione I’ll be publishing soon! Make sure you’re following me for an update and I hope you have fun with this version of our Dragon Tamer. It’s short, but he’s hot. So please join me.

If you want to find me on Tumblr, same user name! Ladykenz347 and I’d love to chat and share more pretties with you.

Wow. That’s a lot of rambling.

Until the next, my friends.

-LK
Recovery

A/N: EEP! Sorry for the delay in this chapter if you’ve been waiting on it. Work is a bit crazy at the moment and it’s putting a damper on all my fandom fun. I’ve been really excited about this chapter and I hope you guys love it. See the end A/N for my big fat thanks a lots.

In my recovery

I’m a soldier at war

I have broken down walls

I defined

I designed

My recovery

-Recovery, James Arthur

If I pretend it’s not Christmas, it might not hurt as much.

It’s just dinner. Just another Sunday at the Burrow with the rag tag crew of Weasley’s… but as I stand in front of my Floo, arms full of candy and flowers, sporting an emerald green jumper and khakis (an outfit that would have been abhorrent for Christmas at the Manor), I can feel my heart titter around my ribcage like a snitch.

Racing thoughts of skiving off and getting obliterated on firewhisky and Nebula attack the corners of my brain, and they are nearly impossible to chase off. My eyes flutter closed, and I suck in a soft, calming breath, quelling the urges that threaten to constantly overthrow me.

I don’t need it. I want it.

I fill my lungs, fortifying them with coveted Gryffindor qualities I’m going to need for today, and step into the Floo.
Green flames engulf me, and with a grimace, I announce my destination.

“Draco!” Molly chimes, waiting for me at the Floo and wrapping an arm around my waist as she pulls me without hesitation into her home. “Finally.”

It’s exactly 12:01 p.m., and I was expected at 12:00 p.m., so I chuckle as she tugs me towards the chaos in the kitchen.

Against my volition, a blush stains my cheek and neck as I offer her a bouquet of winter roses and a basket of fancy candy that now seems ridiculous. “This is for you.”

Molly’s face lights up, and I get the feeling people don’t give her many gifts. “Thank you,” she says quickly, taking the items and poking at the basket of sweets idly. “That was thoughtful of you. More thoughtful than my own boys,” she shouts the last bit, and Bill and George tense near the window as they eye me disdainfully. “Dinner is in an hour. Keep yourself busy until then,” she chuffs, and shoos me from her area, snapping a chocolate wand between her teeth.

“‘Bout to play catch the snitch; want to join?” George calls from his spot near the back door.

“It’s just called Quidditch, mate.” I laugh. Bill reaches his hand out in an offering, and I startle, taking it perhaps too eagerly. I’m unnerved by his blaiçé greeting of me, like he wouldn’t have Avada’d me in the back six months ago.

George rolls his eyes at my reaction, a mischievous twitch of his lips as he chuckles. “If you think he’s pretty now, you should have seen him before Greyback made mashed potatoes of his face.” Bill mutters something unintelligible, and George throws a sharp elbow into his side. “It’s not Quidditch. It’s just a little pickup game we manage when we don’t have time for a full game.”

“How do you play?”

“You catch the bloody snitch,” George articulates slowly, near condescendingly, and shoves his fingers into my shoulder.

Within minutes I’m frowning, sitting atop a Cleansweep that must be close to a decade old, although I’m still sure it’s one of their nicer brooms. Ron is hovering across the garden, and it seems so odd that we both have such fond memories here when we could easily strangle the other for fun.
He’s ignored my presence completely up until then, but his eyes narrow upon seeing me up there mingling with his family, and he makes a wide, lazy circle as he pulls up next to me. He rubs his calloused hands together in the frigid December air, and he lets out a long sigh that solidifies into a cloud.

“It’s a bold move showing up here today, Malfoy,” he says.

“Well, I’m a bold kinda bloke, Weasel.”

Ron snorts like a pig. “It’s becoming clear you can’t take a hint and piss off from my family.”

“I don’t much care for hints,” I drawl lazily, my head finally rolling towards his.

“Well, I’ll say it plainly then: I don’t like you near my family.” Ron’s eyes are a sharp blue, and I can see his hatred for me plain on his face. For the first time in my life, I try to put myself in his shoes. I’m trying to imagine my parents inviting him into our family while he makes chummy with my friends and family, and as much as I’m loathe to admit it, I get it.

I not only get it, but I don’t blame him.

I sit up straighter on my boom, my fingers wrap tightly around it. “Noted, Weasley. However, I’m far less scared of you than I am of your mother. So until she stops inviting me, I really think we ought to get past this.”

“I’m not getting past anything.” His words feel like a blade as they cut through the space between us. He’s dipping his broom down and toward the other side of the garden, and a chill runs up my spine as I realize how bloody freezing it is.

We’re floating in a haphazard circle, Ron, Harry, George, Bill, Ginny and myself, and I realize that most of this circle would be all too happy to see my brains scattered on the stone walkway beneath us.

Just a friendly game, I try and reassure myself, but Ginny is fixing with me an arched brow that feels like a dagger, and Ron’s shoulders are practically rippling with tension. Brilliant.
Potter reaches into his pocket and procures a tarnished golden snitch, holding it out in his palm, and its wings stutter to life. I’ve already decided not to try; it seems a poor decision to try and beat Potter or these Weasleys, and there’s really no point in doing so.

Instead, I make lazy circles around the garden, watching as Ron and George race each other in a dead sprint towards nothing and Potter pulls up next to Ginny to plant a lazy kiss on her cheek. No one seems all too concerned with the snitch.

The back door opens, and Molly leads Granger onto the lawn. She’s all bundled up again, curls pouring out of her silly hat as she stares up into the sky at us. There’s one long twitch in my throat as my addiction beckons to me at the sight of her. It’s stupid and shallow and fucking petty, but I swear I’ll catch that fucking snitch if it’s the last thing I do.

I pull up on my rickety arse broom, and I realize starkly how much I miss the powerful feeling of a broom between my thighs.

This doesn’t even come close.

My eyes scour the skies, searching for a glimpse of the worn snitch, but they fall on the Ron’s ugly face instead, looking for the same prize I am.

It takes all my effort to keep my gaze from the curly-haired witch below us, and when Ron takes off in a bee line, I nearly laugh. The brute could barely be confused with someone with actual finesse. The fact he played Keeper would forever be the laughing point in Gryffindor Quidditch history. He’s a bludger by nature, which meant he was meant to play Beater.

His movements give away too much, and he’s not fast enough to close the distance before we catch up. It’s a near fucking mess as the players shoot around each other for a chance at the snitch, Molly shouting up at the tangled crew to take it easy and back off a bit.

Even I’m impressed at the vertical corkscrew Potter pulls off, lifting effortlessly from the mangled mess of us and towards the sky. With a sharp pull to the left, I’m in the open, waiting. There’s a clue to the snitch, one that Potter never takes the chance to look for.

He’s faster, always has been, but he lacks the thought, lacks the instinct and the fluidity that I’ve managed after a lifetime of flying. I know the way a snitch moves; I know how it juts to the left just
to cut to the right, slight movements that give way to a course.

This fucking broom does me no favors, but I slip just past Ginny who is fiddling with a family broom instead of her professional one, and I’m seconds from touching the gold casing, moments from feeling a semblance of pride that doesn’t belong to me.

Instead, I hit Potter. Our brooms collide grandly, and I roll across the snow-covered ground, heaving as the cold air burns my throat.

I’m cursing and clawing for breath, that shitty broom long forgotten as I lay in the frost.

“Malfoy!” Her wild eyes lock onto mine, and I’m lost in a canopy of her curls. Granger is hovering over me, checking me frantically for a nonexistent injury, and a smile curls its way onto my mouth as I realise she rushed to me, not to Potter. That’s something, right? It’s definitely not nothing. “Is anything broken?”

I hollow chuckle slips past me. All of me is broken, love.

I push up to a sitting position, and she’s so close that I want to leech the warmth from her. She’s a fire in the winter, all flushed cheeks and worried eyes. I can’t help but remember the taste of cinnamon when I kissed her lips and the noise she makes when I wrapped my fingers at the curve of her neck.

“I’m fine.”

Molly’s shrill shriek fills the garden as she demands the snitch. With a flourish of Harry’s wand, the snitch appears in his palm, and he hands it reluctantly to Molly. She’s muttering something about how this is why she banned the game altogether, and the red-headed siblings form a sad parade back into the house, and I can imagine this is probably the twentieth year this has happened.

Granger tucks her curls behind her ears and stands, offering her hand to me. I take it and rise to standing, towering over her as she fidgets with the thin chain around her neck.

“Happy Christmas,” she says. Her gaze meets mine, but only briefly. Too soon, she’s starting at our shoes, her cheeks flushed from the cold or the lingering awkwardness.
“Happy Christmas.”

She turns on her heel and marches back into the house, and rubbing the pain from my neck, I trudge along after her.

Dinner is an entirely new experience. It’s the same food – turkey and various fixings on numerous platters spread over a long table – but everything else is different. It’s boisterous – rambunctious, even – and there’s laughter that hasn’t exist in any Christmas I can remember.

Ron’s at the opposite end of the table, and while I ignore the few withering looks he shoots in my direction, I enjoy the way the rest of his family seems to shamelessly bully him. Bill has a delightful way of calling him “Ronnie,” which makes him turn a delightful shade of crimson that I wish I could take a photograph of.

Dinner finishes, and I’m almost desperately awaiting the pudding because the one thing I know is that Molly’s chocolate butterscotch cake is worth the entire ordeal of sharing a table with the man who arrested me a few weeks ago.

“Alright, finally!” Molly claps her happy hands together and delivers a package in front of the Weasleys and Hermione at the far end of the table, and an overwhelming fear seizes in my chest. It’s an anxious panic that I can’t quell to save me.

I’m not sure why, but the feeling of being outed as the only person not to receive a gift guts me. I stare at the knotted wood table and wish to be magically transported to anywhere, anywhere but here. Then, surprisingly, a gift appears – wrapped in plain brown paper and a red dingy ribbon – but it’s there.

The feeling in my chest is tight and ugly. It’s warm and unfamiliar, and I don’t know why she’s given me anything when she’s already given me everything.

My eyes drift towards the end of the table where Granger sits, and I notice her eyes are locked on my hands. With a hard flinch, she tears her gaze from me and rips into the gift in front of her.

With nowhere else for my eyes to travel, I stare at the suspicious package on the table in front of me. **What on earth could Molly Weasley buy me?**
When everyone else seems to coo over their gifts I tentatively tear at the corners of my gift, revealing a crude knitted garment, a large ‘D’ fixed on the front. My brows furrow as I lift it from its wrappings and find a fucking jumper. It’s the ugliest fucking jumper I’ve ever seen, honestly. But as my eyes flit around the table, I realize it’s significance.

I want to banish the tightness in my throat, but it catches, seizing and startling me.

Stupid fucking jumper.

“Well?” Molly is looming near me, her eyes wide and excited as she stares at me, and I can’t fucking tell her how much this matters. Maybe someday I will, but not today. Today, I’ll just survive, and I give her a disbelieving grin. “Try it on! I had to guess, and you’re not built like my boys, shorter than the twins—” The table falls silent, and I remember that this is their first Christmas with just one twin. I can’t share their pain, but… I still feel it. I feel it in the way their eyes dart away from the others, in the way they shift in their seats.

Molly clears her throat after a few moments of stressed, uncomfortable silence. “Does it fit, Draco?”

My eyes flit down to the hideous sweater, large loops of pale green and dull grey.

For Molly.

I shrug my jumper off and replace it with the scratchy garment, clawing at my neck, and I feel a hot blush on my neck when I make eye contact with Granger, her toothy grin overly ecstatic.

My head shakes in disbelief. Sitting at the Burrow on Christmas Day in a fucking Weasley jumper.

What would Mother say now?

There’s a quiet hum through the house, a contented purr that seems to spread from room to room. On almost every piece of furniture, there is a snoozing Weasley: Molly and Arthur in their armchairs by the fire, Potter has Ginny tucked in his arm in the alcove by the window, staring at the snow collecting on the garden bench, and he even gives me an almost friendly smile as I pass.
I’ve found the quietest place I can think of, and I cradle my tea in my hands for the sake of having something to drink, but my ears perk when a familiar yet haunting melody pulls at my attention. Lazily, I make my way towards the back room. It’s cluttered with nonsense: a grandfather clock long since having ticked its last tock and a bookcase shoved full of books not worth reading among other forgotten belongings. In the corner is a dusty, upright piano weathered from neglect, and the top of it is cluttered with knick-knacks. My witch is at its bench, her long fingers brushing the keys in a song I’d committed to memory long ago.

My brows twitch up, because in all the ways she surprises me, this may be the one that tops them all. She’s playing Canon in D, and it’s lovely. Its flexibility makes it one of my favourites – a melody that doesn’t require an accompanist but is still strengthened by it.

I work my way closer as I watch her fingers transition, ready to shoulder the melody on her own.

With a quick breath, I sit to her left, noticing the subtle way she tenses as my hands find an easy home next to hers. My fingers effortlessly match hers, and soon we are dancing together.

Forcing my attention to stay on the keys - even though I’m sure I could play both parts with my eyes closed - I can almost feel the way her cheeks tug into a smile as our fingers collide in melody.

The piece crescendos, and our shoulders brush, ever so slightly, and in a shared breath, we bring the piece to its beautiful end, the last of the chords echoing in the quiet room in the back of the Burrow.

The silence stretches, deafens. It’s heavy and pregnant with words that will be left unsaid and just when I think it’s too much to bear, just when I think I can’t stand another minute without capturing her mouth in mine and telling her all the things my dark heart needs her to hear… her finger lifts.

She taps high C a few quick times and I chuckle – I’d know that melody anywhere.


My lips quirk in a knowing smirk. My tongue drags across my teeth as the fingers of my left hand find their place octaves below for the duet.

Heart and Soul.
This song transcends Muggle and Wizarding traditions because our fingers move effortlessly and animatedly together. A chuckle passes between us, and I turn to watch the curve of her cheek for just one stolen moment. Her teeth cut into her bottom lip as she fights the grin threatening to spread across her cheeks, and I realize painfully how very much I miss her.

The moment ends abruptly, and I blink as the trance lifts, Weasel’s voice separating us.

“’Mione? A word?” His voice is clipped, and Granger’s brows fall low as she peeks over her shoulder.

“Everything alright, Ron?”

“No,” he says and stomps out the front door without his cloak.

“Excuse me,” she mutters and follows him, the door bouncing back off its hinge until it’s cracked open.

My eyes flutter closed, and my hands leave their home on the keys to rest between my thighs. I already know what the little prick is going to say, and my head hangs in defeat as I strain to hear when he begins.

“What’s going on in there, Hermione?”

She sighs heavily, and I almost chuckle when I imagine a wayward curl getting caught up in her breath. “I was playing the piano Ronald—”

“With him ?”

“Yes, with Draco. Is there something so positively offensive to you that I share a duet with him?”

“Yes.”
“Yes?” Her voice is strong, almost indignant as he accuses her. I would smile if I wasn’t so embarrassed.

“Do you really need me to list of the blokes rap sheet? Death Eater and drug addict aren’t enough for you? Racist bully doesn’t drive it home?”

“Enough, Ronald! He’s... he’s not like that. You know that—”

“Bullshit,” he spits it at her, and I flinch. I can feel another presence in the room, but I don’t turn towards them. I don’t want to see who is sharing in my humiliation.

“Stop!” She’s shouting now, and I feel my throat constrict as she fights for me. *Hasn’t she learned yet?*

“He’s trash, Hermione!”

“Ronald! I said stop! You don’t know him like I do; he’s not like that anymore. You promised you wouldn’t ruin Christmas.”

“I did, but you said you weren’t seeing him! You looked a breath away from snogging him, ‘Mione.”

She gives a lovely little snort. and I imagine the way her foot probably stomps into the snow.

“Firstly, I can snog whoever I bloody well please. Secondly, I was not about to snog him. We’re friends – that’s it!” I feel her words seize something in my chest, and it sputters in there a few times before I’m sure it dies.

“It looked like a lot more than friends, Mione.”

“Well, I don’t know what to tell you, Ronald. We’re friends. Nothing more, alright? You don’t get a say in who I’m friends with or who I snog, and you don’t get to pull me aside to talk about my friends like this! I wouldn’t allow anyone to speak about you like this—”
“Don’t listen to him.” Potter steps up into my line of sight, and my eyes dart away from the crack in the door to my lap, sucking in a sharp breath.

“It’s fine,” I say through a tight jaw. “He’s not wrong.”

“It’s not fine. He’s still working his way through a lot. He’s not to the forgiveness part of the aftermath yet. He’s got some stuff on his end.”

“It’s late.” I push the bench backwards and make my way towards the Floo. “Will you tell Molly I said goodnight? Tell her Happy Christmas?”

He responds with a stiff nod, his bushy eyebrows knitted together as he stares at me through his out of date spectacles.

Hermione pushes through the door, flustered and agitated, and we lock eyes for the briefest of moments before the green flames consume me.

A/N: All my regular thanks to MHCalamas and Ravenslight for your love and adoration to this story. Also to BiscuitsforPotter who helped me out with the piano scene!

If you’ve been waiting on Tergeo and Duckie, I’ll be getting those updated over the next few days! MWAH!

Your reviews brighten my day and I devour every one that comes across my inbox. Thank you darling ones! -LK
Lost Without You

Strangers rushin' past
Just tryna get home
But you were the only
Safehaven that I've known
Hits me at full speed
Feel like I can't breathe
And nobody knows
This pain inside me
My world is crumbling
I should never have
Let you go

I think I'm lost without you

Lost Without You, Freya

“How was Christmas?” Brenner asks, leaning back lazily in his chair, Muggle pen in hand.

Tugging on my fingers, I loft my head from side to side and shrug. “It wasn’t the worst day of my life. Does that count for something?” The corners of my lips turn up into an almost there smile and I peek up at Brenner—he’s almost smiling too. “How was yours?”

I’m surprised by the question but his eyes lift to meet mine. “It was good. The first Christmas that my daughter’s been old enough to understand. We had fun.”

My lips flatten into a lazy scowl and I bob my head absently, ready for him to continue his probing questions—but the silence lingers on for longer than I’m comfortable with. So long, that I now feel
obligated to speak next.

“I’ve actually started on my list.” I’m picking at my cuticles, just for something to do and I can feel my heart quicken as I prepare to tell him about it. It feels too intimate, too close—but I still want to tell him.

“Tell me about it.” His voice is comforting, and it startles me to remember that not so long ago it was knives on china. I breathe deeply, shakily rehashing my visits with Madame Rosmerta and Mrs. Crabbe.

“How did you feel afterwards?” he asks.

I knew this question was coming—had thought on it for some time—but it still doesn’t make it easier to admit, not to him and certainly not to myself. “I felt better.”

“Good.” There’s no smugness to his tone, just sincere appreciation, and my brows knit closely together as I realize how good it feels. “Keep going with the list. It’ll help. It’ll hurt, but it’ll help.”

His words make me flinch, and I remember Granger settled between my knees, forehead to forehead as she confessed her feelings for me. “I don’t know if it will hurt or help.”

There’s a pain deep in my ribs, like they’re rebelling and threatening to close in on my heart until they collapse.

“Who’s next on the list?” Brenner asks almost cheerfully.

I tug the list from its home in my trousers and unfold it gingerly.

Madame Rosmerta
Katie Bell
Pansy
Goyle
Crabbe
As I stare at the parchment in my hands, I’m not sure where I’ll go next. “Maybe Pansy,” I murmur. “Maybe Goyle.”

“Good, good.” He nods, scribbling in his notebook. “I have more homework for you this week.”

Returning my list to it’s home in my trousers, I answer with a snort. “Brilliant. Just what I need.”

“I want you to try some hobbies.”

“Hobbies?” My mouth puckers around the word as if it’s a lemon.

Brenner chuckles and stores his notebook away, tilting his head to the side and sucking on his cheek. “Yes, hobbies. I think you need something to distract you from your… urges. Something that’s not work.”

“What kind of hobbies?” I ask, brows low over my eyes

“ Anything. Just something you can delve into that’s not drugs or alcohol… or Hermione.”

Freezing, my lips pull back, baring my teeth. She’s off limits, even here.

He leans forward, pushing his fingers through his messy hair and then rubbing his palm along the stubble on his cheek. “I know you’re not ready to talk about her. I won’t press it. When you are
I feel a violent rage swell in my lungs and I’m just about to rip him a new one when he stays me with a docile lift of his hand.

“I know, I know. Off limits. Until you’re ready to talk about it, I want you to find something. Yeah?”

I nearly growl my assent at him and Brenner chuckles, flipping his notebook open and scratching his stupid pen over the parchment until my ears are nearly bleeding.

**Hobbies.**

Surely, I’ve had hobbies before. I had Quidditch, and I like to consider myself well read. I’m more than decent at Wizards Chess and I — on more than one occasion — solved the riddle to the Ravenclaw commons in order to snog a witch or two.

Shaking my head as I lean back in my rickety, well-worn office chair (that I’ve sworn I’m going to replace on at least a dozen occasions), I realize I can’t think of anything I’d like to pick up as a hobby.

My eyes scour my desk, tripping over receipts and ledgers, prototypes for future products and scrolls of customer feedback I need to read through. Spotting the bright cover of the yellow book Granger gave me all those months ago, “Accounting for Dummies”, I cock my head.

I pluck the book from the home it’s kept these last few months and I almost chuckle as I remember my first few days here, savouring the stolen moments where she flirted with me over a cactus and a calculator. I flip through the dog-eared pages and let my gaze drag over the pages. The margins are filled with my notes and absent-minded scribblings, and I can’t help the smile that spreads across my face as I imagine Granger seeing what I’ve done to this book.

I close the book and toss it onto my desk with a resounding *thud.*

My eyes catch on the vibrant back cover, and I notice a list of other books in the aptly named, “Dummies Series”. They appear to be mostly related to accounting but a promising “AND SO MANY MORE!” in giant red text at the bottom of the cover sparks an idea and I’m rushing from my
I stop into the Dirty Grind, and scour the menu for something unfamiliar. Eventually, I settle a Dirty Chai Tea Latte which tastes exactly like you’d imagine – like dirt. I wince through each sip and pull my wool coat tighter around me before bringing the disgusting drink to my lips again.

Outside the coffee shop, I peer down the street with a narrowed glare. I’m positive I’ve seen a book shop in my meandering but I can’t quite remember where. I decide to turn right. There must be something poetically tragic about my decision, because at that moment, the sky darkens and a new chill settles in the air.

Snowflakes drift down, collecting on the edges of the sidewalk and as I lift my face to greet them, I’m reminded of the snow globe. The further I get into this treatment of Brenner’s, the more I find that the ever present twitch of my neck calms. Sometimes I go hours—even a day—without it attacking me.

The far-off notion that there might be a day I don’t think about drugs or death is almost tangible and I find I desperately want to grasp it. I want to not think about drugs again.

About a block down is a Book Emporium, and although the term emporium seems a bit far-fetched, it is larger and more expansive than Flourish and Blotts. Ducking in, I check that my Accounting for Dummies book is tucked safely under my arm.

“Hello.” I approach the kid behind the counter. He’s probably close to my age but he hasn’t seen war or death yet, presumably, and still has the air of innocence around him.

“Sup.”

I grimace, imagining the look on my mother’s face had she been greeted in such a manner.

“Right. I’m wondering if you by chance had any more of these?”

His lazy gaze travels from the magazine – which must be of paramount importance because he hasn’t taken his eyes from it yet – to the book in my hands. “What? The accounting one?”
My spine straightens and my patience is quickly running thin. “No. I obviously own the accounting one. I’m wondering if you happen to have any of the others in stock?”

His gaze turns withering and a mocking smile tugs at his lips. “Are you joking?”

My eyes narrow and I match his smile with a scowl. “Do I look like I’m joking?”

He gives a disbelieving snort and points to the back wall without another word. I have a brief moment where I consider sending him a Bat Bogey Hex from the stacks, but I don’t think it’s worth risking my probation. Instead, I stomp in the direction of his gesture.

Granger would love this place. Each shelf is stuffed with books of every topic and although none seem of great value, I know she’d appreciate the words within. I turn into a section with a large SELF HELP sign and I nearly growl at it. I don’t need any more help, I just need a bloody hobby.

Along the back wall is covered in books with the offensive yellow bindings. My jaw falls open slightly as I step up to inspect the spines, each one for a different kind of dummy. I pick one up arbitrarily and notice it costs 15 pounds.

That’s it?

With a shrug I start choosing ones I could see myself trying out: Chess, Cooking, Drawing, Dungeons and Dragons, and Gardening. I’m about to leave with my haul but my eyes catch warily on Poetry for Dummies and with a curious lilt of my shoulders, I add it to my pile. I’m about to hover the books to the front when with a grunt realize I’m in the Muggle world and trudge back the way I’d come, working my way through the aisles of the emporium with six new tomes in hand.

“Malfoy?”

I freeze midstep, and my eyes clench shut. Not happening. It’s not real. You’re having some kind of episode because no one has this shitty of luck. It’s not—

“Malfoy?” she repeats with a squeak, and when I open my eyes she’s there, curls everywhere and faintly stained cheeks from the cold.
If the stack of books in my arms wasn’t so obnoxious, I’d drop them and run but, as it is, they could break a foot, so I just clutch them tightly to my chest and my eyes blow wide as I take in the awkwardness this moment is presenting.

“Hello.”

“What are you doing here?” Her brows lift in genuine curiosity and I can’t help but notice the golden specks in her chocolate coloured eyes.

“I’m— I’m shopping.”

The idea startles her and she peeks down at the books in my arms. I feel hot shame colour my face and neck as she grins.

“More Dummies books?” One perfectly shaped brow quirs in my direction and my lips pull back from my teeth in a grimace.

I adjust the books and tilt my chin proudly. “Well, apparently my therapist thinks I need a hobby. I didn’t know where to start. What are you doing here?” The last bit sounds like an accusation and I wince as it leaves my mouth. I’m not sure I’ll ever get used to being her acquaintance when I was so close to being more. “I just mean, well, you work at a bookshop.”

“True, but they don’t have quite the same selection. How’d you find your way to this corner of Muggle London anyway?”

The books are now becoming burdensome and this small talk is exacerbating my impatience but it’s a stolen moment with Granger, so I shuffle the books again and my mouth begins talking before I can give it permission.

“My therapist lives near here, so I started wandering. There’s a coffee shop I frequent just up the way and I found my way here.”

“Look at you.” Her lips purse pleasantly, like she’s hiding a secret.
“What?”

“I just mean— you’re different. Therapy and Muggle shops. Hobbies. It’s a good different.”

My heart startles to a near stopping point for the briefest of moments as unnamed emotions flood my chest.

“Adapt or die.” I respond cryptically, and when she hides a giggle, my eyes roll behind my closed lids. What in the bloody fuck is wrong with you? You used to be charming, you fucking wanker.

“What hobbies did you choose?”

I yank the books out of her reach, guarding them in my arms like they’re a stack of first editions and not cheap self-help books and with another giggle, she steps into me and stares at the spines.

She lists them off and balks when she gets too Dungeons and Dragons.

“What? Seems interesting enough. I didn’t even know you could make a hobby of such a thing,” I say.

“I don’t think it’s what you think it is.” Her laughter trills through me and heals a little crack in me. Just one—but it’s a little more that’s not left broken and I’m thankful for it. “You’ll need supplies for these.”

“Supplies?”

“You’ll need a sketchbook and pencils for drawing, soil, seeds and planters for gardening… I don’t even know where to begin with Dungeons and Dragons.” She shakes her head and her curls bounce around her face. “I can help you, if you want. Most of them are here—notebooks and pencils and such but there’s a general store just up the way. I can show you what you need. If you want.” She shrugs and her eyes are soft as they study me.
I open my mouth to accept but the words die in my throat.

*It might hurt more than it helps.*

“I’ll be okay, I think.” My eyes lock between our feet and I can hear my heart violently opposing every word I’m saying, begging me to take it back and grovel for her attention.

She’s already made her choice.

She didn’t choose me.

“Oh.”

“It was nice to see you.” I can’t meet her eyes again; I’m sure the act would leave my heart gasping for life on the tattered carpet. My lips tighten into a flat line and I nod a swift goodbye and move around her towards the counter, a knot forming in my chest as I leave her in the aisle behind me.

“I saw her.”

Brenner doesn’t speak and although my eyes are trained on my fingers tracing lazy lines along my palm, I know I’ve peaked his interest.

“She offered to help me. With my hobbies, that is. Offered to help me shop.”

“And?”

I swallow the tight feeling in my throat and run my palm along my weary face. “I said no. I don’t know why.” This is by far the most I’ve offered him regarding my relationship, or lack thereof, with Granger, and for the first time I find I’m actually curious for his insight. “When she left, the last time, she said something to me. She said she wanted to tell me something and she didn’t know if she should. ‘Not sure if it will help or hurt’, was how she phrased it.”
“Did she tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Did it help or hurt?”

It’s been close to forty-five minutes since our session began and I don’t know the last time I looked at him. I really just want to drop some of the baggage I’ve been carrying, simply because it’s becoming too heavy to carry. I don’t know where else to leave it and he seems happy to have me leave it here; so I continue. “Both. I think it hurt more than it helped though. She told me she thought she was in love with me.” I bury my face in my hands again and when I finally look up to meet him, my nails scratch along my stubbled jaw. I open my palms to him, inviting him for insight that he seems hesitant to give. “Why would she tell me that?”

Brenner cocks his head back and forth a few times, considering my question before answering it. “I suppose because she meant it.”

“She’s whole and wonderful and fuck, it’s like the universe conspired to create all things good and she was born. And then there’s me. Her antithesis. I’m broken and fucked and all things terrible. If she loves me, it’s not really me she loves. It’s that she wants to fix me.” Brenner snorts and my eyes flash angrily at him. “You don’t agree?”

“I agree with all the things you said about you,” he says with a wry laugh. He removes his glasses, cleaning them on his wool jumper and allowing me to wait for his sage wisdom a few more moments. “Have you considered she might be a little broken and damaged too? You’re placing her on an unreachable pedestal, one that no one, including you, will ever be able to live up to. Have you ever stopped to consider how that would affect her?”

“What’s that mean?”


“Well after your little mind fuck, I went to Knockturn but—”

“But you didn’t use then. So when did you relapse?”
“She left. She chose someone else and it was too painful.” The simple way I confess startles me.

“Well, it seems as though you’re putting an awful lot of pressure on her. She is the crux of your sobriety, your sole reason for wanting to be clean and if she fucks up, you’ll use. Not only that, but you also seem to regard her so highly that I’m sure she’s terrified of ever letting you down. I assure you that Hermione Granger, despite public opinion, is just as much a human as you and I are. From what I’ve read, she’s endured as much trauma during the war as anyone else and it’s unrealistic for you to expect that she isn’t, in some way, broken as well.”

“You clearly don’t know her.” I chuckle to myself and lean back against the cushions of the sofa.

“Do you?” My eyes flash up to him, red twinging my vision briefly. His thick brows are perched high on his forehead and his expression is open and curious. “Have you ever asked her how she was after the war? How it affected her?”

I flinch when he asks the question as a bombardment of memories flood my mind: the sadness in her eyes when she cut my hair in the attic and in Flourish and Blotts when she mentioned how long it took her to assimilate back into society; how she still had panic attacks whenever a child screamed for ice cream. I remember the way her tears stained my shirt over a pan of lasagna and the hurt she let me kiss away just moments later.

My eyes clench shut and I physically recoil from the memories.

“I think you did the right thing, Draco. I don’t know you’re in a safe space for that part of your life yet… but you’ll get there. Your addiction and trauma will not rule your life. You’ll overcome it. When you’re ready, ask her. Ask her and be willing to accept her answers, even if they hurt. From what I understand, you were, unfortunately, part of that trauma.”

The shroud of guilt is too heavy for me to speak on it anymore and so I nod along.

“What about your list? Any progress there?”
“Goyle didn’t want to see me. I think word got around that I was no longer—” I cough into my palm and find that I’m fucking exhausted from this round of mind fuckery. “Well, that I’d changed.”

“That’s alright. You tried. You attempted to make amends. You can now release that part that is weighing you down and someday, maybe, you can try again. Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“And the hobbies?”

I bark a laugh and recount the series of books I’ve decided to take on. Brenner joins me, nearly tearing a stitch in his side as he imagines me with an armful of Dummies books in a Muggle shop.

“Brilliant. I’m proud of you. That’s a huge step, Draco.” He finally commends me after the laughter dies down. Proud. “What’s first?”

“I thought I’d go in alphabetical order until I find something I like. So, chess, I guess,” I reply with a shrug.

“You’ve never played chess?” His voice is thick with disbelief and I roll my eyes at him.

“I’ve played Wizards Chess since I could sit upright, but I wasn’t sure if Muggle chess was the same. Turns out it is, except that you have to move the pieces by hand.”

“Do you want to play?”

My nose wrinkles as I regard him. “With you? Our session is almost up.”

He removes his wand and wordlessly summons a lavish chess set through the air and onto the table between us. “You’re the last of the day. And I haven’t beaten anyone in a while. Could be fun.” As he speaks, he’s careful not to make it seem like he’s doing me a favour.

For that reason, I agree and while he does in fact beat me at the end, I managed to only attempt to
instruct the pieces two or three times. And these days, I take wins wherever I can possibly fucking get them.

A/N: Beyond grateful to my dear friend and beta, Partylines for taking time to help me with this chapter! And of course to my alpha and love, MHCalamas!

Please don’t give up on the Dramione aspect of our story. It was really important to me that Draco find healing independently from Hermione… but I think he’s getting better, don’t you? ;)

In case you haven’t heard, Sweetly Broken is up for Best Angst in the Enchanted Awards!! I am so incredibly honored to be nominated with some of my favorite authors. I can’t believe anyone would speak my name with theirs let alone think SB belongs with them. So thank you!

If you’re enjoying the story and want to vote, or vote for any of the lovely stories, visit this link! Just remove the *

http://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSejCxo5yHoJ0EAiNXdmO8HEplU5vCWcyo

There are also links on my Tumblr (Same pen name).

Would love to know your thoughts, they make me GRIN! Until next time my loves!
I Am

I'm a problem, I'm the killer, I'm the cure, I guess
I'm the end, I'm the beginning, the apocalypse
I am something from nothing, I heard 'em say
Rags to the riches, your best mistake
I'm the future, I'm the relic, I'm the "not done yet"

Oh, oh, oh I am

Forevermore I'll be

*I'll Be, James Arthur*

I turn her so she’s facing away from me, her hands squeezing the bookshelf in front of her as my hands roam her body. The buttons of her Oxford are strained from working far too hard to keep her contained and with a firm yank, they fall to the ground and her breasts are freed. Palming at them, she rests her head back against my shoulder, quiet whimpers escaping her full lips.

I run my hands along the dip in her waist, reaching the soft flesh at her hip and digging my fingers in. Yanking her against my hard on, I flick my wrist and flip her skirt up. Tearing her knickers to the side, I slide into her before she has a moment to speak.

She’s always talking too much.

Watching my cock slide in and out of her is enough to make me spill, but with a groan, I steel myself. My fingers curl in her hair and yank until she’s staring back at me, her pupils blown and her lips parted as she moans. My free hand grips her harder at her hip bone as I drive into her again and again.

When she screams my name, I come undone, growling obscenities into her hair as her hands wind back behind my neck and somehow, pull me impossibly closer.
With a strangled gasp, I wake, shooting up in my bed. Slick sweat is covering my body, and I’m panting in the darkness in the wake of an unintentional orgasm. I look down and groan as I feel the familiar stickiness from my youth splayed across my belly and matting the hair under my belly button.

I grab my wand and cast a cleaning charm before falling down on my pillows, my breathing finally evening as I throw my arm over my eyes. There are threads of my dream fraying and re-entering my consciousness and I feel my cock twitch.

“Fuck .”

Tapping has become a nervous habit of mine. I tap on my thigh, on my parchments at work, on my palm. Today, I’m tapping on the shiny wood of the table top at Madame Puddifoot’s while I wait for her. Part of me can’t believe that she agreed to meet me after the last time, but I know I need to say some shit and there’s no way she’ll meet me at the Dirty Grind.

There’s something almost comical about the fact that we’re meeting here, especially because of the way she used to beg me to take her there on Hogsmeade weekends. I never did, finding far more enjoyment in ragging on the Twatty Trio and getting buzzed with my friends behind the Hogs Head.

The little bell over the door trills and when she saunters up to the table I’ve selected near the back, she clears her throat to let me know of her presence— as if it were possible not to notice Pansy sucking the air out of a room. I stand like a good little Pureblood boy and pull the chair for her. She takes it demurely, tucking a silky strand of raven hair behind her ear.

“It’s good to see you,” she says with a practiced smile. I’ve seen this witch in all her forms— I’ve seen her wasted and giggling over some stupid thing I’d said, I’d seen her wail and scream; I’ve seen her orgasm. Yet still she sits across from me with all the grace of her charm lessons; her back rigidly straight and her chin level with the table in front of us.

“Thanks for coming.”

Mother would flay me if she saw me now, hunched over a cuppa with too much milk and sugar and avoiding eye contact with the girl I’d sworn I’d love forever.
“Heard you and Blaise had quite the falling out.” Her perfectly shaped eyebrow arches and she nods in my direction.

I stir my tea just for something to do and don’t meet her eye. “That’s an understatement,” I mumble.

“Are you okay?” Her voice is soft and warm and suddenly, she’s the Pansy I’ve always known.

“I’m getting there. Had a bit of a rough run and my therapist wants me to make amends with people I’ve wronged. Says it’s supposed to help me heal—load of bollocks.”

“Sounds like a nutter. You’re Draco Malfoy.” Pansy rolls her eyes and shifts her weight to her other hip. “You apologize to no one.”

My brows knit together as I take in what she just said and my hand instinctively reaches out to squeeze hers, my thumb running across her palm.

“I’m sorry.” Her shocked expression almost makes me laugh. Who am I to think I’m above apologizing to someone I’ve hurt? “I should have called you after that night but—”

“Oh, hush.” Pansy’s shifts in her seat, a little color staining her cheeks. “I’m not the same gushing girl I was a few years ago. I didn’t think you were falling in love with me all over again. It was a fun romp, Draco. Hell, happy to do it whenever you want.” She giggles and snags a biscuit from the tray I’d ordered.

My pulls in a crooked little smirk. “We always were rather good at that part of our relationship. Even if we were rubbish at everything else.” I cough into the back of my hand, a piss poor attempt to hide my discomfort. “I want to say sorry— for all of it. For sixth year and after, for dragging you along for it. I treated you like shit, Pans. I never even properly called us off and I hate that you were probably waiting for me. You deserved better. You deserve better.”

Pansy’s dark eyes are roaming my face, her features pulled tight and she quickly looks down to her hands. I see her gulp when she snaps her biscuit in half, crumbling it to keep her hands busy. When she looks up again her eyes are rimmed with unshed tears.
“Don’t be silly. Wait for you?” She says in a mocking tone, trying to make light of the tension lingering between us. “Wizards are like the Knight Bus—another one always come around.” She winks and suddenly, we’re just a couple of kids again, untouched by war and fucked up parents.

“You’re quite the modern witch. What does your Mother say about your liberalness?” I grin at her and when I hear the chime of the bell over the door, I look over my shoulder out of instinct. My hand tightens on Pansy’s when I see the Gryffindor squad strolling in, Hermione’s eyes locked on Pansy and myself.

*What in the actual fuck are they doing in Hogsmeade on a Saturday afternoon?*

I cough and straighten my spine, sitting tall as I release Pansy’s hand and nervously cradle my teacup.

“Ah, that one again.” Pansy alludes to the curly-haired, tight-lipped witch at the counter. “Speaking of Mother’s rolling over in their grave.” She giggles into her cup and fixes Granger with a pointed glare that I know is meant to make her jealous.

“There’s nothing going on between Granger and I. She’s just…someone I used to know.” I stare at the floral table covering, at the vines entangling themselves around rosebuds of varying shades of pink.

Chancing a look up at the three of them, I nearly blush when I find Granger peeking over her shoulder at us. Pansy’s amused chuckle breaks my trance.

“Let’s get out of here,” she says with a nod towards the door. “I’ll let you buy me something pretty.

“Some things never change.” Smirking, I stand and pull out her chair and she rises with practiced polish.

Unexpectedly, Pansy’s hand curls around my neck and tugs my mouth against hers. The kiss is soft; her lips moving quietly against mine. My eyes flutter closed and when she breaks the kiss—looking up at me with a cheeky smile—I can’t seem to form thoughts enough to answer.

She lifts onto her tiptoes, her lips finding my ear, and whispers to me. “Witches are not like the Knight Bus. Don’t let the one you want to catch pass you by— it’s likely she won’t be back around
Studying her face, I’m worried momentarily that she thinks I may have meant something else by this meeting.

“A little dose of jealousy is good for the heart. If she doesn’t know how she felt about you before, she knows now.” Pansy grins and turns for the door without looking back.

When we pass the window, I’m a man possessed as I look past the swirly font of the etched glass. Granger is staring back at me, her lips pursed and her brows low over her chocolate coloured eyes.

The Cooking for Dummies book was really quite enlightening. After finishing the section on ‘Tackling Breakfast’, I’m now standing in front of my stove with a determined set to my jaw and a brown paper bag in my arms.

The grotesque yellow book is flipped open to a recipe for French Toast, and I begin meticulously following the instructions: whipping eggs and a cup of milk in a small bowl, and heating the pan. I glance at the recipe, it calls for ‘medium-high’ heat but the rest of the prep work is finished and I’m not about to wait for the pan to catch up. Surely a higher flame would heat the pan faster. With a shrug I set it on the higher end and set about dipping the bread in the eggy mixture.

The heavy pan on my stove begins to smoke and with a yelp, I reach for the handle. It’s fucking scalding and I curse as I cradle my injured palm to my chest, sure that the first few layers of skin have been singed off.

“Fucking hell!” I scream. “It’s not supposed to be this bloody hard!” I decide to work with my mangled paw and retrieve the bread that’s been soaking. When I lay it on the pan, I’m greeted by a violent sizzle and after about five minutes, my kitchen is filling with smoke.

I use the tool my book refers to as a spatula and flip the now charred bread over to the other side. Muttering obscenities, I walk the half-soggy, half-burned slice of bread to the rubbish bin and begin again.

It takes me nearly a dozen tries but I’m finally staring at two pieces of perfectly golden slices of French Toast. It looks exactly like the photo next to the recipe and with a grin, I cut off a steaming bite.
I flip the page to a recipe for dinner and, after flicking my wand at the mess I’ve created in the kitchen, I rush from my flat to the market once more.

I’m proudly cradling a glass casserole dish as I step through the Floo into the Burrow.

“Molly?” I call, working my way towards the kitchen where she nearly always is.

“Draco? Is that you?”

“I’ve brought you something!” I round the corner into the kitchen and stop in my tracks. That ugly-faced Weasel is sitting at the table with his mother and I scowl at the sight of him.

His lips purse as though I’ve brought a stench into the room and I wish I could knock the look off his face.

“What’s he doing here?” Ron asks brusquely.

Molly swats him swiftly on the back of his head and he rubs his fake injury with a sneer in my direction.

“He’s come to see me. Something you might think of doing now and again–”

Ron snorts, rolling his eyes. “Mum, I’m here now.”

“Don’t start.” She points an accusing finger at his face and then turns to me with a bright smile. “Have a seat, dear.”

“Oh, it’s fine. I was just popping in to drop this off.” I avoid eye contact with the Weasel, who’s
glaring holes in the side of my face, and deposit my dish on the counter unceremoniously.

“Oh!” Molly coos, and stands with exaggerated effort, peeling the lid from the dish and staring at the food I’d prepared. Her jaw falls open and she looks at me in a state of awe. “You cooked?”

Straightening my spine and trying to ignore the third person in the room, I allow my gaze to dart past her son and settle on her. “Well, Brenner suggested a hobby. So, yeah. Cooking was second on the list.”

“What was the first?” she asks with a curious twinkle in her eye, procuring a fork from the drawer.

“Chess.”

Ron gives another primordial snort from his seat. “What kind of wizard doesn’t know how to play Wizard’s Chess?” he asks, and this time I turn to him with my brow arched.

“It’s not Wizard’s Chess, you oaf. I decided to try the muggle version, but apparently it’s all rather the same, except the pieces don’t move. I would happily school you in either any day.”

“If your skills on the Quidditch pitch are any indication of your skills with a chess set, I’ll be just fine.”

“Are you daft?” I chuckle at him, leaning confidently against the counter and crossing my arms across my chest. “In what world would those two skill sets have anything to with the other? Regardless, I excel at both, I assure you. Lest you forget that I was on the Quidditch team since second year—”

“Because your dad paid for the brooms for the whole team!”

“Bullshite! I made the team, then my dad purchased the brooms.”

“Likely fucking story, Malfoy.” Ron’s mocking tone enrages me as he sits back arrogantly in his chair, crossing his arms behind his head like a prick. “Tell me, didn’t something happen that caused you to have to leave the team early? What was it again? Were you or were you not plotting to murder
the Headmaster?”

Rage swells in my chest. “You are such a fuc—”

“Enough!” Molly shouts, her hands slicing through the air and the two of us both flinch, having forgotten she was there.

“Sorry,” we mutter simultaneously.

Somehow fighting with Weasel is as second natured as breathing; especially when he’s acting particularly twatty.

Molly lets out a tired sigh and rests her hands on her hips, shaking her head. “Ron, go and find your father. Tell him Draco’s come for dinner and then come back. We’re all eating together.”

Ron makes a whimpering little noise and I can’t help but imagine what an annoying little twit he must have been as a child. “Mum, I have plans.”

“A date?” She asks hopefully. I snicker when his face falls.

“Er, no. Just meeting Harry for a pint.” His cheeks flush scarlet and I smirk at him with pure glee.

“Well, tell him to come over or that you’ll meet him after. I’m getting sick of you two fighting like this.” Her pointed finger gestures between the two of us and I’m

“So, your plan is to force us together?” Ron asks incredulously, pushing the fringe of his hair back from his brow.

“If that’s the only thing that will work, then yes. I’ll force the two of you together until you are so desensitized to each other’s presence that you can at least act civilly while sharing the same air. I swear, you would think the two of you were raised by a pack of wild thestrals with the way you behave.”
Ron pushes back from the table, unwilling – or more likely, unable – to fight with his mother, and disappears through the back door.

“What’d you make, dear?” Molly asks, flicking her wand through the air and summoning plates and cutlery to the table.

“It’s nothing fancy. Spaghetti with meat sauce.” I mutter, shame colouring my cheeks at having fought with Ron in her presence.

“Smells delightful and cooking will be good for you. I’m making a roast on Sunday, why don’t you come by early and I’ll show you how to make one properly. Some things need to be learned hands on, not from a book.” She makes little clucking noises as she moves around the kitchen and I watch her in amusement. She’s a strange little woman— a force to be reckoned with.

Ron re-enters; Arthur is hot on his heels and has a palm on his son’s shoulder. “Heard you made dinner, Draco!”

“It’s probably not any good, but it should be edible.”

“Well, that’s more than I could accomplish at any rate.” Arthur grins back at me as he kisses Molly on the temple and takes his seat.

Ron and I lock glares once more before we take our seats opposite each other.

Brenner’s chin rests in his palm, his thumb running along his stubbled jaw as he stares at the chess pieces between us. I have taken to studying him, as he takes an ungodly amount of time to decide on a move. I’ve never seen anyone take so much bloody time to move a single fucking chess piece. Finally, he slides his rook up, claiming my pawn, and I scoff— quickly moving my queen against his castle. He grins then, his eyes lifting to mine as his bishop slides across the board and claims her.

“Fuck!” I curse, my palm slapping against the table.

Brenner chuckles to himself, inspecting my queen between his thumb and forefinger. “Ah, the queen. The most ruthless, the most powerful, the most sought after. Yet, the game doesn’t end when she is lost. Why do you suppose that is?”
“Kingdoms crumble without a king.” I shrug. “They can survive without a queen.”

Brenner arches a brow at me. “My kingdom would crumble without my queen. She’ll be the first one to tell you that.” He chuckles and leans back in his chair.

“Tell me about your father.”

I wince. “Fuck, you’re gonna start like that?”

“We have to start somewhere.” He shrugs and gestures towards me. “Tell me what he was like when you were a child.”

A violent swell of anxiety crashes in my chest, thrashing against my ribs until my breath feels tight and I twist my neck until I hear it pop.

My mind travels to places I’d rather not visit: his gloved hand curling along a metal serpent head, him blatantly bringing mistresses to our home, and backhanding my mother at the dinner table.

“He was a bastard.” Simple. Honest. Safe.

“Did you know growing up that he was into Dark Magic?” Brenner uncharacteristically doesn’t have his notebook and pen in hand, and it feels more like we are chatting about the weather, than discussing the dark dealings of my maniac father.

“I mean—” I card a nervous hand through my hair. “Yeah. It’d be pretty fucking hard to miss. But it was different before — there wasn’t anything all that dark to get into. He was elitist and entitled, but so was I.”

“When did things change?”

I pick at my cuticle and then turn to tapping my finger on my palm. “After the Tri-wizard tournament.”
My brows tug together as I remember him sitting me down in his study and handing me a tumbler of chilled Ogden’s. He recalled the return of the Dark Lord and told me from here on out, things would be different; there were things I needed to prepare for and I’d be expected to step up as the Malfoy heir. I was still too young to fully comprehend what he was saying—my knowledge regarding the First Wizarding War was limited.

“Everything changed after that,” I say, gulping.

“How did he die?”

I flinch as I remember the haunted look carved into his face. He died in fear, his features frozen is a scream and his once steely silver eyes reduced to a dull grey.

“No clue, just that it happened in battle. I was the one to verify his body in the Great Hall.” Unnamed and unwanted emotion sticks to the sides of my throat and I can’t help the complexity I feel at knowing my father is lost. I hated him; hated everything about him, what he stood for…yet, I’ll never have a chance to make it right—to change his mind.

Squinting at me, Brenner takes a gulp before speaking. “I’m sorry.”

His apology slams into me like a bludger and I scowl over stolen chess pieces at him.

“Don’t be. It’s not loss I mourn.”

“I’m still sorry,” he offers kindly. There’s an angry twitch in my neck, one that hasn’t been hanging around so often and I press my fingers into it, trying in vain to quell it.

My eyes narrow at him and I began pulling on my fingers until they crack. “Were you there? At the battle?”

Brenner shifts in his seat, folding his hands in his lap and squaring his shoulders. “I was.”

“You weren’t part of the Order.” It’s not a question, just a fact.
“I was not. I didn’t arrive until closer to the end with other reinforcements. I’m a bit of a pacifist, so the Order didn’t seem like the right fit.”

“So, you – as a Muggleborn – let others die to keep you safe, while you sat here in your posh little office, ignoring the war.”

Brenner’s eyes flash in anger. “That’s not quite how it happened. However, you are entitled to your opinion on my actions during the war, even if that’s not what we’re here to discuss. We were discussing—”

“My father?” I interrupt with a growl. “Let’s talk about him then; you would’ve loved him. He would have had you flayed at my dining table while two dozen death eaters laughed over a bowl of pumpkin soup. He would have raped your wife and sold your daughter into slavery for sickles. Sickles he would have forgotten about before they hit the lining of his pocket.”

“That’s enough, Draco,” Brenner’s jaw is tight and I can see I’m pushing him too far but I can’t stop what he’s started.

“You think you know what a monster is, but you don’t. Not until you’ve had one raise you; not until you’ve lived with his master and seen the things I have. You can sit here with your degrees and your analogies and pretend that you know everything, but you haven’t seen death like I have. You haven’t seen war or tragedy or any fucking thing that matters. And if you had, you’d understand why I don’t want to fucking talk about it.”

“I get it, alright? Your life sucks and it’s not fair for the rest of the world to expect more than you’ve been giving. But I expect more. I’ve seen it in you, those cracks you’re so possessive over – they’re healing, mending. Your father was a monster. I’m sorry that he was, I’m sorry that your childhood wasn’t a safe place and that you’ve seen such horrors at your young age.”

My eyes clench shut and rage thrums under my skin as he speaks. I can’t fucking breathe anymore and even though he’s talking about cracks healing, I feel something in my chest break.

“It’s not fair!” I shout, and my voice cracks as it leaves my throat. I bury my face in my palms, as waves of anger and shame and fucking pain crash on my hunched shoulders. A few traitorous tears slide into my hands and I growl at their presence.
“It’s not fair. Do you hear me? It’s not fair.” Brenner’s voice has returned to a soft lull and I manage to look at him again even though I’m trembling. “It’s not fair. But it’s what you’ve got. Forgive him.”

I give him a dark laugh, rubbing the heels of my palms into my eye sockets. “Forgive someone who wasn’t sorry?”

“Ah, the hardest thing for us mere mortals do. Learning to forgive, when you don’t receive an apology. It’s why making amends is such an important part of your recovery. Don’t leave people wondering. Give them peace and in doing so, receive it.”

My list burns in my pocket, and I know there are still far too many apologies left to be said. I sigh exhaustedly.

“What if I don’t forgive him? What if he doesn’t deserve it?”

Imaginary weights drag me down and I want to be rid of them; want to cut them loose and walk away, but I’m not sure who I am without them. Who am I if I don’t have a bastard for a father and seething hatred to go along with it?

Brenner laughs and leans forward, resting his elbows on the tops of his thighs. “I can assure you – he doesn’t deserve your forgiveness. Despite what you think, it’s not for him. What would he do with it, now that he’s past the veil? It holds no value, and he likely doesn’t give two sickles that you’re offering it.”

“So why should I plague myself with forgiving him in the first place?”

“Because it’s for you. Imagine if that dark chasm inside you wasn’t taken up with resentment and anger. What if you just freed it, let it all go and used the energy you’ve dedicated to hating him to love yourself? Forgiving isn’t forgetting, and nothing will ever remove the trauma you’ve experienced. It’s important for you to understand that some people are not capable of more. Your father was a product of his circumstances and he never took the opportunities to change. You are a product of yours, but you’re here. You’re trying. Don’t stop.”

Don’t stop.
I repeat it to myself like a dying man’s mantra long after I’ve left Brenner’s office.

Don’t stop.

A/N: Endless thanks to my Alpha and Beta, MHCalamas and PartyLines.

Today is the last day to vote in the Granger Enchanted Awards! Go vote for your fave authors and put a smile on their face :) Doesn’t have to be for me!
Certain Things

Something about you
It's like a addiction
Hit me with your best shot honey
I've got no reason to doubt you
'Cause some things hurt
And you're my only virtue
And I'm virtually yours

And you keep coming back, coming back again

Certain Things, James Arthur

Staring at Dumbledore’s shrine, I can’t help but think it’s quite ostentatious. I’ll be the first to admit that he and I weren’t close, but even I know this probably wasn’t his style. A giant crimson phoenix rises from a polished marble block while tendrils of magic swirl away from its feathers; it screams at me, and I have to wonder who picked this.

Here lies Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.

Headmaster. Teacher. Friend.

Missed by many. Forgotten by none.

Bringing flowers seems a little ridiculous now; laying dying flowers on a dead man's crypt even more so. Actually, everything about this moment seems ridiculous. He deserves my apology as much as anyone, but he’ll never hear it, and it seems silly to offer it to a gravestone.

Guilt spreads through the centre of my chest, weighing down my limbs until I’m not sure I’d be able
to lift them if I tried. The early morning light is soft in the overcast sky, and the red phoenix set against the gray morning looks as if Rowena herself painted it here.

I allow myself a fortifying sigh, grasping for words I wish I didn’t have to say. Funny how I don’t want to speak them even to a tombstone. No one is around to hear my shame, but still there is something about saying it aloud...

“I should have listened,” I mumble at my feet, my head hung low. “Should have taken all the chances you offered and…” Deep breath. “I’m sorry. Sorry it took me so long to figure it out. I know now I did it all wrong—” Shaking my head at my shoes crunching in the snow, the words feel sticky in my throat. I can still imagine the crisp blue of his irises and the way they clouded a shade darker when he was disappointed in me. “I’m still fucking it all up.”

I drag my palm down my tired face and groan up at the cloudless sky. This shouldn’t be so hard. Shouldn’t be so fucking impossible. But it is.

“I’ll try and do better, Headmaster. I’m sorry. Again.”

Tugging my cloak tight around my shoulders, I turn towards the edge of the Forbidden Forest. I’ve received permission to be on the grounds this morning, so long as I don’t disturb anything and mind the students, and McGonagall has included instructions for finding Snape.

A stone rests against an aspen tree, the only marker Severus Snape will ever have. A charmed glowing doe is engraved in the flat surface of the stone, his initials etched directly below it.

Everything feels a little easier here, shrouded by the cover of the forest. I push some snow away from his tombstone with the toe of my dragonhide shoe.

“Hey, Professor. Not sure if you’ve been watching, but since you always kept on eye on me in life, I assume you may be in death as well. If you are, don’t be mad. I didn’t mean for everything to get so positively fucked. But that’s why I’m here, groveling for forgiveness to a couple of graves that can’t hear me. I don’t even know where to start with you.” I shrug, closing my eyes and start at the beginning. “Sorry for being a prick when I was a kid. And a teenager. And now as an adult. Sorry that you had to kill Dumbledore.”

I’ve been filled in on the circumstances regarding the death of Dumbledore, but I’m certain that Snape didn’t find it an easy task.
“I’m really sorry about that one. You shouldn’t have died with his blood on your hands but—” I’m shocked, but the words catch in my throat and hot tears prickle the corner of my eyes. “Thank you for doing it. I’d be rotting in Azkaban right now if you hadn’t. You didn’t deserve any of what you got, Professor. I hope you’ve found peace, wherever you are.”

I wipe away a wayward tear streaking its way down my frozen cheek.

My lips flatten into a tight line, and the pressure in my sinuses inform me that I need to leave, lest I start weeping like a fucking Hufflepuff.

“Until we meet again.”

The roast smells fucking divine. I’ve barely contributed to it—Molly didn’t really let me do much at all—but if she allows me to take some ownership in this little masterpiece, I’m going to fucking take it.

“How do you check that it’s done?” I ask, wiping my hands on the apron she’s insisted I wear.

She scoffs and points a wooden spoon at my face. “You don’t check. You just know. It’s a feeling.” Her shoulders straighten with pride, and I can’t help but laugh.

“That doesn’t sound right.” I fix her with my best smug expression and lift the apron from my shoulders.

“I told you—” she shrugs. “—some things you can’t learn from a book.”

The back door swings open, and Granger and Ginny tumble in, arms wrapped around each other and filling the room with laughter.

“Hi, Mum!” Ginny calls and gives me a polite smile as she disentangles herself from her curly-haired friend.

“Hullo, you two.” Granger grins, her cheeks kissed pink by the winter air, and she rests her palms on
the counter in front of us. “Dinner smells great, Molly!”

“Draco made it.” Molly nudges me with a conspiring smile, and I blush, looking down at her proud face framed with frizzy, ruby-coloured curls.

“That’s a bit of an overstatement—” I interject, but Molly stalls me, winding her arm through the crook of my elbow.

“You’re cooking now?” Granger’s brows rise high on her forehead, her milk-chocolate eyes round.

“Another hobby,” I murmur. “I’m not all that good, but I stopped turning everything black and filling my flat with smoke, so I think I’m improving—against all odds.”

Granger stares at the oven door, and she catches her bottom lip between her teeth, her eyes sparkling as they flit back to me. “Always surprising me, Malfoy.”

She turns to follow the way Ginny left, and I hear Molly’s soft chuckle at my side. She pokes a finger between my ribs, and I yelp, jumping away from her.

The little round witch starts humming to herself and tidying up the kitchen, flicking her wand in time with the song she’s inventing.

“You seem pleased with yourself,” I say with a narrowed glare.

“Do you think she’ll change her last name?” Molly calls over her shoulder, and my jaw drops. “I bet she’ll hyphenate. She’s a modern witch. Granger-Malfoy? Malfoy-Granger? I think I like the former.” She nods to herself.

My cheeks flame, and I toss the borrowed apron on the counter.

“I think those creatures Looney Lovegood is always prattling on about must have taken over your brain.”

I turn my back to her, shaking my head when she erupts in riotous laughter. “Don’t do anything too
pretentious for the wedding! She reminds me of a garden wedding type of witch!” She calls after me, the door slamming shut on her giggles.

Ron’s presence at dinner does little to ruin the surprisingly good mood I find myself in, and when George silences the table to announce our newest product, he grins at me with pride.

I’m struck in the moment how wild it is that I am here. In this home. In this bizarre turn of events.

After dinner, Molly sits with me on the bench outside, casting a warming charm around us and breezing through a conversation about absolutely nothing. Eventually, she moves on to the harder bits. She asks me about my visit to Hogwarts, and I crane my neck as I tell her the bare bones of the visit; I'm unwilling to divulge the flesh.

“I’m proud of you,” she says quietly in the darkness, her breath forming a cloud as she speaks.

It’s a simple thing. Barely there and hardly noteworthy, but it seeps through my skin and settles deep in my chest, curling in on itself like a sleepy cat.

“Thank you.”

She claps her hands together and stands with an exaggerated groan. “Those dishes won’t do themselves.” She turns to me with a knowing grin. “Actually, they will.” Her laughter follows her through the back door, and I sit a while longer on the bench facing the frozen garden.

It won’t be long until spring arrives to thaw winter’s icy remains, and her gardens will sprawl in an unkempt but beautiful array of wildflowers and barbarous gnomes.

Spring.

Known for rebirth, but to me it’s only death. It’s when my mum died. It’s when I started to die. It’s when everything started unravelling.
The back door clangs, and I jump out of my seat and spy Granger tugging her coat on and walking through the snow towards me.

Seeing her here, surrounded by snow flurries in the quiet, I’m reminded of my snowglobe. She’s my safe place as much as it is.

“How are you?” It’s funny how can she speak to me like she hasn’t seen all my horrors.

“I’m good. Keeping busy. And you?”

“Same.” She nods along, her lips pursing in thought. “Did you have a pleasant trip to Hogwarts?” Her cheek pulls into an almost grimace as she studies the clear skies.

My heart plunges deep in my belly, and I don’t know how the fucking hell she knows about any of it. Surely Molly wouldn’t have said something? Maybe McGonagall—”

“Or did you just visit Hogsmeade?” Her voice cracks.

“What?”

“I saw you there, remember? You and Pansy.” She’s glowering, and in the darkness I can’t be sure… but she seems… jealous?

“Oh.” I chuckle. “I didn’t visit Hogwarts then. Just tea.”
“With Pansy.” She supplies it factually, and I try— _I swear I try_ —to hide my smirk.

“With Pansy. She’s an old friend.”

“Ah. An old _girl_ friend?”

It’s official. Hermione Granger would make an absolutely horrendous undercover Auror.

“You could say that.” I shrug with an air of nonchalance.

“Is she—” She clears her throat and turns to face me, squaring her shoulders and summoning all that courage her lot is known for. “Are you guys dating? It’s fine, of course. I wouldn’t care or anything.”

My smirk is now full blown as I squint at her flailing in front of me. Jealous of Pansy Parkinson. What a knob. Doesn’t she know there will never be anyone but her?

“I’m just curious. As your friend. Friends tell each other if they are dating people, you know. So it’s not inappropriate for me to be asking. it’s— well, it’s proper. Yes. Quite proper.”

I have a creeping suspicion that she’s talking entirely to herself now as she nods along with her one-sided conversation and trains her eyes on the treeline over my shoulder.

I decide it’s best to let her stop drowning in this god awful awkwardness and offer her what she’s looking for. “Pansy and I aren’t dating.”

Just there, just barely, I see her release a sigh of relief and hope floods me.

Despair drags me down, drowns me until air is burning in my lungs. But hope?

Hope gives me wings.
And I’m fucking soaring.

“Just tea, then? Nowhere closer for Pug-faced Parkinson to enjoy a cup of tea?” Granger bristles and I find her completely charming.

I could be honest. I could tell her that I went all the way to blasted Hogsmeade to avoid the chance run-in with her on Diagon but I find her envy too tempting.

Something stirs deep inside me when her lips fall for a long moment on my lips. My tongue darts out, dragging along the flesh of my lip. “When we dated, she made me promise I’d take her. I never got around to it, and since I’m on this damned journey to make amends—”

The words freeze in my throat, which ironically feels fevered, at my slip of tongue.

“Journey to make amends?” Her brows knit together, and she scoots just marginally closer to me.

I’m having a fucking awful time of trying to come up with a good lie, and with a resigned growl, I offer her the truth instead. “It’s stupid. Like the hobbies thing… Brenner wants me to make amends with people I’ve wronged. Madame Rosmerta, Katie Bell. Pansy.”

I can’t bring myself to tell her she’s the last one on the list, the big one. I suppose I could use this moment, sitting in our private snow globe, to tell her how fucking sorry I am, to apologize and beg her to see the person I’m becoming and not the person I was… but not yet.

I’m not the person I’m going to be, and she deserves to hear it from him.

There’s no beginning to the hurt I’ve caused her because it always has been. Me hurting her is as intrinsic as breathing; I don’t know any other way. And before I apologize, I’m going to figure out a way to stop it from happening again.

“Oh.” Granger directs a few long blinks at me before waking from her trance. “That’s brilliant. That’s— yes. That’s brilliant.”

“Do you want to get coffee?” I blurt, and if it wouldn’t be mortifying, I’d clamp my hand over my
“Well, no. It’s nearly nine o’clock. Just sometime. Do you want to get coffee sometime? As friends.” I tag that last bit on the end even though I hate it.

“Oh! Of course. I’d love that. But not Madame Puddifoots. No respectable girl asks to be taken there.” She rolls her eyes, and I chuckle. There’s no competition, love.

“There’s a place near that bookshoppe I ran into you at. The Dirty Grind? I’ve been frequenting it lately; the coffee is pretty good and the Muggles aren’t the annoying sort. Maybe tomorrow morning? Or any morning?” I’m the one rambling now, and I bite my cheek just to get it to stop.

“Tomorrow morning would be lovely. I have a meeting with my lawyer at Flourish and Blotts at eleven, so maybe nine?”

“Lawyer?”

Her lips pull into a proud, face splitting grin, and she scoots a touch closer to me, close enough I can almost feel her body heat. Almost.

“I’m purchasing it,” she whispers, though no one is close enough to hear.

“I cock my head in her direction. “Purchasing what?”

“Flourish and Blotts! Although, don’t mention it to anyone, will you? I don’t want to announce it until it’s all settled up. You were right, you know—what you said about me. I mean, you said it just horribly—” The trill of her laughter pierces through me. “I don’t need to be wasting away stocking shelves, and Maggie was thinking about retiring. My parents weren’t Malfoy-rich, but they had been saving some money for me in an account under my name. For secondary education and a wedding, I suppose. There’s no way of them having it now, and I think they’d be happy if I did this. It’s so me, isn’t it?”
I’m stunned, all gaping jaw and stuttering words that fail me. “Gr-Granger. That’s fucking brilliant.”

“Yeah? Maggie is cutting me quite the deal, and she’ll stay on for a while during turnover, but she wants to retire near her kids, which I get. Her husband died in the war, so I think she’s ready for life to quiet down.”

She’s prattling on and on about Maggie and her kids and her plans for the bookshop, but I’m unable to follow anymore. I just stare at the passion in her gestures and the way excitement sparks behind her eyes. I’m bloody ecstatic to see her that excited about something.

I wonder if I’ll ever feel that way about anything other than her.


I pull my pocket watch from its home in my breast pocket, and with a growl, I snap it shut.

Ten minutes until nine.

I’ve no reason to suspect that she might stand me up, but the anxiety never leaves. I’m sure it’s just as much a part of me now as my fucking prick; the only difference is that I’m constantly aware of the anxiety thrashing against the confines of my skin.

The bell over the door chimes, and I scowl as a happy couple enters, stomping snow from their boots and making their way to the counter. I have also decided that I hate every bell over every door in every shop in London.

“Fucking useless little pieces of—” I mutter to myself, and when it chimes for the second time in thirty seconds I’m ready to rip it off the wall until I see her; she's pulling her scarf from its loop around her neck and shaking her curls free of her hat, snowflakes drifting off and melting in the air.

“Hi, Draco.” She grins as she makes her way to me, and I shoot out of my chair. I nearly fucking bow, like I’m about to take her for a spin across a grand ballroom but she catches me in a friendly hug, and I freeze.
If I hug her back now, I’m sure I’ll crush her to me and bury my face in her neck, neither of which would be appropriate. So I pat her awkwardly and release her.

“Coffee?”

“Please.” Her smile touches her eyes, and before I can stare too long, I lead her towards the counter.

Granger orders a cinnamon vanilla latte, and I double the order, sliding my credit card across the counter covered in stickers.

“A credit card?” She hums, nudging me with her elbow.

I give her a sideways smirk and watch the colour rise on her cheeks. “I’ve been spending so much time in Muggle London that I figured it was time. Constantly exchanging currency was getting old, so I set up a new account.”

She’s grinning as I tuck the card in my pocket and lift our two steaming cups from the counter.

“Always surprising me.”

Before I can turn back to our table, Ed calls out to me from behind the espresso machine.

“Draco, my man! Can we count on seeing you tomorrow night?”

My eyes flash in his direction, but I simply nod, my teeth baring just slightly as I return us to our spot by the window.

“What’s tomorrow night?”

“It’s just a show thing they do here. Muggles get up and perform their work. It’s kind of weird, but I was here last month. If I attend things once, people seem to think I’m obligated for the rest of my life. Dinners at the Burrow… and work.”
Her laughter fills a little void in me, and we spend the rest of the hour talking about Flourish and Blotts and all things Granger—and it feels, for the first time in a long time, that everything is right in the world again.

A/N: Just wanted to take a moment and thank you for following, reading and reviewing. It means so much to me everytime I see your thoughts about this little story come into my inbox.

Thanks as always to my Alpha and Beta, MHCalamas + Ravenslight.

My sweet beta has just launched an EPIC Voldy Wins Multi-chap and guys, it’s SO GOOD! Run over and follow it because it’s really quite incredible.

Alpha has always posted a Period AU Oneshot thats up and complete, so check that out too!

I’ll be back next week, or sooner if I can get my life together lol. MWAH! -LK
Hold of Me

Then you said, "I need nothing from nobody"
I can see it on your face you're hurting, grab a hold of me
I said, 'Baby, can't you see?
That your past is your past
Oh, babe, you've got a hold of me

Hold of Me, Dean Lewis

Another dream. About her.

Well, to be fair, I’ve had five dreams about her, but the one from last night won’t fade away.

The shower pelts away at the tense muscles of my back, and I’m about to turn the fucking water to ice cold just to get my hard on to go away, but visions of her curls falling down her back while I fuck her from behind just won’t fucking go away.

While I’ve had exactly three sticky little dreams, I haven’t allowed myself a proper wank to her. Something about doing that has just feels like crossing a line… but, here I am with a raging erection that—despite the last fifteen minutes—won’t go away. Behind every blink, she’s there.


“Fucking hell. Just once,” I grumble as my hand grips the base of my cock, pumping to visions of her pressed against the bathroom tile and begging for me.

It’s the first nice day of spring. Budding greens and wet grass sprouts everywhere, and even rose bushes are starting their slow blooms, but I can’t stand the sight of them. Roses will forever belong to my mother.
Between the months of April and August, if someone were looking for Narcissa Malfoy, you’d only need walk into the gardens and head straight for the roses.

It’s funny; I never really connected how much she adored them until she was gone. Until every flower cart had me scowling and this spring had me wanting to light rose bushes on fire with a flick of my wand.

Brenner suggested we meet at St. Johns in Muggle London; he thought the fresh air would do me well.

I might be the only person walking towards the fountain with a scowl, but all these happy fucks grate against my skin. I swear to fucking Merlin if one more snogging couple traipses past me I will hex their Muggle arses into next winter.

“You’re looking positively charming today, Draco.” Brenner grins at me, hands stuffed deep in his pockets. “Fancy a game?” He gestures towards the empty chess table, and I can only manage a grunt as a response.

We sort the pieces in silence, and once the game begins, I realize I’m hunched over the board with a nasty curl to my mouth. I straighten my spine, narrowing my eyes as he moves his inconsequential pawn. I still haven’t beaten him.

“Do you feel like talking about it?” Brenner’s eyes don’t leave the table, and he’s rudely resting his stubbled chin in his palm, mapping out all the ways he’s going to walk away with a victory.

“About what?” I know I’m being too short with him; it’s painfully obvious. It’s not like I’m leaving much for interpretation with my pursed lips and narrowed glare.

“About whatever seems to have you in such a fuss.” He chuckles, finally leaning back and tilting his head as he studies me.

“I’m just in a bad mood.”

“Do you want to use?” he asks.
The question slams into me like a wayward bludger. I blink. “I don’t know. Yes? No.” I let out an exaggerated groan. “I always want to use.”

“What does it feel like? Wanting to use?”

I take his bishop.

“What? You want a play by play?” I smirk, watching him capture another pawn.

“Sure.”

I groan. “I don’t bloody know. Feels like it’s all I can think about. Like I know what will make everything better and why the fuck would I do anything but that.”

Brenner’s brow flicks towards his hairline, and his lips mash in a tight line as he leans toward the chessboard. “And you’re saying that’s how you feel right now? Like you can’t think of anything else but how drugs will make everything better?”

He sounds skeptical, like I’m fucking lying. And why would I?

But then, maybe I am. I’m actually thinking about the wank I had in the shower before I came here and how I’m a fucking pervert for cranking out to Granger when she’s barely let me kiss her… four months ago.

“No,” I say with a tight jaw. “I’ve just had some other stuff resurfacing—”

When a slow smile spreads across Brenner’s face, it takes every ounce of strength in me not to clip his perfectly square jaw.

“Oh.” He grins. “That’s— that’s normal, Draco.”

“‘Scuse me?”
Brenner’s voice is soft and timid, like he’s speaking to a skittish animal. “It’s normal. For your circumstances…”

I’m not quite sure what the fuck he is talking about, and I’m sure my face depicts as much. “What are you on about?”

“For the last several months, your brain has been completely preoccupied with your next high. As that urge subsides, older, more instinctual, urges resurface. If you know what I’m saying?” When I don’t respond, he continues. “It’s normal for your sex drive—”

“Fuck! Brenner!”

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about; those are natural human urges. They are simply resurfacing after being dormant—”

“I really don’t want to talk about this.” I shake my head. My skin is crawling like the first time my father called my tutor in to discuss sex for the first time, textbook laced with sketched pictures of a man and woman intertwined, as he pointed to each drawing with his stubby hands.

His queen moves against the rook guarding my king, and my eyes flicker up to his dangerously. “Sex is completely natural—”

“Pleasefuckingstop.”

“—it’s healthy, honestly. Don’t feel like you have to suppress those urges. Explore them and do it in a healthy, non-addictive way.”

I watch as he moves his queen against my king and bury my face in my palms. It has nothing to do with his checkmate.

The resounding slurp of the bottom of my mocha caramel frappuccino would be embarrassing if I wasn’t so entranced by the sugar hitting my bloodstream. I pull the straw from the plastic cup, sucking on the end to savor every bit of whipped cream that I can get.
“Hi.”

My eyes flicker up to study the small girl from behind the corner, her voice lilting like a birdsong.

“Can I help you?” I ask, my brows tugging together.

She has dull blonde hair, tied back neatly, and she shifts on her weight under my stare. “I was just seeing how your drink was?”

_Odd_. Especially given that I’m slurping the remnants like a fucking child.

“Brilliant.” The side of my face screws up as I set the empty cup back on the table, and when she slides the chair out across from me, I stiffen.

“I’m Daisy,” she offers with a sweet smile. I’m pretty sure I’m still frowning. “I work here.”

My lips tug up as I watch her shift in her seat. “I know. I’m a frequent patron, in case you didn’t realize.”

“Right.” Her eyelashes flutter, and her slender fingers began tearing apart pieces of the napkin between us. “I guess I just wanted to introduce myself.” She shrugs.

“Oh.” I cough, straightening my spine. “Draco.”

The silence that stretches between us is fucking traumatizing, and my eyes blow wide as I stare at the coffee table.

“Anyway, I just wanted to say hello. Officially.” Her small hands reaches out to me, and I take it tentatively, my lips flattening into a tight line at the awkwardness of the moment. Finally, she stands, her chair scratching across the cheap tile. “You should try the mocha coconut next.” She nods towards my empty cup. “It’s my favourite.”

She leaves, and I’m scowling for no good reason at her back.
Before long, Ed makes his way to the makeshift stage and announces the first of tonight’s
performers. It’s a pair of girls, singing a folky little duet about going home.

The lineup isn’t bad, but it’s not enough to hold my attention, and soon my nose is buried in a book
on gardening. I think I’m going to try African Violets; they seem pretty innocuous, and the window
in my bedroom gets decent light.

Coughing into the microphone startles me, and I blink up over my book to see the same bloke from
last month, the one with the poem that made me shake. He’s flexing the moleskine notebook
between his hands as he speaks directly into the mic, his lips brushing unhygienically against its
surface.

His low voice glides through the crowd, silencing the room with his smug smirk.

*Grief is fear and fear is despair,*
*An intertwining trifecta polluting the air,*
*A suffocating cloak without a care,*
*Seeping in and swallowing any prayer.*
*Such hollow darkness, a consuming foe,*
*It cannot be defeated in a single go,*
*Time, hope and love are its enemies, so,*
Reach out and cling to the light you know.

His echoing words hang in the air, and I wish I could study them. I have a rushing need throbbing
under my skin to hear it just one more time, and I’m stuck with replaying the words from memory.

The lines haunt me, licking my skin uncomfortably and impossible to ignore.

The lad hops down from the stage to a quiet applause, and when he struts past my table, I snag his
attention.

“‘Scuse me?” I hear myself speak without my brain’s permission.

*What the fuck.*
He pauses, his brows lifting as he stares down at me.

“Do you want to have a seat?” I gesture to the empty chair across from me, and he studies it with an open expression before sliding into it.

“Jon,” he says in way of introduction, and I reciprocate, shaking his hand.

“I like your work,” I say with an awkward nod. I hadn’t really considered what was coming next, hadn’t really considered anything. Do I ever?

“Thanks, mate.” He grins. “Do you write?”

“Me?” I snort, fussing with my empty cup for something to do. “No.”

“Have you thought about it?”

I shrug. “No.”

His eyes float over my features, and I look away, unable to handle his scrutiny.

“I started as an accident,” he laughs, leaning forward and rubbing his hands over his face. “I still don’t consider myself a poet or anything. But I felt something inside me, swelling and threatening to take over. I knew I had to let it out. I used to be in a bad way.” I see his fingers drumming on the edge of the table. Just like mine. “Drank way too much trying to cope with the bullshite I saw growing up.”

“Ah, you too?” I smirk knowingly at him.

“Shite head dad. You?”

I chuckle into my chest. “Same.”
“You should give it a try.” His eyes crinkle as he speaks; as if he knows me.

“Give what a try?”

“Writing.”

I bark a laugh in his face. “Writing? Me? It’s… it’s not me. I wouldn’t know what to say—”

“You don’t have to, mate. Write about anything.” He shrugs, pulling a thread on his jumper. “Write about what’s close. Write about what hurts. Write about what feels good.” He nods over my shoulder, an unspoken word to someone behind me. “Just write. Yeah?”

“I’ll think about it.”

We shake hands again before he’s gone, and I’m left staring at the empty seat he left behind.

_Just write._

---

Another Saturday evening at the shop. Usually I don’t mind the mindless work, but tonight is different. Tonight the shop is full of kids on their break from school, swarming the shop and running around chasing the last of their sugar rush.

I have the Dungeons and Dragons book cracked open near the register, and I’m staring at it like it’s personally offended me.

_What in the actual fuck is this?_

I’m curious how the Muggles have such intricate knowledge of Dragons. Surely the author is a wizard, maybe a Squib looking to make some money off the world he’ll never fit into, but whoever it is has taken quite the liberal agenda with the creatures.

_What in the fuck is a Wraith?_
Trolls don’t live in the Highlands, you twat.

“The fuck is a Beholder?” I scowl at the pages, unable to understand how the game operates and why dice are involved and what kind of fucking dice even are these?

“I tried to warn you.” My eyes shoot up to find her staring at me with a smirk all her own.

She looks different in spring. I wonder if her wardrobe is divided by seasons because I’ve never seen her in colors like this. Swathed in a powder blue dress that kisses her knees and her curls pulled up off her neck, she’s holding another plant, and I feel my face pinch at its presence.

Clearing my throat, I stand tall and straighten the hunch from my spine. “You did.”

“What do you think? Is it your next foray into the hobby world? I’ll have to admit I won’t be able to help you much; I never did get into games like that. I could most definitely school you in a game of Monopoly.” She crinkles her nose at me and places the purple flower at the register and pushes it an inch closer to me. “Begonias.”

“’Scuse me?” I eye the plant suspiciously, waiting for it’s stems to reach out and wrap around my throat before it all fades to black.

“It’s a plant.” She shrugs. “My mother always loved them, kept them all over our terrace. She told me once they represented peace.”

“Oh.” I poke at the petals just to be sure.

“There’s also some bit about begonias and forgiveness.” I feel my airways close in, and it’s like the tentacles of the innocuous little plant has finally emerged to put me out of my misery. “That’s really why I brought them, I guess. Well, mostly because I remembered your book on gardening and thought you might need a starting subject. You know, in case Dungeons and Dragons doesn’t pan out.” She chuckles softly, worrying her lip with her teeth, and she finally looks up at me. “But also because I wanted to say I’m sorry.”

She says it so quietly that I’m not sure I’ve even heard it.
“You’re—”

We’re interrupted by a little blip of a girl with tawny brown hair and thick framed glasses who unceremoniously deposits an arm’s worth of Weasley products on the counter between us.

I fight the urge to sneer at her. After all, she doesn’t know she’s ruining my life.

Granger steps to the side with a small smile, allowing the girl her transaction. I shove her items in a bag and slide them towards her with a half smile.

“How’s that?” I mumble and turn back to Granger. “What did you sa—”

“How’s that?”

My eyes narrow into slits at the new intruder, and Granger giggles, leaning across the counter towards me.

“Can you meet after? Late dinner, perhaps?”

I gulp, and her dress suddenly means something different. All of it does. The flowers she brought and her hair all piled up like that. She’s wearing makeup again, and all of it tied together causes a flutter in my belly.

I nod as the little twat across from me clears his throat.

“Great. I’ll see you outside after closing,” she says and then disappears into the crowd, the tinkling of the bell signaling her departure.

I return to the kid in front of me and bare my teeth in way of a smile. “This it?”

Only two hours until close, but maybe if I set the fireworks display off and the store burns down I
I managed to close the shop a few minutes early so I could run upstairs and change my clothes so I’m not dressed in head to toe black while she looks like a spring flower. I’m finishing the button on my white oxford as I skip down the steps, searching for her.

There is a quiet *pop* of Apparition in front of me, and she materializes in the same space I was about to occupy. We collide in a tumble of curls and limbs, and I manage to break her fall, wrapping my arms around her waist and letting her land on top of me with an *oof*.

“Ow. Owowowow.” She fumbles on top of me, curls everywhere, and I have a vivid vision of a dream I’ve just had of her riding me in a very similar situation. When her knee touches the inside of my thigh, my cock twitches, and I scramble to disentangle myself.

“Sorry,” I mutter, pushing to my feet and brushing at my clothes just to avoid her gaze.

“My fault entirely. It’s a wonder that doesn’t happen more often,” she muses.

“One of life’s greatest mysteries,” I interrupt her rambling, turning down the alley. “You’re hungry?”

“Famished. Anything sound good? I was thinking that sushi place we both loved so much or maybe Bernards? I always liked their french onion soup.”

She’s prattling on like nothing has happened in the months since. Like I didn’t get very close to losing everything. Like we are just deciding on dinner on any other Saturday night.

I stop on my heel and catch the crook of her elbow. My mouth blurts the unfinished question from earlier. “Why did you say you were sorry?”

“Hmm?” The space between her brow wrinkles as she looks up at me, unaware of the effect she has on me when we are this close.
“When you gave me the Bemonays—”

“Be- go- nias.”

“Whatever.” A wave of my hand dismisses the word between us, and I stare down into her chocolate colored eyes, hoping that she’s here for the same reason I am. “Why did you say it?”

“Well, I am sorry. You deserved better.”

Nothing’s better than you.

“I left when you needed me.” A shameful blush sweeps down her face, and she stares at the cobblestone between our feet. “I shouldn’t have left you.”

I gulp, deciding on the truth; knowing it will hurt me but help her. “I’m glad you did. You deserved better than what I was offering. Definitely deserved better than fucking Cormac McLaggen.” I chuckle, breaking the tension between us and picking up my step again. “Honestly, how you could ever give that prick a chance... I’m becoming dangerously close to thinking you have horrible taste in men.” I eye her sideways and watch as the corners of her mouth turn up.

“You may be on to something there. At least personality-wise. My ability to pick handsome wizards is unparalleled.”

She’s goading me, and I can’t help but rise to the occasion. My hand flies to my chest, clutching at it like she’s hexed me. “You think Cormac McLaggen is handsome? Merlin. You need help. Ron Weasley?” I snort. “No, you’ve got the whole thing wrong. Horrible taste all around.”

“Well, I fell for you once upon a time.” Her voice is light, almost flirtatious, and I feel my heart quicken in my chest. “That’s got to say something about my taste.”

I chuckle darkly, offering her my arm to Apparate. “I’m the worst of the lot, Granger.”

Watching her tonight, I hunt for clues: the way she slides her pointer finger along the curve of her spoon, the swirling ice in her water glass as she spins her straw, and the little tendril of hair that she tugs on repeatedly. All clues to her anxiety that I seem to have overlooked in all my fuck ups.
I tear my eyes from the creamy lines of her throat and the curl that’s tucked there. “How are things with Flourish and Blotts? Everything on track?”

“It’s overwhelming.” She sighs and take a demure sip of water, before resting her chin in her palm. “There’s a lot to running a business that I wasn’t exactly privy to, and I’m frantically trying to catch up before I take over this summer.”

“Let me know if I can help. You know— now that I’m an accounting extraordinaire and all that.” My eye flutters over my water glass in a wink, and when she flushes and bites into her lip, I feel it in my chest.

The night carries on, food arrives, and soon we are both leaning our elbows on the table and riling each other up for the fun of it. The lines between flirting and fighting are surprisingly thin, and we dance over them easily, as if we’d been doing it for a decade— which some could argue we have. But I’m sure that ten years ago I didn’t find the shade of pink on cheeks quite so charming.

“I could still do it,” I argue, eyes crinkling as I study her. “I’m just saying the game is not exactly accurate— but I could still do it.”

“Draco Malfoy, you are mad if you think you are going to play Dungeons and Dragons, and I will easily empty my Gringotts account to witness it.”

“Well, I don’t exactly need your money, but I guess it never hurts to pad the trust fund for a rainy day— because now that you’ve challenged me, I will most definitely be playing it. I just need to find some Muggles.”

The curly-haired vision across from me erupts in riotous laughter, and she wipes happy tears from her eyes. “I’m not sure how much padding it will do, unfortunately. Did you know buying a successful five-hundred-year-old book store is actually quite expensive?”

*Did she always have dimples?*

Brenner’s voice echoes between my ears, and I wonder about how well I really know her and how much I’ve imagined for myself or filled in to cover the ground that she’s left out. All those months ago I fell in love with this idea of her, whole and wholesome all at once. I don’t know how to show her I love all the broken pieces too.
I try to swallow the nerves clamoring up my throat. “Your parents ran their own business?”

The space between her brows wrinkles, and her eyes flash with unnamed emotion. With a nod, she begins to spin her straw in her drink absently. “They did. Their own practice, actually. They were dentists— well, I suppose they still are.” Her eyes darken briefly, the space between her brows wrinkling. “It’s not as if they’re dead.”

Panicking, I curse Brenner internally. *This is why people aren’t meant to pry in other peoples fucking business, Harold.*

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“*No!*” she interrupts with a small smile. “It’s… nice. Nice to have someone ask about them. I think Harry and Ron think it’ll upset me, and maybe they’re right. But even if they’ve forgotten me, I don’t want to forget about them.”

I straighten my spine, tucking my lips between my teeth to try to calm the thundering in my ribcage. “Do you want to tell me about them?”

Her eyes flash up to me, waiting for the punchline, I’m sure. “You want to know about my parents?”

Another gulp and I let my shoulders rise and fall as if it’s that’s an answer in itself. “I want to know everything about you. I’m sorry I never thought to ask before.”

Her teeth cut into the curve of her bottom lip, and the smile she’s trying to hide reaches her eyes.

Tilting her head, she stares at me like a puzzle she doesn’t have all the pieces for, not that it would ever stop her from trying to solve it. “What do you want to know?”

“Let’s start with their names.” I stab my fork into my salad but quickly return my gaze to her.

We talk until we are the last people in the restaurant and the waitstaff starts to get annoyed. We talk
until we are at the Apparition point and silence falls between us as she shifts her weight nervously from foot to foot.

“I’m glad we’re friends again.” She smiles tentatively up at me and wraps her arms softly around me in a hug.

Blood rushes through my limbs at her touch, and I waste no time in embracing her, remembering the floral scent of the shampoo she uses and the way her soft curves press against me.

“I am too, Granger,” I admit into her wild nest of curls.

The Ministry of fucking Magic.

Who would have thought I, Draco Malfoy, would be willingly walking into the Auror office.

In handcuffs? *Absolutely.*

But not willingly. I pull my list from my pocket, staring at the well worn edges and ink spots.

- Madame Rosmerta
- Katie Bell
- Pansy
- Goyle
- Crabbe
- Snape
- Dumbledore
- Molly
- George
- Weasel (shite...maybe?)
- Potter
Granger

The list is getting smaller as the weeks go by, but the further down I get, the more I loathe the idea of continuing.

This is what brings me to the steps of the Ministry. Katie Bell. Junior Auror, previously cursed by yours truly and most likely would love to see me back in a holding cell.

Brilliant.

Whose fucking idea was this anyway? Oh yes. Dr. H. Brenner. My personal emotional terrorist.

I leave my wand at security— sure that I’ll never see it again as Auror Bell is moments from shipping me to Azkaban— and enter the lifts. A hand shoots out to stay its departure and my eyes flutter closed as Weasley’s ugly mug enters the space.

“Malfoy,” he says in a clipped tone, eyeing me suspiciously. “Turning yourself in?”

“Ah, where’s the fun in that? Gotta make you work for that Junior Auror badge, Weasley.” Smirking at the folded memos hovering over our heads, I imagine the shade of red his cheeks are turning.

“What are you doing here?” he asks with a sigh, I can tell he’s getting just as tired as I am by these little tet-a-tets.

“I’m here to speak with someone.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

I arch an aristocratic brow his direction, meeting his gaze and wishing I was just one inch taller so I could stare down my nose at him. “Do I need one?”

His eyes flicker, considering my question. “Maybe.”
I shrug. “Then maybe I have one. Tell me: do they have you manning the appointment desk now? You’re quite a bit uglier than I remember the secretary being last time I was here—”

Ron turns to face me, his stubby tongue darting out to wet his lips as he apprises me. “I don’t like you.”

“Feeling’s mutual, mate. But as stated before, I won’t be pissing off until I’m told to by the people who keep me around. So we need to come to an arrangement where we stop meeting like this.”

We are approaching our floor, and his eyes tighten. “Fine. I’ll stop giving you a hard time—” I let out a sigh of relief but he cuts me off. “But I want you to stay away from Hermione.” His eyes soften, and I can see how very much he cares about her too. He just wants what I want for her: the best.

And we both know I’m not that. Not yet.

“It’s clear that I won’t be ridding myself of you any time soon, but Hermione’s been through enough.” The lift door dings, and it opens to a group of witches and wizards staring at the residual tension between us.

“I’m not staying away from her. As long as she wants me in her life, I’m here. I’m not fucking this up again.” I don’t wait for a response as I march through the small crowd waiting for the lift before heading toward the Auror office.

I’m still working on steadying my breaths as my knuckles rap against the frosted glass, and I push the door open to the department. Luckily, the altercation with Weasley has sufficiently distracted me from my task at hand. That is, it has until I’m staring into the hazel eyes of Katie Bell.

Objectively, she’s rather pretty. A heart shaped face and soft, feminine features pulled into an apologetic smile at nearly bumping into me. That smile fades as realization dawns on her, and her eyes settle on me, her brows furrowing in disbelief.

“Auror Bell,” I say, greeting her with a wary smile. “Might I have a word?”
“You don’t have to, Katie,” Ron interrupts with proud tilt to his chin, falling into a rickety chair behind a cluttered desk.

“Be nice, Ron,” Katie scolds him, and she almost sounds like Granger. “Sure. Let’s go in the hall... unless you’d rather have Ron involved.”

I bare my teeth in an uncomfortable grimace. “I’d rather be covered in boils.” I hold the door open for Katie, and she follows without a backward glance.

“I can arrange that, Ferret,” Ron calls after us enthusiastically, and I answer by letting the door slam shut.

The hallway is no more pleasant than the office was. There’s a long moment of silence between us as she fidgets with the files in her hand. Finally, I get the nerve to break it. “I’m here to apologise.” Usually the person receiving the apology interjects by now, but she doesn’t. She just stares at me with a judgemental frown until I continue. “There was no excuse for what happened between us at Hogwarts. I was caught up in some shit and—”

“I could have died.” She says nothing else. Just leaves the fact hanging between us.

“I know.” My heart hangs heavy in my chest, and I find it’s nearly impossible to meet her gaze.

“I’m really sorry, and if there’s anything I can do to make amends to you for what I’ve done, I will gladly do it. I know that words really don’t do enough here, but I swear if I could change it all then I would.”

“I forgive you.”

Just like that.

Another tether that’s been holding me down is severed and releases me. Lightens me. Saves me.

“Why?” I breathe, unable to understand what she’s offered.
Her lips curl into a sad smile. “I don’t know.” She laughs, and the sound grounds me. “But I do. I forgive you. Some things are easier to let go of than hold on to. Hating you seems like one of them.”

She hugs me. She fucking **hugs** me.

I’m back in the lifts within fifteen minutes, scratching yet another name off my dwindling list of sins.

A/N:

The poem in this chapter was lovingly written MCal who has been apart of this journey from the beginning. Thank you my friend!

Thank you again for all your love and support with this story! Reading your thoughts puts the biggest smile on my face!

We are nearing the end-ish. I think this will clock-in around 28 chapters and an epilogue, but I’ve been wrong before.

As always, huge thanks to my Alpha and Beta, MCal and Ravenslight. You are treasured beyond words!
A/N: A little surprise update for you lovelies! I am (*gulp*) finishing up the story as I post this. The remaining chapters are with my lovely beta, Ravenslight, and will be posted as she returns them to me! (So please give her all the thanks! This story would not be possible without her! Also go read her new WIP, Queen of Swords. It’s fucking epic.)

All the poetry in this chapter (and story) are the incredible work of MCAl, my friend and alpha. She’s lent me her brilliancy to flesh out this story, and she is truly the best. Thank you, darling! Without you, there would be nothing but dirty, contrived limericks for people to read.

Thank you to everyone reading and those who review. You have no idea how much it means to me and I can’t wait to finish up the rest of this story! Y’all don’t mind a little fluff, right?

-LK

---

I remember all of the things that I thought I wanted to be
So desperate to find a way out of my world and finally breathe
Right before my eyes I saw that my heart it came to life

This ain’t easy; it’s not meant to be
Every story has its scars

But when the pain cuts you deep
When the night keeps you from sleeping

Just look and you will see
That I will be your remedy

*Remedy, Adele*
I’ve killed the African Violets. and the Begonias are starting to wither. I still haven’t won a single game of Muggle Chess, and I wouldn’t show the crude figures in my sketchbook to anyone if my life depended on it. Hobbies are very quickly proving more trouble than they’re worth.

After the last open mic night at the Dirty Grind, I hoped that poetry might be the thing that healed me. But now, staring at the blank page in the new moleskin notebook laid open in front of me, I’m beginning to doubt it. There are no words.

_Just write._ That’s what the bloke said at the Dirty Grind. Just write. As if it’s that bloody simple.

Burying my face in my palms, I let out an exaggerated groan. “Okay,” I mutter to myself, eyes floating around the room for something to write about.

A teapot, a stack of books, my grandmother’s coffee table. When my eyes land on the lumpy woolen sweater draped over my wingback chair, my brow arches. With a lazy flick of my wand, it flies towards me and lands with a soft _thud_ on my desk — which is really just my kitchen table covered in clutter.

Picking up my new Muggle pen—which is the single most brilliant fucking invention I’ve ever seen—I hover it over the parchment.

I think back to the poetry I heard in the cafe, trying to hear the rhythm within the words.

Blake’s words were clear and concise, a stream of his consciousness laid out for others to bear witness to. I don’t want this lyrmeric or sonnet bullshite they’re trying to sell me on in the book; that’ll never be me.

My tongue darts out to wet my lips, and I figure it’s probably best to just start. As much I’m positive this will be another burned piece of french toast, there’s something inside that’s drawing me towards it. A little creature is clawing away at my insides, and it desperately wants to escape and live on the blank pages in front of me.

_Just write._

---

_Massive and itchy,_
and did I mention two sizes too large?

Bold and unapologetic in its green and silver,

when a black would have sufficed.

I want to snarl and hiss,

to mock and scoff.

Hide it the mounting pile of discarded tissue

and holiday themed wrappings.

But then I look about,

and I am not alone.

For everyone in the room has donned a similar garb,

of their own free will...

And she is flushed and smiling

as she accepts all their praise and embraces.

She catches my eye and sends a wink,

and I’m filled with sense of belonging for the very first time.

Stepping through the Floo at the Burrow, my eyes land on Arthur snoozing lazily in his armchair by
the window, hands folded over his round belly and quiet snores filling the air. A clatter in the kitchen
lures me forward, and I make my way through the now familiar clutter towards her.

She doesn’t see me at first; she’s all business in here. Taking a moment, I watch her bustle around the
kitchen: wiping, stuffing, flicking her wand. Her crimson curls are piled messily on the top of her
head, and she removes her stubby wand from her teeth only to shove it in the nest on the crown of
her head.

The similarities between her and Narcissa Malfoy could be counted on one hand, and most of them
really just have to do with their schooling and the fact that they’ve born a child. Slipping my hand in
my pocket, I run my fingers along the worn edges of the list I carry like a talisman.

This is a big one. I suck in a deep breath, filling my lungs until they are nearly painful and let it out in
a slow stream, like someone’s shoved a needle into the side of a too-full balloon.

She hears me, her eyes sparkling and an enthusiastic smile spreading across her face when she faces me. “Draco! I didn’t know you were stopping by. Hungry?”

I shake my head, but she starts pulling out mini pies anyway, arranging them on a plate and pushing them across the counter towards me.

With a chuckle and trembling hands, I take my seat at the counter and indulge in a bite of the best little pie I’ve ever had. “How are you, dear?” Her worried gaze studies the shake to my hand, and I know where her mind is going, where everyone’s mind goes when I have a shite night of sleep or my anxiety causes me to shake.

Nodding, I swallowing another bite. “Better than usual, so that’s saying something.” A tight smile tugs at the corners of my mouth. “Had dinner with Granger the other night.”

Molly’s eyes crinkle at the edges, and a slow, knowing smile spreads across her face. She looks almost manic, and I chuckle at her response.

“And?”

“And nothing.” I shrug, wiping the crumbs for my mouth. “We talked. Dinner was good. We went to a little—”

“So you’re dating?” Her hands rest on her hips proudly, as if she’s been the one to orchestrate it from the beginning. If she had, she surely must hate Granger for wanting to curse her with a life filled with me.

“What?” It’s less a question and more of a laugh. “Are you mad? Of course not.” My finger traces the grout between the burgundy tile, and I realize with swelling disappointment how much I wish that were true.

Her face falls in a disappointed grimace as she rearranges the pies in their case. “You need to get on that.”
I roll my eyes with a dry chuckle. “If you say so.”

“If you’re not here to tell me I’ve got another wedding to plan, what’s going on? Just missed my pretty face?” Molly’s smirk puts mine to shame as she refills my plate with scones now, muttering something under her breath about how skinny I’ve gotten.

Clearing my throat, I sit up tall, eyes narrowing at the counter between us. “I wanted to talk to you about something. Well, that’s not exactly right.” Hot shame colors my cheeks, and I jump to my feet, pacing just for something to do. “I need to apologize.”

Molly’s brows tug together as she watches me with a suspicious glare; her arms cross tersely over her chest. “What did you do?”

“Well, nothing recently. But my stupid therapist has this stupid list.” I reach into my pocket and offer it to her. Other than myself, she will be the only person who has ever read the names on it other than myself, and my fingers shake when I hand it over.

Eyes roving the page, she glares up at me with a narrowed gaze. “What kind of list is this? A hit list?”

“Well, nothing recently. But my stupid therapist has this stupid list.” I reach into my pocket and offer it to her. Other than myself, she will be the only person who has ever read the names on it other than myself, and my fingers shake when I hand it over.

Eyes roving the page, she glares up at me with a narrowed gaze. “What kind of list is this? A hit list?”

“Some stupid project my therapist wants me to take part in. I have to make amends with people I’ve wronged.” Igulp, feeling the tendon in my neck flicker to life under Molly’s stare.

Her eyebrows tug closely together as she continues to study the parchment in her hands. “Why am I on the list? You have nothing to apol—”

I interrupt her, blurtting out the rest, lest I chicken out and let the words die with me. “I do. I do because you opened your home to me. Honestly, your home was the least important thing you gave me after the war; I had nothing—no one. And I’m sorry that I’ve repayed your kindness with my problems. You didn’t deserve to clean up after my mess and worry about me. You were at the hospital every day during my recovery last winter; no one else came. No one but you. You’ve given me a home, given me the closest thing to a real family. I’m sorry that I didn’t... that I haven’t—”

The words scorch my throat, and all I want to do is flee the scene before I have to look up at her again. It’s not like she wasn’t present for all my sins, but something about unearthing them for her inspection feels too heavy.
Before I can meet her eyes, I’m wrapped in tiny arms. She’s squeezing me around the elbows and resting her head on my chest. I allow a broken little breath to slip out, and I free my arms only to return the embrace, my chin resting on the top of her head. Suddenly, I’m lighter than I was before.

Abruptly, she shoves me away and wipes frantically at her cheeks — back to business again — and I can’t help but smirk as she returns to whatever she was doing before I swooped in with my bumbling apologies.

A thought seems to crash into her, and she freezes, palms resting on the counters. She manages one more red-rimmed look up at me, and I can see the serious set to her lips. “After I say this, we bury it. All of it. It’s done and over, okay?”

I nod, my throat tightening as I fight off the emotion that’s threatening to drag me under.

“I know you think you’re the only one who messed up after the war. You think you’re the only who can claim awful choices? You’re not. There’s far more blood on my hands than yours. I killed people I went to school with, people I’ve known for forty years—your aunt included. I’ve lost more than I’m sure I was willing to, and I’ll never get them back. And if that’s the price?” Molly shakes her head, a single tear falling from the corner of her eyes. “Let’s just say I’ve found myself at the bottom of a wine bottle or two, wondering if it was all worth it. If my Fred’s life was worth it. In my mind, I know it is. I know that freedom is worth everything. But when we are at our lowest, we find consolation where we can. In wine bottles and tears and, for you, in vials. I’m glad you’re clean — glad you’re becoming the man that Albus always knew you could be—but don’t isolate yourself from the rest of us. I promise you we are just as fucked up in the head.”

Dragging the back of my hand across the tears staining my cheeks, I nod.

“You’re a good kid, Draco Malfoy. A kid,” she repeats that part again, driving it home. “Oh Merlin, could I tell you some of the mistakes I made at eighteen years old.” She laughs quietly, memories colouring her features as she speaks. “My stakes were lower; they weren’t life or death. They weren’t torture or be tortured, and I can’t tell you what I would have done in your shoes—honestly, I don’t know. So don’t keep punishing yourself for the things you’ve done. The rest of us have forgiven you. It’s time you forgive yourself.”

Her crystal blue eyes are fiercely trained on me, and I feel it, the tether being cut loose. I let out a huff of air as the twitch in my neck fades away, and my ruined soul mends itself another crack.
My list is—thankfully— dwindling. There are just a few names left to blot out, but unfortunately they are the roughest ones.

The girl with the squeaky voice behind the counter hands me my drink: a cold brew with some kind of creme in it. I take it, my lips pulling into a flat line as a thank you and head to my spot near the window. It has become my favourite seat in the cafe; it’s where I can scowl at the happy Muggles and still sit in a seat with a cushion.

I open up my notebook and hunch over it, studying the scribbles I’ve left while trying to piece together a string of thoughts. I wince as I take my first sip of the too-strong coffee, and it hits my bloodstream like it’s in a fucking race to my heart.

My pen drags along the parchment creating lazy swirls while I read the last few lines:

The silence stifles,
Yet comforts all the same.
The dark suffocates,
But soothes nonetheless,
   Impossibly enough...

Twisted and tangled,
Walking contradictions
Black and white,
weaving throughout,
   Birthing shades of grey...

“Draco?”

I slam my notebook shut and crash my elbow onto it; I’d know that voice anywhere.

I assume I look rather guilty, shoving my items in the corner of my chair and snagging my drink from
“Gr-Granger.” I stammer, a blush colouring my neck where an angry twitch has come to life. I shove the heel of my palm into the trembling tendon and manage a grimaced smile up at her. *What in the bloody hell?*

“Fancy meeting you here. I was just going to grab a coffee and head to the bookshop.” She’s playing with the loose beads on her bag and chewing on her lip. “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

My eyes float over her face, and I can’t help the smirk that tugs at my cheeks. She’s lying. It’s obvious to me, and I mark another mental note about why she’d make such a shit Slytherin.

“Herminny!” Ed calls from behind the counter, and with a groan and roll of her eyes, she sulks towards the counter to retrieve Herminny’s coffee.

Like a good little pure-blood boy, I stand and pull the seat out across from me, and she nearly falls into it.

“Heading back to the Book Emporium then?” I ask with a lopsided grin, my eyes memorising her face for the hundredth time. Everytime I see her I find something I don’t want to forget.

“Huh?” Her face clouds in confusion, and then her lie crashes back into her consciousness and she flusters. “Oh! Yes. Yes, the Book Emporium. I was looking for a book.”

I snicker into my coffee cup and arch a disbelieving brow at her. “You’re a rotten liar, Granger. If you missed me, that’s all you needed to say.”

“Who says I missed you?” An indelicate snort escapes her, and she bites back a smirk of her own. “You’ve always been such a prat—you know that, right?”

My tongue flickers out to wet my lips, and I offer her my most charming smile. “Maybe I missed you too.” Winking, I lift the bitter coffee to my lips once more, and her eyes catch on something on the side of my cup.
She’s studying it with a scrutinizing glare, and I pull the coffee from my mouth, scared it may be sporting a floating insect and that’s what caused its horrendous taste.

Her face brightens playfully, and she leans forward to snag the cup from my hand. “Who’s Daisy?”

“Daisy?” The name is familiar; I’ve heard it recently. A knot of dread and discomfort fills my belly as my focus falls on the girl with the flaming red cheeks and wide, horror filled eyes behind the bar.

I suppress a groan as my gaze flickers back to my table mate.

“She’s left you her number,” Granger turns my cup back towards me, exposing the numbers scribbled under “Daisy xx,” and the pit in my stomach transforms into a swamp.

“Oh. I—um.” Surely there are words I know that are longer than a single syllable, but they aren’t springing forth, and so I’m just unattractively scrunching my face up and staring at the drip-stained ceiling.

Granger’s jealous glare falls to the tawny girl behind the counter and then returns to me, sparkling with mischief. “You should call her.” She pushes the cup back towards me. “She’s cute.”

“With what?” I chuckle, stealing my cup back and wincing as the steaming liquid scorches my throat. “Is it a Floo number?”

Her chocolate colored eyes roll back obnoxiously, and she digs in her little beaded bag and procures a palm-sized silver phone. She slides it toward me, a lopsided grin accompanying the challenge in her eyes.

“I don’t know how to work that—”

“I’ll dial.” Her nimble fingers pluck it from the table, and I shoot out of my seat, grappling her for it as her laughter fills the room.

“Granger!” I hiss as she flips her phone open.
“Fine, fine. Just teasing.” The resulting smile on her lips causes one of my own and she slides the phone back into her bag and stands. “Feel like walking me to the bookstore?”

A huff of disbelief leaves me; how can she keep shelling out chances?

My chair scratches against the cheap tile as I stand, and I offer a tight smile over my shoulder to Daisy, whose eyes keep floating over towards us. “Lead the way, Granger.”
Leave the Light On

A/N: HUGE thanks to GalwayGirl2 for suggesting this song! It came at the most perfect time and I think it fits with this chapter perfectly.

If you look into the distance, there's a house upon the hill
Guiding like a lighthouse, it's a place where you'll be
Safe to feel at grace and if you've lost your way
If you've lost your way
I will leave the light on

And I know you don't know oh, but I need you to be brave
Hiding from the truth ain't gonna make this all okay
I'll see your pain if you don't feel our grace
And you've lost your way
I will leave the light on

Leave the Light On, Tom Walker

There’s no chess set on the coffee table today. Brenner sits in his usual chair, his hands folded over his chest and his chin tilted. “Should we just dive right in?”

I snort and roll my eyes. He’s serious today, but there’s not much else he can fuck me up with now that we’ve covered how my parents were fucking savages and Granger left me. I can handle anything he throws my way.

I open my palms in a gesture for him to continue.
“Let’s talk about what happened to you in the months leading up to the War.” Brenner flips his notebook open while simultaneously hitching an ankle over his knee.

That bloody twitch in my throat dances to life as if Brenner’s words have beckoned it forward.

I let out an exhausted sigh. ‘You know everything.”

“I’d like to try something akin to visualizations again, if you’re amenable.”

Sitting back on the chaise, my brows tug together, and I fold my hands behind my neck. “What? Another snowglobe?”

Brenner’s face screws up on one side, and he shakes his head back and forth in thought. “Not exactly. It’s called hypnosis. We would be working through some emotions you experienced in places where you might not have felt safe or comfortable.”

Suddenly I’m hyper aware of everything in the room: the ticking of the clock on his wall, the whirring of the air conditioner, even the blood rushing in my ears. The last time we tried his little trip down memory lane, I nearly relapsed. It was the beginning of everything else.

Everything else was fucking shite.

A vein on my wrist has caught my eye, and I count my pulse as it quickens under my pale skin. “Didn’t bloody work last time.”

“Well, last time we weren’t as well prepared as we are now. Visualizations and hypnosis are powerful psychological tools that, when used properly, can help you sift through your trauma and move forward when you’re lucid. While under a state of hypnosis your mind is open, more able to accept suggestions—”

My vision darkens, and I’m genuinely curious if this man is a fucking lunatic since he thinks I’m going to let him plant sweet nothings in my brain.

As if he can read my thoughts, his hands fly up in defense. “The things I would be suggesting would
not be anything you aren’t currently trying to accomplish on your own. And most importantly, this isn’t a fix-all. You will still have to fight your daily urges to remain clean and sober, but it should help in removing some of the anxiety you’re experiencing.” He’s watching me as I mull it over. Every fibre of my being is thrashing and clawing at me, begging me to run and retreat into safety. “You can trust me, Draco. I’m only here to help you.”

**Trust.**

Trust seems to be the root of all evil where I’m concerned, but I’m self-aware enough to understand that if I don’t start trusting someone at some point then I’m going to be tragically alone for the remainder of my days.

With absolutely no degree of self-preservation at all, I agree.

“First: are you an Occlumens?” His pen scratches against the parchment in his notebook, and when I don’t immediately answer, he peeks over the top of his glasses in my direction. “Draco?”

The whooshing of blood and the grating noises of his office are overwhelming, and my eyes flutter closed as I crack my neck, trying to bring my attention back to the conversation at hand. When my eyes open, I flip my wrist and stare at the vein throbbing on my wrist.

“I am.”

“Okay. Natural or trained?” More scratching.

Without permission, my mind takes me to the cold dungeon at Hogwarts, to the cluttered office there stuffed full of potion vials and scattered herbs. “Trained.”

“Legilimens?” His voice raises an octave, but he doesn’t meet my eyeline.

I gulp; it’s not exactly something one goes around talking about. “Yes. Natural and trained.”

I feel Brenner’s gaze heat the side of my face, and my nerves tangle in the top of my belly, trying to claw its way up.
“May I ask who trained you?”

My fingers pluck at one another in front of me, and a wicked smile tugs at my lips. I meet his eyes for the first time, a proud tilt to my chin. “Bellatrix LeStrange.”

The sharp point of Brenner’s neck bobs, and continuing his scribbling.

“We will begin by entering through a safe space. The snowglobe, if you prefer. We could also do a meadow or a beach—it’s unimportant. Wherever you are safest. From there, I’m going to take you back to some of the moments of the war. During this time you will be able to talk to me and describe your experiences. I will help you work through the anxiety you may feel and leave suggestions when appropriate on how to to deal with the trauma.” Brenner pauses, pinching his notebook shut and leaning towards me until his elbows are resting on his knees. “It’s important that you trust me. No Occlumency, so you’ll need to resist the urge to push me out. Keep your mind open, and if I push back, it’s only because you’ve been trained to keep me out and I’m trying to stay in.” His instructions tumble out one after another, and tendrils of my consciousness chase after them, attempting to make sense of each one.

I cough into my palm and avert my gaze to the Persian rug at my feet. “I’ve not had great experiences with Legilimency. He used it on me.”

Please, don’t make me talk about it, Brenner.

“I’m not a Legilimens. I told you it wouldn’t be ethical for me to be— naturally or trained. This is something entirely different, but it’s important that I know that you are, because when the session is finished, you can lock those memories—and the new feelings associated with them— away. The goal is not to forget them but to stop them from manifesting negatively when you revisit them.”

“What happens if—” The words stick to my tongue as the memory of the last time floods my mind. I don’t want to think about the overwhelming anxiety that crushed me the last time we did this; I certainly don’t want to speak it aloud. “What if it’s like last time.”

“It will be,” he says. “It might be worse because you are going to fight through it.” Brenner speaks like it’s nothing, like he’s not about to force me to relive the worst fucking moments of my life. Brenner removes his glasses, dragging a hand down his face before returning them to his slightly crooked nose. “I don’t think you’ll be able to speak honestly and openly about your time during the war with me. Not that you don’t want to, but especially given your proclivity towards Occlumency
and self preservation… it’s just unlikely. By entering through hypnosis, your walls will be naturally down. You will experience very intense emotions through this, and I want you to try and latch onto my voice, follow where I lead you, and remember that you’re stronger than you were before. You’re much stronger.”

I feel a knot form at the base of my throat, and I try to swallow it back down, but it catches on the sides of my throat.

“Lie back and get comfortable,” Brenner instructs with a reassuring smile. He flicks his wand and tranquil nature sounds fill the air.

Trembling, I rest my head on the pillow and cross my ankles, my hands folding across my chest. All my focus is on trying to quell the short bursts of breath as they pass my lips.

“Snowglobe?” Brenner asks.

I shake my head. It’s spring, after all. “Meadow, I think.” I pause before adding on, “Include some rose bushes.”

I can practically hear his smile, and he begins, “Breathe. In and out. In and out. Focus your attention on the feeling of your lungs expanding and emptying, expanding and emptying.”

*Simple enough, Brenner.*

“Focus on slowing your breath; fill your lungs more, then empty them slowly. As you focus on your breath, I want you to imagine a light burning bright in the center of your chest. What colour is it?”

My forehead crinkles as an image fills my mind. “Purple.”

“As you listen to my voice, the light flashes brighter and swirls in your chest. It’s warm.”

It’s fucking weird, but I can feel it, the little warm light. It’s buried in my chest and pulses as he speaks.
“It’s travels down your legs, spreading through your limbs and through your toes before swirling back up and entering your arms. The light touches your heart, covering it in it’s glow, and then it continues up your throat and into your head. It surrounds your lips, your nose, your mind, until you feel completely relaxed and at ease.”

My body sinks into the chaise, even my head rolls slightly to the side, and I feel like I’m about to fall the fuck asleep, which probably wouldn’t accomplish much of what he’s after.

“Keep listening to my voice, as you listen you find yourself falling deeper into relaxation. As you relax more, you listen closer, until you feel completely free of any tension.”

Brenner never stops talking; he continues to reassure me in the same soft monotone until it’s an endless fountain of drabble.

“You’re doing great, Draco. Now, listen to my voice. Imagine yourself in a field. The grass is tall, nearly at your waist, and it sways as a gentle breeze glides through the air around you. You feel the tickle of the grass on your fingertips as you walk further into the clearing.”

My fingers twitch.

“Walk further still until you see a cluster of rose bushes. What colour are they?”

My eyelids flutter, even as they remain closed, and my mind pulls me into the vision when he asks me. “White.”

“How many are there?”

I’m standing in the meadow, and his voice is almost an echo now, like he’s speaking from the sky. Before me is a lone rose bush, smattered in white roses in full bloom.

“Not many.”
“In this field, you can feel yourself at peace. Everything else fades away here. You don’t need drugs to feel whole. You are whole. You are in charge of the rest of your life, and here you find yourself whenever you are lost.”

I breathe a long sigh as relief washes over me, and I know now that I am really about to fall asleep.

“We are going to go somewhere else now, Draco. I want you to take me to the beginning—”

My mind travels to my father's study, a cold glass of whiskey in my hands as he tells me how things are changing now: how our family will be exalted amongst the Sacred Twenty-Eight, how I’m a part of those changes.

The flashes of memory are quick and too vibrant as they flash painfully behind my eyes, and I remember the moments in the Room of Hidden Things and the way the windows exploded in the Great Hall, shards of glass and memory raining down on top of us.

“Take me to the Manor.” Brenner’s voice leads my consciousness, and I follow without question, the only hesitation is a flicker of my lids. “Where are you?”

My jaw clenches as the cold of the memory seeps into my bones. “The main dining room.”

“What’s happening?”

A broken breath slips past my lips, and I feel my eyes flutter as the three sodding Gryffindors are dragged onto the floor in front of me.

“They’re here.”

“Who?”

“Potter, Weasel—Granger.”

“Why?”
Air catches in my throat as I remember them on their knees in front of me and the terror that pulsed through me when Father threatened to call Him. I didn’t want Potter to win, that much is glaringly—painfully—obvious. But more than I don’t want Scarhead to win, I need him to live, need him to see one more day so that he might make this fucking mania end.

As much as my blood must surely be beautiful and pure and defended at all costs, it can’t be worth this.

The scruff of my collar cuts into my throat as Father’s fingers dig into my neck, and he drags me across the floor until I’m staring into the obviously disfigured face of Harry Potter.

They ask me—beg me—to tell the truth.

They want an answer, and it’s there, sitting smugly on the tip of my tongue.

The sharp nails of Father’s unkempt fingers cut into the skin at the base of my neck, and I shake my head.

“I can’t be sure,” I manage with a growl. “I don’t know.”

My eyes flicker to the vibrant emerald irises of my nemesis, and I watch the subtle way his breath leaves him in relief.

Brenner’s voice breaks through the moment. “Tell me: how do you feel here?”

My eyes fall over Potter’s face again. “Terrified.”

“Oh.” Brenner breathes. “Take me somewhere else. Take me to the last time you saw your mother.”

My heart clenches and throbs in my chest, burning and burying itself in my ribcage, and I want to fucking sob when I see her face bloom behind my lids again.
I’ll never see her like this again.

“Describe it to me.”

Hogwarts burns behind us, rubble and rock strewn throughout the courtyard, and I can’t help but think it’s a bit dramatic, what with the smoke and the stone and the endless death and dark magic floating all around us.

‘Harry Potter is dead.’ Voldemort had rang out triumphantly.

The words don’t sit like I thought they would. No, they pierce me like an arrow, stinging and dragging through me all at once, and suddenly I can’t feel anything.

It’s good. It’s good when I don’t feel. The numbness is better than all despair that I can’t claim because I’m Draco fucking Malfoy, and I don’t own shit like that.

He asks for his followers to step forward.

I don’t move. Can’t move. Can’t claim that fucking monster who has shed innocent blood on my kitchen table as my king. Monster.

My mouth tugs into an angry snarl, and when Father steps forward, beckoning me to his side, I can’t bear the sight of him. He was strong before. Now the grey of his skin and the lifelessness of his long hair make my stomach churn. You make me sick, I think to myself as my the corner of my mouth curls into a disappointed grimace.

The Dark Lord’s curse leaves his mouth before I could realize what happened, before I realize I could have saved her and I rewatch it, my limbs spasms.

“Draco, what you’re seeing right now is painful.”

My body twitches under the weight of the trance I’m in.
“It’s okay. It’s allowed to be painful. You’re allowed to feel pain.”

I feel a hot, angry beast crawl its way up my throat, and foreign sobs tear their way past my lips. “It wasn’t her fault.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“She fucking died. She’s dead.”

The words are fucking painful. They’re painful, and I’m aching from having said it aloud. I can’t breathe much longer if my throat keeps closing in like this. My fingers dig into the skin of my forearms, my face, my neck, clawing at anything I can reach.

“How does it feel?”

I should be irate at his pompous fucking question, but I’m not. I’m just overwhelmed, drowning in grief that I can’t escape. Dark and dangerous water crashes over my head until my breath only comes in greedy little gasps. I just want my fucking mum back.

I want to tell her that a hundred things. I want her to see me now that I’m the man I was always supposed to be and not that scared little shit that hid and cowered away from things that mattered.

But she’s dead.

“I can’t—”

“You can.”

“No. I—I—” The sobs that fill the room are too loud. They can’t be mine.

“Draco, you’re stronger now. You’re better now. Go back to the moment, stand in your shoes and
stand in conviction. You chose the light. When you are here, you stand tall. When you are unsure, you choose right. When you feel weak, you are strong. When you can’t keep going, you do.”

I answer with another broken sob, and I feel my body curl on itself while I clutch at my torso.

“You are strong. You don’t need anything to make you feel whole. You are whole all by yourself. You’re whole.”

I can hear the words echo throughout the courtyard of Hogwarts, but all I can focus on is the blank, grey expression painted on my mother’s dead face. The dullness in her eyes that I’ll never see sparkle in her ire again.

She’s dead.

She’s fucking dead.

“Pull yourself from here, Draco. Take me to the meadow with the bushes, the one with the too-tall grass and the oddly placed rose bushes. What colour are the roses?”

My brows tug together and glimpses of the meadow with the swaying grass flash behind my lids, but I don’t stay there.

I try; my fingers claw into the soft earth by the roses, but my mind takes me to Hogwarts, my real home.

But right now, it’s not a home. It’s a prison. I’m climbing the steps with a weary, reluctant drag to my steps. The creeping feeling of dread settles into my chest like the giant squid, wrapping its vice-like tentacles around my ribs and squeezing me until I can’t fucking breathe.

My wrist moves through the wand motions. Simple. Easy.

Flick here. Flourish there. End with a stab.

My lips ghost over the words. Avada Kedavra. Just another Unforgivable.
Won’t be the first, but gods, please let it be the fucking last.

A tremor settles in my spine, and it spreads through my limbs until my body shakes with anxiety.

I feel everything. It’s pinching in my sinuses and sliding down my throat; everything is heavy and dragging me down, and I want to fucking quit. I don’t know when the stakes got so fucking high, but they aren’t worth it anymore.

Still, my feet lead me up.


Up, until I’m there, my wand barely hanging by my fingertips in the shadows.

This is it. This is that fucking moment when the rest of my life is decided; this is the moment when I might not be a fucking coward anymore. This is when I save my mum and redeem our family.

I’m a fucking coward; who am I trying to fool?

“Expelliarmus!” The spell is quick and easy—too easy.

“Draco, I want you to come back—” I can hear Brenner instructing me but his voice is too muffled by the memory I’m reliving.

Dumbledore is tired—defeated, even—as I jab the tip of my wand in the air toward him.

The memory is pulling me in too deep, and I’m drowning, coughing and sputtering on a plush couch somewhere in Muggle London even though in my mind I’m hundreds of miles and years away.

My body fights the memory as the others rush into the tower, and my wand falls towards the floor, a relieved sigh leaving my lips.
“You’re safe, Draco. You’re strong, so much stronger than you realize. You have things worth
fighting for—take me there.”

Granger fills my mind. She’s all I can see.

Curls and wildness and laughter that spills out like a fountain; unapologetic and never ending.

The way her skirt swirls against slender thighs.

The pull of her fingers through my hair when she kissed me once over a pan of lasagna.

The crinkle between her brows when I’m infuriating.

Granger.

“Take me to the meadow, Draco. Take me to the place where you’re strong. You’re whole. You’re
strong—”

His endless mantra continues for far too long, until I’m walking through a meadow of tall grass and
staring at a field of rose bushes blooming in the evening. Something in my chest flutters and settles,
like a piece tried to escape but decided it was best at home with the others.

“Draco?”

My eyes flutter open, and I’m back in Brenner’s office again. Lighter than I was before.

A/N: I took a little creative liberty with hypnosis here, so if you are an expert on the subject - forgive
me! I’ve actually entered hypnosis once before and it’s very strange and surreal feeling.
I’m hoping you guys will have daily updates now until the end! EEP! I’m so overwhelmed by all your love and support through writing this and at the end, I will give you a little insight into why this piece is so incredibly personal to me. But I won’t bore you with that now lol.

As always, thank you to Ravenslight and MCal for their unparalleled beta and alpha skills. This piece simply wouldn’t exist without you.

Love hearing your thoughts and they make me grin all day long!

-LK
Fortress

There are things I thought I could rise above
And all the things I thought I was better than
And a coward might call it a conscience
And a liar might call it the truth
Nothing could ever make me more frightened
Than the thought of hurting you

Fortress, Bears Den

There’s something strangely satisfying about the quiet little pop when I open the beer bottle, an old friend greeting me again.

I set the beer next to his hand and offer a small smile in way of acceptance. Acceptance of what? Maybe of how fucking low I’ve gotten in my life that I can’t enjoy a damn pint with my mate for fear of it spiraling me into a bender that causes me to lose my fucking mind again.

“I wasn’t aware you kept beers around,” George says with a twitch of his brow, pulling the bottle to his lips.

Perching on the tiled countertop next to my sink, I cross my arms and stare at him. “I don’t. Special occasions and all that.”

A wicked grin pulls at George’s face, and in an automatic response, I scowl. He sets the beer down with an air of superiority, as if me saying that this is a “special occasion” has somehow transformed him into the Minister of fucking Magic.

Alcohol would definitely make this easier.
Apologizing to Molly was difficult, but… there was something about it that felt inherently comfortable. I’d been baring my broken soul to her for so long that surely one more little jagged piece falling away was nothing. But saying it to George?

Fuck.

My vocal cords tangle in a knot low in my throat, and I cough, trying to clear them. From my perched position on the edge of my counter, I eye him with a wary expression. “Have you heard about the bullshit Brenner is making me do?”

Georges brows tug together as he takes another long pull of beer. “What, like the cooking shit?”

My face pinches up, and I rub my palm against the stubble on my cheek. “Kinda. I’m— well, it’s kind of ridiculous is what it is.” I chuckle darkly and suck on my tongue a moment. “I have to make amends with people I’ve wronged.”

The air shifts suddenly before settling uncomfortably around us. From the corner of my eye, I see George twitch in the awkwardness I’ve thrown into the room.

“So, yeah.” I tilt my head to the popcorn ceiling and feel the pressure of the moment prickle at my sinuses. “I’m sorry. Sorry you had to pick my ass up—more than once. I—” I clear my throat for something to do, “I’m not sure where I would have woken up if you hadn’t come after me. After everything, you still took me back. You gave me a job, gave me a place to stand and a home of my own.” Another cough. “Thank you.”

George’s face twists up in the same uncomfortable grimace that often sits on Weasel’s face, and for a moment, I’m struck by how similar they look.

Draining his beer, he lets out a low sigh and wipes his mouth. “Well, it was nothing really. I needed help in the shop; you needed a job. Made sense.”

I almost quip something about how I’ve never really needed a job, nor will I ever for the rest of my days, but I don’t. He gave me a lot when he offered that tiny little closet office and the ledgers that were months out of balance.

It’s George’s turn to clear his throat, and I notice the ticks I would have missed before, the way he
taps his finger on the tile and the way he grits his jaw before he speaks. It seems everyone has a tell. “Is this your way of quitting, then?”

Thickness once again settles in my throat, and I try to swallow it away. “Yes.”

I’ve been thinking about this for just a few days, but as soon as I the thought settled in my mind—*I knew*. This isn’t the place for me, not anymore. The same way Granger wasn’t meant to stock shelves; I’m not meant for this.

I might despise the legacy left to me, but there are roots there that are just as much a part of me as the blond on my head. I owe nothing to the generations before me that polluted my mind and corrupted our family—but I owe something to myself.

Malfoy Enterprises waits for me, just as it always has, and for the first time I feel it call to me. I can rebuild what was broken. I can make it new—*better*—just like I’m trying to do with myself.

“It’s nothing personal—” I begin, only to be silenced by a raise of George’s palm.

“I never expected you to stay long term, Malfoy. I’m grateful for your help, and you’re welcome to stay in the flat as long as you like.” His lips quirks up. “You’re not as bad as everyone says you are.”

I snort, pushing off from my spot on the counter and turning to stand in front of him. “Yeah, you aren’t either, mate.”

I hold my hand out to him, and he inspects it with a quizzical crinkle of his brow. Taking my hand, he crushes me to him in a hug and, surprising even myself, I don’t hesitate to return it.

Shoving my head through the Floo, I wince at the sensation of the green flames tickle my skin. “*Molly!*”

From my skewed view of the sitting room of the Burrow, I watch Molly huff and puff her way into the room with a worried brow. “Draco Malfoy, what are you doing in my Floo? Come through—”

I cut her off before she can keep jabbering. “Molly! It’s an emergency. The Floo is open. Hurry!”
Withdrawing my face, I stare at my kitchen in horror. When Molly stumbles through seconds later, shaking soot and Floo powder from her apron, her eyes widen in horror.

“Merlin’s beard— what have you done?”

“I tried to make a roast.” We stare together at the smoke billowing from the cast iron skillet and the frothy water bubbling over the edges in an angry hiss.

“How long til she’s here?” Molly studies the chaos erupting in my kitchen with a disbelieving pout.

I grimace as I examine the clock on my wall. “Forty-five minutes?”

Molly pulls her hair down around her shoulders, which is longer than I would have imagined, and re-ties it more securely at the crown of her head. “Grab your wand; you're going to need it.”

Stomping determinedly into the kitchen, Molly gasps when she sees the charred mess of meat in my skillet.

“Why in heaven’s name would you do that to a piece of meat?” She blanches, her hand resting on her chest as though I’ve cursed her youngest child.

“That stupid, bloody book! It told me to get a crust before slow roasting. But it’s burnt!”

“Yes.” Her lips fold in on themselves as she inspects my stove. “Yes, it is. Congratulations on destroying a fine piece of meat. Now, let’s just hope you have something else in this icebox.” She flicks her stubby wand at my stove and clears the entire mess instantly.

My roast—the one that was worth over twenty pounds— drops unceremoniously into the rubbish bin.

“At least the carrots haven’t been ruined yet—”
I snort. I’d still been cutting them and hadn’t yet attempted to cook them.

“The potatoes are probably salvageable. Do you have a chicken?” she asks with wide, hopeful eyes.

My hands gesture in disbelief, motioning around my kitchen engulfed in smoke, and a little scoff escapes me. “Who on earth keeps a bloody chicken lying around?”

“People who can bloody cook!” she shouts, her hands flailing in the air, and she stomps back towards the Floo and disappears in a flash of green smoke accompanied by a shout of “the Burrow!”

Fuck.

She’s left… left me with a pot of half boiled potatoes and a stack of raw carrots. But as soon as she’s vanished, she reappears, holding a roasted chicken in oven mitt-clad hands. She’s mumbling to herself, something about “who-leaves-forty-five-minutes-for-a-roast-anyway.”

Foregoing acknowledging me further, she shuffles into my small kitchen and pops the chicken in the oven and sets a timer on her wand. “Keep chopping carrots; they need at least forty minutes, so I don’t know what that horrible book told you, but you’re fucked.”

My jaw drops slightly at her curse, but when she points the tip of her wand at my face, she’s all business, and I know better than to question Molly Weasley in a kitchen—even if it’s mine.

Thirty-five minutes later, and I’m hopping out of my bedroom, stuffing the tail of my oxford into my charcoal trousers.

Molly pulls the chicken from the oven with a grin, but it quickly transforms into a sharp glare as she notices me. “You listen to me right now, Draco Malfoy. You are not to carve this bird for at least fifteen minutes. Do you hear me?”

My lips quirk up in an almost smile as I finish the buttons on the sky blue buttoned shirt I know Granger likes. “Don’t cut the chicken for five minutes.” I see her jaw twitch, and I can’t help but smile at her. “Yeah, yeah. At least fifteen.”

Molly’s eyes catch sight of me for the first time, and she huffs her air in for a moment as she
approaches me. “You’re more handsome with some weight on you,” she states factually. Her hands fussing with my collar, and I smile down at her. “You’ll do well tonight. You’re different than before. Okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“Plus, that chicken is going to be delicious, and you owe me dinner now because I’ve given you my chicken.”

My grin widens, a soft laugh escaping. “Thank you, Molly.”

She clucks her tongue between her cheek and teeth and moves towards the Floo. “Thank me with a couple grandbabies, would you?” She disappears in the flames with a wink.

There is a knock at the door, and I feel my heart scorch a trail to my throat. Fussing over my clothes one last time, I pull the door open.

_There she is._

Am I even sure there was a time I didn’t find her earth shatteringly beautiful? How could I ever have thought anything else?

She is autumn in October and a spring in May. She peeks up at me through thick black lashes, and I can’t believe she’s here. Doesn’t she remember a few months ago when I was laying on the floor vomiting until I lost consciousness?

When she clears her throat, I realize that I haven’t yet invited her in, and I nearly yelp as I move to the side to allow her entry.

“Smells delicious,” she remarks, shrugging her light cloak from her shoulders, and my mouth runs dry.

It’s nothing really. Just a little dress. A little dress that kisses her knees and exposes the creamy lines
of her throat, and my cock twitches in the memory of a dream.

I swallow the sticky feeling on my tongue. “You look beautiful.”

“Oh.” She fusses with the full skirt of her little blue dress, the same shade as my shirt. “Thank you. You don’t clean up so bad yourself.”

My lips threaten to pull into a smirk, but I try my best to keep them neutral—an impossible feat. “Wine?”

Her entire body tenses, and her eyes flicker up to study me, always searching for the crack in the foundation.

“I bought a bottle for you in case you wanted some. If you don’t, you can take it with you—or I can give it to George. Bloke will go crazy for that nice of a bottle.” I try to keep it light even though the insecurities raging inside me threaten to pull me under.

“That’s okay—” She’s warring with herself, wondering if she could maybe just enjoy a glass or if it might send me over the edge.

“I’m okay.”

Her chocolate eyes lift to mine, and I watch the little pulse point in her throat, counting the flickers to calm me down. She has the same anxious little tendon that I do.

“I promise.” I’m trying to show her—fuck, I’m trying to show myself. I can do this.

The delicate hollows of her neck shift as she swallows. She’s nervous.

I pour her a glass and return it to the fridge. A bit of envy courses through me as her eyes flutter closed when the cool liquid slips over her tongue.

I try to smell roses. Try to remind myself of that stupid little meadow with the blooming rose bush.
When you are here, you are strong.

I swallow the urges clamoring up my throat and check the clock; it’s been thirteen minutes, and I want to carve that fucking chicken for something to do, but I’m sure Molly Weasley would be marching through my Floo seconds later to flay me on my dining table.

“How was your day?” My brows peak together. This relationship—casually getting to know each other even though we know each other intimately—is exhausting. What I really want is to sink to my knees and tell her how fucking wrong I’ve been all this time—but it’s not time. Not yet.

“Good! You?”

“Good,” I reply flatly, my lips flattening as I scramble for something to fucking say. “I quit my job.”

“You what?” Hermione shrieks, her palms slamming against the table, causing me to jump. She quickly realizes her error and composes herself. “You quit?” she asks politely, and the corners of my lips twitch.

“It was never meant to be long term,” I say. “It was always to get me back on my feet.”

Her brow arches suspiciously at me. “And you think you are?”

A feeling I can’t name, something that makes me feel like an imposter, rises up within me. After all, it was only five months ago that I was heaving vomit on the stone of Diagon Alley in the harsh afternoon sun. “I think so.”

Straightening her spine, she sips demurely at her wine glass, and I notice all the things that would drive my mother crazy. She’s sitting too far back on her chair, and she’s holding her glass by the goblet and not the stem—not to mention that her legs are crossed at the thighs and not the ankle.

But somehow, making the connection between the two makes me feel fractionally better, like they almost exist in the same space for a moment.
“What will you do?” she asks, replacing her glass on the counter.

“Return to Malfoy Enterprises.” I can see the worry etched in her features, and I’m quick to continue. “Our name doesn’t hold a lot of clout these days; I’m going to change that. I’m going to rebuild and get rid of every old fucker who disagrees with me. It’s my company.”

It’s now been sixteen minutes, so I carve the damn chicken, serving us both hearty portions of the meal I—or, rather, Molly—created and hover it to the table.

We pick at our dinners, both too nervous to really eat. The way her eyes light up when she talks about Flourish and Blotts destroys me. Hopefully I look that way when I talk about Malfoy Enterprises someday, though I highly doubt it.

“My question is—” she giggles over her second glass of wine “—do I add my name?”

“Flourish and Blotts and Granger?” I test it on my tongue, and her face scrunches up at the sound.

“It’s ridiculous,” she laughs.

“Well, change it.” I shrug, studying the slight sheen to her eyes as she sips her wine. I think I like the way she looks when she’s two glasses of wine in.

She scoffs, rolling her eyes dramatically. “I can’t change it. It’s five-hundred years old!”

“It’s zero years old to you, and it’s yours. If I’ve learned anything over the last year, it’s that we owe nothing to the generations before us.” My mouth pulls into a tight line, and an unexpected heaviness settles between us.

Granger swallows air as she stares at me. “Are you coming next week?”

I wrack my brain for something I must be missing. “Coming?”

“To the Victory Ball. It’ll be the anniversary of—”
I cut her off as I stiffen in my seat. “Oh... That’s not a good idea, you know. Death Eater and all that.” I laugh hollowly and sip on the water that I desperately want to be Firewhisky.

Shifting in her seat, she lets out a nervous breath. “I was thinking you might go with me? As a— well, I guess you could call it a date, but it doesn’t have to be that. Just— I thought we might go together.”

A blush stains her cheeks, and all I want is to fucking say yes. But the words don’t come, and I sense there’s a reason for it.

Tugging on her curls, she avoids my gaze. “I’m accepting this stupid award, and I’m so nervous about it because who even accepts awards for something like that,” she says, laughing nervously.

Her hands fumble with anything she can get her hands on, and I notice the thrumming of the tendon in her throat again; it’s beating furiously, and I want to tell her that she should press two fingers just there, that it might help the pulsing feeling.

“I— I can’t, Granger.” I shake my head at my plate of half eaten food, and I feel a swell of emotion rise inside me. “I can’t go back there.”

“It could be fun,” she tries. “I mean— we’d be together... and it’d just be nice to have someone there for m—”

“I just can’t,” I blurt as panic crashes on my shoulders and rages in my skull. It’s relentless, like I’m trying to stand under a waterfall that wants to drag me under.

The crumpling of her face feels like a knife between my ribs, and I let out a broken breath when she tosses her napkin on her plate. I’m fucking disappointing her again, just like I swore I’d never do again. But I don’t know how I’m supposed to walk into the the Great Hall on the arm of the Golden Girl like I fucking belong, like I didn’t almost kill Dumbledore, like I didn’t wait until the last minute to defect. Like I didn’t kill my mother.

I can’t be what she wants me to be.
“I understand,” she lies, her features heavy with her discomfort. Her eyes flicker to the clock ticking obnoxiously on the wall, and she clears her throat. “I actually should be going. I have such a big day tomorrow. But I’ll see you soon?”

Standing, she makes her way towards my door, summoning her cloak to her side and draping it over her shoulders.

Just like that, everything crashed and burned because I couldn’t do something for her.

*What in the fuck is wrong with me?*

“Thank you for coming.” I swallow, staring at our feet.

“Thank you for dinner. This was fun.” *Another lie.*

She reaches up on her tiptoes and brushes her lips against my cheek before turning swiftly for the door, leaving without another look back.

My forehead crashes against the back of the door as realisation crashes over me.

I’m still fucking this up.

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*A/N: I got this chapter ready for tomorrow’s update and figured I should go ahead and posit now! Just a touch o’ angst for you tonight.*

*I adore you all and your reviews today left me speechless.*

*MCal and Ravenslight are the real MVP’s and I am a puddle of love at their feet.*

*These next 3 chapters are maybe the chapters I am most proud of. Who knows… maybe I*
can’t wait. Maybe I'll have another beer and post another…
Impossible

Tell them all I know now
Shout it from the roof tops
Write it on the sky line
All we had is gone now

Tell them I was happy
And my heart is broken
All my scars are open
Tell them what I hoped would be impossible,
Impossible

Impossible, Originally by Shontelle, Covered by James Arthur

Sun pours through the window of the Dirty Grind and heats my favorite spot to an uncomfortable degree. Shrugging from my jumper, I toss it on the seat across from me and remove my pen from my the binding of my notebook. I continue to scrawl the words that are bouncing around my head.

I’ve not seen Granger since our disastrous dinner—not really. I stopped in the bookshop earlier, but she was running around with her soon-to-be ex-boss and, with a small, rushed smile, told me she’d owl soon.

This place we find ourselves in is confusing. I’m not sure what I’m allowed, and I’m still too terrified to ask. Trying to get my mind off her polite snub at Flourish and Blotts, I keep my mind focused on the words appearing on the page in front of me.

I’m not sure I’m a poet, but I’m pretty sure I’ve got a poem. It came to me as I stared at the wood grain of the door after Granger abruptly excused herself after our dinner. And now that I’ve found my muse, it seems she is relentlessly trying to get me to write the words that are trapped in my skull.
My wrist feels weak as I scribble, and I don’t stop until the seat across from me moves. Tension spreads across my shoulders, and I expect to see the girl from behind the counter; instead, it’s Jon, the bloke from the open mic nights.

“Whatcha working on?” he asks with a cheerful smile, nodding towards my now clenched notebook.

I blink a few times as I stare at the back of my notebook. “Nothing.”

His smile broadens almost empathetically. “Didn’t look like nothing. Why don’t you read at the next reading?

_Oh? That simple, yeah? Why don’t I also slice a knife through my belly and leave my insides out for display._

“Not my style,” I say, my lips flattening into a tight line.

Jon seems to dig deep for a moment, his eyes searching mine and, he leans forward. “I don’t know you,” he says, his hands clasping over the square table between us. “But I think I might _know_ you. And if you’re anything like me, you should give it a try. I’ll be here if you do.” His gaze is heavy and almost intrusive, but now that Brenner has destroyed my walls, it doesn’t feel so much like an attack.

“I couldn’t share this,” I say with a gulp, and suddenly the words in the notebook take on a new weight.

“I get that,” he agrees, his lips pulling to the sides. “It has helped me, though. It’s just words on a paper until you breathe your life into them.” His lips quirk up in a knowing little smirk, and he gestures with his chin over his shoulder. “There’s a sign-up in the back. Glad you’re writing.” His grin widens, and I can’t help but wonder how Muggles demonstrate such blind friendliness—clearly they’ve never met Lucius Malfoy.

I clear my throat. “What night is it? The next open-mic?”

Jon brings his paper cup to his lips and winces as the hot liquid scourches his mouth. “May 2nd.”
My tea’s gone cold, and I swirl the specks of loose leaf at the bottom with a frown; the idle chatter of the Burrow is background noise as my mind wanders to a dozen different places.

“Draco?” Molly hums from her seat near the fire, her feet kicked up on a tufted footrest and a content smile on her lips. “Would you play us something? That old piano never gets used, and you’re so lovely at it.”

I hear a snort from the Weasel near the back, but other than that, no one says anything.

“Oh, I don’t know—” My voice drifts off, and Molly sits up out of her chair to look at me straight on with round, hopeful eyes. My lips fold in, and I chuckle, setting my teacup on its saucer and rising to my feet.

Out of habit, I brush the bench and take my seat. My foot rests on the pedal without pressing down, and my fingers hover over the black and ivory keys as I try to think of what to play. My brows crease, and I remember sitting at the Grand Piano in my mother’s drawing room overlooking the rose garden.

Sitting in velvet wingback chair with her ankles crossed, Mother once begged me to play her something pretty as the scents of spring lingered in the air. Now sitting at this dusty little upright with Molly humming from her slouchy armchair, my lips tug up into a smile.

My fingers float towards the left, starting the melody in a low, ominous way that always leave my forearms prickled with gooseflesh. I like that about this song; the way it starts dramatically, almost foreboding, only to thrust you into the gentle tittering of the soprano.

The room falls silent as I reach the height of the melody, and my fingers dance over the keys.

My mind wanders as my fingers play out the tune from muscle memory, and I try to remember the last time my mother hugged me. Really hugged me. I hate that I can’t remember her last loving touch, even though I can remember the gentle curve of her lips as I played for her on a spring afternoon.

The song fades, and I rise from the bench with a tight smile towards Molly.
"I could listen to you play that old thing all night, you know." She grins at me, her eyes watery. "Thank you."

I manage only a nod and announce quietly that I need a bit of fresh air.

Pushing through the back door and out into the garden, I suck in a deep breath of evening spring air. I wish it stung like firewhisky because sometimes I just need that touch of pain to ground me, and that feels fucking sad.

It wasn’t too long ago that I felt nothing; anytime any emotion tried to pry it’s way out of me, I’d drown it with something stronger until it receded back to the dark chasm inside me. But Brenner and his mind games have peeled that part of me away, and now I fucking feel everything.

My soul feels raw from overexposure, and every thought is like salt in an open wound. The door creaks and crashes shut behind me, and I turn wildly, searching the darkness for the intruder.

"Hey, Malfoy." My throat runs dry at the familiar voice. Potter steps forward with his hands shoved in his pockets and his eyes set in a hard glare. "Got a minute?"

"Fuck off, Potter" is where my mind instinctually takes me, but I bite it back. He’s on the list, after all, and maybe if I just do the thing now, I can never speak to him again—although that feels unlikely. I lift my chin in way of agreement, and he crosses the yard to stand a few feet from me.

The silence that stretches on is so awkwardly deafening that I grimace at the treeline. I know I should probably say something. I’m supposed to be making amends, after all, and if he’s on my damn list then I must be sorry for something, right?

But I’m definitely not sorry for calling him Scarhead or ratting him out to Umbridge—the twat was breaking the rules. I could probably apologize for making the Potter Stinks buttons… that’s innocuous enough.

"Hermione told me you aren’t coming to the Victory Ball?" His voice lilts at the end like a question, although I’m not sure it is one.
There is a dangerous thudding in my chest now that the Boy Who Lived has brought up Granger. They’re close, always have been, and it dawns on me that he probably knows more about me then I ever would have told him. “Is that a question?”

Potter’s head shakes from side to side as he thinks. “I guess not.”

More silence.

“You’d be welcome, you know,” he continues his earlier thought. “It’s no secret you fought in the Battle of Hogwarts, and I think everyone is just ready to move on.” He pauses to swallow, his eyes studying the grass between his trainers. “I know I am.” Potter turns to me, staring at me from behind crooked, out of date glasses, and his jaw is set firmly as he seems to come to a conclusion.

“Hermione is important to me—”

**Brilliant.** A big brother speech, just what I need.

“And maybe at first I was a little wary—but she seems intent to have you in her life in some capacity.”

**Oh.** Well, I hadn’t been expecting that. I’d been expecting more of a “hurt her again and I’ll castrate you with the tip of my wand” kind of chat.

I clear my throat and meet his intent gaze with one of my own. “She’s important to me too.”

“So we’re in agreement? I think we can all benefit from leaving the past where it belongs. Yeah?” His thick brows rise over the frame of his glasses, and I can tell he’s being sincere. Another olive branch I don’t deserve.

Swallowing, I manage a nod before returning my focus on the distant trees. “I’m sorry, for what it’s worth. For everything.” Fuck, I hope that’s enough. I don’t want to get in any deeper with Potter; I’m not sure my fragile ego could withstand the humiliation.

“It’s in the past,” he says with an air of finality. But the tension between us transforms into something new, and I can tell it has nothing to do with what’s been said already. “There’s, uh, there’s something else.” It’s Potter’s turn to shuffle in the awkwardness of the moment, and I peek out of the corner of my eyes at him. “It’s about your mum—something I should have told you a long time ago.”
Ah, my old friend, I think as the tendon in neck awakens furiously. My palm immediately finds the fluttering under my skin and presses into it. The rawness is back, and the last thing on Earth I want to hear out of this twat’s mouth is a word against my mother. Who fucking cares if she didn’t defect in the end? She’s still my fucking mum.

My lip curls into a snarl. “If you have something bad to say about my mother, you can ke—”

His hands lift in defense, and he takes a tentative step towards me; I stiffen in response. “No, you misunderstand. I— well, I want to thank you, I guess. Or, rather, thank her, but I can’t do that so you’re the next best thing.”

Studying him closely, my brows pull together, and I find I’m mostly speechless. “What are you talking about?”

Potter lets out an exhausted sigh as he lifts his glasses from his nose and rubs the indents left there. “I went to the Forbidden Forest to meet Voldemort—” My shoulders stiffen, and I swear I can feel the burn of his call on my forearm even though his mark has long since faded. “Well, it’s a long story from there.” Potter chuckles darkly. “But Voldemort thought I was dead. He asked for someone to check, and your mum volunteered.”

There is a whooshing between my ears, and I swear I’m fucking trying to follow what he’s saying but it’s like he’s speaking Mandarin.

“Your mother, she knelt down next to me and placed her hand on my chest.” Potter mimicks the movement, placing a palm over his heart, and his brows tug together. Malfoy, she knew I was alive. But she lied to Voldemort.”

The strength in my legs is syphoned away, and I feel them knock together as my hands brace on the back of the bench. “What?” My voice is a breath of disbelief. “Why in the fuck would she do that?”

Potter’s hand lifts and hovers over my shoulder, ready to console me, but he, wisely, drops it back to his side. “I don’t know. I wish I did, if only to give you some peace in it all. But I can tell you in complete certainty that had she not lied, I would have died right then. She saved my life—saved the war.”

Sharp breaths push from my lungs, and for the life of me, I’m not sure why I’m so affected by this
news from Potter. It changes nothing, but somehow, it also feels like it changes everything.

“I just thought you might want to know,” Potter offers quietly and walks a few paces away, seemingly lost in thought. I’m still focusing on trying to calm my strangled breathing when he pauses and turns back to me. “There was one more thing,” he calls from a few feet away.

*What else could there possibly be,* I think to myself as my knuckles turn white from gripping the back of the bench.

“She asked about you.”

My vision darkens the longer I go without blinking, and I’m just trying to make sense of it all. Slowly, I turn towards him, waiting for a punchline. “What?” My voice is barely a whisper.

His lips pull into a lopsided smile. “Yeah, it was strange. She checked to see if I was alive, and when she realised I was, she wanted to know if you were okay. She said it so quietly I almost wasn’t sure I’d heard it right. Of course, I’d just seen you an hour or so before, so I managed to nod just once. She didn’t say anything else, but that seemed to be all she needed to know. I was sure I would be dead within the next few minutes, but she seemed more… *resigned* after that. Like she just needed to know you were okay.”

Hot tears well in the corner of my eyes, and I can feel the overwhelming emotion threatening to pull me under.

My throat tightens far beyond uncomfortable, and I feel like my breath is barely leaking from my lungs. I need to get away from the Golden Boy before I have a full-fledged panic attack in front of him.

“Here—” Potter produces an fancy sealed envelope with delicate calligraphy adorning the front. *The Malfoy Family.*

My brows tug together. “What’s this?”

“Your mother is being awarded an Order of Merlin, Second Class at the Victory Ball. I—” Potter lets out a heavy breath before continuing. “I wanted to explain before you received it.”
This sores me, and I twist to face him again. “Order of Merlin?”

“Yeah, as if awards mean anything after everything we’ve all been through.” He snorts and runs his hands through his sloppy hair. “Hermione’s not happy about it—says she doesn’t wasn’t an award for killing people. Ron is, of course, over the moon.” Harry laughs and stares at the ground between us again. “You should come. It’d mean a lot to Hermione.”

My eyes water, and I blink a few times to clear them. “I’ll think about it.”

“Hermione would appreciate it,” Harry says again with a nod before retreating into the Burrow.

It feels like I’ve been hit by a bludger, and I sink to the bench, burying my face in my hands.

Words are tumbling from my mouth before I’ve even made it over the threshold of Brenner’s office. “Well, I’ve got a real mess of shit for you this week, Harold.” I fall indelicately into my seat and wring my hands together.

Brenner chuckles and quietly closes the door behind me. “Do tell,” he says, arching a brow at me while he takes his seat.

Trying to decide where to begin on the arseload of fuckery I have to unload on him is difficult. “I told Potter I was sorry.”

“For what?”

I wince. “It was easiest just to say ‘everything’; the list was probably a little too long.”

Another dry laugh from Brenner, and he flips his notebook open and gnaws on the end of pen. “Okay, I’m assuming there’s more.”

“He told me something about my mother.” My eyes dip to my intertwined fingers, and I don’t realise I’ve been squeezing them until I see my knuckles are white. “I guess she lied to the Dark Lord. She
was sent to check if he was dead, and she lied.”

Brenner makes a little humming noise as he scratches his pen quickly across his notebook.

“Potter says if she hadn’t lied, then the war would have ended much differently. He thinks he would have died.”

Brenner’s eyes stay locked on the paper in front of him. “That’s interesting.”

I’m watching him intently, curious to see his reaction. “She— she asked about me. Before she lied, she wanted to know if I was okay. When she found out I was… that’s when she lied.”

Brenner’s eyes flick up to mine, and his brows are pulled tightly together over his glasses. “Is that so?”

“I guess.” I shrug, shifting in my seat. “I’m not sure if Potter has a reason to lie about such things.”

“How does that make you feel?” Brenner’s voice is soft, like he’s scared of spooking me.

I snort, unsure how I’m supposed to respond. It’s been four days since I’ve gotten the news, and I’m still working out how I feel about all this. My mother risked her life just to know I was okay, did it again to save Potter, of all people. “How’s it supposed to make me feel?”

Brenner’s lips fold inward, and he shrugs. Looks like no easy quaffles today.

“I just wish I could understand her motives behind it. Why did it matter if I was alright? Why did she even ask that? Why did she lie? None of it makes sense.”

“Makes sense to me,” Brenner says.

My eyes flash up to him, and I’m almost not sure I’ve heard him right. “What does that mean?”
“I think it’s pretty easy to deduce that your mother loved you and was willing to risk a great deal to ensure your safety.”

I bark out a laugh and then another. “You’re mad, Brenner. I’ve really come to like you, but you’re certifiably mad.”

Brenner smirks at me and closes his notebook. “What other reasons could she have had?”

Silently, I take a moment to mull over for the hundredth time why she would have done it. I keep coming back to the same place again and again. *She cared about me.*

Coming to this conclusion about one’s own mother shouldn’t be such a mind-blowing experience, but it is.

“That one act doesn’t make up for the other horrible things she watched happen to me.” I scowl, dragging my fingers through my hair.

Brenner lets out a long sigh and leans forward until his elbows are resting on his knees. “No, it really doesn’t. What are you general feelings towards your mum?”

A lovely little cocktail of rage and annoyance cool my blood, and I glare at him from my seat. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Brenner’s hands gesture towards the heavens and he lets out a tired sigh. “I think you need to admit to yourself that you’re angry at her.”

“I’m not.” The words are quick, no chance to second guess them.

“I think you are. And I think when you can admit that, you can forgive her and realize that while she made mistakes in loving you, she still *did* love you. She wanted you to be okay even if she didn’t know how to do it. You can be angry at someone and still love them—still miss them, even. Emotions are not mutually exclusive.”

I take a long pause to think about what he said. I try to name the emotion that surges through my
veins; anger seems too harsh, but I’m fucking mad. I wish—


“I wish she’d had a fucking spine! I wish she had done something before the last day of her life, and, fucking hell, I wish she’d showed it to me and not Harry fucking Potter! What? She gets one redeeming moment, and I don’t even get to own that? I get it secondhand from the boy who gets everything else?”

“Are you angry right now?”

“Fucking yes, I’m angry! Things could have been different, you know? She could have been there when I needed her. She could have helped me out of that fucking mess instead of watching me drown in it—” I can feel hot stabs in my throat, and I try to swallow them down. “I want my mother to have loved me, and I don’t want to have to guess at it from my therapist’s office with secondhand information!”

My chest is heaving as the words rush my past my lips, and a vibrant crimson flashes behind my lids. I realize suddenly that I am very, very angry.

“I don’t want to be angry at her,” I confess, feeling a traitorous tear slip past my lashes. My eyes work their way up to Brenner’s, and he’s brimming with quiet contentment.

“Then forgive her.”

My eyes flutter closed, and against my will, a little sob cracks through my chest. My mind takes me to the parlour floor where she watched me be Crucioed, to the look on her face when the Dark Lord branded me with his inky mark. To the last look of despair in her eyes when he asked for his followers to step forward.

Those aren’t the ways I want to remember her.

I want to remember her with her legs curled under her in a large armchair by the window in her drawing room. I want to see her in the garden trimming away the wilting roses and lovingly caring for all the ones that remain. I want to know that, in her final moments, she loved me.
Behind my closed lids, a meadow springs to life. I’ve been here before, now several times, and today it’s quiet with a gentle breeze floating through the tall grass. Towards the centre of the field, I know I’ll find the rose bushes I keep there, but as I make my way towards them, I see her. She has garden gloves on her hands and a neat chignon at the nape of her neck.

She turns, and a knowing smile pulls at her cheeks. She holds out her palm, reaching for me, and when I place my hand in hers, the skin around her eyes crinkle with happiness. She’s smaller than me, a feat I never thought I’d see when I was still a child, even though she always told me I would outgrow her.

Searching her blue eyes for coldness or anger, I find none. I find peace. They’re clear and wide and full —of what I don’t know— but she looks ready to burst. She doesn’t speak, and I attribute that to the fact that she is a figment of my imagination, but she’s smiling at me and wraps her arms around my middle.

She’s here, in the roses—where she’s meant to be. And even if this moment isn’t what I thought it would be, even if it’s not what we deserve—even if it’s not real—it’s mine.

A/N: GUYS! Chapter 27 is my favorite thing I’ve ever written. And I want to share it with right MEOW! EEEEEK!

I hope you like this chapter, it was something that I’ve been dreaming of writing for months. In this little AU, Draco never knew about his mom’s involvement in the end and I’ve always thought it was an important part to Draco moving on afterwards.

I’m so curious to know what you guys think about his revelation and I will get 27 to you ASAP! MWAH!

Mcal and Ravenslight, all the hugs and kisses. You are queens.
You Say

I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I’m not enough
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low?
Remind me once again just who I am, because I need to know

You say I am loved when I can’t feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don’t belong, oh You say that I am Yours
And I believe

You Say, Lauren Diagle

Since our last session, Brenner and I have discussed that I’ve had a “breakthrough,” or so he calls it. I’m not sure it feels quite so dramatic as all that, but we’ve discussed that by realising my mother loved me—and thus forgiving her for doing it incorrectly—that maybe I can accept that people want to love me too. That maybe they’ll forgive me if I couldn’t love them the way they needed.

Brenner likes to do that, I’ve noticed. Use generic pronouns instead of “she,” even though we both know we’re talking about Granger.

The big thing he wants me to take away is that my mother never got a chance to love me right, and I still have that opportunity. Seems a little hokey, but the old bloke hasn’t steered me wrong yet, so I nod along and try to soak up what it is he’s saying.

“How are you feeling about this weekend?” Brenner asks jovially.

“Fine.” My voice is clipped, and Brenner makes a little mocking face at me.
“Right.” He eyes me suspiciously. “Anything you want to talk about?”

“My parents died a year ago on Saturday.” I manage the words through a tight jaw and press my fingers into the dull ache in my throat. “All of London will be celebrating its victory—including the death of my parents.”

“I’m sorry,” he offers to me, like it’s worth anything.

“Yeah.” It’s all I can manage, so it’ll have to fucking do.

Brenner clears his throat, “Are you going to the Victory Ball?”

“No,” I say instinctually, heat lightly staining my cheeks. “I don’t want to be a spectacle. It’s not my place.”

“You fought on the winning side—”

I scoff loudly and roll my eyes. “In the last hour. Not when it mattered.”

“It all mattered, Draco.” Brenner’s reassuring voice does little to help me through the chaos I’m experiencing in my mind.

I run my tongue along my teeth and consider how much I ought to share with the dear old doc today, but at this point he’s seen all my demons. What’s a few more? “Granger asked me to be her date,” I say, pulling at my fingers until the knuckles crack.

Brenner’s face lights up as if he and Molly Weasley have finally gotten their wish, and I laugh at his hopefulness. “I said no, Brenner.”

His face falls. “Why?”
“She’s getting her fancy little award and being recognized for all this heroism; she doesn’t need me stealing the attention by being the Death Eater on her arm.”

“Bullshite!” Brenner bites uncharacteristically, and my eyes go wide studying him.

“‘Scuse me?”

“You have got to be one of the densest, more infuriating clients I’ve ever had. Do you know that?” he says with an incredulous little frown. “Have you learned nothing about her? I’m no marriage counselor, but I do like to think I have a happy marriage, so take my advice for what it’s worth. Listen to her. Stop presuming you know what’s best for her and listen. If she wanted you there, did you stop to think it might be because she might need you there?”

My jaw falls open, and I abruptly slam it shut. For not the first time, Brenner makes a very good point. “Well, I just— I have plans.” I scramble for the first thing that comes to mind. “I’m reading at an open-mic.”

It’s Brenner’s turn to be completely at a loss for words as his eyes narrow into slits. “What are you reading?”

I gulp audibly. “Well, those stupid hobbies you made me try… I started chatting with this bloke at the coffee house, and he encouraged me to read some of my work at the Open Mic Night on the second. I hadn’t fully committed, but I did write my name down.”

A wide grin spreads across Brenner’s face as he laughs brightly. “That sounds pretty committed.”

My face falls, and I scowl at him. “I can back out if I want.”

“Are you planning to?”

I think about that for a minute. It’s hard to plan to back out of something that you’d not really planned on doing in the first place. I really just signed up because I was coming out of the loo the other day and the list was just there. Doesn’t mean I’ve made an Unbreakable Vow or some shit. “Maybe.”
“Can I come?” Brenner says it so nonchalantly that I choke on my spit.

My eyes shoot wide as I recover from my hacking cough. “Of course not! Have you lost your mind?”

“Why? I want to see all this hard earned progress you’ve made—and I like coffee.” My face flattens as he speaks because he seems like he’s stretching a bit.

I can’t imagine anything worse than having him hear the stupid little poem I’ve been picking at. It’d be mortifying beyond words. “Slytherins do not typically invite others to witness their humiliation.”

“It might be nice to have a friendly face around,” he says hopefully, but when my scowl doesn’t flicker he tries another route. “What if I promise to never speak of it to anyone or to you. I won’t bring up anything you’ve read—or that you’ve even read anything—for the rest of our time together.”

I eye him suspiciously, and he responds by making a little X over his heart with his forefinger. For some godforsaken reason, I soften. “Fine! But you’re to sit in the back and not make a fuss. Don’t clap or anything, just sit there quietly. Then leave and never speak of it again.”

Brenner rolls his eyes as his teeth gleam in a crooked smile. “Sounds like the time of my life.”

The rain is falling steadily outside the cafe window, and my leg bobs up and down, matching the rain’s tempo effortlessly. I’m ready for Ed to fucking getting this stupid thing started. I should just bloody leave. That’s what I should do.

What good does reading this thing out loud even really accomplish? It’s fucking humiliating, and I can’t understand why I’ve decided to do it.

I’ll leave, I decide with a firm nod but before I can make it to my feet, Ed’s voice booms through the room. What was once a bobbing of my leg is now a tremor of anxiety wracking its way through my entire body.

What the actual fuck was I thinking?
The bell over the door chimes again and again but I don’t look. Brenner is already seated across from me, even though I had originally told him he was banished to the back of the coffeehouse. When he came in I found that I did desperately need a friendly face in the crowd and, with a small scowl, gestured him over to my table.

Ed introduces the first act, and I swear to fucking Salazar an entire family of angry owls has taken flight in my chest, and I feel like I could easily vomit my freshly gulped mocha frappuccino on the table between Brenner and I.

The little folksy duo finishes their song, and a girl with a monologue takes the stage next, prattling on about her first period or heartbreak or maybe both.

“Fucking hell,” I curse under my breath, and Brenner catches my gaze, meeting it intently. It shouldn’t but it calms me.

“I’m really proud of you for doing this, Draco. And I know it doesn’t mean much coming from me, but I am.” His eyes are a clear, pale green behind his surprisingly clean glasses, and I want to tell him that it actually does mean something coming from him. His opinion has actually somehow come to matter over these past few months, but I can’t. Not right now.

Right now, I need to focus on not vomiting.

My finger now matches the tremors coursing through my leg as I tap impossibly fast on the wooden table, my other sweaty hand curling around the notebook on my leg.

“Up next,” Ed calls into the mic, “A rookie to our stage! Our very own Draco Malfoy, let’s give him a warm welcome!”

The cafe flutters in a gentle applause, and I look with wide, terrified eyes to Brenner. He gulps in solidarity.

“You can do this,” he reassures.

“What if it hurts more than it helps?” I ask although my throat is fighting every word.
“It won’t.” His eyes are warm, and his hand finds purchase on my forearm, squeezing it once, and the simple touch sobers me slightly.

“But what if it does?”

“Then you’ll get through it. Like you do everything else. You can do this.” His words are like a potion, and they settle in my belly pleasantly, easing the thrashing that was there moments ago.

On wobbly legs, I make my way towards the stage; I chance a quick glance at the cafe full of Muggles, but I don’t linger there. I flip my notebook open to the page I’ve reread a hundred times today and take a deep breath. “This might be rubbish,” I warn. “But it’s mine.

She scurries and flitters
here and there,
to and fro;
cradling shards and fragments
all the while.

She thinks we don’t see,
thinks we cannot know,
believes us to be ignorant,
that the broken pieces she holds,
are all pieces of us.

I take a steadying breath and let my eyelids close; I don’t need to read it anymore.

Not pausing or ceasing
to mind the shattering in herself,
to linger and mourn,
to acknowledge the destruction
that has scarred and marred her, too.

She’s too preoccupied to know,

she’s the glue that binds us all;

that binds and twines,

and breathes new life into all she gathers,

making us whole.

She’s light and grace,

beauty and perfection;

selfless in all her efforts,

finding battered, rare and splintered,

while declaring it artistry beyond comparison.

I’m about to reach the final stanza, and my eyes open, locking onto Brenner for a moment, hoping to leech a little more strength from him. His face isn’t what I expect; it’s almost painted in disbelief, and he nods towards the back of the cafe with a smile.

Never realising she

is the most precious of it all;

Hermione.

Standing there in a stunning navy formal gown that exposes her shoulders and the long lines of her neck. Her curls are twisted back, and she has her face painted again. An umbrella hangs limply at her side, but all of it pales to the shocked look on her face. I gulp, before forcing the final lines out of my lungs.

the rarest of gems,

cut and polished and unparalleled,

as she beams and shines for all to admire.
The silence that follows the final words stretches for too long as Granger and I stay locked in an intimate trance. Her eyes betray nothing, not until the swell of applause slices through the moment.

Her face crumples, and I swear I see tears well in her eyes before she turns and rushes out the front door. I hurry off the stage, pausing at the table where Brenner still sits with his hands clapping together. “Did you tell her?” The question is more of an accusation as my mind wraps around how and why he would have betrayed my confidence to tell Granger what I was doing tonight.

His hands shoot up in surrender. “Draco, of course not. I would never do that.” Something about this worried expression makes me believe him, and with a growl, I stomp out into the rain after her. Her umbrella is perched over her, and she rushes down the street. Calling her name, I jog after her until she finally halts in her escape.

“Granger,” I say one last time as my fingers find their way around her elbow, and I turn her back to me. “What are you doing here?”

She’s crying.

I made her cry again.

And when she finally looks up at me, my heart seizes and stutters in my ribs.

Her lips are pursed unpleasantly, and when she peers up at me, her eyes are hard edged in a way I hadn’t anticipated. She sniffs and wipes away her tears, and I’m struggling to hear over all the fucking rain. “I tried your flat first, but you weren’t there.”

I duck under her umbrella, and my chest bumps into her. “Sorry, what?”

Her glare is an odd cocktail of sadness and fury, and I don’t quite know how to proceed. “I said I tried your flat but you weren’t there. So I came here.” Her foot has begun tapping, and there’s an odd tilt to her jaw.

My eyes tighten momentarily, and I dip my head a little closer to her. “Are you cross with me?”
“Harry told me about your guys’ talk. Told me you apologized.” Her eyes tighten as she speaks, and nothing about this moment makes sense. If Hermione Granger is upset that I’ve apologized to Harry Potter than surely I must still be on drugs.

“Yeah, we talked a bit. Things are—”

She cuts me off. “Can I ask why?” Her sobs are back, but this time there’s rage mixed in there.

My face pulls tightly as I stare down at her. “Why?”

“Yes.” She clips. “Why does everyone else deserve one of your apologies except for me? Harry and Pansy and fucking Katie Bell? Did I do something? Or do I just not matter enough to you?” Her tears have returned, but they are angry as hell, and she gulps before continuing, a single finger poking me in my sternum. “You’re in there writing poems and apologizing to Harry Potter, but what? After everything I don’t deserve even… hell, something?”

My mouth opens, and I know there are words I’ve already practiced, but they are falling short now. None of them seem big enough to express just how fucking sorry I am and just how much I need her.

Watching the emotion flash across her face, I can see her ire waning. A broken little sob escapes her, and she drops her umbrella, letting the rain pelt down at us. “I need to know why? Tell me why, Draco! Why don’t I mean enough—”

“You mean the most!” I shout over the rain, my hands flying wildly in the air before landing on her cheeks. I tilt her face up to meet mine; I need her to really see me. “Can’t you see that? You are the last on the list for a reason. Because you mean the most, this—” I gesture between us “—this is the most important thing to me. And I know you needed me to heal on my own, and I’m doing that.” I think of all the broken pieces I’ve been mending. Think of the war and my father and my fucking mum not hating my guts after all this time. I think of all the apologies I’ve trembled through and all the nights I’ve stared at the ceiling in my too-quiet flat ignoring the call for drugs. “I— I think I’ve done that.”

The confession hangs between us, and she sucks in a shattered breath.

“I needed to be better, Hermione. I know that now. I couldn’t come to you still broken and risk
putting you through that again. But I am so fucking sorry. Do you hear me?” My thumbs drag along her cheekbones, and her lips quiver as the last of her sad tears slide down her face. A hollow little half laugh slips out of her, and her umbrella crashes to the sidewalk. Her hands wind into my soaked t-shirt, and she drops her forehead to my chest. “You are the most important one,” I say into her drenched curls. “That poem wasn’t about just anyone.” I snort. “It’s about you. Everything’s about you.”

She twists her face up to me, and my fingers wipe the tears and raindrops from her cheeks. “Draco,” she says, and it’s a cry of relief.

I should feel more nervous for the next part. I’ve never said it to someone before—maybe my mum when I was still a kid—but no one else. I haven’t meant it ‘til now.

“I love you, Granger.” I’m smirking down at her, and she chokes out a little laugh through her tears, blinking the raindrops away from her lashes. “I am desperately, stupidly, helplessly in love with you. And I’ve done a shoddy fucking job of showing you, but I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.”

She buries her face into my chest again, and the rain has yet to let up. I realise when my fingers glide along the soft fabric of her dress that she’s meant to be at a ball very soon, and my hands slide down her soaked gown until they find the curve of her lower back.

When she looks back up at me, her eyes are wide and full of unbridled happiness. “Well, I love you too, you prat.”

There’s not a moment of hesitation between when she insults me and my lips crash against hers.

It’s a bit more slippery than I’m used to, with the rain still sliding down our bodies, but damnit if it isn’t better than I remembered. Her kiss is a drug in and of itself because I’m soaring as her full lips glide perfectly against mine.

The silky material of her dress tangles in my fingers, and I feel her cheeks pull into a small smile as her hands wind around my neck and pull me deeper into her. I could drown here.

One hand slides up her spine and curves around the back of her neck, and the other one pulls her hips into me. I could crawl into her mouth, and I swear I still wouldn’t be fucking close enough. The wet material of her dress leaves nothing to my imagination as I explore the dip of her waist and the
“Hermione!” A feminine voice calls from over her shoulder, and I peer through the rain for the source.

My lips curl into a snarl as I spy Potter, Weasley, and She-Weasley standing just a few feet away. Potter seems pleasant enough, a knowing little half-smile on his face. She-Weasley is positively grinning—that is, until she realises that Hermione is soaking wet, having abandoned her umbrella some time ago to snog me properly. But really it’s Weasley’s face that causes my snarl to fade and a smug smirk to take its place. He looks absolutely unamused, his jowls all loose and his eyes bored. At least he doesn’t look quite as pissed; maybe he’s resigned his post to drive me to the brink of insanity with his hostile fucking behavior.

“Hermione Granger!” Ginny steps forward, her wand pointed towards the sky in an umbrella charm. I suck in a breath, ready for her to chastise her friend for being caught in my arms. “Could you have not snogged him inside? Or under an umbrella? How am I going to make you presentable in the next fifteen minutes?”

Granger chuckles and turns her face into my chest. When she looks back to me, she’s biting her lip, and I swear I’ve never seen her so fucking happy. Pride swells in my chest. I did that. I put that look on her face.

“They’ll kill me if I’m late,” she mutters. “I’ll stop by later, okay?” Her brows rise high on her forehead, and I can tell she’s nervous to leave this moment, scared it won’t be the same when we revisit it.

“Okay.” I lean down to brush my lips against hers one last time, and she rises on her tiptoes to deepen it briefly before pulling away.

She skips away towards Ginny, who is shaking her head at her drenched friend, and Granger sneaks a smile and a wave over her shoulder at me as the four of them Apparate away.

I jog into the cafe where Brenner is waiting with his hands shoved deep in his pockets and a worried slant to his brow.

“I need your help,” I pant. “Can you get me a portkey to Hogwarts?”
Brenner’s lips curve into a sly smile. “You can’t go dressed like that,” he eyes the plain t-shirt clinging to my torso and the denims pooling raindrops on the welcome mat.

I snort and open the door again. “I’m Draco Malfoy. My mother didn’t teach me many useful things, but you can bet your ass I have a pair of tailored dress robes in my wardrobe at all times.”

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A/N: Gulp, gulp, triple gulp. I have been playing this scene out in my head for MONTHS guys and I was so happy to finally write it out.

The next chapter is the last and then the epilogue! I know there are some fun open ended things that people are eager to read about and I promise I haven’t forgotten them!

The lovely poem was written by the stunningly incredible MCal and I’m still speechless over it. She has been my alpha through this entire piece and she knows these characters almost as well as I do. I couldn’t have asked anyone else to help me breathe some life into Draco’s poetry.

Ravenslight, as always, you are a goddess. Thank you dear for lending SB your talents. This would be a garbled mess without you.

And thank you to everyone who is following along and those of you have left me your thoughts. You put the biggest smiles on my face and I love knowing that you’ve connected with my version of this beautiful characters.

-LK
Here With Me

Can I tell you something just between you and me?
When I hear your voice, I know I'm finally free
Every single word is perfect as it can be
And I need you here with me
When you lift me up, I know that I'll never fall
I can speak to you by saying nothing at all
Every single time, I find it harder to breathe
'Cause I need you here with me

Every day
You're saying the words that I want you to say
There's a pain in my heart and it won't go away
Now I know I'm falling in deep
'Cause I need you here with me

Here With Me, Marshmellow

Brenner is at my door with a portkey within thirty minutes. Apparently he does some counseling for the seventh years at Hogwarts who had a part in the war, so he keeps a stash in his office. He’s also warned me about the grey area this exists in ethically and politely asks I not tell anyone where I’ve obtained the portkey.

Whatever, Harold.

The slap of my dragonhide shoes on the stone leading to the Great Hall is a familiar sound, and I fortify myself with a deep, almost painful, breath. Stepping through the grand doors, I straighten the Windsor knot of my slender navy tie. I’ve decided on the dark blue dress robes for tonight, paired
with the silver cufflinks Mother gave me for my sixteenth birthday.

The room is crowded, full of slightly buzzed witches and wizards, and my mouth goes dry as a tray of champagne floats near me. The anxiety that’s been dulled in my rush to get here is brought back to life at the riotous drunken laughter of the party guests.

Turning my back on the tray, I find the hall has been completely transformed. The tables have been cleared and replaced with dozens of circular ones all draped with white linens and fancy tableware—at least what the Ministry considers fancy; Mother would turn her nose up at it. The house pennants are missing, and the enchanted ceiling is a clear night sky with a vibrant swirl of galaxy dust curling through the center.

I spy a few familiar faces, but none are hers. There’s a spot near the back that I tuck myself into, hopeful to hide away from any prying eyes until I can get to her side. It doesn’t last long.

Slughorn sidles up to me, his hands folded over his bloated belly and his cheeks rosy from imbibing. “Draco Malfoy! Wasn’t aware we’d be seeing you here tonight.” He hiccups. “How are you, my boy?”

My lips tugs into a grimace. Slughorn has a very distinct smell, something akin to pickled slugs due to stewing in a potions classroom all day. He’s also never liked me, and that he pretends to now adds to my annoyance. “Hello, Professor.” I nod politely, although I consider calling him Horace just to ruffle his feathers.

“What have you been up to this past year?” His glazed eyes dance over my face and settle just over my shoulder.

I entertain the idea of shocking him by telling him what I’ve really had going on these twelve months but instead settle for something he’s looking for. “Just this and that,” I say with a smirk. Shacklebolt takes the podium, and the crowd breaks into a courteous applause as he raises his hands to quiet them. “Excuse me, Professor. I’m only really here for a girl.” I nod and take a few steps away, searching the crowd for her.

Shacklebolt makes a speech I don’t hear much of, not until I hear Mother’s name, and the noise in the room is sucked into a vacuum. The resounding whoosh deep in my ears blocks out everything else,
A quiet, albeit slightly surprised, applause fills the room, and although I can feel eyes on me, I don’t turn my gaze from the stage. It’s taking all my strength not to cry in this fucking hall, and I swear if it’s the last thing I do I will maintain a single shred of my dignity.

The minister continues with his speech, and turns to the main event of the evening: Potter, Weasley, and Granger.

She appears at the foot of a small set of stairs leading up to the stage where the faculty used to eat. Potter offers her a hand, and she takes the stairs with a surprisingly bright smile for someone who doesn’t want to be here, and my lips quirk at the sight of her. The she-Weasel didn’t do a bad job getting her ready so quickly but her hair is wild with unruly curls no longer pinned back. Her makeup has been reapplied, her eyes sparkling even from here.

Shacklebolt gives a long-winded speech, and while I’m desperate to be near her again, I know the most important thing is just being here. So I stay tucked near the door, watching her every movement as she shuffles from foot to foot and leans in to whisper something in Potter’s ear, who chuckles quietly. Twat.

It’s Weasley who spots me first, his eyes narrowing at me from the stage. I straighten my spine and lift my chin, trying to feign an air of superiority. Even though my mother was just mentioned on that very stage, I still feel like an intruder. A spot on my arm with a faded tattoo reminds me of that. I’m glad he can’t see the shake to my hands or the way my jaw slightly quivers just standing in this room.

For a long moment, he inspects me, and then, with a begrudging roll of his eyes, he nudges Granger with his elbow.

She turns to him while Shacklebolt continues the wordy story of Harry Potter and his incredible sidekicks, and Weasley nods to where I’m standing before resuming his previous pose. Granger’s confused glare spans the length of the room, but it doesn’t take her long to notice me.

Attaboy, Weaselbee.

Her eyes darken briefly in confusion before her lips curl into a breathtaking grin. “Hi,” she mouths wordlessly, her fingers wiggling eagerly near her belly button.
I nod in response and ignore the eyes that have turned to study me, the boy who caught the attention of Hermione Granger. That plump little man to my left seems to have detached his jaw as he stares at me.

But I’m just here for her. I don’t take my eyes from her and try to wordlessly express how proud I am of her.

Her gaze doesn’t leave me again for the rest of the speech, not until the Minister calls her name.

“Hermione Granger. Order of Merlin, First Class for acts of bravery or distinction,” Shacklebolt announces proudly and with a soft blush, Granger steps forward to receive her medal and her eyes find me immediately and even from here, she’s glowing.

I join the applause, clapping softly as the three golden Gryffindors stand proudly to receive their praise, their hands intertwined.

Shacklebolt barely has a chance to tell everyone to enjoy the party before Hermione is rushing off the stage and towards me, her face nearly split in two from her grin. She crashes into me, and I tense immediately.

Granger is seemingly oblivious to the dozens and dozens of eyes on us as her hands wind up the back of my neck and she stares up at me. “What on earth are you doing here? I thought you said—”

“You said you wanted me here,” I interrupt her and remove her arms from where they are wound around me. “People are staring.” My eyes dart around the room, and a small panic swells in my chest.

Granger scoffs, and her fingers dig into my lapels. “What? Are you embarrassed to be seen with me? I’ll have you know I’m a decorated war hero.” She’s teasing me, and my eyes narrow in response.

“Yes, it’s me who should be embarrassed to be seen with you. However did you guess?” I roll my eyes severely, one hand reaching up to tuck one of her riotous curls behind her ear before dropping it back to my side.
“Draco Malfoy, do you think I care what these stuffy politicians have to say about who I’m sleeping with?” She cocks her head at me, and I can’t help but smirk back.

“Sleeping with?” My eyes flash, and this time I can’t help but touch her as my fingers curl around her hip.

A beautiful blush stains her cheeks, and she swats at my arm. “You know what I mean,” she says, biting back a cheeky smile.

I think I could stare at her the rest of my life. Everytime I look at her, really look at her, I find something I hadn’t noticed before. Like the golden specks in her irises or the way her bottom lip is slightly more full than the top. My worries about her being seen with me must be evident on my face because she places her palm over my heart and looks up at me with that incredibly Granger look. The one I used to think meant she wanted to fix me like one of her broken things, but now I think it might just be how she looks at things she loves.

“Stop,” she hushes, stepping closer to me. “I asked you here. I want you here. You. So stop whatever stupid voice in your head is telling you otherwise, okay?”

There’s something sharp and hot in my throat, and I swallow hard to rid myself of it, but it doesn’t work. “I don’t think I’ll ever stop thinking you deserve better.” My eyes follow the ribbon of her medal and inadvertently catch on her cleavage. My lips part just barely as my breath seems to slow. *Did she say sleeping with? She did. Does that mean she wants to be?*

She interrupts my train of thought, and I shake my head, turning my perverted glare from the curve of her breasts.

“I don’t know about that—” She smirks up at me, wrinkling her nose. “I just bagged the most handsome boy in our year at Hogwarts. If Lavender Brown could see me now… and gods, I’m not even ready for the obnoxious onslaught of questions from Ginny. Did you know they once saw you shirtless after Quidditch practice? I have heard in disgusting detail about your abs. Seriously, all night they would go on and on and on —”

My head falls back as I laugh and wrap my arms around her. “Well, I’m not surprised about that. I used to purposefully change my shirt on the field just to garner a stray witch’s attention.”

She swats playfully at me again as she chuckles. “You’re a prat.”
“Adds to my charm, I like to think,” I tease, my fingers pressing into her ribs until she squirms and giggles.

“C’mon.” Her fingers thread through mine, and she tugs me towards the dance floor where a few couples have begun to twirl in each other’s arms. I pause near the fringe and look at her with a worried glare. Her brow again arches defiantly at me. “You can’t dance?”

With an audible scoff, I roll my eyes. “Please, Granger. Don’t offend me.” This is far more exposed than it was back by the door, and I can’t help but offer her another out. “There’s no going back if we go out there.”

I swear she releases a little growl, and she wraps her hands around my neck before pulling my lips against hers. My eyes blow wide as I try to gage the reaction of the people around us, but when her lips start to move against mine, I lose all thought. My spine curves to accommodate her height, and my arms wrap around her waist to pull her flush against me. *Gods, I want to see this witch naked. Please, Merlin, say that’s in my near future.*

Her teeth nip at my bottom lip a little rougher than I expect, and I flinch back. “That’s for annoying me,” she says through a laugh as our noses bump against each other. “And there. No going back.” *Cheeky little witch.* “Now are you going to dance with me or do I need to find another partner?”

An overwhelming surge of emotion rises inside me; if it was a colour, it’d be gold, and I hate to call it happiness because it feels so fucking cliche, but it must be. This must be fucking happiness.

“I’m at your disposal, Granger.”

Her lips curve into a smile, and she places another quick kiss against mine. “Just how I like my wizards.” She has the audacity to wink, and I can’t help but chuckle as she drags me onto the dance floor.

With all the strength I can muster, I ignore the looks from the crowd and focus on the witch in my arms. I’m struck by the surrealness of the moment, of this night, of the woman in my arms.

One year ago, I’d lost everything. I had embraced the end of my life, whether by death or Azkaban. Never in a million years did I imagine I’d be standing here with Hermione Granger in my arms three hundred and sixty-five days later.
In all the moments of utter and complete despair, in the moments when I was sure there was no hope left, she was there. She was there fighting for me even when I couldn’t fight for myself. All the shitty things I’ve done in my life led me here—and I’m not sure how I ever did anything so good to deserve her. Brenner must be right; someone is looking out for me somewhere.

“Excuse me, Mister Malfoy?” Kingsley Shacklebolt’s deep, accented voice interrupts our dance, and I turn over my shoulder with a furrowed brow.

“Yes?” Maybe it’s illegal to even dance with her and I’m about to be carted off after all. If this is the case, then surely I’ll be put to death for all the wanks I’ve had in the last few weeks.

“We were going to have this sent to you as we never received your reply. But seeing as you’re here —” In his hands is a flat velvet box, and when he releases the clasp, my throat constricts. “We would be honored if you accepted this Order of Merlin, Second Class on behalf of your mother.”

My arms fall weakly to my sides as I stare at the innocuous little gold medal. Blinking a few times to banish the emotion sticking to the corner of my eyes, I nod and take the box from the Minister. “Thank you,” I manage through a tight jaw.

“The wizarding world owes her a great deal. She’d be proud of what you did in the end, Mister Malfoy. Her sacrifice was not in vain.” Shacklebolt offers a tight smile to both me and Granger and then disappears. The box feels heavy in my hands, and my finger traces the engraving with a reverence I didn’t expect to feel.

Hermione Granger is positively, unquestionably, adorably drunk.

She’s had four flutes of cheap champagne, and her eyes are all red-rimmed, and she’s sucking on her bottom lip like it tastes like a sweet, which I wouldn’t argue with her about; I’ve tasted it, and I’d have to agree.

Sitting in the chair next to me, she bobs along to the tempo of a song that played at least fifteen minutes ago, and I can’t help but stare at her with an amused smirk.

“You’re a cute drunk,” I say, breaking up her private dance party.
Her neck snaps to me, and her eyes blow wide and offended. “I am not drunk, Draco Malfoy.”

I make a conspiratorial little face at her and mouth “okay.”

“Seriously! I’m not.” There was a little glare she used to shoot me in class when I’d mock her about her the size of her hair, and she’s doing it again now. Her nose is all scrunched, and her eyes are beady. I’m pretty sure she’s about to stick out the tip of her pink tongue, but something else dawns on her, and her cheeks flame in a heated blush. “But I am ready to go home. They’ve set up the Floo in the trophy room.”

“Of course.” I rise with practised ease and help her from her chair. She only stumbles once. On our short walk to the Floo, she manages to be snagged into goodbye hugs by no less than four people, Potter included.

“Take care of her, yeah?” He extends his palm to me, and I stare at it for a moment before shaking it.

“Always,” I assure him then guide her toward the room adjacent to the Great Hall.

She’s doing that little shuffle thing she does when she’s nervous, and I peer down at her with a suspicious glare. “Are you alright?”

“Quite,” she rushes. “Yes, quite. Her fingers tangle in the nest she calls hair, and she tucks a curl behind her ear. “I’m actually a bit hungry.”

My brows shoot up. It’s nearly midnight, and I can’t think of a place with a Floo still open. “Can you Side-Along without getting sick?”

Her face flattens in annoyance. “I told you I’m not drunk.” Then she starts shifting again, and I can see her mind trying to figure out what she’s getting at. She seems to call on a reserve of courage, and her chin tilts proudly. “Maybe you can make me something at yours.”

It takes me longer than I’d like to admit to realise what the little drunken witch is getting at and a slow smirk pulls on my lips. “Love to, Granger.”
Her gaze is locked on my mouth, and I dart my tongue out to wet my lips and watch with pure, unadulterated glee as she gulps.

As I step through the Floo, Granger is shifting again, nervously looking about as if she’s never been here before.

“Anything particular you’re in the mood for?” I ask, shrugging off my tux jacket and draping it over the armchair. I loosen the cufflinks on my shirt and drop in them in a decorative bowl, and I can’t help but grin as she watches my every movement with a desire dancing in her eyes.

Her eyes widen, and she swallows before speaking. “Mood for?” Her voice is several octaves higher than normal, and I chuckle, rolling my sleeves up my forearms.

“For food? You were hungry, remember?” I arch a disbelieving brow in her direction.

“Oh!” She startles in her spot and slaps her palm against her forehead. “Yes. I was hungry but I— I don’t think I am anymore.”

She takes a few slow steps towards me and tosses her clutch on the armchair. My heart lodges in my ribcage, and I can feel it thudding, desperate to be free as her touch slides up my newly exposed forearms. They don’t stop there as her fingers curl briefly around my triceps and then land on the flat expanse of my chest.

I can feel the heat from her body as she presses into me, and I know she’s fucking drunk, but my hands rest softly on the curve of her lower back, letting the silk of her navy gown slide under my fingers as I breathe her in.

Fuck, why does she have to be drunk.

She lifts onto her tiptoes and presses her impossibly soft lips into the hollow of my throat, one hand winding up to pull me closer, and I swear I am so fucking close to saying bugger it and just taking the witch to bed like she wants, but I can’t. I can’t.

Younger Malfoy might have been able to, but he probably would have been piss drunk as well. And
this Malfoy is very much not.

“Granger,” I murmur, and my voice sounds strangled even to me as I feel the attention of her lips drag up towards my earlobe. My hands tighten on her hips, and I briefly pull her closer into me, relishing the feel of her soft curves against my body. I force myself to say the words that I’m pretty sure will ruin me. “We can’t.”

She freezes in my hands, and I want to suck the words back in and ravage her instead. That sounds so much better than looking down into her disappointed eyes.

“You can’t?” She squeaks and pulls her lips off my skin, her eyes darting towards my cock.

Shock and shame colour my cheeks, and I nearly yelp at her sad little face. “Merlin! Granger, I can. Trust me.” I stare at her sternly and grip her firmly in my hands, and I repeat myself. “I can. It’s just that we can’t. You’re drunk——”

“I. Am. Not——” I cut her off with a raise of my palm.

“I wouldn’t feel right and—and this?” I glance to the space between us and then press my lips to her forehead. “I want this to be right.”

“Okay,” she breathes, and I wince at the tone in her voice. I should have just fucked her—it’s not like she’s that drunk. But no, I guess I’ll just not fuck tonight—that’s what I’ve been doing for the last year and a half—What could be more fun?

An idea flares in my mind, and I meet her disappointed glare. “Do you want to stay the night?”

Her eyes brighten, and a slow smile curves across her lips. “Yes.”

Cradling the sides of her face in my palms, I capture her lips in a quick kiss. “Are you hungry?”

She sighs, a lovely, low little thing. “No, it was just a ruse to get you in the sack. I’m horribly out of practice.” Her lips form a pretty little pout, and I kiss it away.
“I bought a telly,” I say with a gulp. “But it’s in the bedroom. I could move it out here easily enough…” I’m watching for her tells, waiting for the clues that will tell me what she’s thinking. I mean, she came here with intent to sleep with me, so surely watching a movie in bed wouldn’t be all that nefarious.

“Don’t be silly, we can watch in your bed.” Imagining her in my bed makes my cock twitch, and I take a small step back so I don’t blow my cover of a caring, thoughtful boyfriend—if that’s what I am now. “Can I borrow a t-shirt?”

My eyes flicker closed as my prick gets caught in my trousers trying to stand at full attention, and I nearly grimace. “Of course, second drawer on the right.”

“Brilliant.” Her smile broadens, and she turns towards my room, lifting her curls off her shoulder and exposing the long lines of her back. “Could you just help with the zipper then?”

I bite into my lip so hard I very well might draw blood, and with a shaking finger, I drag the zipper down her back. Someone have fucking mercy on me. She’s not wearing a bra, and I can see the top of her sheer black lacey knickers.

With a gulp, I step back and imagine peeling that dress from her shoulders and slamming her against the door. I have a feeling I’ll be sporting an erection for the rest of the evening, and that suspicion is solidified when she peeks over her shoulder at me and whispers her thanks. Watching her retreat into my room with her dress barely hanging on, I have to grip my cock just to reposition myself.

I groan as I try to think of what the fuck I’m going to sleep in tonight that won’t completely betray my secret hard on.

I poke around in the kitchen just for something to keep my mind off the very naked Granger changing in my bedroom. It fails spectacularly, and when she steps out in my fucking Quidditch t-shirt, her long legs fully on display, my head drops dramatically. and I chuckle into my chest. This witch will be the death of me.

“Something funny?” she asks with a smug smirk.

Loosening my tie, I cross the room and stop before where she is perched in the door frame, letting my chest bump into hers, and I swear I can feel the curve of her breasts through our clothing. My
eyes rake slowly over her, enjoying the way she shifts to press her thighs together and the blush that stains her cheeks.

“Not at all,” I say easily, lifting my hand to curve around the back of her neck and letting my thumb drag across her freckled cheek. “But you do look good in green.”

I refuse to have sex with her when she’s drunk. I refuse.

But the way her hips wiggle when she crawls under the sheets and the feeling of her warm body tucked into mine drives me mad. She’s snoring softly on my chest by the middle of the film, but I don’t drift off for much longer, unable to tear my eyes from the sight of her in my arms.

The dream I’m having is bloody fantastic. I swear I can feel Granger’s fingers running long lines down the center of my chest, her warmth radiating against my body. The scent of her shampoo is so bloody realistic I can nearly taste it.

When dream Hermione dips her fingers under the hem of my t-shirt and slides them up my stomach, my eyes fly open.

Not a dream.

Granger is here, staring at me with large doe eyes, and her palm is splayed over my abdominals.

Blinking a few times, I try to make sense of the girl in my bed before I remember the events of last night. Before I remember that this impossibly perfect girl loves me.

“Granger.” My voice is husky as her fingers slide over my hip bone, and she arches into me.

I know I shouldn’t because she’s quite possibly still pissed, but my hand finds her waist anyway, sliding down towards her arse, and I clutch the thin shirt that’s barely covering her backside.

She shifts under my touch, and her lips are on mine before I can speak. Her kiss is soft—tentative even—and when she pulls back, her shaky breath ghosts over me. “I slept off the champagne,” she
That’s all I need to hear, and I crash into her, swallowing her little gasp and pulling her against me. I palm her arse through the flimsy shirt and reveling in the moans my touch coaxes from her throat. My cock stiffens beneath my boxers, doing little to hide my desire for her. Gods, I want— need —to bury myself inside her.

I break our snog to leave wet, open-mouthed kisses down her throat, and my hand glides south, hitching behind her knee and lifting it over my hip. Fuck, she’s perfect. My hand slides up her thigh, and her breath quickens as I grope her like a fucking teenager.

“Draco?” Her voice trembles as her arms wind around my neck, and I kiss my way back to her mouth, humming my answer to her call. “Touch me.” Her words float over me, barely audible, and I freeze for just a moment as a growl rumbles deep in my chest, unbidden—uncontrolled.

I’m a man possessed. I need to feel her skin underneath my touch. I need to make her keen. I need her moans to fill the room. My hands desperately shove the hem of her shirt up. Staring down at her, my cock pulses against her thigh and my tongue flickers out to wet my lips. I fill both of my hands with her, squeezing and kneading until she’s whimpering. My lips latch onto her pebbled nipple, grazing my teeth against her while her skin pricks.

One of her hands wind between us, and she grips my cock through my pants; I nearly come undone as she squeezes me. It’s been ages since anyone has touched me, and Merlin only knows it’s never been this fucking good. I thrust shamefully into her hand as I kiss my way across the ladder of her ribs.

My hand begrudgingly leaves her breast and memorizes the curve of her waist, finding her arse and giving it a final squeeze before dipping my fingers in the seam of her knickers and yanking them to the side. Her folds are wet before I even touch them, and I swirl the pad of my finger around her clit once, twice, three times until she whimpers and rolls her hips against my hand. I slip a finger inside her and groan at the silky feel of her. Mine.

I need to be inside her— need to be fucking her into this mattress I paid too much for. Her back arches as I curve my finger inside her, beckoning the most erotic noises I’ve ever heard in my life from her throat. As I find a pace that leaves her breathless between moans, I slip another finger inside her. Merlin, she’s fucking responsive, keening and twisting under my touch. My cock is throbbing painfully inside my shorts. I murmur her praises, repeating her name like a mantra as I dip my fingers inside her again and again, as I drag breath little moans from her lips.
This could be enough, I think. I could fuck her with my hand until she’s undone and remain happy for the rest of my days, but I want her screaming my fucking name, and when I swipe her sensitive little bud again, she lets out a yelp. Taking me by surprise, she rolls us so she’s sitting on my lap and I’m staring up at her. Tugging my shirt from her body, I watch in awe as her curls cascade down over her, partially covering those perfect tits, just allowing the dark pink of her nipples to show through. Fuck, she’s perfect. I swear I’ve never seen anything quite so fucking beautiful as a mostly naked Granger sitting on my lap.

My hands rest where her hips meet her thigh, and I grind up into her, unable to help myself. I don’t want to fucking ravage the girl, but I’m starting to tremble with my need for more of her.

“Are these knickers of sentimental value to you, Granger?” My focus falls on the swell of her breasts, and I reach up, rolling the peak of her nipple between my index and thumb teasingly.

Panting as I play with her nipple, her gaze darkens just barely. “No. Why?”

“Good.” The ripping sound of her lace knickers make her gasp, and she crashes down on top of me, her lips finding mine easily. My hands don’t stop moving over her, exploring every inch of her that I’ve been imagining all these months. She’s better than I ever imagined.

She rises up and tugs my pants down just enough to free my cock. I can’t help the feral growl that slips over my tongue when she settles back down and her slick heat slides over the length of me. “Fucking hell, Granger.”

With a roll of her hips, I’m slanted just at her entrance, and I want to fucking drive into her but she sets a maddening pace. Her hips rise and fall slowly, as if she is trying to feel every inch of me. Her tongue runs along the seam of my lips, and she dips it softly into my mouth. I brush my tongue against hers again and again as she slides down my cock, swallowing up every noise she makes.

Keeping it together is near impossible. She is driving me fucking wild with the slow pace in which her hips meet mine. My hands wind around her tiny waist, and I shove into her, greedily swallowing the noise she makes. She sits up so I can stare at her in complete awe. and when her hips begin rocking back and forth against me and her lips part, I swear I’ll die of just complete, blinding happiness.

This is too fucking much, and when she lifts up just to slam down on me again, I lose all control. In a frenzy, I slide my hands over her again and again until I find the crook of her hip where I can set the pace so she’s fucking herself into an orgasm.
Her nails drag across my chest painfully, leaving red trails in their wake, but I’m too distracted by the sound of her arse slapping against my thighs. I am risk of coming right fucking now. She feels bloody incredible. The slight sting coupled with the tightness of her cunt—Merlin knows if I died in this moment, I would die a happy man. Her walls tighten around the length of me, and when her hand leaves my body to swipe at her clit, I fucking whine.

I can feel everything as she comes undone under her own touch, and the strangled cry that fills my room is something I never want to forget. She lets out a relieved, heavy breath as her shoulders slump in exhaustion. Without warning, I flip her so she’s on her back, and I shove into her again and again until her knees are hitched up and her nails are again dragging down my back, mirroring the marks she left on my chest.

Her earlier whimpers have turned into crazed moans, and I swear I never would have thought Hermione Granger was a screamer, but gods, she is, and I’m fucking thankful.

When she cries my name and her back arches up, I’m done for, spilling into her as I let out a strangled grunt into her curls. Everything muscle in my body flexes, and the world around me feels so fucking dull compared to the radiating bliss that is coursing through my veins. As my cock pulses, I can feel my muscles slowly begin to relax in the post-orgasm bliss, but my lungs work in over time, trying desperately to deliver much-needed oxygen to my brain.

I allow my arms to give out but still support my weight so I don’t crush her. My eyes rove over her face. Her eyes are closed but the corner of her mouth lifts as she catches her breath. One of her hands is resting up near her curls, and when her eyes flutter open to stare at me, her hands moves to cup my jaw.

“You’re fucking beautiful,” I confess and capture her in a firm kiss, crushing myself to her. When it ends, I slip from inside her and chuckle as she shimmies at the sensation.

Her hands capture the sides of my face, fingers sliding through my hair. “I love you,” she says earnestly, and my breath hitches.

I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of hearing that.

I shift to the side of her so I can wrap her in my arms and never, never let her go again. “I love you, too.”
A/N: I’m emotional writing this authors note!! Thank you everyone who’s joined me on this painful journey to healing and redemption and I hope the ending was worth all the angst along the way.

While I do have some family history with addiction, I have never suffered or been close with anyone who suffered from addiction.

This piece was born during a horrible time in my life when I was struggling with postpartum depression after the birth of my second child. Those early moments with Draco feeling helpless and worthless on the bathroom floor, those were my moments. The moments in therapy forgiving people who don’t deserve or ask for it, learning to feel loved even when we don’t feel we are capable, and sorting through trauma that has led us there – those were all my painful my moments. I experienced those breakthroughs in my own counseling and writing them these past few months has been the most cathartic and rewarding experience for me.

When you cheered for Draco, I felt you cheering for me. When you cried for him, I knew I had friends around the world who shared in my sadness.

All this to say, thank you. I can’t say it enough and I don’t think I’ll ever stop.

I had a huge team of amazing friends who helped me finish this piece. MCaI and Ravenslight who have loved and cheered me on every step of the way and MsMerlin, PartyLines, and BiscuitsforPotter who have lent me their talent and wisdom as well. You guys are my mentors and I’m grateful for everything you’ve done for me and Sweetly Broken.

Epilogue will be up as soon as I receive it back from my lovely beta.

Until next time.
-L.K

P.S. Hope you don't mind that little bit of gratuitous smut there at the end. It in no way was necessary to the plot, nor did it drive it forward... but you know, these two have been the ringer and they deserved a good lay before it's all said and done lol extra thanks to MsMerlin for her help on that scene!
Big Plans

I got real big plans, baby, for you and me

So love me for who I am and for who I'm gonna be

Ain't got everything you want, but got everything you need

So take a chance, take a chance on me

I got real big plans

Big Plans, Why Don’t We

“Draco, you have to.” The little pout on her lips and the spectacular jut of her hip as she scolds me is quite adorable really. I doubt she means it to be, but I know by now that unless I’ve done something truly horrendous she’s all bark and no bite.

The snort that escapes me makes her eyes darken. “Not bloody likely. I was out of my mind when I wrote that, and besides, I’ve nothing to apologize for.”

I try to walk away, but her tiny little stomps round me too quickly, and she’s standing in front of me with her attempt at a menacing glare. “I think it’ll be good for you both.”

I shrug. “I don’t.” I try to sidestep her, but her hand reaches out for my wrist, and she peers up at me with that look that she knows I can’t fucking say no to. She might be part Slytherin after all.

“Please? If you and Ron can just… coexist.” Her voice fades off as she decides to try another tactic. “He’ll never make the first move, but it would mean a lot to me if you did.”

Fuck. Studying the sincerity in her face makes the ice around my heart thaw infinitesimally, and I shake my head. “What am I supposed to be apologizing for exactly?” I ask, pulling her against my chest and burying my face in her curls.
“Just your general prattiness ought to do.” She chuckles, and my fingers find the spot under her rib cage that makes her squeal; soon she’s thrashing as she’s caught in my arms. As her laughter quiets, she looks up at me with a bright playful look before winding her arms behind my neck. “If you do it—and do it nicely—I’ll wear that thing you like.”

My lips curve into a wicked smirk as I press her back into the counter where we shared our first kiss all those months ago. The counter where we’ve since cooked at least half a dozen more lasagnas and where she let me bend her over not but three nights ago. “Now this is a negotiation I can get on board with.”

My hands slide down the dip of her waist and grip under her rear to pick her up and deposit her on the tile counter. I find my place between her thighs and latch unto her neck, pushing the curls over her shoulders.

She lets out a tiny little gasp, squeezing her thighs on my hips for a moment before lightly pushing me away. “Draco!” she chastises. “We’re due at the Burrow, and you’ve got one more name on that list before you get to see me in that little number again.”

With a tiny hop off the counter, she makes her way to our Floo, and I watch with a desperate hunger at the way her denims perfectly cling to the curve of her arse. She turns before tossing the powder in and throws me a cheeky little wink before disappearing.

My vision darkens as the green flames die down, and I storm towards the Floo myself, growling “Fucking Weasley” before announcing my destination.

The Weasel and I are sitting across from each other at the table sharing narrowed glares and curled-lipped grimaces as Molly and Hermione stand guard over us.

“One of you has to say something eventually,” Molly says with an exaggerated sigh.

“I’m just waiting for his apology, mum,” Ron says with a smug raise of his brow. “He’s given them to everyone but me, and you can’t expect me—”

“Yes, we can,” Molly and Hermione chime in perfect unison but only Molly continues. “I absolutely
expect you to be pleasant and well behaved. Maybe you should apologize first, Ronald.”

The ginger twat releases a loud bark and shifts in his seat. “For what? Arresting him? Not likely. It’s my job as an Auror—”

“Junior Auror,” I chime in with a smirk. The way his mouth transforms into a ugly glower delights me.

Ron’s palm opens in my direction, and his eyes blow wide. “Do you see what I’m saying, mum? He’s impossible.”

Hermione lets out a delicate little cough, and my gaze flickers up to meet hers—which is self righteous as fuck, and if I wasn’t guaranteed the opportunity to fuck her in that little green corset I love so much, I’d already be through the Floo.

My lips pull back, baring my teeth slightly as my jaw clenches. “I’m sorry,” I manage with a tight throat.

Ron’s face flickers in amusement, and he leans over the table with a hand perched obnoxiously behind his ear. “What? I could have sworn— Oi! Mum!” Molly’s hand shot out to slap the back his head, and he’s rubbing at his “injury” with his fat palm. “Fine. I’m sorry, too. Kind of…” He ducks the next swat with a laugh.

We stare at each other for a long moment, sizing each other up the way we’ve done for nearly a decade now, and with a tight lipped smile, he thrusts his hand towards me in an offering. I take it tentatively, and after a few quick shakes, we both rip our hands back to our sides.

“Oh, I know!” Hermione exclaims brightly, clapping her hands together before bringing her wand out and flourishing it through the air. A wizarding chess set appears on the table between us, and we eye it and then each other with a tentative awareness.

“There.” Granger grins. “You two fight out all your aggression over this game, and then when it’s over, you stand up as friends.”

Weasly sits back with a smug smirk that I’d like to smack off his ugly face. “Not bloody likely, ‘Mione.”
“Scared, Weasel?” I challenge, leaning my elbows on the table.

Ron’s eyes narrow at me, and he matches my posture, staring at the pieces of the chess board in front of us. “Fat chance, Ferret. You’re up first.”

The game stretches on for the better part of two hours but in the end, he fucking wins. It was a stupid oversight on my part, and I’m growling at the shattered remains of my king when Weasley again offers his hand to me.

“Good game, Malfoy.”

I manage a grunt even as my shoulders are slouched over the board. I’m not used to losing. “You too, Weasley.”

“Tentative friends?” he offers with an arched brow.

I consider his offer with a bob of my head. “Conditional acquaintances.”

“Deal, you fucking wanker.” He whispers that last bit since Molly and Hermione are just on the other side of the kitchen watching us with wide, hopeful eyes, and I chuckle as I stand from the table and clap my hand on his shoulder.

I disappear outside and pull the tattered parchment from my trousers. It’s tea stained and fraying past the point of being acceptable. I remember the day I sat down to write the names. I study them and the moments they all represented in the months following the war. Each one of them was an open ended story that I can finally say has finished its arc.

Madame Rosmerta
Katie Bell
Pansy
Goyle
Crabbe
Snape
Using the tip of my wand, I cast an inking charm and cross out the final name. I can’t help the grin that spreads across my face as I stare down at my list, marveling at how far I’ve come.

I hear the back door slam shut, and Granger’s arms are winding around my middle seconds later.

“She mumbles into my shirt, tightening her arms around me.

“Yeah, yeah. Thank me with that little green thing I like.” I chuckle, turning my face so I can stare over my shoulder at her.

“Maybe I’m already wearing it,” she teases, and I feel her words between my legs.

“Cheeky little witch.”

“I just don’t think I’m going to be any good at it, Draco. Maybe I’ll just stay home?” Granger is shifting in her corner of the couch but she’s not getting off that easily.

“Nope.” My lips pop around the second syllable as I shrug the silly muggle hoodie over my shoulders and grab my velvet bag of die. “You promised me all your Galleons, and since I’ve made the executive decision not to pauper you, you will be joining me for tonight’s adventure. What are you going to roll as? Rogue? Ranger? Wizard seems a bit obvious.”

“Well, I did technically promise that, dear —” she says the term of endearment like a hex “—but I never anticipated you’d have such enthusiasm for fantasy roleplaying games with Muggles.”
I shrug and run my tongue over my teeth as I stare back at her.

Granger nearly jumps from her seat with an idea. “What if I wear the green thing again?”

I respond with a scrunched nose and a shake of my head. “I nearly destroyed it last time, and you can’t expect that little piece of satin to get you everything.”

Her bottom lip juts out, and she crosses her arms over her chest. I’m tossing my die bag up and catching it midair when another thought dawns over her.

“What if—”

“It better be really good, Granger,” I cut her off with a bored roll of my head.

Her teeth cut into her bottom lip, and when she releases it, I’m all ears. “What if I offer you another kind of roleplay?”

My chin quirks at the thought, and I find myself considering all the different versions of Granger I’d like to fuck.

“Now you’re talking, Granger,” I say, tossing my die bag on the counter.

An hour later, I’m sitting in that same stupid little hoodie on the edge of our bed and practically vibrating with anticipation. Lucky for me, Granger had everything she needed for our little roleplay in her trunk, but she has been taking a painstakingly long time in slipping into character.

“Maybe we ought to go to Dungeons and Dragons after all?” she calls from the bathroom, and I shout back my disapproval before she can even continue her argument.

Her curly little head pokes out from behind the door. I must look like a child on Christmas morning because I swear I’m dancing in my seat.

She steps out, hidden by her large black Hogwarts robes, her hands clasped behind her, and she
trudges up to stand in front of me.

This has been a fantasy of mine for almost as long as I’ve noticed that witches had tits but she’s ruining it with her hesitation.

“Granger, if you don’t want—”

“I want to,” she cuts me off. “But I want something too.”

My brows raise in question, and from behind her back she withdraws my old Quidditch jersey and shoves it into my chest. I smirk at the worn fabric in my hands and stand to full height, shrugging off my hoodie and undershirt. Her eyes study the lines of my chest, and I can see her cheeks twinge with a pink blush.

Wetting my lips with the tip of my tongue, I pull the emerald green shirt over my head, noticing the way it stretches over my chest a little more snug that it used to.

Her cheeks flush as she smiles shyly down at me and my hands grip her robes and rip them open to expose her uniform below.

My jaw drops as I stare down at my naughty little witch; she’s taken some creative liberties with her old uniform. The hem of her skirt falls just at the crease below her bum, and the buttons of her oxford are strained from working far too hard to hold it together. She still has those ugly wool socks pulled up to her knees, and her tie is loose and disappears into her cleavage.

“Fuck,” I breathe as my hands push the robes from her shoulders and then slide down to groove her arse while my fingertips slip under the hem of her skirt.

She stiffens and furrows her brow in a scold at me. “Ten points from Slytherin for foul language.”

I chuckle as the blood rushes to my prick, and I pull her down into my hard on, her breath catching. “Surely there’s something I can do to make up the points, Granger.” My hands continue exploring under her plaid skirt, and when I discover she’s without knickers I fucking growl.
“I might be able to think of something,” she says with a proud tilt of her chin, a look I’ve seen grace her face in class a hundred times.

She moves around me and sits on the edge of the bed, and for a moment, I’m not quite sure what she means—until her knees spread and her jaw falls open. I swear to fuck I’m the luckiest bastard in London, perhaps the world.

I sink to my knees in front of her, and her hands tangle in my hair as I kiss her kneecaps and then the soft skin of her inner thigh. I push the hem of her skirt up around her hips; I can see her wet slit from here.

I wrap my fingers around her delicate hip bones and tug her closer to the edge of the bed before I grip the collar of her obscenely lowly-buttoned shirt and rip it, the buttons flying around us.

She gasps, her back arching as her red tie settles between her exposed tits, and I tease them mercilessly as I push her back and bury my face between her thighs.

It has been nearly eighteen months of sitting on this little chaise, and against all odds, I think I’ve come to like this odd little Harry Potter look-alike.

Our sessions have become less about healing and more about moving forward. We still discuss everything that has happened to led me here, but it hurts less now.

“I have something for you,” Brenner says with a gleaming smile and tosses a folder on the table.

I eye it carefully before gingerly taking it into my hands and flipping it open.

**Release from Care #M8952**

I, Dr. Harold Brenner, do hereby release Draco Malfoy from my care. Over our time together, I have come to find that he is of a sound mental state and, in my professional opinion, is of no threat to society.
It is also in my professional opinion that he be granted an early release from his probation with the Ministry of Magic.

Signed,

Dr. H. Brenner

My eyes study the innocuous words for a few long moments before I peek up at him over the folder. “What’s this?”

“You’re done.” Brenner grins, gesturing at the space between us proudly. “You’ve come a long way, Draco. And I can see no reason why you need to continue with weekly court-mandated therapy.”

My vision darkens as my fingers grip the papers in my hand too harshly. “You’re kicking me out?”

Brenner laughs, removing his glasses and cleaning them on his jumper. “Not in the slightest. But it is quite the accomplishment and you should be proud. My door is always open, Draco. I haven’t filled our Thursday appointment; if you’d like to come back, you will be doing so as a free man. No one is forcing you to be here anymore.”

I try to swallow through my impossibly tight throat. I haven’t felt forced here in months.

“I’m proud of you, Draco. I know it doesn’t mean much coming from me—”

“It does.” I cut him off, refusing to meet his gaze as I examine the paper in my hands again. “It means a lot.”

I close the folder and toss it back on the table between us. Finally meeting his gaze, I offer him my hand and watch as Brenner’s face flickers with an unnamed emotion before taking it.

Standing, I make my way towards the door but pause just past the threshold, tapping my closed fist on the doorframe and looking back over my shoulder. “I’ll see you Thursday, then?”
Brenner’s lips quirk up in a lopsided smile, and he nods back at me. “Thursday, then.”

“Sorrysorrysorry,” Granger rushes, pulling the hood of her cloak down as she pushes through the throngs of people to meet me.

I’ve been sitting staring at a glass of water for the better part of half an hour. When she finally makes her grand entrance, I breathe a sigh of relief. I wonder if that part will ever go away, the anxiety that something awful is going to happen to the people I love.

She brushes her lips on my cheek, but I capture the side of her face and pull her in for a deeper kiss. “I missed you,” I mumble against her lips when we part, and I love the way she smiles against me.

“I missed you, too. And I do love you in that suit.” She winks at me, taking her seat and grabbing her food menu. “I think it’s my favorite part of you being at your big fancy job; you look so dashing dressed up.”

We must look quite the pair: me in a tailored suit and her in denims and a rosy-hued blouse with cap sleeves. She’s taken over Flourish and Blotts with a fury, changing the cataloguing system as well as updating the events, bringing in fresh new authors and even writer workshops.

Watching her thrive in this role has only driven me to excel in my own. There are nights it seems like we are just passing in the night, finding each other in the sheets just to tangle around each other and pass out before a few minutes have passed.

But when I look at her, I see all the plans I have for our future. Big plans. Plans that include continuing to prove to her the man I’m going to be, and I can’t let up on working towards those.

As she searches the menu for something to eat, she twirls the ring on her left hand—the one that’s sat there for only six weeks—and I watch her with quiet amusement.

“Mister Malfoy?” The server interrupts my trance and I blink up at him.

“Yes?”
“This was sent over for you.” The wiry little man sets down a tumbler of Firewhisky near my hand, and my vision blurs for just a moment. “From Mister Zabini, at the end of the bar.” My gaze follows the direction he points and sure enough, at the end of the long bar is my old friend.

He’s leaning back with a smug slouch, and his lips are quirked up in knowing smile. He lifts a matching tumbler in a greeting before touching it to his lips.

My fingertip grazes the side of the glass for just a moment before I blink back to reality and shake my head. I offer him a quick nod, my lips forming a tight line as I pick up the glass and tip it back in his direction.

Blaise’s cocky grin widens, but when I place the Firewhisky back on the server’s tray, it fades instantly, and I turn back to my soon-to-be wife.

Her eyes are twinged with worry, and she reaches out to grip my fingers. “Are you okay?” she whispers, squeezing my hand in hers.

I take stock of myself for a moment, my hand lifting to the tendon in my throat that often screams back at me, but it’s dull, barely even there, and my finger slides down it before falling back to the table.

“Actually, I am,” I grin back at her and it feels fucking amazing—because I know I mean it.

A/N: The fic wouldn’t here without the devotion and love of so many people. Thank you to everyone I’ve mentioned a hundred times and to every single one of you have read, favorited, kudo’d, reviewed, messaged and anything else I might have missed. I wrote this for me, but knowing how many people have connected with the struggles I’ve tried to depict has been truly the greatest thing I could have hoped to achieve in writing fanfiction.

I adore you all.
I'll have some fun pieces coming up this summer and as always you can find me on Tumblr. I love getting one shot/drabble/aesthetic requests, they keep my muse content.

Until next time.

LK

End Notes

Would love to hear what you think and thank you for following me on another adventure!

Follow me on tumblr – LadyKenz347 – for chapter aesthetics and updates on the fic.

Thank you to my wonderful Alpha's: PartyLines, MsMerlin and MHCalamas for talking me through all of this whenever I need it! My Beta's who make everything better by just breathing: Partylines and Ravenslight – I adore you!

XOXO!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!