

Beyond Recall or Desire

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/49432360) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/49432360>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship:	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy
Characters:	Draco Malfoy , Hermione Granger , Theodore Nott , Harry Potter , Severus Snape , Nymphadora Tonks , Ginny Weasley , Lucius Malfoy , Narcissa Black Malfoy , Andromeda Black Tonks
Additional Tags:	POV Third Person Limited , Soul Bond , runic magic , Harry Potter Epilogue What Epilogue EWE , Time Travel , Memory Loss , Memory Magic , Unspeakable Hermione Granger , Unspeakable Theodore Nott , Auror Harry Potter , Potions Master Draco Malfoy , Forced Proximity , working together , one bed , Explicit Sexual Content , All The Tropes , Post-War , POV Draco Malfoy , POV Hermione Granger , TheodoreNottIsANationalTreasure , HEA , love is a perfectly reasonable explanation in HP , additional tags marked in author's notes , Theo is on something
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-08-18 Completed: 2024-02-01 Words: 80,889 Chapters: 25/25

Beyond Recall or Desire

by [vannminner](#)

Summary

In December of 2001, Draco Malfoy was meant to be married. Unfortunately, a union with Astoria Greengrass would be impossible as his soul had already been bound to another's. Now, if only he could remember whose...

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"A birth bond?" Narcissa asked.

Alistair shook his head, "I'm afraid not. This is something else entirely."

He made eye contact with Draco before quickly looking away.

"This is a chosen bond... a mutual decision..."

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Now Complete | E - Rated | See Tags

Notes

Housekeeping - the idea for this fic began with the prologue. Everything else was secondary. That being said, this fic is utilising many major tropes (as, like, a challenge?). Tags will be updated and/or provided in the author's notes as needed. There will be no non-con or underage elements. This fic is not considered 'dark', though there will be heavy emotional triggers in later chapters.

Critiques - You may dm/comment with spelling, grammatical errors, and brit-picks if you so desire. Other criticisms are not appreciated. This includes NOT adding my story to Goodreads, StoryGraph, etc.

Remember, folks - fanfic is free. I'm only a part-time writer looking to have some fun when I'm not running around after my toddler.

Spin-Offs - At this time, spin-offs and continuations are not permitted. Of course, I can't stop writers from doing as they will, but this is an active story being updated regularly.

As of January 2024 I've had translation and binding requests...

Translations - are permitted with explicit permission. I do not sanction cross-posting to Wattpad, ffnet, or any other platform.

Binding - Upon completion, binding is permitted for self-use only.

Cheers, and hope you enjoy the chaos.

- Translation into Čeština available: [V nedohlednu \(Beyond Recall or Desire\) Czech Translation](#) by [RangerElik](#)

Chapter One

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner



“And what do you fear, my lady?”

*“A cage. To stay behind bars until use and old age accept them and all chance of valor has gone **beyond recall or desire** .”*

- J.R.R. Tolkien

- December 2001 -

From the peacocks freely wandering the garden to the charmed rose bushes in full-bloom, every detail was held to Astoria Greengrass' exact specifications. She'd wanted a winter wedding. She wanted to wear lavish furs over her white dress. She wanted snow as a backdrop, but not as an inconvenience underfoot. There were to be blood-red accents and gold table settings. The guests would wear black, as would Draco.

Prior to the day, there'd been endless deliberation between Astoria and Lady Malfoy. Draco had suffered countless dull luncheons as they ironed out his most significant life-change to date.

He couldn't deny, the pair had done a remarkable job. Narcissa might've had her concerns about the youngest Greengrass daughter, but the two witches did make for an impressive team. Once his mother got past Astoria's more modernized political opinions, they discovered they had a lot in common; namely their preferences in style and design.

As Draco looked around at the sophisticated, yet tasteful decorations, he knew this to be true; further highlighting the importance of their union.

It was his wedding day—a day most couples lost hours daydreaming about. Draco, however, was not like most wizards. He and Astoria had their ceremony booked as soon as their contract was finalized, following her Hogwarts' graduation. He cared for nothing other than Astoria's continued approval. Details were irrelevant. He'd wear what he was told to. He'd eat what was available. So long as his bride-to-be was content, he'd find contentment himself.

This was what was expected of him, yes, but the outcome was also better than he anticipated.

Draco had grown up alongside the Greengrass family. He and Daphne were close during school. Of all the women his father could have contracted him with, Astoria was by far the best of them.

That thought had him shockingly excited. There was an opportunity here. He could have what his parents had found; an arranged marriage, but with mutual respect and surprising love. They knew each other, cared for each other. Not to be forgotten, Astoria was also beautiful, kind, and incredibly intelligent. She was everything a rich, pure-blooded wizard like Draco could hope for, and because of that—he was fully committed to his pending marriage.

“For the nerves,” Draco heard spoken over his shoulder.

He turned to find Theodore Nott at his back. He wore his standard boyish smirk and a tailored black suit. His hair was trimmed and the edges were well-lined.

Theo held out a flask, eyebrows lifting.

“Excellent timing,” Draco grinned.

Draco felt Theo's eyes on him as he took a swig from the flask. He cleared his throat, shivering in delight. *Ogden's, the good stuff.*

“How’s it feel, mate, leaving your bachelorhood behind?”

Shrugging, Draco handed back the flask. “It feels the same.”

“Ah, the woes of a pureblood heir. So glad I evaded that one,” Theo grinned.

“I suppose I could have done worse-”

“Than Astoria? You survived Azkaban and came home to find yourself rewarded with the most eligible bachelorette. Yeah, I’d say you’ve done alright for yourself.”

Draco rolled his eyes, “Don’t be a git. Where’s Blaise?”

Theo’s smile continued to widen, “Tending to Daphne, of course.”

“Enough said,” Draco grimaced.

“Daphne won’t be the only Greengrass sister being tended to today.”

Growling, Draco knocked Theo in the arm, “Don’t be crass, Nott. That’s my future wife you’re talking about.”

“Speaking of,” he sang, “I’m here to direct you toward the altar.”

Draco’s brow arched, “It’s time, then?”

Theo nodded. ““fraid so.”

Reeling in a steady breath, Draco straightened his outer robes. After checking over his appearance, he nodded once. Theo clapped him on the back before ushering him toward the platform.

“You’re doing a good thing, mate. You’re making your family proud.”

Draco said nothing to that. Instead, he took his station beneath the floral arch and watched Theo return to his chair. Amongst the seated were his parents. Narcissa stared at him, handkerchief in hand. She dabbed at her eyes and smiled weakly. Lucius, ever the stoic lord, merely lowered his eyes.

Pansy was there, and Millicent Bulstrode. Daphne was hurrying up the center aisle before she sat beside her mother. Blaise stood at the back of the crowd, appearing perfectly pleased with himself. There was also his Aunt Andromeda and cousin Teddy, a recent development at the manor. Various Ministry personnel showed in support. Select media representatives were permitted to attend, and assorted friends and family; some familiar and others not in the slightest.

Everyone gathered to witness the union between the Malfoy and the Greengrass families.

The faint sounds of a harpsichord drew Draco’s attention back toward the center aisle. Before him, Astoria, and head-of-house, Mr Sidney Greengrass approached.

Astoria looked stunning. She adorned a slim-fitting satin dress and fur cape. Her hair had been pulled back into an elegant knot. She had eyes only for Draco as she descended the aisle. Her affectionate gaze had him holding his breath.

He hadn't expected to feel this way. Emotion tightened his airways and caused him to fidget with his sleeves. *Merlin, he was a lucky sort of bloke.*

Astoria was beautiful. She was considerate and everything he knew her to be. He didn't yet love her, but he could, given more time. She smiled at him, and he smiled back.

It felt right, the two of them. It felt... *good.*

Draco stepped forward when Astoria reached the platform. He extended his hands and she accepted them graciously. As they joined before the bonding officiant, Alistair Mills, Draco tightened his hold on Astoria's fingers. He squeezed them affectionately and fully met her gaze.

Alistair cleared his throat, "Family and guests. I thank you for joining us today for the soul bonding ceremony of our beloved, Astoria Greengrass and Draco Malfoy."

Astoria's thick lashes fanned her cheeks and she blushed.

"We will begin with the fastening of hands."

Using his wand, Alistair procured a braided rope from thin air. He stepped toward them and held the rope above their conjoined hands.

"I will take the satin and hemp fibers and weave them five times for the earth, the sky, the soul, for time, and for mind."

He did as he said, laying the cord across their hands before circling it around their wrists. Draco felt it tighten. He felt Astoria's hands dampen beneath his touch. Her expression never faltered, though. She remained a perfect picture of pure-blooded pride. In this instance, Draco adored her for that.

Alistair raised his wand once again. He glanced at the pair before smiling at the crowd.

"Hanc unionem sancimus. Hoc par coniungo. Spectatores vident ut duae animae, duae nuclei magici una fiunt. Una ligamen fabricamus."

Heat began to spread across his fingers, up his hand, and beneath his sleeves. Magic filtered along his skin. It felt like static. It felt familiar in a way Draco couldn't understand.

He accepted the heat as part of the ritual until his side began to burn. Excruciating pain coursed beneath his button-down shirt. Still, he held Astoria's hands, trying not to wince.

Surprisingly, she seemed entirely unaffected, albeit a bit concerned. Her eyes lowered. Her head tilted. Lips parted as she likely felt his fingers tighten desperately around hers.

"Duas animas in unum iungamus testemur."

He couldn't tolerate it a moment longer. Draco cried out. His hands slipped from Astoria's as he doubled over in agony. The cord fell from their wrists and dropped to their feet. He faintly heard the crowd gasp, but paid no mind as he collapsed onto his knees.

Something akin to an explosion sounded overhead. Draco was hugging his side. His eyes fixed to the ground as Alistair's wand-tip landed beside the cord.

Smoke billowed from the jagged end. Draco could smell it, the smoke and tarnished magic.

"What is the meaning of this?" he heard his father bellow.

Alistair's stammering went unheard as Astoria joined him on her knees. She took Draco's face in her hands, cradling him softly.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

Draco opened his mouth to respond but couldn't find the words. He was burning from the inside out. Every thought transfixed on the all-consuming sensation.

Suddenly there were more feet beside them.

Draco could make out his mother's pearl-tipped heels and his father's dragon-hides through his bleary gaze. Then, Astoria's father and mother were there, as well.

"Explain yourself," Lucius demanded.

Draco looked up in time to see Lucius lift and point his cane at Alistair's chest. Narcissa lowered herself at Draco's side and wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"It's not- I didn't," Alistair's head erratically shook. "I've never experienced anything like this in my life!"

"Then how did it happen?" Lucius sneered.

"He must- your son must already be bound to another witch."

Hearing that, all eyes turned to Draco. Astoria looked betrayed. Her jaw was slack and her eyes, wide. Lucius appeared outraged, but his mother only showed concern.

"I'm not," he said. "I think I'd remember binding my soul to another witch."

With Lucius' cane still directed at his chest, Alistair raised his hands in surrender. "I'm sorry, it's the only explanation."

"Draco, dear..."

Narcissa's hands found his shoulders and she turned Draco to face her.

"We'll figure this out."

“You will figure this out,” Sidney Greengrass corrected. “My family will have nothing to do with this... this farce you’ve put us all through. I should’ve listened to my advisor. No good will come from a union with a Malfoy.”

Lucius lowered his cane, “Now, now, Sidney. Let’s not be too hasty. Whatever this is, it’s temporary. I’ll have Draco seen by all the best healers. They’ll break this bond and we can all move forward.”

“Lucius!” Narcissa cried.

He flashed his wife a glare in warning.

“Did you know?”

It was Astoria. Her voice trembled as she clasped her hands against her chest.

Draco shook his head, forcing his mother to drop her hold. “I didn’t. I don’t know what this is. There must be another reason.”

Narcissa raised her eyes to Alistair, “Can you look? Can you see if such a bond exists?”

“My- my wand,” he pointed at the remaining shards littered on the ground.

Without thought, Narcissa unsheathed her own wand. She extended it to Alistair. His hands shook as he accepted it and stepped in closer to Draco.

As he returned to his feet, Draco’s entire body ached and burned. He lifted his head; his shoulders pulled back with pride.

“*Vinculum revelare.*”

Narcissa’s wand tip circled Draco as Alistair whispered the spell. The burning in his side increased, but Draco didn’t react. He breathed through the pain, his eyes lowering when a bright light emitted in thin air.

He squinted, attempting to read the unfamiliar diagnostic. At his side, Narcissa gasped and hurried to stand. She covered her mouth. Her eyes welled with tears.

“A birth bond?” she asked.

Alistair shook his head, “I’m afraid not. This is something else entirely.”

He made eye contact with Draco before quickly looking away.

“This is a chosen bond... a mutual decision...”

“I’ve seen enough!” Lucius roared.

He stepped through the diagnostic, causing it to dissipate. His hand came down around the back of Draco’s neck and he led them away from the others.

“You will fix this. Do you understand? You will fix this, and you will make things right.”

“I- yes, of course,” Draco said.

“Good,” his eyes lowered as he assessed his son. “Do you know this witch?”

“There is no witch, father,” Draco defended.

“Then we will exhaust all resources until we break this bond,” said Lucius.

“Darling, we must tread lightly here. Soul magic can be dangerous. We shouldn’t trifle with it without caution,” Narcissa whispered, her hands wrapping around Lucius’ arm.

“Astoria, come,” Sidney’s voice raised above the chaos.

As a unit, the Malfoys turned to face the Greengrass family. Sidney had Astoria’s engagement contract suspended between two fists. Before anyone could stop him, he tore the parchment down the middle. Magic sparked and fizzled, trailing away into nothingness.

“Our agreement is terminated. This is the last time I allow my family to be played for fools by a Malfoy,” he said, his tone barbed.

Sidney swung an arm around Astoria’s shoulders and led her from the platform. Mrs Greengrass took her husband’s hand. Together they moved down the center aisle, confused eyes from the attendees darting between them and the Malfoys.

But Lucius wasn’t one to back down from a fight. He charged after Sidney with Narcissa on his heels. His continued angered words went unheard as Draco focused all his attention on the burning.

He ducked behind the floral arch and away from the wandering stares. Frowning, he lifted his shirt. His eyes traced down his side, looking for the source of pain. There, lingering beside the littered *Sectumsempra* scars was a bright red brand Draco had never seen before. It appeared new—swollen and bloody as if someone had only minutes ago taken a knife to his skin.

It looked like a rune...

Draco dropped his shirt, smoothing a hand down the fabric.

This little discovery would be his secret... *for now*.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

I'd like to start off by thanking everyone who took the time to kudo, comment, and subscribe on the first chapter of this story. It's been a blast to write. I hope you enjoy this next installment.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Two -

Irritation boiled beneath his skin. The sound of Theo's maniacal laughter had Draco gritting his teeth. His hands balled into fists. Standing at the drink cart, he turned his back on Theo and released a breath. Only after pouring himself a healthy dose of whisky did Draco reface him.

He took a long swig from his glass, "Glad you find my predicament amusing."

Theo wiped a stray tear from his cheek, "Sorry, mate. It's all so unbelievable..."

Ignoring him, Draco strode across his study. He dropped down into the wingback in front of the fireplace and stared into the flames as he nursed his drink. Theo joined him at the chair by his side.

"Aren't you the least bit relieved?" he asked.

Draco's head snapped to Theo. "How could I *possibly* feel relieved?"

Theo shrugged. "You're free from your contract. Your father can't force you into another so long as your soul is bound to someone else. You evaded an arranged marriage - wasn't this what you'd wanted only two years ago?"

"I thought you liked Astoria?"

“I do,” said Theo. “She’s a sweet girl. That doesn’t mean I’d want to be shackled to her against my will.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Draco gritted out. “I’ve been tasked with finding someone to destroy the bond, and once I do... If not Astoria, there will be some other witch for me to wed.”

Lifting his drink, Theo nodded, “To family.”

Draco watched the coy smirk slowly pull across Theo’s lips. He rolled his eyes and withheld his drink on principle.

“What’s your plan, then?” Theo asked. “Are you meant to track down every witch in Great Britain and force them to show you what’s under their shirt?”

Draco’s eyes lifted. “I was hoping you might have some ideas for a better approach.”

“Blast!” exclaimed Theo with a wink. “I should’ve known this wasn’t a social visit.”

Draco turned his head as he chuckled.

“I have been giving your situation some thought, though,” Theo continued.

Draco sighed, “I’m afraid it’s a little more involved than what you saw at the ceremony.”

Standing from the wingback, Draco set his drink down on the end table. He freed his shirt from his trousers and rolled up the hem.

“Oh, so this *is* a social visit...” Theo sang.

“Stand down, Nott. I’m certain Blaise will be more than willing to accept your advances once we’re through here. Now, if you don’t mind.”

Standing sideways, Draco revealed the brand on his ribs. In the light of the fire it appeared to glow. The skin was raw and puckered. It was painful to touch.

Theo was on his feet and examined the mark closely, “Have you always had this?”

Draco shook his head. “A recent development.”

“Blimey, that’s fascinating.”

Theo prodded the scar with his finger and Draco winced.

“It looks like a rune, though not one I’d recognize.”

“I had the same thought,” said Draco.

Theo’s eyes lowered as he scanned the mark with intrigue. He conjured a quill and parchment from thin air before drafting a sketch of the possible rune.

Once he’d finished, Draco dropped his shirt. “Does this change your approach?”

Pursing his lips, Theo returned to his chair. He crossed a foot over his knee and leaned back. He tilted his head, brown eyes glowing with evident mirth.

“If anything, this further proves my superior intelligence.”

Draco came to stand against the hearth. He leaned into the brick, facing Theo’s chair.

“Go on,” he urged.

Theo sipped his whisky before returning his glass to the coffee table . “There’s someone I work with who can help you, but I can’t imagine either of you would be all that thrilled about the arrangement.”

“Regardless of which swotty Unspeakable you mean to hand me over to as an unfortunate experiment, it would take me months to acquire a clearance into the DoM. I don’t have that sort of time.”

“I’m sure Lucius could find a way to expedite the process.”

Draco snorted, “He’d have to be willing to stand in the same room as me for that discussion to happen.”

Returning to his seat, Draco sighed and his grip tightened around his glass. He leaned over with his elbows bearing into his knees.

“What do you suggest I do?” he asked Theo.

“I have a friend who works in the Soul Room; she just so happens to also be an expert in Ancient Runes.”

Lines creased his forehead. “Certainly you don’t mean Granger.”

Looking down at his hands, Theo smiled. “If there’s anyone who can work out your little problem, it’s Hermione Granger.”

“*Merlin*, I’m not that desperate.”

Theo’s brow arched, “Are you certain about that?”

Draco polished off his whisky before returning to the cart for a refill. As he watched the amber liquid trickle out of the decanter, he pondered Theo’s words.

Draco *was* feeling a tiny bit desperate. Not to appease his father, no, but instead for purely selfish reasons.

It’d been a sleepless night. Draco tossed and turned, rotating between rage, fear, and confusion. He searched through his mind, looking for evidence of the bond. He tried to locate the ache in his ribs as if it were some sort of cord tethering him to another person. Draco found nothing.

And if there *was* another person, did they know about him, or were they equally unaware? When the bond appeared for him, did they too begin to burn? Did some ancient rune spark to life on their chest, branding them together forever?

Or was this second soul responsible for all this? Had they been anticipating the bond to activate, waiting until Draco was on the precipice of marital bliss before intervening?

He reached only one logical conclusion: this intrusion on his soul had been done without his consent. Someone had likely performed an experiment on him whilst he awaited trial at Azkaban, and then they *Obliviated* any memory of it. This was a punishment. The consistent burning in his side proved that much. A true soulbond. A soulmate... that would feel *good*. No?

With all that considered, Draco wasn't one hundred percent certain he wanted Granger or any other bloody Unspeakable prodding at his body with magic. This bond was dormant, and then suddenly sentient, overruling his very autonomy. If there was dubious play at hand, he'd rather live ignorantly. He'd wait out his assailant and let them come to him.

But his father would likely have none of that. And truly, his own need to enact revenge on whoever had embarrassed him like this grew stronger with every minute.

He didn't have to decide now. He could give it a few days and wait until after the new year.

Unfortunately for him, though, there were other factors at hand. One in which decided at that moment to remind Draco of their presence... There was a knock on his study door. The knob turned and his mother stepped into the dimly-lit room.

"Draco, darling, your father's asked that you look these over."

Narcissa approached him, a large stack of parchment clasped between two hands.

"What is it?" he asked.

Draco placed his glass down on the cart before meeting her halfway across the room. Narcissa's lips tugged to the side and it appeared that she couldn't quite meet his gaze.

"I have a few items here for you to address," she continued, lining the parchment on the dresser stationed behind his loveseat.

"The first is your acknowledgment of the termination of your betrothal. Sidney Greengrass would like it for his records. Second, your father has compiled new portfolios for you to review."

Draco's brow knit. "Portfolios..."

Narcissa nodded, only once. "Yes. Your father needs to make certain that you continue to appear available for the other remaining witches in our community. You'll be happy to find your friend Miss Parkinson has reentered the mix."

He didn't have an ounce of energy to spare on that information, and instead said, "But that's not exactly true, is it mother?"

Narcissa's blue eyes widened as Draco resumed his thoughts.

"I'm not technically available," he said and shrugged as if that response made perfect sense.

Smiling weakly, Narcissa turned her eyes down to the parchment. She pulled forward one of the documents before drawing his attention to it with a steady tap of her finger.

"Tampering with soul magic is experimental, but your father's located a few practicing healers, one here in England, who'd be willing to... *examine* the bond more closely." Narcissa cleared her throat, "The healer would need your signature before he'd be able to move forward with any necessary testing."

Draco recognized his mother's voice but only heard his father's brash desperation in her words.

"You don't agree with him—with father?"

Narcissa blinked before her posture straightened, "I have concerns."

His lips parted to respond when Theo cut in, "If I may... I was just telling Draco here that I have a contact at the DoM who might be able to rectify this little problem."

Her head tilted. "Go on."

Draco was eternally grateful for Theo's ability to remain passive when he said, "Hermione Granger."

Brow arching, Narcissa asked, "And what, pray-tell, can Miss Granger do for my son that an esteemed healer cannot?"

"She works with soul magic. Her current research has her examining the parts of the soul; how it stores hereditary and existing magic. She's also done quite a bit of investigation into soul bonds. I think she could be an incredible asset for Draco."

Her nostrils briefly flared and her lips quirked at the corners. "I see."

She turned her attention to Draco, "Do you agree that working with Miss Granger is the best course of action?"

Draco frowned, "I haven't put much thought into it yet."

Narcissa regarded Theo once more, "You believe Miss Granger will treat the matter with the utmost delicacy?"

In other words, her concern was that he'd wind up dead - which was an odd comfort coming from the woman who hadn't been permitted to coddle him since Draco turned eleven.

Theo chuckled, “Granger’s nothing if not thorough and a gods-awful stickler for safety.”

Narcissa released a breath. She smiled easily then, and it surprised Draco to find his mother so visibly relieved.

At that moment, he knew his fate had changed. He’d risk reuniting with Hermione Granger, if only to appease his mother and save her from the stress of what might happen if he didn’t.

“One issue remains,” Draco said. “I’d need a clearance to enter the DoM.”

Narcissa lifted her hand and squeezed his shoulder, “I’ll have your father see to it. In the meantime, Theodore, if you wouldn’t mind arranging a time for Draco to meet with Miss Granger after the holiday, we’d be incredibly grateful.”

He flashed her his youthful grin, “Anything for you, Mrs Malfoy.”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Short scene - which for you means, bonus chapter tomorrow or Wednesday. Continued gratitude for Forgive_Me_Severus, who puts everything else aside to work with me on this piece. (I seriously don't deserve you)

Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall and Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Three -

A mug of tea came down beside her hand. A croissant followed. She didn't allow the sweet aroma of chai and melted chocolate distract her from making her point. Instead, she slowly turned on her stool, lifting her eyes to him and pursing her lips.

Hermione glared. "Tea and treats won't make me spare you."

She took the mug in her hands. As she brought the brim to her lips, her eyes never left Theo's. It was the perfect temperature, the perfect milk to tea ratio. At that moment, she internally cursed his generosity while still refusing to show her appreciation. She returned the mug to her desk before folding her arms over her chest.

"Here I was thinking we were friends," he chided.

Hermione's eyes continued to lower. Unconvinced, she tilted her head.

"Friends do favors for friends. It's common courtesy," Theo continued.

"Friends also respect each other's boundaries. I'd argue what you've gone and done is the exact opposite of friendly." With that, though, Hermione sighed.

She and Theo had grown close since starting at the Department of Mysteries together. He was nothing like she'd imagined him to be; almost entirely separate from his Slytherin cohorts and the traits she'd assumed they all carried.

Theo was kind and thoughtful. Most importantly, he was funny. He filled her mundane work days with laughter; humor so potent it sometimes had her cramping and clutching her side. She'd learned to trust him. Hermione had put her life in his hands more times than she could count as she dabbled with experimental magic, and he'd never once let her down.

"It's a big ask," he said.

She released a careless snort, “I wasn’t aware your, ‘*I’ve put an appointment on your calendar this morning*’, was a request. If that’s the case, then I full-heartedly *decline*.”

Theo’s entire face contorted. His bottom lip wavered. His eyes grew a little too wide.

Oh no, here it comes, she thought. Theodore Nott had a knack for getting people to agree to anything. It was his charm and boyish good looks. He could command a room without even trying. Theo could convince anyone to jump off a bridge just by batting his eyelashes and flashing a toothy grin.

“Do I ask you for much?” he said.

Hermione groaned, “No, if anything you’re more often doing me a favor.”

He smiled at that, “Please... If it weren’t important, I wouldn’t have brought it up. But as it stands, there’s no one else I can think of who’s more qualified to help.”

She released a long breath. Her shoulders slumped briefly before her posture straightened.

“Fine,” she said. “I’ll do it for you.”

“You’re a wonder amongst witches, Hermione Granger,” he sang.

“Flattery will get you nowhere, Mr Nott.”

Theo wagged his brow. “On the contrary, flattery has gotten me *everywhere*.”

She rolled her eyes, unable to fight the smile tugging against her lips. Theo easily forced that reaction from her on a regular basis.

“How long before he arrives?” she asked.

The *he* in question - one, Draco Malfoy.

Hermione had tried and failed not to give the situation much thought once she realized she’d agree to help simply because Theo asked her to. Now, however, the anxieties concerning an unwanted reunion with Malfoy rushed back to the surface. Something resembling anticipation or dread filled her chest. She hadn’t seen nor spoken to Malfoy since his trial. That was also when he’d reminded her he didn’t want or need her pity.

She wondered what today’s services would equate to? Would he once again call her out for sticking her nose where it didn’t belong?

“He’ll be along shortly. He’s collecting his clearance paperwork from the Minister.”

Hermione’s eyes widened, “The Minister? This must be a pressing matter after all.”

“Regardless of the fact that anything which distresses Lord Malfoy is to be considered a pressing matter, I am shocked this news hasn’t reached *The Daily Prophet* yet. I assumed there were some stories money couldn’t banish, but I suppose I *can* be wrong.”

“Something I should know?” Hermione asked, brow arching.

“I’ll let Draco give you the finer points, but the gist of it is - he needs his soul bond broken.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

He’d said it so casually it took a moment to register what Theo was asking her to do. Draco Malfoy was minutes from arriving and expecting her to experimentally tear apart pieces of his soul.

“I won’t tamper with soul magic,” she spoke sharply.

Theo chuckled, “That’s what you do everyday.”

“In *theory*,” Hermione pointed. “For practical purposes, but never with the intention of severing a bond. I’m not even certain that’s possible, though I would be curious to see if it could be done...”

Her star-eyed and curious gaze traveled toward the ceiling as she pondered the opportunity. Unfortunately, Theo broke the spell.

“You’re in luck then, because the Malfoy’s are very motivated to have this little problem eradicated. This would be experimentation without boundaries. I’m certain you could get Draco to agree to anything.”

“Not without the pair,” she said. “I’m happy to hear him out, but he’ll need to bring in the witch he’s bound to. That’ll likely be the only way.”

Theo’s hand massaged the back of his neck and his nose scrunched, “Aye, that’ll be difficult to do... Draco says there is no witch.”

Her lips parted and she stared hard, “A muggle then?”

That was news. No wonder the Malfoys were adamant to keep this information out of the papers.

By tell of Theo’s long shake of his head, Hermione's assumption was incorrect.

“There’s no woman - witch or otherwise.”

She laughed, loud enough to surprise herself. “And you believe him?”

He stood straight before her desk and nodded, “I’m inclined to. Yes.”

Hermione’s brows knit. She bit down on her lip. “This would be difficult, bordering on impossible. Hopefully you haven’t given him a false sense of security about my abilities.”

“Your abilities have always spoken for themselves.”

She tensed. Hermione watched Theo turn toward the unexpected voice, a smile curling against his lips. She couldn't bring herself to force the same reaction. Instead, she rotated slowly in her seat. At a lackadaisical pace, Hermione directed her eyes up from the floor.

She found Draco standing in the hall, seemingly waiting for permission to enter. He leaned against the door frame. His ankles and arms both casually crossed. Hermione blatantly refused to meet his stare.

"Pardon the intrusion," he said. "With all the checks and balances in the DoM, I'm surprised to find you leave your office doors open."

Hermione tossed a glare at Theo, knowing precisely whose oversight that was.

"It's fine. Come in. Shall we move this conversation into my office?"

She didn't wait for a response. Hermione stood and led the pair of Slytherins toward the stairs fit between two large bookcases.

"Glad to see some things don't change," she heard Draco mumble to Theo. "Always straight down to business with this one."

Hermione ignored the commentary. She hiked up the narrow set of stairs and directed them through the single door at the top of the landing. Beyond the entryway there were more bookcases and a filing cabinet. She had a second desk, this one specific for reading and research. There was also a large sitting area, which Hermione navigated toward. She dropped down in the corner chair and waited for Theo and Draco to join her.

"I don't believe Theo's brought me entirely up to speed so if you'd like to tell me what you're hoping to achieve here, now's the time."

Draco chuckled, "We don't have to do this."

Her brown eyes lowered, "What's *this*?"

She took in Draco's face for the first time since he entered her lab. He looked better than he had following his few months in Azkaban. The light in his eyes returned and his skin had softened. Still, he'd grown taller, broader in the three years that passed. He filled his entire chair with ease, knees resting a little too high to appear truly comfortable.

"We can be friendly. We don't need to pretend as if we don't know each other," Draco said.

Hermione tilted her chin, "And how are you Malfoy?"

"Fine, Granger, and yourself?"

"Wonderful. And now that niceties are out of the way... How I can help you?"

Draco sent Theo, who sat to his left, a narrowed glance. He rolled his eyes before refacing her.

“It appears I have a soul bound. We discovered this on my wedding day, which I’m sure you could deduce was a less than thrilling discovery for my bride and her family.”

“Not to be forgotten, Lucius Malfoy,” Theo said.

She watched Draco’s jaw clench, “Yes, my father was not especially happy about this development either.”

Hermione whistled, shaking her head, “That is... unfortunate.”

“A glaring understatement,” Draco spoke tersely. “I’m here so you can do what needs to be done. If you can break the bond, excellent. If you can’t, perhaps you can find out who’s done this to me, and at the very least, might you be able to tell me what *this* is?”

Hermione’s eyes widened as Draco began rolling up his jumper. Her cheeks burned seeing his chest come into view. Yet all of that confusion and embarrassment dissipated the moment she saw it; a brand, a rune. It had an orange glow and looked fairly new. Similar to a pumpkin carving, the scar was jagged as if the knife had been wielded by a child's hand. With three prongs on either side, it looked like two mirroring wishbones crossed over each other.

She was on her knees before him and pulling his shirt further out of the way. “Merlin, that’s fascinating...”

“What is it with you Unspeakables and your complete disregard for personal space?” Draco snapped.

He tried to yank down his shirt, but she would have none of that. She slapped his hand and sent him a stern look.

“What’s it mean?” Theo asked, his cheek pressed into the top of Hermione's head.

Both were mere inches from the mark, hovering over Draco.

“I’m not sure,” she replied.

“I feel like a bloody animal,” Draco cursed.

“You *should* be grateful,” Theo quipped. “You could be at St Mungos right now with the healer who I’m certain would’ve loved nothing more than to shred you to bits.”

“This is far too delicate a situation for a healer,” said Hermione.

She stepped back and pulled her wand from her robes. She met Draco’s eyes and nodded. “May I?”

He shrugged.

She took that as acceptance. Her wand circled the scar, the tip igniting with magic before fizzling out. Hermione cleared her throat, stealing herself. She could feel Draco’s scrutiny and it drew a blush down from her cheeks onto her chest.

“New wand...” she said, “I’m still trying to find one that fits...”

Hermione reran the diagnostic, wand circling Draco’s scar a second time. The reading drew to life before them and she released a painfully held breath.

The diagnostic was complicated, to say the least. It was as unfamiliar as the possible rune, but there were parts of it she could understand. There was the soul line, his magical current, and something else she couldn’t quite decipher.

Her eyes widened briefly before she frowned and bit her lip.

Draco’s brow arched, “Anything you feel like sharing with the class?”

Hermione squinted, tilting her head. “I’m not a fan of sharing my thoughts before I’ve had a chance to confirm them, but seeing how this directly concerns you... There *is* in fact, a soul bond,” she confirmed. “However, it’s not one I’m familiar with. It appears to be directly connected to your marking.”

“In English, Granger...” Draco stated impatiently.

She dropped the diagnostic and folded her arms, “Both your magic and part of your soul are tethered to the brand.”

“What’s the other part tethered to?”

Hermione’s lips pursed and curled downward, “I can’t say.”

“Can’t or *won’t*?” he growled.

“I. Don’t. Know. Is that clear enough for you?” she snapped. “I’d need more than a few moments to thoroughly assess this.”

Theo pulled Hermione away from Draco with a hand to her arm. “Do you recognize the rune?”

She shook her head, “I’m not certain it is one. That, or its origin is one I’m unfamiliar with. I’ve also considered it might be a hieroglyphic of some sort... I’d need to look into it.”

Theo dropped his hold on her arm. Hermione slowly readdressed Draco who was tucking his shirt back into his trousers. When he was situated, she lowered her head respectfully.

“Theo’s informed me, but I do need to ask... you’re certain you have no idea who’s placed the bond?”

Hermione expected anger. She anticipated frustration. What she didn’t plan for was Draco’s calm, albeit a bit sad, response.

“I haven’t the foggiest,” he said.

Her brow furrowed hearing that. “I’ll need to collect some reading materials. I’ll start with the rune and see if that points us in the right direction.”

“You can’t snip the bond and call it a day?” Draco asked.

Hermione snorted, her eyes creasing at the corners. “I won’t. Ethically speaking, it’s entirely too dangerous.”

“Wow, Granger. I wasn’t aware you cared...”

She scowled as he laughed sardonically.

“I care more about maintaining my career than I do your well being,” Hermione said.

“You should be more concerned with remaining on my father’s good side,” he told her.

“I wasn’t aware he had one of those.”

Theo stepped in, taking an arm around her shoulders. “Completely understandable. I’ve known the Lord for twenty-one years and I still avoid him at all costs. Reminds me too much of my own father.”

He grimaced before Hermione continued, “I’ll go up to the Magical Archives in Cambridge this weekend and see what I can find.”

Draco stood, “You have two rooms here filled with books, full access to the ministry’s congressional library, and *still* you’ll need to go to Cambridge? I don’t have that sort of time.”

An indignant huff escaped Hermione’s throat, “My work doesn’t stop because *you* have other need of me.”

“The Malfoy library might have better resources, no?” said Theo.

Both Hermione and Draco flinched. He cleared his throat, “It’s... substantial.”

“We can start there then,” Theo beamed.

To his credit, Draco had the decency to appear apologetic. He made eye contact with her before looking away, his lips drawing to the side.

“I can wait until the weekend,” he said.

“Come on, mate. Surely Lucius will be agreeable given the turnaround he wants on your new contracts.”

Sweet, Theo, Hermione sighed. He was completely oblivious to her and Draco’s discomfort. With his wide, eager eyes and his head rapidly searching between his two friends, he looked like a kid who’d just aced his maths exam.

"Theo..." Hermione said slowly, "Draco is trying to spare my feelings..."

Shrugging, Draco stuffed his hands in his pocket. "It's fine - and don't call me Draco. It's unsettling hearing it from you."

Hermione's lips quirked. Theo still appeared puzzled.

Finally, she relented, "I'll go to the manor."

Draco's eyes snapped to hers, "That's not necessary."

"If it'll speed up the process and get you out of my hair, it's a win-win."

Amusement crossed his face in the form of a near-smile. "Trust me, Granger. I want very little to do with those sentient lifeforms you call curls."

"As you shouldn't," she said with a smirk.

Theo aggressively nodded, "It's true, mate. I swear they tried to bite me once."

Draco's eyes had softened but still, he stared at Hermione, appearing utterly perplexed. Wrinkles tightened across his forehead. The ridged lines of his jaw were tense.

"You don't have to do this," he said, no longer meeting her stare.

She shook her head, standing tall.

"I'll do it," Hermione reiterated.

"Bloody lions..." he drawled, tone lacking the familiar disdain it once held.

Theo took both Hermione and Draco's shoulders beneath his hands. "Well that's settled then! We'll pop by the manor around seven-thirty tomorrow evening."

Draco's brows lowered, "Who said you were invited, Nott?"

Hermione's cheeks darkened, "I think I'd like for him to be there..."

His confusion continued to deepen before she watched understanding reach Draco's brain.

"Right," he scoffed.

Disappointment? Shame? Some unknown emotion was quickly banished from Draco's face. Hermione didn't understand it, and more than that - she couldn't.

Nodding, Draco crossed the room toward the door. "Seven-thirty, then."

"I'll see you out," said Theo, following him.

Draco had his hand on the door knob when he paused. His shoulders curled inward and Hermione heard him release a breath.

“Thanks, Granger,” he spoke beneath his breath.

Hermione found she had nothing to say in return.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Your continued support is so appreciated. All comments, kudos, and subscriptions make my little writer's heart so happy.

Additional thanks to my alphabeta soup for helping me work through some character dilemmas. Much love to [forgive_me_severus](#). Please go check out her stellar work.

Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Four -

Theo Nott was yammering in her ear. She didn't have the heart to stop him, nor the energy. He'd been regaling her with stories from his and Draco's childhood. There was something about peacocks, and Blaise and a toupee, but the closer they drew to the manor's front gates, the less she heard.

Snow crunched underfoot. The walk was washed in the dim light from their wands. Only the sconces beside the door proved they were headed in the right direction. If Hermione hadn't known the Malfoy's were expecting her, she would've believed no one was home. Every window had curtains drawn. The grounds were silent as if charmed from all sound. If the cold and quiet were testament to the wrongdoings that had happened here, then the reality was worse than what Hermione experienced firsthand.

Malfoy Manor was a haunted house on a hill. The waning crescent moon and few stars did little to improve its eerie atmosphere.

There was the groan of aged hinges as the gates parted in unison. Theo passed through first, completely unphased. Meanwhile, Hermione hesitated. She looked down the path at the manor veiled in shadows and drew in a deep breath.

"You're going to love the library," Theo told her. "It's incredible - collections dating back centuries."

She smiled weakly, "That sounds... nice."

Theo kept talking and Hermione finally managed to follow. Snow turned to stone beneath her heels. Shrubbery and rows of trees crowded the walk. Twigs and low branches stretched out like arms with claws. The weight of their shadows had her feeling as if she were shrinking. She wondered if there was a prophecy stashed in the DoM for her, and if in it, someone predicted that any trip to Malfoy Manor would end in more scars.

The reminder caused her forearm to itch. She rubbed the faded mark through her jumper as she continued on.

As they drew closer to the front steps, Hermione's breathing turned shallow. She could feel her heartbeat against her ribs, making her head swim. Sweat drew to her neck and greeted the frigid winter air. Ahead of her, Theo took one marbled step after another.

Her legs shook as she climbed up after him. She had her hands buried in her robes, and when he knocked, Hermione closed her eyes. She counted to five—long and slow—before reopening them.

When she did, there was a brief few seconds before Draco greeted them. He had the door held wide, frame grasped in his large hand. He stood there in his tan khakis and a black button-down. Hermione wondered if that was his version of 'casual wear'?

Despite the inner turmoil she was experiencing, when Theo entered the foyer, Hermione followed. Her eyes trained to the framed walls and incredibly high ceilings, looking anywhere but at Draco.

She heard the door close and feet approach. Draco came to stand at her hip, his gaze trailing the edges of her face. She remained neutral, passive. She wouldn't give Draco Malfoy the satisfaction of knowing she was afraid.

"Theo, head to the library. Granger and I will meet you in a moment," he said.

She turned her head, looking up at Draco. Hermione's brow furrowed and her vision narrowed. His storm grey eyes were dark. His face was expressionless, bordering on lost. It confused her further and so she pulled her attention back to Theo.

He smirked, "If I didn't know you as well as I do, I'd assume you were both up to something scandalous."

"Theo," Draco said, and it resonated like a warning.

Theo lifted his hands, "Alright, I can tell when I'm not wanted."

He turned on his heels and headed across the tiled floors. Hermione watched him disappear down a darkened hallway to their left as Draco came to stand in front of her.

She folded her arms, "Do you parents know I'm here?"

"They do."

"I've been permitted to look through your family's books then; no qualms about my dirty hands tainting their precious heirlooms?"

Hermione mentally slapped herself. She wasn't sure why she said it. The combination of anxiety and discomfort had her on edge. She was feeling scattered, a sensation she typically avoided at all costs. It wasn't practical.

Draco's response, however, wasn't combative, nor was it defensive as she would've expected. She'd only known her harsh words landed by the slight widening of his pupils. The rest of his expression remained unchanged.

Draco dragged a hand through his hair. His shoulders deflated. He said nothing, which further ignited Hermione's irritation.

Her hands went to her hips and she tapped her foot. "Was there something you needed from me or can we get on to the research portion of the evening?"

"You don't make it easy, do you, Granger?"

Her eyes lowered, fingers digging into the band on her skirt.

"I'm trying to apologize to you," his voice was low; his tone, harsh.

Hermione laughed—a sudden burst of amusement—and she quickly covered her mouth with an open hand. After collecting herself, she pulled it aside.

"Is that what this is?" she asked. "Well, you're not very good at it, are you?"

"We can't all be bloody perfect at everything," he quipped with a roll of his eyes.

"Apologies typically require more words and a kinder inflection. Might I suggest starting there?"

"I'm reconsidering *starting* at all..."

Hermione snorted, "Typical."

"Merlin, you're impossible..."

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Draco turned his back on her. He strode for the hallway, leaving Hermione alone in the foyer. Suddenly, he stopped short beneath the marbled arch.

"Mippy!" he called.

In a blink, the house elf *Apparated* before him. She smiled up at Draco, eyeing him fondly.

"Mippy, please show Miss Granger to the library."

She bounced, hurrying to Hermione's side and grabbing her hand. She had on tiny leather loafers and a pink jumper.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet the famous Miss Granger. If you'll please follow me."

Draco was already on his way down the hall. He came to a halt once more, his spine pulling taut. He didn't look at them; only his lips turned over his shoulder. "She's paid, by the way... *And well.*"

Hermione fought not to roll her eyes in front of Mippy. Instead she squinted through her irritation and drew in a short breath. She relented to the tiny hand tugging against hers. She allowed Mippy to pull her forward and into the dimly-lit hall.

"Mippy, one more request..."

Draco was now standing at the far end of the hall. His posture wasn't quite as rigid as it had been last time he spoke.

"Avoid the lower east wing. Take Miss Granger through my quarters instead."

Hermione had to wonder if the instruction was more for his benefit or hers. Something told her she knew the answer to that question, and it surprised her.

The trek to the library was a kin to a hike - multiple sets of stairs, long hallways with many turns, and more doorways than Hermione could count. With each step, the manor grew darker. Cold stone walls, obsidian tiled floors, and aged-bronze sconces. Theo made up for it as she entered. He lingered near the doorway with a glass of red fairy wine. Hermione accepted it without debate. Typically she'd make a comment about not drinking on the job, but this particular job could benefit from some liquid courage.

"Will you be needing anything else, Miss?" Mippy asked.

"Oh, no... Thank you, Mippy."

Hermione lowered herself down to the elf, extending her free hand. Mippy frowned at the gesture before her already large eyes grew impossibly wider. She grabbed Hermione's hand and shook it eagerly.

"Such a polite witch," Mippy crooned.

"Careful with that one, Mips. Hermione's ego is already at risk of rupturing."

Hermione scowled at Theo as she returned to her feet. Her expression shifted into a smile before she addressed the elf. "Thank you, Mippy. I can take it from here."

Mippy grinned. She nodded and *Disapparated* from sight, leaving Theo and Hermione on their own.

As she sipped her wine, she examined the room before her. It was brighter than the other parts of the manor she'd walked through. The library had two levels and was roughly the size of a ballroom. What truly stuck out to Hermione, though, was how warm the room was.

There were dual fireplaces; one in the entry sitting area and the second on the upper landing. Instead of stone or marble, the walls were carved from rich mahogany. And of course, the books... There were hundreds of shelves, meaning tens of thousands of collections. She knew she could get lost for hours, if only they allowed her to.

"Stunning, isn't it?" Theo asked.

Hermione's shoulders shrugged as she turned to him. She realized the combination of wine and the library had her forgetting entirely about where she was.

"It's certainly impressive."

Theo chuckled, “Where’d you lose Draco to anyhow? I’m surprised he’s not here to see this. We had a wager going on about whether or not you’d faint.”

Hermione snorted, “Who won?”

As her own brow arched, Theo smirked. “Draco, of course.”

Hermione didn’t know how to respond to that. Draco had bet in her favor; that notion was oddly surprising. She sipped her wine instead of dwelling and began to wander the room.

The sitting area was retrofitted with lush green chairs and antique tables. She ran her hand along the mantle, eyeing the dated portraits watching her closely. Beady eyes stalked her every step. It was like being at Hogwarts again, sans the ‘better off dead’ vibes the manor seemed to bestow on her.

“All relatives, I presume?”

One of the elder men scoffed before stalking out of view.

“Ah, yes...” Theo sang. “The Malfoys of better years.”

“Better for who?” she quipped.

Theo scratched his head, “Fair point.”

She continued her trek around the bordering wall, admiring the paintings and first of the collections. The books here were veiled behind glass, sated beneath a stasis charm she could feel, like static against her skin.

“Is there an organization system in place or are we meant to go through everything?”

Theo’s mouth dropped to respond at the same time Draco entered.

“Who won?” he asked.

Theo reached into his robes and withdrew a gold galleon. He tossed it to Draco who caught the coin in a tight fist. He flipped it once before stashing it in his pocket.

“Now that your childish wager has been settled, could someone please tell me how to navigate the shelves? I don’t fancy spending all night here.”

“Liar...” Theo smirked.

Clearing his throat, Draco stepped forward. “I’ve had everything pulled aside regarding runes, hieroglyphics, symbolic languages, etcetera, etcetera...”

He started across the room.

“I’ve set us up in the loft - Theo on languages. Granger on runes, and I’ll look into hieroglyphics.”

“If only you’d put this much effort into your schooling, you might’ve out-scored me in something,” Hermione said, lips curling with mirth.

From over his shoulder, Draco tossed her a glare. It wasn’t all that menacing; in fact, she was closer to calling the expression playful, but she wasn’t open to having that kind of rapport with Malfoy. She held his gaze as she sipped her wine, her own eyes lowering.

Draco turned away as he led them up the stairs. “External factors can be extremely motivating. My future’s in a holding pattern until I’m rid of this blasted bond.”

“What makes you think the bond’s a bad thing, mate?” Theo asked.

Draco darkly chuckled, “Perhaps if someone severed your soul without your knowing about it you might understand.”

“Do you have any theories?” Hermione asked, and only because it appealed to her more curious nature.

“A few,” Draco replied. “Namely unethical practices at Azkaban.”

“Unlikely,” she said. “Kingsley instated routine wand-checks in July of ninety-nine. You weren’t incarcerated until November.”

He stopped at the top of the stairs and turned to her. “Go on, then. What’s your theory?”

Draco was towering over her. Hermione joined him on the same step and angled her head high. “I don’t have enough information to propose one yet.”

Gliding past him, she found the second sitting area in front of a roaring fire. She watched Draco and Theo claim two wing-backs while she approached three very large stacks of books.

“If not Azkaban, could be Death Eaters,” Theo pondered.

Hermione quickly turned to him. “That’s a rather good theory actually.”

Her attention redirected to Draco.

“Is there anyone your family was involved with who might find it beneficial to sabotage your marital autonomy?”

“Approximately a dozen,” he deadpanned, running a hand over his face. “Enough gossip. Pick up a sodding book and get started.”

They searched through the texts for what felt like—and likely was—hours. Hermione’s vision blurred. Her legs cramped. Still, the sensation that she was on the precipice of something continued to grow. One more paragraph, one more line in one more book. With each turn of the page, she became more determined; even as Celtic, Germanic, and Scandinavian runes all blended into one irrelevant mass of information.

She was certain her research partners were becoming frustrated with her. Draco's many scowls sent in her direction, and Theo's echoing laughter, proved that much. Hermione had always been told she was an interactive reader, and obnoxiously so. Over the years, her sighs and groans irked her study mates to no end. In this case, she continued reading, allowing her irritation to grow as she hit yet another dead end. She was driven by the hope that solving the origin of Draco's strange marking would make up for it.

Luckily, the decision to quit was forced on them. The library doors parted in unison; the sound of sharp heels on tile followed.

"Draco, darling, are you aware of the time?"

Through the railing, Hermione watched Narcissa Malfoy enter the room. She appeared small from Hermione's current height and distance. Still, she radiated elegance. Crisp white robes and well-styled hair; she was everything Hermione assumed a pure-blood matron would be.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Draco check the time.

"Bugger," he mumbled.

"It's late, then?" she asked.

"Or early, depending on your preference."

Hermione nodded to Theo, "We have work tomorrow."

He scratched his head. "I might as well stay here. Blaise has likely already found another bedmate this evening."

Hermione schooled her face. The idea of walking through the grounds of the estate at night terrified her, but she wouldn't let it show.

"I keyed you into the wards after you arrived," Draco said, returning to his feet. "I'll show you to the floo parlour."

As he stood, Narcissa's voice rang out behind them. She was ascending the stairs.

"You boys clean up here. I'll see Miss Granger to the floo," Narcissa offered.

She smiled at Hermione, toothless but sincere.

She glanced between Draco and Narcissa. He was staring at his mother, an unspoken conversation happening between them. He was evidently angry, but said nothing to the affect.

"Come along, Miss Granger," she kindly urged.

Hermione pushed out of her chair. She crossed the landing toward Narcissa.

"See you in the a.m., Granger," Theo said.

Hermione gave Theo a small shrug before nodding to Draco. “Malfoy.”

He nodded back, offering nothing else.

She turned to Narcissa, who’d taken the lead down the stairs. Hermione hurried to catch up, leaning into her hand as it glided along the rail.

Narcissa was silent as they moved through the main floor of the library. The steady click of her heels was the only sound she emitted as they made their way out of the room. Then, side by side they descended the hall; when finally, she spoke.

“I hope you don’t mind. Draco was respectfully adamant that I stay out of your way, but when I heard it was you helping my son, I saw an opportunity to make amends.”

Hermione snorted under her breath, unheard. “There appears to be a lot of that going around tonight.”

“I see...” Narcissa hummed.

Hermione’s lips pursed and she shook her head. “You have something you’d like to say to me?”

Stopping short, Hermione was forced to follow. Beneath the yellowed sconces, Narcissa clasped her hands. She drew in a short breath, head tilting slightly as her posture straightened.

“What happened in my home three years ago - I didn’t condone it. I regret my actions, my family’s actions, and I’m grateful to see you continue to surmise all of our wrong-doings by coming back here to help my son.”

Holding her breath, Hermione’s shoulder tucked into her ears. “Thank you for saying that. I didn’t need to hear it, but I appreciate the gesture all the same.”

Narcissa was silent for a beat. With all her pride intact, she left her eyes trained on Hermione. She was assessing her slowly, giving the impression that Narcissa was truly seeing her for the first time; finding an intelligent witch beyond her blood status. At least, that’s what Hermione hoped was happening.

“My son’s lucky to have you- and Theodore, of course.”

“Of course,” Hermione agreed, and only because she wasn’t certain there was much else to say.

“Is that you ‘cissa?”

Hermione’s body tensed. The voice echoing at her back was one she hadn’t heard in a long time. It commanded the corridor, dominating the silence. Forceful steps followed, beneath shoes Hermione couldn’t begin to consider the cost of.

Slowly, she turned. She greeted Lucius Malfoy with a polite nod. And despite all the bravery she maintained throughout the course of the evening, Hermione found herself tucked into the wall. Stone bruised into her back. She hoped the shadows might swallow her whole, spitting her out somewhere very far away.

She held Lord Malfoy's gaze, not allowing him to read those thoughts on her face.

"Ah, Miss Granger. I would've thought you'd be long gone by this hour," he stated.

Narcissa stepped forward, catching his arm. "I am showing Miss Granger to the floo, dear."

There was something hesitant in her tone that had Hermione believing Narcissa hadn't expected Lucius to intervene. And while the thought was comforting, it didn't ease her concerns given the current circumstance.

"While I've caught you, I'd love a word," Lucius continued.

"We've occupied enough of Miss Granger's time this evening, darling. Perhaps it's best to save the conversation for another day?" Narcissa asked.

He casted what Hermione perceived as a glare at his wife. "This will take but a moment," he said with an edge of finality that couldn't be ignored.

Drawing in a deep breath, Hermione lifted her chin.

"Lead the way, Mr Malfoy," she said, teeth grit behind her lips.

"Go on to bed, 'cissa. I'll see Miss Granger to the floo."

Narcissa glanced between them before providing a single nod; a bidding farewell. Hermione could hear her pointed heels echoing across the tile long after she disappeared from sight.

Lucius motioned with his cane. "This way," he instructed.

Hermione followed a step behind, keeping a cautious and respectable distance. "Is this about Draco or do you have something else you'd like to say to me?"

"If you're speaking of the past, I don't dwell, and neither should you. It's unbecoming of someone with your social stature to do so."

Together, they navigated the remainder of the corridor before veering down a familiar set of stairs. It was the same route Mippy had taken during Hermione's trip up to the library. There was no detour to some darkened study as she expected; no interrogation planned beyond a slow walk toward the reception hall. Lucius had stuck to Draco's suggested route, through his own personal wing.

"You want something from me," Hermione guessed, though already knowing the answer.

"Your rumored brilliance lends to very little small-talk. That's a quality I can appreciate," he commended her despite still appearing disgusted by her presence.

“I find I don’t like my time wasted,” she replied curtly.

“I’ll get right to it then.”

Lucius rounded the bend in the stairs before continuing. Despite the cane, his steps never faltered.

“I’d like for you to make my son’s... *unfortunate* circumstance your main priority. Whatever else you have on your to-do, it should fall further down your list until his predicament is resolved.”

“That’ll be difficult,” Hermione said. “I report to many Ministry departments.”

At the bottom of the stairs, his cane came across her front, wedging into the wall and trapping her there.

“What’ll it take?” he asked.

Hermione lifted her eyes to him with no apprehension. “I can’t be bought.”

He sneered, the corner of his lips turning higher toward one side. “Everyone can be bought, Miss Granger. That fact is a testament to my success - to my son’s.”

She said nothing, her stare narrowing.

“The Minister tells me you have passion projects.”

Sodding, Kingsley, she thought. It felt like a betrayal, but she’d been at the ministry long enough to know these methods were summed up as ‘business’.

“I’ll fund your research - one year, two. You name your price,” he said flippantly.

Her brow twitched. At that moment she hated her expressiveness; her inability to hide her sudden thoughts.

“I can’t be bought,” she tried again.

“It’s intriguing, though, isn’t it?”

Lucius dropped his cane and led her forward once more. As she followed, her eyes trained to the edges of his face.

“My son, amidst a tradition criticized by many in the wizarding community, to discover a bond bestowed upon him without memory of it...” Lucius’ voice hummed.

“It is strange, yes...” She bit her lip. “What are your thoughts on it?”

The corridor gave way to a large, open room. Sconces along the perimeter brightened the space immensely, to the extent that her eyes fought to adjust.

“My response depends on your level of commitment, Miss Granger.”

She anticipated a response like this. The Malfoys would be nothing today without the deals they'd struck. What Hermione wasn't expecting was to enjoy it; the bargaining and swift banter. Lucius Malfoy could be reasoned with. The two shared a language many others couldn't understand.

"I'll see to Draco's dilemma," she agreed. "I can't abandon all of my work, but I'll make it a priority."

His eyes closed, but only briefly. A smile—a shockingly genuine one—curled over his cheeks. "My son is a liar, Miss Granger, and despite my efforts to correct this behavior, he always has been. His self-gratifying behaviors will be his ruin."

Her lips parted, stare widening. "You believe Draco knows who he's bonded to?"

He crossed the room and directed her toward the floo. "I'm entirely certain of it."

Lucius stalked away before Hermione could ask anything further.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Continued appreciation for [forgive_me_severus](#) who is the lifeblood of this story. I couldn't do it without you, babes.

And many thanks to everyone who has taken the time to kudo, comment, and subscribe.
M.

Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Five -

Flat on his back, eyes fixed to the ceiling, Draco Malfoy wondered how he'd gotten there. More importantly, he wondered how he'd gotten into this *willingly*.

His hands were bound. Arms splayed wide. Uncomfortably bright lighting burned his retinas, and he could feel the cold metal table through his thin cotton shirt. The entire situation was made worse under the scrutiny of three pairs of unwavering eyes. Draco felt like a test subject. He supposed he *was* a test subject.

His morning had begun with a missive from Hermione Granger. After the previous evening, he'd been surprised to hear from her at all.

He'd lectured both of his parents at great length to avoid her. Unsurprisingly, they did not. First, his mother and her uncharacteristic need to make amends. Second, his father; who said *Merlin only knows what* to Granger. Draco had tried to pry the information out of him over breakfast. Even his mother was irritatingly tight-lipped about the ordeal.

Whatever was said, it wasn't enough to deter the swotty Gryffindor. She'd arranged to have Draco meet with her and Theo after their daily stand up. He imagined that entailed a bunch of Unspeakables standing around talking about Unspeakable things, patting each other on the backs for being so annoyingly brilliant.

The clearance his father had acquired for him allowed Draco access to Level 9 and her lab, but nothing further. When he arrived before Hermione and Theo's return, he was left to his own devices. Unfortunately, he understood very little about Hermione's research.

There were essays on the separation of souls from the body, and the effects of magic on Muggle souls all haphazardly strewn around the workstations. It sounded fascinating, but the studies read like gibberish. And not understanding had Draco more concerned about what Granger had planned on his behalf.

It felt strange knowing someone he'd actively hated at Hogwarts had intimate control over his soul. Someone of Hermione's intelligence could break him as easily as she could help him.

Laying in bed the night before, he'd wondered if that's what had lent him to try and apologize to her. Was he afraid of what she might do to him if he didn't? Draco had scoffed and rolled his eyes at the thought. Hermione Granger was many things. She might've even been a tad vindictive, if what Theo had told him about Rita Skeeter and a peculiar jar were to be believed.

Draco's situation, however, was different. He'd proposed a mystery that needed solving. Granger's desperation to find an answer would drive her forward, not petty revenge. Not to be forgotten, this work was a direct reflection on her career. She wouldn't risk not advancing to Matron Unspeakable or the next Minister of Magic for the slight thrill of tampering with Draco's soul.

Knowing this, that'd meant Draco's attempted apology was genuine. Or worse, bred from *from guilt*. The mere idea had him nauseous. Guilt was a weakness. Guilt was embarrassing. Guilt could be squandered with time and avoidance; not with asinine apologies. He hadn't thought about Hermione Granger in years. Blissfully out of sight and out of mind.

But seeing her again, Draco was punched with something resembling... *regret*.

He was a prat in school, and delightfully so. He'd carried out plenty of acts that he *could* feel regret for, but he simply chose not to. And yet now, with Hermione's return as an irritatingly constant fixture in his life, the unfortunate feeling of regret was harder to ignore.

He needed the predicament concerning his soul-bind resolved and eradicated as soon as possible. The faster it was, the quicker he'd be free from Hermione Granger and the disturbingly compassionate emotions she evoked in him.

Perhaps that's why he'd climbed himself up onto the exam table and allowed Katie *fucking* Bell to probe his mind.

When Hermione and Theo returned to her office after their stand-up, Draco was seated and waiting in the small library nook beneath the stairs. He stood from the loveseat as they approached. Both wore expressions he could only think to describe as cautious.

Hermione had her hands clasped at her waist while Theo's held at his back. In their dark, full-length Unspeakable robes they appeared near-haunted as they came closer. Stopping in unison a mere step away, they stood side by side. Both were silent for a long moment and Draco grew tense.

"Who's died?" he asked, and with a bit of a snort.

Hermione and Theo exchanged a look before her mouth parted to speak. "I've come up with a plan that might help point us in a better direction. As much as I love studying runes, we could do so for days and never know if we're on the right track."

Draco's blue-grey eyes lowered. He felt his nostrils flair. "By tell of your demeanor, I'm fit to believe I won't like what you have to suggest."

"It's a good plan, mate," Theo added. "Brilliant, really. I wish I'd come up with it myself."

Burying his hands into his pockets, Draco's fingers tightened into fists. "If it's as brilliant as you say it is, you'll have no issue sharing it with the class."

Hermione cleared her throat. "I have a friend who works in the Mind Room. She's extremely skilled in memory extraction. I thought we might have her examine your bond and see if it has any memories attached to it."

He said nothing. His lips pursed.

"Your father seems to think that you know who you're bonded to, and I'm inclined to believe him..."

Draco's face flushed with anger. As he reactively stepped forward, Hermione held up a hand.

"Allow me to finish," she spoke sternly. "As I was saying, I believe him, but I also believe you... The research I've done on soul bonds shows that all parties involved need to be willing and active participants. This means that at the time, you were likely aware of what was happening. The *Imperius Curse* and memory erasure are all valid reasons for forgetting, but I am inclined to believe that when the bond was made, you were aware."

"And so you'd like to *what*, exactly?" Draco snapped, his teeth grit. "Have some random Unspeakable poke around my mind and look for clues like I'm some gods-damned child's mystery book?"

Her shoulders shrugged. "She's not a random Unspeakable. You know her actually."

At that, Theo coughed. His eyes turned toward the ceiling and he rocked on his heels. "It's Katie Bell..."

"Of course it bloody is," Draco sighed.

"I haven't said anything specifically about you yet; only your circumstances. If it's too uncomfortable, or if you'd rather continue exploring runes, we can do that," she added.

There it was - another punch to the gut. Hermione Granger was being sensitive of his past and his unfortunate current circumstances. She was coddling *him*... of all people.

As the guilt crept back in, Draco turned to indifference instead. "Let's get on with it."

Hermione's brown eyes widened. She blinked once, twice, before turning to Theo.

"I'll let her know we're on our way," she said, and Theo nodded.

"We'll be right behind you."

Hermione spared Draco a final glance before she turned on her heels. She slipped through the door, leaving him and Theo on their own.

"You sure you're alright with all this?" Theo asked.

Draco chuckled dryly. "I lost control over my autonomy decades ago. This is just yet another extension of that."

"We needed someone we could trust to help keep this information underwraps," Theo explained. "The older Unspeakables are talented, but their alliance is to the Institution. You can trust Katie."

That notion was hilarious, really - that he could trust the girl he'd near-sent to an early gravesite. As it turns out, the Gods did have a sense of humor.

"We'll make our way there, yeah?"

Draco watched Theo gesture with his head toward the door.

"Might as well," he said, and followed.

In silence, they navigated the wide marble halls. There was the occasional *boom* or shout coming from behind veiled offices, but Theo didn't react. That led Draco to believe that explosions were common occurrences in this Department. Perhaps Katie Bell would do him a favor and blow him up instead.

It was a short walk to the set of brown double-doors Theo stopped before. He raised a hand to knock, but not before shooting Draco a tentative glance.

"You're ready?"

"Get on with it," Draco said, despite how tight the muscles in his neck and shoulders had become.

He kept his eyes directed straight ahead. They remained unblinking even as the doors parted. Hermione greeted them in the entryway. She wore a half-hearted grin. Draco could tell it wasn't sincere because she wouldn't look at him. There was something solemn in her expression that had her attention flitting from place to place, never quite landing on him.

Hermione and her unreadable appearance were soon forgotten, however, as Draco came face to face with Katie Bell.

Surrounded by shelves of potions and unknown vials, Katie wore the same Dementor-like robes as Theo and Hermione. Beneath them, her arms crossed, and her back drew straight. She didn't look away from Draco as Hermione had. She fixed her stare on him and didn't shy away.

"Mr Malfoy," she greeted, and with a justifiable amount of ire.

"Miss Bell," he replied.

She sucked in an audible breath. "I'll be honest, I'm not thrilled about this."

Her dark eyes held his. They lowered, assessing his face greedily.

"I have no desire to help you. In fact, I wouldn't be at all, had Hermione not asked me to do so herself. But I'll admit, your situation is... intriguing."

Draco appreciated the honesty. It had the corners of his lips lifting, but only slightly. Katie turned to Hermione amidst his silence. Her anger didn't fade; if anything it continued to grow. Her cheeks were flushed and her hands were held firmly at her sides.

"Tell me what you want me to do."

Hermione nodded, "You'll examine the bond. See if you can follow it into his mind. We need to bring any memories of the soulbinding forward so we can assess them for relevancy."

Katie lifted her chin, humming idly. "I can't use projection methods on civilians. You'll need to use a Pensieve to view whatever I collect."

Theo's eyes widened and he stepped forward. "You're going to extract his thoughts? That's a bit barbaric, no? Fascinating, yeah, but..."

His voice trailed off and Draco frowned.

"Not exactly," Katie explained. "I can duplicate anything I find. I'll be removing copies of the thoughts, but not the thoughts themselves. His memories will remain intact when I'm finished. True extraction is, well... it's more unpleasant."

"What do you need from me?" asked Draco.

Katie led them over to a metal examination table. With a quick wave of her wand, the overhead lights brightened. Both Theo and Hermione shielded their eyes behind an open hand while Katie and Draco didn't react.

"Lie down here," she instructed.

Draco nodded once. He slid his rear onto the table and kicked his legs over the edge. As he laid back, he focused on the sconce lowering down toward him from the ceiling.

Someone pulled at his arm. He let them.

“I’ll need to bind your arms and legs. There can be no sudden movements,” Katie lectured sharply.

“Do what you must,” Draco obliged.

Both Theo and Hermione had stepped forward to help with the bindings. The last was a brace which slipped over his forehead before being ratcheted down tight.

Draco’s movements were reduced to blinking; to wiggling his toes and fingers. As panic began to creep in, he shoved it aside. He dug through his mind to find a corner to stash the panic in. Only later when he was alone would he allow himself to remember how eerily similar this situation felt to when Voldemort had him bound and gagged before probing his mind.

“I’ll examine your soul first,” said Katie. “You won’t feel anything, maybe only slight pressure.”

He remained silent. Only out of the corner of his eyes could he see both Hermione and Katie standing over him at his hip.

Katie had run a diagnostic. Draco was too far away from the reading to make out any of the symbols or shapes that’d shown before them. Both appeared pensive, squinting through their thoughts as they assessed his soul.

“You see,” Hermione inquired. “This thread goes off in search of the pair, but this one here is connected to Draco. It should go beyond the soul.”

Katie bit her lip. “I can follow it; see where it leads me. It’s likely less intrusive than poking around his mind for memories about his soul.”

‘Should’, ‘likely’, ‘more unpleasant’... these vague statements regarding the very thing keeping him alive continued to circle between the Unspeakables. If Draco hadn’t been entirely at their mercy, he might’ve questioned it. Unfortunately, he was a mere experiment, and the three brainiacs were having their daily dose of fun.

“It’s fragmented,” Theo said in a whisper.

“What’s that mean?” Draco grit out.

He heard the tap of thick soles as someone came closer. Hermione appeared above him, moving to stand near his head and looking down into his eyes.

“The thread from the soul bond can be traced up toward your mind, but there are hundreds, if not thousands of directions it’s leading,” she explained.

The bright tip of Katie’s wand, which had started low near his ribs, now traveled up his chest. It didn’t stop until it was level with the center of his forehead.

“Thousands is probably more accurate,” Katie said.

“What’ll you do?” Theo came to stand opposite of Hermione.

His hand came down on Draco’s arm. He simply left it there, warm against his sleeve.

“I can pick one,” said Katie.

Theo chuckled, “And what, see where it goes? Follow the yellow brick road, or whatever Hermione mumbles to herself on the daily?”

“Precisely.”

“Why don’t you use *Legilimency*?” Draco asked.

Katie’s wand hand remained steady. “I don’t need to. This room is special - warded and charmed. In here, anything in your mind is mine to take.”

That would have been more concerning had the brand on Draco’s chest not come to life at the exact same moment. The sharp burn, which had dulled in the days following his failed marriage, now returned with vengeance. Draco bit down hard on his cheek. His fingers flexed and tightened.

“What a mess...” Hermione said, eyes following Katie’s wand.

“What- what is it?” Draco demanded; his voice was strained.

He focused on his breathing, taking long measured breaths to try and distract himself from the growing pain.

“The threads from the bond, they’re intertwined,” Hermione explained.

“I’m looking for an end strand, something separate from the rest of it,” said Katie.

The ache in his ribs seemed to expand. The pain once central to his soul marking began to expand, coursing outwards at a rapid pace. Soon his entire chest burned. His throat. His head. His eyes.

“Be quick, yeah?” he managed.

Theo’s face lowered down to Draco’s. “Are you alright, mate? You don’t look so good.”

“It bloody hurts,” he breathed.

Katie’s wand moved across and in front of his eyes once more. She frowned, “It shouldn’t. I haven’t touched anything yet.”

“Well, it fucking does,” Draco snapped.

His fingernails cut into his palms. His eyes clamped shut.

“Maybe we should stop?” Hermione suggested.

“I’m close...” Katie mused. “I can feel it.”

Draco grunted. He refused to cry. He wouldn’t, but *Merlin*, it hurt. His entire body was on fire. His head was pounding.

“Wrap it up, Bell,” he urged her.

She said nothing until, “Ah... look here.”

“More broken fragments,” Hermione stated, whether for Draco’s benefit or for her own, he didn’t know.

“Endings,” Katie corrected. “Directly linked to the mind. And if I hone in on this one here-”

There was a bright flash of light behind his eyelids. It was like being hit with the *Cruciatus Curse* straight to the skull.

Draco could hear screaming. He shockingly recognized it as his own.

“Pull out, Katie. Pull out!” Hermione’s voice was frantic.

Theo’s grip on his arm had tightened to the point of pain. How thoughtful of his friend to add to the agony he was already experiencing.

“I’ll just grab this and we can-”

Katie’s voice silenced. *Everything* silenced. Gone were the bright lights and the hand on his arm. There was no more pain. The brand on his ribs was warm, but no longer hurt. Draco was content, sated, happy; one would say... *blissful*.

“Draco... Draco...”

Theo’s voice.

Draco’s lips moved to respond, but if he had, he couldn’t hear it.

“Mate, are you alright?”

“*Rennervate!*” Granger shouted.

All at once, the lights returned. The pain. The brand.

Draco groaned. He fought against the bindings holding him down until suddenly, he was freed.

When his eyes reopened, there were three additional pairs staring down at him. All wore similar signs of concern - the knit brows and pinched lips. Hermione had her hands clasped up near her chin. Her jaw wavered.

Draco snorted, hoping it veiled the pain as it slowly crept back in. “Worried about me, are you, Granger?”

She laughed - a burst of amusement. “Worried that I’ll lose my job if you die while in my care! Ugh, you complete arse, Malfoy.”

His eyes rolled, “That’s the Granger I remember.”

Theo pushed Hermione aside. “You good?”

Draco shrugged. He moved to sit up. As he did, Hermione and Theo shot forward to help him. Draco cast them off with a scoff, batting away their eager hands. He came to sit on the edge of the exam table with his legs dangling off the side.

“What happened?” he asked.

“You fainted,” Theo said.

“I certainly did not.”

“You did.”

“You definitely did.”

“Ya, mate, you did.”

The chorus of voices bombarded him at once. Draco scowled and turned away.

“Did you at least get what you needed?”

Katie Bell stepped aside, leaning into her hip. This time when she met Draco’s eyes she didn’t appear quite as angry. Her features had softened. Her eyes irises had brightened, and while her expression remained passive, it was easier to digest than the blatant hatred she bestowed when he’d entered.

She held up a tiny vial for him to see. “I got... something?” Katie said, her lips curling downward. “You can review it here, if you like?”

She motioned toward the Pensieve at the back of the lab. With an outstretched hand, she dangled the vial before him.

Draco shook his head. “This is Granger’s research. She should be the one to review it.”

Katie turned the vial to Hermione instead.

Her mouth parted. She briefly frowned before accepting and safeguarding it in an enclosed fist.

“You don’t want to see for yourself?” she asked.

“You should,” Katie added. “It might spark something. You never know.”

Theo strutted to Hermione's side. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and grinned. "I, for one, will definitely be sticking my head in that vat. I get the F.O.M.O."

"You don't have to spell it, you just say it." Hermione groaned as Katie chuckled.

Draco merely sighed. "Enough, let's have a look. I need to get back to work."

Hermione, who'd started for the Pensieve, quickly snapped back around. "I didn't know you work?"

Before Draco could respond, Theo cut in, "He owns his own apothecary. He's a brilliant potions' master."

Hermione's gape continued to widen before snapping shut. "You always were excellent in potions."

She turned back to the Pensieve and strode across the room as if all allure had faded. Draco laughed under his breath before leaping down off the exam table.

He met Theo and Granger at the edge of the Pensieve. She held the vial above the pool of water and then met his gaze.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

"Nothing could shock me more than discovering I'm soul-bound to someone else on my wedding day."

"You say that now but there are a lot of witches and wizards I'd be hard pressed to want to be bound to forever," said Theo.

Draco lowered his eyes at him before nodding at Granger. "Get on with it, yeah?"

She drew in a breath. With a steady hand, she overturned the vial. The trio watched as the memory swirled into the basin, blending hues of black and grey into the silver pool.

Hermione moved first, and then Theo. They lowered their heads into the Pensieve. Draco turned over his shoulder. He saw Katie watching. She motioned with her head for him to follow.

He had no choice; or at least, he felt he didn't. Draco dropped his face beneath the liquid and allowed the memory to wash over him.

Hands on a textbook - a textbook Draco didn't recognize. A finger scanned the runes across the page before snapping the book shut.

Dragon hide boots then strode across worn-wooden floors.

"The Restricted Section," he heard Hermione's voice confirm.

The library fell away, fizzling out of existence.

In its place, Draco watched a new room come into view. There was plush green furniture, like the Slytherin common room, but nicer and more intimate.

Another flash. The setting changed.

They were in the Astronomy Tower where a young version of Draco stood alone.

The brand on his side began to thrum and burn. Draco ignored it as he continued to watch.

They were in the medical wing. Draco lay before them while being tended to by Madam Pomphrey.

"I'm sorry," young Draco said. "Tell her, I'm sorry."

The scene before them fizzled out yet again.

Another scene change - they were in Snape's potions' classroom. Young Draco was alone, reviewing sheets of parchment. He gave a frustrated shout before shoving the documents onto the floor, kicking at them as they scattered around him.

"That's it?" Theo grumbled.

The three were back beside the Pensieve. Draco ran a hand through his hair while Hermione began to pace.

"You're right," she said. "It's not much to go by, but we do have somewhere we can start."

"What do you mean?" Draco asked, leaning against the rim.

"Hogwarts, of course," she said, and as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Ah yes, let me just phone up my old pal McGonagall and ask if I can poke around the Restricted Section. I'm sure she'd be more than agreeable..." Draco drawled.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," Hermione grinned. "I can get us into Hogwarts."

Theo's hands raised, "I'm obviously coming. I'm here to see this one through."

"Don't you have your own work to finish?" Hermione asked.

Theo moved to respond and Draco growled, “If you both don’t mind...”

He effectively cut their argument off.

Turning to him, Hermione shook her head in amusement.

“How do you anticipate getting me into the school?” he reiterated. “It’s winter holiday.”

Her smile took on new life. It was haunted; near-menacing.

“I have a friend...” she simply said.

Hermione then turned for the door before making a quick exit.

-

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Ugh. I love all of you - anyone who took the time to comment and like and kudos - gods, I love you all.

As always, so much love to forgive_me_severus for being the motivation to keep going (even when I delete chapters a half dozen times before landing on a direction). I ADORE you.

Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Six -

If only someone decided to capture this rare moment in history, Draco mused in thought. He imagined his current predicament would make for an undisputedly ridiculous Christmas card. He had half a thought to send one to his father and watch his head explode.

He was sandwiched between two Gryfindors in the tight cabin. Disturbingly warm thighs pressed against his own. A bony shoulder prodded his arm. There was the nauseating scent of aftershave and honeysuckle perfume blending together beneath his nose. He'd shielded his face behind his shirt at one point, but he was then scolded within an inch of his life for 'being rude'.

He decidedly suffered instead.

Of all the bloody people to be recruited on his behalf, Draco really shouldn't have been surprised. And yet there he was, irrevocably perplexed as he sat beside Hermione Granger and Harry *Fucking* Potter on a small passenger train.

He'd remained silent throughout most of the journey so far, never extending past niceties; and if only to acknowledge that they were, in fact, also there. Meanwhile, Granger and Potter yammered on about nonsense, throwing out names Draco certainly didn't remember. Nor would he want to, if given the the chance.

"She was in our potions class," or "He sat behind you in Ancient Runes."

His, *"I don't keep a running tally on everyone who's stood in my direct vicinity like you do, Granger"*, went unappreciated by both Ministry Representatives. Perhaps Gryfindors lacked both a sense of humor and self preservation skills.

Draco's thoughts had since traveled elsewhere; eyes lost to the window and the scenery moving past. It wasn't until he heard his name uttered by Potter his attention drifted back to the train car.

"You could do it, though. If anyone could, it's you," said Harry.

Hermione scoffed, though Draco had caught the slight upward curl of her lip. “Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. Draco’s memories are directly tied to his bond. You didn’t see him, Harry. Katie’s slight prodding at his thoughts rendered him completely unconscious.”

Looking between the two who sat well below his own height, Draco scowled. “If you’ll please, Granger. Potter’s here as an escort, not my mind healer. He needs to know nothing about my personal matters. His only responsibility is to get us into that sodding library.”

She smirked. “I suppose that means I’ll be owling two statements this week.”

Hermione’s brow arched as she glanced up at him, evidently not afraid to hold his stare. *Irritating*, but he’d be lying if he said it wasn’t marginally intriguing.

She continued, “If I’m to be subjected to your personal matters, as well as responsible for solving them, at least I can collect a healers’ fee.”

Draco snorted. “Touché, Granger.”

“Circling back,” she continued with an exaggerated roll of her brown eyes. “Harry’s entitled to know why he’s helping us. He could have good insight.”

“Unlikely,” he deadpanned.

“I’m right here, you know?” Harry flippantly supplied.

Sitting up higher, Draco directed his gaze downward. “Sorry, didn’t see you there, Potter. Is your wife’s Harpy diet taking a few inches off longways instead of around the belt?”

Potter puffed up his chest in the way that only he could, but before Draco landed his pending quip, Hermione stopped him. She leaned over his lap, a hand to both of their thighs.

“We’ll have none of that. I’ll remind you only once, we’re here for a purpose. Let’s not hex anyone in the process,” she scolded.

Draco nudged her off of him, smoothing down the pressed fabric of his trousers. “Imagine how much easier this would’ve been had we traveled by Floo as I suggested.”

As expected, she stampeded back into the same rant about holidays and last minute travel arrangements. He’d heard it all at the station, of course, but it was easier on the ears than another lecture about his sorely behaviour.

“As I was saying, Harry might have good insight.”

She’d looped back to *him*.

Bloody fantastic.

“You’re well-versed in memory charms. You could try it,” said Harry with his palms raised.

Her head shook with finality. “Katie encouraged us to stay away from his mind. It’s a precarious bit of magic... and the soul itself is very temperamental. We might risk the pair if we tamper with the bond too much.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised that a thorough swot like yourself mastered both soul magic and memory charms,” Draco said, leaving the edge in his tone intact as punishment for sharing his personal matters with Potter.

Her eyes briefly met Harry’s before turning back to him. “I’ve always enjoyed research. The Department of Mysteries was a good fit, and soul magic... Well, let’s just say I’m looking to prove that Muggleborns are entitled to their magic; the same as those from wizarding pairs.”

Draco cleared his throat, looking away. It was likely Granger’s personal ‘fuck you’ to the Malfoys and other members of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. He ignored the slight pinch in his chest and steered the conversation elsewhere.

“And the memory charms?” he inquired passively.

She bit her lip; its pink complexion paled beneath the weight of her teeth. “I suppose you could call that a passion project. I *Obliviated* my parents during the war. I spent twelve months studying memory removal and restoration charms.”

She’d said it so casually, Draco believed it might’ve been for his own benefit. *Obliviating* her parents, evidently to keep them safe from people like him; his parents and fellow Death Eaters. Regardless of how it’d come across, the shame still filtered in. Once again, he shoved the discomfort aside with a quiet scoff.

“Did you do it, then? Restore their memories?”

Hermione’s head tilted. Brown eyes found the arched ceiling, seemingly lost in thought.

“I could have easily managed it,” she said with a slight, childish shake of her head. “I chose not to.”

Draco frowned. His vision narrowed.

She continued on a sigh, “It was unfair, is all. When I returned to Australia to restore them, they’d moved on. They were traveling for the first time since they graduated from Uni. They’d made a new life, a new family for themselves. They have friends and neighbors and new people they love. They’re happy, and didn’t want to confuse things by inserting myself back in.”

He blinked before turning away. “I see,” was all he thought to respond with.

Then came Potter to the rescue; better versed in validation than himself.

“I still think you made the right choice,” he said.

Hermione smiled, but even Draco could tell it was forced. “Thanks, Harry.”

His brow quirked in contemplation. “ So if you can’t poke around Malfoy’s brain, your plan is to poke around Hogwarts’ instead?”

“I’m afraid we don’t have many other options right now,” Hermione said.

“What she means, Potter, is I’m an enigma and it’s titillating to her swotty brain. Isn’t that right, Granger?”

She shoved her shoulder into his arm. “Were *you* not the one asking me to fix this quickly?”

“Predictably, you agreed. You just couldn’t let this one go unsolved, exactly as I anticipated.”

“I’m happy to return to work if you think you can manage this on your own,” she baited.

Draco stood, hunching down to avoid hitting his head on the ceiling.

“Where are you going?” Hermione demanded.

“Surely there are quieter cars where one might catch a kip.”

Draco slid open the door before peering into the hall.

“Quit acting like a child and sit down,” she argued with his back. “Besides, we’re nearly to Hogsmeade already.”

With a defiant huff, Draco shut the door. “Shove down, Potter. I’m taking the window seat.”

He did so without argument, and as Draco slid between them and the wall, he awkwardly climbed over their legs.

“Last time I head to Hogwarts in the off-season...” he grumbled before dropping down into the seat.

As he tilted his head toward the window, Granger and Potter reconvened their irrelevant chatter.

It was turning out to be the longest four hours of his life, and the knowledge he’d get to do it all over again on their journey home had Draco positively *thrilled*.

Headmistress McGonagall greeted them in the Entrance Hall.

Never in Draco’s twenty-one years would he have thought he’d be relieved to see her. She was an unexpectedly welcomed reprieve from the nostalgic reminiscing he’d heard on a loop during the long walk up from Hogsmeade Village.

“This is quite the unusual trio,” she remarked, smirking as her brows raised.

Draco nodded with his hands held at his back. “Headmistress.”

“Mr Malfoy,” she replied evenly.

To his mortification, both Potter and Granger embraced her. Awkward hugs, brown nosing, and more tales from the ‘good ole years’; the scene was worse than he could conjure in his own nightmares. He’d take being *Crucioed* to his genitals over reliving this deranged reunion any day.

“As I’m certain you’d expect, Madam Pince is on holiday. You’ll be responsible for finding whatever resources you need on your own,” McGonagall explained.

“That’s not a bother,” said Hermione. “We appreciate you being available to continue our research.”

McGonagall laughed as she took the lead out of the Entrance Hall. “I won’t lie and say I’m not a little curious as to why two Ministry Representatives and a Malfoy need access to my Restricted Section.”

“Confidential matters, I’m afraid,” stated Harry.

Draco could only assume Potter loved using that line in his work. He probably did so given any opportunity. *"Hey, Potter. What's in that take-away cup?" "Confidential matters. Strictly Auror business, I'm afraid."*

Draco chuckled under his breath as they headed across the viaduct toward the central tower.

Humor quickly fell to the wayside, however, when the first classrooms came into view.

All appeared as it should. The walls were intact. The bridges were standing. It looked the same as it had during his first year at school. Despite that, memories of war and bloodshed slowly slithered between the folds in Draco’s mind.

He quickly boxed them away and schooled his face.

He’d leave the reminiscing to the bleeding-heart Gryffindors.

“I’ll leave you with the key, Mr Potter.”

Stopping in front of the set of double doors, McGonagall extended her hand. She dropped the key into Harry’s palm before scanning her eyes between the three alumni.

She stepped back with a short nod. “I ask that you return items where you found them, and if any resources need to leave the grounds, I expect an itemized list on my desk before your journey home.”

Hermione smiled, “Of course, Headmistress.”

Swot, swot, swot... Draco hummed behind pinched lips.

“Take whatever time you need,” she said.

Potter reached for the door. “Thank you, Headmistress.”

Harry and Hermione entered first. Draco followed many steps behind at a leisurely pace. No one said anything as they cut through the dark stacks.

Draco realized if he’d set Granger up with one of his family’s first editions he would have saved his entire train ride. Now he hoped they did find something to bring back with them. That’d be one less conversation he needed to evade during their return trip.

A set of iron gates pulled between the main library and the short few steps down to the Restricted Section.

New protocols, he imagined.

Smug in his stance, Potter unlocked the gates. He pushed them aside before waving Draco forward.

“In your memory, the book was with the untranslated tomes. That should be three cases from the back wall,” Hermione said.

“Spend a lot of time in the Restricted Section, did you, Granger?”

Lip curling, Draco met her stare. His brow arched knowingly upward and she lowered her eyes before turning away.

Hermione directed them between stacks. She made surprisingly quick work of navigating through the dark shelves, eyes scanning the spines and fingers trailing behind them.

After a mere minute, she stopped short. “Harry, you take far left. Draco, far right. I’ll take the middle section here.”

Draco slipped past her. With a flick of her wand, Hermione began pulling book after book from the shelves.

“Anything in here I should be concerned about?” he asked.

Hermione snorted.

“Yes,” was all she said before returning to her search.

Draco was far less methodical. He eyed the spines, looking for the same worn-brown leather he’d seen in the Pensieve. Although he was please to find he was managing worlds better than Potter. Brutish in his search, Potter grabbed book after book and tossed them aside. For his sake, he was lucky Granger wasn’t paying attention. She’d likely hex the scar from his face for mistreating old tomes.

“A little breathing room, if you’ll please.”

Draco looked down to find Hermione scowling up at him. He could smell the rich aroma of her honeysuckle perfume. It was rather pleasant when separated from Potter's cheap aftershave; not that he'd ever admit it to her.

“Just doing as I was told, Granger. You stick to your section and I’ll stick to mine.”

Her arms crossed. “This *is* my section. If you worried half as much about finding that book as you were with what Harry was doing, you wouldn’t be trampling over me right now.”

He ignored all of it, when out of his peripherals he noted the familiar russet coloring.

“If this is your section, Granger, then how’d your nosy arse miss this one?”

Draco pulled the book from the shelf above her head, flipping it over in his hands. He could feel Hermione’s stare moving between him and the text. Her mouth was parted. Her eyes held wide. She rose onto her toes and snatched it straight from his hands.

Draco followed close to her back as she paced, quickly scanning through the pages.

“This- this is it! Draco, you’ve...”

She came to a sudden halt. Hermione spun on him, thrusting the open page into his face.

“Look at the markings, Draco!” she exclaimed as she practically vibrated with excitement. “They’re just like yours!”

He motioned toward the book with his chin. “What’s it say then?”

She was silent, turning her attention back down to the book. Potter joined at her side. His eyes drifted over her shoulder, confusion wreaking havoc across his face.

“Not certain you’ll want to hear this,” she said, biting her cheek. “But I’m not familiar with the language.”

Draco frowned. “Give it here.”

With a slight shrug of her shoulders, Hermione obliged. She handed Draco the text and he wandered over to the foot bench between stacks. As he sat, he rotated between pages. His frustration grew with every incomprehensible line his eyes turned over.

“Half of this is written in whatever bloody runic language I have scarred into me,” he spat. “The rest might as well be made up.”

He shoved the book from his lap, letting it fall to the floor at his feet.

“Draco!” Hermione scolded.

She knelt down and picked up the book, glaring as she did. A soft gasp escaped her lips. Hermione quickly hauled herself onto the bench at his side.

“Merlin! Look here!”

She shoved the text back between his hands. He examined the cover page, but couldn't believe what he was seeing: his own handwriting staring back at him.

It was the library reference card; aged and discoloured, but unmistakably, *that was his name*.

“Checked out the second of February 1997...” Hermione said. “Madam Pince allowed *you* to take a book from the Restricted Second?”

Draco scoffed, rolling his eyes. “I think the more pressing matter here, Granger, is that I don't recall ever seeing this book before in my life.”

She turned to him, eyes narrowing and lips pursed. “What were you doing in February of ninety-seven?” she asked.

He chuckled darkly. “Bit of nonsense, really... Plotting the headmaster's demise, saving my mother from being cursed to death, planning my own escape... Only top notch memories from sixth year.”

Hermione ignored him, stealing the book from his hands. “Perhaps we could ask Katie if-”

“*No*. No sodding way I'm letting Bell back into my brain, thank you very much,” Draco quipped, effectively cutting her off.

“Well, do you have any other suggestions for how we can find out what you were up to?” she asked, arms hugging the book tight to her chest.

“You're the Unspeakable. I don't suppose you keep time turners in that Time Room of yours?” he deadpanned.

Hermione began, “Well, the Ministry bars the use of time magic on civilians, but actually-”

“Don't,” Potter stepped in.

She scowled. “Oh, don't *you* start with me, Harry Potter. It's fine when it's for your benefit, but when it's for someone else's...”

His hands raised. “I'm an Auror now, or have you forgotten that?”

Hermione's lips parted to respond when Draco cut her off. “If Granger's about to suggest something frowned upon by your department, Potter, perhaps it's best you cover those oversized ears of yours, hmm?”

Harry glared.

Hermione stepped between the two, turning her back on Harry and facing Draco completely. “I do know someone with a time turner, and he’d be more than willing to help.”

“I’m not hearing this...” Harry sang.

Hermione spun around. “Good, then you’ll have no issue staying silent while I suggest what I’m about to.”

With a slow shake of his head, Harry backed away. She waited until a few meters separated them before returning her sights on Draco.

“As I was saying, I know someone who’d love to donate their time turner to a good cause.”

Draco bristled. His shoulders pulled taut. “It’s not another Gryffindor, is it? No one I nearly killed when I was sixteen?”

She shook her head. A curious sort of smile tugged against Hermione’s lips.

“No, I’d say you’re quite familiar with this particular contact all on your own.”

“Don’t tell me,” he stated behind a vacant stare.

Theodore *Fucking* Nott and his experimental time turners.

Well, if the mind probing hadn’t killed him, perhaps a quick journey to the past would do the trick.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Oh no, she's done it. She skipped a week. Apologies to everyone invested! As I anticipated, I was set back by event deadlines, but I'm here to make good on my promise. This week there will be two updates! I'll be continuing that trend into next week as well. Unfortunately, I'll be taking a brief sabbatical during the first week of October for a family vacation. Enjoy the bi-weekly updates in the meantime and the second week of October will carry out as expected with singular updates. :)

As always, big huge thanks to forgive_me_severus for your dual task of both keeping me motivated and spelling pensieve correctly. Will she ever get it right? Probably not. (But it ain't for a lack of trying) Anyway, I also want to take a moment to let you know that this wonderful person is wrapping up her story, Never Let Go, this month. I know

how much work she's been putting into this ending, so Harmony fans, please consider showing FMS and her story some love.

Thanks to all for the comments, kudos, and Facebook recs. They're keeping me fueled during this chaotic month of events.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

-Chapter Seven-

Theodore Nott stared at her and she stared right back. She could feel Draco's eyes moving slowly between the two of them. His hands held in his pockets. Shoulders arched and back straight.

Hermione had arrived at the manor minutes prior. Both Draco and Theo greeted her in the parlour, but neither had spoken since. Their expressions had her feeling skeptical. Their silence, even more so.

She frowned. Her head tilted. "Is there something either of you would like to say to me?"

Theo blinked and turned toward Draco. "You tell her, mate. She already despises you."

Draco sent him a glare, eyes held dangerously low. Instead of responding, however, his attention filtered back to Hermione.

"We're waiting on a friend," he said with a slight shrug.

Crossing her arms, her hip jutted out. "Which friend?"

The men shared another look. Theo shook his head and waved Draco forward.

"Pansy-" he'd began.

"Parkinson?" Hermione cut in. "And why, pray tell, is *Pansy Parkinson* joining us this evening? This is business, not a social visit, is it not?"

This time when Draco turned to Theo, he gritted his teeth. His brows raised and he crossed his own arms.

"She has the Time Turner," Theo explained on a sigh.

“You gave Parkinson a Time Turner? For Merlin’s sake, what is wrong with you?” Hermione scolded.

“I’ll have you know, I’m extremely trustworthy. Loyal to a fault.”

“I must be in the right place. I could smell Nott’s conceited ranting a kilometer away,” a new voice greeted

Behind her, Pansy Parkinson stepped through the flames. Hermione turned in time to watch her cross the hearth and enter the parlour.

She was anything but the puggish teenager Hermione remembered. She was elegant with rich tanned skin neatly tucked behind designer clothes. Her hair was longer, falling in styled ringlets onto her shoulders. But it was those dark brown eyes that made Pansy unmistakably *her*.

“I wasn’t assuming you weren’t trustworthy,” Hermione defended when Pansy raised an elegant brow. “I was simply stating my frustration with giving away something we were clearly meeting here tonight to discuss.”

“Don’t get your knickers twisted, Granger. Here I am, and here it is.”

Pansy dangled the Time Turner by its chain. She smirked, holding Hermione’s gaze.

She stepped forward and made a grab for the chain. Pansy pulled it back, lifting it out of reach.

Hermione glared. “And why exactly are you needing the illegal use of time magic?”

She shrugged. “Research purposes.”

Pansy smirked. Her dark eyes fell away. She turned to Theo with a thumb directed at Hermione.

“You’re certain this is the same Granger from Hogwarts, yes? The one with the teeth and ghastly hair?”

Hermione grumbled, but Pansy kept at it.

“She’s fit now... If you sense she leans my way, you know where to find me.”

Turning back to her, Pansy tossed Hermione the Time Turner. She fumbled but caught it before stashing it in her outer robes.

“Change nothing, Granger. Your looks are finally working for you,” Pansy called.

She winked as she backed into the hearth. There was a bright flash of green and Pansy was gone from sight.

Hermione merely stared, blinking as her head tilted. “Is she always like that?”

“Annoying?”

“Blunt?”

Both Draco and Theo answered in unison.

Hermione ignored their responses. She headed across the parlour toward the archway. When she turned back, both remained where they’d been, watching her with evident curiosity.

“Well, are you coming?” she demanded.

Draco took a single step toward her. “You are aware this is my home, are you not?”

“I can find my way to the library with or without you. I’d prefer with you so we might establish some ground rules before we travel.”

“Not the library,” he said with a stern shake of his head. “We’ll visit my study.”

Draco stopped beside her. His eyes narrowed briefly and then relaxed. He appeared to give Hermione a once over, slowly examining her face, before taking the lead down the hall.

Frowning herself, she waited, watching his steps take him further away.

“He told me about it,” a low whisper.

Theo appeared at her hip. His head tilted and his lips edged sheepishly toward one cheek.

“About what happened to you here... He told me, but I wish you would have said something sooner. I never would have suggested we come.”

Her smile came easy. She leaned into his arm before nudging him forward. “It’s all in the past.”

“Is it?”

Theo stopped Hermione with a hand to her shoulder.

“I came back again tonight, didn’t I?”

He sat with her statement, face scrunching in thought. Theo took her arm in his and started down the hall.

“He’s worried about you, you know,” Theo said, directing his words over their shoulders.

“Who? Malfoy? Doubtful. Very doubtful,” she laughed.

“I don’t think he’s entirely comfortable with you having to come back here either; running into his old friends, his parents.”

“He tried to apologize, if you could call it that,” she told him.

Theo snorted. “Draco Malfoy? Apologize? Now *that’s* doubtful.”

His hand lowered to her back as they ascended the staircase off the lounge.

“He pulled from his trust to have the drawing room removed and replaced by a courtyard,” he continued.

Lines creased her forehead. Her brow lifted and tensed as they reached the landing. Hermione wasn’t certain what to make of it. Draco wasn’t the boy he’d been at Hogwarts, but he surely wasn’t proving himself to be any more amenable than he’d been at school.

These were unusual circumstances. Hermione cared for him on principle. Draco’s situation was unique, delicate. He’d entrusted her with his life, and yet they weren’t friends. They had an arrangement— a fact agreed upon many times over. He still believed she was a terrible swot and Hermione still saw the same pretentious pureblood she met at age eleven.

Theo pulled Hermione from her thoughts, stopping before a set of mahogany doors in the obsidian hallway. He allowed her to enter first. He motioned toward the room with his head and offered her a small smile as she passed through. Together they found Draco by the bar cart.

“I really don’t recommend mixing time travel and alcohol,” Hermione chided.

“When we revisit your childhood memories, you’re free to make judgments on my behavior. In the meantime...”

He sipped the whisky, eyeing Hermione over the rim.

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” Theo patted her head with an open hand. “I’m well versed in sloshed time travel.”

She glared, moving out of reach. “That’s not something you should commend yourself on.”

Draco crossed the room. He sat on the arm of the loveseat facing Hermione and Theo.

“You said you had ground rules?” he asked.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, but first I think it’s important for Theo to review the particulars of his Time Turner. You said it was modified?”

He shrugged, smiling to himself. “She’s an impressive feat of magic, if I do say so myself.”

Draco snorted and turned to Hermione. “I’m surprised you’re not more concerned about the experimental aspect of all this.”

“I’ve seen Theo’s research, and if you recall, experiments currently afford me my life,” she sassed. “I’ll agree I’m apprehensive, but we are at an impasse. The only logical option we have now is to visit your sixth year.”

His eyes lowered. Draco watched her again behind that same unwavering stare. After a long moment, he turned away.

He nodded to Theo. "Go on then."

Theo wandered the room, eyeing the wood paneling and few decorative paintings. "Well, I'll start by saying, she's not your typical Time Turner. I've dabbled with a bit of blood magic making it easier to trace people. With the older models, wearers needed to be standing in the location they wanted to travel to. That was a long and lengthy process for Aurors who wanted information quickly.

She's also retrofitted with a *Notice-Me-Not*, removing the risk of being seen by people in the past. There are limitations, of course. While we can't be seen, we can still influence past decision making by leaving traces of ourselves: interacting through writing, speaking out loud, etcetera-

"Which brings me to my first rule," Hermione cut him off. "We're there to observe, not to influence the past."

She shot Draco a glare.

He raised his hands. "Why are you looking at me like that? I'm not planning to intervene."

Her arms crossed. Hermione leaned into her hip. "You're the only person here who is directly impacted by what we're about to see. If you don't like it, what's to stop you from changing it?"

"Self-preservation, Granger," he drawled, rolling his eyes. "I know you Gryfindors are unfamiliar with the concept, but I am aware that in this current timeline I'm alive and mostly well. I *do* intend to keep it that way."

She held the expression a blink longer before softening. "Fair enough. Theo, you're free to continue."

He softly hummed and leaned into the brick bordering the fireplace. "Erm, I suppose I should mention the possible side effects."

"Perhaps you should have started there," Draco said, voice dripping with irritation.

"It's unlikely," Theo went on. "But we have seen a few instances of rapid de-aging after travel."

"I'll take regaining a few years over losing them," said Draco.

"I suspect that stems from a place of vanity," Hermione stated with a smirk.

"Unapologetically," he replied.

She snorted, both trying and failing to hide her amusement. "Any other concerns?" she asked.

Theo shook his head. “Nothing that can’t be solved by a quick *Obliviate*.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that...” she said.

Standing, Draco set down his now empty glass. His arms crossed. “Any other rules, Granger, or can we get on with this?”

“We stick together. No unnecessary wandering,” Hermione urged.

Neither protested, eyeing her blankly. She reached into her pocket and withdrew the Time Turner.

“That’s that then. Theo...”

She held out the Time Turner to Theo who took the chain in his fist.

“A drop of blood, if you will, Granger,” he said.

Hermione held up her wand, approaching Draco slowly. “This is the unfortunate bit, I’m afraid.”

He extended his hand. “Do as you must.”

With one hand, she held his wrist. The other aimed her wand tip at his pointer finger.

“*Diffindo*,” she declared.

Nothing happened.

Hermione growled, tossing back her head. “Oh, for Merlin’s sake! *Diffindo*!”

Draco hissed as his finger split at the point. Hermione conjured a quick vial and stoppered a few droplets. She healed his wound before dropping his hand.

“Still having trouble with that wand?” he asked.

Hermione shrugged, sheathing the wand. She handed the vial to Theo. “I’ve been through about a dozen since the end of the war. Nothing quite responds to me like my dragon heartstring did.”

Draco looked away. Tension creased his brow but was swiftly banished. Passiveness replaced whatever incisive emotion she’d seen there. Instead of dwelling, she followed his stare. Both watched as Theo upturned Draco’s blood onto the Time Turner.

“*Coire et sanguine*, ” he stated clearly.

The gold varnish began to glow; light emanated throughout the study causing Hermione to shield her eyes. After a moment, it dimmed.

“She’s ready,” Theo said with a grin.

“You have your measurements set?” Hermione asked.

“Checked and double checked.”

She nodded once. “Very well.”

As Hermione stepped up to his side, Theo unfastened the chain. He brought it behind their necks before glancing up at Draco.

“You coming, mate?”

Uncharacteristically, Draco shuffled his feet forward. “Not left with much of a choice now, am I?”

Draco leaned down. Their heads huddled a hair's width apart. Hermione took the brief opportunity to examine his face up close. Draco, with his grit jaw and harsh pointed features. He appeared softer at this distance. His skin was almost ivory. She could see some unspoken emotion in his unusually dark eyes.

Theo cleared his throat and Hermione quickly looked away.

“If you’re done ogling my mate, I’m ready to go,” he teased.

“I was *not* ogling! I was-”

Hermione’s futile attempt to jerk back was stopped by the chain wrapped around their necks. Her forehead clanked into theirs, causing Theo and Draco to groan.

Theo chuckled. “Don’t mind me, darling. I’ll set the dial for an hour trip while you continue making doe eyes.”

Hermione growled, but any further protests halted on her tongue as the room around them began to fade.

A winter wedding...

A quaint apothecary...

A trial held before the Wizgamot...

A cell in Azkaban...

The Dark Lord in the manor...

The drawing room...

A dimly lit Hogwarts’ dormitory beneath the Black Lake...

Time swirled through dizzying images. Hermione was forced to close her eyes as the memories burned through her retinas at a rapid pace. A hand braced her left arm. Fingers

bruised into her sleeve. Still, they kept her grounded. She reeled in a deep breath waiting for time to settle.

“Merlin- *fuck* !” Draco moaned. “Next time warn a bloke.”

Squinting, Hermione slowly reopened her eyes. The first thing she noticed was Draco’s death grip on her arm. She met his stare and he quickly let go. The second change she noted was the looming darkness overhead. She turned her attention to the room beyond as Theo removed the chain from their necks.

Draco massaged his fingers into his temple. Hermione frowned.

“Are you alright?”

Draco scowled. “Fantastic, Granger. I thought that much was obvious.”

“I wouldn’t worry,” said Theo. “You haven’t been exposed to time magic before like we have, and this was a big jump. You’ll feel right as rain shortly.”

Hermione respectfully looked away as Draco gathered himself. “We’re back in the Restricted Section,” she noted. “How’d you get the timing right?”

Theo smirked. His shoulder lifted. “An *Intention Spell*. Genius, isn’t it?”

Hermione nodded, lips pursing. “I’d say.”

“You can stroke each other's egos later,” Draco deadpanned. “I’m headed out, if you intend to follow.”

She and Theo followed Draco’s pointed finger. Young Draco was exiting the Restricted Section down the main aisle. He had the worn-leather book held against his hip.

Hermione started after him with Draco at her back. They entered the main floor, light increasing with every step. At a series of tables, she stopped short. Her jaw dropped.

“Gods! That’s me, and Pavarti!”

Her younger self was tucked into a study station, a copy of Advanced Potions held between her hands.

“Were you not the one lecturing about wandering off?” Draco scolded and grabbed Hermione by the arm. “Let’s go.”

Once her feet were moving again, Draco released her. His eyes held low and lines traced through his forehead. He’d transcended pale and was now closer to virescent.

“I expect your professor to come down here on his own the next time he needs something from the Restricted Section.”

Madam Pince's sharp tone dragged Hermione's attention away from Draco. Before them stood Young Draco. The text was held on the desk between him and Madam Pince.

"I've made an exception this one time given the time restraints on your assignment, but any further visits to the Restricted Section will be made under your professor's guidance only."

"Understood," the younger Draco dryly stated.

"Merlin, you look like shite," Theo whispered. "I'd forgotten how much weight you lost during sixth year."

"Please keep any further commentary to yourself," Draco chastised.

From across the aisle, the three watched younger Draco scribble his name in the back of the book. He took it beneath his arm before taking a step back.

"You have twenty four hours," Madam Pince told him. "I will not grant any extensions."

Draco merely nodded. He turned on his foot and headed for the exit.

Hermione and Theo moved to follow. When Draco didn't, she turned over her shoulder and frowned.

"What's wrong?" she asked him.

Draco shook his head. "Migraine- I'll get over it."

"And your ribs?"

His teeth grit. "Bloody unbearable. I can't wait to be done here."

Theo linked his arm with Draco's and led him toward the doors. Hermione sighed, looking away. Younger Draco had been quick to flee.

"You go on," Theo said. "We're right behind you."

With a quick nod, she slipped into the hall. Young Draco was headed toward the Central Tower. Hermione hurried after him. She glanced over her shoulder, seeing Theo tug Draco along.

At the Transfiguration corridor, they turned for the Dark Tower. They didn't stop there. Young Draco continued on towards Defense Against the Dark Arts. Hermione waited at the foot of the steps for the others to come into view. Once they had, she ascended the stairs. She reached the landing as Young Draco drew back the door, managing to slip in behind him. A bit of quick thinking had her freezing the entryway ajar.

"You're cutting it close to curfew, Mr Malfoy..."

The familiar drawl. The icy tone. Hermione hadn't heard Professor Snape's voice in years, and it struck her with surprising sadness.

“Wasn’t an easy book to bloody locate,” Young Draco grumbled. “I don’t even know what language it’s in, and Madam Pince was *very* pleasant.”

“And yet here you stand...”

Snape stood above them in the doorway to his office. With a long sigh, he descended the stairs.

“You’ve made your decision then?” he asked.

Young Draco nodded. He watched Snape cross the classroom with his hand outstretched. Draco gave him the book, stepping back with his eyes drawn toward the floor.

“It’s not a language,” Snape continued. “It’s magic in runic form; created in the early eighteen hundreds by alchemists looking to create and control magic.”

“How d’you know what each rune’s for?” said Draco.

“You don’t. You pull them apart. You apply the theory to what you need them for, using magic in the blood and in the soul.”

Young Draco frowned. His head turned. “I don’t understand.”

Snape’s eyes narrowed. “You will, Mr Malfoy. If you’ve made your decision, unfortunately you will be all too familiar with this particular... *brand* of magic soon.”

His voice trailed off and Young Draco nodded again. “We’ve no other options. It’s the only way to keep her safe.”

Snape was silent. His chin lifted as his hands clasped at his waist. “Bring her in.”

Young Draco scrambled, reaching into his pockets. He revealed a small matchbook and flipped it open. He struck a match against the coarse outer edge. A flame emitted at the tip. Draco dragged it through the air, as if holding a pen. The matchbook in his hand transfigured into a single sheet of parchment.

Hermione stepped closer to get a better look. She’d managed less than a meter when someone grabbed her wrist.

Turning around, she found Theo. His brows knit. He shook his head, motioning toward the door.

Disgruntled, Hermione followed.

Once in the hall, Theo veiled them beneath a *Silencing Charm*. “Sorry to say, we’ve got to cut this visit short. Emergency evacuation.”

“But Snape was just-”

“It’s Draco,” Theo said, briefly biting his lip. “He’s in bad shape.”

Hermione's brown eyes widened. She dragged in a shaky breath. "Let's go."

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

I cheated - you got two chapters mashed into one instead of two very short chapters. Cutting you off before the time travel felt rude. 19 chapters still holds for the final count. I moved some plot things around.
Reminder, one more chapter before a brief hiatus. (Though my husband doesn't believe I can hold off from writing for a week even in 'the most magical place on earth'... hmm. Guess we will see...)

Seventh time thanking Forgive_Me_Severus for all her hard work on this piece. She's my ultimate cheerleader. My SPAG guru. She never laughs at me when I use the wrong variation of words (like weather vs whether or principal vs principle). She always has my back for proper capitalizations of magical artifacts. All around, she's a saint. AND she just wrapped up her story *Never Let Go*. I've got it queued up for my plane ride to FL. Please show her some love.

WRONG (or right) ANSWERS ONLY IN THE COMMENTS - What was Pansy using the Time Turner for?

Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Eight -

“You’re one hundred percent certain he’ll wake up soon?” she asked.

Theo was silent for a long moment; lips drawn to the side. “No...” he sang. “But he *should*.”

Hermione huffed. She dropped down onto the love seat near Draco’s feet. They’d run a diagnostic, checked his temperature. Short of taking him to St Mungos and landing them all before the Wizgamont, there was very little left that they could do.

“He’s fine, Hermione,” Theo assured her. “He fainted. Draco will be back to his normal brooding self soon.”

“He vomited all over the Transfiguration Courtyard.”

Theo snorted. “Wouldn’t be the first time.”

Scowling, Hermione crossed her arms, sitting up higher. “Do you think this has anything to do with his veiled memories? It seems strange Draco would have a similar experience visiting the past as he did with Katie here in the present.”

Theo shrugged. He perched himself on the edge of the coffee table, facing her. “We do seem to have a trend going... Anytime we prod too close to the bond, it all goes wonky.”

“Understatement,” Hermione hummed. “What if it’s getting worse?”

He frowned, lips protruding in thought. “What do you mean?”

“What if every time we pry into Draco’s past, his symptoms worsen? What if vomiting and loss of consciousness are only the pinnacle of consequences? Theo, what if we’re doing more damage than we can see?”

Theo’s expression deepened as he turned down to look at Draco. “I think we’ve run out of other options.”

Hermione followed his sullen gaze. Draco's head was tilted against the pillow she transfigured from her outer robes. Color returned to his cheeks. The once sunken and bruised skin beneath his eyes now revealed their usual pale pink hue. Draco's breathing had evened out and his pained expression softened.

All good signs, Hermione noted.

"So... What did you learn?" Theo asked.

Hermione shook her head. She placed her hand near Draco's knee. "He should be the first to know."

She turned back to Theo, biting on her lip. Her stress was palpable as it tugged on her brow.

Theo rolled his eyes. "Come on now, Granger. Don't tell me your loyalty has shifted in less than a month."

Hermione pushed back into the cushions, hands now finding her own lap. "It's his story, not ours."

Theo's arms raised in surrender. "Fine, fine. Keep your secrets. I see how it is."

"How *what* is?" The voice was strangled and groggy.

Both Theo and Hermione directed their attention down to Draco. He was shielding his eyes from the sconces, arching back into the pillow behind his head. With a wave of her wand, Hermione dimmed the lights. Draco's hand pulled away and he squinted, attention filtering between the two hovering beside him.

"I think Granger here is developing a bit of a crush on you, mate. She's been all out of sorts since you knocked your head into stone."

Hermione leaned forward and whacked Theo in the abdomen with the back of her hand. Theo winced, stepping further away from the couch.

Draco ignored them. "I did what?"

"You fainted," said Hermione as she slid closer to him.

"*And* you owe me a new pair of Oxfords. I don't care what Granger can manage with *Scourgify*."

Drawing his back higher onto the arm of the loveseat, Draco massaged his temple. "I feel like I've been hexed."

"Can you remember anything?" she asked.

"We were in the library. Everything hurt. *Still* hurts. I thought my head was going to explode..."

Hermione motioned towards his ribs. “And the brand?”

His hands barely lifted as he shrugged. “No more of a nuisance than usual.”

“Interesting,” she considered before turning to Theo. “Grab him a pain potion, would you?”

“Top drawer in my desk,” Draco added.

Hermione was silent as Theo retrieved the potion. She watched Draco empty the vial into his mouth and take it down in a single swallow. Slowly, his eyes appeared to brighten. His shoulders relaxed against the pillow.

“Did I bugger up the entire trip?” Draco finally asked.

Hermione shook her head. “Not exactly.”

Theo circled the coffee table and sat on the edge, facing them.

“You took the book to Professor Snape,” she continued, eyes briefly finding her lap before circling back to Draco’s. “He was expecting you.”

Draco frowned. “You think I asked Snape to do this to me?”

He fisted his shirt. His glare hardened.

“Every time the Dark Lord called, it was Snape who sat across from me at the table. You think I’d be so daft as to have *him* bind my soul?”

Jaw wavering, Hermione returned to her feet. “You did, and you were bringing someone else.”

“Who?” Draco snapped. “Who would be moronic enough to bind their soul to mine during sixth year?”

“I... don’t know. That’s as far as we got, but it sounds as if you were doing it to protect her.”

He laughed, turning away. “Protect her... I was having weekly round tables with Death Eaters and my deranged aunt. I was plotting the murder of the world’s most powerful wizard.”

Her arms folded over her chest. “Try me. You are a skilled *Legilimens*, are you not?”

“Draco’s only bitter because he’s embarrassed he fainted in front of a pretty witch for a second time.” Theo chided. “Get on with it. What else did you learn?”

Draco was openly glaring. Hermione turned away.

“Snape said that the runes aren’t specific to a geographical location. They’re not a language. It’s magic in written form.”

“I understand none of that,” said Theo.

Hermione continued, "I'm not certain I understand it myself. Snape said the runes needed to be pulled apart. They're a type of blood magic."

"Sounds dark."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I didn't exactly have a great track record going. *Dark* was my *modus operandi* back then."

"I think you might've been a bit desperate," she said, biting her lip.

He turned his feet onto the floor before he huffed and stood. "Wonderful assessment, Granger. D'you know what else has me '*a bit desperate*'? This sodding soulbond. So do us both a favor and get rid of it. Then we can both move on with our sorry lives."

"There's no need to be rude. I could have left you to bleed and vomit all over the school," she argued back.

"You should have. Because now we're left with more questions than answers."

"Ah, yes... '*Britain's Golden Girl Maims Malfoy Heir in an Unsanctioned Trip to the Past*'. I'm certain that would've gone over well with my department head."

Draco scoffed, turning his back on her. He strode over to the bar cart and fisted the whisky by the bottle neck. She watched him take a generous swig straight from the decanter.

"It wasn't a *complete* waste. We know that the symbols are rooted in magic. I can start by pulling apart the ones in the text to gain a better understanding. I'd also like to speak to your father."

The decanter fell to the bar cart with a loud *clang*. "I'm sorry, what?" Draco said, spinning back to her.

She crossed her arms, lifting her chin. "I'd like to speak to your father."

"Absolutely not," Draco said with a swift shake of his head.

"And why not?"

"Why do you want to speak with him?"

"I'd like him to arrange for us to travel to Hogwarts, without the know abouts of Wizarding Law Enforcement."

Draco snorted. "Keeping secrets from Potter, are we?"

Gritting her teeth, Hermione fisted her hips. "Will you permit me to speak to your father or not?"

His expression matched hers. Teeth bared. "Fine," he managed. "But I'm not happy about it."

She smiled plainly. "I don't expect you to be."

"No one did tell me what you both spoke about last time," he said.

Hermione turned away, ignoring him. She faced Theo head-on. "Show me out?" she requested.

A slow smirk creased his cheek. "Finally remembered I was here, did you?"

She lowered her eyes.

"Fine, fine," Theo relented. "What are you up to for the rest of the evening?"

"I have dinner plans."

He whistled, shaking his head. "Hot date?"

She returned his coy grin and shrugged. "Perhaps."

Draco cleared his throat, hands stuffed in his pockets. "I'll owl you later."

Theo placed his hands on Hermione's shoulders and began steering her toward the door. "What if she's busy, mate? Best wait to send it until tomorrow morning."

As they slipped through the doorway, Hermione glanced back at Draco. His color had returned but he still appeared weary. He looked lost and perhaps a bit scared.

"Take it easy tonight, yeah?"

He said nothing and placed his back on her, facing the bar cart.

Entering the hall, Theo's head lowered down to hers. "Don't you worry that bleeding heart of yours, Granger. I'll keep an eye on him."

"I feel entirely relieved," she deadpanned.

She *Apparated* to the Burrow. It wasn't the hot date she'd alluded to. Truthfully, Hermione wasn't sure why she'd continued the ruse. It would've been just as easy to tell Theo he was wrong and end the charade there. Neither cared what she did with her free time but there was something thrilling about pretending she filled her post-time travel evening with a new conquest. And she'd be lying if she said she wasn't a little curious what Draco's reaction would be.

She imagined he still perceived her as the same frigid know-it-all he claimed her to be whilst at school together. And while she didn't have the copious amounts of free time other witches

and wizards her age appeared to have, she did have dates. Hermione had the occasional shag. She rotated between regulars when needs arose. No, she didn't need to prove this to Draco, and Theo heard enough about her dates during their working hours. Still, she felt compelled to prove she was as desirable as she was smart. Perhaps it was a lingering insecurity placed there by the wizard in consequence.

Upon entering the family home, however, dates were far from mind. She'd arrived for their monthly get together. While she and Ron were no longer seeing each other, the Weasley's made certain Hermione was still included in their gatherings and holiday affairs.

With how things ended with her own parents, it was comforting to know there was somewhere she could go to fill the family void created by their loss.

Dinners with the Weasley's were chaotic, to say the least. Bill and Fleur had their two children now. Andromeda often stopped by with Teddy. Then there was Ronald and his new girlfriend Josephine, a friend of Fleur's from Beauxbaton. Ginny and Harry, of course, as well. George usually came by for sweets with Lee Jordan after closing up the shop. And it wasn't unusual for Percy and Charlie to make the occasional appearance.

Needless to say, the visits left Hermione's social meter boiled over, but she enjoyed them nonetheless.

On this particular evening, she was first greeted by Ginny. She slid a glass of wine into Hermione's hand as she kicked off her shoes.

"Harry told me you've been spending a lot of time with the ferret lately. Figured you could use that," she said with a wink.

Hermione took a sip. "He's actually been rather pleasant."

Ginny smirked, arching a single brow. "*Pleasant*, you say?"

Shrugging, Hermione stepped further into the room. Ginny followed close to her shoulder. "He's not all that bad. I actually think he regrets how he treated us at school."

"And you're saying this because it's true, and not because Malfoy's fit as fuck?"

"Ginevra!" scolded Molly Weasley from the kitchen.

Her head rounded the archway. She sent her daughter a wicked glare.

"Merlin, I swear she's got ears everywhere. A room filled with people and she's got the know-abouts for when *I* curse," Ginny murmured, crossing her arms.

"And eyes in the back of my head, so you put that cheek away, young lady!"

Molly wiped her hands over her apron. She entered the room, arms outstretched and pulled Hermione into a tight hug.

"Hermione, dear. How are you?" she greeted.

“Fine, Molly. The usual, work and lots of it.”

Molly released her. “Taking time to relax every now and then, I hope?”

Hermione’s lips drew to the side. “When I can, yes.”

“That’s good to hear,” she said before giving Hermione’s cheek a quick pat. “I’m afraid Ron won’t be joining us this evening, and Charlie’s been called away to China for a relocation effort.”

“Mum,” Ginny sang, eyes glowing with mirth. “Wouldn’t you like to share *why* Ronald won’t be coming?”

Molly’s cheeks burned. Her lips pursed. Her hands balled into her fists at her side as her shoulders drew upward.

“I’m sure you and Harry will do a fine job of filling her in yourselves,” she said.

She drew in a short breath, chest puffed. It was a rare sight to see Molly Weasley so flustered. It had Hermione turning toward Ginny and tilting her head.

“We’ll catch up more at dinner,” said Molly before retreating to the kitchen.

Hermione sipped her wine. “That was... odd...”

“You haven’t heard the half of it,” Ginny said with a laugh. “Come on.”

Hand slipping into the crook of Hermione’s arm, Ginny tugged her toward the stairs. Hermione kept a tight grip on her wine, doing well to keep it inside the glass.

Ginny shoved her into the second bedroom, now an informal sitting area for the younger adults. There, they found Harry. His feet kicked up on the coffee table as he nursed a glass of ale.

Ginny leaned back against the door. “Do you want to tell her or should I?”

Harry waved an idle hand for her to continue.

“Alright, sit,” she instructed, guiding Hermione down into the wingback chair.

Across from her, Ginny sat at Harry’s side. She leaned forward over her knees, eyes fixed on Hermione.

“Well, I’m just going to have to come right out and say it,” she said. “Ronald eloped.”

“What?” Hermione yelped, sitting up straight.

“Mum’s furious. She’s sent dad down to France to talk to him.”

“But they’ve only been dating for what, a month- six weeks at most?” Hermione pointed.

“Ginny suspects Josephine is pregnant,” said Harry.

“And do you?”

Harry shrugged. “You know how Ron is. Turning down his proposal really did a number on his self confidence.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped. “*Please*, we were eighteen! Neither of us were prepared for marriage.”

Harry’s hands raised in surrender. “I know, but he’s the type to jump all in. Josephine might be the same.”

Ginny snorted with a slight roll of her eyes. Her arms crossed, but she said nothing.

“Then there was one,” Hermione considered passively.

Truthfully, she felt victorious in that sense. She was unattached, racing through promotions at work. There were still so many possibilities, so many discoveries to be made. Her life was rich with research. She had love in her found family. She was young and living in a world with wide open doors.

She’d always known Ron was determined to be married early, to start a family. If anything, she was happy he’d found someone who could give him everything he desired.

“There’s more,” sang Ginny. “The real reason mum’s beside herself is because Ronald and Josephine bound their souls.”

Her brown eyes widened. “Merlin,” Hermione groaned. “I’ve had about enough soul-bond drama to last me a lifetime.”

“Speaking of,” Harry cut in. “Any progress on the Malfoy front? Did you get what you needed from that text?”

Hermione shrugged. “You mean *this* convoluted journal of sorts?”

She slipped the book from her expandable bag and set it on her lap. She traced the pages with her finger.

“We’re, unfortunately, still left with more questions than answers. I have a few good leads, but none I can explore without assistance. In fact, I’m considering speaking to Lord Malfoy. His connections are a valuable resource. It’s no wonder the Dark Lord kept him close.”

As she set the book on the coffee table, Hermione watched both Ginny and Harry share a glance.

“Your bravery knows no limits,” said Ginny. “How can you stand to go back to that manor and deal with those people? They deserve nothing, and most specifically, from you.”

Hermione waved her off. “The Malfoys are harmless. Besides, I’m doing them a favor. They’ve come close enough to imprisonment once already. I doubt they’d try anything dubious.”

Smirking, Harry crossed his legs. “You’re enjoying this,” he said.

She balked. “I’m..., well it’s my job-”

“You are,” he cut her off. “You’re enjoying this. I’ve known you long enough to tell. I know how you are when you’re pursuing something.”

Her arms folded over her chest. “And how am I, exactly?”

“Hyperfixated,” said Ginny.

“I was going to say, *impassioned*,” Harry corrected his wife.

“I can’t help what excites me,” Hermione defended. “Malfoy’s situation is interesting and deeply layered. I’m curious, is all.”

Ginny snorted, “Well that answers my question from earlier. You fancy the ferret!”

“I most certainly do not-”

A knock at the door had Hermione’s words stolen once again. They turned to watch Andromeda step into the room.

“Apologies for the interruption,” she greeted. “I have Teddy downstairs looking for his godfather.”

Harry passed off his drink to Ginny. “I’m on my way.”

He grinned as his arms wrapped around Andromeda. He kissed her cheek before pulling away.

Harry slipped through the door while she stepped further into the room.

“I’ll hang our robes here and be out of your hair in a jiff, leave you two to your gossip.”

“To be fair, I think this gossip might be of interest to you,” Ginny coyly stated. “Our Hermione fancies your nephew.”

“Godric, give me strength. Would you please stop it with that!”

Andromeda turned to them. Her head tilted. “You couldn’t possibly be talking about Draco.”

“She is,” said Hermione, glaring openly at Ginny. “And she’s wrong. We’re working together, and in her mind that means I fancy him.”

“I’m surprised to hear my sister’s son would be open to such an arrangement,” Andromeda said, frowning slightly.

Hermione shook her head. “He wasn’t at first, but I think that had more to do with him and his own regrets.”

Andromeda’s expression hardened further. “You think he’s changing.”

She nodded. “I suppose I do— though not enough to amend all of my feelings about him overnight,” she ended with a sharp glance sent to Ginny.

Andromeda said nothing for a long moment. Thoughts lost behind her muted eyes. “It would be a great comfort to know there was hope for my remaining blood family. Spending more time with you could only help; there were many times I wanted to drag that boy out of the box he was raised in...” she trailed off before her voice returned, “Anyway...”

Andromeda sighed. She slipped hers and Teddy’s robes onto the clothing rack. She turned to Ginny and Hermione, smiling softly. As her eyes flickered downward, her frown returned.

“What’s this?” she asked, pointing and coming closer to the book at the center of the coffee table.

“Research for our project,” Hermione explained.

Andromeda hummed, squinting deeply. “Interesting... May I?”

Hermione nodded.

Pulling the book into her arms, Andromeda slowly turned through the pages.

“The *ligare* hook on the cover caught my attention,” she said.

Hermione’s feet planted firmly against the floor. “I’m sorry, what?”

She stood and circled the table, coming to stand at Andromeda’s side. Andromeda flipped the book back to its cover. Her finger traced the hook-shaped symbol etched into the brown leather.

“*Liagare* , the Latin word for, ‘to bind’. These are sigils, are they not?”

Hermione’s brow lifted. “Sigils- but I thought they were a type of rune? They're not like any sigil I've studied before.”

Andromeda’s lips pursed and she shrugged. “I suppose they could be runes. I recognize this part here because of my Nymphadora’s part in preparing for the war.”

“I don’t understand,” said Hermione. “Tonks used something like this before the war?”

Andromeda nodded. “The Order tasked her with the safe harboring of Muggleborn children. She used sigils, runes like these, to bind their powers; to break them from the trace.”

“I-” Hermione stammered. “I had no idea...”

“Neither did I,” Ginny joined at her side.

Andromeda smiled to herself, shoulders lifting. “It was a clever bit of magic, if I do say so myself.”

Hermione sighed, retaking the book as Andromeda passed it to her. “I wish I understood how that information applied to what I’m working through with Draco.”

Ginny placed a hand on Hermione’s shoulder. “If anyone can figure it out, it’s Britain’s Brightest Witch.”

Ginny smiled reassuringly at her. Hermione tried to return the expression but confusion had trickled in. Her intellect bowed beneath the weight of yet another unknown variable.

Why was Tonks carrying around the same classified information as Professor Snape?

The question continued to plague her throughout dinner and as she *Apparated* home.

It had vanished entirely, however, when she found a letter from Draco waiting at her doorstep.

He hadn't waited until morning to write her. *Another unknown variable, indeed.*

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Note to self, make no commitments during holiday. Anyway, back to your regularly scheduled chaos.

As always, much love to Forgive_Me_Severus, whose friendship and support is the lifeblood of this fic. I'm not worthy.

Answer to 'What was Pansy doing with the Time-Turner?' - rating her past sexual escapades and using them for research purposes, of course.

Chapter Nine

Chapter Notes

Happy Two Months to my sweet little, all-trope (kinda) fic!
That's means I'm doing better than projected, y'all. It's been a rollercoaster.

-

Thanks to all who have joined us on the ride. Your comments, kudos, and continued support are what keeps me moving. Every time I'm running out of steam I'm thinking about the people who are excited to see what else is in store.

-

And as always, much love to Forgive_Me_Severus. For your edits, friendship, and for loving my wee fic as much as I do.

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Nine -

Draco was growing tired of trains. Somehow—even sans Potter and with increased leg room—their current trip was more unpleasant than their last.

Though he and Hermione shared their own cabin, there was continuous chatter and sporadic interruptions. Unfortunate timing had their next trip to Hogwarts syncing up with the students' return from winter holiday.

Hermione appeared to be less perturbed, however. She'd had her head hidden in the same leather-bound book since their departure from Kings Cross. She never once looked up when their door was thrown open; not for the snack trolley—which was when Draco had purchased sugar quills and an assortment of other sweets *obviously*—nor during any of the numerous times students came by scouting out their friends.

Salazar, to have that sort of attention span. Hermione Granger would rule the world someday, Draco hypothesised.

As time dragged on, he grew bored. Draco had counted exactly thirty-six Bertie Bott's Beans he could flick at Hermione's head before she grew irritated. He could rib her leg with his shoe exactly twelve times.

And he could audibly sigh indefinitely.

He lost count around one hundred.

Boredom had him at wits end. He fidgeted in his seat. He fixed his hair a half-dozen times. Draco was close to risking it all and asking her what her favourite books were when she suddenly looked up.

She had a studious glint in her eyes. Impassioned. Determined.

“Would you remove your shirt for me please?” she asked.

Draco frowned. *He’d lied*. He’d rather she stick her head back in that book and leave him to suffer in his boredom alone, than follow through with that request.

“I will not,” he stated defiantly.

Hermione smirked. She turned the book facedown on the bench seat beside her. “If you recall, this isn’t anything I haven’t seen from you before.”

“Granger, this train is swimming with adolescents. I will not be removing my shirt.”

“I want to compare your scar with the sigils I found in the book,” she said.

Draco snorted. “Is that what we’re calling them these days?”

She leaned forward over her knees. “Take off your shirt, *please*, and then I’ll explain to you what it is I’m thinking.”

Smirking, Draco came in closer. His face suspended a mere few centimetres away from hers. “I typically only undress for witches when they’re willing to pay me the same courtesy...”

She rolled her eyes as she turned away. Her hands reached for the book.

“Fine,” Draco relented, arms raised in surrender.

He first slipped off his outer robes, leaving them bunched around his waist. He then pulled his shirt overhead and cast it aside.

Hermione quickly dropped down onto her knees. Her cold fingers prodded his ribs. Draco wouldn’t lie and say he hadn’t considered having Hermione on her knees for him before. Unfortunately, those thoughts were quickly removed by the all consuming regret that typically followed.

She roughly pushed his arm aside. Draco awkwardly held it up and out of the way.

“I remember thinking this looked sort of like a wishbone when I first saw it,” Hermione casually explained. “But when Andromeda alluded to Tonks imparting Latin on her markings to bind the Muggleborn children’s magic, I wondered if I could find other evidence in the journals to support that.”

His brow arched. “And did you?”

He watched Hermione’s head tilt as she bit her lip.

“No,” she said with a long sigh.

“Then what exactly are we doing here? Trying to dislocate my shoulder to pass the time?”

A delicate fingertip traced the brand. The brand itself burned but the witch’s touch was soothing. Draco couldn’t help the shiver that coursed down his spine. Gooseflesh drove across his skin, and he felt Hermione laugh; her warm breath travelling over his ribs.

“Sigils are unique to their creator,” Hermione explained. “Each one is different. It would be impossible to tell what its intention once was.”

His lips curled downward. Draco arched his arm higher overhead to keep his sights on her as Hermione leaned in to closer examine his side. “If it’s all irrelevant, Granger, why are you still trying to rearrange my ribs?”

She looked up at him. Her brown eyes found and held his stormy grey. “Because it’s only a theory. I thought if yours looked similar to one I’d seen in the journals, I might be able to theorise the intention somehow.”

He didn’t look away. “And does it?”

She smiled and shook her head. “*No*. Yours is probably unique as well.”

Hermione was close enough to count the many freckles lining her cheeks. He could see the swash of amber in her dark eyes. There was the faint pink hue, the curious curl of her lips.

“Where’d you get these?” she asked.

Draco rested his arm along the seat-back and followed her gaze. Her fingers now hovered over the faint scars littered across his chest.

“You should know *exactly* where those came from,” he said.

Her jaw dropped, hand flattening against his chest. His own hand wanted to grab hers and hold it there. Draco didn’t know why. Call it instinct—He didn’t, *of course*— He remained perfectly still, though his heart rate kicked up a notch and his breathing visibly heightened.

“Don’t tell me these are from Harry!”

Draco chuckled. “All forty-three of them. It’s as if the Chosen One wanted me dead or something.”

She gasped. Her fingers curled into his skin and she raised higher onto her knees. “I saw- I knew it was bad... awful really, but I never pictured this...”

“Spare your conscience, Granger. We all have our scars. I lived to go on and serve the Dark Lord another day.”

To her credit, Hermione didn't flinch. She didn't move. Only her eyes widened briefly before her hand drifted lower on his ribs. She covered his mark with her hand.

“Regardless of what transpired, you didn't deserve this,” she whispered. “I know Harry feels badly about it.”

Someone cleared their throat. Both Hermione and Draco's heads turned in unison toward the door. There, they found Neville Longbottom. His mouth was agape as he remained frozen in the narrow hall.

“Hiya, Hermione...” Neville greeted, his hand sheepishly running over the back of his neck as he did. “Heard you'd be joining us today- both of you, of course,” he amended.

“Neville,” she sang with a grin. “Congratulations on the Assistant Herbology position! I'm happy for you.”

When she moved to stand, Draco grabbed her hand. He couldn't explain why he'd done it. Another instinctual act, perhaps. He'd covered her fingers with his own, hiding his brand and effectively trapping her there.

“If a man's bare chest offends you, Longbottom, perhaps that's something to delve into on your own time and in your own passenger car.”

Blushing, Neville turned away. “Apologies, Malfoy.”

Hermione yanked her hand from his. Draco growled on instinct, wondering why he mourned the loss of her hold, her warm hand, her soothing touch. Wondering why his scar began to burn before tapering off.

Sod it all, he thought. *Distracting witch, and all her moronic friends...*

“He's only messing with you, Neville. We're here on business,” Hermione explained.

“So I was told. I thought I might see how you were getting on in here on your own...”

Draco glared as he tugged his shirt back over his head. “Things were positively delightful until you traipsed in.”

Neville took a step back. His grip tightened around the partition. “I can see you were in the middle of something... We'll have to catch up later, Hermione.”

Her brows touched, eyes somehow simultaneously lowering to Draco and lifting toward Neville at the same time.

She grinned. “I'd like that.”

Nodding, Neville closed the door behind him. His weary stare lingered on Hermione until the slider fully latched.

“Paranoid git,” Draco remarked.

Hermione sat at his side. “I’m sorry, is that jealousy I detect?”

“You’re barking, Granger. I’ll have you know, I’m a man of superior intellect. I don’t get jealous.”

She snorted. “You could have stopped at ‘*a man*’ and that would have summed up all of my assumptions about you.”

Draco glared and crossed his arms in show.

“If we’re not addressing your sudden display of fragile masculinity,” she continued, “-then it’s back to the matter at hand... My theory about your mark.”

He rotated on the seat to face her. “I’ve a better idea. Why don’t you answer something for me first?”

She grew visibly cross and her mouth tipped to stampede into one of her sodding rants.

Draco continued, halting the words before they could leave her lips. “It isn’t as if we don’t have plenty of time. So tell me, Granger, what’s transpired between you and my father?”

“I’ve said it once already.” The edge in her tone was enough to level any fully grown man. “I asked for his assistance getting us into Hogwarts without having to go through Ministry hoops.”

He shook his head. “No, not last week. The first time. Did he threaten you?”

Hermione’s anger shifted into a state of perplexion. Her brow flickered and head rotated from side to side. “You think your father threatened me?”

“That would explain why you’ve been so noticeably dedicated to my cause.”

Her eyes widened as a small laugh escaped her throat. “Answer me this... If you believed your father had threatened me, why did you agree to let me speak to him again?”

Draco shrugged. He felt heat rise to his cheeks. He couldn’t tell her the truth - that he was unlikely to deny her anything she asked. Be it guilt or an unfortunate and most recently discovered sort of attraction to her. Whichever the reason, he’d never admit it aloud.

“I’ll have none of that,” he said instead. “You can’t answer a question with a question.”

She snorted, eyes briefly closing. “He didn’t threaten me. He asked that I make your situation a priority. He promised to fund my research if I did.”

Relief spread in knowing his father might be amidst some sort of curious character growth. Disappointment followed upon learning Granger's motivation to help was born from a bribe.

Said disappointment must've been clear as day across his face because she touched a finger to his chin and smirked.

"I didn't agree to anything, by the way. I said I would help because I wanted to. Because it was the right thing to do."

As her hand was replaced in her lap, Draco scoffed. "Do-good Gryffindors..."

"Yes, my affinity for helping others is certainly my worst character flaw by a kilometre."

Draco openly laughed, shaking his head. "Fine. So he didn't threaten you. Did he say anything else?"

"Only what I've told you before," she said. "That he believes you know who you're bonded to."

He released a breath. His shoulders strained. "I suppose perhaps at some point I did, but right now *you* appear to know more about my past than I do. It is strange, though. I don't feel that there are any gaps in time."

"Which brings us right back to my theory," Hermione sang.

Draco supplied a short nod for her to continue.

"Typical soulbonding ceremonies don't involve markings of any sort. Most practices utilise handfasting; others lend themselves to Muggle traditions with a vow exchange."

"The point, Granger. Get on with it."

She sighed, glaring at him. "What I'm saying is this marking wouldn't have been necessary, which has me believing that its true function was to bind your memories. It might not be directly related to the soulbond at all. Perhaps the marking was bound to something else instead?"

His eyes lowered and lips pursed in confusion. "Katie's examination proved—"

"—that the mark had interlaced with your mind, yes," she finished for him. "And while I thought I was proving that your soul bond linked directly to your brand, maybe I was preemptive in my assumptions. Perhaps your brand is only the halfway point, like a transfer station or a filter."

"A filter?" he asked, brow arching.

"Muggle's use them to clear bad bacteria out of their water sources."

"And you think this mark might be... what, filtering the bond?"

Hermione shrugged. “Perhaps. It might take any stimuli related to your bond and alter it. That’s why you don’t feel you have any lapses in your memory. This is only a theory, of course.”

Draco smirked. “Of course.”

Her eyes assessed him slowly. He turned his toward the ceiling, evading her stare. Hermione said nothing as she squinted through her scrutiny.

“Is that everything?” Draco pulled her back from her wandering thoughts.

He watched her cheeks darken. “Can I ask you something else? Something unrelated to the bond and all of... *this*... ?”

Draco slid away from her, tucking into the corner of the bench seat. “I wouldn’t dare squander your childlike curiosity, Granger.”

A small smile drew to her lips. “Before we time travelled,” she spoke in a whisper, though their quarters had been charmed silent. “The apothecary in your memories... was that yours- the one Theo mentioned?”

Feeling smug, his shoulders lifted. “That’d be it. *Draconis Sanguis* .”

Hermione’s grin widened. “Dragon’s Blood Apothecary. Clever,” she remarked.

“At the time, it seemed like a subtle way to renounce my previous opinions surrounding blood superiority matters.”

“From what I saw, your shop looks lovely. Where are you located?” she asked.

He looked away. “Knockturn Alley. They were the only vacant storefront I could convince to allow me to operate there.”

She didn’t react, still appearing impressed. “I’ll have to stop by and see it in person sometime.”

“I’ll plan to give you the grand tour when you do.”

Hermione’s attention had also drifted. She stared down at her hands.

“Was there anything else?” Draco inquired. “Any further curiosities needing to be abated?”

Laughing beneath her breath, her eyes returned. “Theo told me something else. I’ll admit I’m curious but I’m a little worried how you’ll react if I bring it up...”

Draco frowned. His mouth drew into a tight line across his cheeks. “Go on and ask, Granger. I promise to keep any negative reactions to ‘*merely disgruntled*.’”

Hermione bit her lip. He was really beginning to hate when she did that. Clever little teeth sinking into soft pink flesh...

When his eyes returned to hers, Draco knew he'd been caught. Her brows raised and those soft pink lips drew to one side.

"Theo told me you were replacing the drawing room with a courtyard. He alluded that you... might've done that for me."

Draco grit his teeth. "What's your question?"

She cleared her throat and shrugged. "I mean, you wouldn't, right?"

He drew in a deep breath through his nose. "Tear down the drawing room? *I did*. Replace it with a courtyard? That work is in progress as we speak. But did I do it for you?" Draco shook his head. "I did it for me, but because of you, Granger."

Her eyes widened. "What does that mean?"

Draco looked away, eyes finding the window in the spot above Hermione's shoulder. "It means, I have regrets... I avoid that room and many others, just as I did for you when you revisited there."

She slid into his line of sight; a small, solemn smile at play on her lips. "You want to forget. I can understand that."

"No." He shook his head. "I'll never forget... This was a change I needed to make in order to learn how to forgive myself."

The sudden shock on her face was quickly replaced by awe. Draco didn't want to see it. He wasn't deserving of whatever that expression was meant to convey.

"So, Granger," he directed their conversation elsewhere. "You've asked your questions, now I have some of my own."

She dragged her feet up and onto the bench, hugging her legs against her chest. "I'm listening."

Truthfully, he had loads of questions he'd been curious about.

What happened with her and the Weasel?

Why soul magic, when he'd assumed she would've pursued management instead?

Why wouldn't she restore her parents' memories after the war?

What were her favourite books and why?

Where did she find that honeysuckle perfume he couldn't seem to get out of his nose even hours after they parted?

He asked none of those, however.

“What can you tell me about my Aunt Andromeda?”

The brief widening of her eyes softened and she tilted her head.

Hermione smiled. “I’ll tell you everything I know.”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Ten

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Ten -

In summary, the train ride to Hogwarts was not the miserable experience it had started off as. In fact, Draco could admit it was at least partly enjoyable. Perhaps it involved a tad more vulnerability than he was accustomed to, but by the end of it he believed he and Granger might actually be... *friends*.

Unfortunately the close proximity set the stage for feelings that most certainly wouldn't be considered friendly. The scent of her perfume. The soft shape of her curls. The heart-shaped arch of her lips. The way Hermione looked when she tilted her head back and laughed; laughing at him, laughing at something he'd said, at his irritated expression when he had no response at all to give. Everything confuddled together, fueling salacious thoughts and emotions.

That realisation had him keeping his distance from her as they made the long walk up to the castle. He allowed—yes, *allowed*—her to spend that time reconnecting with Longbottom. While Draco remained in silence many metres behind, the two volleyed between many conversations.

The arrangement surprisingly benefitted Draco. His inner Slytherin was feeling proud. Neville asked Hermione all the questions he'd been curious about—questions pertaining to the Weasel and her desire to work as an Unspeakable. He learned more about Hermione in thirty minutes than he had in the last month and a half he'd spent at her side.

Though successful, it did make him feel a tad inferior. He wondered if he should take a note from Longbottom and start initiating his own conversations. He *Occluded* that thought away promptly. May Merlin grant mercy on his soul—he'd sooner die by *Cruciatitis* than ever admit he'd briefly considered being more like Longbottom.

The many glances Hermione sent him over her shoulder kept him grounded, however. Brown eyes creased as she bit her lip. Each time he caught her, she'd quickly turn away, feigning interest somewhere else.

But Draco knew. He saw right through her. Neville might've held her ear, and yet Draco stole her thoughts.

He supposed she felt the shift in them, too.

McGonagall wasn't there to greet them in the Entrance Hall this time. Instead Professor Flitwick waited in the courtyard. He and Neville shared a few words before Neville handed them off to Flitwick.

"If you're still here after the Welcome Back Banquet, I'd love to show you what I've been working on," he said.

Hermione smiled. "I'll have to see how we're doing on time. We have lodging in Hogsmeade overnight."

"Either way," he stated with a slight shrug. "It was nice catching up. And erm, good to see you too, Malfoy."

Draco managed a slow nod. "Longbottom..."

Neville headed up the steps and into the Entrance Hall. Flitwick waved them forward to follow.

"Minerva said you two were working together now. It came as quite a shock to her, but I'm not all that surprised," Flitwick admitted as he led them toward the quad.

"No?" Hermione hummed, frowning. "Why is that?"

He smiled to himself. "I imagine if you hadn't been in the same year together, Mr Malfoy here would have landed at the top of your class."

Draco couldn't help himself. He turned to Hermione and grinned. "Only slightly less brilliant than The Brightest Witch of Our Age— I take that as a compliment."

Hermione merely shrugged. "You always were better at potions than me."

She moved a step ahead, missing the opportunity to find Draco with his slack jaw around his knees.

"As it stands, had Mister Malfoy signed up for one additional advanced course, he might have rivalled your N.E.W.T scores entirely," Flitwick continued.

"I beg your pardon?" Hermione gaped, straightening.

"You both completed seven courses, receiving Outstandings across the board. Had Mister Malfoy taken Divination, he would have graduated with eight."

Both Draco and Hermione scowled. "Divination is a waste of time," they chided in unison.

Professor Flitwick's head turned in amusement. "I see you both have more in common than your intellect..." he mused.

Hermione's gaze caught his over her shoulder. Seeing him smirk, she laughed, and Draco chuckled in reply.

Professor Flitwick stopped at the stairs leading below the Dark Tower. "I'll have to apologise up front for the unfortunate working conditions. After the Ministry performed their sweep of the castle, most of Severus' belongings remained. Minerva suggested holding them in storage until they could be dealt with at a later date. He was a brilliant wizard, as I'm sure you both know. There's no telling what research he might have compiled before his passing."

"If you knew the extent of the working conditions I'd been subjected to these last weeks, you'd understand why the dark dusty Hogwarts' Dungeons are a dream in comparison," Draco remarked under his breath.

Flitwick's brow lifted in suspicion. He said nothing but when he turned back to the stairs, Hermione ribbed Draco with her elbow.

He rubbed his side with an open hand, frowning in his distaste. "Witches first," he said and waved her forward. "And that's not me being polite. That's me wanting to have all your pointy limbs where I can see them."

Hermione snorted, turning her head coyly. "Only the pointy bits?"

She flashed him an impersonal smile before following Flitwick. Draco remained at the head of the stairs rooting through his surprise for a beat longer until he found the motivation to continue after her.

"Well played, Granger," he murmured at her back.

Flitwick waited for them at the base of the stairs. He led them down the narrow corridor lined with cold grey stone and dimly lit by iron sconces. Draco could barely make out the shape of Hermione's unruly head as they made their way deeper below the castle.

"I'm afraid there's no clever way to navigate through the storage rooms. There's been quite a few items forgotten by students and staff over the years," said Flitwick.

He rounded the first junction, taking a left.

"We're not far from the Slytherin dormitories now," Draco remarked.

"No," Flitwick agreed. "Though you won't be bothered by the students while you're here. Minerva had most of the dungeons sealed off after the war."

"For any particular reason?" Hermione asked.

Flitwick continued down a short set of stairs. "None other than to limit the amount of hiding places students had access to. Slytherin students became a target amongst the other houses. Minerva wanted to quickly put that to rest."

From behind, Draco watched Hermione's arms fold over her chest. "That's unfortunate..." she said.

"Oh, don't tell me you're sympathising with snakes now," Draco teased.

She stopped short, spinning on him. "If you'd asked me five years ago, my response would have been the same. No child, regardless of their house or upbringing, should be subjected to bullying."

His hands raised and lips curled toward one cheek. "Lest I forget your bleeding heart, Granger."

Hermione glared at Draco before following the short distance to where Flitwick waited for them.

He stood aside a large iron door. Unveiling his wand from his robes, he had the door unlocked and opening into the darkness.

He entered first, with Hermione and Draco at his back. The first thing Draco noticed was the smell. Dust, dirt, and something damp. The second was the very little light they'd have to work by. It was that fact that kept the sheer amount of belongings they'd have to work through hidden in shadow until Flitwick casted *Lumos Maxima*.

"Salazar, spare me..." Draco deadpanned.

Hermione's wide eyes took in the surrounding rooms. "I might've been preemptive in suggesting we'd only need a single day. *Accio* Professor Snape's parcel . "

Nothing happened. Hermione scowled, stomped and turned to Draco.

"You try," she demanded.

Draco chuckled. "You and that finicky wand, Granger..."

"Please keep your commentary to yourself."

His lips pursed, eyes curling in humour. He unsheathed his own wand. "*Accio* Professor Snape's Potions notes."

Again, the room beyond remained still.

Professor Flitwick cleared his throat. "There are likely wards on individual items stored here."

"Fantastic," Draco muttered.

"We should get to it then," Hermione added, hands promptly splayed over her hips.

Ever the optimist, that one.

“I’ll leave you both to it,” Flitwick said. “The room is yours.”

Hermione smiled and offered him a short nod. “Thank you, Professor.”

He trodded toward the door. “Try not to hex each other while you’re at it,” he said as he departed, taking the light with him.

Draco waited until he was gone. Darkness filtered in around them, thick and heavy. “Sounds like something Theo might say to us.”

“*Him* , or Harry,” she agreed.

“Let’s disprove their little faith, shall we?” he asked.

In the low light from the corridor, he watched Hermione’s eyes lower. She bit her lip, staring at him, brain clearly at work beneath all that chaotic hair.

After a moment, she stepped closer. “What are your thoughts about it?”

“My thoughts about what?”

He had light returning to the room with a quick wave of his wand. He set it down on the shelf of a forgotten bookcase. When his eyes circled back to Hermione, she was still staring. Her expression was curious, unreadable.

“About us working alone together like this– do you think we’ll come out unscathed?”

Slowly, she began to smirk. The effect it had on Draco was sudden and extreme. Heat pooled at his waist. His heart uncomfortably clenched. Was Granger *flirting* with him?

He benched the sarcastic response his tongue instinctively fought to unearth. Instead he wandered away from her at a leisurely pace. Taking the wand with him, he waited until she was lost to the shadows before he replied.

“I can’t say I wouldn’t enjoy a little scathing, Granger. Not where you’re concerned.”

He heard her breath catch as she choked on a laugh.

Good. Two could play that game.

They worked through the afternoon and into early evening. Draco had lost his drive two hours in, but still continued on. Both searched parcels by wand light on opposite sides of the cellar. They were too far separated to hold a conversation, though he did enjoy the occasional grumbles he overheard from Hermione.

He was close to calling it quits. They could spend a week down here and never make any progress. Draco was cold and hunger had crept in. He moved to push aside yet another parcel when something caught his eye.

A name. A feminine name, and written in hasty script. It was a letter trapped beneath a stack of books.

Draco quickly freed the parchment and pulled it close to his nose for examination.

“Granger,” his voice travelled across the cellar, breaking the silence. “What was Potter’s Mother’s maiden name?”

“What?”

He heard movement, a dramatic *thud* followed by an “Ouch!”

Footsteps travelled closer. The corner of the room brightened around him.

Hermione dropped down at his side onto her knees. “Why do you need to know?”

Before he could respond, she snatched the parchment from his hands. She held it up beneath her own wand. Orange light reflected against her cheeks and in her brown eyes. It caught her curls, making them appear shiny and soft. Draco turned his attention to the back of the parchment instead.

“It’s a letter from Professor Snape...” she mused as her brow lifted.

“That much I’d sorted myself, thank you.”

She ignored him. “Where did you find this?”

He prodded the wooden trunk with his wand tip. Hermione then invaded his space entirely. She wedged him aside as she buried her head into the depths of the chest.

Draco begrudgingly slid aside. “That didn’t answer my question,” he drawled.

Her head returned at once. She smiled at him. “It’s Evans. Your assumption was correct.”

“Why on earth was Snape writing to Potter’s mum?”

Her smile weakened but remained against her cheeks. “He loved her,” she simply stated.

Draco’s face contorted. Surprise, confusion, denial. “Pull one over on someone else, Granger. We haven’t the time.”

“It’s true! They were friends before Hogwarts. He loved her.”

His lips pursed and he frowned. “He never said...”

Hermione turned away, eyes fixed to the contents in the worn trunk. She pulled a textbook aside, and then another.

Draco grabbed her shoulder and pulled her back to face him. “You’re telling me Professor Snape, *our* shared Professor Snape, *my* godfather— he was Potter’s mum’s lover?”

She snorted, shaking her head. “Wishful lover. From what I’ve been told, Lily never responded to his advances. That, or he never found the courage to act on them.”

“What a terribly depressing ending... Poor bloke,” Draco mused.

“It is unfortunate, isn’t it? Like me, Lily was a Muggleborn, but I assume you already knew that.”

He shrugged.

“Adds a little depth to Professor Snape's character, don’t you think? A Slytherin accepting and loving a Muggleborn.”

Draco scoffed, adding a slight roll of his eyes. “It’s a wonder he deceived Voldemort as long as he did.”

Hermione screamed before he saw it. She leapt back, barreling into him and knocking Draco onto his rear. Hermione was seated in his lap, but only for a short minute. She clambered to her feet, using his knee for leverage.

It was then he saw the flames. They started in the depths of Snape’s trunk and now billowed to the surface.

“*Aguamenti!*” she shouted.

When nothing happened, Draco was quick to his feet and her side. “*Aquamenti!*” he tried.

Water spiralled out from the tip of his wand, dousing the trunk. The first tapered out quickly, darkness following in the flames' departure.

Hermione, however, didn’t need light to find her target apparently. She was a blur surrounded by shadow. She smacked Draco’s chest with the back of her hand.

“Malfoy, you idiot!” she scolded.

He caught her by the wrist by chance before she could smack him again. He held his wand above their heads, light returning.

“How was I to know *that* would happen?”

She pulled against his hold but Draco didn’t let go.

“Oh no you don’t, Granger. Not until I’m certain you won’t hex my balls off with that defective wand of yours.”

She smiled up at him, almost menacingly; she was plotting something dangerous. He could see it in the way her pupils rapidly dilated.

“What’s the problem, Malfoy? I thought you were eager for a bit of scathing.”

Draco released her at once, pushing her away from him in the same motion. Hermione didn’t dwell. She returned to her knees and began filtering through the remains of the trunk.

“This book here seems to be the source of the fire.”

Moving bits of burnt parchment to the floor, she stole a worn leather book from the depths and examined it closely. The cover was charred and unreadable. The edges had disintegrated entirely.

Very carefully, he watched Hermione flip through the first pages. “It looks like a journal of sorts,” she considered.

Draco lowered himself and the light beside her. He held his wand above her head and she muttered a nonchalant “thanks”.

He watched her skim through Snape’s written words, reading over her shoulder as she did.

“Looks like potions’ notes, mainly. How did you know?” she asked, turning to him.

“What do you mean?”

Hermione huffed. “You tried to *Accio* his potions’ notes, remember?”

He had, though he wasn’t certain why. “Clever thought,” he said.

Her eyes lowered. “Clever indeed.”

She returned her attention to the text, flipping through the pages slower. Suddenly, she froze.

“It’s dated! Draco what date did Theo take us to with the Time Turner?”

He grit his teeth. “I don’t know. If you recall, I was indisposed at the time.”

“A general idea, it doesn’t have to be exact.”

Blowing out a puff of air, he eyes wavered as he thought. “Sometime after the holidays I suspect. Early ninety-seven, perhaps?”

Hermione hummed. Her fingers traced down each page as she went. “That’d be Essence of Insanity... or Memory, if my own is to be believed.”

Draco chuckled. “You’re a strange sort of witch, Granger. Is it our entire seven year curriculum you’ve memorised?”

She ignored him. Draco wasn’t surprised.

“Here’s Memory Restoration,” she continued.

He slid around to her side, watching the side of her face as she read through the journal. Hermione's brown eyes rapidly scanned the parchment. Her lips were pursed, pushed out.

"Here!" she near-shouted.

She thrust the book in his face.

"This is odd, wouldn't you think?"

He followed her finger down to a scribbled section on wand cores. Draco frowned, trying to make sense of it on his own without her help.

Hermione sighed. "What do wand cores and memory potions have in common?" she asked, and Draco hated that she was using this as a teaching opportunity instead of coming right out to explain it. She sensed this. "Nothing. Not a thing."

She stole back the book, flipping forward a single page.

"Same applies here with blood magic," she added.

This piqued his curiosity. Draco leaned forward, not caring how he might be too close to her for comfort.

"This is what you said earlier, yes?" he asked before reading the script aloud, "*Imparting magic on a token representation using intent and blood to bind.*"

Hermione frowned. She brought the book higher and held it between them. "I suppose, but why the notes on wand cores?"

"You're the genius. I'm merely the branded bystander looking for explanations."

She chuckled idly, eyes still tracing through the notes. She flipped forward another page and gasped.



It was his mark—cleaner and more precise, but it was no doubt the same symbol Draco had etched into his side.

"There's nothing!" Hermione managed on a breath. "It's there... and then... nothing..."

He followed her finger across the pages. His mark. His brand, yet nothing explaining *why*. Nothing stating what magic lingered behind it. It was his mark, and pages of useless potions' notes. Regeneration vials for first years and wound cleansers for third.

Before the disappointment took over, Hermione flipped backwards through the pages.

“We’ve read about the sigils. We understand the use of blood magic, what still strikes me as strange is the notes on wand cores... Most specifically his apparent fascination with the dragon heartstring.”

Her hands stopped. She tapped her pointer finger against the margin.

“Here,” she read on. “Dragon heartstring, the easiest influenced by Dark and Unethical Arts. Blood magic to bind?”

Draco pondered on his inner cheek. “What’s it mean?”

She sat straight. Her hand covered the page. “I suppose I could concoct a sound theory.”

Draco gestured with his hand. “Concoct away.”

She smiled, briefly catching his eyes in the wand light. “Perhaps he bound your memories to a specific wand or wand core instead of another person?”

“And the soul bond?” he questioned.

“It’s still there, I gather. Still relevant. But if I’m to assume anything, wand cores, of any type, hold an important factor here too.”

“The dragon heartstring, in particular?”

Her lips trudged to the side, flattening in thought. Her shoulder lifted. “It’s the only core mentioned by name outside of the generic.”

“There’s about a dozen or more witches, I presume, who held a dragon heartstring. Not even Professor Snape wielded a wand with that core.”

He watched her cheeks darken in the wand-light. Hermione promptly turned away, fixating on the words between her hands. “My wand— my original wand before your aunt confiscated it... It was a dragon heartstring.”

His tongue clicked to the roof of his mouth. “No good to us now, is it?”

Hermione visibly tensed but said nothing.

Draco sighed. He turned over his hand, looking down at his wrist. “It’s late,” he acknowledged. “We should collect what we can and check in at The Three Broomsticks.”

Her knuckles turned white as she gripped the journal tighter. “We should take the rest of the contents in the trunk. I’ll look it all over after I’ve had a bite to eat.”

“I could eat,” he stated casually. “Pies and lager on me.”

She flinched before taking a breath. She pulled her head to the side, chin to shoulder, and smiled at him. “I’ll expect you to help with the reading.”

Draco smirked. "I've made it this far unscathed. Might as well go for the win."

"If we're sharing a room, the odds aren't in your favour."

Rolling his eyes, Draco pulled the journal from her hands and slipped it between his robes. "I'm a gentleman. I requested a suite, of course."

"One bed!" her voice reached an ear splitting decibel. "One bed? Malfoy you brainless, irritating, manipulative git! 'Pureblooded manners' my arse!"

Hermione had her defective wand wedged beneath his chin as she held him against the door. His hand raised in surrender, but surrender she did not. She squinted through her irritation, glowering in her distaste.

"You heard the witch," he not-so-tactfully defended. "They've overbooked."

She scowled, a slight huff reverberating between her throat, before turning away.

A sink, a toilet, and a bed too large for the room size— that's what their evening had been reduced to. Draco tried not to consider what it would be like to be held overnight in a room this small with Hermione Granger. He supposed, for starters, he'd be sleeping on the floor.

Hermione stalked toward the foot of the bed. She overturned her extended bag onto the duvet, books, journals, miscellaneous photographs, and clothes tumbled out from its endless depths.

Draco watched as she sorted everything into piles - Snape's belongings on one side and hers on the other. He slipped his cufflinks from each sleeve.

"I thought we were heading down to dinner?"

"We are," she sang, not bothering to turn away from the task at hand. "I'm assessing which of these remaining journals to take with me."

He blinked. "To dinner?"

Hermione brought a leather-bound book up to her chest, hugging it there. She then quickly tossed it aside and replaced it with a worn notebook.

"Yes to dinner," she said, facing him. "That would be the most effective use of my time, would it not?"

She didn't wait for him to answer. She grabbed the first book she'd discarded from the bed. Marching forward, Hermione thumped Draco in the chest with it. He caught it with a large, deft hand, holding it in place.

“I don’t suppose there was something else you wanted to do whilst at dinner?” she asked behind an arched brow.

“Eat, mainly,” he muttered.

“I figure you’re not much of a conversationalist. Why sit in silence when we can work through the rest of these notes?”

Pushing past him, Hermione held open the door. She waved him forward with an exaggerated hand. It wasn’t worth the energy to partake in a childish standoff, though he did briefly consider doing just that.

Draco heard Hermione following closely to his back. Together they navigated the short hall to the staircase. The noise from the pub rose with the ascending steps. Music and the shrill of many voices guided them down to the dining area and into the first available seat.

Hermione sat across from him. Her chin was tilted, lips pursed. She looked around distastefully before her shoulders slumped and she sighed.

“Something the matter, Granger?”

She straightened, setting the journal on the table before her. “Poor lighting, is all.”

Draco chuckled. “My condolences. Who would have thought a pub wouldn’t be a conducive reading environment?”

Her stare hardened. He watched the lines of her jaw tense.

“Read your book, Malfoy. If you’re not going to be polite, at least be quiet.”

He rolled his eyes at that, but still, he obliged. He dragged out the book from behind his robes and held it in his lap.

“Mr Malfoy,” a voice loomed from above.

A shadow darkened the parchment in hand and he looked up. There stood Madam Rosemerta. Her face was pinched. She pulled a rag over her shoulder and crossed her arms.

“Rose, you’re looking well,” Draco greeted with a smirk.

Hermione sat back in her chair. Her eyes widened, hands tightly gripping the edges of the journal.

A sudden laugh sprung from Madam Rosemerta’s mouth. She whipped Draco with the end of her rag and shook her head. Smiling now, she turned to Hermione.

“Hermione Granger... I’ve not had the pleasure of seeing your face here for quite some time,” she said.

Confusion continued to plague her gaze. Her eyes filtered between Draco and Madam Rosemerta. "I've been busy..."

"With this one here?" she asked, hand gesturing to Draco.

"Most recently, yes," Hermione explained.

Her arms crossed over her chest. "Took you long enough."

It was Draco's turn to spring back in his chair. "I'm sorry, what?"

Madam Rosemerta waved him off. "Oh, don't start with me, boy. It's my job to know people. I'm observant. This was an inevitable match, in my opinion."

In unison, Hermione and Draco fought to dissuade her. What they managed were broken words lost in a battle between stutters.

"Oh, I won't tease you anymore... Choose your drink and I'll get it started."

Hermione's jaw wavered. She looked to Draco and urged him with a nod.

"A bottle of elderflower and two glasses, and whatever's hot in the kitchens."

She circled toward the bar, but Draco cleared his throat.

"Yes, Draco..." she deadpanned, though humour still lightened her eyes.

"If you've any of your mince pies-"

He'd started and Rosemerta cut him off. "Was already on it."

They watched her cross the floor and disappear behind the liquor display.

"Mince pies, hmm?"

He didn't miss the teasing tone. He could practically hear her smirking.

"They're a delicacy," he explained. "One I can only manage to enjoy when I'm dining apart from my parents."

Her head tilted as she considered him. Draco couldn't help but to admire the copper quality the pub's orange light blanketed across her face.

"I expected that to be uncomfortable," Hermione admitted, catching Draco's eye and then turning down to her book.

"That was the textbook definition of uncomfortable, Granger. She thinks we're shagging."

Closing the journal, Hermione shrugged. "I'd meant between the two of you. I..." her voice faded and she shook her head. "Never mind. It's all in the past, I imagine."

He turned his attention toward the ceiling. “If you’re referring to the incident during sixth year, I’ve made my amends many times over.”

Hermione’s brow twitched. “You have?”

When Draco relented to the softness in her tone, he met her stare. Her eyes held a fraction too wide and her lips had parted.

“Shockingly, I can admit when my actions have caused someone harm.”

“But you apologised?” Hermione near-gawked.

Draco tried not to take offence. “I really like the pies,” he offered casually.

“The pies, but-” she stopped, shaking her head. “Now’s not the time or place.”

Hermione flipped the book back open with force.

Draco was meant to be doing his own reading but found himself considering her even as Madam Rosemerta set down the bottle of wine and their glasses.

He poured her one, slowly sliding it across the table. She didn’t acknowledge him, nor the wine. He took a sip from his own glass—a gulp, a big one.

“You’re upset,” he pointed out, idly holding the stem of the glass between his fingers.

Her head promptly raised. She spotted him first, then the wine.

“I am a bit disquieted, yes,” she admitted before taking down her own healthy sip of wine.

“I don’t— *why* ?”

A noise caught in her throat. It was broken, like a whimper or a moan, but Draco recognized it for what it really was. Articulate, intelligent Hermione Granger was at a loss for words. Her own emotions had her volleying thoughts that couldn’t quite reach her tongue.

“I’d hoped, and it’s likely foolish of me, that you would’ve recognized we’ve never spoken about it,” she stated and with a tinge of ice laced around each word.

His brow arched. “It?”

“Yes, *it*,” she snapped. “What we went through. What *I* went through. We’ve tiptoed around it, but we’ve never said...”

Her hair fanned out as she dramatically shook her head.

“Nothing, it’s nothing.”

Draco frowned. “You’re looking for an apology?”

“No,” her voice demanded, and at a volume that had other inn patrons turning toward their table. She continued anyway, “I’d only meant... you tried to apologise but you never followed through. And Madam Rosemerta has mince pies, and I suppose that’s an added benefit where you’re concerned, but...”

She silenced again. This time when the wine glass lifted to her lips, half the contents disappeared.

“I’m helping you,” she stated definitively as her glass came back down to the table. “Not because I have to but because I want to.”

Draco chuckled. He couldn’t help but appreciate the frazzled state of the witch before him. “You think you’re in the same class as Madam Rosemerta. That’s your problem Granger, always doubting your worth.”

Her mouth tipped to respond but he carried on.

“I apologised to Madam Rosemerta, yes. She deserved one and-”

“And I didn’t?” her voice sliced between them, cutting him off.

Draco took a breath. He felt the strain in his shoulders, tense muscles beneath a heavy head.

“No,” he whispered.

Her cheeks darkened with rage. Her pupils dilated. He spoke again before she could find her voice.

“‘Sorry’ is a single word standing between a dozen wrong doings. Madam Rosemerta was an unfortunate bystander caught up in a war I was too young to have started.

“But what I did to you,” he continued, attention held at the ringlets of red wine amongst the glass. “There aren’t any words I know that can repair it.”

It was her continued silence that bothered him most. It was uncomfortable and heavy, but then after long minutes the silence became familiar. Draco looked up from his wine. His grey eyes met hers.

She smiled at him– a small, considerate grin. Hermione took a breath. “I forgive you.”

Draco didn’t react. Even as his heart throbbed and skin heated beneath his clothes, he remained passive.

“I know. You’d forgiven me long before you agreed to help.”

She shook her head. Her mouth closed and reopened. “I never said-

“You didn’t need to.”

Their conversations shifted following that single intense exchange. A silent agreement took place. A line erased from the sand.

Minutes then filled with wine, and more wine, and eventually food.

He listened to Hermione talk about work—the parts she could. He listened to her talk about where she'd put her time if given the freedom to choose her own projects. And while he listened, Draco was surprised to find that he liked listening to her speak. Her excitement was intoxicating. Her intellect was something to behold. He felt that hearing her thoughts was a rare gift overlooked by most; he knew he certainly had.

The way her mind cycled through thought. The way she considered and processed each question he asked. It was a talent, a rare one. And when they moved away from her work, they talked more about his own. They discussed their favourite books, music, and to Draco's surprise—her love of trying new foods.

He learned Hermione had practised piano for over a decade, while Draco was trained on woodwinds. They both attended a day school—of sorts, in his opinion—but still endured private tutors.

As it turned out, he didn't need Longbottom after all. He was doing plenty fine on his own.

The slight sort of easement they found, however, was often shattered by the cycling reminder that they'd return to that small bedroom above their heads. Together and alone. His voice would sound louder between four walls. Her responses would feel more intimate. The mere thought of *intimate* made his palms sweet. He could admit to himself now that Granger was shaggable—more than that, if he were truly being honest—but he was a soul-bound man. *Unfortunately.*

“Well, this has been a colossal waste of time,” Hermione ended with a laugh, pulling Draco from the depths of his mind.

He frowned, lips turning downward.

His reaction had her flailing. She lurched forward and placed a hand over his. “That was a poor choice of words,” she explained. “I meant bringing the notes down here and thinking I'd get anything done after a glass of wine.”

Draco snorted. “Well, you've had five.”

She blushed. Her hand twitched against the top of his. She slowly pulled it back into her lap.

“Did I really?”

“Can't lay all the fault at your feet, Granger. I had a hand in this as well.”

The pink hue receded from her cheeks. Hermione smiled. “Who would have thought... the two of us, losing track of time and getting along.”

Draco had to rein in his own expression. He allowed his lips to lift, but only slightly. “I think if we’d added in alcohol, you and I might’ve become friends much sooner.”

“We’re friends now, are we?” she asked with a coy tilt of her brow.

“Might as well be. Theo’s determined to make it happen,” Draco said, turning down to his hand as he twisted the ring around his finger. “In the spirit of friendship, I suppose I had a thought about your wand... the dragon heartstring.”

Her eyes widened a fraction, shoulders lifting.

“The Ministry raided the manor after the war. I haven’t seen your wand. There’s a chance my aunt died with it on her-”

“-but there’s also a chance the Ministry has it in storage...” she cut in, appearing dazed.

Draco shrugged. “It’s a thought.”

“And then we could look into a possible connection between your mark and the dragon heartstring!”

He chuckled. His eyes lowered playfully. “It’s a better idea than roaming the streets asking patrons, ‘can I take your wand for a spin’?”

Hermione openly laughed, shaking her head. “I’ve definitely had too much to drink. That was funnier than it should have been.”

“Alright, tipsy. Let’s get you to bed.”

She groaned and pulled a hand through her curls. “We have all that reading to do...”

He stood, holding out a hand to her. “The books will still be there in the morning.”

Hermione accepted the gesture and allowed Draco to help her to her feet. He quickly released her, collecting their books before he waved her toward the stairs.

As they made their way toward their room, he spoke again, “It’s not a guarantee, by the way—your wand and the Ministry. I don’t want to give you false hope.”

Hermione hummed, biting her lip. “It’s not false hope. It’s a regular sort of hope.”

They came to stand in front of their door. She turned to him and placed a hand on his sleeve, ironically above the remains of his Dark Mark. He didn’t flinch.

“I made my peace with it already. If I need to trial two dozen wands in order to find another, I will,” she said.

Her brown eyes carried flecks of gold highlighted by the overhead sconce. Draco lost himself momentarily in her waves of amber before clearing his throat.

"You shouldn't have to," he whispered.

She dropped her hand. A lazy smile caressed her cheeks. "That was sort of like an apology, Malfoy. You're catching on."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Open the door, Granger."

She stared at him a moment longer. He'd begun to sweat beneath her scrutiny when she finally pushed open the door.

Hermione grabbed her clothing from the bed before disappearing to the en suite. Draco took the opportunity to change from his day-wear and arrange a few pillows on the floor.

"You've got to be joking!" Hermione bellowed when she returned.

Draco stood from where he'd laid out a blanket. Her hands were on her hips and her expression, fueled by rage.

"Is the idea of sleeping next to me so revolting you'd default to lying on the dirty floor?"

He frowned, taken back. "Giving you the bed was the proper thing to do."

She snorted. "We're both adults, are we not? We're perfectly capable of sharing a bed for one evening. Besides, I'm hardly your type. I've seen the witch you were betrothed to."

Draco said nothing- not in response, and not when she stormed past him, throwing his pillows and blanket back on the bed.

Hermione crawled over them, huffing as she did. She slid beneath the sheets and buried her ridiculously curly head into one of Snape's journals.

Draco held his breath as he sat beside her. He held his hands politely in his lap, starrng at the far wall.

"I wasn't trying to offend you," he explained.

She sighed and placed the book open across her thighs. "I know."

He smirked, turning to her. "Then why are you still upset?"

Hermione shrugged. She met his stare. "Old wounds, I suppose... But I'm sorry I assumed differently."

Relaxing back into his pillow, Draco reached over his head and switched off the light. "Save your apologies, Granger. I deserved it."

He could feel her eyes on his cheek. Even as he closed his own, her stare warmed against his skin.

She shuffled the sheets around. The mattress bounced as he heard her set her book on the nightstand and turn off her light.

There was more movement. The scent of honeysuckle permeated the air. Draco felt the brush of something soft across his cheek and his eyes sprung open.

Hermione lingered with her lips by his ear. "You didn't deserve it," she whispered. "Goodnight, Draco."

As quickly as she was there, she was gone. Hermione rolled onto her side with her back facing him.

Draco hoped she couldn't hear the erratic beat of his heart nor the faster pace of his breathing. *Merlin*, he was feeling like a teenager all over again.

He slid down the mattress and pulled the blanket over his hips. Draco slung his head to the side, finding the outline of Hermione's hair in the moonlight.

"You assumed two things incorrectly, by the way," he spoke into the shadows.

Hermione hummed. "What do you mean?" she murmured sleepily.

Draco reeled in a deep breath. He let it out slow. "I think you're *exactly* my type of witch, Hermione."

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Eleven -

Wide eyes searched through the darkness. Her heart, which had clenched a mere second prior, now raced beneath her ribs. Hermione hugged her arms closer, hoping to deafen the sound. She held her breath and slowly released it. She trained her ears in the silence, waiting for Draco's own breathing to even out.

Had he said that? Had he meant it? Was she hearing him incorrectly?

Sure, there had been a bit of tension between them. They'd become more friendly. Draco's entire situation was sensitive and intimate. That's where she'd assumed their new found closeness had stemmed.

She wouldn't deny she'd once or twice admired his eyes. Nor would she say she hadn't been explicitly flirting with him when their playful banter called for it. That's all it was, however —passive teasing between two people who'd been forced together through unexplainable circumstances. It was a way to pass the time and nothing more.

Yet, Hermione knew that wasn't true. She felt the shift between them. She watched the change in *him* .

When she finally began to doze, she was still considering what this sudden reveal could mean for them? She thought of the bond that couldn't be broken and dutifully brushed Draco's declaration to the far recesses of her mind.

It was another train ride spent in a tight passenger cabin. Fortunately their ride was shorter, ending in Perth instead of at King's Cross. There was only so long Hermione could handle sitting in close quarters with Draco Malfoy. Not after the night prior. Not after she ignored him, and he now ignored her.

Breakfast had been a quiet and uncomfortable affair. Awaiting the train outside of Hogsmeade had been much the same. Then forced to share a bench seat, the tension between them was palpable.

Hermione turned her attention to one of Snape's journals. Draco followed in suit. Neither broke the strict silence between them. They remained rigid and tense. Only when a sudden gasp wrenched from her throat, did Draco even look at her for the first time.

"What is it?" he asked, putting the journal aside.

Her wide eyes met his. "*Sanguine Magicae*," she whispered. "Blood magic! Snape has notes here from Ninety-Seven on experiments with blood magic!"

Draco shrugged. "So?"

She sighed, eyes tilting with her head. "So... We already know that the sigils are reliant on some type of blood magic. And here he was in February of NinetySeven documenting some sort of attempt at fusing together two things..."

Confusion tugged at his brow. Draco lifted the journal from her hands. "The bond?"

"If we're lucky," she said, reading over his shoulder. "Or perhaps your memories."

Flipping through pages, his fingers picked up speed. He made a disgruntled noise before tossing the book back in her lap.

"There are no details, nothing that explains what he was doing. It's more of the same vague nonsense."

"But that's a good sign, don't you think?" she asked.

Draco snorted and his arms crossed. "Nothing about this feels *good*, Granger."

She ignored him, pressing on and reading from Snape's writing, "*Sanguine Magicae to fuse, the centre to bind, the soul to rewrite...* Vague is good," she continued. "It means he didn't want to risk exposing the purpose behind documenting it."

"It was Snape," Draco quickly chided. "The very definition of *vague*. He was a Death Eater parading around as a professor."

"More like a professor parading around as a Death Eater," Hermione quipped.

He rolled his eyes. "It doesn't work that way. You were a Death Eater or you weren't. There's no grey area. We all paid our dues."

She dragged in a breath, nostrils flaring. "We're back to self deprecation then, are we?"

"I was merely stating a fact."

Hermione sighed. "I don't have time to coddle you right now. What do you want to do with this information?"

"What can be done?" he asked flippantly. "You want to go prodding around my past again? Have at it."

Her vision narrowed and her lips pursed. "You're not willing to try? We're better prepared. We know what to expect. We can bring ailments or take a test run."

"I think you underestimate the price on Nott's shoes."

Hermione laughed, tossing back her head. As she collected herself she noticed the hint of a smile caressing Draco's lips. He watched her closely; gaze fixed on her face. She felt it caress her skin, warming it, tasting it.

She fought for a short breath. "I thought money wasn't an issue?"

"It's not but if you think I want to spend mine on someone of equal wealth with lesser style, you'd be very, *very* wrong."

Hermione returned his grin before turning down to the book in hand. "I'll keep reading. Perhaps I'll find something more explicit."

Draco said nothing. He lifted this discarded journal from the seat and thumbed through the first pages.

A short while later, they arrived in Perth. Hermione stepped off the train with Draco at her back. Together they crossed the platform toward the reception hall, and from there, entered the custodial closet where they located the hidden return Floo.

"To the Ministry?" Draco asked once the door had closed behind him.

She frowned and faced him. "You want to come with me?"

"We're searching for your wand, are we not?"

Hermione blinked. She blinked again.

"It was my idea," he passively added.

She felt heat rise in her cheeks. "I don't know what to say..."

He smirked, taking a step toward her. "Hermione Granger, speechless? Never thought I'd see the day."

Draco stood within centimetres of her. She could feel the warmth from his chest span across her arms. His full height towered above her own but it wasn't daunting; it was enticing, alluring, adrenaline producing.

Her eyes met his and she quickly looked away. "About the journals," she said, "I can look into it for you— your past, I mean. I wouldn't want- what I mean is, it's not worth the risk."

His lips were curling again. It was at the moment she realised how frequently in the last two days she'd witnessed that happen. The once rare sighting of Draco Malfoy smiling; and at her, no less. Hermione's skin chilled and prickled at the thought.

"Grab the powder, Granger."

She playfully bumped her shoulder into his arm before reaching around him. She grabbed a handful from the basin, feeling the soft gritty texture slip between her fingers .

Hermione stepped onto the hearth and Draco shoved in beside her. "Designed for two," he said.

She didn't bother to try and hide her laugh. She tossed the Floo powder into the ashes causing flames rising beneath them. Draco called out for the Ministry and the two were whisked away from Perth.

"About last night," Draco said when they'd stepped off the hearth and into the atrium.

Hermione quickly released him. "We don't need to talk about that. Not now—not ever, if that suits you best."

She'd started for the lifts with Draco hovering near her shoulder. "I think we do," he drawled.

She said nothing. Coming to a halt before the doors, she clasped her hands at her waist. Her eyes remained fixed to the gilded doors before her; her expression calm though she felt anything but.

"I meant it, if that's what you're worried about."

Groaning, she ran a hand over her face. "You didn't. We drank too much. We were finally, after all these years, getting along. What you were feeling was a side effect of an unusual circumstance, that's all."

Draco snorted. He turned his back to the door and met her gaze. "I came to that conclusion long before the drinks, and I think you did too."

The gates parted and Hermione slipped past him. Draco was back at her side in a flash. He hovered over her, staring down his nose as the lift began to rise.

“Don’t hide it from me now, Granger. You fancy me.”

She could hear the tilt in his tone. He was teasing her. It caused her adrenaline to spike and her cheeks to darken.

Hermione spun on him with a pointed finger. “I’ll admit there’s a small bit of chemistry between us, yes. But the fact remains, you’re a soulbound wizard and my one and only responsibility is to figure out to who so we can both move on with our lives, remember?”

He remained unphased by her sudden outburst. His lips curled to one side. “All the more motivation to hop to it then.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That *means*,” Draco sang, a hint of condescension wavering in his voice. “Break the bond and then I’ll let you take me on a date.”

She laughed out loud. Her feet staggered back as she shook her head. “There’s something seriously wrong with you.”

Hermione was off the lift the second they reached level two.

“This conversation isn’t over, Granger. I do intend to ask you out again.”

Another laugh. “Is that what that was? *You* asking *me* out? Sorry, I must’ve missed it amongst the self righteous attitude you were harboring.”

“Don’t get your knickers in a twist, Hermione. T’was only a joke.”

She huffed and faced him. “Drop it, *Draco*. We’ll talk about this later.”

She watched his eyes darken. There was sudden rage which was quickly replaced by something unrecognisable. As he held her stare, she watched him grapple with different emotions. The coyness she was accustomed to. The anger—likely from being brushed off, and then something like acceptance until mirth bloomed there once more.

“We’ve got a wand to locate,” he stated pointedly before extending his arm to her.

She rolled her eyes, relenting with a smirk. She took a hand around the bend in his arm and allowed Draco to direct her towards the DMLE.

The two had barely managed a scant step into the offices when they were accosted by red hair and an equally vermillion face.

“Bloody hell, Hermione! What’s all this about?”

Ronald Weasley stood before them looking peeved. His low eyes scanned between the two, lingering where they were connected with her hand on Draco's arm.

"Hello, Ronald," Hermione sang drily. "I hear congratulations are in order?"

Her stare moved to his hand and the ring around his finger which he clenched in reply.

"Erm, yeah... Thanks 'Mione," he said.

"Weasley," Draco greeted, and with not as much disdain as Hermione would have expected.

His lips sneered. Ron's response started low in his chest. "Malfoy."

Clearing her throat, Hermione tugged against Draco's sleeve. "Lovely to see you, Ron, but we've a standing appointment with Robards that we're officially running late for."

"We do?" Draco asked directly into her ear.

The heat of his breath. The scent of his aftershave. Hermione scarcely managed an idle nod. She forced a smile, eyes gesturing widely.

"We *do*," she stated with emphasis.

His hand slipped further up her arm, curling softly around her bicep. "Right then. Let's get on with it."

He swiftly led her away from Ron. Most surprisingly, the more distance they placed between them, the tighter his grip became. He stood practically on top of her. She could feel his warmth against her back.

She looked up at him as they approached reception. Draco's eyes were directed over his shoulder.

"Nosey git," he murmured.

Hermione found Ron over her own shoulder as he continued watching the pair intently.

"It's been awkward between us since I ended things. He's married now, which should help, but it'll never be the same as it was. Though, I can't imagine seeing the two of us together makes it any easier for him."

"Together?" his voice teased. "I thought we were putting a pin in that conversation."

Hermione scowled. "You're positively insufferable."

He smirked in reply, hand coming around her front, brushing against her hip. "I think you like my sort of insufferable."

She pulled away from him entirely. Her elbow wedged into his ribs as she leaned over the reception desk and held him back.

“Hello, Madam Marsk,” Hermione greeted.

“Ah, Unspeakable Granger... It’s been a while since I’ve seen your face up here. I heard your latest assignment required travel.”

“It did,” she said, smiling. “But it’s called me back unfortunately. Is Gawain in?”

Hermione motioned toward his office and Madam Marsk eyed the closed door.

“He is in the middle of a report and asked for no interruptions, but for you I think he’d make an exception.”

She nodded the pair on, and Hermione stepped forward first.

She knocked on the door, patiently awaiting Robard’s groan of approval. When it came, she felt Draco hovering behind her. His hand intimately brushed the small of her back. Hermione was forced to take a deep breath, ignoring the trail of gooseflesh ascending her spine as she stepped into Gawain’s office.

The first thing she noticed was his back to her. The second was the large stack of parchment he had in hand.

Gawain turned over his shoulder before coming to sit at his desk. “Miss Granger. Pleasure as always,” he grunted.

Both Hermione and Draco approached. She watched Robard’s eyes lower. He fixed an icy glare to his face and directed it solely at Draco.

“And a Mister Malfoy, too. Odd pairing, I’d say. This should be interesting.”

“We’ll be quick,” Hermione started. “I’ve been leading an assignment for the Malfoy Family. This has me wondering if you might’ve been in the raid on their home in the summer of Ninety-Eight.”

Robard snorted. “Yeah, I was there. What a mess that place was.”

At her side, she felt Draco tense. Hermione couldn’t help it. She inched closer to him, allowing her sympathy to carry across his arm in the form of shared body heat.

“I was wondering—we were wondering—I need access to the items removed from the home. Were those stored for review or held somewhere I might be able to find them?”

Massaging a hand across the back of his neck, Robard shrugged. “That’s a loaded question, I’m afraid. Depends on the origin and type of artefact.”

Her arms crossed as she drew in closer to the desk. “A wand. We’re looking for a wand- a ten and three-quarter made of vine wood and a dragon heartstring core.”

Robard openly laughed. “This wasn’t what I was expecting from the pair of you at all. Cursed objects, certainly, but this... An unclaimed wand would be kept in storage in your own

department, Unspeakable Granger.”

Hermione blanched, arms falling. “I beg your pardon?”

“Well, not your department exactly,” he clarified. “But the Room of Wayward Wands.”

She shook her head. “You’re joking.”

His eyes lowered and his expression turned sceptical. “No, Miss Granger, I’m not. That’s where we recycle contraband wands found during a raid. They can’t very well serve another witch or wizard now, can they?”

Her jaw dropped and she turned to Draco. “If you’re right— if my wand,” she stopped herself, pulling back to Gawain. “Thank you for the information. We’ll just- we’ll be going now.”

“Of course, Miss Granger. Mister Malfoy,” he finished.

Hermione grabbed Draco’s hand and dragged him from the office. She spun on him again as the door closed.

“Draco Malfoy, if my wand has been two doors down from my own lab all this time... Merlin, I don’t know if I should kiss you or kill you.”

His eyes widened before they relaxed. Draco smirked. “Might I suggest the former?”

Slowly, she found herself returning the expression. “That’s not going to work on me. You can keep your clever comments to yourself.”

His smile softened. “Are you calling me clever?”

She smacked his chest with the back of his hand.

In a single swift movement, he’d caught her by the wrist. He held her hand, bringing it to rest over his heart.

“You offered...” he said, but Hermione remained unamused. “Go on and lead the way, Granger.”

A puff of air escaped her throat. She rolled her eyes, hoping the action veiled her elevated breath and rapidly darkening cheeks.

Hermione pulled her hand away, clutching it against her own chest instead. “If my wand’s—in fact—in storage, we can test my latest theory.”

He chuckled before waving her forward. “Do tell.”

As they made their way down to level nine, Hermione filled him in.

“It’s simple, really,” she said as they entered the lift. “And it can be achieved with a quick trip to Ollivander’s, if all else fails. I- I’m trying to be realistic about this whole wand thing, though I won’t deny how nice it would be to have a wand that actually responds to my magic again.”

“Back to the theory,” Draco reeled in her rant with a slight snort.

Hermione shrugged; her lips pursed. “Perhaps the connection to the wand core is as simple as using it. If your memories really are tied to the dragon heartstring, a simple *Lumos* might unlock your thoughts.”

“As if anything’s been simple thus far,” he drawled.

“It’s only a theory,” she pointedly stated. “And it’s far safer than strapping you to another Time Turner and popping by your past.”

The lift dinged, the gates parting. Hermione stepped through first taking the lead. As far as the Department of Mysteries went, the narrow corridors were the least exciting. Obsidian tile, dim lighting. It was what remained veiled behind the many doors that captivated curiosity.

She passed her office and stopped before the neighbouring door. Her hand wrapped around the knob, but she went no further.

Hermione looked up at Draco, her lips curling. “I don’t know why but I’m feeling fairly optimistic. I know I shouldn’t, but I do.”

“It’s the blatant irony of being mere steps away from your own wand all these years.”

She said nothing. Draco’s eyes held hers even as she bit her cheek.

“Go on, Granger,” he encouraged.

Dragging in a deep breath, Hermione pushed open the door. They entered the storage closet, a continuation of obsidian tile cut into endless rows of drawers. There were thousands, if not tens of thousands.

“It’ll take us longer to search through these drawers than it did to find Snape’s journals,” she spoke on a long sigh.

Draco unsheathed his wand from his robes. “*Accio* Granger’s wand.”

It can’t be that simple— it wouldn’t, Hermione thought. Still she found herself holding her breath. Her eyes closed.

First there was silence, and then from further back... a *rattle*. It started soft before steadily growing more aggressive.

Hermione’s feet moved forward on their own accord. She fell further into the shadows as she put more distance between her and the door. She felt Draco at her back. He hovered close,

and it was strangely comforting. The warmth of his chest burning through her clothes and wrapping her in a hug; it was nice.

They continued down to one of the last remaining rows; the source of the rattle.

High above her head, a drawer threatened to burst. It shook and vibrated with fury.

With a tentative hand, Draco reached up. His fingers grabbed the handle and he pulled open the drawer. All at once, a wand sprang free from the confines. It hovered before Draco and he plucked it from the air.

Hermione rose onto her toes. She used his arm to keep her balance, eyes fighting for a look over his shoulder.

“Show it here,” she demanded.

Draco passed it down to her. She released him and graciously took the wand in her own hand.

Elation. Relief. A lingering hurt from the last time she’d held this particular wand. Vine wood, the correct weight and length. Hermione felt hot tears stinging her eyes.

“My wand... Draco, it’s my wand... It’s been here in storage the whole bloody time.”

She looked it over, adjusting her hold around the base. It felt familiar— the same as it always had. Every curve in the wood was one she knew intimately.

Hermione looked up at Draco, tears now rolling down her cheeks. “I can’t believe it, I- I never thought I’d see it again.”

She flinched as he reached out with an open hand. It had him stilling momentarily before decidedly continuing to bridge the distance between them. His fingertips traced her jaw. They held her in place, and with a gentle caress of his thumb, he brushed away her tears.

His second hand raised, his own wand trapped beneath his knuckles. He dried her other cheek with his sleeve before pulling away with a slight tap against her chin.

“I’m happy for you, Granger. You never deserved to have it taken from you in the first place.”

Hermione stiffened. He was being genuine. Draco had meant what he said, and it wasn’t the words that proved it to her. There was a glint in his eyes she could make out even in the dim light. Where his irises usually appeared dark and grey, they now produced flecks of heart-stopping silver. Not only that, but his pupils continued to widen as she carried on her examination.

Hermione felt the temperature in her cheeks rise. She quickly looked away; away from him and down at her wand and the tight grip she maintained on it.

“The heartstring!” she said suddenly.

She was holding out her wand, pushing it into his chest.

“You should try it! Cast a spell, go on.”

Draco’s eyes searched the storage closet, his face pulling low with unspoken thoughts. “Not here,” he said. “We should go somewhere else.”

“Probably a good idea,” Hermione agreed. “If anything goes wrong we should have proper back up.”

She allowed Draco to lead her back to the exit.

“I can see if Theo’s in his office. I’m sure he’d be more than willing to supervise,” she suggested.

Chuckling, Draco pulled open the door. “Nott is hardly what I’d call supervisor material.”

Hermione crossed her arms. She smirked. “I can see if Katie’s in if you fancy another uncomfortable reunion.”

He scowled and motioned toward the hall with his head.

Hermione’s smirk widened, coming to rest in a full grin. “Theo it is, then.”

She took the few steps to his office with Draco grumbling at her back. Ignoring him, Hermione knocked and pushed open the door.

Theo sat at his corner desk. He had an array of tools scattered on the surface and a pieced-apart Time Turner at the centre.

He briefly turned, eyeing the intruders. “Lucky gits. I just bagged the sand. Ten seconds earlier and we might have been whisked away to Merlin knows where.”

Hermione chuckled as she approached. “You’ll never guess what we found in storage.”

Theo’s attention was back down at his desk. “If it’s mine and potentially incriminating, I’d rather you keep the information to yourself.”

She set down her wand next to his hand. She watched Theo turn to it and his brow twitch.

“Is that-”

“My wand,” she finished for him before pulling it back against her chest. “It was Draco’s thought that the Ministry raided the Manor after the war. It’s been here in the Department of Mysteries all this time! Can you believe it?”

He spun in his chair. “That’s brilliant, Granger.”

“I know!” she cheered. “But that’s not all... We located Snape’s journals from Hogwarts. We think there could be a connection to Draco’s memories and the dragon heartstring.”

“*She* thinks,” Draco said, stepping in at her side. “I’m still sceptical. There’s thousands of them in circulation. If it’s a specific wand, I’m still royally fucked.”

She huffed and turned on him. “Are you so sceptical that you wouldn’t at least try?”

He rolled his eyes, though the slight quirk at the corner of his lips gave his enjoyment away. “Have you forgotten how poorly your little experiments have gone for me already?”

“Don’t be such a child!” she chided and dangled her wand out front between her pinched fingers.

He deftly grabbed it from her. He drew a tight fist around the base as Theo leapt up from his chair.

“I’m usually all for experimental magic but how about we take this a few steps to the left here— *away* from the temperamental Time Turners.”

Hermione snorted. She took Draco by the elbow and forced him to stand at the centre of the room.

“Go on,” she goaded. “We’re waiting.”

He muttered under his breath before raising Hermione’s wand, “Bloody Unspeakables and their complete disregard for human life.”

“Get on with it, you pretentious git!” Theo bellowed.

Draco sent him a glare before returning focus to the task at hand. He cleared his throat and directed the tip of the wand higher overhead. “*Lumos Maxima!*”

As light burst from the tip of her wand, a sudden burning started at her neck. It cascaded up her spine and spidered across her skull.

Hermione cried out at once. “Stop! Stop!” she pleaded, holding her head between her hands.

Even as the light died out, the burning continued. Draco took her shoulders between his hands and examined her face. “What- what is it?” he asked.

Theo was there. He took the wand from Draco and turned it over in his hand. He ran a diagnostic with his own wand, frowning at the reading.

“It’s an ordinary wand,” he said, and the diagnostic faded. “It doesn’t appear to have been tampered with.”

“Did it work?” Hermione moaned, clutching her head.

She looked up into Draco’s eyes. He shrugged before releasing her. “I don’t feel anything. Perhaps a little more pain than usual across my ribs, but nothing else has changed as far as I can tell.”

She groaned again. Her fingers prodded through her hair to relieve the pain. “I hadn’t considered,” she started, her voice trailing off. “This was silly. I should’ve known...”

Draco frowned and shook his head. “Known what?” he asked.

Hermione released a breath, rolling her shoulders back. “It’s all connected somehow—the bond, your memories—to what, we don’t know, but there’s blood magic involved here, too.”

“For Salazar’s sake, Granger. Spit it out,” Draco demanded.

Her head felt light as the burning continued. “I tampered with the bond,” she managed. “Indirectly, yes, but it was *my* wand. I’m not your soulmate—the blood magic’s fighting back. Fuck, it hurts!”

When she started to sway, Theo grabbed her arms. “What’s all that mean?”

“I don’t know!” she unintentionally snapped; the pain ran too deep to ignore. “I need to lie down... I need a pain potion, something, anything!”

Theo guided her to the floor, propping her up against a table leg. From the corner of her eye she watched Draco rummage through Theo’s cabinets.

When he returned, he unstopped a vial and handed it to her. She took it down in a single swallow before pushing the vial aside.

Draco knelt next to her. “I’m sorry, Granger. I’m- I never meant for you to get messed up in all this too.”

She weakly laughed, closing her eyes and leaning her head against the chair to her right. “Why are you apologising? It was my idea.”

Draco didn’t respond immediately. She heard him breathing, fast and strained. On the other side of her legs, Theo remained silent.

“We’ll go back into my past,” Draco finally said.

Hermione popped open one eye. Confusion struck her face as she looked him over.

“We have to end this. We need to know—everything, all of it. We can’t carry on this way not knowing what other damage we might be causing.”

Her other eye opened and both sprung wide before they lowered.

Hermione nodded once. “Okay.”

Draco mimicked the gesture. “Okay.”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

She's going for Sunday updates now, folks. Seems to be suiting my schedule best. Cheers to all for the comments, kudos, and love, over all.

And as always... my goddess and saviour, forgive_me_severus — what would I do without you? *tears up*

Follow me on ig @ vannminner for story update info.

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

You might notice I jacked up the chapter count on this story by one. That's because I split chapter twelve into two separate scenes but for a very good reason. That being said, upon starting chapter 12.5, please read the author's note to avoid confusion.

Thank you to all for the kudos, comments, love and support!

Also, my bright and shining star, FMS, has been spending time with family this week so this chapter will be reviewed better at a later date. She more than deserved a break but I still wanted to make sure I made my weekly update.

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Twelve -

Was it the head splitting migraine or the meal she was forced to share with one Lucius Malfoy that had her mood dampened? Hermione couldn't be certain but both were certainly off-putting.

"Are you sure you're alright, Miss Granger?" Narcissa asked for the second time since they'd sat down.

"An occupational hazard, but I'll be fine. The food should help."

She smiled. Narcissa's cheeks pillowed beneath her magnetic blue eyes and she nodded. "Good. Well, I'm glad."

Truthfully, Hermione hadn't the heart to admit she'd only managed a few bites. As everyone ate with their eyes directed down at their table settings, a white lie was as much for Narcissa as it was for Theo and Draco who'd sat across from her.

They hadn't handled her 'health scare' well. Neither were particularly motivated to put her through time travel on top of it, but with Draco's blessing- the time was now.

Hermione wholeheartedly agreed.

They'd treaded carefully up until this point, and yet they still struck disaster at every turn. All they'd unveiled were more questions—more problems needing solutions. Meanwhile, they collectively knew every answer could be found in Draco's past, as dangerous as it might be to revisit.

"It's unfortunate you were hurt," Narcissa's voice came again. "You've been very generous with your time. I do appreciate you assisting Draco, given all your other responsibilities at the Ministry."

Meeting her eyes, Hermione shrugged. "It's only a headache."

Another white lie, and perhaps further from the truth than her last attempt.

Pain coursed through her shoulders. It embedded deep in her bones. A scorching heat consumed her entire skull, scrambling her mind and most rational thoughts. It was, however, easier to manage than it had been in the direct aftermath. If this was anything similar to what Draco had been experiencing, *Merlin* did she pity him.

"Soul magic is finicky," Narcissa continued. "I studied it in my spare time in my early twenties. I was always intrigued by how the soul could mimic life. It has its own heart, its own thoughts... Anyway, as I said, it's intriguing."

Hermione pushed a bite of collard greens past her teeth. She chewed through a deep breath, holding a wave of sudden nausea at bay.

"Were you and Lucius soul-bound?" she asked, grateful for the thought to create her own distraction.

Hermione watched Draco flinch across from her. She wondered if it was because she'd dared to use his name, or perhaps he was more surprised she'd chosen to acknowledge his father at all. Either way, Draco appeared tense as he barricaded his arms around his plate.

Narcissa dabbed her lips with her serviette before setting it down. "We were. It's tradition for both the Blacks and the Malfoys to seal their unions with a bonding ceremony."

Placing her fork aside, Hermione leaned forward, facing Narcissa directly. "Did you have the bond examined after?"

"We did," she replied with an easy toothless grin.

"What did you find, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Not at all," Narcissa began. "You see, at the time very few had taken the time to research soul-bonds. Ours was similar to a tether—a gold strand of magic leading from heart to heart."

Hermione's brow pinched. "When you say heart?"

"The centre of the soul. The brightest part."

“Fascinating... That's what we refer to as a central line,” Hermione remarked, turning her eyes back to her plate.

At the other end of the table, Lucius cleared his throat. “What can you tell us about my son's bond? Is it direct?”

Hermione couldn't help but laugh. As she did, she covered her mouth with an open hand and shook her head. “Gods, no... Draco's is a nest of tethers - as you call them. They're deeply intertwined. It's been difficult to make sense of it all.”

Lucius' head raised. “You suspect dubious intent?”

She felt Draco's stare burn into her cheek but she refused to meet his eyes.

“It's still a consideration, yes. I've ruled nothing out.”

Her response appeared to have been the right one. From her peripherals, she watched Draco release a breath. His shoulders deflated, tension escaping into the air around him.

With his lips pursed, Lucius was silent for a moment. He looked Hermione over as she dutifully stared right back.

“Tell me, Miss Granger, why did you choose to dedicate your time to understanding soul magic? Surely with your reputation the Ministry would have hired you for any department of your choosing.”

Hermione pulled her hands into her lap and straightened. “Would you want me to respond even if my answer might upset you?”

His lips quirked to the side; a single brow arched. “I welcome it,” he rasped.

“Very well,” she said.

Hermione's head bowed. Her hand lifted from her lap and splayed on the table beside her plate.

“I want to prove that Muggle-borns are entitled to their magic—that it wasn't stolen from others, and that our magic derived from the same place as everyone else's.”

Lucius' smirk expanded. “And have you—found a way to prove it, that is?”

Hermione took a casual sip of wine from her glass. After returning it to the table, she smiled. “I've learned more than I expected in two short years. Similar to wands, the soul has a core- a heart, as Narcissa said, and that's where our magic is stored. It's always there—always will be... You're born with magic and the soul carries on with it after the body is lost. It's neither created nor destroyed.”

“What about squibs?” Draco asked.

Beside him, Theo scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Salazar's sake, mate. Don't get her started...”

“Squibs are fascinating, but my knowledge about soul transference is quite limited,” said Hermione. “There’s a theory that the soul is inherited. There’s another that states your soul is a combinational gift of sorts from your biological parents. Because we can’t yet trace a soul after death, and only understand its bodily departure from what we can see with our eyes, it’s hard to hypothesize which conditions lead to being born without magic.”

Draco didn’t appear satisfied. His frown deepened. “Do ghosts have souls?”

Hermione shook her head. “None that can be examined.”

“And believe her, she’s tried,” added Theo.

Despite the glare she sent him, Hermione continued. “It’s my own personal theory that a ghost is still tethered to their soul, but that it exists on a different proverbial plane of sorts.”

Narcissa hummed, now sitting higher in her chair than she had before. “A soul-bond to the creature itself... An anchor, perhaps?”

Hermione grinned. “In a way, yes! It really is fascinating to think about. There is so much to learn about the soul- its possible connections to the body, other souls, the mind and to different types of magic-”

“Types of magic, you say?” Lucius questioned, perking up as well.

Hermione did a quick check on her mental shields before nodding. “Yes, I- well, though I haven’t risked it myself, you could—theoretically—interact with the soul with light or dark magic, or, possibly... blood magic, I suppose.”

A slow, wide grin spread across Lucius’ cheeks. “The Malfoys are well-vested in Blood Magic. Though you’re a bright witch, I’m sure you’ve done your research... But tell me, Miss Granger... What do you suppose the benefits could be to combining both soul and blood magic?”

This time when she felt Draco’s stare, Hermione turned to him. She couldn’t help it. And for as brief as the look they shared was, when her attention circled back to Lucius, she knew they’d planted the seed. Curiosity bloomed behind his silver irises. His eyes filtered between the pair of them. Only Theo had been clever enough to look away.

“I’m afraid I haven’t given it much thought,” Hermione finally replied, swallowing thickly.

“Humor me now then,” his voice came again. “Entertain us with your theories.”

She bit her cheek, eyes drifting to the ceiling in thought. “Blood magic could allow ownership over the soul, I suppose. A type of sacrifice that wouldn’t be surrendered until the time in which death called.”

“Interesting. Vague, but interesting, nonetheless,” Lucius drawled. “I suppose I have a theory of my own. Would you be interested in hearing it?”

Her brows touched to her hairline and she offered a short nod.

“Our family utilises Blood Magic as a way of maintaining our generational wealth. Our property, our contracts, inheritances, vaults, etcetera... One might use blood magic to veil themselves in the body of another as we do with our estate.”

She shook her head. “I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

Lucius’ tongue clicked against the roof of his mouth as his hand sought purchase over his cane. “Take Draco, for example. If someone wanted access to his inheritance or blood rights - masking their soul with his would be a thoroughly effective way to do so.”

From further down the table, Draco snorted. “You know how hard it was to convince the Greengrass’ to sign the betrothal agreement. You really think someone was willing to shackle themselves to my soul for a few galleons and a home in France?”

Lucius directed his attention to Draco fully. “But a theory, son. Though, I do hope you and Miss Granger work out the truth soon. Preferably before the end of the month. Victor Bullstrode is quite intrigued by the prospect of a union with our family at long last.”

Hermione watched Draco’s hands tighten into fists. He buried them beneath the table before flashing Narcissa an apologetic sort of look. It hit Hermione square in the gut. This multifaceted wizard was unlike what she expected, and he proved it to her daily. Most recently, in the form of unspoken words shared between mother and son.

“The Malfoys have and always will ensure their standing in the Wizarding World.”

Her brown eyes lowered, turned away now from Narcissa and her son. She felt her lips quirk in distaste. “And by that you mean blood superiority?”

“Don’t make assumptions, Hermione. It doesn’t suit you or your esteemed intelligence,” Lucius responded.

The sound of her name on his tongue was unpleasant. She felt her blood run cold. The ache in her head increased, shoulders pulsing with pain.

“The Malfoys have taken many measures over the years to guarantee the extension of our family line. If you don’t believe that’s involved procreation outside of the pure-blood lines, you’d be incorrect.”

“What Lucius is saying,” Narcissa cut in, clearing her throat. “Is that families like ours—as old as ours—have many measures in place to ensure the next generation comes to light, and it certainly does extend beyond blood.”

Hermione arched her brow. “Such as?”

“Curious how this information might impact the tests you’re conducting on my son, or do you have other reasons for asking?” said Lucius.

Draco stood. His hands held at his sides. Theo took the queue and raised from his chair beside him.

“We have reading to attend to,” he announced stiffly.

“A friendly conversation, Draco. There’s no need to be dramatic,” Lucius stated flippantly, mirth still evident across his pale features.

“Thank you for dinner,” Hermione said instead. “And for the history lesson. I’ll admit my curiosity was biased. It has very little to do with Draco and more to do with your family’s legacy.”

Narcissa waved her off, a small pained smile pulling at her cheeks. “You’re welcome to our home anytime and free to ask whatever questions you like.”

Hermione rose from her chair. She stiffened as Lucius also lifted into his feet. He leaned into his cane, rounding the corner of the table and approaching her slowly.

She didn’t look away. She met his unwavering stare.

“I know our history is tainted for you,” Lucius started. “I’m not proud of every decision made, but I am proud of how long my family has continued to thrive despite the uncertainty of magic throughout the centuries. So tell me, Miss Granger, is there anything you wouldn’t do for your family?”

Her eyes lowered; lips pursed. “No,” she stated clearly, and with the sharp snap of finality. “There are no limits to what I’d do for those I care about.”

He smirked, turning away. “I sensed we had that in common- amongst other things, of course.”

Lucius offered nothing further as he strode from the room. Narcissa appeared apologetic as she followed close to his back. By the time he’d disappeared from site, Theo and Draco were at Hermione’s side.

“That was... *odd*,” Theo said.

“It’s my father. Have you ever known him to be any other way?”

Theo snorted while Hermione’s head tipped to the side in thought. “He knows something... He was leading.”

“He *thinks* he knows something,” Draco corrected her. “Forget about him. Let’s head up to the study.”

She trailed a good distance behind as they made the walk to the second floor. All the while, Hermione couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something of importance in what Lucius had unveiled to them.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter is written from Theo's POV. The scene wasn't originally intended to be told this way but I was presented with a unique opportunity I couldn't turn down.

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Thirteen -

Something happened between the two idiots he called friends; Theo was certain of it.

Unfortunately, due to Granger's affinity for tampering with Draco's soul, he hadn't the opportunity to separate the two of them since leaving the office. Between nursing her migraine and fueling up before their journey back to the past, his pending interrogation had stalled.

The tension between the idiots, however, was palpable, and it consumed every ounce of Theo's attention.

After she'd sat in the wingback by the fire, he watched Draco conjure her a glass of water. Hermione smiled at him, eyes lifting. It was a polite and friendly gesture but Theo couldn't help but read into it more. It wasn't as if Granger was throwing out smiles like that his way.

Then there was what came next.

Draco lowered to his knees at her side. His hand came down on the armrest near her hand. He tapped a single finger against her wrist and beckoned her eyes up to his face.

"You sure you're up for this?" he asked.

Hermione shrugged. "If you're ready, I'm ready."

Theo rolled his eyes. He tipped back the finger of Basilisk Brandy from his glass before slamming it down on the bar cart, rattling the glass decanters and demanding their full attention.

“What’s all this then, hmm?” Theo demanded.

He approached; arms wide with his hands curved over his hips. Draco remained on his knees. His body turned toward him, while Hermione was more attentive in her stare. Her brow knit and her eyes followed him to a stop at the centre of the room.

“What’s what?” Draco asked, a hint of passivity wavering in his voice.

“You know exactly what I’m referring to. Don’t play daft,” he baited and dragged a pointed finger between the two. “You’ve been getting on better, sure, but *this* is different. Something’s happened and I want to know what.”

Hermione’s arms crossed. “Nothing happened.”

“He got you water. He invited you to dinner, and with his parents in attendance no less, and now he’s fawning over you like a precious family heirloom. It’s fucking adorable, but I still want to know why!”

Draco returned to his feet, a definitive scowl pulling at his lips. “Granger was injured and because of the mess *we* dragged her in to. The least I can do is offer her a bite before time-travel.”

“Bollocks,” Theo deadpanned. “You never cared about any of that shite before. Especially not where Granger is concerned. In fact, I think you got off on pretending there was no obvious chemistry between the two of you. Same as you did at Hogwarts, really...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Draco barked.

Theo grinned, teasing him behind an arched brow. “Oh, just a certain pure-blooded mate of mine always going out of his way to land a dig at Granger’s expense.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Draco sighed. “If this is your way of trying to drag something out of me—it’s not going to work.”

Theo pouted and his arms fell at his sides. “You’re no fun, the both of you! You go off on your own secret adventures and only call me in when it’s time to clean up your messes.”

“That’s not true! You’re here now, aren’t you?” Hermione failed to assure him.

“Only because you need my Time Turners,” he mumbled. “All I’m saying is, don’t expect any further help from me if you’re planning another solo trip to Scotland.”

Draco shook his head. “Have you finished?”

“No,” Theo winged. “I haven’t. My best friends are keeping secrets from me! If you’ll recall, I’m the reason you’re both in this together. If it weren’t for me you’d have been shipped off to some experimental healer who’d be happy to sever your soul straight from your body. I saved your life! And for that, I should be rewarded.”

“You’re being dramatic,” Draco tutted dryly.

Hermione pushed herself from the chair and came to stand at Draco's side. "If we're going to do this tonight, now's the time. You can continue your sputtering later, Theo."

"You're certain your head's alright?" Draco asked.

"Much better," Hermione said, and gave him another one of her rare toothy grins.

Theo glared. It was as if they were behaving like this simply to get a rise out of him. He chose to spare them of his comments; curiosity about what they might discover tonight bested his desire to harass them further.

"You've got your tonics?" he asked instead.

Draco patted his trouser pocket.

"You should take a preemptive pain potion just to be safe," said Hermione.

The smirk Draco sent her bordered on flirtatious. "Already done it."

Salazar, spare me, Theo thought.

"Alright," he huffed. "We're all medicated, fed and liquored up. Now's time to go over my alterations."

"Lovely," Hermione deadpanned. "I was feeling *especially* daring this evening."

Theo ignored her. "I added a silencing charm since Malfoy here appears to enjoy adding to my shoe collection."

Draco merely glared in response and Theo went on.

"I've also altered my intention spell... In order to prevent more *unnecessary* galavanting around the castle, we should find ourselves within a five metre radius of Snape's experiment on the twenty-third of February."

"You don't think we're better off tailing younger Draco again? He'd lead us where we need to be." Hermione said.

"Not if we're ruling out Snape and his journal entries. One task at a time," Theo replied.

She didn't question him, but the slight quirk of her lips said she was still skeptical. Whatever had happened to Granger during the wand mishap earlier must've shaken her up good. She rarely sat out an opportunity to debate his plans. Her compliance only sought to extend his own curiosity further.

"Anything else?" Draco inquired.

Theo shook his head. He pulled the Time Turner from his pocket and presented it by its chain in a tight fist. "Anyone fancy a trip to sixth year?"

While Hermione smirked, Draco's expression remained passive. Both stepped forward to create a circle with Theo.

Their heads knocked, both avoided each other's eyes.

As Theo lifted the chain around their necks, he laughed. "So... who tried to kiss who?"

Neither had the chance to reply. He'd set back the dial on the Time Turner and the trio was quickly whisked away.

Before the room came into view there was the sound of simultaneous groans. Two, in unison "*fucks!*" followed.

He turned his gaze to the room at large - a darkened office made of white stone, a large mahogany desk, many bookshelves, a cupboard and a dated workstation.

They were in the Defence Against the Dark Arts tower; the top floor, if Theo had to guess. And there was young Draco before them... He had his head buried into a book as he sat beneath a standing lamp. He wrote line after line feverishly with his quill.

"You weren't kidding," Hermione moaned at Theo's side. "This is perfectly awful."

She held herself up against the wall while Draco had his back to them. He was crouched over his knees, turning vial after vial into his mouth.

"What's got you all bent out of shape?" Theo asked Granger.

She stood taller before wiping the sweat from her brow. "I don't know... I'm all mixed up in this now," she said, managing a quick breath as she looked around the room. "Why are we with Draco? I thought we were supposed to appear with Snape."

Theo shrugged. "There was always a chance Draco would be here too."

"Stop talking about me like I'm not right bloody here," present day Draco spat.

"It's not February either," Hermione pointed. "Look at the scone over the window- the tree."

Draco and Theo followed her finger to the pane. Both frowned.

Hermione sighed as she massaged the tips of her fingers into her skull. "There are buds on the beech tree. It's nearing full-bloom, which means this is mid to late Spring."

Draco coughed. He slammed a hand over his mouth. "I think I'm going to be sick..."

"Hold it in, mate," Theo said. "We've got company."

The door to the office had opened. Severus Snape strode in, cape wavering in the air behind him.

He approached young Draco; his face was stern but there was evident panic there too. "Bring that here," he demanded at a lull.

Draco stood from the floor. He slid the book onto the workstation in front of Snape.

"I recognize that," present-day Draco remarked. "The tiny book with the gold markings."

"It's the same one I saw you use the last time we travelled to the past," Hermione explained.

Draco snorted, swaying slightly on his feet. "I wouldn't remember that now, would I?"

"Because you fainted," Theo said and added a grin for good measure.

"Sod off, Nott."

"I'm sorry, but is no one else concerned that we're three months ahead of the bonding Snape documented in his notes?" Hermione asked; her arms folded over her chest.

"It could be the intention spell," Theo explained. "Perhaps the date I used conflicted with my charms?"

"Would you both turn off your sodding brains and listen!" Draco demanded.

As they silenced, Snape's voice filtered in.

"-the heartstring and her blood are the last items needed."

Young Draco growled in response. "You act as if it's simple to navigate the castle after curfew. I'm here myself by pure luck alone."

Faster than Theo could process, Snape had Draco bared by the collar. He brought his face in close as he sneered. "I understand the pressure you're under Draco but another childish complaint and I will leave you to deal with this on your own. I've already followed through on my part."

Draco shook, but Snape's grip maintained. "You completed the bond but it's our minds and our memories putting us all at risk now! You don't think the Dark Lord won't kill you the same as me if he finds you've turned over my soul to a Muggle Born?"

Severus shoved Draco backwards when he released him. "Petulant child... For all your combined intelligence you're the most ignorant pair I've ever been forced to save."

"Get on with it- the sigil," Draco said, voice lifting with urgency.

Turning to his cupboard, Snape pulled out a worn leather journal and the tome Theo recognized from Draco and Hermione's first trip to Hogwarts.

Snape turned through the pages in his journal before setting it down on the table. “This is what I’ve come up with—a six prong symbol encasing a draconic rune. It will link directly to the wand’s core, binding all memories associated with her and her magic. The same will apply for your own wand and her.”

“How do we go about reversing it?” Draco asked. “If we somehow survive this mess, how will we remove the sigil?”

Snape reached into his pocket and revealed four small vials. “With the same blood magic used to bind your thoughts- bit of blood and an incantation.”

“And if you die?”

“Feeling hopeful?” Snape asked, a comedic glint shining in his eye. “This is your cousin’s creation. She’ll have the means to reverse the binding.”

Draco’s eyes lowered. “And if she’s dead too?”

His eyes gave a brief roll. “Simply engaging with your thoughts will be painful but the bond will unravel over time. A shared spell, intimacy-”

“But how will even know I’m meant to find her if neither you or Tonks are here to tell me to do it?” Draco snapped, his voice but an angry whisper.

Snape’s expression was closed off. “You won’t.”

“Merlin, that’s some sick irony there,” Theo remarked.

When no one responded—or laughed, which they should have—Theo turned over his shoulder to find Hermione leaned heavily against a bookshelf. Her face had paled considerably. Lines creased her forehead and the corners of her eyes. Across from her, Draco was still alert, watching Snape and his younger self while his posture remained pained.

“*Where is Tonks?*” Theo heard young Draco’s voice lift behind him.

“We need to leave,” Hermione whispered, near begging as she moaned. “*I need to leave... I can't be here! Some- something's wrong. I- it hurts...*”

In that moment—as if lights shown down on him from the sky above and a vibrant chorus sang—*everything* came together. Theo fitted the pieces into their final place and he unveiled the complete and shocking truth.

As Hermione pushed off the bookshelf and slowly approached him, he figured out what his two idiot friends had not. They’d spent weeks, full days and countless hours searching for an answer.

Theo only wished he’d figured it all out before Hermione doubled over her knees and vomited on his new shoes.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Fourteen

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Fourteen -

He'd lifted himself from the couch before the room around him came into view. His vision was spotty. The walls appeared to sway. He didn't care. Draco teetered his way toward the door, reaching out with his hands to catch himself should he fall.

"Wait a minute, mate! Where are you going?"

Theo had suddenly materialised in front of him. Draco blinked to clear the dual image of him swimming in slow motion. His shaggy brown hair and pleading eyes, Draco took hold of Theo's shoulders and pushed him out of the way.

"What about Granger?" Theo asked.

He froze. Her name was like a bell chiming in his head- A memory he couldn't reach. Another variable in this fucked up situation he was forced into. Draco froze with his hand on the doorknob before turning over his shoulder.

Hermione was seated on the edge of the love seat. Her head hung between her knees. The ends of her chaotic curls touched the floor, swaying against and circling the hardwood. Draco would assume she was dead were it not for the laboured rise and fall of her back.

"Granger," he called to her gruffly. "Can you walk?"

She groaned. As she lifted her head, she covered her eyes with an open hand. "Can and *want to* are vastly different operatives..."

"To my room- you can lie down there."

"What's the hurry?" Theo asked.

Draco ignored him. He pushed open the door and called over his shoulder, "Help her up."

The darkened hall was easier on his eyes than the lights in the study. His head cleared enough to remember the vials stashed in his pockets. Tipping one back after another, he vanished the glass as he reached his room. With a quick flick of his wand Draco had the lights dimmed and he crossed the floor to the trunk stationed at the foot of his bed.

He heard their footsteps nearing as he buried his head in the trunk. Old textbooks were cast aside: random notebooks, miscellaneous dorm decor, embellished jumpers and scarves. All rubbish, in this particular instance.

Finally, he found it - a journal no larger than a legal pad. The cover was green, made of worn leather.

"It was a matchbox when I first saw it," Hermione explained softly from somewhere at his back.

Theo had a tight grip around her arm as she lowered to the floor. She was on her knees beside Draco, peering over the bend in his arm to better view the journal.

"You lit a match, made some sort of symbol in the air and it transformed into the journal," she explained. "You used it to contact your soulmate."

Across from them, Theo was leaning against the corner post on Draco's bed. His arms and legs were casually crossed. He smiled idly up at the ceiling.

"Finding enjoyment in our pain or do you have something you'd like to share with the class?" Draco asked; his teeth grit.

Theo's lips pursed, curling downward as he shook his head. "No, no. Go on. I'm only here to observe."

Draco let his glare linger for a moment longer before turning down to the book between hands. Quickly scanning through the pages, there was line after line of print. His handwriting layered between perfect feminine script.

"Well that's disappointing..." Theo grumbled.

"What?" Hermione asked.

Draco continued turning pages.

"The blank pages... Surely I thought we'd prove my theory soon."

"What theory?" Draco barked.

At the same time Hermione snatched the journal from his hands. "What do you mean *blank* pages?"

A slow smirk began to spread across Theo's cheek. "Interesting. Please continue," he sang.

The sound of frantic turning of pages drew Draco's attention back to Granger. Her knuckles turned white. Her eyes were impossibly wide.

"Times and locations to meet, mostly," Draco explained. "Bit of back and forth. I can read it to you and perhaps we can infer what house they were in at least. Maybe we had shared classes."

"I- I don't understand..." she hissed.

Hermione lost her grip on the journal as she took her head between her hands.

Fishing around his pockets, Draco withdrew another pain potion. He held out the vial to her and she slapped it away.

"You absolute dolt!" she cried.

"What?" he recoiled in surrender.

"Theo can't read the journal but *I* can!"

Draco scoffed. "Bollocks."

"This- *this* is my handwriting!"

"Again I repeat, *bollocks*."

"It is! But- but why?" Another moan escaped her lips. "Godric, save me... This burning in my head... Gods! I can't think!"

Theo cleared his throat. As he stood, he straightened his jacket, smoothing the lines from the fabric.

He strutted to Hermione's side, humming softly to himself. "If I may," he said before fisting her hair and holding it high above her head.

Theo grinned, brows lifting with mirth.

"As I thought," he stated pointedly.

"Would you bugger off? Let go of me!" Hermione demanded.

Theo ignored her, pulling her hair further aside and forcing her head down. "Think you're going to want to see this, mate."

On his knees, Draco came around to Hermione's side. His eyes mapped her jaw and lower to her neck, until like a punch to the nose, air caught painfully in his lungs.



A brand. A mark. A sigil- jagged, orange and scarred, just like his. A single point... *his* unicorn, he recalled.

The mere thought had pain tearing across his chest.

Draco fell back on his hands and scrambled quickly away from her. Theo released her, and Hermione's eyes immediately found his. Brown burned into his grey as all the color washed from her cheeks.

"What? What is it?" she asked.

His head erratically shook. "Im-impossible."

"What's impossible? Explain it to me!"

Theo lowered to her side. He tapped a finger against Hermione's chin. "As it turns out, dearest Granger, the soulmate we've been looking for is *you*."

She laughed, and at a pitch that would scare most school children. "You're mad! Completely and absolutely mental!"

"You're branded," Theo replied.

Her forehead creased with many lines and her jaw wavered. "No, I'm- of course not... A side effect, surely. I-I tampered with his bond it's- no. I'm not! I'm certain of it."

Theo's brow arched. "And the handwriting only you can see?"

A strangled sort of noise escaped her throat but she said nothing further. All the while, Draco stared, trying to make sense of it all. He had everything in front of him now, and *Salazar's sake*, it fit. It did.

Theo continued, softer and kinder now, "And the burning, the matching wand cores, the purely coincidental interest in soul magic..."

Hermione's hands shook as she lifted the journal from the floor.

"I- I'm not. You've got it all wrong! There has to be some other sort of explanation!"

Theo didn't respond. He reached out to place a hand on her shoulder but she shrunk away. Hermione rose to her feet, journal in hand, and began erratically turning through pages.

"The third of November ninety-five. January of ninety-six... There are years- literal *years* of meetings. Meetings and exchanges... No, this can't be right!"

Draco fought back a wave of nausea, covering his mouth. Theo pushed off the trunk and placed his hands over Granger's.

"It's still a mystery," he said. "There's something to solve. Focus on that - the job isn't done yet."

"But I..." she stumbled, eyes welling with tears.

"Why the soul-bond?" Theo asked. "The memories I understand, but as we learned today, Draco soul bonded first.. And as a means to protect you."

Draco finally found his voice. It came out dry and strangled. "Enough, Theo... We- we've had enough for now."

"S'only a question..."

"We need a minute. Give us a minute to think- to process."

Hermione laughed, brushing her tears aside. "I need a hell of a lot more than sixty seconds."

He joined in her laughter, and for the first time in hours the pain began to fade. "How 'bout a drink?"

She smirked. "How about two?"

Draco held her stare for a moment longer before turning to Theo. "Give us the night. We'll pick up where we left off tomorrow."

Theo blanched, dropping his jaw. "You're kicking me out? But I was right!"

He rolled his eyes. "We haven't proved anything with absolute certainty yet. Just give us the night. Granger and I need to talk."

"Fine, no reason mulling about where I'm not wanted," he grumbled as he headed for the door.

"Thank you, Theo," Hermione called after him. "For taking care of me- for everything."

He looked back at her, lips curling towards one cheek. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride."

H- Quidditch pitch after rounds?

D- I'll be there.

-

D- Doing something different with your hair? It looks dreadful.

H- The bloke I'm shagging won't keep his hands out of it.

D- Sounds like a git

H- He is.

-

D- I love you

H- I know

D- You infuriating witch! That's how you respond?

H- Thank you?

D- I'll just crawl into the forest. Surely something in there will end my suffering.

H- Don't do that. Though losing my first love to a pack of centaurs would make for a tragic addition to my autobiography.

D- Bloody insufferable woman.

H- You love me.

D- I've changed my mind.

-

D- Linger after your meeting tonight. I want to see you.

H- Don't be late.

-

D- I didn't know. I'm sorry. I promise I didn't know.

D- Respond please.

D- I swear I wouldn't do this to you. To me. I wouldn't. I care about you.

D- I'll search the archives at the manor. I'll find a way.

H- We need help.

-

D- Come to the office.

H- You trust him?

D- With my life. And more importantly, with yours. But that doesn't matter now. This is different. You'll be safe. There's no rush for you at all.

-

H- How are you feeling?

D- The same as always.

H- That bad?

D- You can't see me but I'm rolling my eyes. Only you would make jokes while our lives are up in flames.

H- At least we'll be warm.

D- There's something wrong with you.

-

H- I've given it a lot of thought.

D- Not an option. It's not safe.

H-Of it guarantees we find each other when this is over it's a risk I'm willing to take.

D- It was bloody painful. Worth it, but awful. When this is over, you're free to do as you like.

-

D- Okay.

H- To the bond?

D- Yes.

H- Something's happened?

-

D- Everything's read for you. She'll be here soon.

H- I'm scared.

D- Me too.

H- I love you.

D- I'm sorry

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Notes

Note: Rating change

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Fifteen -

Hermione sat across from him in the black leather wingback chair. Her head was turned, eyes lost to the arched window and the view of the front garden. The moon washed out her tanned complexion. She looked almost ethereal with the rings of pale light dancing across her face.

She hadn't spoken, and neither had he. He'd sent Mippy for whisky before the two retired to his sitting area. They now nursed their drinks, both lost in their own thoughts.

Draco knew he should say something. There was too much to discuss, but no words he could think of felt fitting. His own mind grappled with what they'd learned. Did he believe it? Even with all the facts presented to them, he felt sceptical. The questions Theo had thrown at them before he left only complicated the situation further.

And from what he understood, Hermione didn't yet believe it herself. He couldn't imagine it was easy to learn she was missing years of memories, and worst of all - bound her soul to his. An ex Death Eater. The school boy who berated and bullied her. It was him she should have vomited on, not Theo.

"If it's true," she whispered after long minutes of silence. "I think I'd deserve it. Call it karma for my own wrong doings."

He frowned, shaking his head. "That's why you're upset?"

Hermione's eyes pulled away from the window. She met his stare as she bit the inside of her cheek. "You're not upset?"

Shrugging, he sipped his whisky before setting the glass on the end table. "I'm confused. Shocked, really... It's hard to believe something you don't remember."

She nodded idly but said nothing.

"What type of karma are you referring to?" he asked.

Hermione reeled in a breath. Her knee bounced. "I removed my parents' memories only to learn I might be missing years worth of my own."

Diverting his gaze, Draco drummed his fingers against the arm of the chair. "If it makes you feel better, if this is the truth of it, then you likely removed your own long before you *Obliviated* their's. Could've been why you decided it was the best course of action to keep them safe."

Hermione merely hummed. She sipped her drink.

"Why didn't you restore their memories? You said they were happy but their happiness wasn't dependent on you. You could've inserted yourself into their new lives and then they could have both."

"It's complicated," she offered.

Draco snorted. "More complicated than the situation we've found ourselves in now?"

She smirked before finishing off her whisky and setting it aside. "Fair enough."

"You don't have to explain if you don't want to," he added. "I was only curious."

Pushing up from the chair, Hermione turned to him. She leaned against the window sill with her hands clasped. "It wasn't as simple as restoring their memories. I changed who they were when I sent them to Australia. I gave them new identities, a new life, and they moved on, as I wanted them too."

"You were afraid they'd lose the new parts of them if you restored their thoughts?"

She shook her head, lips pursing. "Not necessarily. As I said, it's complicated. When I went to visit them with the plan to return their memories, they weren't alone. They'd moved on."

Draco frowned. "I don't understand."

"They had a daughter. A baby. That intrinsic, parental part of them, it couldn't be masked by magic."

He sighed, bracing his fingers into his forehead. "You didn't want to put them in a position to feel like they had to choose."

Hermione shrugged. "Their lives are in Australia, and mine is here."

"That's- what I'm trying to say is- you did the right thing."

She smiled, small and sad. "I know," she whispered.

He watched as Hermione polished off her drink. Draco rose from his chair and took the glass from her hand.

"Another?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I should probably keep my wits about me if we're to figure out what our next moves are."

"Tomorrow."

Her brow arched. "What?"

"Tomorrow," he said again. "We can deal with this tomorrow. You look tired."

Her cheeks turned a lovely but vibrant shade of red. Hermione quickly shielded her face behind an open hand, seemingly trying to scrub away the fatigue or the embarrassment.

"Tired, but still beautiful," he reiterated.

Her hand fell away, blush darkening. Draco chuckled as her lips parted in shock.

"I- I should go," she said in a rush.

He stepped back politely. "Walk you to the Floo?"

"Please..."

With a barely-there hand on her lower back, he guided Hermione to the door. He grabbed the knob and went to turn it when she spun to face him.

"Wait..." she breathed, her wide eyes looking panicked.

Her gaze slowly filtered up his chest until she met his stare.

Taking a cautious step back, her shoulders pushed into the door, holding it closed. "Before I go, I'd like to try something."

He felt his brow twitch with perplexion.

"Kiss me," she requested calmly.

"What?"

"If you want to... Only if you want to. I'm- it's a hypothesis, I suppose?"

He chuckled, head turning from side to side. "A hypothesis?"

She merely shrugged.

“That’s what every bloke wants to hear before snogging a pretty witch.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Will you do it or not?”

“Oh, I’ll be your hypothesis, Granger, but don’t expect it to draw out any conclusions other than how long I’ve wanted to do this.”

Slowly, incredibly slowly—he should be rewarded for his restraint—Draco’s touch trailed up her sleeve. He curled a hand around the back of her neck, fingers threading through her curls.

He then lowered down to her. Breathing against her lips, he waited, suspended a hair’s width apart. Draco watched her eyes meet his before drifting close. Only then did he move in.

Tentative, sweet, soft—a type of kiss he hadn’t employed in ages, if ever. His lips wrapped around her bottom one before taking the top. He kissed the corners of her mouth, her chin and cheeks, and returned to her lips once more.

Hermione’s hand crept up to his chest. Fingers gripped his shirt in a tight fist.

Something about this—the kiss, him towering over her, her back pressed into something solid—was familiar. It was as if they’d found themselves in this position a hundred times before.

Now testing his own theory, he moved closer to her. He trapped her hips below his. His hand left her hair and descended until his fingers brushed the curve of her waist.

She moaned. As she did, her lips parted. Draco seized the opening, tasting her tongue with his.

Suddenly, however, she was gone. Hermione pushed him off of her in a single strong action. She slipped to the side, running her back along the wall. Her hand covered her mouth as she looked at him with rounded doe eyes.

“We’ve done this before,” she gasped. “I can see it- in my mind I can see it! You were younger- I don’t know where we were, but it was you and me. I could feel it in the way you kissed me, it wasn’t the first time!”

He watched her eyes begin to shine in the overhead sconce as they filled with tears.

“Hypothesis verified?” he asked.

The tears slipped onto her cheeks.

“Please don’t cry,” he stated on a short sigh. “I’m sorry, Granger. If I’d known-”

“What have we done, Draco?” she cried. “What have we done?”

His head shook erratically as his shoulders raised. “I don’t-”

“I don’t remember you, but my body does... The way you touched my waist, your fingers in my hair... What have we done?”

Dragging a hand through his own hair, Draco released a breath. His arms fell limply at his sides. “You should go home and get some rest. We’ll work through it tomorrow when we’ve had more time to process.”

“No!” she shouted, causing his eyes to widen.

“You don’t want to rest?”

“I don’t want to go home!” she defended. “I can’t! Don’t you feel it- the ache in your chest? It’s like there’s something moving under my skin.”

His jaw wavered. “You’re scared, overwhelmed-”

“Of course I’m scared, but it’s more than that!”

She closed the distance between them. Her hands tentatively lifted to rest on his shoulders and she looked him dead in the eyes.

“I’ve done this before,” she whispered.

Her fingers ascended his neck and tangled in the short hairs at the back of his head.

“And this,” she continued.

Draco closed his eyes, her fingers massaging his scalp. Her free hand grabbed his from down at their side. She brought it between them and held it against her chest.

He felt her lips brush his knuckles. The fingers in his hair circled around to his cheek, his nose, his chin. There was heavy intimacy, want, and the familiarity she’d mentioned.

He was fifteen in an empty classroom. Hermione’s hands caressed his face. Her legs tangled with his.

They were sixteen and there were stars overhead. An involuntary chill ran deep through his bones as if the room took on a winter’s night.

Something akin to a whimper escaped his throat. He should’ve been mortified, feeling his masculinity reduced to a series of desperate noises. And yet he didn’t care. As a tidal wave of emotions and sensations curled over his skin, he didn’t care about how he looked to her. All he could focus on were the images behind his eyes, remembering broken moments in a time where she’d touched him like this before.

“You feel it?” she panted.

He shook his head. Draco covered her hand with his over his cheek and his eyes reopened. “I see it.”

Tears flooded her eyes once more. He grabbed her around the waist, holding her close. Hermione's breathing heightened as he soothed his free hand through her hair.

"Please..." she pleaded and curled into his touch.

He knew exactly what she was asking for. Draco felt it too. Please hold me. Please touch me. Please help me remember.

Her eyes closed as his arm tightened over her hips. He pulled her hand from his face and set it between them on his chest. Her fingers instinctively curled into his shirt. Draco brought his hand back up to her face and traced her jaw.

He followed the curve of her face up to her ear. Brushing her hair back, he leaned forward and kissed her head, her nose, her neck. Draco breathed in her scent—the honeysuckle that was suddenly more familiar and alluring than it had been in weeks previous.

That thought made him laugh.

"What?" her voice shook.

She trembled as his tongue curled around the shell of her ear.

"Your perfume- when I first smelt it, it made me sick. Now I realise it was the bond, whatever this thing is between us... I feel like I missed it, like I've been desperate to smell it again."

Her head pressed into his chest, arms hugging him around the waist. She nodded against him. "I feel desperate, too, like some part of me has been dying to be held like this for ages."

Hermione's words sparked warmth across his waist. It burned low beneath his trousers and pants.

Now's not the time, he told himself.

They were amidst a discovery- testing a hypothesis, if you will. Their minds and bodies might be convinced they'd done this before but his more logical brain—the part that pined for her for long weeks—saw him scaring her away by moving too fast.

Draco shifted, stepping back to give her more room.

Hermione would have none of that, though. Her hand around his shirt tried yanking him closer.

"I feel it too," she promised. "Merlin, I want you... It's all so strange."

"I-I can't," he explained.

She chuckled and lifted to her toes, lips trailing his jaw. "I think you have before..."

"Doesn't matter," he stated gruffly.

“We won’t regret it- *I* won’t regret it,” she told him.

“Hermione...” he moaned.

Draco released her at once, freeing his shirt from her fist and his jaw from her lips. He brushed his hands over his front, trying to distract himself from the many sensations coursing through him.

“You’re trembling,” she pointed.

Looking up, he laughed. “You are, too.”

“I feel like something’s alive inside of me... There was always a piece of me that wanted you but this is more than that. I’m feeling things about you in a way I didn’t know I could.”

Draco frowned, lines creasing his forehead. “Feeling what?”

She smiled shyly. The dimples that rarely came to life on her face were there and very present. “Love, I think.”

Her response took him back. *Literally*. His shoulder collided with the corner post around his bed and his grey eyes popped wide.

Love?

Draco thought about it. There was warmth in his chest, a desperation to touch and be touched by her. He wanted to see her, feel her, smell and taste her. But there was also something softer there, too.

He wanted to wrap his arms around her and hold her against his chest. He wanted to look into Hermione’s brown eyes and make promises he couldn’t remember ever having uttered before.

He did. He wanted to love her. He *did* love her...

Holy shit.

“Maybe I should go,” she whispered, looking down at her feet.

Draco’s lips pursed. He could let her. He could escape the fear overwhelming him for one more night, and yet at the thought of watching her leave, he panicked. His side burned. His heart ached.

He shook his head, “No.”

Her eyes returned from the floor and pinned him to the post.

“No, don’t leave,” he reiterated.

Unsheathing his wand from his trouser pocket, Draco locked and warded the door. Another circular wave of his hand had the fire bursting to life amongst the hearth.

He set his wand down on the trunk at the foot of his bed before stepping toward her. The flames created a perfect orange halo around her hair. Even in the darkened room he could see the rise and fall of her chest. He could see the flushed colouring to her cheeks.

His hands tentatively found her hips but they didn't stop there. He curled his fingers beneath her top and started dragging it over head. Hermione's arms raised to help him along. The shirt was cast aside and her bra followed.

But he didn't touch her. Not yet. Salazar, help him, he wanted to. And yet something kept his hands at his sides and his eyes wandering her unveiled skin.

"Turn around," he requested.

Hermione dragged in a shaking breath before doing as he asked. He brushed her hair aside, throwing it over one shoulder before examining the mark on her neck. Softly, he took one finger and traced the brand—once, twice, three times—before covering it with his mouth.

He couldn't remember. The sensations he did have were a patch work of maybes and possibilities.

Draco's hands came around her front. He palmed her waist, fingers sliding upwards beneath her arms and onto her chest. Nose burying into her hair, he felt the curve of her bum between his legs. She felt her ribs expand as she breathed deep.

He remembered her. It was a far off feeling as if decades—not three short years—spanned between him and the last time he held her like this. He was being teased by his own thoughts. He wanted more. He wanted all of her.

Hermione's head fell back against his shoulder. It turned, lips finding the exposed skin above the start of his shirt.

She spun in his arms. As her tongue traced his collarbone, her hands crept beneath his shirt. Fingers traced across his muscles, finding every indent between ribs. She stroked beneath the bend in his shoulders. How did she know he liked that? It was intimate, *so* intimate. No one touched him there before, and yet he felt like someone had. Like *she* had.

"Take this off," she demanded, tugging at his shirt.

He chuckled. Draco leaned back to see her staring up at him. She was all swollen lips and pink cheeks. Merlin, it was endearing. It had him doing as she asked and tossing his shirt aside.

Hermione whimpered upon bracing him with her hands. "You're very pretty..."

"Pretty, Granger? Really?" he said with a snort.

"Hermione."

Her hands circled his waist before returning to his front where her fingers found his belt.

“You call me ‘Hermione’ when we’re being intimate,” she explained.

And there it was, the same whisper that had evidently spoken to her first. A younger Granger, chest heaving with the same swollen lips. She’d made him promise to use her name when their clothes were off.

When he said her given name, it released in a low growl. A feeling like mirth, an inside joke he could feel but couldn’t put words to, sat on the tip of his tongue.

The fingers on his belt hadn’t lingered for long. They curled around the waistband of his trousers and gave a demanding tug.

Something flashed in her eyes. Hermione smirked before lowering to her knees.

She worked the belt end from its loop and released the top button on his trousers. Looking up at him, she pinched the zipper between two fingers and slowly worked it down.

Her actions were unhurried, giving him every opportunity to protest, to slow down. But Draco wasn’t an idiot. The most beautiful witch in the world was on her knees before him, and she wanted this as much as he did.

He helped Hermione free his hips from the trousers as she grabbed at his pants. She withdrew his cock from the fabric, leaving the tight waistband around his thighs. Then she did something surprising – her tongue touched him first. There were no hands, no greedy fingers. She was all desperate lips and tongue.

Hermione traced the underside of his shaft, stopping before the head. One hand pulled his pants lower and made room to cup his balls. The other grabbed his hip.

Draco was stunned from moving. His arms were limp at his sides. When she finally wrapped her pretty mouth around him, her eyes turned up to find his.

Lips and tongue sliding down his length, he groaned her name. Instinctively, he fisted the back of her head.

This view- her big brown eyes, the sight of her mouth impressively taking in all of his cock. The noises she made as her tongue dragged back and forth over him. *Fuck...* how had he forgotten? The nails teasing his sack and simultaneously claiming his hip. How could he have forgotten how fucking gorgeous she looked on her knees. How could he have escaped the obsession of wanting to see this again and again?

Draco pulled her hair up and out of the way, holding it in a knot over her head. His hips instinctively bucked. He drove himself deeper into her mouth, and– *Salazar, spare him* –she accepted every thrust as if she’d done it a million times before.

It’d been long—too long—without her, without anyone driving him to the brink of euphoria. He could spill himself over her tongue and down her throat and never feel better than he did in that moment.

Shame and guilt trickled in, however. By his standards, this was his first time with her. He couldn't call on the memories they might have together. As far as memories were concerned, they were false limbs- once relevant but removed. He should love her, please her, whisper how fucking stunning she was to him in her ear.

Holding Hermione back by his grip on her hair, he released himself from her lips. As her teeth scraped the underside of his shaft, he hissed. Draco was hard as a rock, oversensitive. All she had to do was look too closely and he'd burst. He drew her up from the floor. He kissed her as he walked her backwards.

"Gods, I remember that mouth... those fucking breathtaking eyes," Draco murmured against her lips. His forehead pressed into hers once he'd effectively trapped Hermione against the post.

"I remember the weight of your head against mine. I remembered how you taste," she breathed. "But when it ends... I can't reach it. I want to remember you- *all* of you. I want all the memories we stole from ourselves."

"You believe it, then?" he asked. "You believe we're soulmates?"

Hermione bit her lip. Tilting her head up, her nose brushed against his. "I don't understand it... but I believe it."

First brushing the hair back from her face, he held her cheek. "Snape said the bond would unravel with time. That being intimate..."

She frowned, shaking her head but staying close. "I don't remember that."

Draco tasted her lips because he couldn't deny the magnetic force telling him he had to. "You were an awful shade of green at the time, likely plotting to destroy Nott's shoes."

As he pulled back, she tried to follow. His fingers tightened on her face, holding her still.

"My soul was already bonded to yours by the time we saw what we did tonight. I think we were preparing to bind our thoughts- the wand cores and brands."

Her expression turned pensive, lips pursing. "In the journal I said I wanted to bind my soul to yours as well. That'd meant you'd already done it..."

Draco hummed. He lifted his other hand to cup her face from both sides. Her fingers wrapped around his wrists. "I've been curious about that, too. There has to be a reason. Why wouldn't we have opted for a mutual bond?"

"Singular bonds exist, but they're usually a debt owed. Is it awful to admit I'm sad this wasn't some sort of ceremony we might've planned to stay together?"

He kissed her head, her cheeks. "We're still missing pieces. We were the smartest students at Hogwarts; we wouldn't make any decision lightly."

She bit her lip, body pushing off the post. "This is insane..."

He chuckled. "Entirely."

"I mean it... I feel like I'm losing my mind."

"That'd be the shock," he explained. "I've got a bit of that going on, too."

Hermione's hands slipped down to his shoulders, curling around his neck. "Merlin, this feels *strange*. How can I know you completely and not at all at the same time?"

He smirked-the genuine kind. His fingers threaded through her hair. Each strand was soft and soothing. Part of him could recall a time where he desired nothing more than messing up her curls. A worn couch. This witch's' head in his lap. The world falling away as he sank his hands into her hair.

"It feels right," he whispered.

Lifting onto her toes, she kissed him again. "Draco," she stated between his lips. "Please touch me."

Leaning over her, he grabbed the back of her thighs. He drew her up the post and hauled her legs over his hips. Though her lips had found the sensitive spot below his ear, he still managed to carry her around to the side of the bed. Draco set her down on the edge, pushing her onto her back.

Topless, beautiful. He couldn't stand to be away from her. Draco quickly divested himself of his pants before his hands found the waistband on her black slacks.

When he met her eyes, she gave him an impatient sort of look. One that appeared to say, *I asked for this, why are you stalling?*

"May I?" he asked anyway.

With a nod, she grinned. "Get up here. I'm cold..."

His head turned with mirth. He pulled off her slacks, leaving her in her knickers before joining her on the bed. His thighs straddled her hips. His head hovered over hers. The length of his cock rested against her belly and Hermione squirmed feeling it there.

His brow arched. "Cold? Well, we can't have that. Let's see what can be done about warming you back up."

Slowly, he lowered his weight onto hers. His lips caressed her jaw while a hand palmed her breast.

It was impossible to be with her like this and not feel the ghosts of years past. It wasn't his bed then. It was a broom closet. A barren quidditch pitch.

She was leaning into his touch. The apex of her thighs curled into his waist.

Hermione had pleaded for more. She'd held him close. Her lips whispered praises into his ear, and he'd returned those praises in kind.

He'd palmed this breast through her Hogwarts vest. He'd tasted her nipple between his teeth while she wore nothing but a Slytherin tie.

But how had they gotten there? Intimacy drew out intimacy. He remembered her body but his mind loved and reached for her as if they'd been so much more.

The decision alone to bind themselves together... that was beyond a few shags. It had to be.

Her hand sat low on his back. She urged his hips down to meet hers. He felt the base of his cock against the laced fabric of her knickers. The head pressed into her belly.

Her other hand fell between them. She was guiding him lower, right where she wanted him.

He should taste her. Sweet, unforgettable. He should bring her to the brink and sheath himself inside. Listen to her voice break. He'd done those things, no? Today. Before today? His mind was reeling and the ache of his arousal was winning.

His side was burning. *Was hers?*

He'd fisted her knickers. *When had he done that?*

"Draco please," she begged.

He groaned hearing her pleas. His single hand worked her knickers down. *To her knees? Clean off her? Were they still in one piece?* So many flashes in time, doing exactly this.

Fuck, she was wet. Dripping. He could smell her, feel the heat, and even *that* was familiar. Her dainty hand wrapped around the head of his cock. It guided him between her thighs.

Her arousal coated his head. She was panting beneath him, pawing at his back. "Draco..."

His resolve was breaking. Any restraint left was a thread of internal conflict between the tendrils in his mind: whispers of past, promises for the future, the here and now.

"You're certain?" he asked, gritting his teeth as she pulled her legs around his waist and tried to lure him in.

"This could all be a farce and I'd still be asking you to do this. It's one moment, Draco. One time - for us. Only for us."

His head dropped onto hers and he nodded. As she lifted her lips to meet his, Draco pushed forward. He slipped through her warmth, the tight muscles guiding him to the hilt. Hermione whimpered; her thighs widened to accept the full length of him.

Ghost memories. Hermione on her back. Hermione's hips rolling into his. Her inner-walls clenching, milking him dry. Earth shattering orgasms. Promises to stay in bed forever. Losing hours inside her, and loving every second.

Love.

He used to brush his lips against her ear. Buried to the hilt, arching back, and then filling her again in a single punishing thrust, Draco spoke of her beauty. He praised her. His witch loved to be praised, and gods he'd loved her reaction when he did.

The head of his cock bottomed out against her cervix. She was writhing, begging him to move.

"You're perfect, Hermione."

Her eyes were wide, jaw wavering. There was something there resembling recognition. She was looking at him in the present, but the darkness of her irises held more than mere weeks of familiarity.

"More," she pleaded. "Say more."

He chuckled, moving his hips for the first time since he'd entered her. Draco slowly drew out. She flexed and twitched around him.

"Look at you, taking all of me. Such a good witch."

He demonstrated, refilling her to the hilt. Holding himself there, he rose to his knees and directed her legs up higher.

"No one else will ever love this cunt the way that I do."

He'd spoken words now his lips had drawn before.

Possession. Praise. More whispers. More ways he intrinsically knew would satisfy her.

And her clit...

There was awkwardness- a time where he'd finish long before she had a chance to herself. There were months spent learning each other, their likes and dislikes. *How could he have forgotten?*

He lifted her bum from the mattress and slid a pillow beneath her back. *A better angle.* His thumb found her clit, fingers splayed across her waist. The perfect amount of pressure. Back and forth—not circles—he recalled.

Her response was immediate. She cried out, shoulders arching off the bed and forcing him deeper.

"That's it," he hissed. "So lovely, so perfect."

He started in, quickening his pace, thumb matching every stroke. Her eyes stayed trained on his. Hermione's swollen lips were parted, her beautiful bare chest on full display.

Draco could feel the slight tremor in her legs. Tension built between her hips. Her muscles were tightening around him. Her rasps of pleasure were growing louder and less dignified. It was enough to bring him to the edge, too.

As he leaned over her, Hermione's hands held around the back of his neck. Her brown eyes pleaded with his grey. They met in a kiss that was more of shared breaths.

"I've missed you, Draco Malfoy," she said, trembling beneath him.

Her insides throbbed against his length. She was coming, forcing his own orgasm as he was tugged and stroked so thoroughly. Blinding pleasure. Knee-weakening release. Seconds passed while he was drained in the deepest parts of her, hips losing their rhythm and drawing out their bliss.

"Fuck, Hermione..." he groaned, kissing her clumsily.

"I know," she breathed.

Her hands around his neck tightened.

As the waves subsided, he lowered himself onto her. His body covered hers completely, his limping cock still buried between her legs. Warm. Safe. Spent.

Draco had his face pressed into her neck. Lazy kisses tasted every fraction of skin he could easily reach.

Her hand combed through his hair, holding him there. The other traced up and down his back- another thing he realised she knew about him. His love of touch. His need for closeness; something he'd never thought to have admitted out loud before.

"Did you see it?" she asked.

He slid his head far enough for hers to turn and meet him nose to nose. "See what?"

Fingers traced his jaw and held against his cheek. "When I held you, you kissed me. I was crying. You were shaking."

His length freed from between her legs. A certain chill ran up his spine but he ignored it. Instead he raised onto his elbow, looking down at her.

"You remembered something?"

Her brows twitched. "It's impossible to deny we have a history together."

"It was like flashes," he continued for her. "It was hard to differentiate between now and before."

Hermione nodded, biting down on her bottom lip. "Exactly... except right at the end, I saw more."

He frowned and brought his arm around her waist. “Go on,” he encouraged her.

“You kissed me, and there was Tonks and Snape... It was the twenty-ninth of June, 1997.”

Draco froze. His eyes widened and mouth wavered. “Impossible.”

“I was bonded to you on the twenty-ninth of June, 1997. I don’t know how I remember, but I do.”

He shook his head. “That can’t be right...”

The fingers on his face returned to his neck. Hermione’s hand held him tight, forcing his attention to hold against her. “Whatever we’ve done, and for whatever reason we’ve done it, all leads back to that day. I was preparing to leave with Harry to hunt horcruxes. You’d been given an impossible task. Young lovers amidst a war they were too young to be fighting.”

“No,” he said sharply. “There’s more to it than that. I had to convince Snape to bind our memories after the soul-bond.”

Her eyes lowered in thought. “Maybe your father found out? He was acting rather strange at dinner.”

Draco’s lips pursed. “It’s a possibility.”

“Regardless,” she continued, pulling away from him and sitting up. “We don’t need to understand it.”

He was on his knees before her, head tilted to the side. “What do you mean?”

She shrugged, diverting her gaze. “We can end it here. You’re bonded to me. I can sever the bond and you can move on.”

“What?”

Sighing, Hermione clasped her hands. “There’s no need to complicate matters further. We were children. You deserve a future unbridled by your past.”

A clean break. To move on. The ability to wed pureblood witches and make his father proud.

That’s what Draco had wanted. He’d said as much time and time again.

If that was the correct course of action, however, why did it feel so bloody wrong?

Cheers,

M.

Forgive_Me_Severus worked her arse off today on this chapter and then made me prioritize getting it out there. So if you have anyone to thank right now, it's her. Also she's sick. She kicked arse on edits and making sure I didn't use words like seam and cum wrong, all while ill. Round of applause, please.

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Sixteen -

Naked, leaning back on his hands, Draco looked betrayed. The hurt in his expression was palpable; it reminded Hermione there was power in words. If wielded without thought, they were like salt on an open wound.

He was wounded. Sitting there, staring at her - even in his shock, he was pained.

“Is this because of the money?” he asked, hesitating in his delivery. “The funds my father promised you?”

“What?” she baulked. “No, of course not. That didn’t even cross my mind!”

Visible relief washed over him. She’d seen him vulnerable a few times of the course of the last weeks. It was impossible not to have. Draco had his brain probed, his soul probed, the threads between them yanked on and twisted. He was sent to the past and made violently ill. He’d opened up to her in ways she’d not expected him to.

This level of vulnerability, however, was different. He wouldn’t look at her. His teeth worried on his inner cheek.

Draco was afraid.

“You’ve been through a lot,” she tried again. “Not everyone has the opportunity to correct mistakes from their past, but you do. *We* do.”

He frowned, sudden anger replacing the fear. “You think we made a mistake?”

Hermione blinked. Her head turned. “Well, we don’t really know-”

“That’s exactly it,” he cut her off. “We don’t know. We don’t know why we’ve done this so how could you possibly conclude this was a mistake?”

Jaw wavering, her arms hugged around her bare waist. “We can assume-”

“Another hypothesis?” Draco sneered.

He spun on his rear and his feet found the floor. With a bit of a stomp, he made his way to his dresser. Draco pulled a pair of slacks over his hips before turning back to her.

She hadn't moved. Hermione remained at the centre of his bed, hugging herself tightly. In the dim lighting, he was mostly shadow but she could still feel his eyes staring back at her.

“Why are you so upset?” she brought herself to ask. “I didn't think- I'd thought you'd be grateful for the out.”

“Grateful...” he said with a snort. “I was feeling grateful I was bonded to you and not some other random witch.”

Heavy in his steps, he plucked Hermione's clothing from the floor. He tossed them deftly on the bed, then sat at the edge with his back to her.

She merely stared. Tension drew across his shoulders and up his neck. She could see the prominent stress in his jaw as he ground his teeth. He was holding back from something; something he didn't want to say or admit.

Forgoing the clothes, Hermione crawled to him. Tentatively, she placed a hand on his arm. He flinched and hugged it tight against his waist, hiding what lied beneath. The mark, she assumed - still ugly and still there. She didn't much care about that anymore. She suspected she hadn't for quite sometime.

Hermione traced his jaw instead. She didn't stop until she reached his chin, hooking her finger beneath it to turn his head.

“Tell me what you're thinking,” she whispered.

His anger was still evident. It showed in his low eyes and creased brow. “You're right. I *did* want this. I wanted you to break this sorry bond so I could move on with my life.”

His voice trailed off and she pulled her hand away. “You don't want that anymore?”

“Do I need to have an answer? Can't it be as simple as wanting to see this through?”

When her jaw tipped to respond, Draco ploughed on.

“You can keep your assumptions and your theories. Can you honestly say you'd be okay with breaking the bond and never knowing if that was the truth? Aren't you the least bit curious to know for certain?”

She sighed, pulling her hands into her lap. “Of course I am, but uncovering the truth wasn't the commitment I made to you. You wanted an out. I thought I was doing you a favour by offering one.”

Draco turned away from her. His eyes found the floor. “I should be surprised you'd respect me enough to do that, but truthfully all I feel is insulted.”

“Insulted?” she breathed, her jaw falling slack.

“After all that-” he motioned toward the bedspread. “Your first reaction was to move on.”

“Well, no-”

“That’s what it felt like.”

Hermione turned a leg over his thighs, straddling them between hers. Her hand found his shoulders. “You’re not- Draco, you know me better than that. I thought I was solving a problem! I had a solution. I didn’t *mean* to insinuate anything more than that.”

He was stiff. Draco’s hands braced the edge of the bed. She was weak beneath his unwavering, albeit harsh stare.

Her own truth broke free, “I’m scared, alright? I wanted to give you an out so you would take it because, the truth of the matter is, I’m afraid.”

His frown deepened and head shook. “What could you possibly have to be afraid of?”

She shrugged, her fingers curling desperately into his skin. “Many things- getting my memories back, relearning myself, visiting the past I’ve worked so hard to move on from; of you and of me.”

“You’re afraid of me?”

She groaned, fingers crawling closer to his neck. “Stop picking out all the nuances in my words and listen to me!”

At that, Draco smirked. “Not very Gryffindor of you to be harbouring so much fear.”

Her face fixed a glare. “Courage is not the absence of fear, but I don’t need to tell you that.”

Finally, his hands moved from the bed and caught her waist. The heat across her skin was dizzying. It set in motion the waves of familiarity she’d experienced long minutes before.

“This is what I meant,” she stated on a startled breath. “This scares me- your hands, the disconnect from here and now. Gods, when you touch me I feel like I don’t know where I am...”

Draco leaned close, pressing his forehead into hers. “Like you knowing my body better than I do.”

She nodded. “Exactly.”

His hands moved to her back. They caressed up and down her spine in long, soothing strokes. “I want to see it through,” he whispered.

Hermione hugged herself tighter to him, arms wrapped around his neck. Draco’s eyes burned through hers, nose to nose. “What if we learn something that makes us hate each other?”

He laughed. “Is that really the impression you got from any of this?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“I’m not going to leave you to deal with any of this on your own,” he promised. “Regardless of the truth, we’ll work through it together.”

His softly spoken words, the sincerity - heavy emotions built in her throat. Had anyone promised to share the burden before? Had anyone committed to supporting her through until the end? Was there a time when she was more than what someone wanted or expected from her?

Involuntary tears slid down her cheeks. She tried to pull back but Draco held her still.

“Whatever you decide, Granger,” he whispered. “It’s your call.”

His lips hovered before hers. She could feel his restraint as he diverted his gaze. They were right there, and she wanted him to kiss her - here, in the present. This Draco. The one who she’d gallivanted across the country with. The git who teased her relentlessly. The man who listened to her. The wizard who asked her for a date before knowing what else was in store for them.

Reeling in a breath with her eyes wide, she pressed her lips to his, and *Merlin*, he sighed. The tension from his shoulders released all at once. He sagged against her, hugging her lazily as they kissed.

His contentment was intoxicating. She closed her eyes and fell into the moment.

This time, there were no flashes of thought. There were no previous memories associated with this kiss. It was them, here and now. It was them, unbridled by the past - just as she’d wanted for him.

Hermione allowed herself to be guided back onto the bed. Draco carried onto the pillows, settling himself behind her. He kissed her shoulder, her neck. He wrapped an arm around her waist and hugged her to his chest.

As the blankets magically lifted from the foot of the bed and settled over their shoulders, there was fatigue and fear. Contentment and worry.

They still faced a problem—many of them, likely—but those problems could wait.

Hermione finally drifted off in the earliest hours of morning, her breathing set by the man she might love behind her.

She was warm. Her thoughts were heavy. She was vaguely aware of the mattress and the pillow beneath her head.

It was a slow trickle of consciousness that began with ease. Ease and shared heat. Softness and unhurried breaths. Unfortunately, the lackadaisical pace of her wake up shattered upon finding two very wide eyes looking down at her.

“Good morning, miss!” Mippy greeted cheerfully.

Hermione was struck speechless, resembling a gaping fish as she stared at the house-elf perch before her.

“I’ve come to collect the young master for breakfast.”

Behind her, Draco yawned and stretched. His movements had the blankets pulling down from her chest. Arms flailing, Hermione caught the hem and brought it up to her chin, hiding the skin she couldn't fathom exposing in front of Mippy's unsuspecting eyes.

“Thank you, Mippy,” came his gruff, tired voice.

The warmth from his breath brushed her shoulder causing her skin to bristle.

“As you can assume, Granger is rather indecent beneath these sheets-”

“Yes, yes! Of course, sir! Sorry, sir!”

She *Apparated* from sight with a *pop* .

Hermione slowly turned in Draco’s arms. Her eyes still held wide as her hands found his chest.

“Draco, your parents!” she cried.

His eyes closed and he tucked her head beneath his chin.

“Please don’t bring up my parents while you’re naked and delicious and pressed up against me...”

“I have to get out of here before they notice I'm still here!” she said, trying to rise but his arm tightened around her.

“Bad news about that, Granger,” he mumbled. “Unless you plan on hiding out here until evening, there’s no way off the property without their knowing about it. My father is meticulous with his wards”

She blinked. “I’m sorry, what?”

Hermione felt his lips move through her hair. “Don’t stress, love. I’ll take care of it.”

She pushed off his chest and met his eyes. “And tell them what? Theo left and I decided to stay for a kip?”

He chuckled. “With that hair, they know exactly what we’ve been up to.”

“I’m here as a Ministry Representative! If your father-”

“Granger,” he stated firmly. “Your job is safe. I pursued you.”

“Do you really expect your parents to believe that?”

“Don’t care,” he grunted, burying his face in her hair.

“How can you say that? This is your family's worst nightmare!”

He laughed again. “Imagine how they’ll react when they find out you're the witch I’m bonded to.”

She whacked his chest with an open palm, glaring openly when he turned down to find her.

“How are you making jokes right now? Why are you not freaking out like I am?”

Lips curling downward, Draco shrugged. “I woke up with a naked, beautiful witch in my bed. Can’t seem to find the thought to care about much else.”

She huffed, leaning in with venomous words on her tongue.

Those words were lost, however; stolen straight from her lips when Draco kissed her.

She was forced onto her back as he slid a leg between hers.

It was starting again - the internal debate. The bed was a hardwood floor. The bed was a stone wall with a cheeky young Draco baring down on her.

Scents like parchment and sleep, a groomed Quidditch pitch and lingering aftershave - they all melded together beneath her nose. The here and now.

“We have to speak with Theo,” she said once they’d parted.

Draco groaned. “First my parents and now Theo- is there anyone else you’d like to bring up to *Avada* the mood? Potter, perhaps? Weasel-Bee?”

“I’m serious! We’re unravelling the bind on our memories. I’m not sick. There’s no pain-”

“If you say you want to use the Time Turner again I’m going to hex myself.”

He hovered over her, Hermione’s hands clinging to his shoulders. “Once again, we’re not left with many other options. I can ask Katie about removing the bond on our thoughts now that we know it’s linked to the wands, but even still. It’s very risky.”

Humming in thought, he lowered down to her once more. His lips claimed hers before rolling onto his side, and then onto the floor.

“Hungry?” he asked, holding out a hand.

Hermione lifted onto her elbows. “Absolutely not.”

His fingers waggled and she relented. Draco hauled Hermione up from the sheets.

“On second thought,” he said, adjusting the front of his trousers.

As she stood from the bed, grey eyes slowly traced the length of her body. She smirked and shook her head.

“Somehow I expected you to be more modest in the bedroom department.”

Her brow arched. “Why? Apparently it isn’t anything you haven’t seen before.”

Draco laughed, hands finding her hips.

“But no. I’m not particularly modest. What’s the point when it’s all been examined up close and *very* personal.”

Hermione slipped from his hands and began pulling on her clothes. “I’m going to Floo to the ministry and talk to Theo, maybe Katie and see if they have any other suggestions. Meet me there when you’re done with your meal?”

“You sure I can’t convince you to join us?”

She snorted. “Not on your life. I’m not sure that’s a conversation I’d like to be a part of.”

She watched as Draco quickly changed for the day. He was meticulous in his routine, down to the silver cuff links. His rigidity had Hermione making changes to her own outfit - anything to make it look like she wasn’t wearing the same clothes two days in a row. Theo didn’t need that sort of fodder.

Pulling her curls into a tie on the top of her head, she stepped back in his mirror. She still looked thoroughly shagged. She wasn’t fooling anyone.

Her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes looked tired. She had visible bite marks along her neck and shoulder. When had he done that? Hermione laughed under her breath.

When she turned to Draco, he was charming his hair flat.

“I liked it better before,” she said, smirking.

He matched her expression, fully facing her. “I liked yours better before too.”

“Touché,” she sang.

Taking her hands in his, Draco backed toward the door. “I’ll see you off and then join my parents. Better to face them head on than avoid it.”

Her own head tilted. “What will you tell them?”

Draco shrugged. "The short version - you stayed the night and leave it at that. The don't usually pry for details when they don't want to hear them."

Hermione reeled in a breath and nodded. "Fair enough, though I still don't envy your circumstances."

"The lingering shock is a wonderful numbing agent."

She laughed as Draco opened the door. He tugged her forward where she nearly collided with Lucius Malfoy.

The Lord said nothing at first. His ire was evident. It was visible in his sneer and narrowed eyes. Lucius looked down at their clasped hands and back up at his son.

"I can't say I hadn't expected this. I only thought you might have the decency to engage in your depravities outside of my home."

Hermione tried to free herself from Draco's grasp, but his hold only tightened.

"Wasn't exactly a planned, father."

Lucius' head tilted higher. "No, you're much too impulsive for rational thought."

With his free hand, Draco dragged a hand down his face. "Spare your insults until after I've seen Granger off."

"What's insulting, son, is not offering a meal to your guest before shuttling her off."

Hermione cleared her throat. "He did offer, and I appreciated it. Unfortunately, the Ministry calls."

Lucius' brow arched. "Dedicated to your career in more than one way, it would appear."

Draco's hand pulled away, finding her shoulder instead. "Let's not hold Hermione up more than we already have."

He held himself between her and Lucius as he guided her down the hall.

"I shall look forward to seeing you again soon, Miss Granger," his voice rose at her back.

Hermione held her breath until they reached the stairs. Draco's arm dropped to her waist and he held her close while they descended the steps.

"I'm sorry about that," he whispered gruffly. "I should've expected him to intervene."

Her eyes raised to find Draco's. "Do you think he was angry?"

He snorted. "Definitely, though calmer than I thought he'd be, given the situation."

"I still think he knows something, or thinks he does, at least."

“He’s reaching, but you’re right. We’ll keep our heads down while we work through the rest of this.”

She sighed as they entered the parlour. “That’s probably for the best.”

They stopped in front of the Floo. He released her, only to retake her hand and spin her towards him.

Lifting her fingers to his lips, he kissed her knuckles. “I’ll be along shortly.”

Her shoulder shrugged. “Good luck.”

Draco dropped her hand and Hermione stepped onto the hearth. He held the powder basin out to her, and she reached for it only to have it quickly pulled away.

Words died on her lips as he leaned down and kissed her. “Sorry,” he murmured before pulling back. “Had to see you off proper.”

The next time he held out the basin, she managed to grab a handful of powder. She tossed it onto the grate and stepped into the flames.

As she was tugged from Malfoy Manor, nausea crept in. Her head burned. It was the first time since they’d slept together she’d felt anything resembling pain.

She knew better than to try, and still she attempted. Hermione took a quick glance at her appearance in the glass partition. She checked her shoes to make sure they were on the correct feet.

Theo levelled her with a stare as she entered his lab. He was smirking; a single brow arched.

“Tell me you at least used protective charm,” he greeted.

Hermione merely rolled her eyes.

“I suppose if there was any reason to be kicked out so quickly, this is one I can fully support. I’m not very interested in seeing either of my mates doing the deed.”

“Pity,” she said with a smirk. “I imagined we’d put on quite a show for you.”

Theo rose from his desk. “You believe it then- that you’re his soulmate?”

She shrugged. “All signs point to yes.”

“Wild,” he breathed. “I’ll admit I had the thought at one point- as in, how funny would it be if it was Granger, but Salazar’s sake. I didn’t really expect it to pan out that way.”

She lifted herself on to the edge of one of the lab tables. "It's all so unbelievable. Without the memories, it feels strange. I believe it, and yet it doesn't make sense."

"The two of you?" he asked and she nodded. "Makes perfect sense to me. You rival each other intellectually. You challenge him, and him you. The chemistry's been there even most recently. It's a match made in mutual bliss and destruction. I'm only upset I never caught on back at Hogwarts."

She smiled to herself, hand running over the back of her neck to soothe the ache.

"Still bothering you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Not until I left."

"You too?" Hermione heard spoken roughly behind her as a door closed.

Both she and Theo turned to find Draco entering the office. He appeared winded and dishevelled. His breathing was labored. His collar had been tugged to hang low across his upper chest.

"What are you doing here?" A hint of awe struck her voice.

"You left and then then burning started up; thought it might've meant something?"

She frowned. "It could, but what about your parents?"

Crossing the room, he came to stand at the edge of the table with her and Theo. "I told my mother I had to go but that I'd speak with her later. She said she'd like for you to join us for dinner."

Hermione snorted, turning her head. "No thank you, I think I'll pass."

"Oh dear, sweet Granger. You have much to learn about pureblood etiquette. One does not simply turn down a dinner invitation from Narcissa Malfoy," Theo sang.

"I think, given the circumstances, she'll understand."

"Given the circumstances, she'll drag you there herself," Theo wove with a smirk.

Rolling her eyes, she looked up at Draco. "A conversation for later. Right now, we need a plan."

He motioned toward the chalkboard. "May I?"

"Have at it. Whatever's going on here is vastly more entertaining than Unspeakables' unspeakables," said Theo.

Standing before the board, chalk in hand, Draco faced them. "Predicament number one- how to remove the bind on our memories."

Hermione jumped down from the table. “Number two- why the soul-bond, specifically yours?”

“Three,” came Theo. “How did this-” he motioned between the two of them. “-happen in the first place?”

Draco shrugged. “Fair enough.”

“There’s more,” she hummed. “Your diary posed a few predicaments we weren't aware of.”

She pulled it from her pocket and Draco frowned. “Thief.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. She turned through the pages before stopping and holding it up against the whiteboard.

“Disregarding the earlier entries, which were mostly times and places to meet, it looks like our first issue arose in December of ninety-six. I said we need help, and later entries show you enlisted *him* , who I’m now assuming is Professor Snape.”

Draco’s fingers followed her trail of thoughts across the whiteboard. “*What happened in December of ninety-six?*”

“Which subsequently leads to your soul-bond.”

“But not yours?” Theo questioned.

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t think so.”

She flipped ahead as Theo came to stand at her back.

“There are more meetings throughout, but what stands out to me is, here, where Draco writes, ‘*when it’s over, you’re free to do as you like*’, and then later confirms ‘*the bond*’. He was bound to me first, and later, me to him.”

“If at all,” Draco pointed.

Hermione’s brows lifted. “I hadn’t considered that. We’ve no proof my soul was ever bonded to yours.”

“We could look,” Theo suggested.

She shrugged. “It exists or it doesn’t- right now the priority is unlocking our memories. Do you think Katie could remove the bond if she knew it was somehow connected with our wands?”

Theo’s lips pursed as his fingers combed through his hair. “Hard to say. There was blood involved. Snape had concocted some sort of potion to aid in binding your memories to the sigils.”

“You think it’s too complicated?”

“I’m saying, I wouldn’t recommend tampering with it. Draco’s memory bond awakened when he tried to wed Astoria. Yours showed up when Draco used your wand. Just now you discovered the side effect are exacerbated when you’re apart. There’s too many variables.”

Draco chuckled. “You’re usually one for a little risk.”

“Doesn’t sound like a little, mate. Souls, blood, bonds, and binds. You’re a yarn ball of unpredictable magic.”

“Granger, you have a cat, don’t you? Think he might be able to help us out of this one?”

She met his smirk with one of her own. “I’ll have him get right on it for you.”

Draco replaced the chalk in the tray before stepping back to view the board. “So Katie’s off the table, then.”

“We could see if Snape documents the potion ingredients anywhere in his journals,” Hermione suggested.

“What about Veritaserum?” Theo offered. “We could see if it works against the bind.”

Her lips pulled to the side in thought. “It could, but it’s unlikely. Veritaserum works at the surface level, forcing you only to answer what you know or think you know.”

“You’re both bloody Unspeakables,” Draco followed with a grunt. “You’re telling me there’s nothing stashed in these rooms that could unveil locked memories?”

Hermione sighed. “Most of our work is experimental.”

Draco chuckled as he crossed his arms. “Isn’t that what I’ve been to you- a convoluted experiment of sorts?”

“Yes... but as I now find myself a variable in your experiment, forgive me if I’m feeling a little more cautious.”

“I see,” he teased. “So when it’s my life on the line you’ll endure a little risk, but when it’s your own-”

“Things have changed, yes. For both of us. Any experimentation I could think to do on myself might directly impact you and vice versa.”

The Time-Turner suspended between them, Theo dangling it from a single hooked finger. Hermione frowned and Draco turned to him.

“You’re going to ask for it,” Theo deadpanned. “Just take it.”

“How do you know I-”

“Because this is all that’s left. Get your answer to break the hold on your memories and get out. You know I’d do it for you, but not even I would risk a solo trip more than a year in the

past.”

Hermione’s hand wrapped around the chain and she clutched it against her chest. “I’d never allow you to do that, nor ask you to.”

“I do have a theory about the illness, though, based on what we learned last night.”

Wandering over to his desk, Theo picked up a sheet of parchment. He lifted it to his face and began to read.

“You both experienced pain after the initial awakening. Draco found that the pain worsened every time he interacted with his bound memories.”

Hermione hummed. “I’ve been wondering why the bind didn’t reveal itself sooner to me given the same exposure to the past.”

With a boyish grin, he turned to her. “I considered that- but those weren’t *your* memories now, were they? They were Draco’s.”

She shrugged. “I suppose that’s a good enough theory.”

Draco stepped in close to her, his hand hovering above the small of her back- wanting to but not directly touching her, she guessed. “What do you think would happen should we revisit the past now, given both our binds have presented.”

“Well, you’ve added another variable,” he said, voice lifting in curiosity. “Earlier I would have said nothing’s changed, but now you’ve started experiencing pain when you’re separated.”

“I don’t know of any soul bond that results in pain, given distance,” said Hermione.

“That’s because this isn’t the soul bond,” Theo continued pointedly. “It’s your memories. You’re thinking about him now; missing him...”

His brows waggled.

“Now that you mention it, the pain was always worse when I was thinking about Granger,” Draco said. “Thinking about Hogwarts and what a git I’d been.”

Hermione shook her head, lifting a hand. “How does any of this explain what might happen if we travelled to the past again now?”

Theo shrugged. “Your proximity to each other could take the edge off, or it’s completely unrelated, as I suspect it is.”

Draco snorted. “So we’re still doomed to vomit all over Snape’s office? What exactly was the point of your theory?”

“Just making conversation, mate.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. She turned her attention down to the Time-Turner and tilted her head. "What if we went in blind?" she suddenly asked, her eyes widening as she stood straight.

"What?" the two wizards asked in unison.

"What if we removed one of our senses? Thinking, seeing, smelling, feeling- they all carry memories that are uniquely their own. What if we eliminated one? That could help take another edge off, as you said."

Scoffing, Draco's arms crossed. "You want us to, what, huddle in the corner of the room with a blindfold on and listen?"

"We need one answer, Draco. One. We get the answer, restore the memories and leave. We don't need our eyes, but we do need to make it through long enough to hear what's being said."

Draco grunted with a slight roll of his eyes. "So we stand there and listen."

Her shoulders raised. "Emersion theory- you know my voice and I know yours. We'll leave if anything more disastrous happens."

"If anything more disastrous happens, I'll be dragging you out by your curls, Granger."

Hermione smirked. "It's a shame you don't have more hair than, yourself."

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Preemptive notes for next chapter-

Hold onto your butts. All seeds were plants. You were forewarned.

A. I meant all tropes(ish)

B. We're in the past again

C. Pay attention to POV notes.

D. All additional tags will be listed following this next update

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Seventeen -

“Surely you’ve been told before, it isn’t polite to stare,” she snarled.

Her hair flashed red. Her cheeks darkened. Tonks dragged her eyes up his greasy, dishevelled exterior and fed him a hard-earned glare.

She wasn’t certain why he was still invited to these meetings. He could do no wrong in Dumbledore’s eyes, but she had her doubts. Severus Snape was not to be trusted. Anyone who could veil themselves behind the Dark Lord’s belief system and succeed, their own morals ought to be questioned.

“Simmer down, Nymphadora,” came his iconic drawl.

Her hair flashed red again - a warning, a promise.

“If I might... have a word?” he requested.

With a single finger, Severus motioned for her to follow. She took her time rising from her chair and returning to her feet. Her arms stretched overhead in show; she would heed his request, only because her own curiosity could not be squandered.

Severus led her down the hall at 12 Grimmauld Place. He motioned toward the first unoccupied bedroom; more curiously, the one where the portraits had been removed.

She entered first and he closed the door behind them. As she waited for Severus to get around to making his point, Tonks perched atop the dresser. Her hands caught the edge and she crossed her legs.

“I have a... situation,” he began low and slow.

She rolled her eyes, arms folding over her chest. “Don’t we all.”

He ignored her. “I’m curious about this form of blood magic you’ve uncovered.”

Tonks snorted. “You’re going to have to give me more than that if you’d like for me to waste my time explaining it to you.”

He wandered the adjacent wall, finger trailing the trim until it coated the tip in a fine layer of dust.

“Is it something that can be learned quickly?” he inquired with his back to her.

“Depends,” she deadpanned. “How skilled are you in intuitive magic?”

“Not very,” Severus replied.

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Tonks released a long breath. “What are you *really* asking of me? We both know I’m not your favourite person, nor my husband.”

“As I said, I have a situation. I do believe your area of expertise could be of service.”

“I’ve no desire to be of service to you or anyone you’ve tangled yourself up with.”

Slowly, he turned to her. One corner of his lips curled before falling flat. “Your husband was always very fond of her.”

She reeled back; brows knit. “Who?”

“The Brightest Witch in a century,” he said.

Tonks shook her head. “Hermione Granger?”

He was suddenly standing on top of her. A hand covered her mouth and she shoved him off.

“Discretion, Mrs Lupin... I must insist on total and complete discretion.”

Severus took a step back and she held his stare.

“Explain it to me,” he challenged.

Her brow arched. “The bind?”

He supplied a single nod. “As I’m not capable of attending every meeting hosted by The Order, I’ve only heard rumours about what you’ve achieved.”

Tonks jumped down off the dresser, facing him head on. “And how do I know you won’t report my findings to your Lord? We both know you serve him better than you do any of us.”

She watched the vein in his neck tense. She heard his teeth grind together.

“I’ll make a vow, but we’d request the same from you.”

Tonks said nothing for a long moment. She took him in, all of him. Severus always appeared run down and tired, but there was more behind his appearance now. He was fading before her

eyes. Tension lined his forehead. His robes were stained and the skin across his cheeks was so pale it was nearly translucent.

“This is for Hermione Granger?” she asked, still holding her ground.

He nodded again. “She is one part of the equation... Yes.”

Tonks waved a frantic hand. “She is the only part of the equation that matters to me. Would I be helping her?” she demanded.

“Yes,” Severus’ voice echoed on a breath.

“Then I’ll take your vow with one addition of my own - any information I give to you cannot be shared with anyone other than Hermione Granger.”

He bristled, his posture straightening. “An amendment...” he drawled behind pursed lips. “Hermione Granger *and* whomever she approves to hear it.”

As Tonks reeled in a breath, her eyes turned toward the ceiling. Her nostrils flared as she considered his proposition.

“Fine,” she relented. “But I’d like to speak with her myself.”

“You’ll have many an opportunity, I’m sure,” he stated flippantly. “First I’ll need to assess if this type of magic will suit the purpose we need it for.”

She shook her head. “I will speak with Granger before I offer up any information.”

“I understand the gist of it,” Severus said, coming closer once again. “The bind you’ve placed on Muggle-borns to hide their presentations.”

Tonks lowered her eyes. She felt the irises subconsciously darken. “If you understand the gist, then you’re free to make your own assessments.”

“Binding magic would only be one part of my request. What I really need to know is... can you apply the same theory and bind a thought?”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

The chapter that wasn't.... until it was.

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Notes

SEE END NOTES FOR ADDITIONAL TAGS AND TRIGGERS - No dark elements in this story including non-con, character death, or else. Future chapter tags included in end notes.

I rewrote this chapter three times. I went completely off script. I had a plan on how I should do this unveiling but I wanted it better.

Is it perfect? No. But on the bright side, the next chapter is done because I wrote that as well while trying to figure out where the cut off for eighteen should be! Cheers to me.

As always, thank you for your continued support. I'm certain I'll lose some of you after this but... you were warned!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Eighteen -

The earliest hours of morning began with a knock at their front door. The misses nudged her husband, rousing him from sleep.

Another knock sounded and he effectively sat up. He rubbed at his eyes as his feet found the floor. Groaning and stretching, he pawed at his mused hair.

Another knock.

“Who could it be at this hour?” she asked.

He slipped his jumper over his sleepwear. “Haven’t the foggiest.”

Watching her husband trudge from the room caused her to follow. The peculiarity of it. The mystery. They hadn't been in town all that long.

On bare feet, she padded down the stairs behind him. She watched as he tentatively approached the door. His expression still riddled with fatigue and confusion as he pulled it

open, unveiling a young woman at their front step.

“Apologies for the intrusion. I calculated the time change wrong,” the woman greeted.

Both she and her husband stared. The woman appeared nice enough. She was clean, though dressed in a funny oversized coat. Something about her unusual attire felt familiar but she couldn’t place it. Aside from the clothes, her brown hair was pulled back. She had large eyes and cheery cheeks.

“You’re Mister and Mrs Wilkins, are you not?” she asked.

Monica nodded. “We are... Do we know you from somewhere?”

The woman smiled softly. “No... I’m a friend of a friend. She said you might be able to help me with a certain predicament I’ve found myself in.”

Wendell frowned. “A problem that couldn’t wait until sun up?”

Nose wrinkling, the woman shrugged. “I’m afraid not. It’s a pressing matter and I can’t stay long.”

From beneath her jumper she unveiled a worn blanket. It clutched against her chest.

“This one’s been at a home in Cambridge for the last few weeks. She’s a tiny little thing but strong.”

Monica’s eyes expanded to the point of discomfort. “Is that- is that a child?”

The woman nodded, her shoulders now quickly deflating. “A newborn actually. She’s just seen her first month.”

“And what do you want from us?” Wendell demanded, standing taller on his feet with his chest pushed forward. “We’re not some sort of charity house.”

The woman had the decency to appear apologetic. “That wasn’t the presumption, no... I was told you were the exact type of people to raise a child who needs a temporary home.”

“Who said that?” Wendell’s voice continued to rise.

“As I said, a friend of a friend.”

Neither Wendell nor Monica had anything to say to that. It was absurd, really; a stranger on their doorstep before sunrise with a child they were expected to raise.

“Her name is Cressida,” the woman explained.

With lithe fingers, she pulled back the blanket from the child’s face.

She was a wee thing, a newborn without a doubt. Her cheeks were still fat and round. She had a slight bit of hair the colour of fresh snow, and skin that looked like rose pedals.

“Cressida is Shakespearian,” Monica pointed.

“There’s a chosen middle name, too, if you’re interested in hearing it.”

Wendell frowned. His eyes held away from the woman and the infant in her arms.

Monica merely nodded.

“Cassiopeia,” she said.

A laugh wrenched from Monica’s throat. “That’s a mouthful of a name.”

The woman joined in her laughter. “I said the same thing.”

“And you want us to take this child and, what, raise it?”

There was hesitancy in the woman’s next movements. Wendell’s words sparked a certain visible sadness as her eyes traced down to the child. Her feet took a step back from the door and her arms appeared to tighten around the blankets.

“It won’t be forever,” she whispered. “Only until it’s safe.”

“The child’s not safe?” Monica heard herself say.

“I’m afraid not. Timing’s not on her side... She needs somewhere safe and remote.”

Shaking her head, Monica frowned. “And someone suggested us? Well, that can’t be! We have no children. We don’t know the first thing about raising them!”

The woman’s lips tugged to the side - not quite a smile, but still a genuine sort of expression. “The way I heard it, you’d always wanted to be. The timing wasn’t quite on your side either.”

Another moment of silence crossed between the adults. Wendell still appeared perturbed. Monica, however, wasn’t feeling as hesitant.

She caught a second look at the sleeping child. She had sweet cupid’s bow lips and a button nose. Cupid, as in desire- the same meaning as the one behind Cressida. She was perfection, if such a thing did exist.

“Why Cressida? If you happen to know.” Monica asked, edging closer to the entry.

The woman softly laughed. “The mother said you’d catch on quick. I wouldn’t have thought twice about it, but she wanted her child to know that, despite the circumstances, she was desired and loved and wanted above all else.”

“She’ll come back for her?” Monica asked.

Giving brief pause, the woman finally nodded. “Yes. Her parents will come back for her.”

Wendell scoffed, turning to Monica. “You can’t seriously be considering this!”

Monica shrugged. Her lips pursed. “I feel that this is something we’re meant to do...”

“And then, what?” he chuffed. “We’ll hand the kid we’ve raised and paid for off to some stranger and forget it ever happened?”

The woman grimaced. “It’s a little more complicated than that. I’m afraid there’s not much more I can say. Just know that when the time comes, making a decision will be easier than you think.”

Wendell flashed Monica an incredulous look.

Continuing, the woman asked, “Are we in agreement? I- well, there's somewhere I have to be.”

To that, Monica’s gut responded ‘yes’ while her brain reminded her to be sceptical. This was a child, an infant. They had needs beyond her comprehension. They were expensive and disruptive. Wendell and her had only just settled down into retirement.

“How long do you suppose we will have to take care of this child?” Wendell asked.

Monica heard the tinge of softness in his voice as he, no doubt, teetered toward accepting the strange request.

“It’s hard to know for certain,” the woman responded. “I wish I could offer more assurance than that.”

When Monica met her husband’s stare, she was shocked to see certainty. As if he, too, were grappling with some intrinsic inability to turn this woman down. As if turning away this child were the wrong thing to do.

Were they really considering this?

More than that, were they truly going to say yes?

Cressida Cassiopeia Wilkens was an angelic baby who grew to become a wonderful child. She was easy to love. She was bright and determined.

Four years and seven months separated Monica and Wendell from her arrival. Each day that passed loomed over them like a ticking time bomb.

At first, they’d told themselves not to become too attached. Unfortunately, Cressida made that impossible.

She was a perpetually happy child. Her stubbornness was endearing. To know her was to adore her, and so every minute they shared, they cherished. From her stunning white curls to

her magnetic grey eyes, she was a vision. Neighbours believed there was something ethereal about their adopted child.

Who could ever think to abandon such a beauty?

Sometime after the third year, they wondered if something had happened to the parents. Then, they selfishly began to wish something had.

Wendell began discussing legal endeavours.

Cressida had come with curious temporary guardianship papers, but Wendell still saw it as an easy win.

He'd decided that if—or when—her parents came for her, he'd fight them on it. Cressida was his and Monica's, and he was determined to make the arrangement permanent.

His fear, however, did not stop Monica from discussing Cressida's parents with her. She didn't know them but Monica had felt the woman's hesitancy as she handed Cressida over to her. This wasn't their choice. It'd been a forced hand. Monica was certain of that.

What's in a name?

Desire...

A name for a child who was loved and wanted, but outside of a time or place that could accept her.

Monica had spun her own theories about this to give her nightly stories more credibility. She and Cressida tucked into bed and crafted tales about who her parents could be—spies on the run, lovers from different kingdoms... Monica never shared her more likely assumptions, and that rather, her parents were young and this was a matter of familial differences.

She supposed one day when Cressida was older, evening fantasies would become a desperate form of rationalisation.

For now, she was happy to paint Cressida's dreams with vivid colours and whirlwind romance.

29 June 1997

“Let me go back!”

Draco was shoved into the small living area, a hand wrapped tight around his collar. He was released at once and forced into a rickety chair.

Fuming, he looked up into the face of Severus Snape. He tried to stand but Snape pushed him back down.

“This is it...” came his tell-tale drawl. “All your winging... your pleading... This is what you asked of me.”

Draco’s hands slammed down on the table before him. “I didn’t know- I didn’t think-”

“Enough,” Snape cut him off. “You have a task to complete. Your mother’s life, is it worth your hesitancy now?”

The room silenced. Seconds ticked by.

“She didn’t even look at me...”

“And she won’t,” argued Snape. “She won’t until I break her bind.”

“I wanted a minute... only a minute...” his voice was on the edge of breaking.

“You don’t have a minute. Now sit still. If this knife slips from my hand you’ll bare a mark you won’t be able to hide from *his* eyes.”

Leaning over the table, Draco held up his shirt. He felt the press of cold metal against his skin. Searing pain then followed.

“*Draconis Cor* to bind. *Unicornis Capillus* to restore-”

“Blood of theirs, and her name to recall,” he mocked. “I know...”

A hand came down over his head. Draco winced, feeling fingers draw him upright by his hair.

“This is the exact moment you’d return to if all else fails. Do not... waste my time,” Snape sneered.

Draco silenced at once. He bit down on his inner cheek until the point of pain.

“Blood of a lover, unicorn hair, dragon heart and standard ingredient,” he went on. “Now swallow.”

The vial dangled before his face. Instinct told him not to. He shouldn’t take the vial. He should risk it all and keep his memories instead. To remember their faces. To carry them with him. To love and want and-

He was a coward, however. His clammy fingers wrapped around glass and he lifted the vial to his lips. He upended it in a single swallow before shoving it aside.

“You wanted a failsafe, Mister Malfoy,” Snape said as he lifted his wand. “In a future without Granger’s blood, without Tonks or myself to break the bind, speak her name aloud and recall.”

“Cressida...” he whispered.

Snape’s wand pressed into the soft skin of his forehead.

“Wait!” Draco shouted. “One more thought. One more-”

“*Draconis Cor*,” Snape spoke with absolute finality.

Silence...

It enveloped the room.

Pain seeped in.

Snape pulled Draco’s shirt back into place over his unblemished side.

“You have a task to tend to, Mister Malfoy...” his voice cut through the room.

Draco stood from the table. “Where can I find the headmaster?”

Snape’s eyes lowered. “The Astronomy Tower. Keep to the shadows.”

Draco stifled a breath. His eyes widened and he shook his head. “I don’t think- I can’t do this! I can’t...” he edged toward panic.

“You can and you will,” Snape instructed. “Now go. End this and save your family. This is our future now, Mr Malfoy. Best not to avoid the fallout.”

Draco swallowed harshly. The sound of his boots against the hardwoods was too much, too heavy. He heard the swish of Snape’s cape as the professor followed close to his back.

Together, they moved through the doorway, setting a lock and warding it behind them.

More silence followed.

There was nothing until—in the far corner of Snape’s living corridors—Hermione freed herself from the blindfold.

Draco tugged off his own and looked down at her.

“I don’t understand,” she said, turning her head back and forth.

Draco’s mouth tipped to respond when the scenery suddenly changed.

They were back in Hermione’s flat, the intention spell having been lifted by the Time-Turner.

He took her shoulder beneath his hand. “We have the ingredients. We know the spell work. It’s almost done.”

She pulled away from his touch, stepping back.

The heat of him burned through her shirt. Her head continued to shake erratically. An itch she couldn't scratch. The feeling of something on the tip of her tongue. Something just out of reach. It clawed at her consciousness. It ached through each ending in every nerve beneath her skin.

Overwhelmed, her jaw trembled. Tears collected in her eyes. "Say her name?" she breathed.

Draco frowned, lips pursing before reopening. "Her name..." he pondered. "Cressida?"

Hermione's hand caught over her mouth, stifling a gasp. Watching his expression shift, she fisted his shirt to hold herself upright.

"Cressida," she echoed, and it happened all at once.

In the following seconds, when her eyes—once again—met Draco's, they did so with urgency.

There was no veil; no lost time nor memories.

They had a name—*her* name—and the plan they'd concocted to save her life from those whose schemes ensured her very existence.

Chapter End Notes

Updated tags: unplanned pregnancy, forced pregnancy (do I interpret it this way? no. but i'm patiently awaiting some karen to come at me), attempted abortion, conversations about abortion, teenage pregnancy, war babies, forgotten children... i think i'm just typing nonsense for fun at this point.

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Notes

If you'll all please note the added chapter. It was quite literally impossible to write, edit (even halfway decently), and get this to you all in one chunk. And so, enter the cliffhanger no one (not even I) asked (or planned) for.

On a MORE serious note, I want to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to comment on the last chapter. I was so nervous to unveil that shit and you all turned up for me. Thank you. I have so much gratitude, dudes.

And on a final and EVEN MORE serious note. TRIGGER WARNINGS - nitty, gritty, politically heavy, 3 seconds of reading adds the controversial tag of attempted abortion. i have my reasons for going this route. i'm not going to explain them unless someone really genuinely needs to understand why.

Hugs and love to, FMS - you're the best, always.

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Nineteen -

His words were but an echo- nothing more than far off noise. She was being tugged toward the Floo. Her feet allowed it. The weight in her mind was too heavy. The ache in her chest was too painful.

She was guided across marble floors. She was seated on a plush chair in a darkened room.

A vial was directed up to her lips.

She didn't want to take it but the pleading grey eyes held before hers had her tilting it back. Lavender and toadstool ghosted over her tongue. It slipped down her throat and settled warm in her belly.

Still, those grey eyes suspended above hers.

“Are you with me?” he asked.

Hermione reeled in a breath. She felt her head nod but couldn't be certain she'd told herself to do so.

Hands held her face. A forehead pressed against hers.

“What are you doing here, Granger?” he sneered. “Come to get another hit in?”

Hermione scoffed, rolling her eyes. “I’ve come to apologise, but I can just as quickly change my mind.”

“I don’t want nor need your apologies, mud-”

“Say it,” she dared him, unveiling her wand.

The tip pressed into the soft skin at the side of his neck.

“Go on and say it, but only if you mean it.”

Draco grit his teeth. He snarled, “Don’t-”

“Look me in the eyes, Draco Malfoy. Tell me I’m dirty. Tell me I’m less than you.”

His eyes widened briefly. Air caught in his throat. “I-I can’t.”

Hands were now tight on her shoulders. She was being shaken. Hermione was lifted onto her feet, arms around her waist.

“Come on, Hermione.”

Hermione... It sounded nice on his lips.

“We have...”

Draco nodded. “I know...”

She shook her head. Her hands were clutching his shirt, though she couldn't remember when they'd found their way there.

“Years...” she breathed. “We had years together.”

His lips were hot against her cheek. They then trailed up toward her ear. “My wife... Can you believe it?”

“They always said the line between hate and lust was parchment thin.”

Draco pushed her into the stone. His lips caught hers again. “Shut it, Granger.”

She smirked, fingers threading through his fine hair. “Make me.”

She *could* believe it. As if to prove the point, she took a hand through his hair in the here and now.

Draco sacrificed his very autonomy for her, and she'd done the same in return. A child's whim. A childhood romance. But he hadn't cared, and neither had she.

Hermione was crying. Tears descended her cheeks. They dampened his shirt, the fabric she'd pressed her face into. Hands soothed through her hair.

"You found me..."

"Fuck," he swore. "You bloody brilliant witch, that was all you."

She shook her head. Her eyes slowly enlarged. "We- we lost so much time!"

At that, she reeled back. Both hands now clutched him desperately.

"Years, Draco. Years! We've lost years!"

He palmed her cheeks, brushing the tears aside.

"What's the endgame here, Draco?" she hummed, crossing her arms. "We run into each other. We snog. We lie to our friends."

"If you're so eager to tell Potter and Weasle-Bee, have at it."

She snorted. "I won't be doing that."

"Then what do you want from me?" he asked, his voice lowering.

"I-I don't know..." Hermione whispered.

"This is what we are. It's all we can be," he said, stepping back.

She quickly fisted his shirt. "Is it so wrong that I could want more?"

He took her wrists between his hands and freed himself from her hold.

"Yes," he stated, before turning on his heels and walking away.

The Calming Drought had begun its slow journey throughout her bloodstream. As her mind continued to spiral, her body warmed and grew limp.

He kissed her head. "Gods, I... I thought I'd never see you again."

Despite the potion, tears continued in hot streaks down her face. " *Years* , Draco..."

In his evident bliss, she found her own frustration.

"We have- we have to go!"

His hold on her shifted, grabbing her behind the neck. “Granger, look at me... It’s after five. The Portkey office is closed-”

“It’s an emergency!” she cut him off. “I’ll Floo Harry.”

She pulled from his hold, but didn’t make it far. Draco caught Hermione’s wrist and tugged her back to him.

“A gift...” he greeted.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Why would I possibly want anything from you?”

“Granger, please,” he pleaded.

“What’s the problem? You saw me dancing with Krum and now you want to restake your claim?”

His grey eyes lowered. “You danced with him, but your attention was on me.”

“Actually, I was distracted by Parkinson’s hideous dress,” she flippantly supplied.

He stepped in close, barricading her between his arms as he’d done many times the previous year. “Tell me you don’t miss me.”

Her eyes diverted. “Hard to miss something I never had.”

“That’s bullshit, Hermione. I know what I said, and you know I didn’t mean it. It’s fucked. It’s all fucked, but I can’t go on pretending this meant nothing.”

Lips pursing, she met his stare. “What’s the gift?”

He smiled - small, and barely there, but it was a smile, nonetheless. He pulled a wrapped parcel from beneath his robes.

“It’s a journal—well, a matchbox... I’ve charmed it so only you and I can read it.”

The tension from her shoulders released. “Well, that- this is very sweet.”

“After the year ends and the tournament’s over, I can still contact you.”

Tentatively, Hermione accepted the parcel from his hands. “And why would you want to do that?”

Draco shrugged. “It’s simple. I tried to stay away and I still find myself falling in love with you.”

“I love you,” he said.

Her next words came easier as she sucked in a breath. “I know...”

Hermione laughed. The sound startled both her and Draco, but it happened again. Doubled over her knees, laughter barreled through her chest. Violent tears escaped her eyes.

“This...” she tried. “I can’t believe this!”

With hands beneath her arms, Draco helped her stand. Her laughter slowly subsided and she dragged a heavy hand down her face.

“I can’t believe this...” she said again. “You and I...”

He nodded, dumbfounded in his expression.

“And we have...” her voice trailed off and Draco was still nodding. “Oh my gods!”

“Gods, I missed you.”

His tongue plunged between her lips.

She managed a breath and hummed. “I missed you, too.”

Draco’s fingers tore through her hair, claiming her, holding her. “What Potter said is true,” his breath skirted across her jaw. “About the Dark Lord... He is- He’s back.”

There was shock and fear and anguish. A melting pot of emotions bubbled beneath her ribs.

Draco had led her over to the trunk at the foot of his bed. She teetered on the edge as he sat beside her. His hand was warm on her thigh; his other combed through his mused hair.

“What are you thinking?” she asked.

Hermione finally met his eyes, finding the same smattering of emotions there. Draco was happy and sad. He was scared and angry. He wasn’t Occluding. It was all right there for her to witness and it stifled her breaths.

“I worry about you going back there,” Hermione whispered.

Her head rested against his chest while an idle hand soothed down her back.

“My mother has been perfecting my Occlumency skills since I was seven. You’re safe in my mind.”

She sighed, arm curling around his waist. “He’ll recruit you.”

“Not unless my father disappoints him. Which is unlikely considering he’s prioritised the Dark Lord’s cause over his own family for decades.”

Hermione shivered.

With a hand to her cheek, Draco tilted her head. “He failed once. He’ll fail again.”

She shrugged and leaned into his touch. "People like Umbridge make it harder to believe that... but people like you, like Theo, Pansy, Daphne, Blaise... The hatred could end with your parents."

"None of us, not even Crabbe or Goyle want to find ourselves caught up in war."

"You want to survive," she said. "Same as me."

He nodded before placing his lips against her hair. "Same as you."

Draco cleared his throat, turning away. "I have to tell my parents."

Hermione's brown eyes widened.

"This..." he continued. "This changes things. We're- we've been bonded for years... It was my choice and..."

Draco's words cut off on a long sigh.

The door to the infirmary was thrown open. She struggled to sit up, but managed to prop her back against the pillows.

Draco stormed into the room. His eyes were wild, a darker shade of grey than he usually wore. He hurried to her side and grabbed her face.

"I don't have long," he said. "I'm here under the guise of visiting Theo's father."

She yanked herself free from his hold. "Theo's father? Theo's father is the reason I'm here!"

Draco reached for Hermione again anyway. His fingers found her hair. "An alibi... I'm sorry Granger, I really am. I had to see you, make sure you're okay."

"Of course I'm not okay!" she cried, tugging against his hands. "I've been cursed! Your father was there!"

Draco released her at once. "I-I know..."

His face was guilty and hers was stern. She relented after a minute and held out her hand. Sighing, he tangled their fingers together.

"This will change everything now, won't it?" she asked.

Draco didn't respond. He turned his attention down to where they were connected.

His silence said everything. He was too afraid to speak.

Hermione was on her feet, standing over him. Her hands proudly splayed over her hips.

"After everything, after all we've done and gone through- how can you trust them?" she demanded.

His hands wavered between them. "It's different now and-"

"*Different ?*" she snorted. "Draco you were contracted off to the first Pure-blood family that would accept you. I have no doubt your father's in the process of lining up another suitress for you as we speak. The overarching threat might've changed but our situation is still very much the same."

Hermione couldn't help it. She ran to him. The door to the Room of Requirement was still closing behind her when she landed in his arms.

His nose buried into her hair. Draco was trembling. He clung to her as if she were the lifeline tethering him to earth.

"He's going to kill my mum," he whimpered. "I'm sorry... He's going to kill my mum."

Hermione pulled back enough to see his face. His eyes were closed.

"You took the mark?"

Her question was met with silence.

"When you didn't respond to my messages, I thought..." Her voice tapered off and she shook her head. "It doesn't matter. We'll figure this out. I can get The Order to-"

"No," he cut her off. "You can't involve anyone. Not with my mother's life on the line."

It was a tone she hadn't heard him use against her in years. Broken. Angry.

Scared.

He brought her head back down to his chest. "We always knew we'd never have much time together..."

Hermione grabbed his arm, squeezing him tight. "Don't talk like that, Draco."

"It's the truth," he uttered on a sigh. "We're on opposite sides of a war- a war I likely won't see the end of."

"Draco..."

"Please," he whispered. "I've done nothing but consider my fate all summer. I've missed you... Give me one night where I don't have to think about anything else."

After a long minute, Hermione directed her eyes to his. "Alright."

He was on his feet before her. Hands secured around her upper arms.

"This changes *everything*, Hermione. There's nothing they can do. It's done. Their legacy, their plans for me- finished. Everything they wanted, they can no longer have it."

Frowning, her head tilted. "You're upset... You're upset you've failed them?"

“I don’t-” he stopped himself. “Don’t put words in my mouth. I’m processing this the same as you.”

Hermione bit her lip, head tilting into a short nod.

Slowly, his hands loosened. They caressed up her arms and onto her shoulders. “We have a daughter.”

He’d been avoiding her.

She expected this but that didn’t make it any less painful.

Their shared correspondences grew fewer and further apart. He was tangled up in something. She knew it. She could feel it despite the distance growing between them.

A more pressing matter, however, made itself known. It was January and she hadn’t seen him outside of class since November. Hermione was left with no other options as she cornered Draco in the library.

“Room of Requirement, after rounds. Be there,” she stated sternly. “This isn’t something you’d want to see written out on parchment.”

His eyes widened briefly. He said nothing before stalking away.

Still, she felt surprised when he did show up as requested.

Hermione awaited him in the centre of the room. Her hands folded; eyes held low. She had no time to offer him. They were out of time.

“I’m pregnant,” she announced.

His feet slowed until they came to a sudden stop. Jaw wavering, Draco’s eyes grew wide.

Hermione continued, nodding to herself for encouragement, “We’ve always been careful. I’d done everything in my power to prevent this.”

“What?” he managed beneath shaking legs.

“There’s more,” she stated and frowned. “I tried a spell in a book. I’m not naive, I know what this would mean for you, for me, for it- I tried the spell and it didn’t work. Had it, I wouldn’t be here at all right now.”

He shook his head, blinking rapidly. Hermione then stepped closer. Her arms crossed over her chest, creating a safe barrier between them.

“It was a fairly simple spell. It should have made all of this go away, but it didn’t. Upon further investigation, there’s a layer of magic protecting it, holding it there,” the anger in her voice thickened. “Is there something you’d like to tell me?”

Draco’s mouth opened and closed in succession. “I don’t-”

"I found this in the library," she cut him off before pulling a leather tomb from beneath her robes. "It's a detailed account of Pure-blood ancestry. In it, they explain how families go to great lengths to ensure future generations. A form of blood magic, they called it. A security clause. Limited to Pure and half-blood relationships, but of course all magic finds fault where love is concerned."

"Did you know, Draco, that at age sixteen all forms of contraceptive would render useless?"

Draco still gaped at her. He fought with an open hand, seemingly pleading for words to manifest over his tongue. "I thought- that was a rumour... A story told to Pure-blood children to keep their virginity intact for marriage."

"Not a rumour," she sang, her voice laced with ire. "Nor story... In fact, it's very, very real."

Hermione unveiled her wand. She performed a quick spell, lifting a diagnostic reading between them.

"Meet your daughter, Draco Malfoy. I'm twelve weeks pregnant today. I would've told you sooner but you've been dodging my missives since we went on holiday."

The brief smile her lips managed quickly faded. "Cressida," she answered.

Draco traced a thumb across her forehead, soothing the tension she felt there.

"We need a plan," Hermione said sternly.

He dragged in a breath, holding it in his lungs until it escaped in a rush.

"A plan," he agreed.

Together they sat at a table in the Room of Requirement. Parchment held between them.

"Illusion spells will keep the pregnancy veiled. I'll go to a Muggle hospital for the birth. Then I'll Oblivate my parents and have them raise the baby in Australia. It will be safer for all of them there."

Draco's fingers dug deep into his forehead. "One glaring issue, Granger."

She sighed, her shoulders deflating. "Go on."

"My family's wards. She'll show up in our spell work at the manor as soon as she is born."

"Fuck," Hermione moaned, throwing her quill aside.

"I'll figure something out."

She said nothing as she pushed from her chair. Hermione wandered to the far side of the room. Her arms hugged her waist as she stared out the false window.

Sudden hands wrapped around her. Draco's chin perched over her head and he held her close.

She let him. Some intrinsic part of her missed him. She missed their closeness. She missed their shared whispers and thoughts.

"I don't want us to spend the next months hating each other," he admitted. "In another life, this could have been a dream."

"I don't hate you, Draco," she said. "I hate the situation. I hate that everything's out of our control."

His arms tightened, squeezing her. "I'll get us help. There's someone I think who can."

"Who?" she asked, her head turning to find him over her shoulder.

Draco shrugged. "Professor Snape."

Hermione paced the room as she thought. "Step one, travel to Australia and restore my parents' memories."

She came to a sudden stop, head turning to find Draco.

"Which will require healers because the length of time I've left them without their memories could've resulted in permanent brain damage, seizures during reversal, chronic migraines—*Merlin*, fuck!"

She closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Impossible to do all that without alerting the DMLE," added Draco.

Hermione groaned. "I'll add them to the list as well."

She covered her face in her hands. The sound of his shoes against the hardwoods drew louder as he neared.

Draco wrapped her in his arms. His chin propped over her head. "We'll get a Portkey first thing tomorrow."

Hermione's nails clawed through his shirt. "You were right... We have to tell your parents. There's no getting back into the country with her without their knowing about it."

"Foolish, insolent children," the professor sneered. "I've waited a week to say that to the pair of you."

"Trust me, Professor. No one could feel worse about the situation than we do," said Hermione.

"For all your shared brilliance, this has to be the most moronic mistake one could ever make. Do you not realise the Dark Lord is planning to round up Muggle-borns for extermination?"

Do you not think he would make your spawn an example as the worst of our kind?"

Hermione bristled. Her brown eyes widened.

"Will you help us, or not?" Draco demanded.

Snape's low stare honed in on Draco. "I'll help you, Mister Malfoy, but only because if the Dark Lord learns I've known about this, he'll end my life alongside your family line."

His forehead pressed into hers. "Four years ago we agreed to do whatever it takes to keep her safe. Nothing changes now."

Hermione felt his lips brush hers.

The warmth, the familiarity—a sudden jolt coursed through her skin. Her stomach churned. Her head grew lighter. Hermione's mind sang his name on repeat.

"Draco," she whispered, answering the call.

He hummed and leaned into her. She allowed him to kiss her again as her hands covered his heart.

Stepping into the Room of Requirement, her illusions faded. The slight swell across her stomach was prominent now. She approached Draco and sat down on the love seat next to him.

"I love her," she whispered.

His head whipped in her direction.

"I love her," Hermione continued, staring at her clasped hands. "I didn't mean to. I thought if I could keep my thoughts about her separated, it would make it easier to do what needs to be done. But I love her. She's moving. She's a part of me and-"

"Moving?" he asked, wedging himself into the corner of the couch.

Slowly, Hermione lifted her eyes. She chewed on her bottom lip as she nodded.

"It feels strange... She's really quite active..."

His grey eyes widened. Draco was impossibly still. He held his breath until he suddenly leaned closer.

He held out his hand, palm side up. "Could I, erm- never mind..."

Draco's hand snatched back into his own lap.

Hermione laughed. "It's alright... I think we're entitled to something normal in all this."

She reached for his hand, pulling it closer. She tucked them beneath her shirt. Hermione held his palm against the warm skin along the underside of her belly.

“Feel her there?” she asked, pressing him into her more firmly.

Draco’s brows lifted. He nodded idly. He held his hand against her even after Hermione had pulled away. His fingers glided across her skin, stopping when their daughter moved.

“I don’t want us to resent her,” she said. “It’s not her fault.”

Removing his hand, Draco shook his head. “It’s okay. You don’t have to explain... I love her, too.”

“You do?” she baulked.

Draco’s lips curled to one side. “How could I not? It’s you and it’s me.”

“But we didn’t choose this,” Hermione responded.

“We don’t get to choose much in this life, but we can choose to make the best of what we’re dealt.”

His nose crooned against hers. “You’ve seen her...”

Shared breath carried his words to her ears.

“What?”

He shook his head. “You said you went to your family’s home. They had a child, *our* child.”

Hermione frowned. Her fingers traced his jaw and down his neck. “Gods, you’re right... It was at a distance, but she was small- a little younger than a year maybe. I wonder if I had seen her up close, would I have known?”

With the flat of his hand, Draco pushed back her hair. “Impossible to know.”

“She was blonde,” she told him with a slight laugh. “That much I could tell.”

He joined in her laughter.

“It’s surreal... her, you, us.”

Hand in hand, they stood before Professor Snape’s desk. His pointed face lifted, nostrils flaring.

“He’ll bind his soul to yours.”

Hermione gasped. “That’s meant to be permanent! A one-way bind... that’s dark magic. Blood magic!”

His long finger tapped impatiently against the parchment. “If you have another option you’d like to explore, by all means, Miss Granger, feel free.”

She silenced. Draco released her hand and held her around the waist.

“As I said, he’ll bind his soul to yours. This will veil Draco as a Granger. His blood will remain his own; his family will be none the wiser, but when the child is born-”

“She’ll be a Granger. Magic and all.”

“Exactly...” Snape drawled.

Hermione turned to Draco. “It could work,” she said. “But it’s a massive sacrifice.”

He shrugged. “This might be the first sacrifice I’m full-heartedly willing to make.”

Draco faced Professor Snape.

“How soon can this be done?”

“Tomorrow after your rounds.”

He reeled in a breath and nodded. “Deal.”

Tucking Hermione against his chest, Draco mindlessly combed his fingers through her hair. This was something he’d done often, she recalled. It was for both of them - grounding, loving, calming.

“Surreal, but I don’t regret it,” he said.

“I’m not certain even I have the knowledge to undo this all for you if you did.”

He pulled back slightly, eyes lowering and finding hers. “Undo it?”

She shrugged. “Your bond. When I thought it might’ve been a mutual bond, I could have broken it for you. It wouldn’t be painless, but you would have been free.”

Hermione watched his face contort. There was anger, sadness, and then his expression was drawn carefully blank.

“Even if it were simple, I wouldn’t have asked you to do that. Not now.”

There were a dozen arguments on the tip of her tongue. Only one was relevant.

“Regardless of what you want, your family will demand I break the bond.”

A dry laugh escaped his throat. “Not if it’ll kill me. They’ll be disappointed. They might even consider disinheritance. Whatever their response, I’ll choose you, Hermione. Again. I’ll choose you every time.”

She watched as he dozed. Their entire Saturday was spent hidden in the Room of Requirement. When Draco did wake, it wasn’t long before sleep found him again. He was weakened, tired.

It was the opposite of how Hermione felt.

She had excess magic coursing through her blood. She felt strong and energetic.

"I can't let you go on like this," she told him.

He frowned, but before he could get a word in she continued.

"You won't survive a war separated from your soul. If it's tethered to me, you'll never have your full strength. I've done enough reading to know now that while this was the right thing to do... there are far too many risks we hadn't considered."

"I won't have you completing the bond, if that's what you're asking," he said, turning onto his back to look up at the ceiling.

"That'd be irrelevant. I'd undo your sacrifice and iron myself to your family's wards. If I died or you died, we'd draw each other into the same fate."

He grunted. "What are you going on about then?"

Her hand wrapped around his bicep, pulling his attention back. "Not a two way bond, another one way. Take my soul, blend our magic for your benefit, too."

"Absolutely not," he answered quickly.

Draco was on his feet. His strides toward the door were unsteady but he didn't slow.

"It was just a thought, a suggestion," she promised, following after him.

"You should be less concerned about my weaknesses and more concerned about your vulnerable thoughts. There are more important matters here and the fate of your soul isn't one of them."

A knock on the door had Hermione flinching. She leapt up from Draco's arms and put a respectable distance between them.

Something akin to a pout tugged at his lips. As quickly as it was there it vanished.

Draco straightened his robes. He strode to the door, taking a deep breath before opening it.

There in the hall waited Narcissa. She had her hands clasped as she looked up at her son.

"Mippy said you warded her from entering. Come. It's time for dinner. I assume Miss Granger has taken us up on the invitation to join us?"

Draco didn't move even as Narcissa motioned for him to take the lead. He drew a hand over his face and audibly sighed.

"There's been an unfortunate change in plans, I'm afraid."

If Narcissa was upset or surprised by his words, she didn't show it. She remained poised and calm.

Draco turned to Hermione. Her eyes widened, wondering if he was about to unveil everything now, if *this* would be the moment that marked their next steps.

“It’s Hermione, mother. I bound my soul to Hermione’s.”

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Twenty -

“This... I was not expecting...”

Crossing his arms, Draco grumbled, “Wasn’t like we planned for it.”

Hermione stepped forward and placed a hand on his lower back. She faced Tonks directly, feeling heat rise in her cheeks. “What Draco means is, there were other factors that contributed to this. Blood magic. Old magic. We- well, this is isn’t something we wanted, but we’re dealing with it. We’re making the best of the situation and all we really want is to ensure her safety.”

At that, Tonks' stoicism faltered. Her lips quirked. “Her?”

Hermione failed to fight her own smile. “A girl.”

Tonks’ mouth tipped to respond, but Snape cut in. “Yes, it’s all very touching but as I cannot explain your reasons for being here, let’s move on... Shall we?”

Clearing her throat, Tonks nodded. “You want me to make the vow.”

Hermione chewed on her lip. “That would be best, yes. We’ve all taken one already but it ensures our collective safety.”

She drew in a breath. “I can do that. What else do you need from me?”

Drawing her notebook from behind her robes, Hermione opened it against the work table. “Obliviation would be too risky. Even with an intention spell, we’d risk eliminating each other from our minds completely.”

“Obliviate also leaves a trace. If my aunt or... anyone else were to probe my mind, they’d see it’d been altered,” said Draco.

Tonks hummed idly, flipping through Hermione's notes. "You'd have me bind the child's magic as well?"

"Yes," Hermione quickly agreed. "An added precaution. Given all else fails... well, our hope is to return to her, but if we can't..."

"The Muggle world is the safest place for her until he is defeated," Draco finished for her.

She turned her head to peer up at him. They shared a small, sad look before their attention circled back to Tonks.

"So the question is, then, can I bind your thoughts in the same manner that I do magic?"

They nodded.

Tonks shrugged, smirk coming to play against her lips. "Should be easy enough."

"There's another... small problem that I thought you might be able to help with," Hermione continued. "You see, I can't go to Madame Pomphrey. The likelihood that I'd make it to a Muggle hospital in time to deliver is very slim. I wondered if maybe you-"

"You want me to deliver your baby?" Tonks interrupted, her eyes widening.

"And bring her to my parents after I've Obliviated them."

Her lips wavered, head turning from side to side. "I'm not certain that I-"

"You'd have time," Hermione added. "There's months now before she's due, and I've done my readings. I'm confident I could do it on my own but if anything went wrong, we..."

Draco's hand lifted to the back of her head, fingers threading through her curls. "It's not exactly something we're set up for here."

Sighing, Tonks pinched the bridge of her nose. "You don't have a fall back? This is childbirth. Not exactly a predictable experience."

"I know," Hermione assured her. "If anything were to happen before then- if something went wrong, I'd go to the Order. We would," she said looking to Draco. "It's not ideal, not with his mother entangled with..."

Hermione quickly shook her head.

"It doesn't matter. We have a backup, but I'd like for us not to have to use it."

Tonks said nothing for a long moment. Her eyes drifted between the couple and the pages of extensive notes. "This is quite the mess you've found yourself in, cousin," she deadpanned.

Draco chuckled. "Chaos runs in the family."

Her expression was calm, unwavering. Narcissa took a step towards her son and into the room before closing the door behind her. With her hands still held politely at her waist, her eyes filtered between Draco and Hermione.

“Miss Granger is your soulmate?” she questioned evenly.

Draco dragged a hand over the back of his neck. “I suppose that’s the short of it.”

Nodding, Narcissa slowly strode into the room. She appeared to scan the far walls, the window, the antiquing furniture, before facing them again.

“It appears your father may have been onto something,” she said.

Draco frowned. His head shook. “Father suspects Hermione?”

Narcissa’s chin lifted, posture straightening further. “The first night he walked her to the Floo. He’d barred the use from non-blood relatives, and Miss Granger stepped through without an issue.”

“I added Hermione to the wards-”

“-as a guest, I’m aware. That’s what brought this to your father’s attention. She wasn’t only accepted into Floo Network that night; she was added to the blood wards as well. She bypassed your father’s magic. I’ll admit I suspected my sister was to blame - Miss Granger’s scar and her... *unfortunate* experience here in our home. I told him as much but... well, there’s no point in theorising now when the truth stands before me.”

She regarded Hermione with lackadaisical consideration. Her lips were tightly pursed and her eyes held low.

“Lucius cannot find out this way,” Narcissa continued. “He’ll demand you break the bond before you’ve discovered a way to do so safely. That is, if you do still intend to break the bond. That’s why you became involved, is it not?”

Hermione’s mouth parted to respond but the words didn’t come. Draco cleared his throat, stepping closer to her with a hand pressed lightly into her back.

“We didn’t know,” he explained to his mother. “Hermione and I didn’t know we were bonded. We’ve only just found out.”

Narcissa nodded again as she drew in a breath. “Then you’ll keep this to yourselves until you’ve worked out how to break it.”

“I’m afraid it’s more complicated than that,” whispered Hermione.

“We have a daughter,” said Draco.

Both watched as Narcissa's careful facade broke. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped.

"The generational blood magic your husband spoke about at dinner last night- as it turns out, Draco and I became vibrantly aware of those securities during our sixth year."

Backing herself into the trunk, Narcissa sat. Her shocked expression remained as she stared.

"She was delivered by your niece on the 29th of June, 1997," Hermione went on. "The bind on our memories would have been removed sooner but unfortunately Tonks was murdered by your sister and Professor Snape was the only other person privy to our situation."

"He'd vowed to do anything to protect me," Draco cut in. "We now know that was your doing; wasn't it, mother?"

Narcissa's jaw wavered. "What- what's her name?"

Hermione's lips quirked into a small smile. "Cressida. Cressida Cassiopeia Granger."

She swallowed. The tendons in her neck tensed beneath her porcelain skin. "I'm not familiar with that name."

"It's Shakespearean," Hermione explained. "It means 'to desire'. Given a situation where Draco or myself couldn't be there for her, we wanted her to know she was wanted above all else."

"Where is she?"

Narcissa's question resonated on a single breath. She wrung her hands in her lap, blue eyes suddenly lightening with awe.

"She's in Australia, with my parents. I'd *Obliviated* them before the war. Given our collective blood status and their relationship to me, I knew they'd be safer overseas."

Narcissa said nothing. She covered her mouth with an open hand.

"We plan to go to them tomorrow," Draco added. "As soon as the Ministry travel offices open."

She shook her head mindlessly, ungracefully. "You'll never make it back into the country without drawing attention from every Magical news outlet."

Draco frowned at his mother. "Is that what you're concerned with? That we'll make you look bad?"

Narcissa stood, hands pleading out in front. "No, of course not, my dragon. This- while no, not ideal- I'm only trying to protect you, to prepare you for what will happen."

Hermione crossed her arms. "We're quite aware."

Swallowing, Narcissa locked eyes with Draco. "I can handle the papers, but you will need to warn your father."

"I won't lie to The Prophet to protect our name," said Draco. "They'll hear the truth."

She drew in a short breath. "I understand... but if you would, allow me to intervene. Get ahead of the narratives they'll spin if we do not."

Draco's nostrils flared as he considered her. "If Hermione's comfortable with it, then I agree."

She turned to him, lips pulled to the side in thought. "It's not an awful suggestion, and neither of us exactly have the time to field Skeeter and her minions."

Hermione pulled away from them, returning to the side of Draco's bed. She picked up the journal and carried it back to Narcissa.

"You'll want this. There's not much that makes sense, but it paints a better picture."

Narcissa accepted the journal. She turned it over in her hands, appearing almost fearful to dive into its pages.

"I should speak with Harry," Hermione continued. "He'll get a team together, perhaps put something in place to keep some of the finer details private."

Draco nodded. His arms were stiff at his side. "And I'll go to my father."

"Do you want me there?"

He shook his head. "I should face him on my own."

Narcissa touched his sleeve. "Not on your own."

Draco offered his mother a small, contemplative smile before refacing Hermione.

She shrugged. "We'll reconvene tomorrow?"

The lines across his forehead deepened. "Right."

"I'll owl you with any arrangements, but we'll plan to meet at the travel office for opening."

He said nothing. His eyes fell away.

"Right then," Hermione whispered. "I'll be- well, I suppose I'll be going."

Neither Draco nor Narcissa stopped her on the way to the door, and as she navigated the darkened halls of Malfoy Manor, she wondered where the increasing awkwardness had stemmed from. Would it continue to feel like this once everyone else knew the truth? Would discomfort grow and fester between them until the hope that'd bloomed the evening prior wilted away?

Would their sacrifices be all for not?

Hermione departed the Floo at Grimmauld Place. She took a steadying breath before stepping into the living room. There was no one there to greet her but soft voices in the room beyond proved they were home.

Clunky feet approached across wooden floorboards. Hermione waited, hands clasped until Harry came into view.

“Thought I heard the Floo,” he greeted. “Ginny didn’t tell me we were expecting you.”

She tried to smile, her shoulders lifting. “You weren’t. I, erm, have come to ask you a favour.”

Heels clicked down the same path Harry had just taken. Ginny stepped through the archway, smiling brightly.

“I didn’t know you were joining us for dinner,” she said, playfully whacking Harry with her dish rag.

“I wasn’t. Well, I wasn’t planning to- listen could we all sit for a minute?”

Ginny and Harry exchanged a confused glance. He finally waved them all forward toward the couch. The couple claimed the loveseat while Hermione took the wingback beneath the dual-pane window.

She couldn’t meet their eyes; couldn’t stop wringing her hands in her lap.

“We haven’t seen much of you since you took on that Malfoy project,” Harry spoke first.

Hermione nodded. She grabbed her thighs and gathered her courage. “That’s sort of why I’m here. You see, we solved the mystery...”

Harry frowned. “The one concerning his not-soulmate?”

Hermione cringed. “Yes, exactly.”

Ginny sat up. “Oh! Who was it? Let me guess- Parkinson? No, that’s too obvious... It would be really interesting if it were someone from another Hogwarts house.”

“It was me,” Hermione spoke clearly, unveiling the secret like a well-stuck bandage. “It is me.”

In unison, Ginny and Harry’s jaws dropped. Their eyes widened and they stared hard.

“Would you mind repeating that?” he asked at a deadpan.

Hermione sighed, dragging a hand through her hair. “Draco’s soulmate... it’s me.”

“Draco?” Ginny baulked. “Not ‘Malfoy’... Godric, I...” her voice tapered off.

“I’m, erm, going to need a little more information here, Hermione,” Harry tried.

She smiled, teeth grit ominously, and nodded manically. “Well, hands tight around the handle, Harry, because you’ve certainly not heard the bulk of it yet.”

There was silence. Two pairs of eyes held Hermione to her chair.

“Draco is not only my soulmate; he’s also the father of our child.”

More silence. More shock. Hermione could feel her own reserves depleting every second after admitting the truth aloud.

“I have a daughter. Sorry, *we* have a daughter... Sixth year, *I* had a daughter. She’s a- *Merlin*, I think I might faint...”

Her breathing laboured. Hermione clutched her face in her hands.

“What have I done?” she asked, panic seizing her expression. “I have a daughter! She’s four and I don’t know anything about her! I’ve- we’ve lost so much time. Why would I have thought this was a good idea? I could have gone to the Order. I could have tried to save Draco. We could have found another way. And I- I feel insane and-”

“Hermione. Hermione, please, slow down,” Harry begged.

He slipped off the edge of the couch and kneeled at her side.

“The beginning,” he requested. “Start from the beginning. I can’t help you if I don’t understand...”

Hermione managed a shaky breath as Ginny then joined at her back. An arm wrapped around her shoulders while Harry placed a warm hand on her leg.

“Alright,” she said, head bobbing in thought. “It began during our third year...”

Draco felt his mother’s hand hovering beneath his shoulder blade. His own hand splayed over the swinging door. It was the only structure separating him from his father’s ire.

He couldn’t avoid him forever, however. Draco knew his mother was right. It was best to face Lucius Malfoy head-on; his vindictiveness knew no bounds. If Draco waltzed back into the

country with his arms filled with a previously unknown grandchild, his father's punishment could be crippling.

Draco dragged in a deep breath and pushed forward. He stepped into the dining room, taking long purposeful strides toward the table.

"I suspect you have an adequate excuse for your delay," Lucius said, sneering distastefully.

Draco unbuttoned his jacket before taking the seat to his father's left. "I do, and for once, I suppose you'll find it satisfactory."

Down at the other end of the table, he heard his mother fumble with her silverware. She cleared her throat as she sat. Out of the corner of his eye, Draco watched her pull the serviette down into her lap.

"Something the matter, dear?" Lucius inquired, his attention now fixed on his wife.

She smiled kindly, head tilting. Instead of responding, she took a long sip from her water glass.

"Don't harass mother, father. You'll wrongfully waste energy."

Draco also took a sip from his glass. He then buried his hands beneath the table and met his father's daring gaze.

"I take it you have something you'd like to share?" Lucius asked.

Draco managed a nod. "I wondered if I should eat something first. I can't imagine we'll feel much like sharing a meal after..."

"Don't be obtuse, Draco," he drawled.

"Right," Draco sighed.

He conjured the bottle of elf wine into his hand and unstopped it. Taking a swig, he set the bottle down, casting it aside.

"You were onto something, I suppose," he started. "I thought you were leading but Hermione is, in fact, the witch I bonded my soul to."

Draco watched his father's face shift. One corner of his lips began to curl. His matching eyes narrowed dangerously.

"During sixth year," Draco went on. "We ran into a situation. I wanted to protect her. We'd been in a relationship for some time."

Lucius shook his head to stop him. "I won't believe that any son of mine would sully his family's reputation willingly."

“No, not willingly,” Draco agreed, his shoulder casually lifting. “There were other factors- reasons beyond our control or understanding but you knew about all that, didn’t you, father?”

“I’ve never-”

Draco cut him off, “No, you’d never force your child to have one of their own, but your ancestors ensured it. You believed a little side dalliance with a Muggleborn was all that it could be- that she’d be the one to bind herself to me, hoping to extort our family’s wealth. Isn’t that what you said?”

Lucius’ lips pursed. His stare was harsh and unmoving.

“Our magics didn’t apply to Muggleborns, until they did...” he said, turning his attention toward his mother.

Narcissa simply nodded, encouraging him to speak the truth- the whole of it.

“Hermione had a child during sixth year. She’d made the hard decision to do away with it, hoping to protect me. She knew the war was no place to raise a half-Pure infant. But she wasn’t able to. Generations of Malfoy blood magic prevented her from ending the pregnancy. She was forced to carry on, and in turn I decided to bind myself to her to protect the child from our family.

“We then bound our memories, forgetting everything about our relationship and our daughter until today.”

Something akin to shock bloomed across Lucius’ face.

“Still hungry?” Draco asked; his brow arched.

“Your father is entitled to his feelings, Draco. Don’t be flippant,” Narcissa scolded. “In either situation- whether it be with Miss Granger or Pansy Parkinson, this is highly sensitive. You may not be pleased with our decisions in the past but neither your father nor I are responsible for your juvenile dalliances.”

He reeled back. Draco fisted his knees. “‘Juvenile dalliances’? I was young, yes, but I was in love. I was scared, forced into a war I didn’t believe in and I sought comfort with someone who made me happy. And I didn’t need my memories of her to feel that way again. Hermione is spectacular; my only hope is you’ll remain open minded enough to learn that for yourselves.”

Narcissa sharply shook her head. “You misunderstand. I’m not chastising you for finding young love. I’m upset as any mother would be that you did not come to me; that you put yourself in a situation to have this happen at all.”

Draco drew in a breath through his nose. “What’s done is done.”

“Incorrect,” Lucius’ voice sliced through the air. “What’s done is far from handled. You’ve a child out of wedlock. You were contracted to wed the Greengrass girl while having already sired an heir.”

“That was my duty to you and this family. I did so willingly. I didn’t know about Granger and the bond.”

“You ran from your problems. You made a mockery of our family.”

Draco suddenly found himself on his feet. “Yes, I ran. Had I stood beside them, can you imagine Voldemort would have let my daughter live? Let *me* live? Truthfully, I’d always thought you’d side with him. I considered it’d be you who took my life if her existence was discovered.”

“Draco, that’s unfair,” Narcissa replied calmly.

“Is it?”

She said nothing, pondering his question behind pursed lips and a slightly widened stare. He faced his father and looked down at him.

“Would you have let my daughter live, father? Would you have put down your wand if Voldemort demanded you kill us?”

Further silence continued. Draco nodded idly, turning away from Lucius’ glare.

Only when his back was turned did Lucius finally speak, “And you trust this witch? How can you? This was likely a ploy to sway your allegiance; to seek vengeance after the Department of Mysteries.”

“And what *did* happen that evening, father? Was it as they said? Were you casting Unforgivables at children? Did you narrowly miss hitting my soulmate, the mother of my child, with the killing curse? Was it worth it?”

His head rotated to find Lucius over his shoulder.

“I did as was required of me, as you will do for your family- your mother and I.”

“I have to go,” he said.

Narcissa stood. “Don’t leave, Draco. We need to discuss this.”

“And we will,” Draco agreed. “I’m not running. We will sit down and decide what our relationship looks like from here on out. But right now, father is right. My family needs me. My *chosen* family. I do hope one day that will include you both.”

Hermione all but collapsed after stepping through the Floo into her own living room.

With her knees braced into the carpet, she cried. Her hands shook. The sheer weight of the last twenty four hours barrelled into her chest. Breathing turned erratic.

Her soul was bonded to Draco's. It had been the seed she allowed to take root, to start her on the journey toward being an Unspeakable.

She had friends who loved and supported her- a friend who would travel to Australia with her to restore her parent's memories.

And she had a daughter. There was a four year old whom she knew nothing about; a child who'd been raised thousands of kilometres apart from her and separated by many oceans.

Feet approached, soft against the carpet. There were sudden hands on Hermione's shoulders. She was being pulled into a hug. Lips whispered into her ear and kissed her hair.

Stormy grey eyes found her's.

"Draco?" Hermione cried.

"Shh," he soothed.

His cheek rested on her head. His large hands ran the length of her back.

"I'm here," he assured her.

"What are you- your parents, Draco..."

His hold on her tightened. "They don't need me right now. You do."

"I do..." she agreed at a whisper.

"And I need you, too."

She smiled into his shirt. Hermione's fingers knotted in the fabric above his chest. "You have me."

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

A happy new year to each and everyone of you! May 2024 bring you happiness and good health. Please know, every comment, kudo, recommendation, video, graphic, and

art piece made for my stories this year - each one made for a fabulous twelve months back into the HP fandom. I spent near all of the early 2000s writing for these characters. It has been a blast to come home and try my hand at them once again.

Love to you all, and to my alphabet, Forgive_Me_Severus. We both know I'd be sobbing in a corner somewhere without you. <3 I hope your 2024 wraps up the stories and projects you're excited about, and that you get to have more adventures with your family.

Cheers to another year!

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Notes

See end of chapter notes for additional tags.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Twenty-One -

Hermione was hugging the edge of the bath when he arrived. Tonks hovered above her, half held in shadow. Her darkened eyes held Draco's as he approached.

"Wards are holding. Snape's on his way. He'll wait in the hall until—"

His words cut off when Hermione whimpered. Her nails cut into the marble tiles bordering the basin. She closed her eyes, teeth grit. Draco lowered to his knees on her other side and pulled back her hair.

"Shouldn't be long now," Tonks explained. "Contractions are thirty seconds apart. She's fully dilated."

Draco swallowed harshly. His heart was racing. The sight of blood mixing with cloudy water had sweat building against his brow.

"It's normal," Tonks assured him. "I'll heal her right up—good as new."

He could only mindlessly nod as Hermione moaned. Her head tipped back to rest against the stone.

"I hate this," she gritted out.

Draco soothed a hand over her head and down her cheek. "I know... It'll be over soon."

"No. I hate *this*. All of it," she reiterated. "It shouldn't be like this!"

He watched tears descend her face. Draco leaned onto his hands, his lips brushing her temple.

“This is only temporary, love. *Only temporary.*”

He wondered if he was speaking more to himself than to her. Soon, this would all be forgotten. She’d be forgotten, their child, their entire years-long relationship. Would they return to each other again? And if they did, how long would separate them between now and the reunion?

His temperature spiked. His heart moved beyond racing into a steady thrum. He couldn’t go through with this. He couldn’t let her go. He couldn’t let *them* go. He couldn’t—

The next noise that drew up from Hermione’s throat was feral. The growl broke, resounding as a sort of laboured scream.

She’d reached back and found his hand, squeezing with all her remaining strength. He ignored the pain, ignored the small half-moon scratches her nails cut into his skin.

“I have to push,” she cried. “I feel like I have to push.”

“Good, good. You’re doing excellent, Hermione.”

Tonks spoke calmly, but perhaps it was a facade. Draco didn’t feel calm.

“Draco, take her arm. Help me turn her over the bench.”

Hermione’s skin was sweaty, but he managed a tight hold beneath her shoulder. Draco’s arm wrapped over her chest. With aid from the water and the weightlessness it provided, he guided Hermione onto her heels. She turned, knees braced against the bench. Her hands came down on the tile as she bowed her head.

“On your next contraction, lean into your toes. Use your hand to guide her out.”

Hermione’s head bobbed in understanding though she didn’t look up.

Draco, feeling useless, placed his hand over hers. He guided her arm behind his neck, using his own to hold her up.

Hermione’s face buried into his chest, the fabric covering his now-healed *Sectumsempra* scars. Her breaths came in long, heavy gasps- something she’d learned in her modern birthing book, he recalled.

As her hold tightened and body tensed, her other hand disappeared beneath the water. Draco balanced over his knees, keeping her upright. She was whimpering again. Her head turned in, bruising circles into his chest.

“Merlin—I can feel her... She’s right there!”

“Good,” Tonks encouraged. “Now push!”

Hermione nodded into him. Her arm choked Draco from behind.

The next few minutes passed in a haze of similar actions. Hermione cried. She screamed; her teeth grit. She arched back onto her toes and rocked in time with her contractions. When they subsided, she breathed—long and practised.

Then suddenly she was gasping, laughing. Draco didn't release his hold on her even as her arm slipped from behind his neck.

Her other hand fell beneath the cloudy waves circling the tub. When they reemerged, they carried their daughter between them.

Water gave way to the most beautiful face he'd ever seen. Pink, covered in vernix. It was her cry, however, that took his breath away.

He'd guided Hermione back onto the bench, turning her. Her head perched against his knees as she cradled Cressida against her chest.

Her breathing, still erratic, had started to slow. Hermione's eyes were closed and her hand soothed in long strokes up and down Cressida's back.

Tonks was on her feet now. She looked down at the couple. Only when Draco met her stare did reality begin to trickle back in. Tonks appeared far off in her expression. It was a sad, lost sort of look.

"Five minutes," she told Draco. "The more time I give you to make memories, the harder the binding will be."

His jaw ached as he clenched his teeth. "I know."

Tonks' lips pulled to the side. "I'll go get Severus. Say what you need to before we return."

Draco's attention returned to Hermione as Tonks' feet padded toward the door.

She was recovering. Draco doubted she'd heard the words spoken between him and his cousin. That thought was proven true when her eyes reopened and Hermione smiled at him.

"You did good," he whispered to her. "So good."

Draco traced a single finger around her face.

"Would you like to hold her?"

Yes, he did. He wanted to hold them both. Instead, Draco shook his head. "Tonks said I shouldn't."

Then that same expression filtered over Hermione's face. *Reality*. The reminder of what would happen next.

"She's beautiful," he told her.

At that, Hermione looked down. She angled Cressida into a cradle and together they watched their daughter doze.

“We’ll see her again,” she whispered.

His hands came down on Hermione’s shoulders. “We will.”

“We’ll be together again soon.”

Draco didn’t respond. His hold on her tightened.

He could only hope.

When Tonks and Snape reentered the bath, Cressida was separated from the placenta. Hermione was healed. The sigil was carved into her neck after she dressed.

There was no kindness from either of the adults as they moved directly into the memory bind. There was no warning, no goodbye.

Draco’s last image of Hermione was of her clouded eyes and confused stare. Tonks was guiding her toward the opposite end of the hall as he fought back against Snape’s hold.

They rounded the corner, Cressida veiled beneath Tonks’ cloak and her arm around Hermione.

The beginning of the end of their small family.

Hand in hand, they stood centre to the footpath leading to a small suburban home. The wooden horizontal boards were freshly painted a bright yellow colour, and the front door was a darkened green lacquer.

They waited, unmoving. Clammy fingers slotted together as they breathed. Harry, with a team of Aurors and Healers, were held beneath wards at their back.

“I don’t want to scare them,” Hermione whispered.

He squeezed her hand. “I know.”

“I want the chance to explain before...” her voice tapered off.

“We will. We’ll explain.”

Hermione nodded. “We should get on with it, then.”

She didn't move, despite her words. Hermione's feet remained planted against the pavement. Draco led her closer to the house and out of earshot of the others.

She turned to him, taking her other hand around his arm. Brown eyes bore into his grey.

"I don't know why I'm afraid. It's silly..."

Draco touched her chin. "It will be okay. Potter will make sure of it."

He watched her drag in an unsteady breath. "Alright."

He smiled at her. "Alright."

She took the lead up the stairs and to the front door. She'd wondered if Tonks felt similar when she'd stood here. Hermione would need to employ the same level of delicacy now.

With a raised fist, she knocked. Hermione stepped back into Draco's side and held her breath. A minute passed. The end of a second followed, but as she lifted a hand to try again, the door before them opened.

If she'd thought she was frightened before, the sensation tripled.

Her mother, now Monica Wilkins, stepped into view. "Something I can help you with?" she greeted.

Hermione's mouth parted and reclosed. Words failed. Even her mind had silenced.

Something shifted in Monica's expression. Her jaw drew slack and she clutched her chest. "It's you, isn't it? You've come for her! Lord knows I tried to prepare for this moment..."

There was no way to know what Hermione's face conveyed. She probably looked insane. Her eyes had widened to the point of pain. They filled with tears and air lodged in her chest like a rock.

Clearing his throat, Draco took a cautious step forward. His hand firmly held at the small of Hermione's back. She was grateful for the warmth and the comfort that crossed through his touch. It was grounding, keeping her present.

"If Wendell is home, we'd love it if we could come in and talk," Draco said.

Monica's face lowered. Her brows touched and head cocked. The hold she had on the door tightened as she looked over her shoulder.

"I thought I'd feel excited to see you both... to ask questions and finally understand. But the reality is, I'm scared," Monica whispered.

"If- well, if we could explain," Hermione tried. "This conversation really is better suited for closed doors..."

His hand flexed against her back. "If now doesn't work, we could return later."

Monica shook her head. "A moment, please."

She slipped from beneath the archway and closed the door behind her. There was silence. For long moments, they waited. Draco's hand slipped from Hermione's back and refound hers, squeezing it tight.

The shouting began not long after. Monica's voice raised, as did that of a gruff male's. Then they were met with more silence.

Minute after minute until—the next time the door opened—it was her father in front of them. His arms were crossed. His expression was dangerous. His eyes filtered over Draco, then Hermione. Something briefly shifted in his stance before his resolve hardened once more.

She couldn't help but fear him. She expected the same gut-wrenching reaction as seeing her mother up close. The desire to hold and be held by him - a daughter who deeply missed her father. That desire was ripped from her upon seeing his menacing stare.

"So it's true, then?" Wendell said. "You've finally come to claim the child you gave up. Well, I'm sorry to say you've wasted your time. She's not going anywhere."

Hermione fought with a breath. "It's more complicated than that. *Please*, if I could explain, you'd understand."

"You're free to speak with my solicitor. I suggest you find one of your own."

She winced. Looking at Draco, taking in his confusion, the message was unclear. She turned back to Wendell.

"I can't leave until we've spoken," she said.

Draco grabbed her arm, pulling her attention up to him. "It might be better to send in the healers. They could—"

She shook her head, cutting him off. "I can't traumatise them further. This will be hard enough," she whispered.

"I won't have you conspiring on my front steps! Come back when you have legal representation."

Wendell moved to close the door but Draco and Hermione reached out at the same time. They held it open.

"Please!" Hermione begged. "I know you don't know anything about me but trust me when I say, hearing me out now is best for you and for Cressida."

There was movement over Wendell's right shoulder. Monica stepped into view. "Perhaps we should let them in, darling? We don't want the neighbours to worry."

His anger deepened. Wendell's knuckles turned white as he gripped the door.

“Five minutes.”

Even as the foyer came into view, Hermione hesitated. She could feel Draco’s insistent hand on her back. The light blue paint and warm air escaping the home made her pause. Could she really expect them to want to give this life up? They’d be angry—rightfully, so.

“Come on, love,” Draco whispered, urging her forward.

Hermione stepped into the foyer and Draco closed the door behind them. Wendell barricaded them there. His wide shoulders hid the archway and the rest of the home from view.

“Could we sit?” Draco asked.

Wendell folded his arms. “This is far enough.”

Monica returned from somewhere down the hall. “Still asleep,” she told her husband.

He nodded. His attention was honed on Hermione and Draco. “You’re wasting precious seconds.”

Draco cleared his throat, hand flexing against Hermione’s back. “Right. Well, for starters, I’m Draco and this is Hermione.”

Monica’s eyes widened. “Hermione?”

Hermione grabbed Draco’s arm and pulled it down to her side. “Let me try first. It’s delicate and I know them best.”

Wendell laughed. “Best? We don’t know you at all.”

Her expression pinched, shoulders lifting. “You used to. We knew each other more intimately than you remember. You see... you’re my parents. Both of you.”

If her words hit, Hermione couldn’t tell. Monica and Wendell were void of any reaction.

“Your parents?” Monica questioned.

Hermione nodded. “We lived in Hampstead Garden in our family home, centre to both of your practices.”

Wendell shook his head. “Impossible-”

“I know how it sounds, but I assure you it’s the truth,” Hermione cut him off. “I’ll explain why you don’t remember but first, you need to know why we chose you to take care of Cressida.”

Wendell grew stiff. Hermione could see it in his rigid back and angled neck. Monica clutched his sleeve, looking worried.

Hermione continued, “Draco and I were still in school when I became pregnant. Under any other circumstance, that would be difficult, but manageable. Unfortunately, Draco and I also found ourselves on opposite sides of a war that concerned itself greatly with people like me... people with non-magical lineage.”

“Non-magical...” Wendell’s words tapered off, his lips still moving in thought.

“Yes, and for Cressida, her best shot at safety was getting her as far from Great Britain as possible. That’s why I sent her to you... to my parents.”

Wendell waved a frantic hand. “Enough of that. Wasted breath—I won’t be convinced I could forget my own child.”

Hermione’s hands clasped at her waist. “It’s my fault you don’t remember. For the same reasons I sent Cressida here, I took your memories of me and retired you to Adelaide.”

Monica’s head turned in uncertainty.

“I know this is hard to accept,” Draco stepped in. “And it’s easier said than done, but please, believe us.”

“We have a team of healers— of medical professionals with us. They’re going to restore your memories and then I promise this will make more sense,” said Hermione.

“That would make us Cressida’s blood grandparents. That explains why-”

“Stop. Don’t feed into it, Mona,” Wendell sharply spoke. “You hear how insane this is!”

Footfalls sounded throughout the foyer at a sprint. Monica and Wendell quickly spun around.

“Who’s here?” Hermione heard spoken in a soft angelic voice.

She ducked her head. Wendell and Monica blocked her view as they lowered to their knees. Hermione could see pale bare toes between their legs, pink coating the nails and matching the hem on a cotton nightdress.

“It’s nothing,” said Monica. “Let’s go to the kitchen and find you something to eat.”

“But Ami...”

“Shh, don’t pout,” she soothed.

Hermione grappled with the want and need to step forward - to see her child. In his shock, Draco's tight hand held her in place.

Wendell returned to his feet and ushered them down the hall. As they rounded the archway, Hermione caught a glimpse of snow-white curls and a soft cheek as Cressida tried to turn. Unfortunately, Monica chose that same moment to tuck Cressida into her side.

Distracted, Hermione hadn't noticed Wendell barricaded them against the door again. Her wide brown eyes found his.

"That's enough. You need to leave."

Her heart was racing, and the pace of her breaths continued to quicken. "We can't! The healers- they're coming in whether you want them to or not. You have to prepare her-"

"No one steps a foot into my house without my say-so," Wendell fought back.

"Please, I don't want this to get ugly. If we could have everyone sit down and I'll call them in peacefully."

Wendell reached around them for the door handle. Draco side-stepped, cutting Wendell off.

His cheeks darkened. Pupils blew wide.

Before he could respond, Draco spoke. "Hermione, now's the time. We can't let this get any more out of hand."

"No, I-"

"I'm making the call," Draco finished and unveiled his wand.

Eyeing it suspiciously, Wendell stepped back. He then made a fast grab for Draco's wand, but Draco was quicker.

"*Imobulous!*" he cast the spell.

Wendell froze in his step and in his ire.

"She's occupied for the moment. I-" Monica's words broke off on loud a scream.

Draco quickly had her detained as well. Wendell and his anger. Monica and her fear. No, not the Wilkens. Henry and Jean Granger.

"Draco, you used magic on Muggles! You weren't- we promised to let the department intervene!"

To his credit, he appeared apologetic as he resheathed his wand.

Looking between her parents, Hermione sighed. "I'm sorry... I didn't want it to be like this."

The door opened behind them. Harry burst in with Seamus Finnigan at his back, the team of healers following.

Over the onslaught of rising voices, Hermione heard the telltale signs of a chair against tile.

A shout.

"Ami!"

Harry and Seamus moved forward in unison. Hermione held out her arm, stopping them.

“Please! Let me.”

Harry appeared conflicted. His eyes turned to Seamus, but Hermione didn’t wait for his approval. She knew what the chaos would look like to a child. She couldn’t let Cressida experience magic for the first time like this.

She hurried to the end of the hall and into the kitchen where Cressida barrelled into her legs. Embarrassed, the child looked up. Her grey eyes were impossibly wide, but Hermione hadn’t the time to admire them.

She lowered to her knees. “My name is Hermione Granger. You’re safe with me.”

Hermione didn’t let her respond. She pulled her wand from her pocket and pressed the tip to Cressida’s head.

“*Mollis Somnius*,” she uttered.

Cressida’s eyes fluttered closed and her body limpened. As Hermione caught and cradled the child against her chest, she started to cry.

There’d never been reason to visit the paediatric clinic at St Mungo’s before. Hermione wasn’t unfamiliar with the various departments throughout the hospital, but this particular one was new to her.

The walls were painted a warm green colour. Soft music played in the halls. Instead of potions, there was the faint scent of lavender, and the overall temperature was comfortable and warm.

Hermione had spent the better part of the last five hours seated at Cressida’s bedside. The charm reversal on her parents was more complex than the healers anticipated. They had everyone moved to St Mungo’s for observation.

Of the three, none had awakened yet. She waited alone in Cressida’s room while Draco dealt with the DLME. His disobedience would cost him, and while Hermione worried about the ramifications, her mind remained elsewhere.

It was firmly trained on soft blonde curls, rounded cheeks and pale skin. *Merlin*, she was Draco’s twin. Hermione was forced to fight off every instinctual need to hold and touch her.

“She looks just like you,” Hermione heard spoken from the doorway.

A dishevelled Draco leaned against the wall before coming closer. Hermione held out her hand and, once in reach, used it to pull him to her side. He lowered to his knees. His free

hand came to rest against the mattress.

“Funny, I was thinking the same thing about you and her,” she whispered.

Hermione watched as he took in their daughter for the first time.

It made her eternally grateful she’d had the few hours to herself. She could turn away and admire Draco and his reaction. Awe widened his eyes. Emotion brimmed against the bottom lids. His hand had a slight shake to it as he gripped hers.

Thoroughly overwhelmed, Draco turned. His forehead pressed into Hermione’s cheek as he closed his eyes. Fingers gripped her legs and she placed her hand on top of them.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m sorry it turned out this way. I’m sorry we lost so much time.”

His arms wrapped around her waist and Hermione sighed.

“It was a mutual decision. We can’t- there will be time to talk about this later.”

Draco nodded against her. Hermione allowed her own eyes to drift as well.

She hadn’t slept. She fought off each wave of fatigue as it threatened to take her - all for one more minute, another glance at her daughter.

At the thought, Hermione’s eyes popped wide. Her breathing stilled and heart clenched in her chest.

“Draco...” she whispered.

He pulled back to see her, but Hermione wasn’t looking at him. She was caught up in another pair of grey eyes, watching her intently.

“Hi,” Hermione whispered.

Cressida pushed back into her pillow. She didn’t respond.

Draco had stilled. Hermione could practically hear his mind at work as it tried to *Occlude* any overwhelming emotion.

“Do you remember me?” Hermione asked.

Barely nodding, Cressida’s shoulders lowered.

“You’re safe,” Hermione promised.

Her grey eyes looked past her and Draco. She turned to the door and the room beyond.

“Where’s Ami? Where’s Papa?”

Hermione swallowed, reeling in a sharp breath. “Your parents are-”

“Grandparents...” she said, cutting Hermione off. “I don't have a mum and dad...”

Hermione tried to smile but it was weak. “Ami and Papa are with special doctors. We can see them soon, I promise.”

Cressida frowned. Her nose wrinkled, and Hermione caught a glimpse of herself in the expression.

“Who are you?” she asked.

Shaking her head, Hermione shrugged a single shoulder. “A family friend.”

“Oh...” Cressida whispered.

Her cheeks darkened and she turned away. She drew the blanket further up her chest.

“What is it?” Draco asked, leaning closer.

“Nothing!” she responded quickly. “Nothing... It's- Papa would say I'm being silly.”

At that, Hermione did smile. It curled naturally over her cheeks. She gave into the need for closeness and placed a hand over Cressida's covered leg.

“We like silly,” Hermione assured her.

Her blush continued to darken. She appeared to fight with herself before Cressida turned back. “His hair,” she said, pointing to Draco. “I thought maybe... you could be my parents...”

Grinning now, Hermione's mouth tipped to respond. At the same time, a knock sounded at the door.

All three heads watched as Healer Leevy from the Australia trip stepped into the room. She smiled in greeting.

“We were successful in restoring their memories.”

Weight lifted from Hermione's chest. She breathed easier, tears welling in her eyes.

“It was complicated- more involved than any sixth year should have been able to achieve. You really are the Brightest Witch.”

Hermione ignored the praise. “Are they awake? Can we take Cressida to see them?”

Healer Leevy shook her head. “Not yet. Sleep is best for recovery. We will gradually wake them tomorrow and keep them under observation. After release, however, they must be monitored closely. Memory tampering to this degree could result in seizures, short-term memory issues, and loss of motor function. You'll want to keep an eye on them for the first few weeks at least.”

Hermione nodded passionately. "I'll use holiday leave. I'll stay with them as long as they need."

"Hermione..." Draco cut in, appearing defeated.

His lips curled downward and his shoulders uncharacteristically slumped.

"What if they want to go back to Australia?" he asked.

She chewed her bottom lip. Her forehead creased with worry lines.

"We can all be together now," he continued.

Hermione placed a hand on his cheek. She caressed his soft skin, and when he leaned into her touch, her chest ached.

"It's only temporary. *Only temporary*," she assured him. "We will all be together soon."

She wondered if she was speaking more to herself than to him. Her own wants fell to the wayside; wants *had* to come second to this. Hermione pulled her hand away and refaced the Healer.

"I'll monitor them. Not a problem."

"The bind on the child," Healer Leevy went on. "I recommend leaving it on until life has stabilised, but you should consider removing it before her fifth birthday. Not much is known about long-term binds and their effect on craft."

"I understand," Hermione said.

"And there's one more thing."

Something shifted in the Healer's face. Her eyes diverted to the parchment in hand before she pulled it against her chest, hugging her arms tight around her waist.

"Our arrival through the Ministry created a frenzy. Staff from *The Prophet* are stationed in the reception hall. They're questioning everyone for details."

"It's okay," Hermione said. "We expected this."

"Cressida will be discharged and should be taken somewhere else in the meantime. You should all consider leaving," the Healer finished.

"But my parents-"

"-will be safe here," the Healer promised Hermione. "We'll send word as soon as they're awake."

Hermione turned to Draco. "We could take Cressida to my flat. It's well-warded."

He nodded in his approval, but a soft voice silenced anything he planned to say in response.

“What’s happening?” Cressida asked.

Hermione’s hand touched her leg once more. “It’s complicated but you’re very safe with us.”

Tears filled Cressida’s eyes. Her lip trembled. “I’m scared...”

Hermione’s hand moved to the child’s face. She brushed the tears away with her thumb. Her too-soft skin, the warmth of her face; a jolt of shock rattled Hermione’s limbs.

“Don’t be scared,” she whispered. “We’ll take very good care of you.”

“But Ami and Papa?”

“Healer Leevy will let us know as soon as we can come back and see them,” Hermione promised, pulling her hand away.

“I’ll get started on the paperwork,” the Healer said before she slipped into the hall.

Under any other circumstance, seeing Draco uncomfortably seated on a Muggle train would’ve made Hermione laugh. As it stood, they were on a long journey through the Underground toward Hermione’s flat. Floo travel and Apparation would’ve been too jarring for the child, who now slept between them on the bench seat. She’d been through enough.

Draco graciously agreed.

It was well after midnight in Australia. Cressida was perfectly knackered, and once at the final station, Draco lifted her into his arms. He carried her to Hermione’s flat without complaint, even when the walk turned cold and rainy.

“You can put her down in the guest room. It’s just there on the right,” Hermione said.

She set the kettle once Draco disappeared from sight. When he returned, he dropped into a chair at her dining table.

Hermione fixed the tea and then joined him. She slid the second cup into his hand and took a small sip. Draco, however, didn’t move. He stared down into the dark liquid, a slight frown against his brow.

“You’d really go live with them?” he finally asked. “I thought... well, never mind what I thought. You’ve already decided.”

Her head turned as she looked at him. “It’s not ideal. It’s not what either of us would want, but it’s not about me, or you. *I* decided to *Obliviate* my parents. I relocated them to Australia. Wherever they’ll be, that’s where I have to go, for now. They have to learn to trust me again. Cressida needs time to get used to the idea of all of us being in her life.”

Draco sighed. He dragged a finger around the brim of the cup. “I thought this would be the end of it, that we might get to be a family.”

She reached out and caught his wrist. “I want that, too. *Godric* knows I want that, but I can’t rip her from the only home, the only parents she’s known. I know we’ve missed out but she’s only four. We have to take this slow. She’ll be better off—we’ll all be better off for it.”

His lips flattened in thought. “I thought you might tell her. Today when she said she thought—I wanted you to tell her...”

Hermione gave him a small, sad smile. “I wanted to tell her, too.”

Draco returned the expression before flipping his hand over and interlacing their fingers. “Will you? Tell her, that is?”

She shook her head. “No. I think we should wait. It’ll only overwhelm her. I’ll need to prioritize my parents’ recovery and talk with them first. They need to understand why we’ve done what we did.”

He stared at their conjoined hands, avoiding her eyes. “Will you let me be there when you do tell her?”

“Of course, Draco. She’s yours as much as she is mine. We’re still doing this together, even if we’ll be forced to spend some time apart.”

Chapter End Notes

- Childbirth
- Depictions of childbirth

A/N - When it rains it pours. I know I'm behind on updates. I'm slowing down as I get to the end of this. There's a lot more movement and a lot more 'wanting to get things just right'. When paired with sudden unemployment, illness, and loss of health insurance, 2024 has been a real bitch. All excuses stated - I do plan to finish this thing within the next few weeks. While awaiting edits from the lovely *Forgive_Me_Severus*, I did keep the momentum going. The wait between chapters won't be as long next time around.

To everyone taking the time to comment, kudo and recommend, thank you. Every bit of encouragement helps <3

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Notes

Someone called for a pain reliever?

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

- Chapter Twenty-Two -

‘A Hushed Hogwarts Romance Results in Unplanned Pregnancy’

‘Malfoy Heir, Underwraps Down Under’

‘War Heroine Hermione Granger and her Grandiose Affair with a Death Eater’

‘Unloved and Unwanted: The Unfortunate Future Destined for the Granger/Malfoy Child’

Coming to stand at Hermione’s side, Jean frowned. “I thought you’d said *his* mother would take care of the media?”

She shoved the articles further away from her. “That was *The Prophet*. Other sources have been much kinder, but there’s no stopping Skeeter from spinning the truth to her liking.”

“That’s all of them, then?” Jean asked.

“The ones Harry could find. It’s good, though. At least I’ll be prepared to deal with all the questions when I return back to work.”

“Speaking of work...” Jean started slowly as she sat across from Hermione. “Your father and I thought that since we’re back in England, perhaps we should reopen a joint practice.”

Eyes widening, Hermione reeled back. “Are you certain? It’s only been a few weeks...”

Jean laughed with a slight roll of her eyes. “It’s been well over a month, dear. We’re doing fine. Healthy as ever, and we can’t expect you or your—*friend* to manage our finances forever. Living here is expensive.”

She frowned, brows creasing. “I don’t mind helping.”

“We know you don’t,” Jean assured her. “But Cressida will start primary school in September. That’ll free up a lot of our time. We’ll need something to keep us busy.”

Hermione stiffened. She sipped her tea, finger tapping idly on the handle. When she set down the cup, she held her mother’s gaze. “I thought we discussed this. A Muggle primary school would be a disservice once we’ve unbound her magic.”

“Primary suited you just fine.”

Her hands raised in exaltation. “Because we didn’t know any better!”

“*Quiet*,” Jean snapped with a pointed glare. “You know how these conversations affect your father.”

Hermione tore her fingers through her hair and sighed. “He wants to keep her magic bound. I’m well aware, but it’s not his place to decide.”

“Hermione,” Jean said, leaning forward to cover her hand with hers. “You were young when you entrusted Cressida to us, but giving up control won’t be easy. We know we will have to step back eventually, but for now, we all need to work together to find common ground. This has been hard enough on her already.”

Hermione rose from her chair. She pulled the many *Prophet* articles against her chest. “I understand the consequences of my actions but trying to stop Cressida from being what she is meant to be will not be one of them. I fought too hard to ensure we’d have a place in the magical world. I won’t be so willing as to give that up.”

With a deep breath, Hermione turned for the hall. She stopped short before spinning back.

“I know this is difficult for all of us, and I know apologies can’t fix the hurt I caused, but please, consider this from where I’m standing. Every conversation we have about Cressida ends in an argument. She’s my child, mine and Draco’s—a man whose soul is bound to mine and whose name you both know but refuse to say—and neither of us even knew she existed until a few weeks ago.”

Jean hummed, lips pursed. “I think I might understand exactly how that feels.”

Nodding, Hermione swallowed - tired, chest growing heavier by the minute. “At least you had memories of me to return.”

Before Jean could respond the door leading out to the back garden was thrown open.

“It’s so nice out!” Cressida exclaimed. “Ami, will you take a walk with me?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, love. I have to get these parcels unpacked.”

Cressida turned to Hermione with that slight smile that reminded her of Draco. “Will *you* walk me?”

Her heart clenched and she grinned. “I have some time before I need to leave. Let me put these away and I’ll join you.”

It wasn’t long before Cressida appeared in the doorway of the guest room Hermione had claimed. As she stashed *The Prophet* articles in the rubbish bin, Cressida wandered over to the dresser.

She loved the moving pictures and the many books with ‘funny’ titles. Hermione couldn’t wait to show her more of the Wizarding World. To have someone to share adventures in Diagon Alley with, and to read *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. She had so many desires but found herself stuck in the limbo between consequence and confusion.

“Where are you going?”

The voice pulled Hermione from her thoughts. She turned to find Cressida now seated at the end of the bed.

“You said you were going somewhere. Can I come?” she asked again.

Sitting beside her, Hermione ran a hand over Cressida’s curls. “It’s Draco’s birthday today.”

Her pale face gleamed. It quickly morphed into a steady smirk pulled high across one cheek. “Can I come with you to see him?”

Her father’s anger and mother’s worry spiralled between Hermione’s ears. They were cautious, understandably. They’d grappled with their decision to return to England. Cressida’s trepidation gave them pause. Her friends were there. Her school. Her life. Hermione’s parents fought to keep Cressida ‘normal’, unburdened by the fame she’d—no doubt—attract in the Wizarding World.

Cressida respected them, adored them. When dreams turned to nightmares, it was Hermione’s parents she called for. When she was scared or tired, she crawled into *their* laps.

Still, there was something blooming behind her grey eyes. She looked at Hermione with intrigue. She refused to use her name. Perhaps it was in the way she referred to Cressida’s—both self-proclaimed and factual—grandparents as her own.

Perhaps she could see parts of herself in Hermione.

And every interaction with Draco played out the very same way. Cressida intently eyed his hair. She fished for information every time they spoke. She fell into a natural rhythm with him that could best be explained by genetics.

Casual, gradual - they were building trust, growing a foundation from which they could build their own family.

Hermione's wants were closer to fruition every day, but in that realisation, her parents' grip on control continued to tighten.

She tapped a finger on Cressida's nose. "Draco would love nothing more than to see you."

Hermione sighed. She bit down on her bottom lip. She couldn't tell Cressida the truth of it. She never could. She couldn't villainize the fears her parents carried about introducing Cressida to the Wizarding World. She couldn't divide the two homes she'd—one day soon—come to have.

"Tomorrow. We will see him together tomorrow."

Pouting, she leaned into Hermione's arm. Cressida said nothing for a moment as her head rotated to examine Hermione more closely.

"How will you get there?" she asked. "To the magical world?"

The warmth of Cressida's head as it tucked into her side filled Hermione with peace.

"Well, there are a few ways... I can Apparate which, if you remember, means I think about where I want to go and my magic will transport me there. Then there's the Floo network - fireplaces all connected together so you can walk in one and out another. But I've got a bit of a secret of my own, do you want to see it?"

Cressida pulled back and nodded eagerly.

Taking her hand, Hermione stood. She drew her over to the corner of the room - the standing bureau with a set of double doors.

Hermione pulled one open before climbing inside. She lifted Cressida into the space beside her and then closed the door behind them. Darkness crept in. Cressida gripped her arm tighter.

Hermione reopened the door, unveiling her flat now on the other side.

Cressida gasped. Her head popped out of the opening as she looked around. "It's your home. The one from before!"

"My flat is connected to the Floo network. It makes it easier for me to travel to the Wizarding World from here."

She moved to climb out of the bureau but Hermione stopped her.

"You can explore another time. How about that walk?"

Cressida's infamous pout returned. "Fine..."

Hermione checked over her appearance in the mirror. Her cheeks were flushed. Her hands were clammy. She had no business being this nervous. It'd only been a few days since she'd seen him last, but her body had its own ideas. They hadn't been alone together in over a month.

Closing the door to the guest room, she moved in front of the bureau. Hermione pulled it open and stepped inside, repeating the same process from earlier that same morning.

This time when her flat revealed itself on the opposite end, she exited the bureau.

The windows in the living room were open. A Spring breeze filtered through her tiny home. It smelt like parchment and aftershave.

Aftershave?

"You look beautiful."

Hermione spun on her heels. She watched as Draco pushed himself to stand from the wingback in the corner of the room. He slowly glided toward her.

Her smile came easily but she didn't move. "How long have you been waiting for me?"

He shrugged. "A while."

Draco took a step closer.

Another step.

"Hermione..."

She hummed, suddenly overwhelmed by wants and needs.

Draco had her face between his hands. His lips found hers. Hermione allowed him to take and devour whatever parts of her he needed. She was doing the same - memorising, remembering, loving him in the way she missed most.

He sighed, and as if he heard her thoughts said, "I missed you."

"I missed you, too. So much," she managed to exalt against his mouth.

"Never again," he grumbled. "-had a miserable week without you. Never fucking again."

Draco backed her toward the couch. He laid her down against the cushions before climbing on top of her.

"We made good use of those journals, though, and you're finally getting a hang of the mobile phone," she teased.

Draco silenced her with another kiss. “My entire world has been on the other side of the planet for the last five days. Forgive me if I’m not in the mood for your shite jokes.”

Hermione laughed, loving the sound of it being swallowed by his lips.

“Never again,” she promised.

Draco pulled her up and into his lap. Though his mouth had promptly retracted from hers, his hands were everywhere. They traced through her hair, down her sides, before securing to her hips; he held her to him.

“How is she? How are you? I know I’ve asked every day, but tell me again anyway.”

Hermione grinned. “She’s doing well. Her favourite part of the day was when we talked to you. She missed you. She wanted to celebrate your birthday with me—Happy Birthday, by the way.”

He ignored the gesture. “You should have let her come.”

His words were like unspoken permission to feel. Sadness, anger and regret washed over her. They barrelled into her chest with surprising force. As Hermione began to tremble, she clutched Draco’s jaw. She quickly brushed her lips against his before tears overtook her eyes.

The hands on her hips slid around to her back. He hugged her closer but Hermione’s body remained stiff.

“I hate this. I *really* hate this!” she cried.

She sat back on his knees. Her hands drew down from his face and she clenched Draco’s shirt between her fingers.

“I’m tired of fighting. I’m tired of surrendering to my parents because of the guilt I feel for what I did to them! I did this to us, and to her. I gave them control and I believed we could step in and take over, but Cressida - she loves them. She looks to them for everything and it feels selfish to want that to be me- to be *us* instead of them, and you, Draco...

“You’ve been so patient. You’re riding out my parents' scepticism, their anger. You let us close on the house, you take every second I’m fighting for regardless of how and when it comes, and I’m tired of fighting. I don’t- I don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t know how to fix this. It’s your birthday and you shouldn’t-”

“Shh,” he soothed, cutting her off.

He brought her head down to his chest. His arms wrapped around her waist as his chin propped over her hair.

“It was never your responsibility to take it all on. I’m equally to blame for allowing this to continue as long as it has.”

She shook her head, but he went on.

“I let Cressida dictate our place in her life. I let myself be offended by her want to return to Australia and her hesitance to stay here with us. I let your parents keep their role, the same as you did. I didn’t want to scare her off before I had a chance to really know her.”

Sitting up, Hermione’s hands found his shoulders. “It’s time, Draco.”

Slowly, his fingers traced her spine. They threaded through her hair and he lowered Hermione’s lips down to his.

“There was never going to be a perfect time. We were always going to have to deal with her reaction and our parents-”

Hermione cut him off with a watery laugh. “Never in a million years would I have anticipated Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy to be the more agreeable set of grandparents.”

He held back her hair with his palm. “Suppose we should take any win that comes our way.”

She relaxed her forehead against his, nose to nose, and her eyes closed.

“I’ll give my parents the decency of a warning, but yes. I think Cressida’s ready to hear it. She already suspects something and still won’t use my name. She’s been giving me this cute little smirk that looks so much like yours.”

Her words resonated against his lips. “We won’t push her. We’ll take it slow,” he promised.

“I’m worried she’ll never accept us over them... I think that’s why I’ve been so hesitant.”

Draco pushed her up by the shoulders and kissed Hermione’s head. “We have to give her the opportunity to try.”

At that, she hugged herself to him. She breathed Draco in, taking long, measured breaths. Hermione relished in the feel of his hands, the thrum of his heart.

Finally, after a long peaceful moment, she sat up. Her feet returned to the floor and she reached for his hand.

“I have a gift for you. Come with me.”

He snorted, rolling his eyes. Still, he allowed her to direct him down the short hallway toward her room.

“You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“I didn’t *purchase* it. I charmed them for you,” she explained.

Hermione drew Draco toward the bed. There, she’d line up a series of photographs. Cressida as a newborn, as a toddler. Cressida as she was now. There were photographs from birthday parties, piano recitals, and covered in mud from the back garden.

They were Muggle photos Hermione had charmed to move like magic.

“I know I owed you some, but I thought we might frame these for wherever we decide to live together...”

He smiled to himself as he continued down the line of photos. “I suppose you fucking off to Australia with them wasn’t all for not,” he mused.

Hermione laughed. “No, I was happy for the peek into her life before us. I’d like to show you, if you want?”

His attention returned to her. His eyes had darkened. “Later. Show me later.”

Draco threaded his arms beneath Hermione’s. He lifted her from the ground, forcing her legs to wrap around his waist.

“Thank you,” he told her, and his lips found hers. “For the photos, for the reminder that this will all be over soon.”

He kissed her again, and again. Draco’s hands gripped her rear, holding her to him.

He walked her to the corner chair before sitting her on the edge. On his knees, he divested Hermione of her dark denims while she pulled her blouse overhead. Starkers, clad in only her knickers, Draco’s hands drew up her legs. He palmed her waist, her chest and shoulders.

“It’s nice to remember you this time. All of you,” he said.

Her head tilted and she smiled at him. “I was nervous, I’ll admit. I didn’t know how much of this was because of Cressida.”

Leaning over her, Draco kissed her waist and up to her chin before hovering over her lips. “I’d bind my soul to yours all over again, Granger.”

Before she had a chance to respond, he was kissing her again.

He moved across her jaw before descending her neck. Draco unclasped her brasserie and breathed in her warm skin. He kissed the peak and valley of each breast, then he pinched her pert nipple between his lips. His tongue lavished the hurt in a long circular stroke, all while his hands worshipped the length of her.

Hermione whimpered, arching into him. She threaded her fingers into his soft strands of hair.

When Draco moved south again, he didn’t stop until he was between her thighs. He kissed Hermione through the laced fabric of her knickers. Dragging them down with his teeth, he tossed the garment aside.

He didn’t ask permission to taste her. She was his as much as he was hers.

Draco brought her to the edge like he owned her. He pushed her over the peak like he’d be there to catch her when she fell—which he was and always would be. When aftershocks rattled her mind and stole her breath, his hands soothed down her back like she was precious to him. He let her heart rate calm. He let her fingers release their grip on his shoulders.

And after, Draco rid himself of his clothes before taking her seat in the chair. He sheathed his length between her legs in a single thrust, gilding her down onto his lap. Her legs draped on either side of his hips and Hermione's head lolled back.

Draco buried himself to the hilt like he was searching for home. He pushed into her, claiming her, remembering her like there was no one else worth considering in the entire world.

That's how he made her feel—how he'd *always* made her feel. Hermione was loved and adored. She was worshipped and praised.

When she clenched around his length and surrendered a second time, Draco came right along with her. He filled her with himself like a promise for more.

They'd made it this far together and there was a lifetime to go.

"I love you," he breathed into her neck.

His hands gripped her shoulder and waist to the point of pain.

Hermione buried her face into his hair. "I love you, too."

She heard his feet coming up behind her. Bare feet on tile - a sound she hadn't heard in years.

Arms circled her waist. Hands drew up her thighs and under the button-down shirt she'd stolen from him to wear. Draco's lips searched through her mess of curls until they located her neck. He kissed her soundly, nuzzling her skin with his nose.

"Pour me some, too," he mumbled.

Hermione grinned. "One step ahead of you."

She could feel his heat between the layers of clothes they'd readorned. Still, her hands remained steady as she overturned the kettle into two cups.

"We'll be okay," he told her. "All of us."

"I know..."

"She'll be thrilled you're her mum - a war heroine, the brilliant Hermione Granger. Anyone would be lucky to have you in their life."

She sighed, leaning into him. "I know that anywhere I fail, you'll be there to take over. You'll be an incredible father, Draco. You already are."

Head turning, he placed a kiss to her hairline. Draco then spun her to face him. “You’re an amazing mother, Hermione. For all your sacrifices and more—Cressida will see that soon.”

His mouth tipped to say more when a far-off sound caught Hermione's attention. Draco didn't notice.

He barrelled on, kissing her face as he did, “Beautiful. Intelligent. Stubbor-”

Hermione pushed him back. Her hand covered his lips as she glanced around his shoulder. The empty foyer. The barren steps leading to her front walk. The bureau—

Her chest clenched. Hermione slid her back along the counter before freeing herself from Draco's reach.

“Granger?” he questioned once his lips were released.

“Oh no...” she whispered, breathless. “No, I—”

Her words cut off as she slowly walked across the kitchen into the foyer. With a deep breath, Hermione lowered to her knees before the bureau. A shaking hand reached up to pull open the door.

Tiny, pink-lacquered toes revealed amongst shadows. The rest of her small body was held in a tight ball in the darkened corner.

Quickly, Hermione slid the hanging clothes aside. Cressida came into view, arms hugging her legs as she buried her face between her knees. Strands of messy blonde curls stuck out in every direction.

Hermione pulled open the second door and climbed inside. She tried to pry Cressida's limbs apart, but she resisted Hermione's hands.

Draco was there on his knees. “It's alright... you're not in any trouble.”

When she didn't move, he reached forward with both hands. He caught her arms and lifted her from the floor of the bureau. Hermione scrambled out after them.

“Set her on the couch,” she said, voice panicked. “I'll get a blanket.”

Even after Draco placed her down, Cressida remained tucked in the fetal position. He kneeled before her as Hermione wrapped her shoulders with a faded green quilt. She joined at his side, catching his perplexed stare with her wide one.

Her head swivelled back to Cressida.

“Love,” she whispered, feeling the endearment on her tongue and meaning it more than she realised was possible. “Did you hear us talking?”

Cressida nodded into her knees.

Reaching forward, she watched Draco cover Cressida's feet with his hand.

"We're not upset," he promised her. "We're worried about you."

Hermione covered his hand with her own. "What did you hear us say exactly?"

Cressida's voice muffled into her nightdress.

Draco chuckled softly. "Pick your head up a bit so we can understand you," he teased.

She did as he asked, but barely. Her face was still shielded by her knees.

"You want to be my parents..."

It was then they realised she was crying.

"But you can't," she continued. "I have to wait! Ami said we're waiting."

Confusion laced with thought and Hermione tilted her head. "What are you waiting for?"

Cressida dragged in a breath. Her head raised and she hugged herself tighter. "The stories... my mum and dad are coming for me like in the stories!"

Draco's head shook. He looked at Hermione, his brows knit.

"If you take me, they'll never find me! They have to find me like in the stories!"

She shared a glance with Draco and he nodded in his approval.

Moving onto the couch, Hermione caught Cressida's chin. She held her watery grey eyes. "Oh, love, we're not taking you from your mum and dad... We *are* your mum and dad."

Cressida lips parted. Her eyes widened in that cartoonish way that only a child's could do.

"It's true," Draco promised. "We've been looking for you for a long time."

Cressida shook her head forcing Hermione to drop her hand. "But you didn't say-"

"-we didn't want to scare you," Hermione explained.

"We wanted you to get to know us first before we told you the truth," Draco added.

Her face reburied into her knees.

Hermione combed a hand through her blonde curls. "Are you angry with us?"

Cressida shook her head.

"I- I'm happy..." she cried.

Hearing her daughter say it, Hermione thought—perhaps—it was finally possible for them to find happiness all together.

“Us too,” she promised before taking Draco’s hand and directing him up from the floor.

Hermione pulled Cressida over her legs and sat her between them on the couch. Draco’s arm circled Hermione’s shoulders. His other hand found her leg.

They waited for Cressida to untangle her limbs from their ball. Once she had, they hugged themselves to her.

Despite the shock, their melancholy history, the weight of Hermione’s parents' wants and desires - they shared their first real moment as a family of three.

Cheers,

M.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

Chapter Twenty-Three

Draco hesitated with his hand suspended above the door. He could hear raised voices coming from beyond the entryway. Then came the telltale pitch of a cry. Despite knowing he shouldn't, he opened the door. He let himself into the Granger home, stuffing his hands into his trouser pockets.

He couldn't see them, but he could hear them - broken bits of an argument that, no doubt, concerned him. Lingering in the front hall would only rank him higher on the Granger's shit list, though, and so he pressed on. He rounded the archway and cleared his throat, alerting them of his arrival.

Four pairs of eyes located him immediately. He took in Henry Granger's fury, Jean's erratic breaths, and Hermione's red face.

Cressida tore from Jean's arms in a leap. "Dad!" she shouted.

Gods, if that didn't make his uncomfortable entrance worth it.

He caught Cressida in the air, settling her on his hip. "Apologies for the intrusion. I knocked but..."

Draco let his words taper off. Cressida's hands were warm around his neck. She hugged herself to him; the trepidation from moments earlier was evident in her elevated heart-rate and the grip she maintained on him.

He turned his head and met her gaze. "Happy Birthday, beautiful."

She grinned, leaning closer. "Were you there when I was born?"

Draco chuckled. "I was, yes."

"Was it disgusting?"

A gasp sounded from across the room. Hermione covered her mouth and the laugh that burst from her throat with an open hand while Henry fixed his glare on Draco.

“Cressida!” Jean scolded.

“A valid question!” she fought, crossing her arms.

Her sneaky gaze slid back to Draco, and she whispered, “Will you tell me about it someday?”

As she approached, Hermione rolled her eyes. Her hand held against Cressida’s hip before she rose onto her toes and kissed Draco’s cheek.

“When you’re older,” she said. “*Much* older.”

Draco caught her stare. His head lowered to hers. “Everything alright?” he whispered.

She shrugged. “It will be.”

He watched as Hermione turned back to face her parents.

She sighed, forcing a hand through her mused curls. “I know you’re upset. I know you don’t approve, but I did not bind her magic with the intent of making it permanent. I was keeping her safe, and now that she is... it’s important for Cressida to have the freedom to learn every bit of herself that she was born with.”

Cressida leaned her head against his shoulder. “Will it hurt?” she asked.

“See! She’s scared, and your disregard is why we’re upset,” Henry said, his hands raised.

“She’s scared because we’re fighting. We’re always fighting!” Hermione exclaimed.

Draco traced his daughter’s nose with his finger. “It won’t hurt. We’re taking you to see Healer Leevy and then to someplace very special.”

Her brows rose. “Is it another magical place?”

He smirked, his shoulder lifting. “Perhaps.”

Cressida wiggled in his arms until he put her down. She grabbed his and Hermione’s hands and tugged them toward the door.

“Wait just a minute,” Hermione pleaded with a laugh.

She slipped her hand from Cressida’s before she returned to the centre of the room.

“We’re in this together. The five of us. We’re a family with a taxing history, and we’re not always going to see things the same way, but we need to try,” she said and ran a hand over her face. “You accepted me once for who I was, and now I’m asking you to do the same for my daughter.”

Neither Hermione's mother nor father responded. A deep, contemplative look appeared on both of their faces.

Hermione continued, "She was born to two magical parents, then raised by the most incredible people in my life. I'm so grateful to have you, and that Cressida has you. That will never change."

She took a step back, a second, before taking his and Cressida's hands in her own. Draco squeezed her palm. He kept his eyes on her parents, nodding a polite farewell.

"Can we go now?" Cressida whined and she stomped her little foot.

He heard Hermione's long intake of breath as she nodded. "We can, and we'll be back in time for dinner. Dad as well, if he likes."

Cressida was dragging them toward the door again. This time, Hermione let her.

"Say goodbye," she whispered to their daughter.

"Goodbye, Ami! Bye Papa!" Cressida shouted as she joyously leapt off the landing onto the front steps.

Her hands pulled from theirs and she skipped ahead. Her ruffled skirt fanned out when she spun. As Draco and Hermione watched on, he draped an arm around her waist.

His lips brushed her temple. "I'm proud of you."

She leaned into his hold. "I hope I did the right thing."

"You did," he promised her. "One step closer to being the family we're meant to be, your parents included."

It must have been the right thing to say because Hermione stopped short. She grabbed his collar and gave him a quick, bruising kiss.

When she pulled back, she called out to Cressida, who rejoined at their side.

"Are you ready for your first lesson in Apparition?" Hermione asked.

Grey eyes widened, and it did something to Draco's heart to see excitement blossom behind irises he'd bestowed onto someone else.

"It's wonderful to see you again," Healer Leevy greeted Cressida. "I've heard we're celebrating a birthday today."

Cressida blushed as she was helped onto the examination table. "I'm five today..."

"Five is an excellent age to be," she said before turning to Draco and Hermione. "Mister Malfoy, Miss Granger, how are you fairing?" she asked.

He gave a small nod. "The response has been... overwhelming, to say the least, but we've been managing it."

She smiled. "Gossip fades."

"Good gossip lingers," said Hermione.

Draco chuckled, leaning into her arm. "Anyway, we appreciate you agreeing to see us in a more private setting."

The healer waved them off. "Of course, it's not a problem. I did have time to look over your notes from Mrs Tonks. It's a simple enough extraction. You'll be off to celebrate this birthday in no time at all."

"And it won't hurt?" Cressida asked, lip pouting and eyes fixed on the healer.

Healer Leevy placed a hand on her knee. "Not one bit, I promise you."

Draco brushed a finger over Cressida's arm. "Told you as much myself."

She smirked and asked, "And then I'll have magic, too?"

Draco spared a quick glance at Hermione. She appeared nervous; her hands wrung at her waist.

"Not for immediate use, no," Healer Leevy began. "I'll remove the bind and we will meet again in a few weeks."

"You see, magic presents itself when the person is ready," Hermione explained. "It can be sudden. You might not realise it's happening at first."

"But we'll be there for you the entire time," Draco added.

"Yes," Hermione agreed.

Cressida frowned and her head turned in confusion. "I will have magic, though, won't I?"

Healer Leevy squeezed her knee once more before removing her hand. "We'll know for certain once your mind has healed in a few weeks."

"My mind?" Cressida questioned, prodding a finger against her head.

Lifting her wand, Healer Leevy conjured a diagnostic. "That's where the bond was placed. It prevented your mind from accessing any magic you might have."

Draco tried to ignore the sting that hearing ‘*might*’ had drawn to his chest. He could continue to love his daughter under any circumstances. He’d support her regardless of any future prepared for her—magical or non.

He couldn’t say the same for his parents or the dozens of reporters scouring for good gossip. Though he was still silently hopeful that it would all be an irrelevant worry.

“Right there- you see the golden threads,” Healer Leevy continued, pulling Draco from his thoughts.

With her free hand, she pointed toward the diagnostic. Long strands of yellow pulsed within the reading. Cressida looked on eagerly with a grin and wide eyes, nodding with equal enthusiasm.

“Those are your thoughts- see how they move?”

At that, they began to move faster. Another turn of her wand hand and Healer Leevy honed in on a singular thread.

“And this here, that purple thread- that’s magic.”

“My magic?” Cressida asked.

Hermione moved to sit beside her. “No, that magic belonged to a friend- the one who brought you to Ami and Papa.”

Healer Leevy turned over her shoulder to Draco. Her brow arched and she nodded. Her wrist moved a third time. She uttered the severing spell and the thread of Tonk’s magic was removed.

“And that’s that,” she said. “You’re no longer bound.”

Cressida’s mouth dropped. “That was it? But I feel the same...”

Healer Leevy sheathed her wand and the diagnostic faded. “You likely will for a while. Your mind has to heal and relearn to connect to magic on its own.”

Her words left Cressida silent. She appeared contemplative, perhaps a little sad.

“Are you alright?” Hermione asked.

She smiled but it was quickly replaced by the same far-off expression. Cressida nodded instead.

Hermione’s eyes lifted to his. He could see it there; she didn’t believe their daughter either. There was something satisfying about understanding Hermione this way—without words and with only a look. It had Draco feeling like they’d be okay, regardless of what their future held.

“Shall we continue on with our day?” he asked his girls after they’d finished with Healer Leevy.

He lifted Cressida off her feet and took Hermione’s hand. The three were whisked off to their next destination.

“Why is she taking so long?” Cressida asked, groaning as she leaned into Draco’s arm.

The sugar high from their trip to Fortescue's had long since gone, as had the initial excitement about her first trip to Diagon Alley. He directed Cressida toward the bench in front of Borgin and Burkes. He sat first and she surprised him by climbing up into his lap.

She turned, facing him. “Why can only magical people come here?”

He shrugged, lips pursing. “Non-magical people don’t know it exists. There are important rules to keep places like this safe.”

“Ami and Papa have been here, though, and they’re not magical,” she pointed in a very Hermione Granger sort of way.

He chuckled and playfully lowered his eyes. “There’s an exception for Muggles who have magical children.”

She hummed, nodding to herself. “So if I didn’t have magic, I could still come here with you?” she asked.

Draco affectionately brushed the light curls from her face. “We could come here anytime you like.”

“And could I still go to magical schools?”

He drew in a breath before slowly releasing it. “Well, that’s a bit different... but you don’t need to worry about that because I’m not worried about it.”

A disgruntled noise sounded in her nose.

"Is that why you were upset while we were with Healy Leevy?"

She turned away from him, but Draco caught her chin with a hooked finger.

Cressida sighed before she answered. "She said my mind has to find magic on its own. What if it can't?"

His fingers combed her hair. It was soft, like his own. He found himself wanting to do it over and over again. If this simple action brought her the same peace it brought him, he decided

that he would.

"Your mum is a very powerful witch, you know," Draco started. "And I'm not certain there's ever been a non-magical person born to my family. But as I said, I'm not worried. Do you know why?"

She shook her head.

"Because magic isn't what makes you special or important to me. You're special all on your own."

Slowly, Cressida began to grin. She leaned against Draco, hugging him tight.

"Goodness! Is that her?" They heard spoken above them.

Both Draco and Cressida pulled apart. They looked up to find a witch staring at them with wide eyes and a slack jaw.

"Merlin's beard! She looks just like you!"

Draco's hands tightened on Cressida. He pulled her off his lap and tucked her into his side.

"This is hardly appropriate timing," he scolded the woman.

"Sorry, I- sorry! The rumours, well, no one knew if they were true or not. No one's seen her, and-" She cut herself off.

His glare further hardened. Draco said nothing. He pulled Cressida from the bench and promptly carried her into the shop.

"I'm sorry about that," he said, placing her back on her feet.

"Mum said people might be excited to see me."

Draco laughed. "That's putting it lightly. You're bound to be a celebrity, just like her."

Shock fell over Cressida's face. "Mum's famous?"

He smiled. "There's a lot to learn, but luckily we have plenty of time to review it."

"Review what, exactly?" Came her voice from behind them.

With books wedged in one arm, Hermione placed her free hand on Cressida's shoulder.

"The events that led to your fame, of course," he explained.

She rolled her eyes with a soft snort.

"That being said," Draco continued. "We should probably head out. There's going to be a scene here if we linger much longer."

She motioned down to her books. "I'm all set."

"What did you get?" Cressida asked, pulling onto her toes for a closer look.

"We'll look through them together later," she said, pulling the titles closer to her chest. "I thought we might see what we can find about magical bonds, and some fun facts you might like to know about the Wizarding World."

Draco's head tilted. She wouldn't meet his eyes, but the cheeky tilt of her lips gave her away. Ever the swot, Hermione was obviously eager to start Cressida's studies. It appeared she wasn't nervous about their daughter's magical fate anymore, either.

"Dinner with your parents?" he asked, taking Hermione's arm and leading them from the shop.

"Probably a good idea. They'll want to see for themselves how Cressida is doing, and have cake to celebrate, of course."

He motioned forward with his head before they continued toward the Apparation point outside the Leaky Cauldron.

"I'd like you to stay, if you would? If it makes you uncomfortable, I'd understand. I'm not trying to pressure you into anything or-"

He sent her a look, cutting her off. His brow raised and he smirked. "I'll stay."

Hermione smiled, releasing a breath. "Good- that's great. I- thank you."

He loved the red tinge that quickly covered her cheeks. He'd employ a million more reasons to make her do just that.

Hermione

Draco left after dinner with a promise to return to her flat later, after dark.

Hermione stood in the doorway of Cressida's bedroom. She watched her five-year-old lecture her dolls on proper Diagon Alley etiquette. They were lined up at tiny desks; it was reminiscent of the way Hermione remembered her own youthful imagination.

"Cressida," she greeted with a slight smile against her lips.

She watched her turn, a matching grin overtaking her face.

“How would you like to go somewhere with me? We wouldn’t be long. Think of it as one last birthday gift.”

Cressida was quick to her feet. She hurried to the doorway, presenting herself eagerly to Hermione.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

Hermione lowered to her knees. She brushed the curls back over Cressida’s shoulders.

“I have a favour to ask someone, and that someone has been very excited to meet you.”

Grey eyes widened and Cressida brought her face in close to Hermione’s. “How will we get there?”

She touched her daughter’s cheek before tapping a finger against her nose. “I think it’s time we try the Floo...”

Cressida gave an excited jump and was then pulling Hermione toward her room and the enchanted bureau.

Chapter End Notes

This isn't what you want to hear right now... or maybe it is. I don't know. I have these next scenes monopolising more of the epilogue than I intended... So I might, possibly... add one more chapter. I know, I know, but sometimes when we outline these things... nineteen chapters turns into twenty-five. And that's on fanfic.

There was a lot to wrap up, and I really do want the epilogue to feel like a hea epilogue. I think these kids deserve it.

Cheers (as always) for the love and feedback. Know I appreciate every comment, kudo, and rec along the way.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner

Chapter Twenty-Four

There was the sudden *pop* of Apparition. Cressida flinched, ducking quickly behind Hermione's back. Then Cressida's head circled her hip and she gasped.

"Mummy?" she questioned; voice tinged with hesitance.

Her wide confused eyes looked up at her from around her waist. Hermione shouldn't have been surprised seeing her first house elf was more shocking than the trip by Floo. Leave it to Draco's daughter to be completely giddy at the sight of green flames.

"Miss Granger!" Mippy greeted. "It's wonderful to see you again, but I'm afraid the young Master Malfoy isn't home."

Hermione smiled. "That's quite alright. I'm well aware. As it stands, we're here to see the Lord and Mrs Malfoy."

Mippy fidgeted with her hands. She dared a glance at Cressida. "The Misses will be so pleased to see you. I'll bring her straight away!"

Another *pop* had Cressida hiding at her back once more. "Mummy, what was that?"

Hermione drew her out from behind her and lowered to Cressida's height. "Do you remember those books you saw in my room? There was one called, *Magical Creatures and Where to Find Them*. Well, Mippy is a house elf."

"She's a magical creature? But she can talk!"

Hermione laughed. "Yes, well, I suspect you'll be surprised to learn how many can. The term, creature, is extremely off-putting, I think."

Any further commentary drew to a close as fast feet move in their direction. Sharp heels cut into tile and ascended the adjacent hallway.

Narcissa Malfoy came into view. She skid to a dramatic, and uncharacteristic halt.

"Miss Granger... Mippy said- and I wouldn't let myself believe that you did, but you have..."

Hermione internally penned another 'when pigs fly' moment as she watched Narcissa Malfoy ramble on.

As if suspecting Hermione's thoughts, Narcissa composed herself, reeling in a breath. Her chin tipped and she slowly approached.

Hermione took a hand around Cressida's arm and returned to her feet. "Cressida, this is your grandmother. This is Narcissa Malfoy, your father's mother."

Cressida's head tilted before she righted herself. "How do you do? I'm Cressida Granger."

And *Merlin, help her*, Narcissa laughed. She took the two steps forward, closing the distance between them, and lowered to her knees.

"The pictures- I saw the pictures but, she looks just like him- like my Draco, Hermione."

Hermione had to hold back a gasp upon hearing her name on the woman's lips. She did, but she was also staring a mental list to share with Draco in the near future.

Narcissa reached out a tentative hand. She appeared to pause, perhaps looking for permission. Cressida, magnetic and confident—like her father—stepped closer. She allowed Narcissa to touch her hair, her cheek—trace her face with a pointed, shaking finger.

"It's my hair..." Cressida said with a blush.

"It's everything," both Narcissa and Hermione found themselves correcting her in unison.

A pair of heavier footsteps followed from a distance. Metal pronged tile, and Lucius Malfoy entered the parlour.

"Lucius, come here," Narcissa instructed. "You need to see- goodness... Come meet your granddaughter."

Lucius was slower in his approach, more reserved. There was no discernible reaction apparent on his face. He appeared as stern and unkind as always.

But as he drew closer, Hermione watched his brow tick. He faltered in step for a mere second, only a brief fumble, but she'd caught it.

"You have my hair, too!" Cressida greeted. "Like mine and my dad's!"

A noise pulled from behind his lips. His eyes widened before lowering. "Some would say it's one of the Malfoy's best family traits."

"It doesn't hurt," said Hermione. "Though there are a few I'm more fond of."

Narcissa returned to her feet. She clutched Lucius' arm between her hands—whether for herself or for him, Hermione didn't know.

“Not that I'm- *we're* not pleased to see you both, but why are you here, Miss Granger?” Narcissa asked. “From what Draco told us, I assumed it's be a long while before we, well, I suppose that's irrelevant now...”

Hermione nodded, pulling Cressida to her front. She placed her hands on her daughter's shoulders. “I was hoping you both might be willing to assist me with something.”

It surprised both her and Narcissa, that it was Lucius who responded first, “Go on.”

She smiled, genuine and wide. Weight retracted from Hermione's chest and breathing was suddenly easier.

“It's for Draco,” she began.

They were many paces ahead of her, but laughter had her slowing in her steps.

“I'm glad you find this funny, Granger,” Draco called back over his shoulder.

Cressida dragged him from the Apparition point at a speed that would rival many cyclists.

“Pick up your feet!” she demanded. “We don't have all day!”

Hermione caught up in time to hear him grumble. “The bloody two of you...”

“Language!” she and Cressida scolded together.

He was rolling his eyes as he reached back and caught Hermione's hand. “You know very well that I don't enjoy surpsises.”

“It's a good one,” she assured him.

His eyes turned down to Cressida who was still apt to keep their pace. “And she told you what it was?”

Cressida shook her head. “Grandmother 'Cissa did. She showed me-”

He yanked them both to a stop. “I'm sorry, did you just say-”

His words cut off and his head sharply turned. He met Hermione's eyes.

“Have you been conspiring with my mother?”

Hermione lips pursed as Cressida said, “What's conspiring?”

“It’s what gets you sorted into the most prestigious house at Hogwarts,” he announced. “So long as you’re not doing it against your fellow Slytherins.”

“In other words, you can dish it but can’t take.”

His expression hardened into a glare, one he fixed on the mother of his child. “On the contrary, I’m impressed, Granger. Though where my mother’s concerned I know I should keep my wits about me.”

Hermione shrugged and motioned on with her head. “You might be pleasantly surprised.”

No longer able to maintain her grip on their hands, Cressida groaned. She drew to their backs, urging them on with a forceful push.

Draco and Hermione shared a smile as they allowed their daughter to propel them forward. She returned to their side when they reached the first crossing and led them left, further down the pavement.

“Where are we?” Draco asked. “I’m not familiar with this neighbourhood.”

Hermione didn’t respond. Cressida flashed her a devious look from around Draco’s waist, and they continued on. A long section of terraced houses separated them from the main drag and the Muggle public transit.

“If my mother’s going to make a sudden appearance, you’d warn me, right?” he asked Hermione.

She laughed, hands raised. “I don’t think you have to worry about that today. Tomorrow, however...”

He squinted at her, obvious in his scepticism. His mouth dropped to respond, but Cressida cut him off.

“Here it is!” she shouted.

Draco quickly turned away from Hermione, confusion lingering. His eyes watched Cressida ascend a set of brick stairs leading to a white door. Her arms held wide; a full grin plastered over her cheeks.

“What’s this?” he said, crossing his arms.

As she strode past, Hermione bumped his hip. She joined Cressida on the landing and pushed open the door.

“Do you want to see *my* room?” Cressida asked, rocking excitedly on the balls of her feet.

“Your- what?”

His arms fell at his side. He approached Hermione slowly, shock pulling his brow high and jaw low.

“No more secrets,” he scolded her. “What are we doing here?”

Cressida grabbed one of his hands with both of hers. Hermione did the same, and they drew him over the threshold.

“It’s not far from my parents,” she started.

“Two stops, and it’s only a quarter kilo to the nearest Underground entry!” Cressida added.

With a snort, Hermione dropped Draco’s hand and placed hers on Cressida’s shoulder.

“What?” she said, pouting. “Papa said it was important to know.”

Hermione’s eyes rolled before refinding Draco’s. “As I said, it’s close to my parents, and thanks to yours... it’s in a Wizarding district. We can be added to the Floo Network here, and there’s Apparation points on both ends of the street. If you don’t like it, it doesn’t have to be forever, but for now, I thought-”

“Granger,” he said, silencing her. “Did you buy us a house?”

Her nose crinkled and shoulders raised. “Sort of, well, I’m renting it from your parents. They insisted, and I insisted, and I suppose it’s actually *us* who are renting it from them.”

He chuckled, head-turning idly from side to side. “You already stole my soul and tainted our five-year-old with your bossy personality; now, you’re telling me where to live?”

She felt the corners of her lips work their way upward. Hermione fought it, waiting for the confirmation she needed to let her joy show.

Draco lifted Cressida from the floor before placing his lips on Hermione’s. “I love you,” he whispered, tilting his forehead briefly into hers. “It’s perfect and I- thank you.”

At that, Hermione allowed her smile to take over her face. “You haven’t even seen anything yet! You might still hate it.”

“Yeah, come see!” Cressida said, bouncing in his hold.

He set her down, playfully swatting her back. “Lead the way, would you?”

She bound up the first set of stairs at a sprint.

Draco turned, taking Hermione’s hips beneath his hands. “You bought us a house...”

She shook her head. “A home.”

He laughed and kissed her again.

“Come on, come on already!” Cressida bellowed before sprinting out of sight.

He smirked, eyes still locked on Hermione’s. “Something tells me, it’d be wise to follow her.”

“Well, she is a Granger-Malfoy...”

Draco took her hand, guiding them up the stairs. “With our combined intelligence, she’s destined for greatness.”

Hermione squeezed his palm, fingers laced together. “And a whole mess of trouble.”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Incoming epilogue in three, two...

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

...one.

Well, that's all she wrote folks.

There's so many wonderful people worth thanking today - up first, of course, my alphabet and main squeeze of a friend, *forgive_me_severus*. You got me through it, and then some. I adore you more than words.

GreyDitto - for all the same reasons, but also for taking the time to share this ride with me. You didn't have to, and it means everything to me that you did.

Arlnoff - as always, for having my back, for following my work, trying it... even if it doesn't hit. For leaving feedback every dang time. I appreciate it more than I can say.

AutumnWeen - for the comments, for the recs I see littered across social media. You bring tears to my eyes, and your support and friendship has been an absolute blessing.

Casey02, FluffyMutant, Frekles, Rav69, samanthalouise, helloworld (*who i think we lost to the big reveal, but i'm okay and i've accepted it- leaving the love commentary here regardless because if they come back, I hope they laugh*), bdevereaux, JasmineDragon, h_nova, and I know there are dozens of others but I'm going off memory here so please forgive me. You're the heart to this story. Your consistent feedback (especially during these last few weeks with illnesses and massive life changes) has been the motivation to press on and keep going. I have so much gratitude for all of your comments and the love you've shown me. All, even those whose pennames I can't bring forward in my mind immediately, are immensely appreciated. Please, don't doubt that.

So, that's that. Here's your hea epilogue. I'm probably going to go cry now or something. Maybe have a glass of wine.

(See end notes for what's next.)

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Beyond Recall or Desire

Vannminner



- Epilogue -

There were no peacocks wandering the garden. Freshly charmed snow didn't cover the grounds. Still, the party planned was held to Draco Malfoy's exact specifications. It was September, and humidity thickened the air as golden rays rained on their many guests.

"This is weird," he heard Potter remark.

"Too weird," the Weaslette-Potter echoed.

It was Ron fucking Weasley who surprised him, however. Draco watched his broadened shoulders shrug as he leaned against his wife.

“I’m okay with it,” he said.

Both Potter and Weaslette turned to him; mouths agape and eyes wide.

“What...” he continued. “The Manor’s not so terrifying in this light, and Malfoy seems like a good bloke these days.”

Turning his head in mirth, Draco chuckled. He crossed through the French doors and onto the patio, placing a hand on Weasley’s shoulder.

“Was that a compliment, Weasley?” he greeted.

Weasley shrugged him off. “Not for your benefit, Malfoy.”

Draco smirked as he fastened the buttons on his jacket. “Correction to your statement. I *am* good- good for Hermione, but there’s plenty of Slytherin still left in my blood for some old fun.”

His head tipped in farewell and he strode toward the stairs.

“Oh,” he stopped short. “Do enjoy the party.”

Draco departed the veranda, travelling across the garden to where he found his parents conversing off to the side.

“Mother, father,” he alerted them to his presence.

“My Dragon, you look dashing,” Narcissa said before kissing his cheek.

He returned the sentiment. “And you, lovely as always.”

When Draco pulled back, he eyed his father. He appeared stiff and out of sorts. His cane clutched between his wide stance and his lips pursed in obvious thought.

“It’s a lovely party,” Narcissa said.

Draco offered her a small smile. “You’ve outdone yourself.”

“Where’s that grandchild of mine?” his father gruffly asked.

He snorted. Draco couldn’t help it. Lucius Malfoy was the same stern-mannered wizard he had always been. The only difference now being that an incredible soft spot formed for the child aptly named, *desire*.

“I suspect she’s around here somewhere. She was tailing Mippy across the rose gardens a few moments ago.”

Narcissa tutted. “Do make certain she makes her rounds. There are many guest here eager to meet her.”

Draco mocked a short bow. “Yes, mother.”

“Astoria Greengrass is here as well,” she said, eyes diverting toward the tea tables on the opposite side of the hydrangea bushes. “With her new betrothed. A nice young wizard- a Muggleborn, too, if you can believe it.”

His lips curled toward one cheek and his mother continued.

“They arrived with Daphne saying they came to support the change in times, and your new family.”

Narcissa smiled fondly at him. His father remained stiff, but no more put-out than usual.

“I’ll give them my thanks after I’ve collected Hermione.”

“Yes, what are you doing down here anyway?” she asked.

Draco’s eyes scanned the party. “Looking for Theo. Have you seen him?”

“Last I saw he was harassing Miss Granger’s parents,” said Lucius.

Draco internally groaned, his shoulders deflating. “Better go save them.”

He was off again. Rounding the tent, he performed another sweep of the large dining area. There, he found *many* missing pieces.

The Grangers sat with the Weasley seniors. Theo was also there, with Cressida on his lap. Her hands moved wildly as she regaled them with some outlandish story she'd obviously made up; a brilliant Slytherin to be.

“Is it true you have to get out of bed to turn the lights on?” he heard Theo ask Henry.

Rolling his eyes, Draco approached. He stood at Theo’s back and greeted the table in sequence.

“Where’s our girl?” Jean asked after the formalities had passed.

“Yes, where is Hermione?” said Molly Weasley, grinning.

“She was changing her clothes. I told her I’d walk her down shortly.”

“Probably irritated,” said Henry. “She hates being surprised, especially when there’s a crowd involved.”

“Like someone else I know...” Jean teased.

As their repartee continued, Draco palmed Theo’s shoulder. He motioned toward the edge of the tent.

“Bring the kid,” he instructed.

With Cressida in his arms, Theo followed Draco back into the mid-day breeze. Draco hovered close. His words were spoken soft, so as not to carry beyond their small circle.

“It’s all set then?” Draco asked.

Theo nodded. He fished around his pocket before slipping his hand into Draco’s.

“Clean as a can be,” he said as his hand pulled back.

Draco locked eyes with him and nodded. “Thank you,” he said sincerely.

Theo shrugged. “Thanks are the least I deserve after, what being abandoned mid-mission and cast aside as the irrelevant lifelong friend.”

Draco snorted. “Are we still on this?”

“I’ll never let you forget, mate. It’s practically my duty.”

“What was that you gave Daddy?” Cressida asked behind low eyes, pulling the men from their banter.

Draco ignored her question. He held out his arms and she leapt into them.

“Come with me,” he said. “You have a very important job to see to.”

He found Hermione in the en suite in front of the mirror. Her body was adorned by new lavender dress robes. She had her hair held in a knot over her head, but promptly dropped it when she spotted him in the doorway.

“I’m very upset with you,” she said, lowering her eyes.

He shrugged and leaned against the frame. “I suspected you would be.”

A long breath of air forced from her lungs and she came to stand before him. “I don’t like surprises, not when they involve a crowd.”

“Apparently, neither does your father.”

Hermione’s head notched in confusion. She ignored him and said, “I don’t want to go down there.”

He smiled, stepping closer. With a raised hand, Draco pushed back the hair falling into her face. “I’m sorry, love, but I’m afraid you must.”

“It’s my birthday,” she grumbled, pouting childishly.

“A very important birthday,” he noted. “Which should be celebrated with friends - the first birthday since revealing your secret, albeit forgotten, dalliance with a Slytherin and your

subsequent secret love child.”

Her eyes lowered, strict in their ire.

Draco went on. “Everyone is here to support you- support us,” he amended. “It’s important we show them a united front. Outside of the *Prophet*, we haven’t moved beyond our small circles. This is important for Cressida, too.”

Lips pursing, she swayed. “Where *is* Cressida?”

“Harassing house elves, no doubt.”

Hermione laughed. She leaned forward pressing her forehead into his chest.

His hand came up and stroked her arms, down her spine, before he pulled her back by the shoulders. “Why are you nervous?”

She sighed and shrugged. “This is the first time our two worlds have come together- my Muggle and your... *not*. And I saw the Greengrass sisters out there. Pansy Parkinson, too... and Blaise, and Theo, and *Godric*, spare me...”

She wrung her hands. Hermione reeled in a deep breath and she continued.

“We lied to all of them. We lied to protect Cressida and enjoy what we could of our relationship. What if...”

Her words cut off. Her gaze dropped to her hands.

Draco frowned. “What if, *what*?” he prompted.

Hermione bit her cheek, mulling through thoughts behind her wide brown eyes which still refused to meet his. “Sometimes I feel like the witch I was before we broke the memory bond. For that witch, this all moved too fast. For the other one, *me*, it didn’t move fast enough.

“What if all the worst things we imagined can still happen to us?”

His hands circled her waist. He held her close. “Before I came up here, father was trying to convince Cressida to fuck off to the stables with him to feed the horses... *Years ago*, we might have faced the reality we feared, but it's different now. We’re safe... all of us.”

She brought her face into his chest once more. Draco felt her breaths deepen and her hands flex against his shirt.

“I think I have a way to prove it to you...” he whispered.

Hermione looked up, brow arched.

His head coyly turned and a slight smirk drew his lips to the side. Stepping back, he took Hermione’s hand and led her back into his childhood bedroom from the en suite.

Draco then directed her to the door. He turned Hermione to face him and dropped her hand.

“Months ago, in this spot, you kissed me. You said something about a hypothesis or some other nonsense, but knowing nothing at all of our past, you kissed me.”

Her face scrunched. “We had the journals, and the matching brands proving otherwise.”

His attention circled the ceiling. “Witch, let me speak. You do enough of it for the both of us as is.”

Hermione whacked him with the back of her hand. “Go on.”

With a dramatic sigh, Draco pinched the bridge of his nose. “As I was saying, you kissed me even though everything we remembered said you shouldn’t. I’d failed you here in my family home. I’d failed you again as the bully who tormented you. I was still that person when you kissed me. And I’m still that person today, even with my old memories intact.”

Her mouth tipped to respond—argue, *no doubt*. He quickly covered her lips with his hand.

“But I have proof people can change. And that *I* can continue to change.”

Draco raised his fist and knocked on the door to Hermione’s right. In a flash, it swung open. Cressida bounded into the room and came to stand at his side.

“Cressida has something for you,” he explained. “It’s from me, but it’s also from my parents.”

Pinched between two fingers, Cressida revealed the silver ring. He watched Hermione’s eyes go wide—and that time, it was *she* who covered her own mouth with an open hand.

“It’s a formality, really,” he went on. “We’re already soul-bond, which is as good as married by Ministry standards. However, I still thought you might like to have a ring.”

“Draco...” she said, breathless, awestruck.

He continued, not allowing Hermione to distract him. “When Father said there were assurances the Malfoys put in place to continue their lineage, a ring was one of them. Not this particular ring. The ring I was meant to give my betrothed was my grandmother’s. This ring... was my mother’s... Father said you should have a ring that wasn’t tarnished by dark magic, an heirloom *separate* from our beliefs. My mother has always been kind, a light in the darkness. We’d like for you to wear this ring.”

She shook her head erratically, fingers still pressed to her lips. “I can’t- I can’t take your mother’s ring, Draco! I- never expected this.”

Draco held out his hand and Cressida promptly dropped the ring in his palm. He then pulled the hand from Hermione’s face, soothing her knuckles with gentle strokes from his thumb.

“You don’t need to worry about joining the party because my parents wanted you to have this. Theo broke the law for us a half-dozen times this year. Blaise is happy to get laid by

anyone willing-”

“Draco!” Hermione scolded, wide eyes motioning toward Cressida.

He shrugged. “Sorry, still getting used to the filter... but moving right along—if you’ll remember, Pansy thinks you’re fit, and the Greengrass sisters told Mother they were here to support our coming out as a family...”

Draco pressed the ring to the tip of her finger before sliding it into place.

“As I said, you have nothing to worry about. They’re all here for you.”

Hermione’s gaze filtered between Draco and the ring. “I- thank you,” she breathed.

He caught her around the waist as she flung herself at him. He then felt tiny arms wrapping around their legs.

Draco lowered a hand, resting it on Cressida’s head. “Who would have thought,” he said, burrowing into Hermione’s curls. “-when we were young and in love, that any of this would be possible.”

She pulled back, hand joining his on their daughter’s shoulder. Hermione gave him a small tearful grin and laughed. And *Merlin, fuck...* that sound strummed the cord tethering him to her, playing his soul like a fine-tuned harp.

“Look at us now...” Hermione responded. “We have all we desired.”

Draco nodded, kissing her lips. “And then some, I think.”

Cheers,

M.

Chapter End Notes

Aside from fests and challenges (and DM's DoDD - which is like my side puff piece), I do have another grand project started. I like to have a little leeway before I begin posting (planning right now for April). She's a bit bigger than BRoD. She's a bit darker in someways. A tinge heavier on the sci-fi / magical ideologies. BUT, still a dramione. I'd drop the summary, but i'm a little nervous to say too much before I have it ironed out better.

For updates - follow me on facebook/tumblr/instagram as vannminner. Also, don't forget to subscribe for future updates.

Oh, you know what I can say, though... the name... the name you're looking out for is *Ephemeral*.

Works inspired by this one

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