Hermione Granger

Hermione arrived eleven minutes before the scheduled start of class.

The classroom occupied a stretch of corridor adjacent to the hospital wing that she'd never noticed before—a peculiarity of Hogwarts architecture that suggested the room hadn't existed until someone needed it to.

She paused in the doorway, looking at the room.

The room was longer than it was wide, with high arched windows along one wall that admitted pale October light. Rows of sturdy wooden workstations had replaced the usual desks, their surfaces scarred and stained. Atop each station sat an enchanted dummy roughly the size and shape of a human torso, constructed from something that resembled flesh-toned leather stretched over a wire frame. They were disturbingly lifelike. Hermione could see the faint rise and fall of simulated breathing in the nearest one.

Anatomical charts lined the far wall: cross-sections of magical injury pathways rendered in moving ink, showing the progression of curse damage through tissue, the branching patterns of hex scarring, the way dark magic corrupted healthy cells in radiating waves. One particularly graphic diagram depicted the stages of an Entrail-Expelling Curse in clinical detail that would have made a Muggle medical student queasy.

The air smelled of antiseptic.

Shelves along the right wall held rows of labelled potion vials arranged by colour and function: blood-replenishing potions in deep crimson, pain-numbing draughts in translucent blue, anti-venoms in vivid amber. Beside them, neatly folded bandaging supplies and what appeared to be a set of silver surgical instruments that gleamed with quiet menace under the morning light.

This isn't a classroom, Hermione thought, choosing a workstation in the second row. *This is a trauma ward dressed up with desks.*

She set her bag down and pulled out fresh parchment, two quills (one backup), and her copy of *Healing Theory and Practice: A Modern Approach* by Hippocrates Smethwyck. The book was already bristling with colour-coded tabs, blue for theory, green for practical application, red for emergency protocols she'd identified as most likely to be relevant given current wartime conditions.

She'd read it cover to cover twice since the announcement.

The door creaked behind her. Hermione glanced over her shoulder as students began filling the room. Hermione noticed that her fellow Gryffindors weren't talking much, usually, they loved to talk, especially about new classes, but right now, most were talking in hushed tones, and not loud ones.

Seamus and Dean came in together. Seamus muttered something about the dummies looking "like something from me nan's horror films" before Dean elbowed him quiet.

Lavender and Parvati slid into the row behind Hermione. Lavender's perfume preceded her by a good three feet.

"Merlin, look at those *things*," Lavender whispered, staring at the practice dummies with undisguised revulsion. "They're breathing. Why are they breathing?"

"Realism, probably," Parvati murmured back. Then, lower: "What if she looks even *more* like Bellatrix up close?"

"As long as she doesn't act like Bellatrix, then I'm good."

Ron dropped into the seat beside Hermione with all the grace of a sack of potatoes being unloaded from a cart. "Cheery place," he observed, eyeing the surgical instruments. "Really sets a mood."

Harry took the seat on Ron's other side without comment. Hermione now could see even more just how much Harry had changed since Sirius's death. Harry would usually talk with Ron right now, perhaps make a joke, or just talk about the class; instead, from the way he was looking at the class, it felt like she was staring at Mad Eye Moody. She noticed that he was looking in a specific direction.

Hermione followed his gaze and understood. He was watching for Neville.

Neville appeared in the doorway a full minute before class was scheduled to begin, which for someone who routinely arrived to lessons out of breath and trailing forgotten textbooks constituted a kind of miracle. He stood at the threshold for a long moment, his jaw set in a hard line, his hand white-knuckled on the strap of his bag. His eyes moved across the room and then fixed on the empty chair at the front where the professor would presumably sit.

He chose a seat in the back row, closest to the door.

More students arrived. Ernie Macmillan marched in with his chin up and his prefect badge polished, as though determined to approach emergency healing with the same officious competence he brought to everything else. Susan Bones followed, her expression closed and unreadable—she'd have more personal experience with the aftermath of violence than anyone else in the room, Hermione reflected. Hannah Abbott sat beside Susan without a word and placed her hand briefly over Susan's on the desk.

The Slytherins entered in their characteristic cluster: Daphne Greengrass. Tracey Davis walked half a step behind. Theodore Nott brought up the rear.

Hermione's gaze swept the Slytherin contingent and snagged on an absence.

Draco Malfoy's seat—the one he'd have been assigned based on the alphabetical arrangement the school insisted upon—sat conspicuously empty. She glanced at Daphne, who met her eyes for a fraction of a second and gave the tiniest shake of her head.

Interesting. A mandatory class, announced by the Headmaster himself, and Draco Malfoy hadn't bothered to show. Either he was ill, which seemed unlikely given she'd seen him at breakfast looking his usual shade of pallid anxiety, or he simply didn't care about the consequences of skipping.

Or he had somewhere more important to be.

The clock on the wall ticked toward nine. Conversations died in stages, like candles being snuffed one by one.

The side door opened.

And Hermione's lungs forgot how to function.

She'd seen Andromeda Tonks at the feast, of course. From across the Great Hall, seated at the Head Table.

Up close was a different matter entirely.

Andromeda Tonks moved the way Narcissa Malfoy moved. That was the first thing Hermione's treacherous brain registered—not the professional robes in deep aubergine, not the calm expression, not the leather satchel of teaching

materials held in one elegant hand. No. What hit her like a Bludger to the sternum was the *walk*. That perfect posture.

Hermione's hands found the edge of her desk and gripped until her knuckles blanched.

Where Narcissa was winter—platinum hair, ice-blue eyes, skin like porcelain left in moonlight—Andromeda was autumn. Rich dark hair fell in soft waves past her shoulders, threaded here and there with early silver that caught the window light. Her eyes were brown, warm and deep, the colour of strong tea or polished walnut. And there were lines at their corners—smile lines, laugh lines, evidence of a face that had spent decades expressing emotions the other Black sisters kept locked behind marble masks.

She was beautiful. Not the cold, untouchable beauty of Narcissa, but something warmer, more human.

"Good morning." Andromeda set her satchel on the front desk and faced the class. Her voice was similar to that of her sister, but unlike Narcissa, Andromeda sounded like a loving human. "I am Professor Tonks. Before we begin, I want to address something that I suspect has been the subject of considerable discussion since yesterday's announcement."

The room went very still.

"I know what some of you see when you look at me."

The words landed like stones in water.

"I share blood with Bellatrix Lestrange. I share a face. I do not share her beliefs. I do not share her cruelty. And I do not share her loyalty to the monster who has torn our world apart."

"I was disowned from the House of Black at the age of twenty," Andromeda continued, "for the unforgivable crime of falling in love with a Muggle-born wizard named Ted Tonks. My family—My family considered this a betrayal worthy of burning my name from the tapestry. I was erased from the family tree. I have not spoken to my sisters in over fifteen years."

"I chose love over blood purity," Andromeda said. "I have never regretted it."

She let the words settle. Then, with a gentleness that somehow carried across the entire room: "I understand that my presence here may be difficult for some of you. If any student finds that my appearance causes genuine distress, I offer private sessions where we can work at your own pace, in your own comfort. There is no shame in needing accommodation. What matters is that you learn these skills, not that you prove anything to me or to anyone else."

Her eyes found Neville in the back row.

She didn't single him out. Didn't call his name, didn't gesture, didn't make it obvious to anyone who wasn't watching closely. She simply let her gaze rest on him for a moment, but her gaze, it was warm, almost like a mother to her child.

Neville seemed to struggle to look at her, and for a moment, Hermione was sure he would pack his bags and just leave.

He did not leave.

"Now then." Andromeda's manner shifted—still warm, but crisper, more businesslike. She drew her wand from her sleeve in a way that reminded Hermione of the way Narcissa would do it.

Stop it. Focus.

"Today we begin with the fundamentals. Specifically, the two spells most likely to save a life in the first sixty seconds after injury." She turned to the nearest practice dummy and, without preamble, slashed her wand across its torso.

The dummy's simulated flesh split open in a diagonal gash from collarbone to hip. Blood—or something terrifyingly convincing—erupted from the wound in a thick, pulsing spray that followed the rhythm of a heartbeat. The dummy's simulated breathing became laboured, ragged, gurgling. Its chest rose and fell with increasing desperation.

Lavender made a sound like a stepped-on cat. Several students recoiled. Seamus went pale and looked away. Even Ron shifted uncomfortably, though to his credit he didn't flinch.

"This," Andromeda said, gesturing to the hemorrhaging dummy, "is what a Sectumsempra variant looks like. You will see wounds like this. Some of you—" Her eyes swept the room. "—already have."

Hermione glanced briefly at Harry, but he seemed calm.

"The first spell you will learn is *Episkey*." Andromeda pointed her wand at the dummy's wound. "*Episkey.*"

A soft golden light pulsed from her wand tip. The edges of the wound drew together slightly—the bleeding slowed, the flesh knitting in small, tentative increments. But the gash remained largely open, still seeping crimson.

"*Episkey* is triage," she explained. "It will not close a severe wound. It will slow the bleeding, reduce shock, and buy you time. Time is what you need. Time is what keeps people alive long enough for a trained Healer to reach them."

She lowered her wand. The dummy continued to bleed, more slowly now, its breathing still strained.

"For wounds of this severity, you need the principles of *Vulnera Sanentur*." She raised her wand again and began a slow, sweeping motion, almost like conducting music, Hermione thought, watching the precise arcs and curves. "*Vulnera Sanentur.*"

The blood flow reversed, drawing back into the wound like a film played backwards. The torn flesh began to mend in earnest, layers of tissue reconnecting, the gash closing from the inside out. Within thirty seconds, the dummy's torso was whole, its breathing calm, a faint pink line the only evidence of the catastrophic wound.

"That," Andromeda said, "took me four years of training at St. Mungo's to master. I do not expect you to achieve it this term. What I *do* expect is that you understand the principles, so that when you cast *Episkey* in the field, you understand what you're doing and why, and you can hold someone together until someone with more training arrives."

She reset the dummy with a tap of her wand. The wound reappeared, bleeding freely.

"Pair up. One person inflicts the wound—a simple cutting hex will suffice, nothing creative, please—and the other practices *Episkey*. The dummies will reset automatically after each attempt. If your healing is incomplete—" She paused meaningfully. "The wound will worsen on the next cycle. The dummy will simulate deterioration. Consider it motivation to get it right."

Movement rippled through the classroom as students arranged themselves. Ron turned to Hermione with an expression that suggested he'd rather be anywhere else, including the bottom of the Great Lake.

"This is going to be disgusting," he predicted.

"This is going to save your life someday," Hermione corrected, already positioning her dummy at the optimal angle.

"Can't it save my life in a less gory way?"

"No."

The next forty minutes were some of the most viscerally uncomfortable Hermione had ever spent in a classroom, and she'd sat through five years of Snape's Potions lessons. The cutting hexes produced realistic wounds that bled quite fast, and the metallic smell of simulated blood quickly permeated the room, mingling with the antiseptic-and-salve scent until Hermione's stomach churned despite her determination to remain unaffected.

Ron's first *Episkey* did nothing whatsoever. His second made the wound slightly worse, the dummy's simulated breathing hitching in a way that was deeply unpleasant to listen to. His third attempt produced a feeble golden glow that slowed the bleeding to a trickle.

"Better," Hermione told him. "You're rushing the vowels. *Eh-PIS-key*, not *eh-pis-KEY*. Emphasis on the middle syllable."

"It always needs to emphasis, doesn't it?"

"Always. Healing magic requires precise intention channeled through precise pronunciation. The emphasis directs the magic to the wound rather than dispersing it generally. It's in chapter three of—"

"If you say Smethwyck, I'm going to bleed on you deliberately."

Hermione's own attempts were markedly more successful. Her first *Episkey* slowed the bleeding significantly. Her second partially closed the wound's edges. By her fourth attempt, she'd managed to reduce a spurting gash to a sluggishly oozing line, the dummy's breathing stabilizing from panicked to merely strained.

It wasn't enough. The wound still wept. The flesh still gaped. But it was a start.

Andromeda moved through the room. She corrected Hannah Abbott's wand angle with a gentle hand on her elbow. She praised Ernie Macmillan's pronunciation while suggesting he needed to commit more emotional intent—"*Episkey* responds to genuine desire to heal, Mr. Macmillan, not merely technical competence." She demonstrated proper distance from the wound for Susan Bones, who was casting from too far away, and Susan nodded with the grim focus of someone who understood exactly why this mattered.

When Andromeda reached Hermione's station, the world narrowed.

"Let me see your technique, Miss Granger."

Andromeda stood close. Not inappropriately close—teacher-close, the practical proximity of someone who needed to observe wand movement at fine detail. But it was enough. It was more than enough. Hermione could see the way the morning light caught the fine silver threads in her dark hair, could trace the elegant column of her throat down to where her aubergine robes met her—

Wand. Focus on the wand. Focus on the spell. Focus on anything except the fact that this woman is very beautiful.

Hermione raised her wand. "*Episkey.*"

Golden light bloomed from her wand tip and flowed into the dummy's wound with a precision that surprised even her. The bleeding stopped almost immediately. The wound's edges drew together, flesh knitting smoothly, the dummy's laboured breathing easing to a gentle rhythm.

"Oh," Andromeda said softly.

She leaned closer to examine the result, and her hand came up to adjust Hermione's wand angle by the barest degree, her fingers brushing the inside of Hermione's wrist where the skin was thin and the pulse ran close to the surface.

Electricity. That was the only word for it. A current that shot from the point of contact through Hermione's arm, up her shoulder, down her spine, and settled between her legs with a warmth that had absolutely nothing to do with healing magic.

Don't react. Don't react. Don't you dare react.

Andromeda withdrew her hand. She studied the dummy's nearly-closed wound, then studied Hermione, and her expression held something that went beyond professional approval.

"Remarkable control," she said. "Your precision is... well. McGonagall wasn't exaggerating when she spoke about you."

"McGonagall—spoke about me?" Hermione's voice came out roughly three-quarters of an octave higher than intended. She corrected with a discreet cough. "I mean—thank you, Professor."

"Mutual acquaintances have mentioned your abilities. You have excellent instincts. Many Healers train for years before they achieve that kind of intuitive response."

"I just—followed the principles in the textbook," Hermione managed, which was perhaps the least convincing thing she'd ever said, given that her textbook was currently sitting untouched in her bag while she cast from pure magical instinct.

Andromeda smiled. The expression transformed her face.

"Keep following those instincts," Andromeda said, and moved on to the next station.

Hermione's hands were shaking. She pressed them flat against the desk surface and stared at the healed dummy until the trembling subsided. Her pulse hammered in her ears. Between her legs, the treacherous heaviness of arousal pulsed once, twice, before she clamped down on it with the same desperate discipline she'd been applying to this particular problem since she was thirteen years old.

Get a grip, Granger.

Across the room, Andromeda had reached Neville.

Hermione watched—she couldn't help it—as the professor paused at his workstation. Neville's wound-closing attempt had been serviceable but unsteady.

Andromeda didn't correct his technique. Didn't adjust his wand angle or critique his pronunciation. She simply stood beside him and spoke in a voice

so low that Hermione couldn't catch a single word, despite straining her ears shamefully.

Whatever she said, it worked.

Neville raised his wand. "*Episkey.*"

The golden light that poured from his wand was very warm, Hermione could feel it from where she was standing. The flesh knitted. The bleeding stopped. The dummy's breathing settled into a calm, even rhythm.

Hermione watched Neville stare at the healed wound for a long moment, something working behind his eyes. Then he reset the dummy and began again.

The remainder of the class passed in a blur of golden light and simulated blood. Students' confidence grew by increments—Susan Bones achieved a clean wound closure that drew quiet applause, Ernie managed to stop a particularly aggressive bleed after four attempts, and even Ron produced a competent *Episkey* that he celebrated with a fist pump before remembering he was supposed to be maintaining composure.

The dummy on Draco Malfoy's empty workstation breathed in its slow, mechanical rhythm. Unwounded. Untouched. Waiting for a student who hadn't come.

Hermione glanced at it once, twice, three times over the course of the hour.

"Alright," Andromeda called as the clock approached the end of the period. "Excellent work. Many of you achieved more today than I expected, which speaks well of your determination. Practice the wand movement in your free time—without the dummies, obviously, I'd rather not have students hexing

each other in the corridors. Wednesday, we'll work on bone-setting, so please read chapters four and five of Smethwyck before then."

Students began gathering their things, the atmosphere significantly different from the tense silence of the session's opening. People were talking. Some were even laughing. Dean was showing Seamus his wand movement. Hannah was telling Susan something that made the other girl's mouth twitch toward a smile.

"Miss Granger? A moment, please."

Hermione's stomach performed a gymnastic routine that would have earned respectable marks at the Olympics. She nodded, taking her time arranging her books while the classroom emptied around her. Ron shot her a curious look; she waved him off with a gesture that said *go, I'll catch up*. Harry gave her a look, but then just walked out of the room.

The door closed. The room felt suddenly, enormously empty.

Andromeda leaned against the front desk.

"I wanted to discuss the advanced sessions I mentioned at the feast," Andromeda began. "Optional healing training for students with particular aptitude, meeting twice weekly in the evenings."

"Yes," Hermione said, too quickly. "I mean—yes, I read the notice. I'm interested."

You're interested in the academic component, she told herself firmly. *The healing. The life-saving skills. Not in spending additional hours in close proximity to a woman who moves like Narcissa and smells like autumn and has hands that—*

"I thought you might be." Andromeda's smile was warm. "Your magical precision today was extraordinary, Miss Granger. Truly. The wound closure you produced would be considered competent work from a second-year Healer trainee at St. Mungo's. From a sixteen-year-old student on her first attempt, it's..." She searched for the word. "Exceptional."

"Thank you, Professor," Hermione said, trying not to sound like an idiot.

"With proper training," Andromeda continued, "you could learn to stabilize injuries that would kill most witches and wizards. That's not flattery. The war will require people who can keep others alive under impossible conditions, and you have the ability to become one of those people."

"I want to learn," Hermione said, and meant it with every part of herself that wasn't currently short-circuiting over the way Andromeda's collarbones caught the light.

"Good." Andromeda straightened from the desk and began gathering her own materials. "Sessions begin next week, Mondays and Thursdays, seven o'clock. I'll send you a reading list."

She paused. Turned back.

"You know," she said, and there was something different in her voice now. "You remind me of someone. I can't quite place it. Something about the way you..." She trailed off, frowning slightly, as if reaching for a memory just out of grasp.

Hermione's heart stopped. Restarted. Stopped again.

"Someone, Professor?" she asked.

Andromeda shook her head, the frown clearing. "Never mind. It'll come to me, I'm sure. These things usually do."

She smiled again and picked up her satchel. "I'll see you Wednesday, Miss Granger. And do read Smethwyck. Chapter five in particular—the section on magical bone density—will be directly relevant."

"I will. Thank you, Professor."

Hermione collected her things and walked to the door.

○○ ‘

○○ ‘

She didn't know whose hand was in her hair, and she didn't care.

That was the first strange thing, though Bellatrix Lestrange was not in the habit of cataloguing strangeness while it was happening. Analysis was for lesser minds, Narcissa and her useless husband. Bellatrix operated on instinct, on hunger, on the pure electric current of *want* that had always guided her more reliably than reason ever could.

And right now, she wanted *this*.

She was on her knees. That fact alone should have given her pause—Bellatrix Lestrange knelt for one person and one person only, and He did not require this particular form of devotion. A voice whispered that kneeling was correct, that this was where she belonged, that the hand stroking through her wild dark curls with such confident authority had every right to be there.

The cock in her mouth was magnificent.

That was not a word Bellatrix used lightly. She had experienced her share of men—Rodolphus out of marital obligation, others out of boredom or cruelty or the peculiar hunger that followed violence—and found them universally disappointing. Clumsy, quick, graceless. Fumbling boys playing at dominance while she bit her tongue and thought about more interesting things.

This was different.

This cock was thick and hard and *perfect*, filling her mouth with a weight that made her jaw ache in a way she found inexplicably satisfying. She could taste salt and skin and something else, something sweet and unfamiliar that made her tongue chase every ridge and vein with greedy attention. She hollowed her cheeks and sucked, drawing a groan from somewhere above her that vibrated through the hand in her hair and down into her scalp like a reward.

"Good girl."

The voice was low, rough with pleasure, and the words hit Bellatrix like a Cruciatus in reverse, a surge of warmth that bloomed in her chest and pooled between her thighs. Her eyes fluttered. A sound escaped her throat, muffled by the flesh stretching her lips, that might generously be called a moan and more accurately described as a whimper.

Bellatrix Lestrange did not *whimper*.

"That's it. Just like that. You're being so good for me."

She preened under the praise like a cat being stroked. Her hands came up to grip the person's thighs and she took the cock deeper, letting it slide past the

resistance at the back of her throat until her nose pressed flush against a pelvis that smelled of something clean and bright.

An odd combination, some distant corner of her mind observed, but the thought dissolved like smoke as the hand in her hair tightened and the voice above her made a sound of pure, undone pleasure.

"Fuck. Your mouth is incredible. Such a good girl, Bella."

Bella. Only Narcissa called her that anymore. Rodolphus had never dared. The Dark Lord certainly never would.

And Bellatrix *liked* it.

She liked the hand in her hair. She liked the cock on her tongue. She liked the way the voice broke on certain syllables, liked knowing that *she* was the cause of that fracturing composure. She, Bellatrix Lestrange, most feared witch in Britain, was on her knees being called a good girl, and some deranged part of her psyche had decided this was the best she'd felt in years.

She worked her tongue along the underside, tracing the thick vein she'd discovered, and was rewarded with a sharp intake of breath and a tug on her hair that sent sparks cascading down her spine. Saliva dripped from her chin. Her jaw ached magnificently. She didn't stop.

"Look at me," the voice commanded. "I want to see those pretty eyes when you take it."

Bellatrix obeyed. She tilted her head back, the cock still buried deep, and opened her dark eyes to look up at the person she was servicing with such devoted enthusiasm.

Brown eyes. Wild brown curls. A young face, flushed with pleasure, with the unmistakable self-satisfied smirk of someone who knew exactly what they had and exactly how much power it gave them.

Hermione Granger gazed down at her with the expression of a queen being worshipped by a particularly eager subject.

"Hello, Bella," Hermione said sweetly. "Enjoying yourself?"

Every rational thought in Bellatrix's mind screamed at once. *MUDBLOOD. FILTH. THE GRANGER GIRL. POTTER'S LITTLE PET. ON YOUR KNEES FOR A MUDBLOOD. HER COCK IN YOUR THROAT. A MUDBLOOD HAS A COCK AND IT'S IN YOUR—*

She should have bitten down. She should have ripped herself away, drawn her wand, cast something unspeakable, *killed* the presumptuous little creature standing over her with that infuriating smile. Bellatrix Lestrange had murdered for less. She had tortured for *nothing*. She was the Dark Lord's most faithful, most feared, most *devoted*—

The hand in her hair tightened.

"Take it deeper," Hermione said, and the command in her voice was absolute.

Bellatrix took it deeper.

Her throat opened. The cock slid past every resistance, thick and impossibly hard, and Bellatrix's eyes watered as she swallowed around the intrusion. A sound came out of her that she would deny to her dying breath—a desperate, hungry, *grateful* moan that vibrated through the shaft filling her throat and made the Mudblood girl above her gasp with pleasure.

"There we go," Hermione purred, both hands now tangled in Bellatrix's wild curls, guiding her head in a slow, relentless rhythm. "See? You know exactly where you belong. On your knees for the Mudblood. Isn't that right?"

No, Bellatrix's mind howled. *NO. This is wrong. This is disgusting. This is—*

Her hips rolled against nothing, seeking friction, her thighs slick with arousal she could not explain and did not want.

"I'm close," Hermione warned, her breath quickening, her grip tightening. "You're going to swallow every drop, Bella. Every single drop. And you're going to *thank me* for it."

I will do no such—

Hermione came.

The first pulse of heat hit the back of Bellatrix's throat and she swallowed reflexively, her body betraying her before her mind could object. It was *a lot*—thick, hot, flooding her mouth faster than she could take it, spilling from the corners of her lips in white rivulets that dripped down her chin and onto her chest. The taste was—

Merlin.

It was *delicious*. Rich and warm and intoxicating, like firewhisky and honey and something else, something that had no right tasting this good, something that made her tongue chase every drop with a hunger that horrified her even as she surrendered to it completely. She swallowed and swallowed, her throat working frantically, and still there was more—an impossible, obscene quantity that painted her lips and dripped from her jaw and made her feel claimed in a way that the Dark Mark never had.

Hermione pulled out slowly, the tip of her cock dragging across Bellatrix's swollen lower lip, leaving a glistening trail. Bellatrix panted, her mouth open, cum on her tongue, her chin, her chest, her mind a howling void of revulsion and want.

"Delicious, wasn't it?" Hermione asked, cupping Bellatrix's jaw with one hand and tilting her face up. The Mudblood's thumb swept across Bellatrix's lower lip, collecting a stray drop and pressing it back into her mouth.

Bellatrix sucked the thumb clean.

WHY DID I DO THAT? WHY DID I—

"Now then." Hermione's smile sharpened into something that looked disturbingly like triumph—or perhaps ownership. She stroked Bellatrix's cheek with a tenderness that was somehow more devastating than cruelty. "I think it's time I put a baby in you, don't you think, Bella?"

The words detonated like a Blasting Curse.

A MUDBLOOD BABY. IN HER. A FILTHY MUDBLOOD HEIR GROWING IN THE WOMB OF THE HOUSE OF BLACK—

She woke with a gasp violent enough to wrench her upright in bed, tangled in sweat-soaked silk sheets, her heart slamming against her ribs like a prisoner trying to break free. The room was dark—her room, her *actual* room in the safe house.

Real. This was real. The stone walls, the cold air.

"A dream," she rasped to the darkness. Her voice was wrecked, hoarse, as if she'd been—

No. Don't finish that thought.

She pressed a shaking hand to her face. Her cheeks were wet. From sweat, obviously. From *sweat*. Not from—there had been no tears. Bellatrix Lestrange did not *cry*. And she certainly did not cry while on her knees for a mudblood who somehow, in the deranged theatre of her subconscious, possessed a cock that could—

"*Fuck,*" Bellatrix snarled, and hurled her pillow at the wall with enough force to knock a portrait of Salazar Slytherin sideways.

She threw back the covers and stood, pacing the narrow room like a caged animal. Her skin was flushed. Her pulse was galloping. Her nightgown clung to her body with perspiration.

And between her legs—

No.

She was *not* aroused. She was disgusted. Revolted. Nauseated. The most loyal servant of the Dark Lord did not become aroused by fever-dreams of Mudblood filth violating her mouth and promising to—to—

"I think it's time I put a baby in you."

Bellatrix shuddered.

The shudder was from revulsion. Absolute, unequivocal, pureblood revulsion.

It was *not* from the way her thighs clenched involuntarily at the memory.

She caught sight of herself in the cracked mirror above the bureau, wild-haired, dark-eyed, her lips parted and flushed a shade of pink that had no business being there—and for one horrifying instant, she didn't see the Dark Lord's most devoted soldier. She saw a woman who had just been thoroughly, comprehensively used and had loved every second of it.

"Oblivia," she whispered to her reflection, raising her wand with a trembling hand.

She lowered it.

One could not Obliviate oneself without risking significant brain damage, and besides, the Dark Lord might sense the tampering during Legilimency, and then she'd have to *explain*, and she would sooner walk naked into Azkaban than allow another living soul to know that her subconscious mind had produced—had *conjured*—had—

She sat heavily on the edge of the bed.

The sheets were ruined. She could feel it.

"Granger," she whispered, and the name tasted wrong in her mouth—wrong because it tasted *right*, tasted familiar, tasted like—

She grabbed the second pillow and screamed into it.

When she emerged, breathing hard, hair even wilder than before, she made a decision. She would find the Granger girl. She would kill her. Slowly, methodically, with every ounce of creativity her considerable sadistic talent afforded. She would make the girl beg and bleed and break, and then—*only* then—would this demented fixation be purged from her mind like the infection it was.

She would absolutely not, under any circumstances, think about the taste.

She thought about the taste.

"*FUCK!*"

Bellatrix buried her face in the remaining pillow, pulled the ruined sheets over her head, and lay in furious, aroused, existentially horrified silence.

She was going to need a very long shower.

A very, very cold one.