

Before going into Avalon, you... you had to ask Arty to be with you once again. Spend time with you. In any way. Even just sitting next to you and holding your hand. Fall asleep on your shoulder. See what cards you would get from a bag of chocolate frogs and compare who got the cooler ones. Play a game of Gobstones or Exploding Snap and see Arty's cute pout when you blew her out at either. If she wanted to just lay down with you after both were exhausted from "Crouchy's" teaching? That would be grand. If she wanted to do more than that after laying down together? Amazing. And if all she desired was to softly cuddle, tell you of her worries while you tried to sooth them? That would be excellent. Whatever she wanted.

If she asked for the stars themselves, you would start walking to the top of the Astronomy Tower as soon as you could pull yourself from her intoxicating embrace and ask Taylor if you could borrow them for a little while.

And while you would give Arty as much as you could, well you wanted something too.

You did choose Slytherin; you were greedy by nature.

And that greed demanded one more night. Before Avalon and its fall out. Before her and the others stole two of the most powerful pieces of magic in the world left after Merlin stole your legacy. Before you cast a spell which would get you shoved in a small cell for a decade at best and killed by Potter or a dozen Aurors at worst.

You knew your plan was... shaky. That even if you pulled it off and kept Salazar from what lay in the Isle of Apple Trees? Prevented Merlin from coming back? Kept your friends and lover alive? Found something to prevent Potter from shooting you the minute he found you; being expelled and having your wand snapped in half would mean getting off light.

So, you wanted one more night. One more before being put on the wizard equivalent of a terrorist watch-list and possibly be prevented from seeing her ever again.

You knew she normally wouldn't have much time to be alone with you. But you were okay at copying her handwriting. After the consequences of what she was going to help you do shake out, having a professor mad about a paper or two wouldn't really matter all that much, would it?

Thus, you had used your Slytherin cunning and a few knuts to find out which assignments the 5th years had been given that day. Used the free time you always had in Slughorn's class, especially large now having figured out some of Snape's tricks. It was double potions today which was convenient. Employed that time to complete her assignments for her so she wouldn't need to stay up till midnight working on them. You had already had similar ones a year ago after all. Even if charms and transfiguration weren't your best subjects, they were easy enough to get a couple dozen inches for her. You could have done the potions one blind and asleep at this point of course and for his favorite student? You were sure the worst Slughorn would do is complain about your forgery skills, give a wink and a thumbs up, then maybe tell you "Go get her".

You knew Arty would be a bit pissed at you for doing her work for her, for a few minutes at least. She had her pride. Wanted to earn everything. Every good grade. Didn't want people to think she was helpless, weak, or unclever. And she wasn't at all. Not in a single fucking way.

She wasn't the best in her grade but always had good scores, despite having to work hard for them. She wouldn't be able to out magic most people soon. Not until the two of you discovered an Ancient place with something to fix the scarred part of her soul where magic lived.

But she worked twice as hard as any other student without a single complaint. Was devious enough to make a good Slytherin. Braver than most Gryffindors. Nott a single Ravenclaw had thought to find Snape's *other* text book in 20 years even though it was right there. Of her Hufflepuff qualities, well little need to be said. But you would, because she deserved it. She had the second kindest eyes you had ever seen. You would have to give that one to Helga on principle. But Arty *was* the most loyal person you had ever met; she stared down the most powerful wizard in the world to defend you and didn't even blink. Had promised to be beside you, be with you till the end despite it being impossible to know if you were just lying about everything. Despite the fact that the end, if it came, would be slow, painful, and messy.

If every single wizard in the world was turned against you, you knew with absolute certainty, when your back was pressed to the wall she would be there too, one hand holding yours and the other with a wand raised alongside your own.

And so, you would endure her being pissed at you for a few minutes for doing this even though it would hurt more than a *diffindo*. If it meant another night of quite comfort. Or of very not quite things being done in a secret Slytherin hide out. You knew Arty was a screamer at this point after all. But after 6 years of casting it on your bed every night, you were *very* proficient at casting *quietus*.

You and Arty 'enjoyed' being abused by a madman that night, one who had focused exclusively on Arty today to teach how it was to cause pain to others and be proud of it. A lesson which made you fight

almost exclusively to protect her versus taking him down when she began to pant, when her wand arm was injured and her spells became slow and sloppy. You had been very happy to get a throat punch in on Crouch, turning that first lesson against him, less happy when he croaked out a few syllables of the spell you were trying to learn. Almost like he had planned for you to hit him in a place which would make it hard for anyone but you to understand the knowledge he was passing on. Crazy bastard. *Smart* crazy bastard.

The two of you had managed to team up well enough to begin pushing Crouch back following you reducing him to nonverbal spells for a time, and the pair of you had put him on the ground by ripping a leg out from him with your signature whip spell and Arty hitting him with a *depulso* at the same time. Arty moved as fast as you had ever seen to jump on to him, keeping the far larger man from being able to use his wand by pinning his arm at the elbow and with her now wandless hand right hand struck Barty as many times as she could, to tie him up for a few moments so you could rush behind him. She wouldn't win that fight for long given the insane strength the madman could bring to bear, despite being almost emaciated. Already he was forcing her left hand away; the blows he was returning to your girlfriend's face knocked her head back while her quick jabs barely rocked his. And it made you furious.

So, when you slide behind him and wrapped your left arm around his neck, you pointed the wand directly at his face instead of just at the top of his head like you should have? You felt very happy to put a bit more magic into your stupefy than needed so his face would hurt tomorrow and it would slam his head into the stone floor nice and hard.

It pissed you off to no end that even down and out, Crouchy-boy had gone out with a smile. That his last blow hadn't been another punch. He had thrust his free hand up and caressed the side of your beautiful Hufflepuff's face, the same side already bruising, almost gently. Sickening, the way his eyes looked before his head hit the ground hard enough he was likely concussed. Not that it would matter for him.

You helped Arty up and off of the insane killer, letting her lean on your shoulder since she was dizzy from the handful of blows to the side of her face which had landed, walking to where her wand was laying.

The two of you sat down against one of the walls of the decrepit shack together. You gave her a Wiggewald from your pouch while she healed a couple of small wounds you had ended up with. Probably against the rules of training but fuck it. Arty had just tossed her wand away and jumped on a man twice her size and many more times as violent to give you a chance to take him down. Trusting in you so completely she would abandon her power, her magic, because she knew you would be right behind her and finish the job she began. Despite the sting of your cuts healing, you smiled at the tiny girl who was surely going through worse as the potion worked to fix the wounds she had received.

Her soft hair against your cheek when she rested it against it felt amazing, despite the injuries. You hadn't planned for this to be one of the ways to steal a little bit of time before marching towards death to kick it in the nuts but you would take it. You and the honestly frightening girl next to you stayed like that for a few long minutes. Far too short. And then you roused her so you could *enervate* the man who was teaching you a spell which had been used to declare the deaths of hundreds of witches and wizards since Voldemort created it.

Because even if your allies could learn it, you would never ask them to. Because you had to be the one.

After 20 more minute where Crouch showed you and Arty some leg movements, to improve you balance and give him a "real" challenge, the two of you were heading back down the halls of Hogwarts so a certain healer could fix the stuff which a simple potions or a couple of *episky* couldn't mend. You holding hands with Arty was no surprise to any one who had seen you recently, so when you palmed the small note to her, well, you doubt even an invisible ex-Auror walking behind you would have noticed.

Following a quick treatment by a scowling nurse and about 15 minutes for her to provide more complete treatment to Arty, the two of you walked out of the office alongside one another.

"My bag is there with the pages. So, are you willing to go Miss Hall- I mean Pertinger.", you say hand back in hers.

"Yes, I suppose I will indulge you. And it is going to be Hallaster-Pertinger, by the by. I am still proud of that name. And while I understand why but... don't pull this again.", Arty said, looking up with impossibly blue eyes and a bruise on her cheek which should be gone by morning while finishing off the rest of a potion Pomfrey had given her, corking it and putting it in the small bag she carried most places. She *did* hate wasting things or littering.

"Sure. As long as you stay away from jumping on top of guys with 100 pounds on you and knocking them in the jaw a half dozen times."

"I refuse."

"Then so do I Miss Hallaster-Pertinger.", you tell her, using the skills you had from years of dance lessons to effortlessly spin around and lower your head to her own in front of the stairs leading to an old House hide out.

Arty responded instantly, your lessons taking hold, placing her left hand between your legs and squeezing just a hair.

“I suppose we are at a stand still *my Lord.*”, Arty says with a small grin and a hand doing something which will make it very hard to climb those stairs.

“I suppose we are *my Lady.*”, you return, hand coming up to caress her small wonderful face before stopping at the last moment, recalling the bruises, how Crouch had touched her in the same place. Your face falls, hand shakes, and your character breaks until the small auburn girl uses her free hand to push against your own. Pressing it against her cheek which you know must hurt.

“We were always at war, Elliot. We have been at war since the first time we met. That first smile when you gave me back something that was trying to be stolen from me. Giving me back something that had been stolen from me. The opening shots of a battle which will last *centuries.*”, your Hufflepuff Wrath states, going in for a deep kiss, the hand between your legs now on your neck pressing down so could reach your lips.

“I will always be your “enemy”. The one stopping you at every turn if you are going to do something dumb. If you are even going to *think* something foolish about yourself, I will be there... I hope at some point you see reason and give up. Surrender to *me.*”, she goes on and kissing you once more. Locking eyes with you. Eyes filled with fire, determination, steel. Ones you would get lost in for days if you could. You return the kiss with passion, enjoying every second like it was your last as her small button nose softly bumps your cheek or in one case your eye.

“Arty, if our *battle* didn’t fill me with so much joy, I would have surrendered months ago. You are a very challenging opponent.”, you say, grinning ear to ear.

“Flattery will get you nowhere. Dosen’t work on me. You... can test it all you want though. So, you keep doing it while we head up to your hide out.” Arty says with a coy smile and tries to lead the way up the steps before the leg Crouch had hit several times with spells and blows hitches, and goes down.

It isn’t even a conscious movement. A rush of motion, your body moving faster than your brain. You are behind her and then your arms are under her knees and shoulders and Arty is against your sore chest all with speed you had only ever known when channeling Helga’s power.

Tripping from one or two steps wouldn't hurt a muggle normally, let alone a witch, even if they were frail. Your girlfriend had taken in Crouch's lessons well enough to take a small fall like that easily. But Arty had already hurt so much today.

When your mind caught up to the body, when the presence of Helga ready to help in your mind shifted back a step, Arty had already wrapped her arms around your neck.

"Dashing and *dashing*. I really hit the jackpot by betting on you, Elliot. Do... you think you could carry me up. Maybe try out a few of those complements which in no way affect me on the way too?", she says and nuzzles your chest.

While you were tired from training, the quick rest and potions Pomfrey gave you, along side a sip of one of your own, had restored a good amount of your strength. And Arty couldn't weigh more than 80 pounds soaking wet.

"Naturally. I am Elliot Hallaster, the man the most amazing girl in the world chose. For you? Anything. And besides, this will be good practice."

"And what do you mean by that, Elliot?" Art asks as you begin ascending the steps with her in your arms.

"Carrying the most beautiful girl in the world back down the aisle, while our friends and family cheer for us.", you explain simply, with not a shred of shyness. Arty curls a bit more into your chest, placing her mouth close to your body and mumbles something you can't make out while holding on to you tight. She looks up after a moment.

"That... may have gotten through my near perfect defenses, sir."

"I should hope it did, my dear. Can you walk when we get to the top for a bit? The second year I got to watch the entrance and prevent anyone from using this place before us needs the second half of his pay, so I'll need to fish that out.", you ask and Arty just gently nods.

At the top of the stairs, you put her back on her feet and then make your way around a corner to an alcove where a small blond boy is sitting on a couch which takes up the end of it with a text book in his lap. You nod once when he looks up. He nods twice and you smile. When he gets up and passes by, you palm him a sickle and a large muggle candy bar from your pouch which he sticks in the pocket of his robes before going the opposite direction you and Arty came from. Once he turns the corner, you hear Arty speak from behind you while you turn to the lefthand wall.

“You are a very bad Slytherin in many regards, *my dear*. But a very good one in others. How much did it cost to buy that little snake-boy’s silence, perchance?”

“His silence? Hardly. For the right price he would spill about seeing us together out past curfew in a second. But he would never get another job again. And if he gave up one of our House secrets? I found a younger member for a reason; that kid would have 5 years to regret revealing where we went. Heh. But his services cost me one sickle, 8 knuts, and a candy bar. Exorbitant rate for sitting in place and telling anyone who came before us the room was already in use before they tried the door if you ask me. But it *was* short notice.”

“Hahaha. I’ll-“

“No, you will not pay me back. The boy overcharged me which was annoying but it is a small price for some time with you. A small price to pay to show you another place to take refuge in besides the Room of Requirements if anything ever goes down. To give a secret to someone who isn’t supposed to know this place exists, let alone how to get in.”, you tell her firmly, pulling out your wand.

“Now take note on how to get inside.”

A tap on a handful of specific stones, your feet pressing others down at the same time, and whispering “two” softly; a small section of wall has split open revealing a softly lit room with a wood floor and a high vaulted ceiling which you lead Arty into.

The room isn’t large by Hogwarts standards, but has been taken care of well by any number of Slytherins across the years. Enchanted lighting from some ancient member. A very nice non-magical painting stuck to one wall. A small cabinet you would *not* be showing the tiny girl, filled with a certain kind of material. Its unwritten rules regarding it and keeping it clean. You had personally had several blankets, pillows, some candy, and games brought in by the same boy from before as he had a very nice expanding backpack you envied some. You should be able to get them back out, mostly, but there was an area you could put the rest which everyone knew meant “don’t fuck with, take back if you can. Thank you”.

“You always take me to the nicest places, Elliot.” Arty says, holding your hand and looking around.

“Which one of us took their date to a bar which smells like goat and has patrons who look like they have done time in prison?”

“Just a joke... I appreciate it. A nice change of pace from the Room. And don’t think I don’t appreciate you showing me a secret place like this. I won’t use it unless... we have to. If I have to, I would rather fight than run but having a back up plan is always good.”, she says, giving you a hug around the arm.

“Now, that little nest of blankets looks nice, I would not mind a chocolate frog. And I am going to kick your ass at the stupid marble game this time.”

Some time later after *not* having your ass kicked, both of you *somehow* getting Potter cards from the chocolate frogs, and a bit of cocoa flavored snogging, Arty looks up from where had rested for a minute against your side.

“Hey, Elliot? Lord Hallaster? I’m feeling a bit better than before. Did... you want to curl up these blankets for while? No one is going to come in, right?”, Arty asks after you turned your face to look in her eyes.

“This place has some old enchantment from when it was built, won’t allow more people than are specified when opened in at any time. Won’t open for extras. I am sure Potter or the Headmistress could override it, but... yeah we are safe here, Arty. Unless a 100 year old woman is a peeping tom. Granted, what with Helga...”

“Hey! I just have to make sure you aren’t doing anything... wrong...bad...dirty... It’s for your own good really. I am the angel on your shoulder young man.”, an offended voice in the back of your head calls out, and you can feel her pout and scowl.

“Sure. Of course. Those are valid reasons for you taking a look when I do things with her. Not because you are a pervert. And you look like you are, at best, 19, *young lady*.”

“Lies and slander. But thank you for the indirect compliment... when I was young, I was quite proud of my beauty. But at this point, as strong as our connection is... it is hard for me to “look away” unless the

Beast is attacking and I have to focus all my attention there. So, I apologize if some times I don't want to give myself a migraine doing so just because the two of you make out in between class or you do... *things with yourself.*", the ghost of a witch so famous she is still idolized by a quarter of the British wizarding population says, slightly flustered.

You laugh mentally. Will never get old, feeling the vague impression of cheeks flushing from a person so powerful when she had lived, she could have taken out Dumbledore before he even had time to regret his hubris at trying to match her. And Helga was, other than maybe Rowena, the least martially inclined of the Founders, one focused on creation and not destruction.

A sobering idea. Godric could have out dueled in a him spar but Salazar knew enough dark magic to make you think, going all out, he could have probably almost killed the other three before he got taken down. The guy you were opposing.

"Hey Elliot? You okay, I just felt a shiver run up your spine and not the good kind Arty causes. I can shut down the connection for a while if... it bothers you that much; migraine might have been an exaggeration. It's just uncomfortable now, with it this strong, both physically and mentally; not being able to immediately help you, keep any eye out for the boy who gave me back *me* and fights so hard to save the world.", she says a bit of concern in her voice.

"No... no it's fine. Just a scary thought. Been having a lot of those lately.", you reassure your mind spirit.

"I could tell. I-I truly wish you didn't have to have them. That your time here could be as we in--"

"Wishes and fishes, Helga. It's alright. If it wasn't me, it would have to be someone else. You are fine just staying in that normal level of sharing my senses. One of the times I did ask you to "look away", Arty and I talked. She is... okay with it. Very embarrassed when she thinks about it too much, that the Founder of her House and someone she looks up to has probably found out she is a bit of a freak. And loud. But until we find you a new body? Our connection is only going to grow. Maybe to the point there isn't a way to look away, or not share our other senses. Both directions possibly. And Arty wants to do "stuff" with me despite it.", you tell her.

"I-we might be able to reduce it. The connection. Don't travel to the forest. I wont pull you there unless its life or death. Don't use my power. Don't let me steal your tastebud any more. The river could start to dry up. If-if it takes too long to get out of your mind, I might be able to take your body fully if something happened to traumatize your mind enough. I... could do the same thing Salazar did to that poor girl, I-", Helga says, shy, almost ashamed.

“And even if you could, had every good reason in the world to do it, you *never fucking* would. You spent a literal eternity in darkness and still came out kind and loyal. Salazar came out broken. You are not like him. I could end up in a coma, helpless and I could trust you to not try anything other than maybe help me if I could make it to you. You are Helga *motherfucking* Hufflepuff. Reason why *thousands* of witches and wizards over the years are willing to be so self-sacrificing. I trust you. Arty trusts you. She said she liked every part of me. And for now, you are part of me. So, she likes you too. Even if you are a perverted voyeur. So grab a seat and conjure some popcorn, Puffpuff.”, you say in your mind, in a lonely dark forest.

You hear a small snuffle.

“Best man I could have found my spirt in. Fucking lucky Helga...”, she mutters softly.

“And you should know only my close friends get to call me Puffpuff. And you... you can use it all you want Elliot. I don’t know what corn is and why it should be blown up but I bet there is a recipe for some in the cookbook you gave me. Also, your girlfriend is almost done undressing.”

The great thing about mental communication? It works at the speed of thought. Arty had only just finished stripping down to her bra and cute underwear, ones with *your* house symbol printed on the front right above her puffy bald pussy. Haha, Puffy for a Huffle*puff*. Truly a master of wit, Hallaster.

“Will you strip down some, Elliot. I really, *really* want to lay down with you some. Feel your skin on mine. Maybe play around some as well before a nap.”, the smiling girl asks, and you immediately obey until only your striped boxers are left, grinning and wrapping your arms around Arty while laying back into the pile of thick blankets. You try and ignore the fact she had a different house emblem than her own down there caused you to become very horny and erect when you and her go to the ground while pulling the covers up.

“Those... those are very cute panties, Arty.”, you inform her while you cock presses against her thighs through the thin cloth of your own underwear.

“You like? There is a very affordable embroider on the edge of Hogsmead, even uses an ancient looking foot power muggle sewing machine. And Andre is familiar with me and thinks Apollo is handsome so I get good deals there usually. He is also very interested in getting you into a dress that matches mine from the party by the way. I wanted to splurge a bit so I got a few pairs like these. I though about having a special one made that had “Elliot’s property” down there but that was a *bit* too embarrassing to ask

for. So, I settled for a snake, even though Mrs. Sutterly wondering why since I had my yellow trimmed school robes on. Heh.”, she says while shifting her legs up and down enough it made it hard to think.

“Arty, putting my House crest, down there, thinking of the other thing is very fucking hot, but it’s not-“

“I gave it to you so, yeah it is. Yours and only yours forever. I still get to tell you if you don’t get to use it because you love me enough to do what I ask. To never hurt me. But you are getting a pair or five of boxers with a badger on the front. Right above this guy.” Arty says in a soft whisper, grabbing your cock and squeezing a few times.

“Because you gave me *that*. And if you make me mad, I **will** have you get a pair that says “Property of Artemis Pertinger”, no matter how badly you will blush or how loud will Helga laugh. Understood?”, the tiny girl tells you in a tone which tells you she *absolutely* will and brook no discussion about it.

“Ah- yes. Yes ma’am.”, you croak out. Arty was one of the kindest women in the world, top three at least. She was also fucking *terrifying*. Could go from being affectionate with you then trying to rip a Death Eater’s throat out with her teeth on the turn of a dime. You had once seen something saying that men enjoy being with mentally unstable women more; guess it *was* true.

Arty’s face softens, when she smiles up at you.

“Good boy.”, she whispers, reaching up before ruffling your hair a bit then draping her hand across your shoulder, and snuggling in. Despite not liking to have your hair touched since you were a kid, you wanted her to do it again and again. Despite the position you two were in, with her tantalizing cunt less than a half foot from you dick and her perky breasts pressed against you, you could feel your penis become soft again. Mostly, anyway.

Not lust, even if you believed Arty was the most beautiful girl alive. Just... love you think.

Her hand caresses places Crouch had hurt and were still healing. Your hands on her own injuries, gently touching them, the spell to heal cursed wounds repeating in your mind... To heal wounds of made by hate with love. Fingers stroking her wonderful red-brown hair, causing a small giggle. Warm breath on your neck, small arms holding tight. Ones which would *always* hold tight, for better or worse. The simple steel ring on your right hand in a mirror of were another was going go when you graduated. The way Arty always smelled like fresh strawberries, even though she only used perfume for special occasions.

So many little things that even in a thousand years you would keep finding them. It filled your heart with fire harder to quench than *fiendfyre* along with a sadness and panic like that which a dementor could cause. You brought Arty into this. Taylor and Linda. Had this girl fall for you, too self-centered to stop from letting her love a walking Catastrophe. In just a few nights, going to drag her head first into something the likes of which already cost two people their lives. Or soul, in Lily's case. Who by rejecting, you let Salazar shatter the last, desperate piece of her left. How many of your choices were wrong? How much harm had you caused? How much hurt? Just lately there were the three Aurors dead at your feet, families likely still grieving.

And the idea comes up again like bile that if you were never born, could this have been avoided? If it was some Ravenclaw, maybe they would have been smart enough to do better. Even if you would never wish your destiny on someone but... there were days you retreated into one of the small private and sound proof study rooms in the dungeons.

Had to breath in and out rhythmically for minutes on end, gulp down some of a potion you were not allowed to have, just to stop the shaking of your hands or the thoughts from becoming too much.

Thoughts like Linda secretly loathed you for what happened to Taylor. Helga only acting kind because if you died, she died too and she had to keep you alive. That you were just manipulating Arty. Your love for her was fake. That she didn't really love you. That Potter was right about it. Or maybe he had it backwards, and you were so fucked up you would cling to her just to stay sane.

When your arm had been sheared off, body wracked by pain that made *crucio* look like a tickle... Time had given that arm back, removed most of the scars, but... did you go insane then? Was everything you had felt since then just fake? Imitation? Delusion?

You kept stroking Arty's hair but your breath had hitched. Body stiffened. Eyes adopting the same 1000 yard stare the had the morning after Taylor died.

"I-I know when something is wrong Elliot. I'm here. I'm here, so... please talk. If... you want to do something extra, get your mind off of it? I'm fine with you using me how every need to. Be Lord Hallaster, Dark Lord Hallaster whatever. Take what you need from my body, if it is what you need. So that even if the rest of us don't make it... you do. If it gives you strength. So the world that gave me *you* can keep existing; even if that world... even if it gave me so much pain before paying it back with joy."

“Arty... no. Please. I don’t want to do anything you don’t want, which could hurt you, you don’t need to-“

“Elliot, I am open to advice but what I need to do and don’t? My choices. And I decided you can use me however you want. Because of the difference between you and *him*. You ask. Feel bad if you think it is too much. Feel bad about too much in general, I think. You would stop the *second* I actually said no. So if you need it, some rough play, to have me screaming out your name while you take me? Its fine. I want it. I will like whatever you could imagine doing to me; because I know you would *never ever* hurt me for real. I love you so much Elliot it hurts. We are about to do something that might get us killed or worse. So fuck me hard in either hole. Tie me up, spank me till I cry, hold me down and make me come until I faint. Hold me gently while we slowly bring each other to orgasm. Humiliate me and make me beg at your feet. Place your arms around me and nod off to sleep after praising me. Talk about what you are feeling and I *will* listen. Today I think the latter two are what you want. All of it and any of it.” Your tiny girlfriend says sternly but softly, her arms never letting go of you for a moment.

“Why... why the fuck would you trust me like that? Enough to let me give into dark urges, to do *things* to you? Accept me... if I said how damaged I am now?”

“Because Potter was partially right. I am by your side till the end. But *not* because you tricked me and Hufflepuffs are foolish or any rubbish like that. Because you love me and I love you. And nothing will *ever* change that. Even if you become Dark and I have to kill you, I would still love you at the end. Cry for you. And if you need company up there? A couple of decades isn’t that long and I will make sure I have lots of fun stories to tell.”, she says, her short nails scratching into your back.

“Arty- hic”, and then it comes. Like a damn breaking. Uncontrollable. The tears, the ones that you held back for so long. So you could stay strong in front of them.

And you *sob*, placing your head against the small girl lying next to you.

For what had happened to Taylor, Raven, and Lily. What Helga endures to keep you safe, fighting alone and being hurt for it. For what had happened to Arty and Apollo. For stealing the hope from Augusta and her family. That you had had brought your friends into all this. The shameful fact that deep down you were terrified of what was about to come and all the other things that kept you up at night.

Any of the urges you may have felt from what Arty had said disappear, replaced by pain, terror, regret, and remorse.

Shifting her body so you could wrap your arms tighter, let your head rest against her chest, Arty stroked your hair, assuring you it was alright, would be okay in a soft tone. Held on to you while the tears ran onto her perfect, lightly freckled skin.

In the back of your mind there was a vague sensation of someone tossing a container of snack food to the ground followed by a soft body pressing against your back.

Ten minutes. That's how long to no longer be wracked with tears. To stop being so pitiful in front of Arty and Helga.

Put back on the mask of strength and control you needed, positive it was now shattered in their minds. Ashamed. Pitiful.

But you still start talking. Telling Arty of the dark thoughts plaguing you since Last Light and maybe even before.

But when you look up, you reddened eye... Arty's are red to, a streak of clear liquid under each.

"Why I love you. Why I cherish you. Will defend you and be there always. Why you are the one. *The* one Elliot. Because no one who would betray me, who could be evil could shed those tears. No one who could hate enough to destroy the world could cry like that. No one who could cry for what is gone and the fear of losing more would every be anything but good. Loving. Kind. I love you Elliot Hallaster.", Arty says, reaching over to plant a deep long kiss.

"But I don't like our kisses tasting of warm saltwater."

Before you can even begin, Arty responds. You are not sure but she may be part Demiguise.

"No. You didn't ruin anything. Being there for you makes me just as happy as... other things. Now come here.", Arty states kindly before motioning you towards her chest.

Cradling your head to her chest, it only takes a few minutes before you fall into a light sleep. When you come back to, Arty is softly snoring and still holding you, so you rearrange yourself so you can hold her now. In a whisper, you say,

“I love you Artemis Hallaster-Pertinger. Thank you for saving me again.”

Arty gives a small grin. Curles up into your arms and once more fell into gentle sleep. The best sleep of your life. It is no wonder both of you missed breakfast the following day.