Corvus Fallere, Book 1

by Mousewrites

Summary

How long do you fight when you've already lost? Harry, Ron, and Hermione must survive in a world where all is not what it seems; but what it seems is unbearable.

Notes

Hello! I am posting this at AO3, as apparently all the other archives that hosted it have died. This is an OLD story (I finished it more than 5 years ago, and it took me 5 years to write, so .... Be aware, the books weren’t done when I was writing this.

Also, this is a text copy of the story; all the italics have fallen off. I'm going to go back through it and fix everything, and I'll remove this note when it's done. I promise, there used to be emphasis in this.

Journal of HP, Day 185 (as counted by Hermione Granger)
Four months in, the first death happened.

We were pretty sure it was suicide; the man was found with his head in the big water trough and no water splashed 'round. Sirius says that everything must have gotten to the bloke. I didn’t know him, personally, but he was one of the people that was here before I came. I don’t really blame him, I suppose. I mean, we’re all scared, even Sirius. I didn’t think anything could scare him, not after Azkaban, but he says that this is worse. I asked him how, but he wouldn’t tell me.

Ron thinks the man was murdered. I told him that he was a prat, and to stop scaring the youngers. We went back to playing chess with the little stone men that Ron had carved from a bit of the wall we’d managed to work free. Not much else to do.

That was nearly two months ago. We’ve lost almost thirty now, as if that first bloke opened a gate. At least five of them are confirmed as murders; the first was a girl attacked by two men, and then those men were... disposed of. Nobody knows who did it. You would think that in a room with over two hundred other people somebody would have seen or heard something, even in a room this size, but nobody is talking. I can’t blame them. I saw the girl, after the attack. Maybe those guys deserved what they got.

As George says, 'Madness takes its toll.’ He doesn’t grin when he says it, though. He doesn’t smile at all anymore, except when he suddenly cracks up for no reason and laughs for a while. I’ve never been quite sure about him, even before all of this happened. He looks lost without Fred; I’ve never seen them apart for this long, don’t think they’ve ever been apart this long. But as long as Fred’s out there, he’s not in here, and I think that George is happy for that at least. God knows I’d rather that Ron and Hermione and Sirius were out of here, even if it meant I couldn't be with them. I hate it here.

The other clear murders we try not to talk about. Nothing to do for this long causes madness. I haven’t seen the sun in over six months. I feel as if we have all been buried alive, corpses that don’t know when to lie down and die. Why any of us still get up in the morning is beyond me. Not that we have morning... or evening, or anything. At least the people who have died are out of here. I try to tell myself that I would never do that. But I miss the sun. I miss the air. Each 'day’ I feel as if another small part of myself is withering away. Maybe that's what those people who don't get up anymore feel. I envy those who have escaped this prison, either by madness or death.

Hermione is determined to keep people sane. Like it really matters now. But she is adamant. We play silly games. We sing. We had the biggest game of freeze tag the other day. Almost two hundred people, adults and students and children, running around a stone prison cell, playing tag. Twenty people ‘it’ at any one time. It was wild.

We also are learning different self-defense techniques from some of the wizards and witches. Most of us don’t have a clue how to protect ourselves without magic. So far the martial arts stuff is my favorite, even if I’m no good at it. We train as if we can make a break from here, as if we can some how get out of this room and fight back against an army of armed Death Eaters.

Fat chance.

But I suppose having no hope is more painful than having pipe dreams.

It was Hermione’s idea that I write this. The paper making experiment went well... I don’t know what we would be writing on if it hadn’t. The toilet paper tubes are a bit slick, and small enough that writing anything on them is rather frustrating. The handmade paper’s texture is a tad bad, but
what can we expect from banana peels? Oh, and of course, the purloined toilet paper. That's something the 'nice men' will give us in abundance. Most of us sleep on beds of the stuff, rolled and stuffed and shredded like rodent bedding. Small piles of bedding line the walls and venture out in spirals and twists. A huge warren of nests for the rats they keep in the basement. The paper tubes have been made into everything from fences and posts to decorative sculpture. One witch has almost perfected a kind of 'spinning wheel' out of them; she's the one that first made a blanket from the paper rolled into snakes and woven. We all have one by now; they help ward off the persistent chill.

When they started giving us blackberries two months ago we knew we had our ink. Finally, ink you can lick off your finger without being horrified. The paper took longer. The toilet paper alone is too weak; it ripped at the least pressure from the makeshift quills. Ink brushes worked better, but most of us wanted to use quills. I, for one, couldn't get used to the brushes. They moved oddly, and it felt wrong to be painting with a bit of Hermione's hair. Even remaking the paper so it was thicker wasn't any good; this one Muggle-born witch named Ester says that the fibers are too short. The banana peels helped; we realized that they didn't notice if we didn't return the peels, so we stockpiled them.

I asked why they keep giving us fruit. Hermione gave me some long complicated thing about the vitamins and the lack of sunlight. She also thinks that the lack of meat is what is effecting all the girl’s cycles; less iron, or something. I dunno; never really paid attention to that kind of stuff until now. Sirius muttered something about 'keeping us strong... not a good thing.' He wouldn't tell me why not, either.

I'm almost out of ink; I'd better stop. Maybe someday somebody will find this. I just hope it doesn't get published as 'Harry Potter and the Descent into Madness.'

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I blew on the ink to dry it and laid the page next to my bed, on the stack of similar pages. I didn’t know why I wrote that today; usually I just wrote letters to people or try to remember schoolwork. Hermione has a huge stack; I think she's re-writing 'Hogwarts, a history' from memory. We are all trying to capture a bit of the past, I suppose. I miss all my things. My wand most of all, I think. Well, my wand, and Hedwig, and sunshine, and robes that aren't ragged and too small and... No, I can't think like that.

Sighing, I got up and wandered over to the 'dining' area. They only feed us once a day. For a while we parcelled the food out so that it would last, but then once they missed a day, and now we get less food than we used to. We just all eat our portion and then wait for more. I'm hungry all the time now, not starving, but not full either. My stomach was telling me that food should be here soon. I'm not the only one with that idea. The whole lot of us slowly migrated over toward the big stone doors, looking hopefully at them. They are our only link to the outside world, and I didn’t think there is anyone here who can completely feign indifference when they open.

A sizzling sound announced the activation of the door spell. I heard somebody yelp as the spell
shocked their foot; they must have left it over the painted line that arches away from the door. Safety line. I'm not sure if it is to protect them from us, or us from working ourselves into a frenzy trying to get out. That spell is stronger than the focused will of two hundred unarmed wizards and witches; we don't fight it anymore.

The right side of the door swings open silently. I'm always faintly surprised that it does so without noise. Nothing that big should move that quietly. One side is almost completely open and I strained my eyes to see the loads of food. Wonder if we will get any meat today? My stomach cramped at the thought; it'd been almost a month by my counting since we got any meat. Usually it's fruit, bread, cheese and peanut butter.

Movement caught my eye, and my head turned in synch with dozens of others. The other side of the door was opening. I felt a cold spurt of panic. That had never happened, in all the months I'd been here. I glanced around for Ron and Hermione, because whatever this is, I don't want to face it alone. I spotted Ron's head near the back and made my way over to him.

"Cripes, that better be the rescue party. If I have to eat one more banana..." Ron said, his eyes trained on the doorway.

"Fruit is good for you," Hermione said distractedly. "I don't think it's the rescue party, Ron. Why would they use the door spell if they were friendly? Are the youngers in the KS?"

I glanced back at the 'kinder-stalag,' the area we cordoned off for the children under thirteen. A few people shooed the last of them into the fenced area, and the appointed babysitters already stood shoulder to shoulder in front of it. We as a group had decided that the children needed more protection than we did, and all had vowed to protect them until death, if need be. Most of them were students, here without their parents. The Death Eaters also dropped off a handful of toddlers with the daily meal about once a month; we tried not to think about where they had gotten them. They didn't all speak English, and some didn't speak at all. Those children didn't do much of anything, just sat or slept. We had lost two to malnutrition because they wouldn't eat.

"Youngers secure. You want to sound an alert?" I asked her.

"No need. Look." She jerked her chin at the people closest to the door. They had already moved to stand shoulder to shoulder, staggered in rows, so that they presented a unified face. I guess that martial arts training stuff is coming in handy.
Sirius suddenly appeared next to me, his tangled hair swinging into his eyes. His head twitched back and fourth restlessly. "You three ok? What's going on? Did anybody tell you anything?"

"No, sir," Ron said, "But I think we’re about to find out."

Both doors were fully open now. The door spell sizzled again, and slowly bulged outward, people hastily backing up so they didn't get shocked. Instead of the normal parade of food boxes, eight robed Death Eaters calmly entered.

Chaos erupted. We hadn't seen any of them since we were dropped here, and I think that many people kind of blocked the reality of them out. All of the training we had done meant nothing when faced with our nightmare. Their malignant presence rolled out into the crowd, and more than a few broke and ran. Some screamed. A couple of wizards threw themselves at the gently pulsing barrier and were propelled backward with a loud 'zap!'

The Death Eater in the lead motioned to one of the others. We couldn't hear anything over the din of the crowd, but he was clearly casting some kind of spell. A haze rose from his hands and swirled around his head. Suddenly it leapt onto the nearest person, who happened to be another Death Eater. Laughing, the first man gestured with his wand, and the glow seemed to wriggle for a moment before leaping onto the head of one of the prisoners on our side of the barrier, who froze; whether in panic or because of the spell, I couldn't tell.

Hermione's hand clamped down on my arm. "Harry, whatever happens..." She didn't look at me, her eyes on the Death Eaters.

I shut my eyes briefly. "I know, 'Mione. Ron?"

"Been brilliant, mate." His half grin coaxed one of my own.

"Yeah. Bloody brilliant."

The spell writhed around the head of the frozen man as everybody else backed up in terror. Even from here, I could see white all the way around his eyes. I tried to swallow past the lump in my throat, but couldn't. I could hear somebody panting behind me; Sirius was hyperventilating.
Abruptly the spell flashed, and then, as the first man collapsed on the ground, leapt toward the head of someone else. Mid air it broke into three strands, and it hit the two people on either side of its intended victim as well. A long scream rose from a witch on my right, and everything was chaos.

People ran. I don't know where they thought they were going, but they seemed determined to get away from those horrible, pulsing strands of spell. The spell leapt again, and split, and now there were nine people frozen, and four on the ground.

I couldn't see the spell anymore through the people, but I heard Hermione mutter something.

"At ten seconds an iteration, and a factor of three, we've got about thirty seconds maximum before those things get here," she yelled over the din, her eyes wide and scared. The three of us shared a glance, and moved to clasp arms. Sirius suddenly yelled behind me, and we all jerked, pulling tighter together. I ended up with Hermione's head tucked under my chin, with Ron's taller frame wrapped around us both. I shut my eyes tightly, waiting for whatever fate was coming.

Ron was hit first; I felt him stiffen and start to shake. Hermione yelped, terrified. I held her tighter, listening to her chant, "oh god, oh god, oh godohgodohgod." "Shhh, 'Mione. I'm here. We're here. Together. Never alone--" I choked as she suddenly stiffened under me, a keening wail cut short as the spell caught her. Above me, Ron suddenly became a dead weight. My eyes stung as I tried to hold him up and keep a grip on Hermione as well. I refused to open my eyes, refused to see it coming. I would not let go.

The pain at the back of my skull was almost welcome; Hermione had sagged against me a moment earlier, and I had to sit down under their combined weight. A sound escaped me, a kind of wet gasp. This hurt, a wrenching, intrusive kind of pain. The thing was digging into my brain, swirling around, poking and invading. I pushed at it with everything I had, but it only hesitated briefly before spearing into my brain. I felt the tremors begin as the spell delved into my memories, my thoughts. A confusing array of pictures flashed behind my eyes, faster and faster: Dudley smacking me for spilling something, the cupboard that once was my home, the thrill of the flying automobile, detention, and the school, and classes, and catching the Snitch and falling from my broom and Hedwig and Hermione and Ron and Dumbledore and Snape and the Forest and running and running and running and runni-

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I woke up, which was rather surprising in and of itself. More surprising, I think, was opening my eyes to see Ron's face inches from my own. He was grinning madly.

"Time to get up, Harry! You've been out longer than anybody else, Sleepy-bones!"

I blinked at him.

"Ron, give him some air. Honestly, you want to startle him back to unconsciousness?" Hermione? Ron moved back and I felt cool hands slide around my shoulders. "Can you sit up yet? Your head should be fine in a moment."

Predictably, she was right. She usually is. I glanced around curiously. We weren't in the big stone room anymore, and I didn't know whether to be relived or terrified. We were now in a smaller stone room. "Where are we?"


I looked at Ron, puzzled. "By what?"

He pointed to somewhere above his head. "Color. Me and you got the same. 'Mione's and George’s is different."

"One what?" I glanced up, past his tousled red hair. And blinked. And blinked again. "Ron, why do you have a glowing grapefruit over your head?"

Ron shot a smug look at Hermione. "Told you they looked like grapefruit."

"I maintain that they are too small for grapefruit. Navel orange, maybe."

"They?" I muttered, looking over Hermione's head. Sure enough, she had a glowing grapefruit too, but it was green, where Ron's was a kind of orange-gold color. Looking straight up brought me an eyeful of my very own radioactive citrus. "What the bloody hell are they?"
"I have a theory-" Hermione began.

"Merlin's nose, give him the short version!" yelped Ron. Hermione glared at him.

"As I was saying... my theory is that the spell that they cast was a categorizing charm, like the one on the Sorting Hat, but a bit less... refined. That would explain the memory slideshow."

"I'll say it was less refined," I said, rubbing at the back of my head. "But why did we get orangey-gold and you got green? Boy-Girl?"

"Nope," said Ron, "Cuz George's is green, and Lavender's like us. Random?"

"Why would they go to all the trouble of using a spell to give us random baubles of color? They have to have some meaning." Hermione's brow crinkled as she though. "It can't be by Houses, obviously, but except for George and I, all the other greens are Ravenclaw. In fact, most of the people in here are green."

"Only Hogwarts students?" I ask, surprised.

"All students or alumni."

"Sirius?"

"Nope."

I craned my head to look at the handful of other people. Many were still unconscious. "Hey! You said I was last one up!" I said indignantly, slapping Ron's arm.

"So I lied. You can wake me up next time." His grin slowly faded. "Assuming there is a next time."
We sat, each lost in our thoughts. Over the last few months I had gotten pretty good at just thinking, without panic. Survival skill. I wondered where everybody else was. This 'morning' when we had woken up, we were a prison group of more than two hundred people. Now we were down to less than twenty. I tried not to think about everybody else, about Sirius, or the toddlers in the KS. Just yesterday I had gotten this sweet little girl to say "'Arry!" which was close enough for me.

Just as the last person came around, we heard a quick 'bang-bang-bang' on the door at the end of the room. We all stood up, watching the door apprehensively.

"Maybe it's food. I'm starving," said Ron, lightly.

"Must be because you're awake," I shot back, like I always did. We shared a weak smile.

The door shuddered, and then swung open, groaning loudly. Nine or ten Death Eaters entered, wands out. I don't know what they thought we would do to them; not one of us had anything more threatening than a shoe. Overwhelm them, I suppose. And then what?

The Death Eaters fanned out, leaving a small gap in the center. We left them a wide area as well. A beat of silence, then a taller man stepped through the door.

Twenty throats gasped at once. Forty eyes opened wide. And, beside me, one Ronald Weasley launched himself across five meters of empty space and was hit by six simultaneous hexes as he tried to kill Severus Snape.

Snape, the traitor. Snape, the deceiver. The Death Eater turned 'spy' turned Death Eater. My lip curled and I could feel the snarl vibrating out of me. An answering growl came from everyone else as Ron went down under five jelly legs and an impedimenta. We took a collective step forward-

Only to be stopped by his voice.

"That will be enough, children. Play time.... is over." He crossed his arms, just as he had done in school, glaring down his long nose at us. He didn't even have his wand out. Bastard. "Now. As many of you have problems following complex directions, as I unfortunately know from personal experience, I will make this very simple. Those of you with Viridans Sphaerae please queue up on the left wall, those with Auraria Sphaerae on the right."
Nobody moved, other than Ron, who was stirring slowly. Snape sighed, his lips curled in annoyance. "No wonder you all do so horribly in school; your Latin is piss-poor. I should just toss you a lexicon and make you look it up, but I haven't the time. Let me speak in terms you will understand. Green ball left, golden ball right." He gestured widely at the walls.

Still, nobody moved. Snape's eyes moved over us, flicking from our faces to the Sphaerae bobbing over each of our heads before moving on. I thought I saw his eyes widen a tiny bit when he got to me, but I wasn't sure.

"Come now, even you group of complete imbeciles can understand that. Move, now."

"With all due respect, sir," Hermione said, in her perfect schoolgirl voice, "And I think I speak collectively for the group when I say, go fuck yourself, you perfidious, black hearted bastard."

I gaped at her. Did Hermione just say that?

Apparently she did, because Snape advanced, his robe slithering out to either side of him noisily. About a meter from her he stopped, his face stony. "Did I hear you correctly, Miss Granger? Did you just tell me to, quote, 'Go fuck myself,' end quote?"

"I did."

"Lovely language, child. I'm delighted to see that the very thin veneer of class and breeding you possessed in school has been stripped away. You always did put on airs above your station." His lip curled into a smirk. "Glad to see you've been put in your place, girl. I was never allowed to, despite my...desires." He turned away. My hands itched to grab his robe and throw him to the floor, but I had no yearning to face the pack of Death Eaters in the room. I made do by stepping on the trailing edge of his robe, as if by accident, as he strode away.

His undignified jerk when the collar of his robe throttled him was satisfying. I let go immediately, watching him pitch forward slightly before catching himself. He spun, eyes burning into the lot of us. His quick sweep of our amused faces only intensified his glare.

"Childish games? And here I thought we had captured a group of adults... Anyone want to fess to that little prank?"
None of us moved.

"No? Ah well. The masses must suffer for the folly of one. putidus pacifico" His wand was in his hand and the spell left his lips before I saw him move.

I grunted as something appeared in my mouth. I tried to spit it out, but it wouldn't budge. It tasted horrible, like castor oil, but was shaped like a-

Hermione turned to look at me. She had a soft pink baby's dummy in her mouth, and was trying to pull it out. It wouldn't budge. Mine wouldn't either, and the horrid taste was building up. I swallowed, but the rank taste just slid down my tongue and coated my throat.

The Death Eaters laughed. We all had pacifiers, with the colors ranging from soft pink like Hermione's to neon green for George. The taste was awful. I couldn't even spit around it, just swallow when the taste got bad. I tried to say something, but the rubber bit pushed my tongue down. We were quickly and effectively gagged.

I grunted in my throat, glaring at Snape. He looked genuinely amused.

"My, my, Potter, you look positively incensed. I would think that this is a new experience for you. Mister Golden Boy. Perhaps this type of punishment will be effective in curbing your childish tendencies. If not, we can always try spanking." His eyes sparked briefly. I shuddered, disturbed. This Snape was most definitely not the Professor I knew how to deal with.

He walked back to the front of the room, stepping around Ron, who was just recovering enough to stand. Apparently they had ended the hexes at some point. He too had a binky, and his jaw was working. Maybe he was trying to chew the damn nipple off... He made his way back to us slowly, and we held him up. He flipped the bird to Snape's back as he chewed. Suddenly he turned white, then green. He began swallowing rhythmically, about every five seconds.

Snape's slippery voice broke over us. "Oh, and children? I would advise against chewing the nipple; when punctured it will produce a steady stream of Ricinus communis oil."

Ron looked like he wanted to be mad, but was much too busy being ill. It occurred to me that he would choke if he vomited, which he looked about ready to do. Apparently Hermione had the same
thought because she began shaking her head at him and motioning downward frantically. I glanced at Snape; he was conversing with a tall Death Eater casually and watching Ron, as if he hadn't just hexed us, as if offhandedly causing somebody to choke to death on his own vomit was commonplace. Maybe it was for him. Black bastard.

Ron gagged.

Startled, I shook my head at him. He nodded emphatically. Shit. Only one thing to do.

I strode over to Snape. Immediately wands targeted me, but I ignored them. Drawing myself up to my 'impressive' seventeen-year-old height, I looked him in the face and pointed at myself. He tipped his head at me.

"Yes, Mister Potter?" I could hear the amusement in his voice.

I glared at him. Smug sonofabitch. I jabbed my finger at the hem of his robe, and then at myself again.

"What is it, boy? You have to go to the restroom? You like my new robe? You want to sit at my feet?" He was smirking now, and the Death Eater he had been talking to laughed outright.

Hermione whimpered loudly; Ron gagged again, and I could hear him choking for a moment before he got control once more. I could feel my anger giving way to terror. He wasn't going to just let Ron choke to death... was he? He looked unconcerned and a bit amused as Ron doubled over. George was holding his brother and staring at me with the most terrible look. Lost somewhere between despair and rage.

I pulled at Snape's robe and clasped my hands together in an age-old symbol of pleading. Please.

His gaze chilled. "You want me to release him, Potter?" I nodded mutely. "You're willing to take the blame for that little prank, all by yourself? No Gryffindor preference to save you now. Just what you deserve."

I nodded frantically, my eyes on Ron as he started to heave.
"Kneel."

My head snapped around to stare at him. Everybody had gone silent.

"Do it, Potter, or your friend ends up another casualty of a war you've already lost."

I shook for a moment, feeling sick myself, but Ron's labored breathing made my decision for me. I dropped to my knees at Severus Snape's feet.

His hand fisted in my hair and yanked my head back. Staring deeply into my face, he said "Finite Incantatem."

The pacifier popped out of existence. I heard Ron gag and the sound of liquid splashing against stone. For the moment I was glad I couldn't turn my head; it sounded like Ron was throwing up everything he had eaten in the last month. A moment later I heard a Death Eater muttering a cleaning spell. Snape was still staring at me.

I didn't know quite what to say. What is the proper response to somebody who almost kills somebody but then doesn't? Somehow I didn't think there was a greeting card for this kind of thing.

His hand tightened in my hair. "Hmmm. Yes. Well. About time to go, I think." He lifted his hand straight up, so that I had the choice of standing or having my hair pulled out by the root. I winced, and stood.

"Now, children. Say goodbye to your friends. It's time to go. Gold this way, Green that way."

I saw the Ravenclaws glance at each other and walk en masse over to the left wall. Logic over fear, every one of them. Hermione and George were supporting Ron and walking over towards the right wall, which was where I was standing.

"Miss Granger, I know you aren't color blind. I can clearly see the Viridans Sphaerae over your head."
"I'm not leaving them." Her words were defiant, but her voice trembled.

"Really?" Snape's eyebrow rose with one corner of his lip. "How very... fascinating. Pray, tell, where did you get the notion that you had a choice in the matter?"

"Because we're not dead. You need us for something, or you would have gotten rid of us. You want us alive. Unhappy people have an awful habit of turning up dead. Therefore you want to keep us happy, and I am staying with them."

Snape stared at her for a moment then gave a snort of laughter. "I see you truly haven't been put in your place yet, Miss Granger. How... convenient. Are you sure you want to share their fate? I can assure you that the lot that awaits them is far different than yours, and I can say with complete honesty that your current assignment fits you more."

Hermione's eyes were firm. "I'm not leaving them."

Snape shrugged with one shoulder. "Very well." He suddenly thrust me toward them. I stumbled, but they caught me. His hands free now, Snape drew his wand. A flick and the glowing Sphaerae over her head shifted until it glowed the same ruddy color as Ron's and mine. He turned to George.

“I trust you believe that you won’t leave them as well, Mr. Weasley? Would you like to make a wager on that?”

He turned away from us partially, and spoke to one of the Death Eaters, who inclined his head and left the room. After a moment he returned, a redhead in green robes trailing him.

“Fred! ” George started forward, then stopped and looked back at his younger brother.

“That’s right, Mr. Weasley. Your devotion to your brother is plain, but to which brother? You can go only with one or the other.”

“It’s a trap, George! That’s probably not even your brother. They could have Polyjuiced someone, or an illus-“
“It’s him, Hermione. I know it is. He... he misses me.” George touched his head lightly, not looking away from his twin. “I... God, Fred...”

Snape closed on George. “Your choice, Mr. Weasley. You will not be separated from your twin if you choose to go with him. I cannot say the same about your younger sibling. The fate that has been chosen for him is not for you. Go with your twin.” His voice dropped sibilantly. I could barely hear him now, but the sound was cold... persuasive. “It is what you want, isn’t it? You miss him. Ron has Harry; he doesn’t need you. Nobody really needs you, do they, George? Your parents have each other, and so many, many children. Bill had Charlie, Percy had his books, and Ron has Harry.... Even your little sister doesn’t need you. In fact, the only one who needs you is your twin. And yet you dither... I wonder if he thinks you don’t want to be with him? He’s asked about you, you know. Over and over. More so than about the rest of your family. Look at him, George. Your indecision is destroying him.”

Fred was staring at George, eyes huge, hands clenched in the sleeves of his green robe. His eyes didn’t even stray to Ron or the rest of the group; they were locked on George.

“Go to him, George. Don’t play this out anymore. You know with whom you belong.” A long pause, in which George looked back and fourth between his brothers. Snape sighed. His voice rose sharply, filling with sarcasm “Besides, you don’t have a choice in the matter.” He motioned to the Death Eater that had brought Fred in. “Take them both back to the Center.”

Moving swiftly, the Death Eater grabbed Fred’s arm with one hand and quick marched over to George, grabbing him by the other arm. George made some understated protests, but as they were marched out, I saw that somehow he had managed to link hands with Fred. And as they turned the corner, I could see that George was smiling.

“Well then, that’s done with. Shall we go? Follow me, then. And Mr. Weasley, stop crying. You still have two people that care if you live or die; that’s more than many people can claim.”

I glared at him, but, when he turned and quit the room, we followed. What else could we do?

As we followed Snape down the hallway, I finally figured out why his robe was making so much noise. It wasn't the thick wool that he wore in the classroom, or the starched linen that I saw him in at the Yule ball... it was leather! Scaly dragon hide down the back, edged with softer leather along the sides. The trailing edge was hemmed in something that slid and slithered against the stones of the floor... it sounded like faint hissing. I was watching the sway of the robe, listening to the faintly mesmerizing sibilant sounds as I walked; I could almost hear words in it, small snippets of
My head smacked into Snape's back when he stopped suddenly in front of a large set of double doors. My cheeks burned faintly as I backed up into Hermione, her hand moving quickly to stop my retreat. Snape didn't turn around.

"Welcome, children, to your new home... at least as long as you last, that is." And with that ominous proclamation, he threw the doors open and stepped through.

We gasped. This... this was not a dank dungeon or a torture chamber. This was a large, airy courtyard, bordered on three sides by elegant hallways with arched doorways. The waterfall coming down the fourth wall fed a large rock pool of water before it meandered across the room and disappeared into one of the doorways. The warm air rolled out and we breathed it in, entranced. This small bit of beauty after so long looking at stone walls was overwhelming.

Our momentary pleasure shattered as the Death Eater behind us muscled us through the doors. Blinking I emerged into the sunlight for the first time in months. Turning my face to the light, I smiled faintly. I had missed the sun so much. I never knew how much I loved its warmth on my face, not until I didn't have it anymore. The warmth on my skin made me think of flying, of days spent by the lake 'revising' with Ron while Hermione scolded us for playing cards instead of revising. The smell of the water and the plants made my chest clench.

A breath at my ear startled me. "Lovely, is it not, Potter? All of this, created as a backdrop for you. A velvet setting for our gems."

I turn to look at him; old familiar hate welling softly in my chest. God, I hated this man. “Gems? Scraggly bunch of underfed prisoners, don’t you mean? If we’re the best you bastards have to display then you’re even sorrier than I thought you were.” My tone was blunted by despair.

His lips quirked at that. “Perhaps you’re right, boy. You do smell a bit. We should definitely do something about that... after the auction.” The edge of his robe brushes me as he strides away, and I heard it whisper again. It sounded like laughter.

Auction?

I hurriedly joined my fellows near the edge of the pool. “Please, please please tell me I didn’t just hear that.”
“What?” Ron’s face was pinched and worried.

“Snape just said that there’s going to be an auction. Please, god, let him be talking about antiques.”

“Somehow Snape doesn’t seem like a supellexphile to me, Harry. Look.” Hermione pointed to the doorway across from the pool, where a few Death Eaters were levitating a large platform into position. She was ghost white, her eyes huge and round. I wondered idly what she had figured out before me. Judging by the look on her face, I wasn’t in that big of a hurry to find out.

“That look like a stage to you, mate?” I asked Ron.

“Bloody hell. There is no way any of those bastards are gonna get me up there. I’d rather be...” Ron trailed off.

“What, Ron? You’d rather be dead? I’m sure that they can arrange that for you, if your pride is that important!” Hermione snapped. “After all this time, all we’ve been through, you’re still as bleeding thick as when we started!”

My eyebrows shot up. I don’t think I’d ever heard Hermione this angry. Not even when Flourish and Blots burned down. But her tirade wasn’t over. “Look around, Ron!” she exclaimed. “Where are we? Look at the sky, at the stones. For God’s sake, Ron, look at the doors!” She grabbed his shoulders and spun him around to face the row of doors behind us. He wriggled in her grasp.

“Leggo, Hermione! What the hell are you talking about? What’s wrong with the doors?”

But I saw it now. Cold despair washed through me. Trembling, I walked over to the door nearest us, reaching out a shaky hand to touch the wood. Old wood, aged and weathered from long use. A blank spot in the center of the door marked where something once hung, a familiar shield outline bright on the faded wood. I had been looking at doors like this for years.

“Ron, be quiet.” I flattened my hand to the blank spot, searching for another explanation, anything that would change the truth in front of me. I was right about not wanting to know what Hermione had figured out. This... this was too much to bear. I turned from the door, as if I could hide from the truth.
“What? What the hell is going on? Where are we? Why are you flipping out?” Ron’s voice broke with panic as Hermione crumbed to her knees, sobbing.

I could only shake my head, defeated. I knew where we were. I had been praying to be here for months. Slowly leaning backward, I let the familiar door take my weight. I couldn’t hold it anymore. A moan escaped my lips as I slid to the ground.

“We’re home, Ron. This is Hogwarts.”

CHAPTER 2

“Come now, Mr. Potter, you can’t have truly believed that Hogwarts hadn’t fallen before now? With your illustrious presence gone, the whole light side simply rolled over. The fighting has been over with for months.” Snape gestured vaguely with one hand; the other held a tumbler of liquid that he sipped while he reclined on the large pillows, back against the stone wall.

We were sitting with Snape in a shadowed alcove, somewhat unwillingly watching the auction. There were many more people here, now, as the audience gathered and they brought out more merchandise. I recognized students that had gone missing before us, and some that I had thought had escaped, as well as many people who were not familiar. The three of us had been separated from the rest before it had begun and had been told to sit here. Snape soon joined us, giving the three of us water and commenting snarkily on our despondency. I had replied, “What’s the point of fighting, if Hogwarts has been turned into a slave market?”

Snape’s eyebrows had drawn down, and stayed that way. He was baiting me now, I could tell, but I just didn’t feel up to rising to his challenge. I didn’t answer his question, only rested my head on the overstuffed pillows.
Ron was abnormally quiet; curled up on his side on a pillow, he appeared to be looking at the stage, but his eyes were shadowed and blank. One finger after another journeyed to his mouth to be slowly stripped of the nail. He’d be down to blood, soon, I though absently. Hermione had her arms around her knees and was weeping softly, I think. I didn’t blame her; I wanted to cry myself, but my eyes were hot and dry.

On stage a Death Eater held a struggling Lavender. He had stripped the tatters of her robe off, and was holding up by her wrists, her toes barely touching the floor. The last few months had melted almost a stone from her, I saw, and she had the patina of grime that we all had acquired. At least they let her keep her underwear, I thought. The audience was disturbingly silent; I could hear her pants and cries clearly as they turned her.

“Ah, Miss Brown. She’ll go to House Dorcas, almost certainly.” Snape’s voice was conversational.

“House Dorcas?” I couldn’t stop myself from asking.

“Yes, Mr. Potter. Even new world orders have their factions. House Dorcas is comprised of sweet, lean things. Easy on the eye.” His eyes roamed over Lavender. “I don’t think that the others will try to outbid Dorcas this early on.”

“But what is House Dor-”

“Hush. Watch.”

Shrugging, I did as he said. I just didn’t feel like fighting anymore. I felt as though I was wrapped in cotton wool, muffling my feelings. Before all of this happened, I’d have been trying to figure out how to get his wand, how to strangle him with the pillow fringe, how to get out of here. Now it didn’t seem to matter.

Sure enough, after some unspoken signal, Lavender was “Purchased by House Dorcas, in the name of Our Lord.” I shot a look at Snape. He was grinning smugly, eyes somehow amused and irritated.

“I told you. Predictable. I don’t know why we pretend to auction you off; you go to whom you belong with anyway. I chance I can guess at least seventy-five percent of this batch.”
I roused myself again, a bit of annoyance at his offhanded manner seeping through my dejection. “So good at slave auctions, Snape? Attend many?”

“Actually, yes. One is expected to go to these things, when one holds my position.” He rested his head on the wall behind him, looking at me through half lidded eyes.

“Oh, and what would that be? Prince Bastard?”

He snorted. “Hardly. I think that even you’d agree that there are worse men than I in line for *that* throne. No, I hold the only position that I would want in this new world.”

“And that is?”

“Head of House Corvus.”

It was my turn to snort. “House Crow? How appropriate. I always thought you looked like a carrion eater.” I half expected him to hit me for the insult, but he just gave a sharp bark of laughter.

“I suppose I would to you, Mr. Potter. Now, shall we see if my predictions are correct?” He turned his attention back to the auction.

A small, angry looking boy was pushed on stage. I vaguely recognized him as a Hufflepuff a year behind me. To my surprise he was viciously fighting the Death Eater attempting to remove his robe. The spectators laughed as the Death Eater suddenly howled; the Hufflepuff had gotten his teeth into his hand and was holding on tight.

“Ah. That one. House Hystrix, unquestionably.”

He was right. In fact, he was right every time. I sat, watching my friends and schoolmates auctioned into House Hystrix, Dorcas, Ovis, or Acredula. Eventually Snape seemed to tire of his game, and shut his eyes. I followed suit; I felt like I could sleep for a hundred years, or maybe forever.
I woke to a terrible ruckus. Snape was standing with his back to the three of us, arguing with a short, bristly man in a brown robe that I could barely see from my prone position. I decided to stay put; sometimes you hear more when you are ‘asleep’ than you are supposed to. I couldn’t make out what they were arguing about at first, but I soon found out.

“You can’t do that!” the short man was saying angrily.

“I am the host of this auction, and I can do whatever I please, Hystrix.” Snape said, his arms folded across his chest. “I get first pick and I pick them.”

“But… But those three are celebrities! Ovis, Acredula, back me up. We won’t stand for this. You can’t deny us the chance to bid on them!”

“I can and I have.”

“You can’t just claim Harry Potter, for Rasputin’s sake, Corvus! He… He undoubtedly belongs in Hystrix.”

“I disagree, Hystrix. All three of them belong in Corvus, and even if they were the dead-eyed wretches that Ovis takes, they would still be Corvus’. End of discussion. Or do I have to trouble our Lord with this?”

I could hear the raised eyebrow in that statement. I propped myself on one elbow to catch Hystrix’s expression; I thought he would pass out for a moment, his face was so red. I also noticed him fingering a long coil of worn leather clipped to the sash on his robe. A whip, he was wearing a whip. And he looked like he would like to take it to Snape, right this second. A shudder ripped through me; this was the man in charge of that Hufflepuff boy, this angry, sadistic fellow. I was suddenly, pathetically grateful to Snape; the evil you know, or think you know, anyway, is better than the unknown. I wanted to hex this man, hit him, anger boiling up out of me suddenly, burning off the haze of despondency. I found myself glaring at Hystrix, pushing myself into a seated position.

“Fah, you’ve even got the damn boy on your side. You probably started training all of them before our victory, despoiling them over the classroom table while marking assignments. Soiled already. I swear to you, Corvus, one of these days the Lord is going to see you for what you are, you and those… things you turn out, and purge the lot of you. No proper training or manners. Good
riddance to the lot of you.” Hystrix stalked off, his robe billowing behind him.

Snape turned to look at me, eyebrow raised almost to the hairline. “Isn’t he pleasant? At least that farce is over. Up, now. I promised you a bath after that little… display.”

I scrambled to stand, glancing at Hermione standing at my side. Ron hadn't moved.

“Ron? Come on, mate, get up now.” I shook his shoulder, but he didn’t move. I noticed that he hadn’t touched his water; indeed, he looked like he hadn't moved at all since curling up there, other than to mangle his poor bloodied fingernails. I glanced at Snape warily. I didn’t want Ron to be hurt, but I didn’t think I could carry him.

“Mr. Weasley still upset? Hmmm. Can’t have one of you down on me. Move, Potter.” Snape had his wand out and was pointing it at Ron. I shielded him with my body. Hermione only stared absentedly at the stage where the last of the audience was leaving, new ‘possessions’ in tow.

“Don’t! I’ll carry him, just give me a moment.”

“Really, Mr. Potter, all this macho posing is unnecessary. I am merely going to move your lethargic friend so that we may be on our way. I didn’t go to the trouble of assuring you away from Hystrix and his bunch to kill you in the courtyard. Think, you stupid boy, and get out of my way.”

I did, watching in mute silence as Snape cast a spell on Ron, who rose smoothly and stood without any sense returning to his eyes. Snape moved behind him, guiding him with a hand on the small of his back. Ron walked forward obediently, moving with an alien grace. I looked away; Ron’s body without Ron’s mind guiding it was disturbing, to say the least.

We left the bright courtyard by one of the arched doorways. I blinked, blinded by the sudden darkness inside. As my eyes adjusted I looked over to see how Hermione was doing. She had risen at Snape’s command, and followed us along the hallway, but I could tell that she wasn’t all right. Although she was now dry-eyed, her face was strangely empty, devoid of any emotion, as it had been since she stood up in the courtyard. This wasn’t good. I threaded my fingers through hers as we walked behind Snape and Ron, giving the cold digits a comforting squeeze.

“Hey, at least we’re still together, aren’t we?” I said quietly to her. “I mean, like you said, if they wanted us separated, they’d have done it by now, right?”
She nodded mutely, clinging to my hand. Her eyes scanned the halls, noting passageways and doors absently. I saw her flinch every time she passed a door that bore the outline of the missing Hogwarts shield. I did too, but she seemed so… lost. I don't think that I liked a Hermione without hope; she looked too much like those people back in the big stone room right before they wouldn’t get up anymore. Would Hermione refuse to get up in the morning? Just lie there and waste away, like we watched Gilderoy Lockhart do? I quivered, thinking of her face with sunken eyes, like his right before the end, or her hair brittle and dead, breaking as Lockhart’s did when we carried his body to the door.

“We’re ok, ‘Mione, I swear. Just hold on for a little longer, ok? Snape said we get to bathe, won’t that be nice? I haven’t bathed in warm water in so long! And we can wash our hair… Weren’t you just talking yesterday about trying to get that tangle out of your hair with banana paste? Gee, Hermione, I would have never thought of that, using banana paste as hair stuff…”

Her hand came up slowly to touch the back of her head, where the lion’s share of her curly hair had ratted into a sizeable snarl. “It’s… the fructose in the fruit should…. Should briefly lubricate the… the… the…” she trailed off, blinking owlishly in the light. “Harry? Where are we going?” she said, sounding more cognizant of her surroundings than she had been since she collapsed.

I felt my face splitting into a grin. “To take a bath, I think. He,” and here I motioned to Snape with my chin, “said that we stink like half-dead muskrats and need to bathe.”

“I would think we would, after only being able to sponge for a few minutes a day with no soap. Why’s he being… well, not nice exactly, but civil?”

Will telling her what went on back in the square send her bonkers again? I thought, Or will she be mad if I don’t tell her… I responded with a lopsided shrug.

I felt her eyes on me, narrowing in thought. She knew something was up, I could tell, but I didn’t know what to say, in any case.

Another set of double doors loomed at the end of the hallway, these emblazoned with a large shield bearing a raven in flight, crossed with ropes. I couldn’t tell if the bird was being restrained, or if it was breaking free.

“House Corvis” Snape said shortly, and steered Ron to the side. Ron stopped when Snape let go of
his arms and stood staring at the wall, still moving under Snape’s Puppetous Charm. Hermione and I gently took his arms and moved him backwards so that he stood between us, facing the door. Snape glanced at us, a quick sideways movement of his head, before turning to the door itself. He reached out with one pale hand to touch the raven on the shield, and he didn’t jump when it suddenly shuttered into life and turned its bright eye to him.

It cawed, cracking its beak together loudly. Snape made a similar noise, though how he did it was anybody’s guess. I didn’t thinking that type of noise could come out of a human being. But, then again, we’ve had no real proof that Snape is human, I thought, grumpily.

The raven cawed again, then sputtered a soft cry and butted its head up against Snape’s hand. He scratched its chin briefly, and it returned to the shield. The door creaked open, swinging inwards. Snape motioned for us to precede him, with a sweep of those big, noisy sleeves.

This hall was more what I had expected before, when we entered the courtyard. Huge and dark, lined with torches and rich tapestries along the walls. Off to the right there was a large desk facing the room, with shelves behind it and a great open book displayed prominently on its surface. Snape steered us over to it, and I watched as the last of the sunlight disappeared from the room as the great wooden door of House Corvus swung shut.

“Sign the Book, Potter,” Snape said, handing me the quill.

“Why? What is it?”

Snape sighed, rolling his eyes a bit, but surprised me by answering despite his obvious annoyance. “It’s a register of who is currently in House Corvus. Once you sign in, the Book will know where you are, as long as you remain inside the House. If you leave it… well, it knows you’re gone, anyway. If only I’d had one of these for school, eh, Potter? I’m sure it would be useful to have a record of where everyone is if one were to go sneaking about, wouldn’t it?” His sharp black eyes locked on mine, his lip curling slightly. I started back, looking up at him defiantly. It was obvious that he knew about the Map, but fuck him if I was going to say anything.

He snorted at the look I gave him. “Yes, yes, you don’t know anything about that, do you, Potter? Sign the damned book. And don’t write somebody else’s name, it won’t let you.”

My hand faltered; I had been just about to do that. Heck, I’d figured that Snape wouldn’t even notice if I signed the book Larry instead of Harry, and maybe that would have circumvented the tracking spell on it. But he had anticipated everything, as usual.
I felt nothing when I signed the blank page with my name, but the words sparkled and then seemed to sink into the paper, graying slightly. A moment later my initials swam to the surface of the page, colored the same red-gold as the Sphaerae back in the courtyard. Next to the initials a little drawing of a desk appeared, as if it had been sketched by an invisible hand.

“You next, Miss Granger.”

She handed Ron’s arm to me and signed the book with a flourish. A loud buzzer sounded, and Hermione dropped the quill, ink spattering across the page.

“Hecate’s teats, girl, calm down. The Book just knows that you were not initially bound for this calling, and is bringing that to my attention. Of which I am aware, thank you very much.” This last was directed at the book itself, which seemed to harrumph, and ruffle it’s pages irritably.

“Well, Mr. Weasley can hardly sign in his condition, so I suppose we’ll come back later for him, shall we? Now, you three reek like half-dead merpeople, and I can’t stand it anymore. This way to the Baths.”

He turned on his heel, stalking off down a long corridor. Hermione and I glanced at each other, at the closed door, and then followed him helplessly. We steered Ron between us.

We managed to keep Snape in sight as we followed him down the twisting corridors, but it was difficult to do. I knew on some level that this was still Hogwarts (at least, I was reasonably sure that we hadn’t left), but I was hopelessly lost in moments. Snape never looked over his shoulder to see if we were following him; apparently we seemed cowed enough that he didn’t need to watch us anymore. I felt a bit of annoyance but, really, we hadn’t given him much trouble since we’d found out where we were; I suppose we just couldn’t fight right now. Besides, compared to that Hystrix fellow, Snape only seemed marginally evil. Maybe.

Snape was waiting for us after the last bend in the corridor. A large door stood open in front of him, the sound of splashing water and the sharp smell of soap rolling from the marble room. We glanced at him, and he motioned us in brusquely.

As soon as we entered the room, the door slammed shut. I must admit that I jumped as much as Hermione that time. Snape snickered. “So jumpy. Well…. Time to get you cleaned up, hm?”
I glanced around, expecting to see a big bathtub or at least shower stalls. Instead, there were large pools of water, some raised and spilling into lower pools, some sunken into the marble floor. Steam rose from the higher pools, rolling along the floor and spilling down the short flights of stairs. The smell of hot water and soap wrapped my head, steaming up my glasses. I took them off to clean them; they were more precious to me than any jewel, here. Thanks to an Impervious Charm they were intact after everything I had been through, but I was always afraid of losing them.

While my glasses were off, the room was a blur of light and dark blobs. Suddenly, a mass of shadows to my right broke into pieces and moved toward us. Hermione gave a short yelp of fear, and I fumbled to get my glasses on. Six creatures were approaching us, and I understood why Hermione was afraid. They weren’t human, but that didn’t narrow it down a whole heck of a lot.

All six were short, only standing about four feet, and had long, distorted faces. They looked like a cross between ravens and goblins. Long, black faces with sharp, abbreviated beaks, their eyes shiny black, oversized and wet looking. Where ravens would have had solid black eyes, the creatures had light eyes with dark irises and pale eyelashes. What I though were black robes at first resolved themselves into some kind of black feathers, although I didn’t know if they grew that way or were just clothing of some sort. Their hands and feet were bare, but a dusky dark gray. They were terrifying, and they reminded me strikingly of birds.

All six ignored us completely, brushing past in their quick shuffle-hop walk, and surrounded Snape, butting against him and making chirring, clacking noises they reached for his face with abnormally long hands topped with small pointed nails. He rubbed at their heads affectionately, clacking and chirping to them, as if they were his pets. Or his children.

“Jesus Christ, Snape, what the hell are those?” I exclaimed.

The six creatures and Snape turned to look at me. Seven pairs of eyes held the same expression, but I had no idea what it was. Snape patted them a last time, then motioned to us, talking in that clacking bird language. The creatures nodded, bobbing their heads and necks without using their shoulders. And then they turned and advanced on us.

Like a pack of wolves they stalked toward us, angular heads down, eyes locked with ours. I stopped breathing, my stomach clenching hard. The sway of their bodies as they walked was hypnotic; only their bodies moved as they walked, their heads staying perfectly still, like snakes…

Hermione broke and ran. I couldn’t move, but I saw two of the things veer off after her, cackling at
each other. They could jump incredibly high, bounding across the marble, pushing off the wall in mid air. One landed in front of Hermione, dropping down suddenly, mouth open in a hiss. She screamed piercingly and changed direction, rounding the largest of the raised pools and disappearing from sight.

The two nearest me reached out their long fingered hands, trying to snag my clothing. My stomach trembled, muscles knotted. I tried to gasp a breath but I couldn’t get any air with my stomach locked up as it was. I felt a hot, dry touch against my arm as the closest one reached for my robe. Their hands were scaly.

“NO!” I screamed, throwing my hands out to knock them away. I felt a great rush of energy leave me, like when I cast a large charm, and the two creatures squawked as they bowled over backwards and tumbled into the wall. I swayed with vertigo. Snape was suddenly there, grabbing both my hands in one of his and slapping me across the face.

“Stupid boy! You could have hurt them. They didn’t even do anything to you, you foul little monster.” He shook me, turning me so I could see the remaining two creatures with Ron. They were gently pulling off his outer robe and socks, clicking and rubbing the scratches on his knees where he hit the ground when he had been hexed. Ron still wasn’t moving of his own accord.

I sucked in a great breath of air, sagging against Snape as the terror let go of me. The half formed images of the things pouncing on me and plucking out my eyes or disemboweling me seemed far-fetched now as I watched the two strip Ron. From the other room there was a terrible ruckus, then a sound like a dry branch breaking and squawking squeal.

Snape snarled and thrust me toward Ron, snapping “Stay there, you little wretch.” He stalked into the other room.

Moments later he returned, dragging Hermione by her wrists in one hand and his other hand fist in her hair. “You little bitch! They were trying to help you and you attack them. Stupid, wretched child. If he dies, so help me, you’ll regret it!” Snape pushed her at me, letting me catch the sobbing girl and returned to the room, returning with one of the creatures cradled in his arms. The two I’d thrown into the wall struggled upright, making soft distressed noises, and scurried over to Snape. The one in Snape’s arms rolled its head and clacked pitifully, and I could see that its right arm was bent at an odd angle.

“I didn’t mean to hurt it, Harry, I swear I didn’t,” Hermione sobbed. “It was trying to take my robe. I was only pushing it away and.”
“Shh, it’s ok, ‘Mione. I’m sure it’s ok…”

Snape glared at us and laid the hurt… thing on the edge of the pool. He clacked at one of the things who ran off, hissing at Hermione as it went by. Snape was rubbing the things head, cooing at it, for lack of a better word.

The two creatures that had been undressing Ron finally finished, and joined the others with Snape at the edge of the pool. It looked for all the world like Quidditch practice, with a group of students huddled around somebody who had fallen off a broom. I almost expected Madam Pomfrey to walk through the door and shoo everyone away.

But the creature that walked through the doorway was most definitely not Madam Pomfrey. It was a taller version of the creatures, more manlike then they, clad in what was unquestionably a robe, with a bag over one shoulder. The messenger creature followed after, wringing its pale hands.

Snape stood and greeted the newcomer, speaking in that odd bird language, gesturing at the hurt thing and at us. The taller thing glanced at us, and then shook its feathery head. He gathered up the broken creature and left, not looking at us again.

Hermione sniffled and raised her head, composing herself. She addressed Snape. “I’m sorry I hurt him. I didn’t intend to. I didn’t realize that they had the same bone structure as birds. I swear that I barely grabbed his arm.”

Snape narrowed his eyes at her, then rose, holding one of the things in his arms like a toddler. It looked huge, clinging to him, but Snape didn’t look like he had any difficulty holding it. The rest of the creatures trailed after him, nervously shifting from one foot to the other. He reached us, and glared down his nose.

“These are Coraxis. They help us around the House. Rather like house elves, but, as they are much more intelligent, they are treated with respect.” He glared at Hermione. “As you wished the house elves to be at Hogwarts, I believe, girl. Is this how you would have treated them once you ‘freed’ them, Miss Granger? Maybe they were better off as they were, away from your tender mercies.” The thing in his arms cowered, tucking its head farther under Snape’s hair. He stroked its head, shushing it. “Now,” he said, his voice soft and kind to calm the Coraxis, “this little one is Dåvo. His nest mates are Janü, Tåri, Citer, Pa’t, and Sist. Citer is the one now languishing in the infirmary thanks to Miss Granger, mending and hoping that bone fragments don’t reach his brain. If he dies, the rest will likely follow suit. And all because they wanted you to be able to bathe without your filthy clothes. Pathetic, the lot of you.”
Snape’s voice broke cold over us, making me shiver. I looked over to the two Coraxis that I had thrown into the wall, and asked, hesitatingly, “Will the others be ok? I mean, I sort of—”

“I am aware of your little display of prowess, Mr. Potter. Târi and Janü inform me that they are fine, aside from a few bruises.” He set Dâvo down, waiting until the gray feet found purchase on the marble, and straightened up menacingly. “If you hurt them again you will sorely regret it. Now, I should just throw you three stinking children into a pen, but I promised you a bath, and I never break my promises.” His black eyes bored into me, daring me to challenge him.

I wanted to refute that, to laugh or curse him, to spit at his feet and call him a warlock a poisoner of wells. An oathbreaker. But his eyes sobered me, and I bit my tongue.

Two Coraxis pulled on my robe, trying to get me to bend so that they could take it off. I had thought I was to be spared the humiliation of undressing in front of Snape when I was spared the auction block, but Snape didn’t look like he was going anywhere. I glanced at him, thinking that, a few weeks ago, I would have died rather than look at this man, other than perhaps at the end of my wand; now I was going to undress in front of him.

Hermione was still crying, kneeling so that the Coraxis could get her jumper over her head. The three around her were trilling, petting her hair and rubbing at the smears of dirt that streaked her body. Apparently, they had forgiven her. I wondered if Citer would be so magnanimous.

“For Merlin’s sake, Potter, just give Târi your robe! I don’t have all day to wait while you decide whether or not to expose your physique to the rest of us. You’ve nothing we’ve not seen before, unless Lily was more adventurous than I believed and you sport some freakish deformity. No? Then strip.”

I glared at him and viciously jerked my clothes off, dropping them on the ground. At one point my robe ended up over Târi’s head, and the other one, Janü, I suppose, made a sound suspiciously like laughter as he pulled it off.

Soon enough I was naked, joining Ron and Hermione in bare silence. Snape was looking us over with a critical eye. I covered myself with my hands, uncomfortable under his black regard, but I still felt horribly exposed.

“Oh, just go bathe. I can’t even see what you look like under all that filth… although I’m guessing that a good portion of it won’t wash off. You three were Gryffindors, after all.”
I glared at him. Hell, I don’t think I had stopped glaring at him from before. I wondered what the 
maximum that you can glare was….

“Stop that, Potter, you look like you’re going to seize. Just bathe already. The higher pools are 
hotter. The Coraxis will bring you soap.

Hermione fled up the stairs and slipped into one of the steaming pools, a blush staining her pale 
skin. I caught myself admiring the look of her calves and… other parts as she ran. Over the past 
few months, we had lost some modesty due to the close conditions, but I had never seen her nude. 
My cock twitched.

“Nice isn’t she?” Snape said quietly in my ear. I started; how did he keep sneaking up on me? I 
refused to turn around and resolutely looked away from Hermione who, despite her 
embarrassment, looked rapturous to be in the hot water. I also resolutely put out of my mind that 
Snape was standing behind me, his leather robe brushing down my naked back and bum. “Oh, such 
the gentleman, now, after you’ve been caught peeking. Go on then, little gentleman, get in the 
water. Besides, the only one left to look at you… is me.”

A ghost of a touch, trailed down my back, so light it could have been the loose edge of his robe. 
But no leather was that hot, and the sharp edge of a fingernail catching at the light hairs dusting my 
arab was unmistakable. I jerked away from him, horror flooding my gut as I realized just what sort 
of nightmare we had been delivered into.

I moved to slap his hand away, but my wrist was caught tight in his hard fingers and twisted up 
behind my back. I bit back a cry.

“Ah, ah, Mr. Potter. No acting up. Now get in the pool.” He thrust me toward the stairs. I was 
halfway into the gloriously hot water before I realized that I had followed his order.

Hermione had her head back against the marble, languishing in the steaming water. Her eyes were 
shut, her hands making little ripples in the water. I stifled a moan as I slid down, maybe from the 
heat soaking into my sore flesh, maybe from the sight of her breasts bobbing gently in the water. 
As I settled in, I realized that the pool had sloped stone benches submerged within, and I slid into 
one of them gratefully, letting my own head fall backward as she had done. I set my glasses down 
on the edge of the pool, raising a handful of water to sluice over my face. This… this was 
wonderful. After all we had been through, me and Hermione and Ron…
RON! I sat upright, sending a small wave of water breaking over Hermione’s face. She sputtered indignity. I crawled to the edge of the pool and propped myself up so that I could see the room below. Snape was standing with his back to us, close to Ron, his dark bulk blocking my view of my friend. He was speaking into Ron’s ear, softly, and didn’t look to be threatening him in any way; but, remembering that light touch ghosting down my back, I was more than a little concerned. Ron was in no condition to defend himself...

As if he had heard my thoughts, Snape turned his head toward me and smiled darkly. I heard him end the puppetous charm, and saw Ron sag into his waiting arms. Snape’s dark head bent to Ron’s once more, the coal of his hair extinguishing Ron’s flame, and for one hideous moment I thought that Snape was kissing him, his head moving over Ron’s in a parody of a lover’s kiss. A sharp noise escaped me, shock or dismay making me cry out when fear did not, and Snape jerked his head back at the noise. He turned to face me, Ron still limp in his arms.

“Settle down, boy. I was trying to talk him out of this... ennui. But, if that makes you uncomfortable, than I suppose there’s only one thing to do.” And he hauled Ron over to the lowest (and presumably the coldest) pool and unceremoniously pushed him in.

“Ron!” Hermione yelled, scrambling up next to me in time to see his limp body hit the water with a splash.

Ron sank in the water, his pale limbs spread like a star as he sank deeper, his head lolling.

“God, Ron!” I yelled, pulling myself up onto the ledge and standing shakily. If I jumped out and to the left, I could just make it into the pool. Before I could even think about what would happen if I missed, if I hit the hard marble edge, I leapt, stretching out towards Ron as I fell, using the same muscles I used when I was on my broom to twist and direct my fall. But I had no magic to buoy me, and I was falling very fast. I barely managed to get myself vertical before I hit the water. It still was a terrible shock, jumping from the hot water of the upper pool and plunging into this one. I could tell right away that the water was much colder than I had thought, damn near freezing. For a few seconds I couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe as the water closed around me. Shock stilled my limbs into immobility, and I fought hard to move again. It would do neither of us any good for me to drown while trying to rescue Ron.

A shape cut the water to my left, filling my eyes with bubbles. When they cleared, I could see Hermione, moving effortlessly through the water, her limbs flashing in the gray twilight of underwater. She glanced my way, and her hair spread out around her head like seaweed. She motioned down, and I could just see Ron, deeper in the water. A column of bubbles rose from his mouth and streamed upward towards the light. I kicked feebly toward the surface; I had forgotten in my panic to save Ron that I wasn’t the best swimmer. My head broke the surface briefly, and I gulped air. Somehow the warmer air my feel colder, and I began to shiver. But I didn’t have time to be cold. I turned in the water, kicking down toward the shadowy forms of my best friends. I had to
I was filled with memories of the lake, of swimming down to find Ron, to save him, and seeing them both tied and lolling in the murky water. I yelled to them, kicking hard, hands cutting at the water viciously. But I had no gills, no fins. I wasn’t moving fast enough. The air in my lungs almost lifted me faster than I could swim down. I blew out hard, watching the bubbles stream past my head as I was suddenly sinking, cutting cleanly through the water to my friends.

But they were rising toward me, Hermione pushing Ron, who was kicking feebly. I sagged in relief. He was alive, conscious even. But we still had to get out of this pool.

As they reached me I grabbed Ron’s arm, and struck out for the surface. My lungs ached, burned. I had no air to expel, and my mind desperately battled my body’s urge to inhale. The cold was sinking in; as the initial adrenalin surge was used up, my body was slowly shutting down from the cold. My hands and feet flexed involuntarily, bones aching from the chill.

Ron wasn’t doing much better. I couldn’t tell for sure, but his lips looked blue from cold, and his arm felt stiff in my hand. Only a few moments more, a few feet...

We burst out of the water, our gasps echoing loudly in the air. Ron coughed hard, and gasped again, reaching weakly for the edge of the pool. Struggling, we managed to get to it and leaned tiredly on the marble. Hot dark hands closed on my arm, and I started feebly. Janü pulled at my arm, urging us towards the steps, and we crawled from the pool to collapse against the marble. We were all shivering.

When I finally had the strength to raise my head, Snape was gone.
Tāri and Janū wrapped us in large fluffy towels and got all three of us standing within moments. Ron was nearly blue with cold, and shivering so hard that I could hear his teeth chatter. Hermione and I were only a bit better off; my stomach was clenched with tremors, and Hermione had her arms wrapped around her middle, hugging her last bit of warmth to herself. I’m sure we looked pathetic.

The Coraxis managed to get us into a warm pool, not as hot as the upper one, which I think I was grateful for; although I knew the water couldn’t have been more than tepid, it felt burning hot. Ron gasped like he was being boiled alive as he slowly sank into the water. We all fell silent as we tried to absorb some warmth. After a few minutes, we were urged to a higher pool, and then another, as our body temperature climbed back to normal. Eventually we found ourselves in the uppermost pool, back against the warm marble, breathing the hot steam gratefully. Ron was the first to break the silence.

“Um... thanks. For back there. In the pool, I mean. I appreciate it, you jumping in and saving me, and all.”

I looked at him incredulously. “Like we were going to let you drown. I still owe you five for that chess game last week. Can’t renge on a bet just because you went and got yourself drowneded.

“Really, Ron,” Hermione added, shaking her head, “Do you think we could have just watched you drown?”

“Um...” His face was red, but it might have been from the hot water.

“You did! You thought we would let you drown! Why in god’s name would we let that happen?” Hermione’s eyes were wide, perplexed and angry.

“Well, you were so mad at me and I chewed off the nipple thing on that awful dummy and Harry had to kneel to that black-hearted bastard and George and Fred left and Hogwarts and everything and....” his eyes were wet, his words coming thick and fast, painful to hear. His voice dropped so
low I could barely hear him. “And I didn’t think anyone would care and I thought maybe that drowning wouldn’t be so bad.” He shuttered to a stop, his head down, hands clasped across his bony knees.

“Oh, Ron...” Hermione waded across to him, curling around his back to give him a hug. “I... We... Please don’t say that. Of course we care... You could have died...” She started to snuffle, burring her head in his neck to hide her face.

Ron looked at me helplessly as she began to cry. I shrugged, half smiling at his perpetual helplessness in the face of weepy women. I mouthed the words “Emotional female” without sound.

His somber face broke into a wide smile, and he mouthed back. “Must be PMT.”

As I had seldom known Hermione Granger to be ruled by anything but her steel-trap mind, this startled me into a laugh. She raised her head and looked at me quizzically. Somehow, seeing my two best friends, marked and bruised from months of capture, glazed in stubborn dirt and exhausted by death-defying leaps into cold water, curled up naked together in a Jacuzzi was too much for me, and I started to laugh.

I laughed. And I laughed. And then I laughed some more. Hermione was asking me questions, concerned, I’m sure, for my sanity. Ron just stared at me for a moment, then snickered. Then he started laughing too. I managed to stifle my laughter for a moment, just as Hermione said, “Oh, not you too!” and set us both off again.

I was laughing so hard I couldn’t breath, and some small, important part of my brain warned me not to go under water or it’d be the end of me. The thought that I could die laughing in a bathtub made me laugh harder. Ron’s face was bright red, and he hit the side of the pool repeatedly, gasping for breaths in-between his guffaws.

Hermione stood up on the bench, looking down at us. “You two jaybirds have finally gone mental. What the bloody hell’s so funny?”

I looked at Ron. Ron looked at me. And as a team, we tackled Hermione’s legs and pulled her underwater.

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When we finally managed to compose ourselves, our hands and feet were wrinkled from the water. Janü brought us some soap and facecloths, and we set to scouring six months of grime from our bodies. We scrubbed hedonistically, feeling clean and fresh for the first time in what seemed like forever. At one point I sat scrubbing Hermione’s back as she tried to get soap into her snarl of hair.

“Ow! Damnit. How can I get this rat’s nest out if I can’t even get soap into it?”

“It doesn’t even look like water’s getting into it, Hermione. Here, let me...” I took the soap from her and rubbed at the snarl. Ron wandered over and whistled lowly.

“Whena, ‘Mione. That’s pretty bad. You get gum in that, or something?”

“For your information, some of us have enough hair that we have to brush it on a regular basis. This is just- ow, Harry!- because I didn’t brush it.”

Ron ran his fingers through his longish hair. “I didn’t brush mine either, and it’s not all ratted.”

“Well, yours and Harry’s hair didn’t grow more than an inch the whole time we were in there.”

“Must be luck, I reckon.”

“Probably not, Ron. Aunt Petunia cut my hair many times, and it grew back overnight. So I don’t see why it we couldn’t have just thought it short. And anyway, it doesn’t matter why. Stop being a prat, Ron, and help me.” I tossed the soap at him, hitting him in the chest.

“Even Mr. Weasley’s illustrious help can’t get that Gordian knot out, Potter. It’ll have to come off.”

The three of us turned around so fast that our feet got tangled together and we fell backwards with a splash. By the time we got ourselves sorted, Snape had ascended the steps and was looming over the pool, hands once again folded across his chest. The fancy leather robe was gone, but a supple sheen on his current robe implied that it, too, was leather.
“Out of the pool, kiddies. You’ve an appointment to keep.”

We climbed out. As I put my glasses back on, I fought the instinct to cover my nakedness with my hands. Hermione didn’t look like she cared, and Ron didn’t even bother.

I sneered at Snape. “An appointment? What, another auction? Perhaps something less dignified… astoning, maybe? I mean, you can’t be much less civilized than you already are.”

Hermione nudged me, her eyes warning me not to go too far. But Snape just smirked a bit and pointed us towards a doorway in the marble wall.

The next room was some type of grooming facility. Stone benches covered with cushions stood at points around near walls, and beside three of them stood Coraxis, each holding a brush and a pair of scissors. Three more Coraxis stood near the door, talking amongst themselves.

“Haircuts? You, the big bad evil Death Eater, are making us get haircuts?” Ron laughed. “Oooo, what’s next? You going to force us to have our nails done?” Ron waved his gnawed fingers at Snape, who smiled a shark smile. His teeth were very white.

“Actually, Mr. Weasley, yours are going to have to grow a bit before your manicure.”

Ron’s face twisted up and he grimaced. “Cripes, Snape, I was joking. Sick bastard.”

A Coraxis pulled me over to a bench and pushed me into it. I looked at the one who was wrapping a fluffy towel around my shoulders and said, “Are you Tåri?”

It froze, then tipped its large head at me. One shiny black eye peered into mine, and I backed up a little. Its beak looked very big this close.

I tried again. “Tåri. Are you Tåri?” I pointed at myself, then at it, saying, “I’m Harry. Are you Tåri?”
From the other side of the room Snape said, “No, Mr. Potter. That’s Queig. Tåri is with his nest mate in the hospital wing. Queig, Shey, and Kiore will be attending you right now.”

“So, these are a different brood?” asked Hermione, studying the creature wrapping a towel around her.

“Yes, Miss Granger. Very keen observation. Now I suggest you all shut up and let the Coraxis commence with their work, as this day is only half done and I have much to do.”

“Oh. I see that we’re bothering you. We’ll just go then…” I stood, making for the door.

“Droll, Potter. Now sit down.”

I took my place on the bench again, wincing as Queig took a brush to my hair. I was brushed and trimmed, although I could tell by the little frustrated noises he was making that Queig could do no more for my hair than Aunt Petunia ever could. On the bench next to me I watched Hermione wince and struggle not to cry as her attendant cut away the lion’s share of her hair, removing the snarl. Snape watched with hooded eyes.

“Relax, Miss Granger. It’s only hair. I see no reason why you can’t sport the same length hair that your companions do. Indeed, anything longer on someone of your… station would be unseemly.”

“And what, precisely, is our station, Snape?” she said.

His dark eyes narrowed. “You are the newest novicii in House Corvus. Speaking of which, I suppose I should set down some rules for you. How can I expect you to behave properly if you don’t know the rules?”

Ron muttered something under his breath, but I didn’t catch what it was. Snape paced, back and forth in front of us, as he often had when he was teaching, and proceed to coolly lecture us on the terms of our slavery.

“You are property of House Corvus, and by extension, Our Lord. You are expected to comport yourselves at all times with the pride and poise that is expected as a member of our House. You no longer own any personal property; your holdings, possessions, and bodies now belong to Corvus.
You will no longer own or wear shoes, except as permitted by me or another of equal status. You will obey your trainers, overseers, and masters at all times. You have no rights, no privileges. I may do as I like with the lot of you.”

Ron had gone very red in the face. Hermione’s eyes were wide. I wasn’t affected so much. So far, aside from the shoe restriction, it sounded a lot like what I had grown up with. Snape continued, relentlessly.

“You will refer to me as sir, as you did before all of the… unpleasantness. But let me assure you,” he paused to glare at us, “I will brook no undue impertinence from the lot of you. I have been patient, so far, seeing as you are noviciii, but do not push me.”

He resumed pacing, his robe billowing out behind him. I watched, transfixed by his voice, as he laid out my life to come.

“You will not be separated, as of yet. I chose you as a set, and you will remain so. You will sleep in the Stabulum, but separate from the other slaves. Each morning you will sup, and then you will be delivered to me. In the morning we will begin.”

He stopped, looking critically at our hair. Queig spread his hands as if to say ‘what could I do?’ and chittered at Snape.

Snape snorted. “Of course not, of course not... Well, that’s as good as it’ll get for now, I suppose.” He chittered at the Coraxis by the door, who turned as a group and left the room. Snape ignored us, and quietly conversed with the remaining creatures in that clacking language of theirs.

Hermione was rubbing her hand through her newly shorn hair, muttering. “I could have gotten the snarl out with a little bit of time. He didn’t need to cut it off. ‘Suits my status’. Humph!”

“Actually, Hermione, I sort of like it,” I said sheepishly. She narrowed her eyes at me, searching for sarcasm. “No, really, I do! It’s sort of... modern.”
“Yeah. Plus you don’t look like a big bushy mess anymore.” Ron said innocently.

Hermione’s eyes flamed briefly, and Ron’s face split into a grin.

The Coraxis returned, each bearing a tray with a bowl and cup. My stomach clenched as the smell of food reached my nose, and I realized that I hadn’t eaten in hours.

Snape stopped the Coraxis from setting the trays down. “Food is a reward. Each of you must ask me to eat.” He stood, expectantly.

My stomach rumbled. “Um, can we eat, please?”

One black eyebrow climbed the sardonic face. “I’m sure that you are capable of it, Mr. Potter. Whether or not you can ask me properly is another matter. Try again.”

“May we eat, please?”

No answer. Snape reached over and dipped a spoon out of the bowl, sipping at it.

My mouth was full of saliva. “May we eat, please, sir?” The word was bitter on my tongue, but the smell of food was savory in my nostrils.

Snape’s eyes flared briefly, and he motioned to one of the waiting bird-things to bring me my tray. It was simple fare, chicken broth and cold pumpkin juice, accompanied by a thick slice of buttered bread. It tasted heavenly. Only when my mouth was full did I notice I was the only one eating.

Hermione was clearly wrestling with the words, but she managed to choke out “May I eat, sir?” A moment later she, too, was eating.

Ron sat, staring at our food. His mouth was pressed shut. I motioned toward Snape with my chin. Ron shook his head. He would not ask. Hermione looked at him, incredulously.
“You need to eat, Ron. Just ask him. It’s not like you have other options right now.”

He shook his head, his hair mostly unchanged by the trim. “Yes I do. I can starve.”

Snape strode over to him, lifting his chin with one finger. Ron stared defiantly at him.

“Mr. Weasley, if you do not ask me, you will starve. While I appreciate you following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, you have neither his stamina nor his force of will. Ask me for the food.”

“No.”

I chewed on the bread, urging Ron silently to do as Snape asked.

Snape dropped his hand, motioning to the remaining Coraxis to bring the food over. He picked up the bowl of soup and passed it under Ron’s face, letting the steam drift upwards. Ron rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, determinedly not looking at Snape or the food.

“Stubborn boy. You want it, don’t you? I bet your stomach is clenching, rumbling with hunger.”

Ron said nothing, ignoring Snape. I watched Snape smile, a cold twisting of his lips. He leaned closer to Ron, dipping a long finger in the soup and trailing it over Ron’s lip. I saw Ron’s hand clench in the towel covering his thigh. Snape smoothed more broth over Ron’s lip, his finger lingering there, pressing softly against Ron’s clenched mouth. “Isn’t it good? Can’t you taste it? Wouldn’t it be nice just to open your mouth, and lick the taste from your lips?”

I heard Ron’s stomach growl, loudly. But he didn’t move, just kept staring at the ceiling. Snape’s smile grew wider, and he dipped a bit of the bread into the soup, then brought it up to Ron’s mouth, painting the butter over his lips like glaze. Ron’s eyes slid shut, and his throat worked. I was frozen, watching, my breath catching in my throat. Hermione gave a little whimper of a sound.

Snape’s voice dropped into that tone, the one he used on George Weasley back before the auction. “All you have to do is ask, Ron. I’ll even make it easier. Just say ‘please, sir,’ and I’ll let you have.
They’re only two little words. You’ve even said them to me before. Just ask me. You only have to ask.”

Snape’s finger was pressing rhythmically on Ron’s lip, forcing tiny drops of soup into his mouth. Ron whimpered, shaking his head, his eyes pressed shut tightly. Snape leaned forward, his forehead touching Ron’s, and whispered to him too softly for us to hear, one hand moving up to cup the back of Ron’s head. Ron gasped and said, “Please, please sir. Please sir!”

Snape stepped back, smirking, and handed Ron the bowl. Ron gulped at the soup, eyes closed. I turned away.

We finished our meal in silence, Snape watching us with no discernible expression. When we were finished, the Coraxis took the bowls from us and retreated. We were alone with Snape. He asked us to stand, and we did. I noticed that I wasn’t the only one who kept my towel wrapped around me. Snape approached Ron, touching his hair softly and murmuring to him. Ron dropped to his knees, head bowed. I looked at Hermione, worried. What had Snape done to Ron?

Snape turned to Hermione, and spoke softly to her. She, too, dropped to her knees, looking surprised that she did so. He came towards me, tipping his head at my murderous look.

“What, Mr. Potter?”

“What did you do to them?” I spat, my hands clenched into fists at my side.

“Nothing I haven’t done to you, Mr. Potter. Only a bit of potion in the juice to make this next part… a bit easier.”

“You drugged us, you bastard!”

“Mr. Potter, you’ve been being drugged for nearly ten months. I’ve just changed the drug. Now, if you would, please follow your fellows’ example, and kneel.”

My knees buckled and I knelt. Once I was there, I couldn’t regain my feet. Even my head dropped obediently.
Snape stepped back, looking at our bowed figures. “Very nice. I think this will work out well, after all. You may raise your heads.”

I lifted my head, glaring at Snape, who approached Hermione and gently tugged the towel off her upper body. Her hands clenched in her lap as her breasts were bared to our gaze, but she said nothing. Snape withdrew a long length of black ribbon from his sleeve, and draped it around her shoulders, bringing the edges together in a point between her breasts. He pressed the edges together, murmuring into her ear, and they shimmered and melded together seamlessly. The whole ribbon writhed, then sank into Hermione’s skin, until it looked like nothing more than a thick black line drawn around her shoulders and down her chest. Snape pulled back to watch. Her eyes were wide, and her chest heaved as she gasped for breath.

Snape gazed impassively as the line pulsed with light. Black filaments shot from the edges, tracing over Hermione’s skin. It looked as if her veins had been traced with black ink as the magic spread and sank into her body. Thin, spidery lines crawled over her skin, up her neck and framed her scared eyes. They spread down, tracing her breasts, disappearing under the edges of the towel and resurfacing on her thighs. She wheezed, her hands curled into claws as she watched the filaments writh over her skin. With a flash, the black lines disappeared, leaving only the thick collar around her neck. Her eyes rolled back, and she pitched over backwards in a dead faint.

Snape caught her before she hit the floor, and lifted her onto the bench behind her. He turned to Ron, whose eyes widened as Snape drew another ribbon from his sleeve. I tried to call out as the process was repeated, but I could make no sound other than a hard breath. Ron jerked as the magic wound itself into his body, and fell backwards, seizing. Snape held his head off the ground and contained his flailing hands, chanting softly. With a huge sigh, Ron relaxed into unconsciousness. My breath was racing, and thought I might hyperventilate as Snape settled him on a bench and turned to me.

I tried jerking my head and shoulders away as he laid the ribbon around my neck, but his magic held me fast. He stared into my eyes for a long moment, before his hand, surprisingly hot, settled on my head. He leaned close and murmured into my ear. “Harold James Potter, I hereby take you as my slave and strip you of your name until such time as you have earned one. From now on you are a nameless body, an extension of my will made flesh. You will do what I tell you to do, say what I tell you to say. Your mind, body and soul belong to me. You are Corvaticta.”

My neck burned where the ribbon touched me, and the flame moved, spreading under my skin to etch itself into my flesh. I locked eyes with Snape, finding surprising strength in his dark orbs, as the magic wound into me. I could feel it dissolving me, destroying me. My neck muscles trembled, my vision grayed. As the darkness took me, I thought I saw sadness in Snape’s dark eyes.
Hot, scaly hands moved over my flesh, rubbing in some type of oil. I couldn’t move, couldn’t speak. I tried to open my eyes, but the swirling, blurry sight before my eyes didn’t mean anything to me. I realized mushily that I must still be drugged.

The hands smoothed in more oil, up my legs and across my stomach, kneading and pressing on my chest. It occurred to me that I was naked, but I didn’t care; the hands felt so indescribably good, seeking out knots and tight spots and massaging them away. I floated, rubbed by those hot, sharp hands for what seemed like ages, only managing to make the softest of noises as I was turned over. The whole process was repeated on my back, the hands pushing and kneading the knots out of my back and thighs. I shifted uncomfortably as hot oil slid over my arse, sliding between my cheeks and dripping onto my balls, but the hands moved to my feet, pressing the soles until I moaned softly in pleasure. I thought I heard a soft moan to my right, but when I managed to open one eye, all I could see was a light blob bisected by a darker one. I shut my eyes again, letting the hands flow up my body and down my arms, rubbing my hands.

I couldn’t even say how long it was before I was turned onto my back again and my legs were lifted into some sort of stirrups. Air caressed my cock, and I realized I was hard. Something at the back of my mind yelled at me to do something, to fight the haze around my mind, but I couldn’t muster the will to do so. The scaly hands rubbed at my ankles, wrapping warm cloth around them, binding them to the stirrups. My hands were lifted over my head, bound with more soft cloth and held to the bench.

Another set of hands, these large and smooth, slid up my body. I tried to open my eyes but could not. The hands circled around my nipples, sliding over them in tight circles. I moaned. One nipple was caught, rolled lightly in oily fingers, and my hips jerked. I felt my cock grow harder. The fingers pinched and rolled my nipples until I was moaning incessantly, my cock twitching on my stomach. Finally the hands left my chest, slipping down to my groin. I shifted my hips, trying to gain contact with my hard cock, but the hands circled down, dripping more hot oil on my balls, massaging the swollen sac softly. I groaned, writhing.

A hot finger slid behind them, between my oiled arse cheeks, and touched my hole lightly. I shifted away, trying to get more friction from the hand kneading me. The finger pressed lightly, then circled around, spreading more oil. I squirmed. The hand on my balls slid up, wrapping around my cock, and I almost wept with relief. I thrust into the slippery fist. The hand moved, sliding up my cock slowly, then twisting as it pressed down, forcing my foreskin to retract. The hand in my arse withdrew, and I felt more hot oil being dripped onto my cock. I heard a soft pinging sound, like a spoon in a glass of water, but the hand on my cock slid up again, bunching my foreskin over the head of my cock, and I yelped, my hips jutting up into the sensation.

The hand moved down, retracting my foreskin, and I groaned as it stopped just under the head,
holding me tightly. A pair of scaly hands settled onto my hips, holding them to the bench as something cold and slick touched the head of my cock. I jerked as more oil was dripped onto my cock-head, filling the tiny hole there. The cold slick thing pressed into the hole, sliding into me.

I yelled, trying to shift my hips away, trying to get the thing out of my cock. Too many hands held me down, and the thing slid inexorably deeper. I whimpered.

The hand on my cock began to move again, sliding up and down over the filled organ, transmuting the stinging pain back into pleasure. My head rocked from side to side as my cock was worked, faster and faster. The thing in my cock moved too, slowly pressing into me, then twisting as it pulled back a fraction, then advancing into me again. I felt my balls draw up, my breath shuttering out of me.

I could hear someone murmuring to me, soft, hot encouragement as my hips pumped, matching the speed of the hand fisted around me. I tensed, trying to come but unable to do so; the rod in my cock prevented any sort of release. I seized back arching, coming without ejaculating. But the hands did not stop, only sped up, as my cock jerked and trembled. My mouth was open in a silent scream as I felt myself building again, hips thudding against the bench. The rod in my cock suddenly vibrated hard, sending shockwaves though my body, and I came harder than I ever had in my life. My balls emptied as the rod vibrated and sucked away my semen. It seemed to go on forever, white waves of pleasure crashing over me again and again, and I convulsed, a last spastic shutter running through me before I collapsed.

The thing in my cock was removed before I could even twitch again, and my legs gently unbound and lowered. Exhaustion crept over me, making my body heavy as my breathing returned to normal. Somebody pulled a thick blanket over me, and I slept.

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Someone was shaking my shoulder. I groggily flung my hand out, muttering, “’m ‘wake. Quit it,” but the shaking didn’t stop. Eventually I managed to get an eye open, squinting.
“Harry, wake up! Honestly, why do you always have to be the last one up?” Hermione shook me again before noticing that my eye was open. “There you are. I was beginning to be worried.”

“What time zizzit?” I said, rubbing my hands across my face. My skin felt cool and smooth on my sleep-wrinkled face, soothing the sore spots.

“I don’t know. Maybe an hour after dawn? Listen, the Coraxis will be here soon; they’re waking people up in groups. We’re the only set left, now.”

I sat up, squinting at the light coming in the window. I was lying in a stall of some sort, with rough wooden walls ending abruptly halfway to the ceiling. The bedding beneath me looked like straw but wasn’t scratchy at all. Indeed, the softness of it invited me to lie back down and catch another bit of sleep, but Ron’s “Here they come” focused my attention.

Ron was standing at the door, leaning with folded arms on the half door. The fact that he was as naked as a mynah bird brought to my attention that I was too. And so was Hermione. I blushed and managed not to look at her chest.

Ron backed up as the door opened, and a bright-eyed Coraxis poked its head in. It nodded, presumably in approval, as it noted that we were already awake. Motioning with one dark hand, it turned and shuffled-hopped out to the main body of the ‘stable.’ Blinking, I followed my friends, trying not to yawn. The stable was larger than I had thought it was; a row of stalls ran along the long sidewalls, and the floor of the common area was of packed earth. Coraxis wandered here and there, some carrying cloths or bundles, others raking out the pens. I caught a glimpse of a human exiting the large door at the far end of the building, but he was gone before I could call out to him.

We were led to a bathing area, where I gratefully washed my face and brushed my teeth with the toiletries provided. I resolutely kept my eyes off of Hermione, who seemed as at ease with her nudity as Ron was. Was I the only one left with some modesty? I splashed warm water on face again, wondering at the slickness of my skin as I wiped at the water running down my chest. Must be left over soap from the pools, I thought.

The Coraxis briskly towed us off, then handed each of us some kind of garment. As usual, Hermione figured it out first; it was a kind of loincloth, with two long rectangles of black silky material suspended on a belt. She quickly belted hers on, adjusting it so that her front and back were adequately covered. “Well, it’s not proper dress, but I suppose it’s better than nothing at all.”
Ron’s face twisted, and he turned to the Coraxis. “That’s it?” He said incredulously, pointing a thumb at Hermione. “You want us to go walking about in just that kit? Bloody well freeze to death, we will!”

The Coraxis tipped its head at him, then cawed, as if Ron could understand him, twitching his hands back and forth. It paused; awaiting a response, then just shook its feathery head, and motioned us to follow it.

Ron and I quickly donned our ‘clothing’ and followed Hermione over to a large rectangular hole in the wall. The Coraxis motioned for us to stay there, while it ducked into a low door to the right of the window. Peering through, we could see that there was some kind of kitchen, where a handful of Coraxis busied themselves cleaning up. ‘Our’ Coraxis walked over to a pot on the stove and ladled out some porridge into a large bowl. After setting it on a tray, he poured a measure of milk on it, and reached into a huge canister for a handful of raisins. He looked over at us, head cocked.

“Maybe he’s asking if we want raisins?” I said.

“Depends on whose bowl that is. I like ‘um.” Ron said, and called “Hey, if that’s mine, you can put them in.”

The Coraxis twitched its free hand restlessly, then dumped in the handful of raisins. It grabbed a pitcher and filled it with water, set a cloth on the tray, and brought the whole thing to us, resting it on the ledge between the two rooms.

“Is this it? For all three of us?” Ron said incredibly, looking at the bowl. “There’s hardly enough for one of us, let alone all three!”

“Ron, calm down,” Hermione said. “I’m sure that this will be enough. Look at it this way; it’s more food than we got back in the big room, even if we do have to share it.”

“She’s right, Ron. Plus it’s hot. I don’t care if I do have to share, I’m eating it.”

Ron grumbled some more, but in the end he, too ate the porridge. It was surprisingly good, hot and filling, even if I did have to pick through the raisins. We laughed as we ate, because they didn’t give us any silverware, and we ate with our fingers. Hermione said that was how people in some native cultures ate, and demonstrated how. We teased her for a while about being an expert on eating with her fingers, and she mock-scowled at us.
When the porridge was done, we wiped our hands as best we could. I felt myself harden slightly as I watched Hermione’s pink tongue lap at her fingers, removing the last sticky bits of the porridge. I gulped and turned my head a little; I noticed that Ron did the same.

The Coraxis collected us as soon as we were done, and led us outside into bright sunlight. I winced, and squinted, trying to see where we were.

As I had thought, we were still on Hogwarts grounds, down near the stables where Hagrid kept all his creatures. I realized, belatedly, that we must have been sleeping in the stables themselves, though they had been thoroughly modified. Just the place for all the little animals.

The trek to the castle was made in silence. Hermione had her jaw clenched, and refused to look around, striding ahead behind the hopping bird thing, while Ron and I lagged behind noting the changes to the grounds. I shivered as I passed into the shadow of a long wall. I let my eyes wander up to the blasted goal posts, the tattered flags motionless in the morning air. Faint echoes of cheering and laughter still clung to this place, even after all this time. I looked away.

We didn’t go all the way up to the main doors, thankfully. I don’t think I could have handled that, seeing the grand doors of Hogwarts opened to the likes of the Death eaters. It was too much. The door we entered went directly to the dungeons, leading down half-remembered corridors and faintly damp hallways. The Coraxis seemed to know exactly where it was going. I saw Ron sneered at a door as we passed it, and I recognized belatedly that we had passed the entrance to Snape’s potion classroom. Where were we going?

A large door at the end of the next hall held my answer. Emblazoned with the same bird-in-chains motif as the main door to House Coraxis, this one stood slightly ajar, weak light spilling out onto our feet. The Coraxis held the door for us, but did not enter itself. It shut the door after we entered.

“Ah. There you are. Dallied over breakfast, did we? How lovely. Now, get over here” Snape was sitting at a large desk, writing with a long white quill. He did not look up. He looked so much like the Snape we thought we had known, quill in hand, marking papers as we labored over some obscure potion. He even looked to be wearing plain wool robes today, instead of those leather ones. We stopped in front of his desk.

“Well? We’re here. Now what?” I crossed my arms over my chest. Ron followed suit, taking advantage of the fact that he was taller than the seated man to glare down his nose at him.
“Oh, stop it, boy. I’ve had grander men than you glare at me, and I dare say that you will have a greater reason to glare at me in a few hours.” Snape finished his document with a flourish of the long quill, then set it aside to dry and pulled out another long sheet. Just as he was about to touch the pen to the paper again, he suddenly lifted his head to pierce us with his stare.

I felt his hot gaze on my face, my chest. My chin lifted and my shoulders squared, determined not to tremble before him. His lip twitched for a moment, then he scratched out a quick word on the parchment. His black eyes focused on Ron and Hermione in turn, and after each he wrote a word on the parchment. He then ignored us for a moment, writing a few sentences on the page before standing in one smooth motion, bringing the parchment and quill with him.

We turned to watch him as he came around the desk to stand in front of us.

“Now. I have some questions that you will answer to the best of your ability, do you understand?” He was writing on the parchment as he said this, supporting it with one large hand.

“No. While we were sleeping in the stables, Jenny Greenteeth came along and sucked out our brains. Of course we understand, you pompous ass.” I felt a spurt of adrenaline at talking back to him like this, as I always wanted to at school. Snape froze, as did Ron at my side. Hermione’s eyes opened wide.

Snape’s head turned impossibly slowly, his lips still, betraying no emotion. He slowly set the parchment and quill aside, and drew his wand from his robe. All deliberately, unbelievably slowly. I watched with detachment as the wand was centered on my chest, over the point of the collar he had dropped onto me last night. The end of the wand dug into my sternum, Snape’s eyes dug into my face.

“I told you, boy, that I would brook no impertinence from you. But you always push. Always have to see how much you can get away with, don’t you? Or perhaps…” and he leaned in, his face close to mine. I wanted to lean back, to shy away from this intimacy, but I did not. “Perhaps you crave the discipline. Tell me, boy, were you ever struck as a child?”

I tried for a smart answer, but my voice was stuck in my throat. I nodded faintly, finally moving my body away from his. He caught the back of my head in one hand, the fingers curling into my hair and holding me tight. I gasped faintly. His breath ghosted over my lips.

“Who hit you? What did you do?”
“I… My uncle Vernon… I. I don’t remember-”

His fist in my hair tightened. It didn’t hurt, exactly, but my scalp tingled. He spoke silkily in my ear. “Don’t remember, or don’t want to remember?”

“I… I don’t remember. Something I did. Something I did with magic.”

“And he hit you for this.”

I nodded again, as well as I could with his hand so tight in my hair. The pressure tightened again, pain blooming slowly at the back of my head. He tilted my head, his eyes roaming over my face. I felt exposed.

“You didn’t have a very care free childhood, did you boy? So many rules. So many restrictions. And then we drop you into a whole new world, full of freedom, and money, and friends. No wonder you were out of control; you weren’t raised into that life,” his face lowered, and I felt his lips touch my ear. I shivered, wanting to pull away, but I couldn’t move. “You were raised… into this one.” My eyes slid shut, another shiver working though me as his lips moved over my ear. His breath was loud so close to my skin. He whispered again, the words flowing right into my ear. “You understand consequences more than we gave you credit for, don’t you, boy? You didn’t think you could get away with all of your actions… and you didn’t want to. All you had to do was ask, you know. I could have given you what you wanted…”

The wand twitched, and he murmured something sibilant into my ear. And all at once, I was on fire.

Sensation rolled through me, starting from the wand, pulsing and throbbing. It hurt! God, it hurt, pressing and lighting all my nerves. It wasn’t the Cruciatus, not even close, but the pain was incredible. I arched into the wand.

When it was over I hung limp in Snape’s arms, wrung out. My face was wet with tears and I sobbed lightly, body pumping with endorphins. I could hear Hermione’s voice, yelling at Snape, demanding that he stop. I didn’t hear Ron.

Snape half carried me over to a corner of the room, pushing me onto low stool that bent forward,
resting my chest on the padded table in front of me. It was actually quite comfortable, and I tucked my legs under the stool to sit on the footrest. I signed, drying my face on the nubby cloth of the table.

I felt Snape’s hand let go of my hair, finally, and my scalp ached. I shut my eyes, not wanting to deal with the light as Snape stepped away. I could hear his voice, instructing Ron and Hermione onto the stools as he began his questioning again.

“Now, I believe I can leave him to rest, if you would be so kind as to answer some questions for me? Yes. How very kind of you. This shouldn’t take long…”

Ron and Hermione dully answered questions for what seemed to be a long time. About birthdays, and birthplaces. Siblings, parents, relatives. He questioned Hermione about her appendix surgery, and grilled Ron just as long about the time he spent recovering from an infected gnome bite. He pulled information out slowly, coaxing them to answer by starting with innocuous, innocent questions. Then came the questions he had asked me.

“Were you struck as a child?”

A beat of silence, then Ron’s voice, slightly huffy. “I don’t think you need to know that.”

“I need to know whatever I ask you, boy. Now, answer the question. Were you struck as a child?”

“Yes.” Said, but said sullenly.

“Often?”

“Often enough. It’s a house full of boys, what do you think?”

“Hmmm. And what, exactly, did you get hit with?”

“… mum’s spoon.”
“What was that, boy?”

“Mum’s spoon, alright? A long wooden spoon that she kept in the kitchen. Bloody personal question, innit?”

“Ron, don’t-”

A rustling noise, and I heard Hermione gasp. I raised my head, even though it felt like it was filled with iron. Snape had Hermione’s chin in his hand, two fingers in her mouth, holding her jaw open. His face was close to hers, and I could see her hands clench and tremble on the edges of the bench.

“What did you say, girl? What was that? I thought I heard you refer to this boy here with a name. He has no name, do you understand me?” He shook her head brutally with his hand, and I heard her muffled cry. “Do you understand me?”

She nodded shakily, and he gave her head a last shake before sliding his fingers from her mouth and dragging the wet digits across her face. “Now. I would wager that your parents did not believe in corporal punishment, did they, girl?”

Hermione shook her head, choking back tears as her fingers wiped at her face.

“As I thought. Now… Just a few more questions, and we can get on with our day. And I see that our friend has joined us in the land of wakefulness once again. Good.” He consulted the parchment again, and said, “Which of you are virgin?”

I was expecting this, but I still went cold when he said it. I saw Hermione raise her hand slowly, a blush slightly staining her cheeks. I, too raised my hand, Snape’s punishment still too fresh in my mind to think about disobeying. Ron kept his hands on the bench in front of him, smirking faintly. Snape snorted at him.

“Oh, how delightful. Some bint let you have your adolescent way with her, and you’re all proud of it. Very tasteful, boy. I’m sure that she had a night full of fantasy and romance. That is, if the oh-so-glamorous Astronomy tower was free for the night. Put your hands down, both of you. Now, then. I’m assuming that none of you have been active in the more passive role of homosexual encounters either, correct?”
That I wasn’t expecting, although I probably should have been. We all shook our heads, and Ron looked faintly ill.

“I see. Well, that’s going to make this more… interesting. Hmmm….,” Snape paced back and forth in front of us, hands clasped together across his back. “Well, no help for it. We’ll begin your training now, then.”

At this, Ron tried to stand up, but a word from Snape and our legs wouldn’t move from the stools, and my hands stuck fast to the bench. Snape turned and looked at us, then waved his hand languidly. “Oh, and no more talking. I don’t want to deal with your incessant chatter throughout this session.”

Ron was jerking wildly, mouth forming soundless curses. Hermione was stock still, face pale and drawn. I couldn’t seem to move either, and I wondered if I would be punished if I got sick.

A wave of Snape’s wand and the benches slid forward, propelling us out from the wall into the middle of his office, then moved so that the three of us faced each other. Snape circled around behind us, the wind from his passage stirring the back flap of my loincloth. I realized exactly how vulnerable I was in this position.

A wisp of smoke floated through the room, scenting it lightly. I shook my head, slightly disorientated from the movement of the bench. Snape stepped to the side so that we all could see him. He waited until Ron had stopped struggling before speaking.

“This will not be the most difficult part of your training, but I understand that it is something that you are unfamiliar with, so for the time being you will not be punished for resisting. But your bodies are mine, to do with as I wish, and I refuse to damage them because you believe you are too modest to subject to preparation. Today is merely a day to get used to the idea of taking a cock up your arse, and some basics.” This was said as if he was telling us to chop slugs for brewing, not laying out debasing actions. I turned my head and looked into Hermione’s embarrassed eyes. She blushed and dropped her head. Snape noticed, and tipped her head up with one finger under her chin.

“I warned you, girl, that you were not suited to this, but you elected to come anyway. Remember that, the first time I take you. Of the three of you, you alone had a choice in this.” Snape said, letting her head drop. He stepped back and looked at us for a moment, then twisted his head to look at Ron.
“I think you’re going to have the worst time with this, boy. Would you like to get it over with?”

Ron shook his head frantically, his red hair splaying out into a frame for wide eyes, but Snape advanced on him anyway. He touched Ron’s head for a moment, and frowned when he felt the tremors that I could see from where I sat.

“Relax, boy. You’re going to work yourself into a fine state if you don’t relax.”

Ron jerked his head away from Snape’s hand and glared at him. Snape just gazed down at him, then his hand snapped out and caught Ron’s head, slamming it down into the bench, where it remained, though I could see Ron straining to pull it up.

I tensed, thinking that Ron was hurt, but other than a great shuddering sigh that could have been a scream, Ron relented.

“Better. Now, deceive yourself into thinking this is a medical examination if you wish, but it would behoove you to accept your position and get used to it.” He crouched next to Ron’s head, stroking his fingers through the fringe of red hair that fell over Ron’s eyes. “This won’t be so awful, you know. Nothing drastic today. I’ll warn you before I do anything. First, though…” Snape stood again, moving around behind Ron. He waved his wand over Ron’s lower back, muttering a charm, and I saw Ron jerk hard, snorting air through his nose.

“Just a cleansing charm, boy. Get used to it.” Snape’s hand slipped his wand back into his robe, then came to rest on Ron’s back. Ron tensed. “Shhhhh. I’m just touching you. Relax.” His hands moved in large circles over Ron’s back, pressing and rubbing at the muscles.

I blinked at this surreal scene. We were in Snape’s office, mostly naked and at his mercy, and he was rubbing Ron’s back. Almost as if he was making this easier for him... I shook my head, trying to get rid of another flash of that unwarranted gratitude.

Snape leaned forward, massaging Ron’s back in earnest now, pale fingers working at the freckled skin, and Ron’s body seemed to relax into the bench more completely. Snape’s right hand slipped into his robe and returned with a length of black silk, which he draped over Ron’s head and shoulders. The contrast between his skin and the silk was startling, and for a moment I forgot who he was and just saw a body, pale and bent and anonymous.
Snape listened to Ron’s harsh breathing, and ran a soothing hand down his back. “Shhh, boy, just relax. No one can see you now, and you can’t see anyone. Just concentrate on my voice, and what you feel. No pain. Just sensation. Relax.” Snape flicked his wand at the wireless on the shelf behind his desk, and low music filled the room, a slow, heavy bass carrying the lighter tones of some foreign music. I could feel the drumbeats in my stomach.

Snape gathered a few things from a cabinet, and returned to Ron, who hadn’t moved at all. The scent rising from the oil Snape poured on his hands was tantalizingly familiar, but I couldn’t place it. I felt myself harden inexplicably at the smell. Snape’s hands once more moved over Ron’s back, smoothing in the oil as he worked at the knobs of Ron’s spine. I saw some of the tension remaining in Ron’s body release. Snape began thumping Ron’s back lightly in time with the music with bunched fingers, moving his hands up and then down Ron’s back. His hands mesmerized me.

By the time the hands moved low enough to touch Ron’s loincloth, I was hard as a rock, and hoping fervently that no one noticed. I couldn’t even figure out why I was hard, but the arousal was hot in me, making me press my thighs together, trying to relive some of the pressure on my cock.

Snape’s hands slid around Ron’s hips, pulling them backwards so that his arse hung over the edge of the stool. His bony hands slid under the loincloth, front and back, and I saw Ron give a great shiver. I almost moaned. This was sick, and violating, and wrong... but my cock was thumping with the music, and my eyes were glued to Snape’s wrists, disappearing under the silk of Ron’s loincloth, and the little jerky movements of Ron’s hips. Snape was whispering to him, leaning forward and speaking into his ear, through the cloth. I saw Ron nod.

Ron suddenly jerked forward, his head moving under the cloth, and he rocked, hips undulating back into Snape’s hand. Snape’s hands moved faster, his robe swishing faintly over the music as he worked. And as Ron spasmed, Snape raised his head and looked into my eyes.

I stopped breathing for a moment, caught by those dark orbs. My cock jerked, and for a second I thought I would come right there, just from the look in those eyes. I turned my head, looking away, trying to get ahold of myself.

Snape wiped his hands on a towel, and then stood for a moment petting Ron’s covered head. “Shhhh, now, it’s all over. You’re all right. Rest now.”

I gulped as he turned toward me, but he stepped around me to stand in front of Hermione. Her face was flushed, and she wasn’t looking up at all. “Are you nervous, girl? Is your stomach in a knot?” His hand slipped down her cheek, cupping under her chin and raising her head. She looked up at
him, lip caught between her teeth. His thumb teased her lip out from under her teeth, smoothing over it with the pad of this thumb. Her breath hitched. “Are you aroused? Did that make you hot, watching me make him come? Did you feel my hands on you while I touched him?” He smiled darkly, his thumb brushing over her lips again, and her little tongue came out and licked off the moisture.

I shifted and my bench groaned a little. Hermione’s eyes shot to me, and a crimson blush bloomed in her cheeks. She jerked her head away from Snape’s hand clenching her jaw. Snape’s eyes narrowed.

“Oh oh, so modest. None of that now. You both watched me with that boy. Don’t be shy now.”

Hermione scowled at him, and tried to move farther away from his hands. Snape sighed, pulling out another length of black silk. This one he bunched into a long strip and tied firmly over Hermione’s eyes, crossing it once and then draping the ends down her chest. The silk brushed across her breasts, and I saw her shiver. Snape picked up one of her hands and quickly bound it to the back of her neck with the cloth, then repeated the process with the other wrist. Her mouth worked for a moment, then her tongue came out again to wet her lips.

Snape moved behind her, pulling up a low stool. I watched as he cast the same cleansing spell on her that he did on Ron. Even seated he was taller than she was, and his eyes again locked on mine as he leaned forward, enveloping her in his arms. She jerked, trying to move out of the circle of his arms, but he held her fast. His hands splayed out on her belly, then moved upward, carefully avoiding her breasts to slide up her arms to the bent elbows, pressing them back and open, baring her chest to my gaze. When he let go of her elbows, she immediately tried to put them back down, but he forcefully pulled them open again.

“Leave them there, girl. Don’t cover yourself.” He finally looked away from me to slide his lips down the column of Hermione’s neck, nibbling at the juncture between neck and shoulder. Hermione shivered, and my eyes trained on the quivering flesh of her breasts. I squirmed in my seat, knowing that I shouldn’t be looking at her like this, but not able to help it. She looked so debauched, trussed up and blindfolded, arching unwillingly into Severus Snape’s hands as he ran them down her chest, circling them around her breasts again without touching them.

I whimpered soundlessly as he cupped them, his long pale fingers caging the white skin of her breasts. I knew that I should look away, but this was too good, too hot. Guilt burned in me almost as much as arousal as I watched Snape play her, his hands alternatively light and fast, then suddenly hard and brutal on her breasts. He dribbled oil onto her breasts, letting the drops slide down her skin before gathering them up with careful fingers and painting circles around her nipples with them. Her lips pursed and she jumped as he touched her nipples, and then she fell backwards against him as he rolled and pinched them.
That tantalizing smell floated through the air again, as he pushed the bench in front of her away, turning both of them towards me to give me a better show. His booted feet curled around her calves, pulling her legs wide. One of his skeleton hands walked down her belly to cup her through the silky material of her loincloth. His other never stopped tormenting her breasts. I shut my eyes, shaking hard, trying to think of Hermione as she should be; studious, pouring over books, or scolding Ron and I, but I could not banish the image as she was, spread out and wanton in Snape’s arms, arching against him.

I suddenly heard her cry out, and my eyes snapped open to see her, back arched as Snape’s hand worked between her legs. I moaned lowly, and the sound of it, combined with the little panting cries she was giving made a bit of wetness leak from me. Snape looked at me, his eyes dark. He bent to whisper something into Hermione’s ear, and she nodded frantically, arching her hips into his hand. As she arched, Snape slid forward and pulled her back, seating her on his thighs. He hoisted her legs up and over his thighs so that she was splayed open, body trembling under Snape’s determined hands.

I panted, squirming in my seat just as Hermione was squirming in his lap. His hand worked slowly under her loincloth, the silken material catching the light as he shifted. She cried out again, loudly, her hips thudding back onto his lap. Snape dribbled more oil on his fingers, and slipped them again under the cloth. Hermione tensed, her body arching away from his hand, and Snape murmured into her ear, his free hand stroking her face, her chest. A moment later she panted a bit, and arched into his hand, short, sharp cries falling from her lips as she did so.

Snape bent his head, nibbling again at her neck, and she seemed to relax again, her hips finding the rhythm she had lost before. My cock was so hard the silky material of my loincloth was driving me insane, and I grunted in time to her cries. Shame burned away in the face of this arousal.

Snape suddenly gripped her hair hard, pulling her head back as his hand sped up. She yelped, then moaned, a long drawn out sound that ended on a squeal, as Snape bit down on her neck. She arched, feet and toes curled tight, then jerked in his arms, sobbing.

I panted, hands clenched. If I thought I was aroused before, when Snape worked Ron, I was wrong. My eyes shut tight. I was so close to coming that my body was tensed, ready. All I needed was one little touch, but my cock bobbed in the air, untouched other than the maddening slide of my loincloth. I bounced my hips, hoping that I could nudge the underside of the bench, but my hips wouldn’t move from the seat.

A sudden noise made me open my eyes. Snape stood in front of me, arms crossed, smirking down at my discomfort.
“Is there a problem, boy? You look…. Uncomfortable.”

“I don’t know what you did to them, but I’ll be damned if you do it to me!” I growled, trying to get my breath.

His hand reached for my face, and I jerked back irritably. “Sod off, you bastard. Don't touch me.”

He tut-tutted, withdrawing his hand and moving behind me. I craned my neck, trying to see him. That smell washed over me a moment before I felt the warm oil slide down my shoulder, separating into two rivers, one down my chest and the other sliding down the skin of my back. My pulse, which had begun to slow, raced again as I got a full lungful of the scent of the stuff. I grunted.

I felt them, then, those bony hands, sliding down my shoulders to grip my upper arms. Dizziness washed over me, and I shook my head. “Stop it, Snape. Let go of me.”

He chuckled, his breath moving in my hair. “I hardly think you are in a position to give orders, boy. You’re going to stop complaining, and just sit there and take it. It’s not like you have a choice.”

I slammed my head back, feeling with vicious satisfaction the crunch as the back of my head made contact with his nose. The pain in my head was blinding, but his nose must have felt worse, for he pushed me away with a yelp and string of curses.

“Blasted boy! Little, foolish wretch! What will that get you, do you think?” He came around in front of me, blood streaming through his fingers cupped over his nose. His gaze shot daggers through me. His wand was out, and he rapped me across the face with it, bringing tears to my eyes. “And so you ask for punishment again. So be it.”

He turned and cast consopio on both Ron and Hermione, who wilted visibly into slumber. Then, hand still stemming the blood flowing from his nose, he returned to me, jerking my arms off the bench in front of me with one hand and crossing them behind my back, holding them tight against my spine. I couldn't seem to move them of my own violation, though I could feel my shoulders tensing sluggishly in response to my efforts. His other hand, wet with blood, grabbed the back of my neck, and between the two, he stood me up with very little trouble. My legs held me, but barely. I apparently had just enough control returned to me to keep me from collapsing into a
He leaned in, hair brushing across my shoulders, and I felt the hot patter of blood down my chest as he spoke. “My intention was never to have to resort to this, boy, but you are much more recalcitrant than your cohorts. I should have known, of course, but I suppose,” and he twisted my arms further up my back, causing me to wince, “that I was mistaken. No matter. While I had hoped to not need the vindicta or its chambers, I am not so naive as to leave them unprepared.”

With that slightly terrifying proclamation, he marched me to a door in the back of his chamber, which opened for us to pass through. The hallway we passed into was dark, and as soon as the door clanged shut behind us, it was darker. Magic tingled around my neck, in the collar. I forced down a bit of panic at the completeness of the darkness, but Snape didn't seem to have any problems with it, marching me quickly, then turning me to the right or left in the dark, as if to pick branching hallways or steer me around obstacles. The echoes of our footsteps, his booted and mine a soft shuffling, changed as we went from room, to hallway, to room. It heightened my fear, and I began to shorten my steps in the fear that he would misjudge the distance on whatever he was steering me around I would bark my toes. I heard him chuckle softly and grip the back of my neck tighter with his bloody, sticky hand. I found perverse comfort in its weight there.

He suddenly stopped and spun me around, my legs flailing as I lost my balance. I yelped as he let go of me as I fell, only to yelp again as he caught me mid turn and shoved me over a padded bench, about waist high. My heart, already thudding, clenched and beat harder. This was not good.

About that time I realized that he had never recast the charm that restricted my voice, and I began to plead with him. I know, not the most heroic of statements, but it was dark, and I was naked and bent over a bench with a man whose nose I had just broken. I hoped that history would forgive me for this little bit of cowardice.

“Snape, now, calm down. I’m sorry about the nose, really, I didn’t mean it. This is all just strange an-” My voice died mid word, the silencing spell taking hold once more, as he bound me to the bench with what felt like leather restraints, one around each wrist and two more around my thighs, binding them to the padded leather legs of the bench. I could hear Snape’s footsteps, retreating, echoing in what I was coming to realize was a much larger room than his office. Locks clicked, doors opened and shut. Bottles clinked, and I thought I heard him sigh softly. I strained my eyes in the dark, trying to make out anything. I couldn’t. I couldn’t even see the bench in front of my nose, and I was less than an inch from that.

More footsteps, coming closer. I felt the brush of his robe against my bare feet, and shivered. I felt a brief brush of magic centered in the black strip around my neck, and the quality of darkness changed.
“Lumos,” he said, and his wand flared to light inches from my face. I winced, snapping my eyes shut and dropping my head. That hurt, bastard! I said in my head, because I couldn’t say it out loud. My eyes ached, and I scrunched them repeatedly, trying to get the pain to lessen. His hand fist ed in my hair, dragging my head up, and I blinked into his face, blood stained and calm. He dragged my glasses from my face, folding them and setting them under the bench. I blinked at the blurred world, even more naked now.

“You got what you wanted, I suppose, boy. I’m angry. Bigger men than you have tried to make me lose my temper, and have not succeeded.” He touched a finger to my forehead, leaving a sticky red print. “But your family seems to have a gift… You, your father and your cursed godfather have all possessed this gift, and, like your godfather, you are about to see why making me angry is a Very Bad Idea.” He pushed my head down onto the bench as he stood, as if my skull was a convenient handhold.

He stepped away, and, although I tried to turn my head to follow his progress, my head wouldn’t turn. Damn spell!

All I could see now was a sliver of light on each side of my nose, and the light was dim with his wand light bobbing along, casting shadows across the ground. The light brightened, taking on the warm glow and flicker I associated with firelight, and in a moment I could hear it, small crackles of torches lighting up.

Long, horrible moments of silence, broken only by the crackle of a stray spark, rang in my ears. My toes curled and uncurled, my wrists chaffing in the restraints with my movements. I still couldn’t turn my head.

I tensed, feeling trapped, which of course I was, but more than that, I was terrified of what was coming. Who knew what Snape had planed for me here? Nothing good, I knew that much. The swish of his robe told me where he was, and I strained my body away from him as he came up to my side, the muscles in my neck knotting in vain trying to move my head. I felt his fingers, tips roughed with endless chopping, grinding, dissecting, smooth down my back. I jerked.

“Shh, boy. No help for it now,” he said, surprisingly gently. I tensed more, feeling his fingers lift my loincloth and lay it across my lower back. Magic tingled through my neck again, and the silky edge of the cloth hardened, molding itself to my skin. Snape knocked his knuckles against it, humming satisfactorily under his breath. “That is there to protect your kidneys and any other vital organs from being... disturbed.”

It was more than my kidneys being disturbed at the moment. I heard him mutter a charm, and suddenly my intestines were full of bubbles, fizzing madly. I snorted, just as Ron had; this was the
cleansing charm. I did feel rather... empty when the fizzing stopped, but the sense that I had just been violated was strong. I clenched my teeth, hands fisting as I imagined his face, bloody and broken. The image gave me little solace. The air washed over me as he stepped away.

“Now, as this was a major infraction, you normally would receive fifty, but, as you are not used to this sort of... discipline, I have decided to be merciful.” He paused, as if waiting for thanks. What could I give him, silenced and restrained as I was? I barely quashed the impulse to flip him off.

After a moment or two of silence, I heard a whistling sound. I gasped into the bench; I knew that sound. Surely he wasn’t going to cane me? Naked as I was, I would bleed if he did. The whistling came again, and I tensed, my muscles locking. A soft touch to my back, meant to reassure me, I’m sure, did nothing of the sort, and I flinched away from his hand.

“Shhh, boy,” he said again, “just let it happen. Yes, it’s going to hurt, and you’re going to bleed, but it won’t be for terribly long, and you’ll live. You’ve had worse. Relax.” His voice poured over me, dark and smooth, and fear roiled through my stomach. My breath hitched. He flattened his hand on my back, and I felt something cold touch my buttocks. He rubbed the cane across my ass, letting me feel the ridges as they scratched over me. Must be bamboo, I thought somewhat fuzzily, fear clouding my thoughts. Maybe if I passed out before it began he would spare me...

He took the hand on my back away, and I braced myself. I heard that whistling again, once… twice, and felt a whisper of breeze. My breath stopped again. My legs were trembling from the strain, my ass clenching and unclenching.

“Ready, boy?” Snape asked, and I couldn’t decide if the question was rhetorical or not. I couldn’t answer it, in any case.

A longer, protracted whistle, and I screamed silently as pain exploded across my rear. Another whistle, and another sharp sound as I was struck again. I writhed, tears springing to my eyes. On the third strike I managed to restrain myself from screaming, and it was on the pause between strikes that I realized that my ass, while burning furiously, did not feel as if it was bleeding. In fact, the pain was diffused, spread across a much wider area.

The fourth and fifth strokes confirmed my burgeoning suspicion, and I nearly sobbed with relief when I figured out that he was using his hand, not the cane, to punish me. The whistling noise was just to scare me. And it had worked; I had thought he was caning me for a few moments. Fear still pumped through my body.
The strokes continued, in groups of three, with a slight pause between them. My neck tingled. The relief I felt that I wasn’t being caned faded as the number of licks I took increased; this hurt, and my ass felt swollen. Every strike burned, pushed into my skin and up my spine to burst in my brain. I shut my eyes after a few moments, trying to breathe, and praying that it would be over soon.

The more I breathed, the more relaxed I found myself getting. The tension left my shoulders, and my feet thumped back onto the bench as I unclenched my thighs and calves. The blows continued, but I felt his robes as he stepped closer, and his hand settled again on my back. The whistling noises stopped.

The pain that blossomed on every strike stopped being a separate sensation, blending together into waves, and I breathed into them. I felt odd, disconnected. My stomach wriggled, almost as if I was being tickled instead of beaten. I sighed.

The blows paused again, a bit longer this time, and I felt his hand slide over my ass. I moaned under my breath, washed in pain and sensation. Another volley of blows, these concentrated on the split between my cheeks. I moaned again, writhing against the bench. And that’s when I realized that I was hard.

The thought should have shocked me, should have sickened me, but I was too far-gone to care. I began thrusting against the bench, pushing my hips up to meet his blows and down to the bench. It took me almost a moment to realize that he had stopped.

I whimpered, blindly seeking sensation, and the hand on my back rubbed in soft circles. I arched, wanting more.

“What a surprise you are, little one. This was not what I was expecting today,” he murmured. I licked my lips against the bench, tasting the leather, and salt, from tears or sweat I did not know.

A light touch on my ass, and I sucked in a breath. Warm slickness, rubbed across my burning skin, soothing and deepening the burn. I gasped, and the sound rang out in the room. The slickness dipped between my cheeks, rubbing lightly at my arsehole.

The sense of violation was back, but it an odd, perverted sort of way. Anticipation spiraled through me, and I pushed back toward his touch as much as I could. Another surprised chuckle.

“So you did deserve your Auraria Sphaerae, boy. I had my doubts...”
I trembled at his voice, the words themselves meaning little to me. His finger circled again, pressing a bit harder. The burn shot through the continuing warmth from the spanking, and I moaned.

His hand on my back slid down to touch my balls, and I tried to spread my thighs. The straps prevented me from doing more than shifting my hips a bit more.

A clinking sound, and both leg restraints fell free. I spread my legs greedily, still awash with sensation. His breath flowed over my ear as he leaned close. His hand squeezed my balls.

“Now, before I let you come, boy, you have to give me permission to penetrate you. You want to come, don’t you?”

I nodded as well as I could.

“Good... feels good, doesn’t it? Won’t it feel nice to let go...” the hand touching my balls slid up to my cock, pumping it with the slick liquid. I groaned again. His finger pushed more at my ass, and I spread my legs.

“Do I have your permission, then? May I penetrate you?” His fingers squeezed at the head of my cock.

I wailed my assent, and his hand sped up, stroking my cock in earnest. The burn from my beaten ass and the pleasure from my cock mixed, both becoming sharper, and I writhed, snapping my hips.

My calves trembled again, my toes curling. His thumb traced my balls, tight and high against my body. I was almost there...

His fingernails scratched down my sore flesh, and I yelped, jerking my hips away from him and then pushing back. His hand moved faster, encouraging my hips to move. I thrust against his hand, the pressure of his finger at my ass increasing. I wanted it all, couldn’t stand it any more. I panted as I pushed back onto his finger, feeling the muscles hold for a moment and then collapse, his bony finger sliding into me. I squealed, freezing, as my ass spasmed around his finger.
His hand on my cock slowed, stroking me slowly, and he murmured something against my skin. I breathed shallowly, panting, trying to recapture the feeling of being right on the cusp of orgasm.

His hand left my cock, and I felt more oil dribbling down onto my stretched ass. His finger moved, slowly, working the oil into me, the odd burn of penetration flowing down my legs to pool in my feet. I moaned.

A slick hand returned to my cock, and moved in unison with the finger in my ass. Pleasure, which had been subsumed in the initial rush of pain from my ass, rose again to swamp me. I began to pump my hips, wanting him to go faster. Back and fourth, caught between his hands, my mind shut down to the point that I didn’t even care that it was Snape touching me like this. Or maybe I did care; maybe that’s why his voice, murmuring encouragement against my shoulder, was driving me insane.

“That’s it. Yes. Take what you want. I can feel you, here, inside,” he raked his finger across my prostate, and I whined, throat tight. I was so close...

His hands moved faster, the pleasure building inside of me spiraling out of control. I grunted, pumping my hips into his hand, teetering on the edge.

His finger in my ass suddenly pulled out, and I arched, whimpering, only to scream as it returned with its mate to slam into me. His teeth clamped onto my shoulder as his fingers roughly pumped me, and the pain, combined with the pleasure of his hand on my cock, sent me over. I howled, coming hard, hips jerking wildly as I emptied into his hand. His teeth bit down harder on my shoulder, and I felt them break the skin, making me howl again, as I spasmed again, my back arching. His fingers pressed my prostate, forcing the last of my come out of me.

I lay, panting, his fingers still inside me, his hand motionless on my cock. Slowly he removed himself from me, his fingers sliding out, his hand releasing my cock. He pulled his head back, and I could feel the blood well and drip from the bite.

“See, little one,” he said, his tongue licking at the bite, “I told you you would bleed.”
My face felt swollen when I finally lifted it off the bench. My breathing had slowed to the point that I could take a breath without gasping, but I still felt slightly lightheaded. Snape walked around me, tinkering with bottles and putting things away.

I watched him for a moment, feeling my body twitch with aftershocks. I floated in a bubble of afterglow and disbelief; what the hell had just happened? I could feel the burn across my arse, and soreness inside that my mind shied away from. I knew what had happened, but I couldn’t believe it. My breath hitched as shame flooded over me. What was wrong with me that I reacted like that? Never mind that Snape had gotten both Ron and Hermione off; they weren’t beaten before hand.

I dropped my head. The feeling of alienation that I had battled my entire life was back; I was a freak. I felt like I should be crying, but I was too exhausted to do so. I felt wrung out, not just by the orgasm, but from the entire day; the first punishment at the end of Snape’s wand, the questions, the heady fear when we were walking to this place, the beating… and my acquiescence to my own defilement.

I sensed rather than heard Snape come up to me. His hand settled onto my back, just below my shoulders, and he rubbed softly.

“You didn’t have a choice, you know. I do what I do very well, and your responses were predictable, and controlled. I played you like I would an instrument, and I am a virtuoso at my craft.” His voice was soft, not the hot, commanding voice of before, but a gentler, kinder version. Part of me leapt for this excuse, this pardon of my actions; it wasn’t my fault, it was Snape’s…

But that part of me that tormented me my whole life whispered truths; that Snape did what he did because he could see something in me, something that would react the way he wanted. That I was somehow flawed, in a way that Ron and Hermione were not. The shame in my gut turned to lead, and I trembled with it.

Snape’s hand paused on my back, and I heard him sigh. A tingle of magic through my neck, and the loincloth laid across my back softened back into fabric and slithered back into place. His hands caught me beneath the arms, and slowly leaned me back till I was sitting on my knees on the bench. I kept my head down, eyes shut, knowing I should be fighting for freedom, but not being able to muster the energy. More guilt rolled over me. Some hero I turned out to be.
Once I was upright Snape stepped away for a moment, and I felt him come around in front of me. A glass was held to my lips, and I sipped without caring too much what it was. Maybe I was lucky and he was feeding me poison; at least then maybe I could expire quietly in this stone walled room and no one would have to see what a freak I was…

But it was only wine, and the acidity of it made me cough and my nose twitch. I pulled away, shaking my head. His fingers wiped up the spilled drops on my lips. I cracked my eyes open, feeling his amusement.

“Not a wine drinker, boy? Ah, no matter. This wine is swill anyway…” he turned and tossed the contents of the goblet into the fireplace, which flared briefly, casting his face into shadow. I blinked at the light. He urged me to stand, his hand cold on my arm from the goblet. I winced, the skin on my arse pulling tight as I tensed. He clucked a bit.

“Would you like something for that? I have a cream-” I shook my head vehemently; I didn’t want him to touch me again. And removing the pain would relegate what happened to some kind of dream. I clenched my ass cheeks, feeling the soreness with a kind of grim pride. He wouldn’t take this from me as well. His eyes were on me, appraising. I looked away.

And sucked in a breath, upon really seeing the room for the first time. This… this was a dungeon! A real, honest to goodness torture chamber. Along the walls there were wheels and racks, Saint Andrew’s crosses and shackles clipped to rings in the stone. I stepped back, into his body. His hands settled on my shoulder, and he turned me, letting me see the whole room. There were a few more benches and tables, festooned with ominous restraints and other implements of frighteningly unknown purpose. I felt rather sick, thinking about getting pleasure in such a place.

Snape’s breath touched my ear. “Yes, it is fearfully overdone, but one must keep up appearances, mustn’t we? But look closer…” He pushed me closer to the crossed wood in front of me, and I shrank away from it. His hand slid down my shoulder to my wrist, and he lifted my hand to the wood. While it looked rough and splintery, it felt satin smooth and cool against my fingers. His hand guided mine up to the leather restraint at the end of the beam, and I fingered the padding inside the cuff. “No more hurt than is planed, boy. It is the fear that is the important thing. The fear works more to undo a person than any of these tools,” and he stressed the word contemptuously, “ever could. It’s the fear that breaks a person down. It’s my job to put them back together again.”

He spun me around, looking into my eyes. “Do you understand me, boy? I don’t want to hurt you; that does nothing but bring you pain. You must learn my rules, and follow them, or I must punish you. But you know all about pain, and pain is not the best teacher.” His finger tipped my chin up, and his other hand caressed my throat. Fear spiked through me. “Next time you feel the need to
fight me, remember that I know you. I know what you are doing before you do it. And I will control you.” His hand tightened on my throat, and I grabbed at his arm, trying to pull him away.

“Pain won’t control you for long, and constant fear will only break you. So I will appeal to your logical and compassionate side. The next time you disobey me, it will not be you over the bench, it will be one of your companions.” My eyes widened. “Yes, think on that, will you? Your sweet little friends, bent and broken because of something you did. Crying out in pain and desperate apology, but they have nothing to atone for, and cannot stop the punishment. And do not think that I will bother with the kind of theatrical mental games that I played with you today; they will bleed, and it will not be my teeth that do it. Do we understand each other, boy?”

I nodded, mind flooded with images of Hermione screaming as the cane struck her, of Ron’s face red and sweating as blood dripped down his legs. I nodded again, squeezing my eyes shut. His hand tightened again around my throat, and I don’t think I was ever as afraid of him as I was right then. He could kill me, and that’s about the worst he could do to me. I was prepared to die, even if it was just to spite him and that pack of black bastards that he worked for, but I couldn’t let Ron and Hermione suffer when I could prevent it.

His hand let go, and I sucked in a breath, clenching and unclenching my hands. His palm stroked over my hair, and I looked up at him, feeling smaller and younger than I was. He was in control, now, completely. I might as well be under Imperio; I would do as he asked, because I really had no choice. He had won.

“Boy,” he said, and I watched emotions flit across his face. One of them looked like sadness. “I—” and he stopped, shaking his head. “Let’s go back.”

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We walked back to his office, through the labyrinth of corridors and hallways, my eyes barely making out the way in the perpetual twilight. Snape’s hand on my back guided me, pressing left or right. I wondered at his night vision…

The office didn’t look any different, really when we got back; the same desk with papers, the same benches arranged in the center of the room, the same still bodies suspended in spelled slumber.

Snape returned me to ‘my’ bench, and ended the spell holding Ron and Hermione asleep. Ron, always a quick riser, sat up quickly, the black silk cloth sliding from his head to pool across his hands. He looked at me in confusion, then at the cloth. He was always a bit confused in the
mornings… Soon enough, though, the memories of what occurred returned to him, and he blushed to the roots of his hair and looked away. That was all well and good; I was filled with guilt myself.

Turning my head I was caught by Hermione’s eyes. She was staring at me levelly, trying to figure out what had happened. Bright girl that she was, she knew that something had happened to me that was beyond her experience. I dropped my head; I couldn’t explain, and I didn’t want her pity anyway. Snape cleared his throat, and all three of us looked up at him.

He stood with his arms crossed, leaning on a counter. “If you are quite done with your naps, children, perhaps we can get some work done? Get over here.”

As we stood up to move over to him, I let the others go first; I was pretty sure my ass was still red, and I didn’t want them seeing it. Not that I was sure how I was going to prevent such a thing when I was wearing only a loincloth, but the shame still was hot in me. Snape showed us the collection of glass potion bottles, some empty, some unlabeled, some just dusty. There must have been almost a thousand of them, in boxes and shelves, piled on the counter and under the long work table. His instructions were simple.

“Sort these bottles by size and color, wash the empty ones and arrange them all neatly on the empty shelves behind you. Relabel like bottles with the supplies on that shelf, and I expect this to be done with a minimum of talking, and no breakage, do you understand me?”

I nodded mutely, and moved to begin. Snape walked away, and I heard him take his place at his desk and begin writing again. As the scratch scratch scratch of his quill resumed, Hermione snagged my arm.

“Are you alright?” she asked lowly, her lips barely moving.

I nodded, picking up another bottle. I just wanted to get going on this task, get it done and forget about the last hour. I heard Hermione gasp as I turned my back to her. I felt her fingers on my shoulder, on the sore spot where Snape bit me. Oh yeah. In turning away from her, I exposed my back, a roadmap of what had happened to me.

“Oh my god, Ha-” I turned and put my hand over her mouth before she could say my name, shaking my head. She nodded. “What happened to you? You’ve got blood all down your back, and-”
I was suddenly annoyed with her. Here I was trying very hard to forget what had happened, and she wanted to talk about it. “Not much different than what happened to you and him,” I said, jerking my head at Ron, who was standing next to Hermione, shifting from one foot to the other nervously. I saw him flush again, and look in surprise at Hermione and I; apparently he just realized that he was not alone in his ‘attentions’ from Snape.

“Yes,” I snapped at him, “we were touched too. You think that Snape was singling you out?” I snorted. “Hardly. Now let’s just sort these bottles out, shall we? I didn’t get a nap, and would like to sleep sometime soon.”

Both their eyes widened at my tone, and they exchanged a glance. Never mind that it must only be mid morning; I was exhausted. I picked at the bottles, collecting all that were squat and blue, with a round glass stopper.

Ron moved next to me, picking up the clear ones that had the odd little ripple across their lips. And Hermione, seeing that no more information was forthcoming, started sorting out the thin yellow ones.

It was a mind-numbing task. There were only six kinds of bottles, but they were scattered throughout the room, and were in various states of disrepair. It took us more than two hours just to sort the things out, and we still had the arduous task of fitting a stopper to each one, as three of the bottles all had a very similar stopper, and we had to test each one to make sure it fit correctly. And that was not even half the task.

By the time the bottles were washed, dried, relabeled and put away, my stomach was cramping with hunger. We had managed the whole thing in about five hours, if my internal clock was correct, and had only broken one bottle. Luckily it was an empty one, and Snape merely looked up and curled his lip at us before motioning us to continue.

When the last bottle was set on the shelf, and the last stopper firmly stopped the last throat, we stood, unsure of what to do. Snape was still writing at his desk. We stood in front of the sink, looking at each other and shrugging. At some point in the long task the uncomfortable tang between us melted away, and it was just another task, like a particularly boarding detention. We had even begun to joke, a bit, speculating about what was in these bottles, and why Snape had so many of them. Hermione had identified a few of the components in one of the bottles, but most of them were odorless and colorless. They could have been water, but for the fizzing the residue did when we washed out the empties. Luckily we followed proper potions class procedures for washing them out, and none of us had come in contact with the liquid.

Snape looked up eventually, when the constant clink of glassware was silenced. He squinted at us.
“Oh, you’re still here? You may go; one of the Coraxis will collect you once you leave by that door. I expect to see you here in the morning, same time. And do make an attempt to bathe, would you? You’re filthy.” And that was all. He went back to his writing as if we really were just at a detention. A spark of annoyance flared up, but I quickly squelched it as we made our way to the door.

Snape was right; a Coraxis did appear almost the instant that we stepped out of his office. The floor in the hall was much colder than his had been, and all of us hissed as our feet came in contact with it. We were forcibly reminded of our near-nakedness at that point.

The Coraxis, wearing, strangely, a kind of green vest that lay across its shoulders and down its back, bade us to follow it. We went a different way than we had come, back, up into light and warmth. I started as I realized that we were back into Hogwarts proper, out of the dungeons, and I could hear voices. But the Coraxis turned us down another hallway, and opened a door into what I realized was the old kitchens.

Steam billowed out. The Coraxis motioned us to go in, and we walked blindly into the steam. The door clanged shut behind us.

After a moment the steam cleared enough for us to see that we were indeed in the kitchens, and a pack of Coraxis, all soaking wet, were doing dishes. One looked up at us and motioned us over. My stomach rumbled as I caught sight of the food, piled in left over dishes. The Coraxis, also wearing that odd vest, this time in green with a blue trim, gestured to a pile of dishes, and we all groaned. We could see the pile, stretching back and away down the hallway. The other Coraxis who were doing dishes looked up at us and cackled; I suppose we were funny, standing there, steam beading on our dejected faces, hands already pruned from washing the bottles, facing a huge mound of dishes.

“Can we at least eat first?” I asked, pointing to the food.

The Coraxis in blue and green looked at me, twitching his hands. I pointed to the food again, then to my mouth. It clacked, then made a fist and tapped the front of its beak.

Hermione and I got it at the same time. We both tapped our lips with a fist, nodding. The Coraxis were speaking a kind of sign language; that’s what all the hand twitching was about! We could communicate with them… provided that we could figure out what they were saying…

But this was easy, and Ron blinked at us, tapping his lips after a moment. The Coraxis showed us
to a table, and there were huge platters of mostly untouched food, and we dug in, pulling bits off of this plate and that one, stuffing our faces. The steam didn’t even bother us after a few moments, and we laughed and joked, and tried to explain the concept of sign language to Ron. Apparently where was no English wizard equivalent, since deafness could mostly be overcome with magic.

“So you speak with your hands? Isn’t that confusing? I mean, there’s an awful lot of words…”

“It’s no different than any other language,” said Hermione. “You just have to learn it, that’s all.”

“But how’d we learn it without knowing what they're saying in the first place?”

“We just do, Red.” We had decided to refrain from using each other’s names, instead, Ron was Red, Hermione was Brown, and I was Black. I thought it bordered on our names, especially mine, but we needed something…

I licked lemon pudding off my fingers, nodding. “It’ll take a while, but we can do it. We already know ‘eat’ or ‘food’, and we can do a lot with just gesture. You know, like when we can’t talk in class, and we still manage to have a conversation.”

Ron grinned at that, and I remembered all those times that we had long conversations without saying a word in Potion’s class about what a prat Malfoy was.

I’m afraid we ate too much, and were rubbing our hands over our stomachs by the time the Coraxis came back. I smiled and pointed to the food, trying to thank it for letting us eat, but I don’t think I made myself clear. It led us back to the pile of dishes, which, unfortunately, did not seem much diminished in our absence. Sighing, we set to work.

This task took longer than the bottles, and, just as we were down to a few handfuls of plates, the Coraxis suddenly left the room, only to return with more dishes. Dinner had been served. We all groaned.

We finally finished, hours and hours after we had begun. My hands were prunes, wrinkled and roughened from the soap. Hermione’s chest, at the same height as the faucet that sprayed the hot water, was red from the constant heat. We were all soaked.
“Well,” Ron said as we finished the last dish, “we are clean…”

“Yeah, nothing like a seven hour bath,” I said, slicking my hands over my head.

“But that blood hasn’t washed off,” Hermione said.

“What?” I asked, looking over my shoulder. From what I could see, the bite was clean.

“Not that blood, the blood on your forehead and neck,” she explained, grabbing a rag and wiping at my forehead. “You’ve got fingerprints here, and a handprint on the back of your neck.”

I flushed, remembering Snape’s hand on me, leading me down the hall after I broke his nose. I grabbed the cloth away from her, scrubbing at my head and neck.

“What happened, really?” she murmured, using another rag to clean my neck.

“I don’t want to talk about it, really. Please stop asking me, alright?” I shut my eyes, shaking off her hand.

“Alright, alright… don’t shut us out, though, OK? We’re in this together…” I felt her hug me, and was surprised that the wet press of her breasts didn’t move me as much as the sentiment behind it. Ron moved in to hug me too, and the feel of their arms around me made me tremble. They.. they didn’t know, they didn’t understand about the chamber and the rack, the bench and the restraints… My shame and my fear.

I bit back a sob; they didn’t need yet another reason to be concerned about me. I had to make them understand, at least a little bit.

“Listen,” I said, pulling back from their embrace. “We need to do what Snape says. It’s just too risky to fight, right now.”

Ron looked at me like I was insane. “What are you talking about, Ha- I mean, Black? You wanna give up?”
I shook my head, “I… I just think that right it is dangerous right now. Too dangerous. We need to wait, to plan.”

Hermione looked like she was all for this. “He’s right, Red. Having a plan is always good. We can’t just mouth off all the time… Right?” and she nudged me. I nodded vehemently; I wouldn’t be mouthing off anytime soon. My mind supplied me another image of Hermione screaming and I suddenly caught her to me, hugging her desperately.

“Please, please, just… just do what he says, ok? I…” and I shut my eyes, rubbing my face into her hair. “Both of you… just don’t fight him. We can’t fight him…”

Her arms came up around me, and she held me as if I might break. “Alright. We won’t… What has happened to you? What did he do to you?”

But I had no answer for that, just holding her, and Ron too when he came closer. Just holding them, feeling them whole and safe, for now, and knowing that I had to keep them that way, that it was my responsibility to do so. No mater what Snape asked of me now, he would get it.

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For the next few weeks our lives followed a pattern. The Coraxis would wake us up last and give us something to eat. Then the trek to Snape’s office, where we would sit quietly while he worked. After a bit he would give us some menial task; chopping ingredients, making labels, washing bottles; anything and everything that required little brain power and much time. I fumed; all of these tasks could be completed in moments with magic, but Snape preferred that we do it.

After we completed whatever task we had been set to, the Coraxis would collect us, and we would trudge to the kitchen to wash dishes. Every day. It was awful. The only break in the monotony of water and china was the constant babble of conversation that we kept up; we had the freedom here
to talk about anything. And talk we did; about school, and our homes, and what we wish we were
doing instead of this. Sometimes the conversation was hard, and we’d turn away and just wash
dishes for a while. I caught Hermione crying more than once, but she never said anything. Ron’s
temper was taken out on the hapless dishes; sometimes he broke more than he washed. But there
seemed to be no punishment for this act of rebellion.

The Coraxis, once they figured out that we did not know their hand language, and that we wished
to learn, set about teaching us with a vengeance. At least two hours of every day we were pulled
aside from our washing to sit with one of them, who pointed at various things and taught us the
signs. Once we had a basic set of nouns and verbs, we slowly built on them, and, by the time about
six weeks had passed, we could communicate fairly well.

The interesting part of this language was that unlike most human sign languages, much of it could
be signed with very small movements of the hands, and therefore looked very much like just
random hand movements. We begin to be able to ‘talk’ in those moments when we were supposed
to be silent, waiting for Snape to give us our daily task. Ron maintained that Snape didn’t even
know the language existed, but I thought otherwise.

I’d catch him glancing at us, once in a while, mouth curved into a smirk or a snarl, depending on
what he was working on, I suppose. A few times he openly laughed, and I had the distinctly
unsettling feeling that he was laughing at us.

Like any pattern, this one soon rather lulled us into forgetting the time. We had become used to the
washing, the menial tasks. We became used to our near nakedness, and to the sometimes
unpleasant but necessary human functions that, with no privacy, we could not hide. We still slept in
the same stall, with the silky soft hay, and as the weather got slowly colder, we had a tendency to
migrate together in the night, sharing what body heat we had.

Which led to interesting mornings.

The first time I woke up wrapped around Hermione, with a very natural reaction to her near nudity,
I was horrified. But she tut-tutted, and told me not to worry about it, giving me some abbreviated
lecture about human male biology and hormones. She even confessed that she had reactions of her
own, although they were much more hidden. This did not help my ‘natural reaction’ to go away,
and I flopped backwards, waking Ron. Hermione was still lecturing; when Ron finally figured out
what we were talking about he blushed so hard we could see the flush spread clear down his
shoulders. Eventually even that aspect of human biology became familiar, and I no longer felt
ashamed at my natural reactions.

We became a bit complacent, comfortable in our tasks, and even Snape’s looming presence no
longer caused so much tension. He hadn’t so much as touched us since that first day, and had I not had a still healing bite on my shoulder to remind me, I might have blocked the entire incident from my mind.

That would soon prove to be impossible.

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Today we were sorting bottles again. The same bottles. Ron was convinced that Snape just magicked them dirty again to watch us sort them, but I think that somebody was using them. After all, there had to be a great number of people in the castle; where else would all those dishes come from?

We signed to each other when we had a chance, having strange little conversations that we translated in our heads; we didn’t know enough of the language to sign exactly what we meant, but we did alright.

Look at this bottle, signed Ron, flashing a blue flask at me, it’s the same as the one yesterday. Look at the chip.

Maybe, I signed back, keeping my hands close to my body so that Snape wouldn’t see, but even if it was, what does it matter?

He’s just messing with us. I bet that we could break every bottle and they’d all be back tomorrow.

What does that prove?, Hermione broke in, he’s still a wizard, even if he doesn’t do this himself. I agree with Black; somebody’s using these bottles. A lot of somebodies.

Ron kind of wriggled his fingers, the sign equivalent of a ‘harumph.’ I stifled a laugh as I went to pour out the contents of the clear bottle I held.

And yelped as hands suddenly clamped down on my wrists, turning the bottle up again and forcing me to set it down. Snape wrenched me around, snarling.
"Stupid wretch, are you not watching what you are doing? There’s still a puddle of water in that sink, and you were about to pour pure Black Mouth venom onto it? What were you thinking?” He let go of my hand long enough to slap me briskly across the face, more shocking than painful. "If you can’t pay attention, then you are unfit for this job. Go stand in the corner." He thrust me toward the stone wall behind his desk.

I looked at him incredulously. The corner? By god, what was I, two? I felt my face firming up into a defiant look, which Snape met with a raised eyebrow. I could see Ron and Hermione, staring between Snape, and I, and I opened my mouth to say something-

And winced as Snape gestured briefly, and remembered pain shivered down my spine. Snape’s eyes caught mine, and he shifted his eyes to Hermione and back.

I sighed, defeated. Shame weighing my steps, I turned and walked to the corner, leaning back against the wall.

"Nose in the corner, boy. You know better than that."

I reluctantly turned, catching Ron’s horrified look, and Hermione’s concerned but slightly amused one. Damn him.

The following hour was hell. I rested my head on the wall as much as I could, but the cold stone hurt my forehead, and I always pulled it back. Snape’s small, biting comments continued, sniping at me, and my friends. This was the most he had talked to us in weeks, and I wondered for a few moments why he was so worked up today. Usually he didn’t seem to mind our presence, and just treated us as if he would house elves; useful, but not something you really had any kind of meaningful connection with. His distance had been reassuring.

But today he was hurtful, bringing up school and our parents, although he never mentioned the war or our parts in it. And I could hear him rustle papers and open and shut drawers, his constant motion drowning out the clink of bottles as Ron and Hermione finished our task.

Eventually they were done, but today Snape did not dismiss us.

"Boy, get your nose out of that corner and get over here." Said as if it was my choice to be in the corner. But I just turned and went to him, where he stood in front of his desk, arms folded. He motioned to the benches along the wall, and one obediently slid out to stop behind each of us. I
went cold.

"Sit down, all of you. Don’t give me that look, boy," he said to Ron, "just do as you’re told."

We sat down, and I clenched my hands at my sides, refusing to put them on the upper part of the bench at chest height; last time I did that, I couldn’t move my hands. Snape smirked at me, then sat back against his desk, arms folded across his chest.

"Today," he drawled, "we are having a visitor. Someone who wants to see you, though I haven’t the foggiest idea why you three would be important to anyone anymore. But, even so, another Head of House is stopping by in less than an hour. And you will be on your best behavior." His face hardened. "The head of House Cerastae is a much harder taskmaster than I, children, and you would be best served by behaving well. You do not want him to think you… unruly." He stared at us, at me. His eyes bored into mine, as if he were telling me something terribly, terribly important. "If you are removed from House Corvus I cannot vouch for your treatment."

He walked in front of us, pulling our arms up to rest on the padded desktop in front of us, folding our fingers together in a semblance of attention. We looked like students, well, naked students, but we sat there, hands clasped and voices silenced by Snape’s will. I pulled futilely at the magic holding my hands to the desk.

Snape went back to his desk and wrote.

We couldn’t even speak in hand language; Snape had seen to that. We communicated in raised eyebrows and pursed lips, trying, I suppose, to reassure each other. The haze that had surrounded us for the last few weeks burned off in the face of this new threat; who was our visitor? And if he took us away, would we be separated? I vowed silently to put up with whatever treatment I was subjected to, if only to keep us together. I couldn’t lose them now, I just couldn’t.

But all my self-sacrificing thoughts were blown to hell when Snape’s door banged open and Lucius Malfoy strode in.

Ron, next to me, wigged. I could see him frantically pulling at the magic that bound him. I could see his eyes blaze from here. Hermione, too, reacted badly, the color draining from her face and her jaw setting so hard I thought she’d break her teeth.

Me? I was terrified.
Malfoy senior still haunted my nightmares. His quick, careless cruelty set the tone for much of the war between the Light and Dark, and he had sent many of our peers back to us, not dead, but in such torment that some of them had to be put down out of mercy. I remembered the blood, the grinding wheeze of breath when I carried Justin Finch-Fletchley down from where I found him, crumpled on the Ravenclaw battlements. I washed my hands for days, after, his hot tears staining me in a way that his blood had not. I didn’t go to the small funeral they had for him.

I tried to glare at him, but I could feel myself shivering. Snape could have warned us a bit better! But I suppose he did, and I took his warning to heart yet again; whatever had happened to us at Snape’s hands, it would be better than the treatment Malfoy would give us.

"Ah, there you are, Lucius, how delightful that you made it!” said Snape, rising to clasp Malfoy’s arms. "I had begun to think that you weren’t coming."

Malfoy smirked. "Begun to hope, I’m sure. How is your little ‘pet project’ coming, Severus?” Too bright eyes turned to us, malice and glee in their gray depths. "All dressed up, I see!"

"As befits their station,” Snape said quickly. I glared at him.

Malfoy strode around us, inspecting. I refused to turn my head to follow him, but Ron craned his neck, looking like he was going to spit. Malfoy barely paused and casually slapped him, leaving a red print across his face. I stiffened, a snarl curling my lip. Snape’s presence in front of me did little to divert my anger, and I glared daggers at Malfoy.

"So spirited still. And here I thought being your sex toys would break them. Do they fight you so when you are fucking them, Severus?” Malfoy turned his eyes to Snape, who waved the question off.

"As if I have much time for that. They are obedient, just startled by your arrival. After all it’s not every day that you are confronted by a conquering war hero, you know. They are justifiably ruffled."

Ruffled? I wanted to stab Malfoy, let his pure blood out upon these stones. I wanted to pound his aristocratic head in with a rock, with a bludger bat. My breath, already harsh, rushed out of me, and my anger was a living, breathing thing. I imagined Malfoy’s blond hair streaked with blood-
The potion bottles behind Snape rattled.

Snape glanced at them, then at me, motioning subtly for me to calm down. I glared at him too, the rage doubling at his pacifying gesture. My teeth ground.

A bottle launched itself off the shelf to shatter against Snape’s desk. Malfoy spun, green robes billowing around him. Another bottle flew, this time toward Malfoy’s head, and he shattered it with a spell. Another bottle flew at him, and he jumped out of the way. Behind him the cabinet doors rattled.

"Snape, you imbecile, you’ve left them whole? Control your creatures!"

Snape was in front of me in moments, hand in my hair and another around my jaw. He wrenched my head back, speaking into my ear. "Control yourself, boy. Or do you really wish to hear your pretty little companion scream?"

The rage turned instantly to fear, and the bottles dropped to the ground, shattering. Oh god, what was I doing? Snape was going to hurt them, make them bleed, all because I couldn’t control myself. My eyes were so open they ached, but I couldn’t close them. The trembling returned, and I thought I might faint. I choked on a sob.

Snape looked down on me for a long moment, an unidentifiable mix of emotions on his face. He shut my eyes with his fingers and let go of me, not touching the tear that escaped my eye. I had blown it, well and truly. My lack of control was going to destroy the only things I held dear anymore. I dropped my head.

Snape and Malfoy were arguing, quietly but fervently. I raised my head eventually, hearing snippets of conversation.

"…must be done."

"…no problems so far… docile, weak…"
"…incident proves my point!… you won’t, but I will…"

"…unnecessary step, hinders their usefulness…"

"…don’t make me put them down."

Snape stopped, just froze, and he turned to look Malfoy in the face. "That is not necessary."

Malfoy smirked, folding his hands slowly into his sleeves. "Then you will do it."

"Yes." Snape sounded angry, but composed.

"Do it now."

"Now? It takes preparation and-"

"Don’t lie to me, Severus. You know as well as I that you’ve had the tinctures ready since the day they got here. Get on with it."

Snape let a slight snarl escape before he caught it. I shivered; whatever Malfoy wanted Snape to do to us, it obviously wasn’t pleasant. And it terrified me that Snape didn’t want to do it. What could be so bad that even Snape balked at it?

Snape sighed heavily and held up his hands. "Alright, Lucius, I’ll do it this afternoon."

"Why not now? I’d love to watch." Malfoy sat down at Snape’s desk, crossing his feet on the papers neatly stacked on top. Snape shut his eyes briefly, but nodded.

"Very well. But you’ll have to forgive me if I put up a sound barrier; trade secrets and all that."
Malfoy waved his hand negligently, saying "Proceed, proceed. I wouldn’t want to use your methods anyway, I’m sure."

Snape moved toward us, tossing up a silencing spell that we could see shimmering in the air. He stopped, looking at us. "Do as I say and you will not be… permanently… damaged." He shut his eyes, rubbing one hand over his brow. "This will be… unpleasant. For all of us."

He looked at us, tipping his head this way and that, and finally sighed. "No other way to accomplish this, I suppose, unless you want Malfoy to help?"

We shook our heads, not knowing what we were getting into, but it had to be better than letting Malfoy touch us.

Snape nodded to himself, and waved his wand. I felt myself slipping into slumber immediately.

When I woke, I was afraid.

I wasn’t in Snape’s office anymore; I was in the vindicta’s chambers, where I had acted so shamelessly before. I was secured to an inverted wooden ‘V’ in the middle of the room, arms tied together above my head, legs lashed to the bottom posts. I was totally naked, my scant loincloth lying near my feet.

I rolled my head to the left, seeing Hermione in the same situation, with Ron on her far side.

Malfoy sat in a padded chair, facing us. The faint shimmer of the silencing spell distorted his features. Snape was just lowering his wand, presumably from waking us up. He turned away from my inquiring eyes.

Snape went to a cabinet and unlocked it, drawing out a set of beakers in a wooden holder. I jerked as he set them on the bench in front of us; not only were the beakers labeled with our names, our real names, but each one had a wand slipped into the space next to it. I felt the pull of my wand from here, and I panted. This had to be bad.

With a half-filled beaker in one hand and a wand in the other, Snape approached us. He stopped in front of Hermione, leaning in to whisper in her ear. She jerked in her bonds, fighting hard. Snape,
wand held loosely in his hand, stroked her hair off her forehead and spoke to her again, his voice soothing, though I couldn’t hear the words. Hermione's face crumpled and a tear fell onto her cheek. He set the beaker and wand down on the ground, and drew a small vial out of his robes. Touching a finger to the lip of the vial, he coated his finger, then touched her forehead, her temples. The base of her throat. I could see a faint sheen to whatever he was dabbing on her. A pause, then Snape painted her lips with the shining liquid, and I saw her lips compress in an effort not to let any into her mouth.

The anger was back, pulsing up out of me, the beakers rattling, but a quick look from Snape and I managed to quell it. Ron and Hermione were here because of me, because of my lack of control. I couldn’t make it worse; I had to control myself. I took a deep breath.

Snape stepped back, surveying Hermione’s body with a critical eye as he picked up the beaker and wand. After a moment’s contemplation, he dipped the wand into the green liquid in the beaker and began to write on her body.

I realized after a moment that it was Hermione’s wand.

The symbols he was drawing on her didn’t look familiar, and I couldn’t tell if the faint glowing was a trick of the light or not. But after a few minutes he stopped, setting her wand back in the beaker, setting the beaker in a holder between her feet.

Hermione cried through the entire ordeal, head down, short hair falling across her eyes. Snape went around behind her, catching her hair up in one hand and pulling her head back. He bit her neck, softly.

I watched, confused, as Snape ran his hands down her body, avoiding the carefully drawn runes. I kept expecting him to go for the whip or crop behind him on the wall, or to claw the delicate skin of Hermione’s back, but he did neither, just gently stroking her, shoulder to flank, flank to shoulder, hands roaming and stroking and touching. The glow was brighter in the runes.

Snape licked his way up Hermione’s neck, sucking at her earlobe as his fingers teased her breasts. She was still crying, but her tears were coupled with pants as Snape worked her body. I knew what she was feeling, that ill, shameful arousal, knowing that you shouldn’t want it, but not being able to help it.

I shut my eyes, but Snape had let her voice free, and she cried out whenever he touched her. I felt my body responding to her voice, and was mortified. I opened my eyes again when she yelped;
Snape had three fingers buried inside her pussy, and she writhed on them, her hips moving to his will. His other hand was behind her, and I knew, with pale certainty, where the rest of his fingers were. The runes were very bright.

Hermione’s voice rose, higher and higher, and I recognized the sound of her orgasm from the last time Snape had touched her. But her eyes were streaming tears, and she was shaking her head frantically back and fourth. Her body arched up, her throat working in a silent scream as she came. I felt sick.

Snape slowly withdrew his fingers from her pussy, cupping them around something that he dropped into the beaker with a tiny clink. He returned to the table, putting her beaker back, wiping his hands and her wand. He corked her beaker.

When he turned to me I think I understood why Hermione was crying. His face was terrible, as if what he was about to do was repugnant, even to him. I shook my head as he lifted a wand, the sight of it in his hand awful. I shook my head, pleading with him with my eyes. He looked away for a moment, then seemed to steel himself, and proceeded. But he went to Ron, not me, and I could hear Ron’s panicked breathing. Snape set the beaker down, and I recognized the battered end of Ron’s wand in the liquid. I shot my eyes to the other beaker, looking longingly at my wand. It jerked a fraction in the glass, spinning slowly around, but the liquid inside flared green, and it stillled.

I heard a sharp crack, and a curse, and looked up to see Ron, fighting Snape with every thing he had. One leg was held at an awkward angle, and Snape had his hands on it, immobilizing it with a conjured splint and trying to keep Ron from doing anymore damage. Snape was speaking to Ron, but I couldn’t hear what he was saying. Ron was crying, his face bright red and his jaw clenched. He surged against his bonds again, his unbroken other leg straining. Snape pulled back and slapped him, twice, his head snapping to one side then the other. He sagged in his bonds, his sobs pulling at my heart. Here then was my punishment; Snape was going to beat Ron, my best friend, for my actions. Guilt swam in my stomach, sank like a shroud into my chest.

Snape grabbed Ron’s chin, tipping it back and dripping liquid from the small vial into his open mouth. Ron coughed, but Snape closed his large hand over his lips and nose, and I saw Ron swallow. Snape stepped back. I watched Ron drop his head to his chest, breath wheezing. He was shaking.

After a moment Snape retrieved Ron’s wand from the beaker and drew the runes onto Ron’s skin, being careful not to touch his broken leg. He went slowly, one hand on Ron’s shoulder the entire time, the other marking him. He finished the last rune, and, as soon as the final downward stroke was completed, the entire set of them glowed green. Ron jerked slightly, and I saw a tear fall off his nose to splash on the stones. I felt my own tears then; I hadn’t even realized I was crying.
Snape set the wand down and lifted Ron’s face with both hands, thumbs smoothing the tears from his eyes. He murmured to him, and Ron shook his head, miserably. Snape pushed a bit of hair from his forehead and spoke again. Fresh tears spilled around his thumbs, and he tasted one, bringing it up to his lips and licking it off. His face closed up, whatever emotion he was feeling shut away, and he ran his hands down Ron’s body, soothing him. Ron lifted his head and mouthed something, and Snape leaned in for clarification, one hand brushing the black ribbon around Ron’s neck. I could hear the rasp of Ron’s whisper, and Snape nodded, pressing again on the ribbon as he turned back to the cabinet. He pulled a length of black fabric from a drawer, and slipped it over Ron’s head. Ron sighed, the shivers slowly fading.

I blinked, not understanding. Had Ron asked to be blindfolded? What exactly was going on here? Snape returned to touching Ron’s body, hands moving up and down, skimming over his chest to brush over his nipples. Ron jerked slightly, his stomach muscles contracting. Snape touched them again, fingernails slightly scratching, and I heard Ron take a breath. The rune’s glow brightened. When Snape pinched at a nipple, they flashed brighter. Ron arched back a bit. Snape’s hand slowly ran over Ron’s collarbones, slowly tracing the black ribbon under Ron’s skin. I could see the silky fabric of the hood move as Ron panted. And as Snape went around behind him, I saw that Ron’s cock was hard.

Snape slid his hands around Ron’s hip, one lightly encircling his cock, the other cupping his balls. His head moved back and forth across Ron’s shoulders, biting him lightly. My own healing bite mark tingled. I felt my cock twitch as Snape’s hand moved on Ron’s cock. Snape withdrew his hand and spit into it, slicking the moisture along Ron’s shaft and over the head, teasing the foreskin with sharp fingers. Ron thrust his hips into the hand. The other hand left Ron’s balls to slide back around his hip, and I heard Snape spit again. A moment, then Ron’s hips shot forward, his back arching. The hand around Ron’s cock tightened, and pulled him backward. Ron’s toes curled.

I was breathing hard. I was disturbingly, hurtfully aroused, watching Snape stroke Ron’s cock and presumably fuck his ass with those long, potion-stained fingers. I could smell the arousal in the air, a familiar scent, and I groaned silently. Snape was jerking his hand faster, the red head of Ron’s cock disappearing into the hand rhythmically. Without warning the room was filled with the sound of Ron’s fevered panting, punctuated with a sharp yelp every third thrust. My cock hardened further.

Snape let go of Ron’s cock and came around to his front, one hand remaining behind Ron. Ron began to plead.

"Please, stop, please, please, please. So close… you have to stop, I can’t, not without… I can’t…” His voice was muffled only slightly by the hood. He sounded strained, defeated. Snape wrapped his hands around Ron’s cock again, jerking him brutally. The runes were points of fire on Ron’s skin. Ron tensed, muscles locking.
Suddenly Snape dropped to his knees, engulfing Ron’s cock in his mouth. I jerked, surprised. Ron screamed, his back arching as Snape sucked, and he thrashed his head. The glow from the runes brightened so much it was hard to look at them, but I kept my watering eyes locked on Snape. Ron came hard, and I could see Snape’s throat working, one hand kneading Ron’s balls. The brightness of the runes seemed to rush towards Ron’s hips and then with a flash they were gone. Ron sobbed low in his throat, a keening, broken sound.

Snape pulled back, one hand wiped on Ron’s discarded loincloth, the other reaching for the beaker. I watched as Snape worked his lips for a moment, then spit something hard and shiny into the beaker. It clinked softly as it hit the bottom. Snape brought the beaker back to the counter, setting it back into its holder with a tired sigh. He looked over toward Malfoy, and I thought I could see Malfoy’s hand moving under his robe. I grimaced, disgusted at the thought of Malfoy getting off on… whatever had just happened.

Snape rested his palms on the desk, his head bowed. He looked miserable. I shut my eyes, not wanting to feel any pity for this monster of a man. I was no longer sure that this was my punishment. Snape had done something to both Hermione and Ron, and I wasn’t sure if I wanted to avoid the process myself; whatever they were going through, I wanted to be there, to be with them. But I wanted to help them too, and-

My circular musings were cut short by Snape’s hand cupping my chin. I opened my eyes to find his only inches away. I blinked.

"Listen to me, boy. This isn’t something I want to do, but your behavior has forced me into it. Try to relax; the spell isn’t going to hurt you, but you will find some discomfort in it. After all, it is removing your magic." He stepped away.

I froze, a chill raining over me. Removing my magic? He was going to take my magic away? My breath started again with a wheeze, and my heart thumped painfully against my ribs. I shook my head. No. Of course he didn’t say that. He couldn’t. They couldn’t. It couldn’t be done. I am my magic, it was a part of me, it can’t just be removed, like a shoe or an appendix. I shook my head again, and again, my control washing away as I saw him pick up my wand from the beaker. He was going to steal my magic, and he was going to us my own wand to do it.

"No!" I screamed silently, my hands clenching and unclenching. I tried to kick out at him, and felt the chain around my ankle creak. Black spots danced in my vision as I hyperventilated. I couldn’t live without my magic, it would destroy me to lose it, I couldn’t just- I banged my head back against the wood holding me, and the black spots increased. Slam. Bastard, you bastard, you can’t do it if I’m dead, you sodding git. Slam. I’ll knock my own brains out, slam, howdoyoulikethat, you sonofabitch? SLAM.
My vision swam out of focus, and I watched Snape move like one of those old movies. Frame: Snape standing with my wand. Frame: Snape’s robe billowing as he turned away. Frame: Snape moving toward me, face slightly panicked. Frame: Snape yelling in my ear.

But I was fading, the blackness pulling my vision away, and I ignored his voice as I fell gratefully into what I thought was death.

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I awoke sometime later in darkness. I was still tied to the "V", but now I was strapped at forehead, shoulder, hip and knee as well. I couldn’t move at all. The darkness was hot, and I realized that I had a blindfold on. My head was muzzy.

I could smell that incense for a fraction of a second before my nose was pinched and a vial placed against my lips. Bitter liquid filled my mouth. A sharp touch to my neck made me swallow automatically, and I coughed as the potion dissipated before hitting my stomach. I groaned as arousal flooded my body, cock instantly hard and aching. My skin felt on fire.

Cold line against my stomach, and I realized that I was not dead, and that Snape was going to do it, going to steal away my magic. I couldn’t move; even without being tied down I felt as if my muscles were limp. I couldn’t even move my fingers. A soft noise escaped me.

Snape continued drawing the runes, the feel of the wand, my wand, torturous on my skin. It wanted to help me, not hurt me, and I ached for its presence. It had been so long…

It seemed to take forever, and no time at all. At last Snape stopped, and I felt him move backwards. My cock twitched again, and I hated it suddenly, hated my whole body, for being born magical and giving me a taste of all of this and then taking it away. I yearned to be a Muggle, and never to have known the joy of anything magical. I would never fly again.

Snape’s slick hand slid around my cock, and the pleasure hurt me, tore me up. I cried. I cried for everything, for not being able to help Ron, or Hermione. For not killing Voldemort in the times I had met him. For bringing him back. For everything. I cried for the loss of my magic as Severus Snape brought me to orgasm with his rough hand.
I could feel the spell working inside me, pulling me in two. I felt like it was peeling something from inside me, like the skin from my body, and the places that it touched were left raw and sore. Snape’s slick fingers slid into my ass, pressing it open and slipping inside, working more hurtful pleasure out of me. I felt myself tensing, even if I didn’t want to, and I strove to feel nothing…

But his fingers pressed on my prostate, a sharp burst of pleasure ripping through me, and I could feel the spell gathering, quickening. I could almost see the light through the blindfold as Snape sped up, his hand clenching hard over my cock as his fingers fucked my ass. I was close, and I hated myself at that moment.

I hung on the edge for an eternity, my willpower holding back even as Snape growled in my ear, and his hands became rougher, harder. He forced another finger inside of me, this one dry, and I welcomed the hot pain. Unfortunately my body tensed another notch, and I could feel the spell tighten. Snape paused for a fraction of a second, then slammed his fingers hard into me, tearing me slightly just as his teeth came down on the junction of my neck and shoulder.

I screamed as the pain ripped into me, and I felt myself coming, the spell rushing and bunching up at my hips for a moment before pouring out of me, the light inside my head blinding. I felt like I was falling, being split in two, one Harry rushing out into Snape’s hand and the other falling into a dark, empty hole. I wanted to be the Harry that was left in the light, but I was not.

Just before I passed out I heard a tiny ‘clink.’

I didn’t want to open my eyes. I didn’t. Not that the darkness behind my eyelids was comforting, far from it, but I just couldn’t bear to open my eyes and see the world again. I could tell it was out there, waiting for me. I could feel cloth against my cheek, my back. Some kind of bed, or cot, I decided, and despised the world for existing. Why should it exist, why now? What use did I have for time? What was the point? I had stopped existing the moment my magic had left me, and floated in a timeless place, numb, empty, and alone.

Only, not alone. Not exactly. I could hear somebody crying, a soft voice whispering consoling words. The sound twisted me up, made my stomach knot with feeling, and with a shuddering rush the numbness left, leaving in its wake pain and anger. I surged upright, only to be thrown down
again by some force, and suddenly I was fighting against the restraining magic, snarling and kicking. I dimly registered Hermione’s voice calling out to me, but it didn’t matter. This churning kickingscreaming anger was real, hot and heavy and burning inside me, and I reveled in it, arching my back and slamming my feet against the confinement again and again and there was an odd little crunch that I somehow identified as bones breaking in my feet and the pain was absolutely magnificent and I did it again, and again, and-...

A shock of cold water brought me to a screaming halt, frozen arched on my shoulders and heels, soaked to the skin. I thudded back down into the mattress after a moment, breathing shallowly, small pieces of ice sliding down my skin as they melted. I felt as if I had been punched in the midsection, the air forced out of me and I couldn’t get it back. A few heartbeats later I was dry again, though still cold, and burning hot hands wrenched me into a seated position.

"Stupid boy, what exactly do you think you will accomplishing with that little scene? You could have beaten yourself to death had I not been in here at the precise moment you decided to batter your brains out. But we’ve already established that you," and his hand slid up into my hair, wrenching my head up, "are a remarkably idiotic child, so perhaps you hadn't thought of that, in your frantic desire to fight a simple restraint spell." I kept my eyes shut, not trusting myself to look at him. I could feel his gaze moving across my face like spiders on my skin, but I would not look at him. A moment of silence, then I was released, and I heard his footsteps growing fainter, and then the creak and click of a door closing.

Silence, broken periodically by my shallow gasps. I finally managed to curl up around myself, arms feeling as though they were going to break any second. My feet throbbed, a thumping swollen feeling that made me want to retch. I slowly pressed them together, getting my bearings.

I cracked my eyes open, the bright light searing. It hurt, and I opened my eyes more fully, wriggling my toes to feel the bones in my feet grind together. The light burned and faded, and I could see my surroundings.

Hermione was on a bed about three feet from me, curled against the headboard, chin on her knees and arms wrapped around her legs. She was watching me, her lips pursed and eyebrows drawn down. She looked angry. Just behind her I could see Ron lying on his back, staring at the ceiling. He wasn’t moving, but I could see the slow rise and fall of his chest.

"All right?" I said finally, not able to stand the silence any longer. My voice was a harsh, rasping thing, and it felt like it was clawing its way out of my throat. I raised one hand to touch my neck, realizing that I must have been screaming for some time for my voice to be this far gone. Hermione’s hands lifted from her legs, and she signed at me.
Use your hands, Black, or your voice will never heal.

"So?" I said, rather enjoying the way my voice sounded. It fit the new me, raspy and broken, a thing once whole destroyed.

Don’t be melodramatic. I need your help.

"With what?" I said, raising one eyebrow.

Red’s.... he’s not doing well. He’s been lying there like that for hours. I’m afraid that he’s gone catatonic again.

"Don’t particularly blame him, now do I? I would’ve had a nice psychotic breakdown there myself had somebody not stopped me. And I don’t particularly feel any gratitude that I was stopped. How come you’re so calm anyway?"

She rubbed one hand through her hair and looked away for a moment. When she looked back her face looked pinched, like she was holding something back. She didn’t answer me right away, asking instead, can you feel it? Where it used to be? Inside of you?

My stomach clenched, and I shut my eyes for a long second. I could feel it; a grasping, empty pit of a thing inside me, raw and bleeding. It felt exactly how I would think loosing a major internal organ would feel. I swallowed down the bile that rose in my throat and nodded wordlessly. She made an impatient noise, and I opened my eyes again.

She hesitated a long moment, looking beaten and miserable, before signing, I can’t.

I sat up, a faint hope blossoming in my chest. I switched to sign; my throat really did hurt dreadfully. Maybe it didn’t-

She shook her head, a tear shaken from her eye wetting the way for the others. No. It’s gone. I can’t… she looked around for a moment, then she concentrated hard, holding her hand over an edge of the blanket. I could see her tremble with the strain, but the blanket didn’t so much as quiver. Hermione always was able to do a bit of wandless magic; her magic was gone if she couldn’t move that scrap. She tried again, her hand shaking, before sagging down over her knees,
her hand open and empty on the blanket. I heard her pull in a shaky breath before she straightened up again. Her face looked so tight I thought the skin might split, spilling her pain out onto her cheeks the way her tears were sliding there.

It’s gone. But I can’t feel it. Not like Red said he can, nor you. Maybe… and she stopped, looking away wretchedly, maybe it wasn’t really a big part of me, you know? Not like it was part of you and Red-

"No," I croaked, aching to use her name, but not daring to. "Listen, you’ve got – had - ," and I saw her shudder, "more magic in you than all of Hufflepuff put together, ok?" My voice was failing, fading off into a harsh whisper, and I swallowed against the ache. The pain in my feet distracted me, and I wriggled my toes again, switching back to sign. You are a wonderful witch. Really. Maybe it’s because you’re a girl. Girls have a higher pain threshold, you said. Maybe you’re just dealing with it better.

She snorted, looking up at me. Don’t feed me that pap, Black, you know-

But whatever it was I knew was forever lost as Snape came back into the room.

"I’m glad that at least two of you are functional. I see that your companion is proving unable to adapt to change yet again. I trust that I will not have to resort to the method I used the last time to bring him out of it, hm?" He stalked over to Ron’s bed, reaching through the faintly visible restraining field to haul Ron into a seated position before slapping him briskly across the face. Ron sputtered after the first slap, and tried to defend himself, putting his arms up. He glared at Snape, rubbing at his red cheek.

"Better. Now, we have much to discuss. If you would sit on the trunks at the edge of your beds, please? The barrier will let you go that far. Quickly now; we’ve much to cover." He snapped his fingers at us while arranging himself at a desk that faced our set of beds. I hadn’t noticed it. Indeed, I hadn’t noticed anything past our set of beds. I climbed slowly over the footboard to perch on the trunk, which was cold. I hissed as my swollen feet hit the wood, and Snape shot a glance at me.

"Those hurt, I suppose? Well, I will deal with them later. Try not to let them go gangrenous in the mean time, please. I rather prefer you whole."

I wanted to spit that I didn’t care how he rather preferred me, but it occurred to me that I rather preferred me whole, too.

Snape steepled his fingers on the desk, staring at us. We had gained weight in the last weeks,
filling out a bit from our near starvation of the previous months. We looked decidedly healthier, though we still had the extreme paleness of northern Europeans after a long winter. Aside from the brief exposure to some bit of sun on the walk up to the castle, we had been without sun for most of eight months. I was almost as pale as Ron, and Hermione’s brown hair had darkened almost to black. Snape must have liked what he saw, however, as he had an odd little smile around his lips.

"Now. We are at a bit of an impasse, I confess. I have taken steps to neutralize your effectiveness as weapons, but you still possess free will. I could strip that from you as well," and he paused, one eyebrow raised at our sudden tenseness, "but that would be cheating. I have a better proposal."

He swept out of the chair, robes billowing around him, to stand in front of us. He held three rolled parchments, each tied with a black ribbon, in one large hand. I stared at them, at the ribbons that slid down his fingers to dangle under his palm. Each had a tiny silver raven attached to the end, and the small flock of them floated in lazy patterns, dipping and swirling, as if catching thermals that could not exist. "If you sign them, you will agree to cooperate fully with your training, without fighting or the least voluntary resistance on your part from this point on.

This means submitting to me willingly in all matters, including but not limited to; sexually, socially, and magically. I cannot, of course, ask emotional obedience from you, as you surely do not possess the self control to keep a leash on your emotions at this point, but I trust that you will act as though you were in control of them. They will act as a geis; you will be unable to refuse a direct order from the holder of the contract. The contracts shall be retained by myself only, non transferable, though I retain the right to temporarily transfer ownership to others, provided that you are returned to me with no permanent damage. I also claim rights to your virginity, in the case of two of you, your complete virginity, and in the third what virginity you retain, to use in whatever manner I desire."

He stood there, contracts held out, as if he expected us to jump for them. We stared at him in varying degrees of shock. I was the first to break, and the hoot of laughter that escaped me set Ron off, and suddenly we were all laughing hysterically. I thumped my feet on the trunk, and the pain made me laugh harder, until I could barely breathe. Tears were running down my face, and half my gasps were sobs instead of guffaws. Hermione, next to me, was bouncing up and down on her rump, hand stuffed in her mouth, and Ron was shaking silently, hands clenched around his stomach. I thought he might be about to vomit.

Snape let us laugh for a moment, then silenced us with a slash of his hand. Our laughter stopped as if it had never began, and we blinked under the magic’s sobering influence. "Yes, yes, very amusing. Now, there are some less pleasant aspects to the contract-"
Snape smirked at my tone, but deftly untied the parchments, being careful of the silver birds, and handed one to each of us. I took mine with some trepidation, half expecting it to bite me, or burn me, or do something else awful. Ron wouldn’t take his, but Hermione snatched hers up and unrolled it so fast I could hear the tiny birds squawk in protest.

I couldn’t really make heads nor tales of it; it was all Party of the first part, second part and third part, party of the Master part and so on. I could see Hermione’s lips moving faintly as she waded through the double talk.

"Wait a tick, this says that you can experiment on us? In what way?"

Snape’s smirk deepened. "In whatever way I want to, of course. Mostly to test potions, I suspect. I need a new lab rat; might as well have three."

Hermione paled, blinking. She read through the contract again, and then carefully re-rolled it. She shook her head slowly. "Put them down. They aren't valid if we don’t sign them willingly."

I shot a look at Snape. "Why on earth would we sign that willingly? Are you mad?"

"No. I’m afraid that I am perfectly sane. You will sign them."

"Or what?" Ron shot back. "You’ll make us your unwilling slaves? Wait, you already have!"

Snape flicked a finger at Ron and he fell backward, pain contorting his features for a few seconds before he sat back up, rubbing at his joints. "Watch your tongue, boy. No, you will sign them because I have something you want."

"And what is that?" I asked, my voice raspy and dark. "What we want that contract explicitly takes away."

"No, no, boy. I have what you want more than your freedom. I have your families."
Snape left us to think about it. If we signed, Ron would see his brothers and Hermione would receive confirmation that her parents were all right. She even gets to see Crookshanks, though why the kneezel was even being held was beyond me. The only family that I knew was alive (at least, at the time of my imprisonment) was Sirius but Snape wouldn’t give me a yeah or nay on seeing him. In fact, there was no reason for me to sign at all, save the fact that Snape would take all or none of us. We sat there for a moment, Ron looking at his parchment, Hermione carefully not looking at me. I could tell they had already made up their minds.

"It’s good enough," I rasped. "You get what you need. I’ll sign it. I know how important it is to you."

"But-" Hermione started, but I cut her off.

"No. Don’t make me defend this insanity, all right? Just agree and leave it alone." I huddled on my trunk, arms wrapped round my knees. I just couldn’t look at Ron’s pleading face anymore, even if he wasn’t looking at me.

Snape came back in, bearing a small stack of dishes and a quill. He set them down and turned to us, brushing his hands on his robe. "I trust you will sign?"

We nodded, and he smiled, shaking his head. "Gryffindor loyalty to the end. Well then. Who’s first?" He picked up one small dish, sprinkled a pinch of powder into it, and approached Ron. "You gain the most from this little endeavor, boy. You should go first."

Ron shrugged and reached out for the quill, but Snape held it away from him. "Ah ah, boy. This is a magical contract. You don’t think ink would be good enough, do you?"

"I suppose we sign them in blood, then?" Ron’s voice didn’t waver; he sounded resigned without any of the derision or scorn that had flavored his tone since we got here. I realized with a shock that Ron really was going to submit to Snape; he wasn’t just signing the contract, he was signing the contract. I almost called out for him not to do it, but I couldn’t make it that hard for him. Who was I to tell him when to stop fighting?

Snape’s face was oddly still, and with another shock I realized that he wasn’t smirking or angry. I could count on one hand the times that I had seen him without one or both of those expressions;
they seemed to be his default state. But for now he looked... resigned. Almost as much as Ron did.

What exactly was going on here?

"In a manner of speaking. I, being the master, will sign in blood. You however, hold a different position, and another vital fluid is needed for you." He looked pointedly at Ron’s crotch.

Hermione choked. Ron blinked, his face comical. "I do hope you’re talking the piss, ‘cause there’s no way-"

Snape sighed and gestured, and Ron’s voice stopped abruptly. "Apparently you haven’t been paying attention. Yes, I am speaking about semen, and yes there is a way; you will bring yourself to completion in just a moment. If you are having trouble with motivation, I can help with that."

Now that was a terrifying thought. But Snape was merely dabbing a bit of oil on his finger, which he then touched to Ron’s upper lip. Ron inhaled sharply, and I could see his loincloth suddenly move. "That should be enough motivation. Get to it."

Ron glanced at us out of the corner of his eye, blushing madly. Snape snorted, a bit of the smirk coming back.

"Get used to it. In a moment they will do the same thing, and I can assure you that this will be on the low end of the spectrum of shame in comparison to the rest of your training, should you look at it that way. Now, in terms you are familiar with; wank."

Ron shut his eyes tight, and the hand that he moved up to push the hair out of his eyes briefly twitched. I’m sorry, it said. His other hand crept down under his loincloth, and he hissed lowly as he touched himself. His hips bucked up, and Snape, standing not a foot from him, made a little noise.

"This will never work. Stand up."

Ron looked up at him, then stood slowly, unfolding his long limbs and climbing up on the trunk. Snape made another impatient sound and flicked the straps holding Ron’s loincloth on his thin hips. He hissed a little bit as the material slid down his cock, but didn’t reach out to catch it. Snape
tapped Ron’s hand, and it was suddenly shining with clear, viscous liquid. I knew I should look away, but I didn’t. I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Hermione’s eyes were glued to Ron’s fist as he slowly pumped himself. I felt perversely grateful that I wasn’t the only one. Even Snape seemed to be completely focused on the erection a foot from his chin, and for a second I thought that Snape was going to catch it in his mouth again, as he had when Snape had taken out mag-

I had to stop that train of thought; the pool of despair was still there, waiting under the surface of this semi-calm semi-acceptance. I forced myself to not think about it, and instead found myself watching Ron, watching his fist move on himself, the hunch of his shoulders. I could hear his little noises, breathy gasps and what I thought would be moans had Snape not stilled his voice.

He was panting, his mouth half open, and I saw his tongue slip out for a moment as he shut his eyes. Snape suddenly moved, fitting his hand over Ron’s mouth and forcing him to breath through his nose. The startled inhale this produced made Ron jerk his hips, and I realized that the oil was still there, and every inhale was making him harder, hotter. I gulped a little; the constant feelings of shame and anger and guilt were being worn away, a bit, leaving me this kind of heavy acceptance, and really, Ron did look rather hot, eyes squeezed shut, nostrils flaring as he fought to hang on. Snape leaned in, speaking lowly, and I could just barely make out his words...

"That’s it, boy. Yes, that feels good... how long has it been? Haven’t been touching yourself much, have you? Been all pent up, seeing her breasts next to you when you wake up, seeing his arse move under that cloth, aren’t you? Lying there in the night, trying so hard not to let them know that your cock is hard, trying not to rub against that smooth skin, to touch that messy hair... How many times did you get off, muffling your cries in the hay? They’re watching you now. Don’t you feel their eyes on you?"

Ron’s eyes shot open, looking at Hermione, then me. His eyes locked on mine, and I dimly realized that he was coming, his body jerking. His eyes rolled back and he dropped his head, breathing hard. Snape turned away, stirring his little dish, his clothes and hands impeccably neat. Ron slowly sat down on the trunk, slumping over the footboard. He looked exhausted.

Snape picked up another dish and walked over to Hermione. She looked up at him, pink cheeked but determined.

"And how, exactly do you expect me to fill that dish?"

Snape looked at her, then shook his head. "Yes, yes, I know your gender, and I know at least some of your habits when you orgasm. You so far have shown no predisposition toward female ejaculation, so we will have to make some... concessions. Stand up please."
Female ejaculation? What the hell is that, I thought, but was honest enough to realize that the concept of watching her masturbate made me even warmer than I already was. I didn’t want to dwell on Ron’s face, eyes wide and near surprised as he came, gaze locked on mine-

Snape had drawn his wand and he was now muttering a spell, touching Hermione’s lower belly, then the little cup. I could see a shimmering thread form between the two, and I wondered what exactly would be appearing in the cup.

"Well, girl, go ahead."

She didn’t move. She just stood there, looking at him with an almost comical expression on her face. She’s nervous, I thought. Very nervous.

Snape blinked at her, then barked a laugh. "You’re kidding. No, of course you’re not. You have no idea how to get yourself off, do you? With all your vaulted knowledge, you lack even the most basic facts about your own body. Typical cerebral-focused bookworm." He said, setting the cup on the floor. He pushed her backward, tripping her over the footboard. She squealed and bounced onto the bed, arms and legs akimbo. The thin, glittering stream that connected her to the bowl arched through the air, a silvery tether spooling out from her stomach. Snape followed her like a great black bird, and had her arms over her head and held tight in one hand before she got her bearings back.

He clucked at her as she began to fight, and she gave a great sigh and stopped fighting him, though she was far from relaxed.

"Now then, if you don’t know how to do it, I will teach you, but now is not the time. For now you will get off in the quickest manner possible, even if it is not as satisfying as it could be. Spread your legs, please."

I could see her blush, see it start in her chest and flow up her face and down her breasts. Even the dip of her stomach turned faintly pink. Snape sighed when she didn’t move.

"Don’t make this difficult, girl. You just watched a long time friend come on my hand, and you’ve been sleeping next to both of them nearly naked for weeks. All this is is a bit of pleasure. And you need to get used to me touching you; this is really very minor. Now spread your legs." And he tapped her thighs with his wand.
She turned her face into his arm, hiding all but the swell of one pink cheek. Her thighs dropped open, and he pushed them wider, pulling her loincloth up. He tapped his wand once on her stomach, and it began to hum. He slowly brought the wand down till it the tip just disappeared between her thighs. The angle of her body hid exactly what he was doing, but I could hear a soft thrumming, and her body jerked. I met Ron’s eyes over the bulk of the bodies on the middle bed, and he blinked at me before giving me a kind of half smile, half smirk.

I couldn’t help it, and I laughed quietly. Hermione didn’t hear me, but Snape’s head came up, and he looked at me.

Just looked at me, but the jocularity seeped down into my belly and turned to thick, dark anticipation. His arm moved in little rocking motions, and I could hear her now, crying out into his shoulder, her hands clenching and unclenching, her hips following his motions. The thrumming got a bit louder, and Snape’s look slowly deepened, his chin dropping, and I couldn’t look away from those dark eyes, the music of Hermione panting and groaning a backdrop for whatever was going on between he and I. I sucked in a breath, cock hardening under my loincloth, and I heard her cry out at the same time Snape smiled.

I ground my feet into the cold wood of the trunk, hoping to center myself, but the pain that shot up my legs just made me harder. I shuddered.

Snape unfurled himself from the bed, leaving Hermione there, spread and panting. He wiped his now silent wand over her belly, leaving a glistening trail, and scooped the little cup off the floor, bearing it back to the desk where he stirred it slowly. I followed him with a half suppressed hungry gaze, lust thick in my head. I didn’t really understand any of this, but my body was geared up. The air seemed smoky, and I panted lightly. I could see Hermione sitting up on her elbows, pushing down her loincloth. I saw her signing to Ron, who was watching with a strange look on his face as Snape approached me with the little cup.

"Stand up." His voice was like liquid chocolate, dark, coating the space between us. My perception of the room beyond him dimmed.

"No."

"Do your feet hurt? Do those broken bones pain you, little boy? I said, stand up." He caught my hair in one hand, hauling me to my feet. I yelped as my feet took the weight, and rocked back on my heels trying to relieve the pressure. I could feel the bones shift. I was so hard.
"Now, you contemptible brat, you will come, and you have exactly one minute to do it, or.."

My hand was on my cock before he finished the sentence. I flipped my loincloth up and fisted my cock, using no finesse or style. I pulled desperately, his hand in my hair holding me steady as I swayed. My feet throbbed with my heartbeat, with my cock.

"40 seconds left."

I groaned, stroking faster, the friction horrible, and I wanted something, some bit of moisture, but I couldn’t take the time to bring my hand up to my lips, and I couldn’t drop my head.

"30, you little whore. Hurry up."

My hips were jerking, and I had never gotten off this fast, ever, and I whined, deep in my throat, wishing for just a bit more time, I was so close...

"15 seconds boy. You’re not going to make it."

I arched forward, putting my weight on my poor broken feet and keening as he jerked me back, white exploding behind my eyes as I came, hard, into his waiting hand, my body jerking. His hand slid out of my hair and around my shoulders, and he tipped me back onto the bed, laying me down gently as I sucked in great gulps of air.

"Good boy," he whispered into my head, then he tapped his wand against my sternum and pain exploded through me, and I was yelling, screaming as it burned through my nerves and down my spine to pool in my feet. I felt like I was falling, and I didn’t want to because I didn’t want to not feel-

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I blinked awake, sitting up suddenly. The light was slightly dimmer in the room, and my feet didn’t hurt. Hermione, seated again on her trunk, turned to look at me. She gave me a odd, sad smile, then motioned me up to my own trunk.
Snape was at his desk, carefully dripping blood from his pricked finger into the green inkwell. There were four inkwells total, one black, one red, one brown and the green. A long black quill stood in each, and the three contracts lay open, waiting to be signed. The birds on the ends of the ties pecked and squabbled across the desk.

He turned and beckoned us, and the three of us rose, approaching his desk in tandem. He motioned to Ron, who stepped forward. The room was thick with silence.

"I took your name when I made you Corvaticta. As novicii you have no name. Now you become discipulus, and you have earned your name."

He touched Ron’s forehead with one long finger. "You are Taru. Sign your contract and become discipulus."

Ron, shaking just a bit, stared at the parchment before lifting the quill from the red inkwell and touching it to the paper. He stopped and looked up at Snape.

"Yes, sign it Taru. That is your name; Taru." Snape said softly, and Ron’s hand shook as he signed. Snape slid behind him before he could move, and quickly whispered something into his ear. Ron nodded, and Snape took up the quill from the green inkwell and signed with a flourish. Together they rolled the parchment closed, each one tying a knot with one set of cords. The silvery birds flew in ecstatic patterns over the completed contract. Ron walked back and sat on his trunk, dropping his head into his hands.

Hermione stepped forward at his motion, and he repeated the same words, solemn as a ritual. "I took your name when I made you Corvaticta. As novicii you have no name. Now you become discipulus, and you have earned your name. You are Bili. Sign your contract and become discipulus."

Hermione pulled the quill almost angrily, and stabbed at the paper, signing the short name quickly. Snape enveloped her in his robe, hiding her from view. He signed the parchment, and they tied it, the second contract complete.

When she turned, I saw the tears on her face.
Snape turned to me, and I almost left right there. Just turn around and walk to the door, knowing that I would be stopped and prepared to die fighting. But I could see the forms of my friends, huddled on their beds, and knew I would not leave them.

I stepped forward.

Snape moved close to me, laying his finger first on my chest, then my head. "I took your name when I made you Corvaticta. As novicii you have no name. Now you become discipulus, and you have earned your name. You are Modha. Sign your contract and become discipulus."

I took the pen from the black inkwell, watching the glittery thick ink drip. It looked like blood, blood thick with magic. My hand clenched on the quill, and I sucked in a hard breath.

The name was incredibly hard to write on the contract. I didn’t want this. This was a travesty, to sign away my life to this man who took everything away from me. My stomach clenched on a ball of bitter anger.

I felt him come up behind me, his soft robe brushing all along my back. His arms came around mine, his hands flattening on the parchment. I studied his fingers, long, with ink stains and quill calluses. He had a small scar over the knuckle of his right thumb...

His breath moved my hair. "You are Modha. You are my discipulus, my pupil." He took up his quill, dipped again into the green inkwell, and signed his name. I felt smothered by his proximity. "This contract binds you to me, and only in true desire will it be served completely. Tie the cord and complete the binding."

I numbly tied a loose knot with my cords, and Snape gathered them up. I watched four of the birds hang limply as the others flapped.

I turned back to my bed. On the headboard the name Modha stood, carved as if it had been for a thousand years. I sat down on the bed, not looking left or right, as the last of the sunlight faded from the room.
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