

She hurried to follow him, her shoes wet and her feet cold from the grimy puddles. The rain was heavy and the fog thick, as she squinted ahead to get a better look. He'd turned a corner; bastard. Instinct had her reaching for her right thigh, the empty holster a harsh awakening once again as she vowed revenge for the man who'd stolen her wand.

That wand was precious to her. It had been a salvation, of sorts. Where most children lay in bed at night, soothed in warm comforts with a mother's lulling voice speaking whispers of love and safety - Jade had experienced gutters, cold pavement, and begging for scraps - any kind of food that would sustain her further.

Jade had learned early in life that the goal to living a full life was just that - to live. And she had done whatever had needed to be done, in order to survive. And once you've done whatever you've had to, "they" never let you do anything else. Anything. Men wanted one thing, and Jade knew exactly how to use that to her advantage.

This man, large and foul, had been someone she believed would provide for her, for a little while, at least. Jade had promised him her heart, and because of that, he would buy her things - pretty things, give her delicious treats in boxes wrapped in lace, and money by the bagful. He was a rich man, with worldly possessions and had promised her everything she could think of. She wasn't naive enough to believe him, to fall for him, to need him... but as long as he continued putting coins in her pocket, she would play the game a while longer.

Jade knew love didn't exist. She understood that caring for someone was simply a manipulation to get something in return. Sex wasn't the epitome of love. Sex was something all men wanted, all the time, no matter what. So she fucked, on occasion, and promised love when necessary. Food was fuel and sex was money - and she was tired. So very tired. But to stop would be to die, and she wasn't ready to give up yet. She was close, though... so very close.

It had been her own fault, really. Just a simple flirt with a baker. Show a little chest, lift the skirt a bit, usually meant "voila" - bread for the night. But HE had been around the corner, and had seen her with someone else.

She stared at him, and he stared at her. Not knowing what to expect, but not ready to run, she took a step towards him. It was that step that seemed to cure him of his indecision, and the next thing she knew, he had stormed over to her, grabbed her by the wrist, and yanked her into the nearest alley.

He shoved her painfully against, and pressed his sweaty body against hers, practically spitting in her ear, "you slut. I knew you weren't worth my time." As Jade pushed against him, he slowly groped down her leg - she tensed, and in that moment, he had hit her and she was on the ground.

Her cheek throbbed as she picked herself up off the damp street. God, would this rain ever quit? Her rags were muddy and wet, and she shivered. She reached for her wand, anxious to use a drying spell.

And it was in that moment, that she realized what he had done. Rage flooded through her as she limped out of the alley, her eyes scanning the crowds for him. A movement caught her eye as she witnessed two women being pushed out of the way, she was running before she even knew for sure it was him. Of course, her assumptions had been

correct, and if he hadn't had such a lead on her - she would have had him in her grasp by now. He wasn't fit or in shape, but he was faster than she'd given him credit for.

He turned left, and she followed. Something caught her eye as she chased him. Someone tall, dressed in black, running ahead of her, and then gone.

He turned again, and she continued after him. Until he ran into a dead end. Good - finally. She would get her wand back. After she first introduced him to her right fist, of course. And once she got her wand back, she'd curse him to next Sunday.

He turned, breathing heavily, as he warily watched her near him. Slowing down, and gasping for breath herself, she cursed at him. "Why the fuck did you take my wand, you son of a bitch?"

"Bother you, did it?"

She glared and held out her hand. "Give it back to me, you bastard."

He snickered, which infuriated her further. He looked down at her, a sinister smile growing on his face. His eyes were black and empty.

"What will you promise me, if I do decide to give it back."

Jade saw red, but taking a practiced deep breath, she paused. She needed the wand. There was no money to buy a new one. She wouldn't survive without it on the streets. The wand had been nearly impossible to get in the first place. It was everything, in the magical world.

Jade thought fast. A raise of the chin, a pop of the hip, and she was someone different, someone practiced, someone taught. She sauntered over to him, and put her arms on his shoulders.

"Now, Jack, don't be like that. I'm sorry. You know it didn't mean anything. I understand why you are punishing me."

Her finger trailed his sweaty cheek, down his chin, to his chest, as she breathed deeply and cooed at him. "I'll be good, I swear. Just give me my wand back, and I'll do anything you want. Be anyone you want me to be. You'll love it, I promise." She winked lazily at him.

His smile widened as he slithered away from her. "I knew you'd beg, you slut."

Jade's smile vanished. "Wha-"

He then took her wand lengthwise in both hands, her precious wand, and snapped it in half. The magic swirled around it in blue mist, and there was a crack as loud as lightning, and then nothing. The pieces fell limply to the ground without a sound.

Jade's heart stopped beating. Nausea filled her gut, and her delicate hands began to shake. Her lower lip quivered and her eyes welled up. Angrily, she swiped the back of her hand against her eyes, refusing to give him the satisfaction of seeing her desperation.

Jack pulled his wand out of his pocket and aimed it at her. He walked slowly toward her, pushing his body against her, hip to hip, and pressed the edge of the wand against her throat. "Get on your knees, you bitch."

Jade shut her eyes.

"Pieces of shit like you are good for one thing. I've told all of my friends about you. How easy you are to bribe, how good you are, how worthless you are. No one will miss you, no one will notice you're gone." He leaned back as he tore her shirt in half, undressing her. "Now be a good girl," he whispered harshly, "and show me how good you can be, little bitch, before I drag you to them... you'll think me kind comparatively."

Shaking and weak, Jade felt hands on her shoulders, pushing. He forced her down, to her knees as she struggled against him. She heard the sound of a zipper, and turned her head away.

In a frenzy of movement, she kicked a leg out from under her, circled it around, taking Jack to the floor. His surprised yell was muffled as she kicked him in the side and flipped him over. His face, now covered in mud, lifted to try and find her, but she was too quick. In a matter of seconds, she grabbed his dropped wand, straddled his shoulders, and shoved his face back into the puddle of water.

She would drown him - she would kill him. She'd never been proud of the things she'd had to do - but she had done them to survive. Fuck him, he would never understand. He had broken her wand, insulted her, destroyed her. Named her sins and shoved them in her face. Fuck him. She would kill him.

A rustling to her side startled to her, and she dropped Jack's head and slid off his back, wand raised at the ready. A handsome, tall, dark-haired man stood before her. His eyes were fierce as they met hers. He held her gaze, his calm influencing her, and her breathing evened. His gaze dropped from her and she watched as he took in Jack.

Striding over to him, and bending over, he roughly pulled Jack up and shoved him against the wall. With a wave of his hand, Jack was suddenly wearing magical handcuffs.

The man in black raised his wand and said gravely, "Boys, I've got him. Come on in and grab him. He's secure."

Jade's mouth dropped open as she watched four Aurors appear out of nowhere, all dressed in black battle outfits, and drag Jack away. "It wasn't me - you've got the wrong man. It was her - all her. She's a slut, a bitch..." he screamed, until they covered his mouth with a magical gag and disappeared away.

Jade couldn't speak. She was cold, she was shaking - she'd experienced bad days, but this seemed one of the worst so far. She grabbed at her thin, water-logged shirt, trying to cover herself, but it was difficult to move. Jack's wand fell to the ground as she clung to what remained of her tattered clothes. Before she could reach down and try to find it in the mud and wet, something heavy and warm surrounded her, and she was pulled upward.

"Can you stand?" The man asked gently. "Are you alright?"

Jade shook her head. She couldn't speak. What was going on? Who was this man?

“My name is Harry.”

She glanced up. A scar was evident on his forehead. Holy shit - it was Harry Potter.

“I need to ask you some questions, Miss...?”

“Jade. Just... Jade.”

He smiled warmly. “Jade, it’s nice to meet you. How about we get you somewhere warm and dry so we can talk. Is there anywhere you’d be comfortable? Shall we stop by your home first for a change of clothes?”

Jade lowered her head.

Silence engulfed them. “Jade, can you tell me where you live?”

More silence.

She could hear him sigh.

“No problem. Come with me - we can stop at headquarters and get you something dry to wear.”

Anywhere warm sounded good to her. She wasn’t ready to give her shoddy life story to freaking Harry Potter. She had pride.

“But first - here.” Harry waved his wand over her, and she felt a gush of warmth as her clothes magically dried. “The spell isn’t much, but it’s better than nothing.”

She looked at him - her personal motto, that was unexpected, she thought. She’d take it. She always had. Better than nothing. And currently, she had nothing.

He moved closer to her and rested a hand on her back. Jade jerked out of his grasp. Looking at him through narrowed eyes, she searched him for motive. Of course he wanted what every man wanted, but she wasn’t ready, she wasn’t in the mood. She felt vulnerable, and she despised that.

Harry held up his hands, taking a step back. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

Through gritted teeth, Jade hissed, “I’d like to see you try.”

Harry’s eyes twinkled, as a smile begun to spread across his face. “Take it easy. You’re safe - it’s okay. I’ve just got to hold onto you so we can apparate to my office.” His grin faded and his voice softened. “Is that alright, Jade?”

Nodding acquiescence, she timidly stepped towards him. She involuntarily tensed as he put his arms around her, but she wasn’t going to back down. He was taking her somewhere warm, and right now, that was all she needed. She was just using him, as she used everyone else. At least, that’s what she kept telling herself.

His arms were warm and strong; comforting, which put her immediately at odds with herself. She wanted to trust him, to believe all the stories were true. But history had

proven that men were always men, whom she used, and threw away. Could a “hero” to all save her as well? She refused to get her hopes up.

Before she could get her thoughts together, they were suddenly in his office. A large room, with a comfy looking sofa in one corner, and a large mahogany desk on the other. He gently let go of her, and with a smile too charming for any man to have, said, “Now, that wasn’t too hard, was it?”

Jade glared.

“Not a talkative one, are you?” Harry commented, as he walked to a small bag on his desk and shoved his hand deeply into it... all the way up to his shoulder. He reached around like he was searching for something, before pulling out a metallic box of some sort...

Looking up and seeing her confusion, he said, “Sorry - muggle upbringing. It’s called a tape recorder. I find I prefer it to magical recordings.”

Jade shivered. Harry frowned. “Let me get you something.”

Harry pushed a button on his desk, “Money Penny, please bring me something comfortable to wear - size small.”

He grinned, “A muggle joke.”

Jade tried to smile back, but was mostly confused. She wasn’t going to let him in on that, though. At least she was warmer than she was outside. Her hair was wet from the rain and she could feel her shoulder throbbing from where Jack had shoved her against the wall, but it wasn’t often that she got a roof over her head without vague leading promises. She wondered what she would “owe” Mr. Harry Potter when all this was said and done.

At the moment, she didn’t care. She would give him anything, if he could rummage up some warm socks for her cold feet.

A buzz filled the room, and Harry jogged to the door, and opened it.

“Here you go, Sir. I even included an extra pair of warm fuzzy socks.”

Jade groaned.

Harry glanced at her, concerned. “Are you going to be ill? Do you need a wastebasket?”

She rolled her eyes. “Can we just get on with this. Busy day, you know. Things to do, people to see.”

Without missing a beat, he beckoned her to follow him, and led her through a door to his private bathroom. “You can get dressed in here. I’ll wait outside.”

“Are you sure you don’t need to stay?” She eyed him warily, waiting to judge his response.

He shook his head, as he walked to the door. "I'll be in the next room. When you're comfortable, come back in and we'll sit and talk." He gave her a small smile.

Harry closed the door gently on his way out, leaving Jade speechless and flustered. She was never speechless and flustered. She blushed. Why was he making her feel embarrassed? She'd done things men fantasized about without blinking, she'd been treated to the worst of men - why now, with this gentleman of all people, was she suddenly blushing and flustered?

It made no sense. She was about to grab the clothes when she spotted a gorgeous glass shower. Jade couldn't help herself. He'd said, "when you're comfortable" and she was going to be bloody damned comfortable. And she was going to take her time. Who knew what he would make her do, what he would ask of her, how long he'd stay interested before boring of her and sending her back to the streets - but she was going to make the most of it. Besides, she couldn't remember the last time she'd been able to have a warm shower - alone. It was something to be cherished.

Jade let the warmth of the shower seep into her skin, the hot water massaging the sore muscles in her back, and she just stood there, letting the water fall over her. She put her hands on the wall in front of her, and put her head down. God, the water felt amazing. She stayed like that, not moving, for a long time as her thoughts cleared and she began to relax.

She was actually surprised by the amount of really good hair products she found. He does have good hair, she thought fleetingly, as she washed hers thoroughly and rinsed off. She could have stayed in the shower forever, it felt so nice, but she knew he was waiting on her and she had to go out there eventually.

She took her time drying off, wishing she had some lotion for her legs. But those kinds of things weren't usual for a man's bathroom. Sighing, she reached for the clothes he had given her.

Heavy sweats with a t-shirt and an even larger jumper to go over it? She had never dressed in such fashion. Did Harry have a thing for frumpy looking women? She had never worn anything that didn't pull tightly around her figure. If clothes didn't accent what one had, what was the point in wearing them?

But she couldn't bear to put back on her dirty, grimy, torn clothes... glancing over at them, she cringed. Sweats it would have to be. Whatever he likes, right?

The socks felt heavenly as she slipped them on, and for a moment, she just sat and relished the squishy softness of her toes as she pushed them into the carpet. This was luxury. She had a moment of longing, wishing it could be longer, before she forced the thought to vanish. She wouldn't be staying long.

Getting up, she made her way back to Harry's office.

Harry was sitting at his desk looking at what seemed to be surveillance video of what had happened with Jack. How did he get a video of that? She watched herself drop-kick Jack, and felt a moment of pleasure. That felt good. Arse.

"What's that?" she asked, pointing.

Harry looked up, noticing her, and glanced back at his work. "This? Auror trick. It's a spell that lets us see through the eyes of our owls."

"That's pretty... handy, I would guess."

Harry nodded. "More than you would think." He nodded towards the video, "That was a pretty nice kick you gave him."

She looked away.

"Come sit down. Would you prefer the chairs here, or the couch?" He gestured to the couch as he stood.

She glanced at the inviting sofa. It was maroon with gold lining, and looked amazingly comfy.

"Chairs are fine."

Harry stared at her evenly. "Chairs, it is."

She didn't like the feeling that he knew she would have preferred the couch. But she stuck to her guns. The quicker she got this over, the quicker she could figure out her next move. She sat on the hard chair, folding her legs under her and crossing her arms.

"So let's go through this evening. I want to know everything that happened," Harry said, sitting down across from her, and pressing a button on his strange box.

"You were there. You saw what happened."

"At the end yes, not the beginning." He leaned forward. "I want to know why you were chasing him."

"He took my wand."

His eyes were sympathetic. "Start from the beginning."

With a sigh, Jade did. Better to tear the magical bandage off quickly rather than slowly. So she told him, everything starting with the corner, to Jack stealing from her, to her chasing him, to him hitting her, hurting her far worse than physically... And as she continued her story, her emotions began to get the better of her. And through ragged, shaky gasps, "You don't understand, that wand was all I had," and the next thing she knew, she was sobbing into her hands, her desperation and frustration about her wand being gone, and having nowhere to go.

"And what if I could offer you something else?"

Jade stopped crying. Here it was. THE PRICE. The thing she'd been waiting for. She felt like a fool. What was she doing, in front of Harry Potter of all people, sobbing like a schoolgirl? She sniffled, and wiped her tears. She should have known better.

Smiling slowly at Harry, she crossed her legs and breathed, "And what would that be, Mr. Potter?"

Harry crossed his arms, leaned back, and said simply, "A life."

Jade's smile faded. "A life?"

Harry nodded. "A life with purpose." He stood and began to pace around the room.

"We've been keeping tabs on Jack for several weeks now. Not your average thug."

Jade looked at him in surprise.

Harry smiled grimly. "He'd stolen from numerous sources, murdered several people - I'm sure you were going to be next. His M.O. was to find women he... considered helpless," Harry glanced at Jade; she narrowed her eyes back at him, "his mistake this time.

You took him down like nothing flat. I haven't seen anyone without training, do what you did tonight." He looked almost awed. She felt a burst of pride.

Harry sat back down and held his hands out to her. Without knowing why, she reached out and he grasped them and held her hands in his.

"I know what it's like to not have anything or anyone. I've been there." He looked at her sincerely. She held his gaze. "I can offer you a home, a place to belong, a reason. The Aurors are family and we take care of our own. We'll train you, we'll keep you safe. I've seen what you can do - how you can control any situation. I've seen how brave you are and how you fight back. You want to live. And I can offer you a life worth having."