

# MANACLED

## VOLUME II

WRITTEN BY

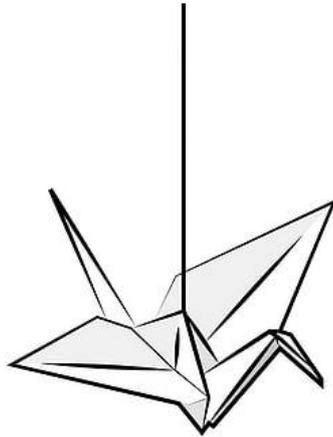
SEN LIN YU



Harry Potter is dead. In the aftermath of the war, in order to strengthen the might of the magical world, Voldemort enacts a repopulation effort. Hermione Granger has an Order secret, lost but hidden in her mind, so she is sent as an enslaved surrogate to the High Reeve until her mind can be cracked.

Illustrated by Avendell





# CHAPTER 26

## FLASHBACK 1

**March 2002 – 3 Years Earlier**

**Nearly six years after the death of Albus Dumbledore.**

Hermione's teeth ground with frustration as she bottled antidote potions. She'd just gotten out of another pointless Order meeting.

Sometimes she wondered if she were the only one aware that they were losing the war.

As she shelved the new bottles, she tucked a few into her pocket and hurried into the next room where Madam Pomfrey was bustling around. The hospital ward occupying the second floor of Grimmauld Place was eerily silent.

No one currently in the room had an easily healed injury. Lee Jordan was lying in one bed. There was brain matter still oozing from his ears, drop by drop. Hermione had figured out a way to cancel the curse but the counter-charm was slow-acting. She could only hope the dripping would stop within the next hour. It was doubtful his mental function would recover. The brain damage was

severe and irreparable. She wasn't sure of the precise extent of it. She had to wait until he woke up.

If he woke up.

Most likely, assuming he wasn't completely brain dead by the time the dripping ceased, the Order would have to make a run to drop him at St Mungo's when they could spare someone.

George Weasley was seated in a bed beside his friend. He was pale with pain and despair. He had been hit in the right thigh with a fast acting necrosis curse. By the time he had been able to overcome the pain and apparate back, the rot had spread all the way up to his hip. There was no countercurse for necrosis. Hermione had barely managed to avoid his vital organs as she'd had to cut it off of him. She hadn't even had a spare second to stop and knock him out. His hands were still shaking, no matter how many calming draughts and pain potions Hermione administered to him.

Katie Bell lay in a bed in the far corner. Sleeping. She would hopefully be released soon. Some nastily creative Death Eater had conjured a porcupine inside her chest. The quills had shredded and mangled the girl's lungs and stomach and only miraculously not stopped her heart. She had nearly drowned in blood before Hermione and Madam Pomfrey had managed to banish the creature and stabilise her. Katie had been there for three weeks. While mostly recovered, her entire torso was still covered in a multitude of tiny round scars. Her breathing made a faint rattling sound when she moved. Hermione went over and poured an antivenin potion down Seamus Finnegan's throat. He'd fallen into a pit of vipers and gotten bitten thirty-six times before he managed to apparate out. It was only because of wizarding folk's immunity to non-magical injuries that he had managed to make it back to them before he had died.

There were a dozen other bodies in the hospital ward, but Hermione didn't know the names of those Resistance fighters, and they were too injured to tell her.

Standing in the room looking over the silent, injured bodies, Hermione felt lost.

She had just come from another meeting in which she'd urged the Order to start using more effective curses when fighting. She'd been shot down. Yet again.

There was a bizarre sort of optimism among many of the Order members that they could somehow win the War without utilising the dark arts. Most of the Resistance fighters still defaulted to stunning or petrifying when cornered, as though the Death Eaters couldn't cancel those hexes in a few seconds and then appear at the next skirmish to horribly kill or maim someone.

There were a few who had begun using more vicious spells. Mostly the ones who had been on the receiving end of a curse that nearly killed them. It was like a poorly kept secret within the Resistance ranks; everyone turned a blind eye to it, pretending that it weren't the case.

Every time Hermione appeared at a high level Order meeting, she laid out the case for why all the fighters needed to be taught more effective magic to duel with. Every time she found herself being given disbelieving looks. Apparently being on "the Light" side required that they fight against completely stacked odds. Never mind that their enemies wanted to kill them all, and then murder and enslave all Muggles in Europe. Apparently that was still an insufficient reason to kill Death Eaters in self-defence.

The response she got each time was the same. She was a healer, didn't she know how using dark curses eventually corrupted a person? If Order and Resistance members made the personal choice to use those kinds of spells it was their decision. The Order would never require it of anyone. Never teach it to anyone.

Besides, someone would always blandly point out to Hermione, she hardly even knew what it was like to be out there in a battlefield facing the choice of ending someone else's life. She was always back at Grimmauld Place acting as a healer, Potion Mistress, and researcher for the Order. That was where they needed her. She needed to let the people specialised in combat be the ones to make decisions about the war strategies.

It was enough to make Hermione want to scream.

As she stood beside Lee Jordan, seething, she heard a grating tap of wood on the ground and turned to find Mad-Eye Moody entering the room. He looked straight at her.

“Granger, a word,” he said.

Steeling herself she turned to follow him down the hall. She hoped she wasn’t about to be scolded yet again for having the audacity to question the Order’s war strategy. She didn’t imagine Mad-Eye would; he was one of the few Order members who didn’t disagree.

Moody led the way to a small room, and once they were inside it he turned and cast a series of complex and powerful privacy spells.

Once he finished he looked around the room carefully. His magical eye was spinning as he scrutinized every corner. After a minute he looked down at her.

He seemed oddly tense, even for a man who barked “Constant vigilance,” more often than he said anything else.

He seemed uncomfortable.

“We’re losing the war,” he said after a moment.

“I know,” Hermione said in a leaden voice. “Sometimes I feel like I’m the only person aware of that.”

“Some people—can only fight fueled by optimism,” Moody said slowly. “But—we’re running out of optimism.”

Hermione just kept staring at him. She didn’t need him to tell her that. She knew.

She was the one who had to hold people down as they died in agony from curses she couldn’t reverse. Who had to then walk into a debriefing room and list the dead and the injured, detailing how long recovery was expected to take and whether those people could be expected to fight again when it was completed.

“An opportunity has come up,” Moody said in a low voice. He was studying her face carefully. “One that could turn the tide of the war.” Hermione didn’t have any reserves of hope left within her to brighten at those words. Based on the context in which Moody was speaking to her, she suspected the price of it was steep enough to be questionable.

“Oh?”

“As Voldemort’s forces have grown, Severus’s intelligence has grown limited. He’s primarily kept researching and developing new curses with Dolohov. They don’t inform him of attack strategies.” Hermione nodded. She had noticed that over the last several months. Some of the other Order members had taken it as an opportunity to begin questioning Snape’s loyalty once again.

“We have an opportunity to bring in a new spy. Someone with a high rank in Voldemort’s army is willing to turn for us.”

Hermione stared at Moody skeptically. “Someone highly ranked wants to turn now?”

“Conditionally,” Moody clarified. “The Malfoy boy. Says he’ll turn spy to avenge his mother. With the assurance of a full-pardon and—” he hesitated. “And he wants you. Now and after the war.” Hermione stood stunned. If Moody had just cursed her she couldn’t have been more astonished.

“Severus thinks the offer is legitimate. Says Malfoy had some kind of fascination with you in school. There’s nothing to indicate the offer was made under orders.”

Hermione barely registered the words as she stood reeling internally.

She hadn’t seen Malfoy since school.

Sixth year had barely begun when he started war by assassinating Dumbledore and then fleeing. She would hear about him occasionally when Severus gave updates on Voldemort’s military structure. Malfoy had been climbing rank steadily over the years.

Why would Malfoy turn? The blame for the war could be legitimately placed on his shoulders. There was no plausible reason for such a late switch in alliance.

Perhaps Voldemort’s power wasn’t as assured as they had thought. Perhaps the ranks were beginning to break. It seemed too good to be true.

But why want her?

She didn’t recall their school rivalry being anything to write home about. He had always paid far more attention to bullying

Harry than her. She had always been more of a footnote; an added insult because she was a Muggle-born. She'd never been the true target of his viciousness.

Unless... demanding her was some sort of revenge on Harry.

Maybe he thought she and Harry were together. Bastard.

She stood there thinking until Moody spoke again. "There's not much I wouldn't do for the intelligence he could offer. But you have to agree. He wants you willing."

No. No. Never.

She swallowed the refusal. Her hands fisted until she could feel the outlines of her metacarpal bones beneath the skin.

"I'll do it," she said, not letting her voice waver. "Provided he doesn't do anything to interfere with my ability to aid the Order. I'll do it." Moody studied her carefully.

"You should think about it more. You can have a few days. If you do this—you can't tell anyone. Not until after the war. Not Potter, or Weasley, or anyone else. Kingsley, Severus, Minerva and I will be the only Order members aware of it."

Hermione looked up at him steadily. There was a sensation in her chest as though something inside her were shriveling and dying, but she didn't let herself attend to it.

"I don't need more time to think," she said sharply. "I realise what's being asked. The sooner we get the information the better. I'm not delaying that so I can have time to mull over or dread a decision I've already made."

Moody nodded sharply. "Then I'll send word you agreed."

Removing the wards from the door, Moody tramped out; leaving Hermione alone to absorb what she'd consented to. She wasn't sure what she felt.

Like crying. That was her most immediate desire.

It felt as though Moody had dropped the war on her shoulders.

But also—hope—maybe. Inasmuch as it was possible to feel hopeful after essentially agreeing to sell herself to a Death Eater as his war prize.

Hermione hadn't felt hopeful in a long while.

Somehow, up until Dumbledore died and even for a bit afterward, she had thought the war would be simple and short. Harry had escaped death so many times in school. He, Ron, and she had beaten so many impossible odds.

So, she had thought that being clever, being good—that friendship, and bravery, and the power of Love were enough to win the war.

But they weren't. Being clever wasn't enough. The goodness in her was being ground to dust under the weight of all those lives lost or ruined with nothing to show for it yet. Friendship didn't stop someone from dying screaming in agony. Bravery didn't win a battle when your enemy had a multitude of methods for removing you permanently from the war, and you were trying to beat them with petrification hex. Love hadn't yet defeated Voldemort's hate.

Every day the war stretched on seemed to make the odds shrink a bit more.

Harry was breaking under the pressure and guilt. He was so thin and exhausted she was afraid he'd crack any day.

He kept withdrawing, further and further into himself. The death of Dumbledore so shortly after the loss of Sirius seemed to have knocked him off kilter in a way he never fully recovered from. Every death and injury among his friends seemed to prod him a little closer to a precipice she wasn't sure he could come back from.

Harry was clinging to the hope that somehow the war would end in such a way that life could be normal afterward. It was that impossible belief that continued to carry him forward. He was the one who insisted most adamantly that the Order and the Resistance never use dark magic. If they did that, he argued, there would be going back. They'd be tainted by it for the rest of their lives. No better than the Death Eaters.

So Hermione was forced to watch the Order and most of the Resistance side with him. And then watch their friends die in her hospital ward. They were relying on Harry. If he despaired, he'd break altogether and give up.

The Order was in desperate need of an edge. A bit of information. To know before a raid hit. Where vulnerabilities lay. Anything.

Malfoy could give them that.

He'd been personally trained by his Aunt Bellatrix before she'd died alongside his mother. He'd climbed high. Now he'd made an offer they couldn't refuse.

That *she* couldn't refuse.

Clearly he knew, acting like a king demanding a tribute.

Because he was fascinated with her...

She mulled over it.

If Severus hadn't corroborated it, she would never believe such a thing.

To avenge his mother. For a pardon. For her, both now and after the war. Which was the true motive? Were any of them? Or was there another angle he was playing?

His mother had been dead for over a year, in a freak accident alongside Bellatrix Lestrange when a Death Eater tried to stop Harry and Ron from escaping Lestrange Manor. It wasn't really either side's fault that she had died. If her death had ended Malfoy's allegiance, it would have happened then. Not a year later. Not after he'd used the void his aunt left to climb into an even higher position of power.

However—wanting a pardon seemed odd. Unless there were some incredible odds she wasn't aware of, the likelihood that the Order could win seemed slim at best.

So, because of her? Perhaps he had hated her more than she had known. Or lusted—

She shuddered with revulsion, and tried to shove the thought away before catching herself and forcing herself to stop and consider it.

If wanting her was his motivation... the opportunity rested on more than merely her consent. Once he'd had her once, or maybe a few times—if it was just fueled by revenge—he'd get tired of her.

Perhaps it was just a game to him. Play spy for a little bit, get a chance to bring her to her knees. Knowing she'd crawl for him if it

meant saving Harry. Saving the Order. And then—once he had what he wanted—he'd turn back. Cast her aside and watch them all die.

Her throat contracted, and she felt like she might be sick. She forced away her horror and ignored the wrenching, twisting sensation in the pit of her stomach.

She had to find a way to fascinate him. To hold his attention and interest.

Would it even be possible?

She drifted out of the room, feeling frozen, and went back to the hospital ward. The room was still silent.

“Poppy, do you need me right now? Or is it alright if I go out?” she asked quietly. “Of course, dear. You should go rest. You’ve been on your feet for twelve hours now,” Pomfrey told her gently. “If anything happens I’ll call for you.”

Hermione fidgeted the bracelet on her wrist. It carried a protean charm that the Order used to summon her to the safe houses where she was most urgently needed.

She left the hospital ward and headed up to her room. She had no intention of resting. She went and changed into fresh clothes, and then went out to the front steps and apparated away. The wizarding world didn’t have what she needed.

She made her way to the nearest Waterstones.

She browsed through the sections. Picking out books; from the philosophy section, from the psychology section, from the relationship section, and the history section until she had a large armful.

The female clerk who rang up pile quirked an eyebrow as she scanned the titles. Several histories and biographies of concubines and female spies; a thick guide to sex; *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu; *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* by Baltasar Gracian; *The Prince* by Machiavelli. *Influence: Science and Practice* by Robert Cialdini; a book on body language. It was an admittedly odd selection. “They’re for a uni essay,” Hermione lied impulsively, feeling the need to explain herself.