

Confessions, A Time of Year Again

by Terra

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It's That Time of Year Again

Chapter 1 of 1

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It's funny what they say about old age.

"People are like wine," some sycophant slurs in my ear. "They only get better with age." Or worse: "Age doesn't matter unless you're a cheese!" some other fool tells me, swaying like a weed (the nasty kind you wished would mind its own business and stay out of your garden), clutching a butterbeer that I'll wager the Manor is *not* butterbeer.

Bloody. Fantastic. I'm being serenaded by the perpetually shitfaced and toady hangers-on. Aren't there any other blasted bars in England? It almost makes one miss Crabbe and Goyle. And *that* should tell you just how bleeding depressed I am.

It's all a lot of rubbish anyway. The next idiot who tells me that my birthday is a special time to celebrate the gift of ME to the world is getting hexed. Violently and virulently. That sound? That's me retching on the sobbing train wreck of a man using my sleeve as a hankie. Do I look like a bloody tissue to you? Goddamn emotional drunks. I *do not care* about your arthritis or bed sores, you blithering moron, and *good god*, man, put that away!

Yes, that's me retching some more. If you didn't know, I'm allergic to tears. Get ill. Very.

My take on the whole aging thing? Getting old's like death by drowning. I'm sure it can be quite delightful, you know, once you've stopped struggling. But until then? I hear choking and thrashing are popular. Need to work on my breaststroke anyway. What are you looking at me like that for? I'm extending the *metaphor*, you daft bint.

Oh, right on time, there's that pursing of the lips you do. Like a psychotic nun up to your ears in maidenly virtue (hear being a virgin is cranky business), and oh, there it is, now you're narrowing those big brown eyes at me. This doesn't bode well. Don't tell me you're hiding a pickaxe or something dreadfully sharp behind your back. I've seen that movie (at your behest, I might add).

"Do you have any idea how many bars I've been in tonight?" you snap, shoulders rigid and red welling in your cheeks. A more perfect picture of ruffled hen I've never encountered. Ow! Guess I said that one out loud. You are, without a doubt, a maniac, and *and violent*. No wonder Weasel tossed you back. Loads of other more compliant birds in the pond.

Ow! Okay, those looks of death? Not just for show; there's *follow-through*. Dammit, woman, it's my sodding birthday. I can't even catch a break on the one day of the year God meant me to be worshipped...Ow! Ow!...all right, *all right*, the one day of the year polite people are supposed to pretend they like the fact that I'm still breathing.

Clearly, you do not number among them.

"You have no idea the trouble you're in," you rant and rave and do that thing where you poke me until I'm black and blue, "breaking out all the patients from the Janus Thickley Ward, how could you? You're lucky that nobody decided to walk into the street because, gee, I don't know, the shiny cars are pretty or something. It would've been on your head if anyone got themselves *run over*..."

I tune you out. Not easily done, to be sure, but it's mighty funny watching you puff up, your wild shroud of hair flailing this way and that. Like a silent movie (yes, I saw those for you, too) or a show on the telly on mute. Wish I'd learned this handy trick back in our school days god, how long ago was that? Twenty...thirty years? I've done a gravity job forgetting.

My philosophy? Growing old's like being increasingly punished for a crime you didn't commit. And I've committed loads, so I'd know. So what if I let the mad hatters out of St. Mungo's permanent ward? How else am I to get together a suitable crush for my birthday party? Malfoys deserve only the best, especially of the boozing variety and you know, all that tripe. They never serve us anything alcoholic, which I'm blaming you for, by the way.

Ow! Yes, I'm *listening*. I'm hurt that you're so suspicious. This is my pensive, listening face, I'll have you know. Not to be confused with my bored, bugger off face. What do you mean this is the end of the line? *What* line?

"I can't *god*, Draco. I don't know if I can keep doing this with you. People are talking and if they find out that I've been...that we're," you swallow convulsively and claw handprints into the wooden counter, "that I've been giving you special treatment, they'll sack me. You know this can't work. I can't keep covering up for you. I'd I'd like to think we've become friends and..."

Did you know, Granger? Your eyebrows crinkle together and your eyes flit about every time you lie. Every fucking time. How *dd* know? I've got this mental sketch of you that I carry around everywhere. On nights when it's not your shift and the Ward's dark and that barking mad Lockhart won't shut it, I take it out, spread it open behind my eyelids, and I count every lash, trace every dimple, smooth that rebellious curl behind your ear. I fall asleep staring into your muddy, dirty, brown eyes.

So I know. I know when you're bloody lying. And you're doing it now. *But why*, why now?

"I know this is hard for you. I mean," you laugh helplessly, wringing your hands until even I'm wincing, "nobody likes getting old. But forty-five's not so bad. It took me some getting used to, too. And well, it's like a set of dress robes that are too small. The first couple of days, it's so tight it hurts to breathe. But then, you fill it out, stretch it until it fits. And then," you gesture wildly at my chest, still not looking at me, "then you get over it."

I don't want to fucking get over it. You're like this disease (did you think I was joking about those virulent hexes earlier?). I've got this memory from when I was four, playing in my mum's garden. I skinned my knee something vicious and it soaked up the dry soil, dyed it crimson. Stung so bad I was howling. That's when my grandfather...good old Muggle-hating Abraxas...tutted and told me, "That's what the mud'll do to you, boy."

I was physically ill with shame the first time you outscored me, did you know that? You still make me nauseous. And the hesitant way you're looking at me now...finally *looking* at me...worrying your lip like that, god, I want it back. It was simple, the clean pure hate. Drawing lines in the sand, me here, you there. Blood, so much blood in between. You're throwing me away, aren't you? Abandoning me like everybody else. I'm not man enough for you. I never was, was I?

Damn you, listen to me!

It wasn't my fucking fault Crabbe Sr. tortured me until I lost my fucking mind. I suppose I deserve it, though. It's on me that Vincent's dead. If he hadn't been my lackey, fallen in too deep to get out, then he'd still be around, chasing Bulstrode's skirts...bloke never had any taste, I'm sorry to say. There it is. I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry that if you wanted me to pitch myself in front of those damned cars you're always harping on about, I'd do it. I'd do anything for you, don't you know?

No, I guess you don't. Because you're gathering up your coat and wiping at your eyes. Why? Since when have I ever been worth tears to you?

"Draco," you say, "I'm going to go now. This this is goodbye."

If you go I'll kill myself, I want to tell you. But I don't.

Because you've been my hostage for too long, so long that even you've realized it, bleeding heart Gryffindor that you are. It's been years since that first day you marched into the Ward with those brisk steps that are always *going somewhere*, no aimless pacing for you, not when there are still so many people waiting for you to compassion them to death. But here's a secret. You don't belong here, cozying up with death and the dying, and really, what's the difference? You're meant to be outside, in the arms of ginger-haired nancyboys and smothered by little babies you'll have with some great bloke someday. Just please, no specy gits. I know I've taught you better than that.

White-washed walls, bars and madness aren't for you. You're too brown for all this desolate white. You're autumn, the scent of a pile of leaves and the gold seeping into everything; you're the season that makes people want to find someone to live out all this dying with them.

And it's you. You're that someone for me. I don't want to be together with you until death do us apart, or some load of romantic bollocks like that. I want to live for you. To live *with* you, because you make waking up to that next birthday worth it. I want...

Oh bugger it, I said that out loud, didn't I? Well, I've never been any good at this selfless, heroic crap anyway. That gaping look on your face? Not flattering, my dear. I'm not, you know, declaring myself or some shit like that, so you can stop crying and clutching at me like a romance heroine with leaky tear ducts and low blood sugar.

I'm no Dracy or whatever the bloke's name is (you made me read that, too).

You shouldn't get any ideas, Hermione. I'll only disappoint...you barbarian, you bit me! Well, that's one way to shut me up.