

Silence

by MaraudingManaged

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Chapter 1 of 1

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She wasn't sure if she would ever truly get used to the silence.

No, that wasn't true. Her cottage wasn't truly silent; not when you had a babbling toddler who had just recently found his feet bounding around it at a somewhat terrifying rate. He never made much sense, of course - toddler babbling never did, apart from a few words here and there - but it made a break from the monotony of twittering birds and countryside sounds she had become so accustomed to that they barely made a dent in her periphery. Sometimes she would pretend to have a conversation with him; imagine the answers he would give, respond in kind, and direct her actions as if he were able to give her detailed instructions. She wondered if he thought she was quite the strangest Grandmother in the entirety of Wizarding Britain. She snorted out loud at that; she probably was. She'd had no shortage of strangeness in her life... after all, her family was prone to all manner of madnesses and neuroses. She was probably the sanest of the bunch.

Still, it was so very quiet.

When her husband had died she'd been bolstered by those around her, at least a little. He'd been missing for some time before the news officially came that he was dead, and she'd had time to steel herself for what was to come. He'd gone on the run after all the Muggleborn Registration nonsense, though of course she'd begged him not to, and the minute he'd gone she knew... She just *knew*. He wouldn't be coming back, and she knew it in her bones. *It was war, after all*. It had been the same during the first war: when someone went missing, they so rarely came back. It had hurt so much, so very, very much; yet she had persevered and carried on, like any true Englishwoman. Her devastation had seemed endless, yet she'd found ways to fill the world with sound and the happy chaos that she had always craved, even as a young girl.

She'd loved the piano - *oh, how she loved the piano*. Her father had played some of the great symphonies - Wizarding only, of course - when he'd worked late into the night in his study on an old gramophone. She had often sneaked down the stairs, hiding behind bannisters just to listen to the music through a crack in the door. She felt a fond smile capture her lips as she remembered the number of nights she'd been found there, fast asleep with her head resting between the elegant railings by her father as he cradled her in his arms. He never told her mother; he knew the reason she broke the rules of bedtime when he heard her humming the melodies to herself sleepily as he tucked her back into the bed that drowned her in its size.

He'd bought her a piano as soon as she was tall enough to reach the pedals, and the finest piano tutor gold could buy. He'd doted on her as only a Pureblood father could - with his galleons, rather than his time; but strangely she hadn't minded his absence as much as her sisters had. It was their secret midnight meetings on the stairs that were theirs alone, even as she grew older and he could no longer carry her. He would crouch by her and brush ink-stained fingers from brow to jaw with tenderness that most would have found rather unexpected of the man. He would tuck long, fine strands of brown hair back from her face and whisper in her ear, so as not to startle her awake too suddenly.

"Time for bed, little maestra."

And she would stir and follow him, allowing him to lift her upward until she stood steadily, letting him lead her to bed and tuck her in. It was their little secret, one that she had cherished and kept close all through her Hogwarts years, even as she progressed from scales to melodies, from melodies to sonatas, and sonatas to concertos.

It had broken her heart as much as it had broken his when she had run away from the house in the middle of the night to marry the man she loved, rather than the man her family intended to force upon her. She had felt the tie to her father snap in her chest when she received a letter from her cousin, still at Hogwarts, telling her in a cursive scrawl that she'd been burned off the family tapestry when they realised her surname had changed to *'that Mudblood scum's'* and was she okay? Her little Gryffindor cub, he was. Another stain on her family's name - she didn't doubt it would be very long at all before a black mark covered his own face and name. That boy, that beautiful, daff boy, was going to get himself into trouble one day. He probably would by asking how she was; if he got caught, anyway. He seemed to be remarkably good at not getting caught, from all accounts.

Was she okay? Well, she was with the man that she loved. The rest of her heart was broken, but she was sure it would be healed by her husband in time.

It had been, though the healing had been slow. And of course, he filled her world with noise and that wonderful chaos.

He had a car, her husband. He was always tinkering with it, out in the garage when he had a day off work, and he played some Muggle radio station that he would sing along to loudly. He'd had a beautiful voice - not many people had known that about him. It was how they'd first met - met properly, anyway. She'd always known *of* him; half the girls in Hogwarts were well on their way to being in love with him, with his wavy golden hair and legs for days, but she'd never really paid much attention to him with her family's penchant for marrying off their daughters to the highest bidder. She was up on the History of Magic floor when she'd heard someone singing Mozart - a *beautiful*, rich baritone - as she was doing her Prefect duties in sixth year. He was in an abandoned classroom far too late at night, perched on a desk with some sheet music in front of him, with those long legs all the girls fancied crossed in front of him by the ankles. A gramophone was set to play quietly, with an old record humming out an opera she shouldn't have recognised; her father would have been sure to bruise her arse black and blue for knowing *'that Muggle filth'*.

She was loathe to disturb him, but a glance at her watch had told her that he was going to get into trouble if he didn't go to his common room. He would have been bugged if Lucius found him, that was for sure. But still, she'd lingered by the door just a little longer, listening to him sing along to the duet from *Così fan tutte* as he found the harmonies along with the woman on the recording.

She'd felt a strange sort of pang in her chest that she wasn't really a singer - she wouldn't have minded singing along with him. There weren't many students at Hogwarts who appreciated classical music, and she would have given her wand-arm to be able to just listen to music with someone who liked it too, and discuss it maybe. She'd raised her hand to knock, but stopped short when she realised that he'd stopped singing and instead was staring at her, face flushed.

"Shit, the set is going to kill me." He grimaced. "Go on then, do your worst. How many points am I losing this time?"

"Well, it depends. Do you think you're going to be singing Mozart again any time soon? What about Donizetti or Rossini?" She'd queried, showing off just a little to prove that Mozart wasn't the only composer she knew. His eyes had widened so comically it had drawn a bit of a giggle from her, and she'd covered her mouth with her hand.

"Got a bit of a fetish for Italian opera, have you?" He'd grinned at her when he'd found his composure, and she'd offered a Slytherin smirk at that.

"You'll have to find out, won't you?"

Well, it had turned out that she really, really did. They'd first kissed two months later in that classroom, the door locked and warding - by him - and she'd practically purred like a kitten as he'd sung against her neck before claiming her mouth with his own. It was sinful, really, how good a kisser a 17-year-old boy could be. She supposed he'd learned a thing or two about romancing a lady from his operas, and a thing or two more about kissing from the practice he'd had with just one or two of the girls around the castle. Alright, perhaps it was a few more than one or two; she wasn't a stupid witch.

She didn't mind. It had been her he was snogging, and her only, from then on.

Their clandestine relationship began in earnest, meeting in secret places around the castle to listen to music, to talk, and to snog each other silly. He understood implicitly the need for it to be a secret; he might have been raised in the Muggle world but he'd come into adulthood in the magical one, and he'd had his fair share of *Mudbloods* thrown at him for him not to really notice who they came from. It wasn't who she was any longer, perhaps she had never truly been of that ilk; but the vile words always spilled from the family that had bred her, bore her, and the other close-minded Purebloods she had been raised around. But Salazar, she was addicted to this marvellous, wonderful man, and as sixth year passed into seventh their relationship continued. She knew she couldn't give him up. No... she wouldn't.

At Easter, not long after she'd turned eighteen, he'd proposed. A beautiful ring, as elegant and poised as she was, he'd said. She'd accepted without a second thought, and they'd made love for the first time right there in the classroom, the one with the gramophone, the place they'd fallen in love in playing Mozart, the room filled with candles and roses. It had been the most magical moment, even when he removed the ring from her finger and slipped it around her neck on a chain so that she could keep it hidden until they could elope - which they planned to do that summer. Before her family had a chance to tie her into a betrothal contract she wouldn't be able to break free from.

Which they did plan to - she saw the papers one night; they planned to marry her off to some Dolohov man she'd never met and never intended to. Her beautiful Hufflepuff boy had made all the arrangements for their wedding, and so as soon as the date was set she left a letter explaining her actions, and then tore up the contract on her father's desk before leaving her own letter in its place. She'd run away, like a thief in the night, never to look back or be admitted into her family manor again.

They'd married in the Muggle world with his parents and family as witnesses, and she'd worn the most beautiful white dress, walking down the aisle alone in the quaint little old church. He'd been all she could see, standing at the end of the aisle in a shaft of light breaking through the stained glass; like an angel with his golden hair lit up like a halo, her own personal saving grace. They'd signed the paperwork at the Ministry of Magic almost as an afterthought, the bonding of their wands in a short ceremony that somehow held so much less magic than their Muggle wedding. Of course they made no announcements, but when a daughter of the Most Noble and Ancient house was wed, it was sure to make some sort of stir - which it did.

Her mother sent Howlers that she simply silenced and let burn themselves out to shreds. Her eldest sister did the same, except hers had a nasty curse added to it, too. She'd needed quite the shield for that one, as well as a silencing charm and a bit of handy wand-work from her husband who grimaced and asked why her sister was such a vile bitch. Her youngest sister simply wrote a letter saying that she hoped she was happy with what she'd done, and that she would break the hearts of her family forever.

She never heard from her father. The silence from him was almost worse than the guilt-inspiring words of her youngest sister, the Howlers, the curses, being blasted from the tapestry. She could deal with all of those repercussions. It was the silence that wounded her deeply.

Just as it did now.

There was no noise from the garage, no tinkering, and the radio seemed hollow when he wasn't singing along to it. Even her piano stood silently in the parlour - she'd not touched it since he'd died. She'd not been able to bring herself to grace the keys, to play the music she'd loved for as long as she could recall. It was all woven into memories of him that were so raw she couldn't bear to unearth them; it was like dredging open a gaping hole in her chest where her heart should have been.

Her daughter was gone, too. Her son-in-law also gone, though he had been a quiet sort in his own fierce, protective way. He'd been a man familiar with loss, just as she'd been a woman who'd known it. She'd been unsure about him and their age difference at the start, but she'd come to appreciate the man - and to be fair, her husband had knocked a bit of sense into her too. She couldn't help but remember the years she'd spent bringing up her daughter to be *so much better* than any other daughter of her old house, and she had been. Oh, how she had been. Never had there been a mother prouder of the child she had produced, from the moment she had come screaming into the world and her hair changed from brown to blonde to bubblegum pink, matching the blanket wrapped around her.

"He makes her happy, you know. Don't start acting like that wretched lot you're related to now." He'd wrapped his arms around her waist as she'd made tea for them, and

started singing in her ear in Italian and she was done for. That blasted man had known just how to push her buttons, even after so many years of living and loving together... or perhaps because of them.

Her vibrant daughter had given birth to a child of her own. A beautiful boy, so beautiful. Named in honour of her father, the grandfather he would never know. He'd started changing his hair the day he'd been born too, just like his mother did; only he seemed to favour turquoise. Merlin only knew where he got that particular shade from - he hadn't seen it that she knew of. He just adopted it and took to it like his own personal shade. It suited him, in an odd way, right from the start; just as pinks and violets had suited her daughter.

When her son-in-law - *her son* - had held the tiny bundle for the first time - right before apparating off to tell Harry Potter and his crew at Shell Cottage - he'd wept. He'd wept and pressed his lips to the child's forehead and just whispered over and over again how much he loved him already, and that he would always protect him. That he would protect him against everything, even himself.

That had nearly broken her, and she'd dragged him out of the room only a moment later to hug him half to death. He'd died only months later. His son would never remember his mother or father; except for in the memories of others, where they lived on still. Memories like hers.

Merlin, her heart hurt. Her heart was tearing itself apart with the loss of them all. The kettle sang shrilly and she stood robotically, moving to the kitchen to prepare tea before she stopped, hunching over the counter with a dry, heaving sob as she clutched a hand to her chest.

Her husband; her golden-haired, soulful, sweet, charming, smooth-voiced, healing husband. Her Ted.

Her darling daughter; her beautiful, brave, clumsy, bright-haired, sharp-witted, and sharper-tongued daughter. Her Nymphadora.

Her son; the one she never expected, clever, unfathomably strong, loyal, the match for her daughter, and another piece to the puzzle that was her heart. Her Remus.

Even Sirius; that darling, mad, rebellious, reckless Gryffindor cub with a heart too big for his poor body to handle.

All of them gone, leaving her in the silence. A silence so deafening, so all-encompassing that she felt crushed under the weight of it, and it forced her to her knees right there on the kitchen floor. All of her dignity, all of her Pureblood training, all of her *Noble and Most Ancient House of Blacks* superiority well and truly beaten out of her; by time and grief and those around her who had taught her to truly love no matter their history and circumstance.

"Nana?"

A tiny hand grabbed at her robes and she almost jumped out of her skin with fright, a slight screech escaping her before she shook herself and swept the tiny bundle of mischief into her arms, putting him firmly in her lap in an act that was so natural it was automatic.

"Oh, my little love! How did you get out of bed, hmm?" She held him close to her chest, pressing his head into her shoulder gently as she stroked his hair. Her eyes screwed tightly shut as she hugged him - the little boy not knowing exactly why, she knew, but somehow he did know what she needed. His chubby little arms cuddled around her neck and dug into the strands of her hair that were still as brown as the day she'd left home under the cover of night, and he snuggled deeper into the cuddle he was given... his hair morphing to match her own.

"Oh, my Teddy. My little darling boy." She whispered into his soft crown, pressing a kiss into the hair that was so like her daughter's it brought a fresh wave of pain. She rocked Teddy back and forth on the floor of the kitchen, tears streaked down her face, her sobs no longer dry, until her heart was utterly spent and until Teddy had fallen asleep again in her lap. She sat then, cradling him in her arms, cherishing the moment where his face was relaxed and she could see every bit of those she'd lost in his features. Ted's expressive mouth, Dora's hair and heart-shaped face, Remus' nose and round eyes. Thick, dark lashes, and irises beneath the closed lids that were (for now, at least) the same clear, inquisitive grey of his grandmother - utterly Black.

She couldn't do this any more. She couldn't live in the silence for a minute longer.

Somehow, she struggled to her feet - her knees complaining all the way - and the boy in her arms remained sound asleep. Trudging through the house on aching limbs she placed the little boy on the settee where he could finish the nap he woke from too early, and then moved to the writing desk. Her fingers lingered on the wood worn smooth with age and constant use, before she withdrew the chair and sat down, drawing out an old fountain pen that had once belonged to Ted and some parchment before she lost her nerve completely.

Narcissa,

I know this will mean so little, coming from me, but I am so sorry for how everything turned out. I...

She balled that attempt up and threw it in the bin. In fact, she binned, burned, and destroyed ten different attempts at a letter to her sister before the words simply came to her in a moment of clarity; an echo of all that she had felt.

Narcissa,

I cannot stand the silence in my own house. I think it's killing me.

Andromeda

She rolled the parchment up and attached it to Ophelia, sending the owl out into the afternoon sunlight with no doubt it would be returned unopened, unanswered, or probably both. Both seemed more likely; the most likely. She tried to put it out of her mind - a moment of madness and weakness - and returned to preparing her tea that had been left to go cold in the kitchen.

It was four hours later, as she was cooking dinner and Harry was rolling around on the floor with Teddy on his back - taking to being a godfather like a duck to water - that she heard a giggling laugh from the front room.

"Nana, now!"

Her heart stopped, and then started again. Surely not...?

"An owl, Teddy bear." Harry corrected as she skidded in, her composure utterly destroyed. "Hey, Andy, isn't this the Malfoy..." His eyes popped wide and he covered Teddy's ears. "Bloody hell, did you write to Narcissa?" He asked, his emerald eyes flicking between her and the envelope that was being held out by her ever-patient owl. Teddy, unaccustomed to being excluded from conversation, swatted at Harry's hands until the man removed his impromptu earmuffs.

She nodded mutely as she untied the letter and offered a treat to the bird before sitting primly on the settee, hands trembling only a little. Harry came to sit next to her - offering warm solidarity; so very different from the overly cautious young man she'd first met only a few years ago. Taking a deep breath and closing her eyes for a moment, she nodded once before breaking the seal and scanning the short, beautifully scribed words inside. She crumpled up on herself with loud, violent sobs, and Harry's arms went around her as Teddy's little hands grasped at her knees, holding himself upright.

"Nana sad?" Teddy said, grey eyes wide with worry.

"No." She gasped, shaking her head. "No, Nana is not sad at all."

'Dromeda,

As is mine.

Tea is always at three sharp, at the Black Dower House.

'Cissa.