

the.redqueen

# **The Queen's Dolour**

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# **Inhaltsangabe**

It was the least she could do, they said, help to improve Azkaban's security. She would be safe, they said. How wrong they were...

# **Vorwort**

# Inhaltsverzeichnis

1. Untitled

# Untitled

This was her punishment. She had made a silent vow to never return to Azkaban, yet found herself captured within the prison's dark stone walls that seemed to be moving, seemed to be slowly suffocating her, as if she, like once her sister, was sentenced to live her life in imprisonment.

Narcissa Malfoy found herself incapable of handling the mere memory of the place she despised, feared, more than she would ever dare to admit, yet knew that she had no other choice than to submit to the Ministry's will. How afraid had she been of the day she would have to return, how bizarre had it appeared to her, being assigned to examine Azkaban, the prison that had broken whom she had loved the most, her sister and her husband within barely two months of time.

Examine Azkaban. She wanted nothing more than to laugh, to break down laughing at something she'd never be able to understand. Examine Azkaban, help improve the prison's security – how ridiculous! How ridiculous it was, and, how terrifying.

This was her punishment; cruel, merciless, as if every happening during the war had been her fault alone. This was her punishment, she thought, staring straight ahead as she turned her head to look around, sighting nothing by empty cells, her punishment for being reckless enough to not go to her certain death in the war like so many people before her. She had risked everything to know her family was safe from harm, would have given her own life to protect her husband and son, had asked nothing in return.

She had fought for her family's freedom, a battle anybody else would have believed to be lost long ago, had never given up. How foolish had she been to assume that peace would bring relief from all the sorrow and fear; how foolish had she been to assume that everything would be all right.

“Assisting us is the least thing we can ask of you, Madame Malfoy,” she had been told at the Ministry's office, as she had been looked at with such disdain, as if she were not worth more than a criminal. “After all, your knowledge will be crucial in such a delicate matter. It might as well be a good idea to remember everything we have done for you and your family within these past months.”

Nothing. They had done nothing for her, nothing at all! None of them had seen what she'd been forced to see, none of them had experienced what she'd been forced to experience, so why would they understand? Why would they show sympathy, why would they pretend to care?

“It won't take long,” she had promised her husband, sealing her words with a long, tender kiss on his lips, as if it could take away all their agony, all their worry at once. She still felt his eyes resting on her, minutes after she'd turned away from him, could still hear his voice resound in her ears.

“Let me come with you,” he'd said, quietly yet determined, causing her to shake her head before he'd even finished his sentence. “Let me at least meet you there.”

Again she had shook her head. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I do not like the thought of you returning to that place.”

“And I don't like the thought of you going there alone.”

Narcissa had answered with a smile, a brief, sad smile; had quietly placed another kiss on his lips. “I will

be back in five hours,” she had whispered against his ear. “I love you.”

Finally she'd turned around, giving a deep sigh as she headed forward, leaving her husband behind in their bedroom, alone.

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She was freezing; found herself surrounded by large creatures swathed in black cloaks, their breath cold as ice. The Dementors were everywhere, merely for her own protection she had been told, yet she felt observed, captivated, as if she were a prisoner herself.

Quickly she turned her head, glancing at the small, silvery creature to her right, a beautiful black swan that was gracefully wafting next to her, and instinctively she tightened the grip around her wand.

It wouldn't take long, she'd been told, like she had told Lucius in her attempts to calm him down, to take away his worries. The examination would last no longer than an hour, they'd said, perhaps two; of course she was safe, there was nothing to be afraid of.

Safe. Of course she was safe. It cost Narcissa great effort to contain herself, to prevent her entire body from trembling. Ridiculous, she thought, taking a deep breath. What was she afraid of, she asked herself, shaking her head as if she were unable to believe how terrified she'd been. Hadn't she been to Azkaban several times? Hadn't she visited Bella, hadn't she visited Lucius, week by week, forced to watch them slowly falling apart? So why did she still worry; why did her blood still run cold at the sheer memory?

Quietly, she walked through the prison's corridors, nodded slowly at her attendant's words; she knew the way to the cells, knew it blindly, yet listened to his instructions, as if she were afraid to be left alone with her thoughts. Still, she did not understand the purpose of her visit – how could she possibly help with something they called the improvement of Azkaban? How could she possibly give advice? She was merely a prisoner of her own mind, had only been a visitor to this place, nothing more. Had all this just been pretence? Was she here for a different reason, was she here to-

Narcissa found herself incapable of finishing her thought; her desperate attempts to keep up her composure seemed to fail as involuntarily she gasped for breath. What happened to her, she asked herself, why had she lost her calmness, what made her lose control so quickly? Again she turned her head, only to find her Patronus still by her side. Again she shook her head, unable to believe how weak she had become over the years.

*She was gone. Her sister was dead. Lying there on the floor, motionless, her eyes wide open. She was dead; Bellatrix was dead! Her sister was dead, gone and would never return. She'd watched her die, had watched the green flash of light hit her body, heard her cold, terrifying laugh – and she hadn't saved her; had found herself incapable of moving, even of breathing, had only stared down at her body, her hands starting to uncontrollably shake. She'd watched her sister die.*

Her wand fell down to the floor; Narcissa was unable to suppress another gasp. She quickly shook her head. The memory of her sister's death was still painful, would still haunt her in her dreams. Countless times, her husband had told her not to blame herself for what had happened; it hadn't been her fault, saving Bellatrix would have been impossible, she'd have risked her own life, too! Of course he was right; Narcissa knew that he was right, knew that she wouldn't have been able to save her sister. Yet, she had never forgiven herself.

For a moment she closed her eyes, attempting to regain her composure as she quickly picked up her wand; the cold air within the prison's walls made her shiver. With only a quick hand movement she conjured another Patronus, quietly hoping it would protect her as they proceeded further.

Azkaban had always been an eerie place; dark, sinister, with no sunlight to ever illuminate the corridors and cells. It was true what they said about it – even the most terrible rumours were true. The worst punishment imaginable was to be left alone with one’s own thoughts; it was easy for the Dementors to break their prisoners, would they be patient enough to wait until they had almost broken themselves.

“In case you should know anything about your sister’s- escape from the prison several years ago, Madame Malfoy, I trust you to inform us immediately.”

The sound of his voice made her wince. Narcissa’s movements froze. Once again, she found herself close to choking, once again she was desperate to compose herself, yet seemed to fail. “I beg your pardon?” she hissed, her voice faint, yet cold. For a moment, the urge to turn around and escape seemed to overwhelm her, but she took only a deep breath, turning around to the man accompanying her, merely to prevent her from losing her way, they’d said.

Lies.

Of course he refused to reply, his eyes denying to ever have spoken the words; he would only continue his walk through the prison, as if nothing had happened. Soon, they’d reach the place she feared the most, it was only a few steps away.

*Her husband wasn’t the same anymore; pale, thin, broken, he would do nothing but look at her, quietly look at her, his eyes empty, without any expression, as if he were staring into emptiness. He hadn’t even said goodbye. They had taken him from her, had forced them to separate, not granting him the chance to say goodbye to her. He was gone, had left her behind alone, and whether he’d return remained unknown. Slowly, Narcissa reached out her hand to gently caress his cheek, but even the softest touch seemed to cause him pain. How much she wished to help him, how much she wished to be in his place, to be able to free him, how much she wished to save him! How helpless she felt...*

The Dementors seemed to haunt her, to surround her, as if they had chosen her to be their next target. Quickly, Narcissa shook her head, as if to banish her thoughts from her brain, closed her eyes, attempting to focus on, once again, conjuring her Patronus. Why, though, did she seem incapable of remembering? Why did every positive memory appear to be so far away, unreachable to her, why did she seem so defenceless? Had the Dementors always affected her so much? Or had she become weak, too weak to any longer handle what she had been forced to handle for too many years?

She bit her lip, firmly, until she felt her mouth fill with blood, found all her attempts to remember happy times to be failing. What about her wedding, she thought – hadn’t excitement denied her to fall asleep the night before, hadn’t she been happier than ever before in her life, knowing she’d be able to call the man she loved more than she loved herself her husband until death tore them apart?

Only a small, silvery shine would escape from her wand, fading as quickly as it had lighted up. She’d been happy, feeling his soft lips against hers, so happy...

*Her mother was dead. Lying there on the floor in her own home, motionless, her eyes wide open. She had taken her life, escaped from a world that caused her nothing but despair. Death had come as a release, but how could Narcissa forget? How could Narcissa forget the terrifying smile on Druella’s lips as she was holding her mother’s body in her arms, cradling her like a child, tears blurring her sight- she was dead. Her mother was dead.*

Narcissa’s entire body started to shake; she stumbled, would have fallen if she had not used her last strength to cling to the wall, next to the cell that had kept her sister captive for over a decade. The blood traces were still visible on the floor, on the wall, an eternal reminder of what had been going on, so many years ago.

*She had come to her, in the middle of the night; found her lying on the marble floor of the entrance hall, half unconscious, heavily breathing, unable to get up, unable to speak. How pale she'd been, terrifyingly pale, like a ghost, a shadow of her former self. She'd never be the same again, seemed to be dead, almost as if she'd never been alive before.*

It was true what they said about Azkaban, every rumour was true – it changed people, changed them before they even had the chance to realise that something was going on inside their minds.

What happened to her, Narcissa asked herself, what did this place do to her, refusing to allow her to control her own thoughts, denying her the ability to compose herself, should she lose restraint? She was falling, slowly falling, and no one was here to catch her. Was she about to lose her mind? Had Azkaban found another victim, had the Dementors found another person to break, now that she wasn't forced to remain strong any longer?

Again she closed her eyes, whispering quiet things to herself as if to distract herself from her memories, as if to make herself forget where she was, forget they wouldn't let her go before they were finished; before she was broken.

“They're alive,” she muttered, over and over again, in a last desperate attempt to conjure another Patronus, as a weak protection from what she knew would haunt her until the day she died. “They're alive... Alive...”

Nothing would ever be able to harm her family; they were alive, safe, wouldn't be forced to fight in a war again, would live in peace... They were alive...

“Madame Malfoy, are you quite alright?”

Again, Narcissa found herself unable to suppress a wince, again she wanted nothing more than to turn around and leave, to run away and never return. She didn't reply, only nodded. Of course she wasn't all right, would never be all right again – too much had happened during the past years, too many things she'd never be able to forget, that would haunt her, forever, even in her dreams.

*One night had changed everything. One single night had torn their family apart irreparably, had broken her heart. How could she have left them? How dared she run away, forgetting about her sisters as soon as she had closed the door behind her back? She'd never return. Andromeda was gone, had betrayed her family, left them behind, would never return. One single night had made Narcissa lose her sister, whom she had trusted blindly, whom she'd always been closer to than anybody else. She'd lost her, would never be able to forgive her. Never.*

Narcissa gasped for breath, almost dropped her wand once more; her body was still trembling beyond her control, wouldn't allow her to move, to even take a single step forward. Was she alone? Had she been left behind once again like she'd been left behind so many times before in her life? Where was the man who'd always stayed by her side during the inspection of the prison? Had he proceeded without her? She was trapped, trapped where her husband, her sisters had been trapped already, weakened, incapable of escaping-

Would she die here?

“Cissy!” a voice behind her back uttered her name, causing her to scream, to quickly turn around; again, she gasped, looking into a face so familiar to her, yet so strange. How many times had she looked into these dark eyes, how many times had she been forced to welcome him in her home, despite wanting nothing more than to be alone?

“How good to see you,” the man said, coldly, tauntingly, creasing his face to a terrible grimace, revealing his rotten teeth to her as he reached out his arm through the bars, as if to touch her. “Finally home, are you?”

She opened her mouth to speak, yet no sound would escape from her lips; she only stared at him, holding her breath, paralyzed with fear. Seconds, minutes seemed to pass before she finally started to run, as fast as she could, falling down to the floor only a few steps later, unable to go on.

“My, my, why so fast, dear?” he asked, laughing quietly. “Wouldn’t you like to keep my company a little longer? I bet your filthy husband doesn’t mind if you stayed here with me for a while!”

“Be quiet,” Narcissa hissed, barely audible, slowly getting up just to sink down again. She closed her eyes, shaking her head, over and over again, as if it could make him stop, as if it could help her cope with his words.

“Why should I?” he replied sharply. “Why should I stop, if I have so much to tell you? You’re a traitor, Narcissa, a filthy traitor! You deserve to rot in jail like your sister did for so many years! Have you forgotten about her? Have you forgotten about Bella already? Imagine what she’d do to you, if she knew what you-”

“Be quiet,” she repeated, her voice firm enough to interrupt his words for a moment. “Stop it, please...”

Why wouldn’t he be quiet? Why couldn’t he just be quiet, why couldn’t he just leave her alone? Didn’t he see how much she suffered already? Didn’t he see that her memories seemed to tear her apart, that she was slowly dying?

“You deserve to be here!” he shouted, laughing as if her despair seemed to give him strength. “You deserve to be here, captured like an animal, rotting in a cell like mine! You’re a traitor, nothing but a traitor! A worthless piece of dirt...”

“Stop it!” Narcissa cried, her voice loud, terrifying, even to herself. She finally got up from the floor, taking a few steps back until her head hit the wall; for just a moment she looked at the man opposite to her, her eyes glistening with anger and hate. She was dizzy, so incredibly dizzy, barely able to breathe. “Stop it, stop it please!”

Where was she? Why had she come here, why-

Again she screamed as she felt hands suddenly take her shoulders, to firmly hold her, as if to keep her from escaping, as if to force her to stay here, forever, as if to never let her go. Why her? Why had they chosen her? Hadn’t she been punished enough already? She’d only wanted peace! Peace, nothing but peace!

“Madame Malfoy!” another man’s voice shouted, but she didn’t react, desperately tried to free herself from the stranger’s grip, to run away. She wanted nothing more than to get out; out! But why wouldn’t they let go of her? Why wouldn’t they just let go to her, why would they still keep her there?

“She’s hallucinating, she needs to be taken to hospital!”

“Her husband has been notified, he’ll be here momentarily!”

“Why was she left alone? Didn’t you notice that something was wrong? Madame Malfoy, can you hear me?”

Far away, she could hear a third, even a fourth voice resound within the stone walls, rushed, worried. Narcissa barely realised how several people were now surrounding her, touching her, looking at her, staring at her as if she had lost her mind. Perhaps she had? Perhaps she had lost her mind already, perhaps she, too, had become a prisoner, a prisoner of Azkaban; it had broken her, irreparably, had taken her sanity from her, as if to release her from everything she’d been forced to remember day by day.



Years ago, it had been death, coming as a release to her mother, taking away the pain; would it be insanity for her, now? Would insanity finally make her forget?

She closed her eyes, for only a moment, never wanting to open them again, not even when she heard steps coming closer and closer, steps so familiar to her, that she held her breath, only to listen.

“Let go of her,” her husband’s voice said sharply, and finally she was released. Narcissa slowly raised her head, just to look at him one last time, barely able to find the strength to move but she stumbled forward, sinking down into his arms, unconscious.