

MANACLED

VOLUME III

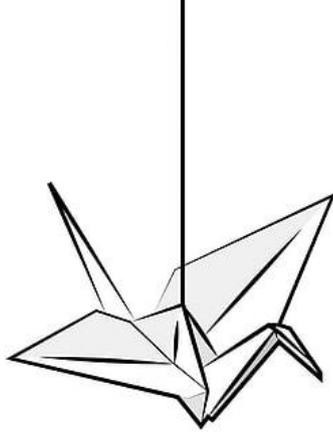
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Harry Potter is dead. In the aftermath of the war, in order to strengthen the might of the magical world, Voldemort enacts a repopulation effort. Hermione Granger has an Order secret, lost but hidden in her mind, so she is sent as an enslaved surrogate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

Illustrated by Avendell



CHAPTER 64

June 2005

Regaining consciousness was like striking the ground after an interminable fall.

Hermione's head was throbbing; an agonising, bleeding pain, as though her mind had been ripped out and torn into pieces. She tried to get up from where she was lying, but her body couldn't move properly. The motions jerked, and her hands trembled.

She could barely see. She tried to push herself up, but her arm shook and wouldn't support her weight. She tried to breathe. Her heart was racing, a painful rapid thrum in her chest.

She reached out tremulously in the darkness trying to find her bearings.

Something touched her shoulder. She screamed and turned.

Draco was standing next to her, his pale hair visible in the dark. She jerked away but then froze and stared at him. Her heart was in her throat. She studied him with wide eyes.

He was older.

His face was the same, but his eyes were older, as though it had been decades since she'd seen him. His expression was closed, but his gaze was familiar and intent as he stood beside her bed.

"You're still alive," she said. Her throat was dry, and her voice broke with relief. "I thought you'd died."

She started to reach instinctively towards him. He was alive. He was still alive. She'd kept him alive.

His eyes widened.

"Ginny. She was the first body they brought back."

Her hand froze.

Everything hit her. Manacled. Imprisoned in Malfoy Manor to be bred.

He was the High Reeve.

Terror welled up inside her. Her blood ran ice cold. She felt as though she'd been struck so brutally she would die from it.

She gave a ragged gasp and snatched her hand back. Her jaw trembled, and she pushed herself away from him with shaking hands until she reached the far side of the bed. She slid off the mattress and knelt on the floor, staring across the bed at him as she struggled to breathe. Trying to reconcile everything.

It was Draco. He was still alive.

But he'd hurt her. He'd raped her. He'd told her he didn't want her; that he couldn't wait to kill her.

She felt like an injured animal struck on the motorway, bewildered and dying and trying helplessly to find a way to escape and hide. She wanted a dark corner to curl up in where things would stop hurting.

What happened?

As she tried to think, an agonising pain laced through her brain so abruptly her vision disappeared. An anguished moan escaped through her teeth. She buried her face in her

hands as she struggled to keep conscious and tried to remember through the blinding pain in her head.

“Let’s be clear, Mudblood. I don’t want you. I never wanted you. I’m not your friend. There is nothing that will bring me more joy than being done with you.”

He’d killed Ginny.

He’d killed everyone.

She looked up and started breathing faster and faster as she stared at him, trying to understand.

“Are you still a virgin, Mudblood? Is that something you even remember?”

The sensation of her skirts being pulled up, exposing her as she stood bent over a table, gripping it, trying not to shake or make any sound.

He’d dragged her before Voldemort and held her in place while her mind was torn to pieces and then left her lying on the floor in a pool of rotting unicorn blood.

Hermione kept staring at him. There was a tearing pain in her chest—in her heart—as though there were a blade slicing through her as she struggled to breathe. Her chest contracted sharply and a broken, gasping sob was torn from her as all the gaps and inconsistencies merged into a single horrifying narrative.

Her heart kept beating faster and faster. Hermione pressed her hands over her mouth and squeezed her eyes shut. Her low sobs cut through silence. She kept shaking as she tried to think.

“I’m going to take care of you. I’m always going to take care of you.”

The pain in her mind was growing blinding, as though the past and present were converging and tearing each other apart.

She gripped her head. Her brain felt as though it were on fire, her skull cut open, the pressure in her head intensifying

and intensifying until she dropped her head down and screamed.

She screamed until she was gasping and then ground her teeth together and tried to keep from hyperventilating. She looked back across the bed again.

Draco was gone.

She sank onto the floor, pressing a hand against her chest. Maybe he hadn't even been there. She might have just hallucinated him.

Maybe she'd hallucinated it all.

Maybe he was dead, and she was still in her cell dreaming of him.

She was just hallucinating that she'd somehow found him in the darkness.

No. It was real. She was certain it was all real. Because it was worse than anything she would have dreamed.

Let's be clear, Mudblood. I don't want you. I never wanted you.

She couldn't understand. Parts made sense, but other parts—

A hand grasped her by the shoulder, and she started violently. Draco had come around the bed and was kneeling beside her.

He studied her, and his eyes flickered as his expression tensed. "You're remembering now, aren't you?"

She gave a small nod, and her hand reached up and gripped his wrist. He was really there. She could feel his bones under her fingertips.

"Grang—"

Hermione buried her face against the comforter of the bed and sobbed with relief. The pain in her head was so severe she felt as though her skull were fracturing. She ground her teeth together as she tried not to scream again.

"Oh god—" she forced the words out. Her whole body was trembling.

A thought struck her, and she stilled, her hold tightening.

“The horcrux—the one Umbridge was wearing—was that—was that you?”

There was a silence. “It was.”

Her lips trembled, and she squeezed her eyes shut. “Was it—was that the last one?”

“It was.”

She nodded, and her empty hand spasmed; she gripped the fabric of her robes and tried to make sense of everything.

If he was there, he wasn't dead.

But—if he wasn't dead, that meant he'd never come for her.

She'd waited. And waited. And waited.

And he never came.

“I don't want you. I never wanted you.”

Ginny.

Her hold on his wrist slipped away, and her hand fell to the floor as the devastation drowned her relief.

“Why did you kill Ginny—?” Her voice broke.

“Ginny's alive.”

She turned and stared at him. “Hannah saw her body. Everyone in Hogwarts saw it. Vold—Voldemort said you killed her. You—you told me you killed her.”

“Ginny's alive.” He met her eyes. “She was pregnant, remember? Her son was born on October 20th, 2003. I'm told he was an exceptionally difficult newborn. She named him James Sirius Potter. You're his godmother.”

Hermione gave a low sob, and Draco continued.

“He's a year and half now. You're going to meet him soon. They're waiting for you. You promised Potter you'd take care of them. You have to hold on and get better so you can go.”

Her heart rose, a flicker of hope in the darkness and the cold.

“You are aware of how precarious she is. I have gone to considerable expense and effort to maintain her environment.”

She dropped her head, her mouth twisting as she trembled and looked away. “I don’t believe you.”

He made no reply.

“I don’t understand—” She squeezed her eyes closed again as she tried to focus through the pain. “I don’t understand what happened. I can’t remember clearly.” She opened her eyes and studied him in the darkness. “But—I remember you.”

It was Draco. He was so close. He was looking at her the way he used to look at her.

She wanted to catch hold of him and bury herself in his arms, against his chest, to feel his heartbeat.

Her hands spasmed.

She couldn’t.

He had killed everyone. He had murdered or executed them all. She felt herself crumbling under the renewed horror and devastation of it.

His expression wavered, and his mouth twitched before he spoke. “What—do you remember about me?”

“You—” she studied his face. He was familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, as though carved out of the likeness of the person she’d known.

Her fingers twitched as she fought an urge to reach out and at least touch him. To just know whether he still felt familiar under her fingertips.

He was alive. She’d been so sure he’d died, that he must have died. But he wasn’t dead; she could see the pulse at the base of his throat.

“You spied for the Order. When you were hurt, I healed you. You—” she swallowed and looked down at her wrists and scarlet clothing as she tried to remember clearly, “—you used to call for me—and—”

There was a stabbing pain through her head, and she gave an agonised gasp and slumped down.

She blinked, trying to remember what she'd been saying. Her tongue felt fuzzy and wouldn't move properly, as though it had been numbed.

She jerked and tried to move her jaw, but it twitched so violently her teeth made a loud clacking sound. Her left arm and leg gave out, and she started to topple sideways.

Draco caught her.

"Dra—?" Her chest spasmed as she struggled to breathe, and he pulled her firmly against his chest.

He didn't say anything to her. Instead he gripped her jaw, pried her mouth open, and rapidly upended a potion into her mouth before clamping his hand over her mouth and nose.

She tried to wrench herself away. Panicking. She didn't know what was happening. Her lungs felt like they might burst as she struggled to breathe. Her body kept jerking of its own volition. Her numb tongue couldn't taste the potion he'd put in her mouth.

She wasn't supposed to swallow things if she didn't know what they were.

"Granger," his voice was calm and close to her ear. "You need to swallow. You're having a seizure. The potion will stop it, but it takes longer to work if you can't swallow it."

Hermione's throat contracted repeatedly, and her arm spasmed, but Draco refused to ease his grip. After several tries, she managed to make herself swallow.

Her whole body went limp as though she were boneless.

Draco's hold relaxed, and her head lolled down and rested against his chest. She felt him sigh, and his hand stroke her hair back. He brushed his thumb against her cheek while his other arm supported her body. His hands were warm. He still smelled the same, and it made her want to start crying.

After a moment he shifted and picked her up. She could feel her bones, jutting through her skin as he lifted her and set her back onto the bed.

Her mouth wouldn't quite work. She stared at him, trying to take in every detail.

He slid a hand under her head and studied her carefully.

Up close, despite the low light, she could see he was visibly exhausted. His skin was pale to the point of being grey. His mouth and eyes were tense.

His pupils were sharply contracted, and his gaze kept flicking across her as though he were trying to make sure he wasn't overlooking anything. His expression was carefully closed.

"You've been unconscious for almost a week," he said after a minute. "You had a seizure and lost consciousness. The healers weren't sure—if you'd wake up. Seizures—" she saw his throat contract as he swallowed, and he stopped meeting her eyes, "are not uncommon when dealing with neurological damage caused by concentrated magical activity. You had—several while unconscious, but fortunately none caused any lasting damage to you—or your baby."

Hermione stopped breathing, and her eyes widened.

The baby. She'd forgotten that she was pregnant.

She was pregnant with his heir. For the breeding program. To force her memories to come back.

There was something she was missing, but the pain still overshadowed everything. She tried to think, but reaching towards her memories was mind shattering.

She couldn't remember—

Her chest started spasming.

"I don't understand," she forced the words out. "What happened? Why—why—"

She tried to breathe, and it made a gasping sound in the back of her throat. Her chest started jerking faster and faster.

Draco's fingers under her head tightened in her hair. His expression was open as he stared down at her, his face only inches from hers.

"Grang—Hermione, you need to breathe slowly. Hyperventilating when pregnant can increase your risk of having another seizure." His eyes were imploring. "Please breathe, Granger."

Hermione gave a low sob and nodded.

Inhale, to a count of four.

Exhale, slowly to a count of six.

She studied his face. She felt a ravenous desperation as she looked at him, but there was also growing well of hurt. She didn't know how to reconcile the person she knew with the person she'd spent six months imprisoned by.

As her breathing slowed, tears began sliding in cold trails down her temples.

Draco's gaze dropped away from her face, and he withdrew his hand and straightened.

He looked down at her, hesitating, his hand curled into a fist at his side. "I'm sorry. Severus and I thought we'd have you out before February. I didn't think you'd be here for so long."

She bit her lip and tried to think of what to ask him. What happened? Why didn't you come? Why did you hurt me? Why did you rape me?

Why did you become the High Reeve?

"Why—" she gave a low sob, "Why did you kill everyone?"

His eyes flickered, and his jaw twitched as he straightened and looked away from her. "I was trying to find you."

Her heart stalled with a mixture of horror and relief.

"You—looked for me?" Her voice was shaking.

He looked back at her. "Of course I looked for you. I looked everywhere for you. Did you think I left you there?"