

No One Left

by Terra

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The first time he calls her "Mudblood," she doesn't understand Ron's instinctive fury or the shocked gasps. All she knows is that Malfoy's face is mottled with rage and humiliation, and it makes her feel triumphant.

But Hermione learns, it is what she does best, and the word mutates into an insult. The last defense of a bully who isn't clever or interesting enough to retaliate fairly. She brushes it off.

The next time he calls her "Mudblood," it's more than a sneer because the sky is raining skulls and serpents and people are screaming, fleeing from black shadows and jets of light aimed to kill.

The word itself is inert, harmless. A logical fallacy - how can blood be muddy? But when faceless specters attack nameless Muggles for sport and call it cleansing, she understands the slur's true meaning. It is the same indifference that raped a continent in the name of colonialism, the same hatred that forced men and women and children to sew yellow stars on threadbare linen, the same ignorance that fed cheering mobs as men in white hoisted black men into nooses.

He tells her, "Granger, they're after Muggles."

They're coming to gas you, lynch you, line you up against a wall and pound lead into your skull.

He jeers, "If you think they can't spot a Mudblood, stay where you are."

They can see the taint in the pigment of your face, the heresy in the sanctity of your faith, the threat in your dreams of a different fate.

He taunts, "Oh yeah, I forgot, you're a Mudblood, Granger, so ten for that."

This is how it begins, she thinks. A taste of heady power that corrupts. Inquisitorial Squad, Khmer Rouge, Third Reich.

He promises, "They'll be the first to go, now the Dark Lord's back! Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers first!"

It always starts small. Disdain because they look, talk, act, think differently. Apathy because it isn't you. Obedience because it's too late to protest.

The last time he calls her "Mudblood," he is about to kill a defenseless man who uses his last moments to refute an offensive word.

Fear of the name only increases fear of the thing itself, Dumbledore has always said. This, Hermione knows above all else. Words have power: it only takes one syllable to change a spell, and only one syllable to decide the victim. It's the difference between pure and mud, white and black, man and woman.

Hermione isn't afraid of the name. She didn't grow up hearing it, and it doesn't make her quiver in anger or shrink in shame. But it makes her think that people aren't really so different.

She remembers silent sobs behind clenched fists, hiding in the toilet while her class switches seats. Because no one ever wants to share desks with her. She remembers vicious satisfaction when the boy who steals her crayons turns into a rainbow of colors. It serves him right for being a bully. She remembers childish delight after casting her first spell. Incontrovertible proof that she is different, that she is special, that she is *better*. She laughs in their faces and imagines coming back one day to teach them shame and pain, the feelings she has choked on for so long.

No, Hermione realizes, people are the same everywhere.

Hearing *Mudblood* saddens her. Because racists and bigots aren't anything terrifying and unusual; they're neighbors and mothers and schoolmates.

The epithet seeps into her until she's proud to bear its mark. She is Muggle-born. She is a witch. She is stubborn and clever and magical. And no amount of ranting or threats can besmirch what she is.

Malfoy says, "I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!"

And Hermione wants to tell him:

They came first for the Mudbloods,

and you didn't speak up because you weren't a Mudblood.

Then they came for the half-bloods,

and you didn't speak up because you weren't a half-blood.

Then they came for you,

and by that time, there was no one left to speak up.

The poem is a paraphrase of "First They Came...", most often attributed to Martin Niemöller.