



Hermione's Husband Checklist

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Hermione's Husband Checklist

by [greenflowerpot](#)

Summary

Post-Hogwarts AU. Bookish Hermione and pining Draco. 🥰

Hermione is on a very important adventure as part of her job at Fletcher's Rare and Unusual Books. Also, she's terrible at dating, but that isn't relevant. To the book job, anyway.

Draco has been secretly in love with her for years. He's been roped in to helping her hunt down the rarest book of them all. Hermione would never be interested in him, he knows that, so he'll just have to control his feelings while they work in close proximity together, won't he?

Notes

Comments are always appreciated ^__^❤️

I made a [Twitter](#) ~*~

- Translation into Italiano available: [Hermione's Husband Checklist \(TRADUZIONE ITALIANA\)](#) by [silmjller](#)

Chapter 1

Hermione was on page 373, and Count Arlington seemed finally about to man up.

For two days she had been speeding through *The Count and I*, impatiently waiting chapter after chapter as Count Arlington denied his feelings for Lady Gray, opting instead to antagonize her in public and long for her in private. Now, at last, he was facing his feelings.

“My dear Lady,” the Count whispered. “I have tried and failed to stay away. Don’t marry the Duke. He loves you not as I—”

Beep beep beep!

Hermione jumped and cancelled her timer charm. With a frustrated huff, she shoved the book into her bag and stood up. Count Arlington’s full confession would have to wait until after work. She drained the rest of her coffee and dropped the mug into the sink before pulling on her shoes and stepping out the door.

Fletcher’s Rare and Unusual Books was just a short walk away, and it took Hermione only ten minutes to cross the few blocks between her flat and the shop. The bell above the door jingled as she burst in. Old Mr. Fletcher was reshelving some new books, and he turned to smile at her as she entered.

“Good morning Miss Granger. You look rather cheerful; did you finish the book, then?”

“Almost! Count Arlington is about to confess his love! You’ll have to tell Maggie that I’ve been enthralled with it.”

“She’ll be pleased to hear that,” he said, eyes twinkling. “Hopeless romantics, the both of you. I believe she has another recommendation when you’ve finished with this one. *The Merwoman and her King* or something like that.”

Hermione dropped her bag on the ground behind the counter and plopped into the swivelly chair.

“I can’t wait to dig into it,” she said happily, shuffling through the papers on the desk.

“Though I’ll have to get through my next nonfiction before I jump into another romance.”

Harry and Ron had been astonished when Hermione quit her job at the Ministry to work at a bookstore, but Hermione knew from the instant she set foot in the odd little shop that she had found her true calling. She’d been at Fletcher’s for two years and she still loved every minute.

Not only was Fletcher’s a beautiful shop—rich mahogany shelves, tiffany lamps, leather chairs—it was also jam-packed with some of the most fascinating books Hermione had ever encountered.

There were fat, leatherbound tomes sitting alongside thin, cloth-covered volumes. Books as thick as tree trunks and books that floated eerily off the shelves. Titles that Madame Pince could only have dreamed of housing in the Hogwarts library: *Truth Potions*, an ancient edition bound in cracked brown cowhide; *Devil's Snare: Two Hundred and Twenty Uses*, a mottled green book made of actual dehydrated devil's snare; *Charms: A Romantic History*, one of Hermione's favorites, a periwinkle blue silk cover with pages thin as fairy wings.

In short, it was Hermione's happy place.

As if the sheer joy of being surrounded by beautiful, interesting books was not enough, the job was also extremely intellectually stimulating. Her work on any given day consisted of cataloguing and analyzing ancient texts, or translating and transcribing the words of long-dead philosophers whose books were on the verge of crumbling into dust. She collaborated with museum curators, private collectors, and academic researchers regularly, helping write papers that were cited worldwide.

Her present challenge was translating a thick scroll of Goblin plays into English. She was deep in focus when she was jolted to attention by someone prodding her.

"Hermione!"

"Oh! Hi Ginny," Hermione said happily, rubbing her eyes. She looked at the clock. "Oh gosh, is it time for our lunch already? I'm sorry, must've lost track of time."

"Always working so hard," Ginny said, rolling her eyes.

Hermione stepped out from behind the counter and gave her friend a hug. Ginny was looking extremely pregnant—she and Harry were due in about a month—and her red hair was swept up into a long ponytail. She was positively glowing.

"You look lovely, Gin. Let me grab that bag – you shouldn't be carrying that."

"You're sweet. Lovely is one word for it, I'm as big as a house," Ginny laughed. "You look very pretty today, too. Are you excited for your date tonight?"

Hermione looked at her warily.

"I don't have a date tonight, Ginny."

"You do now! I set you up on a date. It's tonight. Don't be mad."

Hermione groaned.

"Ginny, I told you – you needn't worry about me just because Ron and I aren't together anymore."

"I know, I know," Ginny said, waving away Hermione's protests. "But just go, okay? It's at that new French restaurant two blocks down from the Leaky Cauldron. Seven o'clock. His name is Archie, and my friend Adriana says he's *very* handsome."

Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Alright,” she said. “You’re buying me lunch though. You sneaky girl.”

Ginny beamed.

Hermione spent the rest of the day working quietly at the bookshop and feeling increasingly anxious about her date. She tried to calm herself down on the walk home. She loved Ginny to pieces but wished that she wouldn’t try to play matchmaker so often.

If Hermione was being honest with herself, she did rather hope to find love sooner than later. She was a romantic at heart and had always dreamed of finding her prince, her knight in shining armor, her Count Arlington. But she was also exceedingly nervous about dating and would usually opt to be at home reading rather than out on the town with an intimidatingly good-looking stranger (all of Ginny’s recruits were intimidatingly good-looking, Hermione didn’t know how the woman did it).

Hermione kicked off her sneakers and went upstairs to find an outfit, and do her hair, and all the other little things she would nervously want to fret over before the date. After an hour or so she had finally settled on a pale green dress that Ginny had given her for Christmas last year. It had a modest neckline but was sleeveless and clung to her frame in a way she hoped was flattering. A few twirls of her wand in her hair later (moderately effective) and she figured she was as ready as she’d ever be.

She had butterflies in her stomach. Maybe Archie would be the one? She could let herself be a little hopeful. Hermione reached into her bag to pull out the little gray notebook that she kept with her at all times, flipping to the middle where a ribbon marked her place.

Hermione’s Husband Checklist

Hermione had started the checklist with Ginny after things with Ron had ended. She wanted to write down all the things she knew for sure she would want, and make sure that any future man she was with fulfilled her criteria.

- Kind
- Reads a lot
- Punctual
- Enjoys travel
- Likes animals
- Funny
- Tall
- Well-dressed
- Good in bed
- He’s in love with me
- I’m in love with him

Hermione had made a copy of the list next to the first that showed how Ron stacked up on the scorecard. She had crossed off the ones that he fulfilled but left the ones to be desired blank.

Ron:

- ~~Kind - Check~~
- Reads a lot
- Punctual
- Enjoys travel
- ~~Likes animals - Check~~
- ~~Funny - Check~~
- ~~Tall - Check~~
- Well-dressed
- Good in bed
- ~~He's in love with me - Check~~
- I'm in love with him

She sighed, then flicked her wand. A new page appeared, with a copy of the list under the name "Archie".

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Hermione nervously tucked an errant curl of hair behind her ear. She was standing outside La Vie waiting for her date, who was now at least ten minutes late.

Finally, someone tapped her on the shoulder.

"Hermione? There you are! Have you been waiting long?"

Hermione turned quickly. So this was Archie. Well, Ginny hadn't been wrong—he was very handsome. Tall, with light brown hair and blue eyes. His face had the sort of conventional, boyish handsomeness that would have made her knees weak at Hogwarts. She noticed his teeth were very white and was reminded forcibly of Gilderoy Lockhart.

"Not at all!" she squeaked. "Nice to meet you. I'm excited for dinner."

"Me too," he said. He ran his eyes unsubtly up and down her body and Hermione grimaced inwardly.

When they sat down, Hermione opened her mouth to ask how his day was but was immediately interrupted.

"You have to have the escargots here," he said, checking his teeth in the back of his spoon. "Absolutely divine. I always tell my dates that they won't regret it."

"Ah, okay!" she said, faking a cheery tone. Why was he talking about his other dates? She suddenly wished that she hadn't worn this silly dress, and her silly heels, and done her hair for this man.

"I'll go ahead and order for us both," Archie said authoritatively, leaning back. He took a lingering glance at her chest.

"You look great," he said with a self-satisfied grin. "But you'd look better in red, I think."

Hermione gave a small, weak smile, holding the menu a little higher. She took a breath and bravely attempted conversation.

"So what do you—"

"Hang on," he interjected rudely, not looking at her. His eyes were on someone over her shoulder. "That's Draco Malfoy. I've been trying to get his business for months."

Hermione frowned. Malfoy was here? She hadn't seen him since the trials. She looked up just in time to see the tall, blond figure walk past. He was wearing a tailored gray suit with a crisp white shirt, a dark tie knotted loosely around his neck. A pretty hostess was flirting unabashedly with him and he said something that made her throw her head back and laugh.

"Mr. Malfoy!" Archie said loudly. He stood, extending his hand. "It's me, Archibald. From the Greengrass party a few weeks ago."

It could not have been clearer that Draco did not like Archie.

"Oh, hello," he said, looking for all the world as though a toilet had just greeted him. "I'm just here to meet some colleagues, really don't have time to..."

His eyes glanced down to where Hermione sat, and he froze. Hermione tried to avoid his eyes, pretending to be enraptured by the wine list and hoping he wouldn't recognize her.

"Granger?"

She forced a smile.

"Oh! Hello! Fancy seeing you here. I'm just—we're—this is a first date," she blurted finally. Godric forbid anyone think she would be on more than one date with someone as obnoxious as Archie.

Malfoy was looking very surprised. He moved closer to the table, ignoring Archie, eyes fixed on Hermione's.

"I thought you were with Weasley?" he asked.

"Um, no," she said awkwardly. "We broke up years ago."

Archie cleared his throat and Malfoy blinked before turning to him coolly.

"It's rather rude not to introduce your date," Malfoy said icily. "Something to be aware of."

"I, uh, of course, Mr. Malfoy! Got to be a gentleman and all that. Not that she minds, right Hermione? She's quite laid back. I think."

Hermione shut her eyes in humiliation.

"Actually, Archie," she said, standing up, "I've suddenly got a terrible headache. I think I'll head home. I'm really sorry."

Archie began sputtering but Hermione didn't care. She stepped to the side and made to rush for the exit when she felt cool fingers catch her by the wrist. Hermione turned in confusion and found Malfoy's grey eyes on her.

"You forgot your bag," he said quietly, handing her the brown purse she had left hanging on the chair.

"Right," she breathed. "Thank you."

Malfoy nodded, still watching her. Hermione turned to exit the restaurant, nearly tripping over her heels in her haste to escape.

She was going to kill Ginny.

Chapter 2

Ginny, to her credit, looked absolutely shame-faced at Hermione's account of dinner.

"I'm so sorry," she said miserably. "Adriana *swore* he was a good man – she works with him at the Ministry..."

Hermione took pity on her friend.

"Oh, Ginny," she sighed. "I know you meant well. Just do me a favor - no more dates."

Ginny solemnly promised that the next man would be better, which Hermione couldn't help but notice was not at all the same thing.

On the bright side, it seemed like Ginny felt bad enough to give Hermione a break. Weeks passed peacefully with no mention of further set-ups. This was just as well, because Hermione started an exciting new project at work that was taking up more of her time.

"It's called *Divine Dualities*," Mr. Fletcher explained. "It's the holy grail of rare books. And I think with you on the job, we stand a good chance of finding it."

"Finding it?" Hermione asked, confused.

It turned out that *Divine Dualities* was currently unowned and somewhere out in the wild. It was highly sought-after, but infamous for being nearly sentient in its ability to elude capture. Hermione began her research, and the more she learned the more enthralled she became with the challenge.

The first difficulty was that the book was known to frequently disappear and reappear in different places, seemingly at random. It had been spotted on the Himalayas, at the bottom of the Dead Sea, and – one memorable summer – the book had simply disappeared and reappeared in different rooms of a sweet old grandmother's house in Bristol for months on end. By the time archivists and curators had become aware of the fact, it was gone once more.

The other very strange thing was: on the rare occasion that someone managed to track it down, the book would fade away at their touch. Over the years, there had been many instances of determined or lucky book-hunters coming across it, only to reach out and see *Divine Dualities* disperse into mist right before their eyes. This was the mystery that Hermione had spent the better part of her time working on, and she had finally found the answer in an ancient letter that had been unearthed in Cairo a few months ago.

The book was charmed to only be attainable by seekers who fit an extremely specific set of requirements.

"It can only be discovered by a pair," she explained excitedly to Mr. Fletcher. "It's got to be two people working as a team – one person won't do. The two people have to be within ten

months of each other in age, and have to have known each other for at least ten years. And – get this – they have to have been *once enemies and now friends*. Isn't that fascinating?"

Mr. Fletcher's eyes were wide.

"Why, that's nearly impossible!" he exclaimed. "No wonder nobody has managed to find the book in centuries."

"I know! I think our best bet is probably putting out an ad in the Prophet for people who match this criteria... we might be able to track down some candidates given enough time..."

But, unfortunately, finding people who were within ten months of each other in age, who had known each other for more than ten years, and who were *also* former enemies but now friends, turned out to be a highly difficult task. After three weeks of no responses, Hermione was feeling decidedly glum about their prospects.

Against her will, there was also something else that had been on her mind during the long hours behind the counter at Fletcher's. Specifically, a certain tall, blond wizard. Hermione flushed with embarrassment as she remembered the look of disgust on Malfoy's face towards Archie. He probably thought her awfully pathetic, going on a date with someone like that. She frowned down at her notepad and crossed out a number rather more angrily than she intended to.

Someone coughed lightly in front of her.

Hermione looked up and froze.

"Malfoy?"

"Yes, I believe we've met,"

He was wearing a white collared shirt and dark wool trousers—had he come from work?

"What are you doing here?"

"I suppose I'm here to buy some books."

His tone was neutral but his eyes crinkled slightly at the corners. Was he making fun of her? Hermione's stomach twisted anxiously.

"Okay," she said. "I can help you find anything you're looking for. Or you could feel free to look around."

"I'm looking for just one or two," he said, leaning casually against the counter and glancing at the shelves. "Big, intimidating-looking ones. So that silly women will be impressed when they come over. Could you recommend me some of those?"

Hermione's eyes narrowed.

"I can try," she said through gritted teeth.

Draco's eyes twinkled.

"Thanks. Oh, and make sure they're not too *old*. The books, I mean, though I feel the same way about the women. I recently had the Manor library purged of all books written before the 19th century. Just threw them away, you know. They were making the room smell awfully musty."

Hermione let out an indignant growl.

"You threw—you despicable—!" she stuttered, nearly shaking with rage. "Well, I can tell you this, *Malfoy*! It will certainly take more than a few 'intimidating-looking' books to convince any woman that you read at all, you neanderth—"

"Mr. Malfoy!" came a delighted cry from the back of the shop.

Hermione and Draco both turned to see Mr. Fletcher puttering towards them.

"Oh good, you've met Hermione," he said, smiling warmly. "Isn't she a delight?"

"I certainly can't think of a better way to describe her," Draco said, straightening up and extending a hand to Mr. Fletcher.

Hermione stared open-mouthed at the two men.

"Mr. Malfoy is one of the experts we sometimes call upon to review potion-related books," Mr. Fletcher said jovially. "We've just gotten in the most fascinating shipment of manuscripts that I wanted him to take a look at. He's an incorrigible bookworm – you two might actually get along!"

Hermione felt heat rush to her face. Draco turned to her with a sweet smile and she glared at him.

"We actually know each other from Hogwarts," she said stiffly.

"Ah, old school friends?"

Draco laughed. He leaned back against the counter again and Hermione shivered as the light scent of his cologne washed over her.

"Maybe more like rivals," he said. "I seem to recall her slapping me once."

"Well you were a nasty little boy," she snapped.

Malfoy turned around and gave Hermione a wink, to which she responded by pretending to gag.

There was a loud clatter. Mr. Fletcher had dropped the armful of books he had been carrying, and was staring at them with great excitement.

"Mr. Malfoy, Miss Granger. When are your birthdays?"

Malfoy frowned in confusion but Hermione's mouth dropped open as the lightbulb flickered on over her head.

"September nineteenth," she whispered, staring at Malfoy. "And yours?"

"June fifth."

Both Mr. Fletcher and Hermione let out cries of glee.

"Malfoy," she said, grasping his hand. "Malfoy – I need you."

A pink blush appeared on Draco's cheekbones and he coughed for a long while, refusing to look at her.

She frowned, impatiently waiting for him to finish hacking.

"Listen, Malfoy, do you know about *Divine Dualities*?"

"Of course," he said hoarsely. "What does..? Oh no... are you looking for it? No, I'm sorry but that's really not something that I—"

"It has to be a pair, Mr. Malfoy!" Mr. Fletcher cried. "And you and Miss Granger fit every criteria. You know how I would ordinarily hate to push you, but I must beg you to consider."

"We could do it," Hermione squealed, beside herself with excitement. "What do you say? I'm sure it wouldn't take more than a few weeks of hunting together, and—"

"No," Malfoy said bluntly. "I'm sorry."

Hermione's face fell. The only reason she could imagine for Malfoy being this reluctant was a deep aversion to having to work with her. Why else would someone decline to pursue a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capture a mythical artifact like *Divine Dualities*?

He seemed to guess at what she was thinking, and his tone softened.

"If I am not mistaken, the latest research indicates that the pair must be formerly enemies and now friends. I don't believe that Miss Granger and I qualify as friends."

"Nonsense, my boy!" Mr. Fletcher practically yelled. "Miss Granger, you like him well enough don't you?"

Hermione nodded frantically.

"I like you!" she shrieked at Malfoy.

"Very convincing," he said flatly.

"Well there's an easy enough way to tell," Mr. Fletcher said, pulling out his wand. "A simple *relation* charm will reveal the nature of your feelings toward the other. *Relati—*"

“No need for that!” Malfoy yelled anxiously, knocking Mr. Fletcher’s wand slightly to the side. “Look, alright. Fine. I’ll do it. But if we don’t find it in the next two weeks I’m out.”

“Eight weeks,” Hermione bargained.

“Three.”

“Eight.”

“Four.”

“Eight.”

“What kind of negotiation is this, Granger?” he snapped. “Six weeks, final offer.”

Hermione squealed, hopping up and down. She threw her arms around Malfoy and gave him a tight squeeze, not even caring that he tensed up under her touch.

“We have to get started right away,” she said breathlessly, letting him go at last. “No time to lose. I think the book was last spotted in Sicily, but it’ll have gone by now...”

“I’m going to need at least one day to get my affairs in order before traipsing all around the continent with you,” Malfoy snapped.

“Let’s start tomorrow morning then,” she implored.

He looked at her out of the corner of his eye.

“Alright,” he said gruffly. “Tomorrow morning. I’ll be here at nine.”

She beamed at him.

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The next morning, Hermione could hardly sit still in her swivel chair.

She carefully straightened the documents on her desk. She had spent all night coming up with a detailed plan for their first day of hunting down *Divine Dualities*. Her notes were organized using an elaborate system of color-coded tabs, a keyword index, and three sub-folders. She looked down fondly at them.

At nine o’clock on the dot, Draco Malfoy walked in.

She noticed for the first time that he was wearing his hair rather differently from how he used to back at Hogwarts. It was more relaxed, swept to the side. It looked rather nice.

“Good morning,” he said, taking a seat. “I suppose you’re eager to get started.”

“Can you imagine if we found this?” Hermione squealed. “The research possibilities alone, I mean my goodness. Time-space academia would have a field day; the fact that this thing can appear and reappear as though *sentient*, what kind of ancient magic could be—”

“There is absolutely no way that this is *that* exciting to you,” Malfoy said. “Are you compensating for a lack of something in your personal life?”

Hermione scowled.

“Don’t be cruel,” she said primly. “You yourself saw the extent of my personal life only a few weeks ago. You can’t blame me for preferring books.”

Malfoy stilled.

“Are you still seeing him, then?” he asked casually.

Hermione scoffed in disbelief. “I’m not even going to dignify that with an answer. Can we please talk about this incredibly important and powerful artifact instead of my nonexistent love life?”

They looked at each other for a long moment.

“It’s in Edinburgh,” she blurted out, unwilling to wait any longer. “And I think it’s in a church.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes.

“Obviously.”

He leaned over to open his briefcase and pulled out a large binder. Hermione’s eyes widened, taking in multiple tabs and at least two sub-folders.

“Based on the last verified one hundred sightings of *Divine Dualities*,” he said, flipping through the pages, “It seems to follow a rough pattern with periods of more ‘sentient’ windows of chaos in between. Luckily right now isn’t one of the chaotic periods. It appears at coordinates following this arc,” he pointed at a chart on the page, before flipping it to its other side and continuing, “and always shows up at a church when it’s at this point in its pattern.”

He rubbed his forehead as he continued through the binder.

“The coordinates are obviously not *definitive*, so we’ll have a hard time getting a more specific area within Edinburgh to look at. Of course, I’ve had a look at the locations of the sightings the last time it was spotted in Edin—”

“Oh,” Hermione gasped involuntarily. Malfoy looked up.

“Sorry,” she said quickly. “Your maps are color-coded. Did you do this all last night?”

He blushed.

“No sense in being unprepared,” he mumbled.

Hermione crossed her legs and willed herself not to think that Draco Malfoy was attractive because of bloody color-coded maps. She failed miserably.

“So we’ll have to look around,” he concluded, closing the binder with a snap. “Once we’re closer we’ll be able to try to detect the magical signature using an...”

“Amplifier!” Hermione jumped in breathlessly. “I made one – it took some work but it should be able to point us in the general direction of any unusually strong or ancient magical auras.”

She pulled out a compass from under the counter. It looked rather like it had been torn apart and then put back together three or four times with a few more knobs and antennae added to each time. Hermione beamed at it.

“That looks perfect,” Draco said, shoving the very expensive amplifier he’d already purchased deep into his bag, away from Hermione’s view.

“What’s that?” she asked, curious.

“Nothing – tell me about your amplifier. What does that knob do?”

Hermione, distracted, began diving into the details of the strange little device, occasionally waving it around for emphasis.

“Anyways, I can explain more when we get there,” she said, pausing for breath. “If we get to the portkey office in the next hour we’ll be in Edinburgh by noon. Then we have until five p.m. before the last portkey comes back to London. Gives us a good four-ish hours of searching.”

Malfoy nodded, picking up his binder.

“I’d imagine today will be mostly reconnaissance,” he said.

Hermione nodded. “Almost impossible that we’d find it so quickly. But according to my calculations the book should stay in Edinburgh for at least fifty more hours, which means if we do a bit of groundwork now then we’ll have a bit of a shot at tracking it down tomorrow or the day after.”

“Is there anything else you need to fetch before we head over?” Malfoy asked, standing and smoothing out the creases on his trousers.

Hermione shook her head and picked up her bag and scarf.

“After you then, Granger.”

Chapter 3

It turned out Hermione could have benefited from fetching a rain jacket.

She scowled in the downpour, looking increasingly bedraggled and rather like a wet cat.

“Goodness, your hair certainly doesn’t hold up well in the rain,” Malfoy remarked, looking dry and comfortable under the hood of his coat. “If you ask nicely I’ll give you my jacket.”

“Let’s just focus,” she muttered, ignoring his offer and casting another futile *impervius* around her hair.

Hermione pulled the amplifier out of her bag. It buzzed softly in her hand and she smiled proudly at it.

“This took me four hours, you know.”

“You should get out of the house more.”

She scowled and flipped it open.

“Okay,” she said, twisting it around to read the dial better. “Ooh! It looks like we’re quite close to a strong signature. Due west. Shall we apparate a quarter mile and see what we can find?”

“Alright,” Malfoy said, and Hermione offered her arm. With a soft tug, he pulled her close and she fell into his side with a little breath of surprise. She felt the warm, hard muscles of his body twitch against her. Then, the world spun around them and they were gone.

They spent a wet afternoon going from church to church, checking the amplifier every once in a while and trying to follow its vague signals. It was a bit harder than anticipated. Each church gave off a light magical signature, which made it difficult to determine where to go.

“There’s only a few prominent churches left,” Hermione whispered as they walked through the pews exiting their fifth location. “We could probably check them all before starting on the smaller ones.”

Malfoy checked his watch.

“It’ll have to wait until tomorrow,” he said. “The portkey office closes in twenty minutes.”

Hermione gave out an annoyed huff and his eyebrows raised in amusement.

“Frustrated?” he purred. Her cheeks heated and she didn’t know why.

“It’s just—we could get so much more done if we weren’t limited by the portkey office hours. At this rate we’ll never find it.”

Malfoy hummed in agreement.

“Maybe we should get a hotel or something,” Hermione suggested. Malfoy froze. “Then we could keep looking for another few hours and be up bright and early to try again tomorrow.”

“Hardly seems necessary,” he said quickly. “I think we should just go back.”

“Why?” Hermione asked, looking up in annoyance. “This is important! Surely we can spare a few galleons for a hotel. I’ve been saving up for this trip, anyway, and I think—”

“I can’t. I have business to attend to back in London,” Draco said. “I am needed for meetings. And such.”

Hermione had the strange feeling he was making things up.

“Don’t you work on your own schedule? And anyway, I thought you took care of your affairs before coming?”

“I did say that didn’t I? Well, I still have... paperwork.

“Have someone owl it to you here and you can do it tonight!”

“I haven’t any clothes!” he said triumphantly. “And neither do you.”

“Oh!” she said, digging into her bag. He peered over her shoulder and was startled to see what looked like a small room full of various odds and ends contained within.

“I have all sorts of clothes in here,” she said. “Men’s stuff too! I bought some shirts and pants in different sizes for Harry and Ron when we were traveling in the woods a while back.”

“I am certain,” Malfoy said, “that nothing you have in there is anything that I would ever be caught dead wearing.”

“Well then let’s go to some sodding shops,” she said angrily, stomping her foot. “This is important and I’ll be damned if your snobbishness is what causes us to lose track of *Divine Dualities*. The research implications of this book could not possibly be oversta—”

“Alright,” Malfoy snapped. “Godric, you are insufferable. We’ll do as you wish since it seems you refuse to have it any other way. You’re an only child, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Hermione sniffed. “As it happens I am. And so are you, if I recall. Which would explain why you are so spoiled.”

“No. I am spoiled because I come from the third wealthiest estate in all of Great Britain.”

“Oh are you rich? I had absolutely no idea, you really must keep that less of a secret.”

“Just because my family is *comfortable*...”

“Is that what the ruling class calls it?”

They sniped at each other all the way down the street to the nearest non-muggle hotel. The rain had finally cleared up and the sky was turning the pale purple-blue of a perfect late fall evening.

“Two rooms, please.” Hermione said to the clerk, who looked up briefly at her before noticing Malfoy with interest.

“Two rooms it is,” she said, giving him a coy smile.

The clerk looked through the vacancy book quickly and then reached under the desk to pull out two keys.

“Rooms 15 and 16,” she purred. “Do let me know if you need anything.”

The last remark had been directed unsubtly at Draco.

“Does that happen everywhere you go?” Hermione asked as they trudged up the stairs to their rooms.

“What?”

“Women throwing themselves at you.”

“Oh,” he replied, smirking. “Yes.”

Hermione huffed. Must be nice to have so much interest from the opposite sex.

They reached their rooms and paused outside.

“Well, goodnight,” she said awkwardly.

Draco looked up quickly.

“Don’t you want dinner?” he asked.

“Oh. Yes, I suppose we haven’t eaten. Probably just the hotel restaurant?”

“There was a rather nice-looking Italian place down the street that I thought we could go,” he said, avoiding her eyes.

“Ooh, some pasta does sound great! Let me just get changed and we can head down.”

In her room, Hermione peeled off damp clothes and rummaged in her bag. She realized that it would likely be at least a little posh, given it was up to Draco’s standards, and searched for something that might be suitable.

She frowned and laid out a few dresses. They were all rather wrinkled. There was a tight black one that she certainly wouldn’t be wearing, a swishy silk number in her favorite shade of pale blue, and a yellow cotton sundress. The blue silk would probably be the most appropriate. She didn’t have any nice heels with her (other than an intimidating pair of

stilettos that Ginny had left at her flat one time) but dug up a pair of black flats that she hoped would suffice.

Out in the hall, Draco was waiting. He took in Hermione's change of clothes quickly and looked away.

"Is this okay?" Hermione asked. "I have a couple other options if it isn't—"

"No that's—that should be okay."

"Thanks for finding us a nice place to eat," Hermione said as they went down the stairs. "I didn't even think to look around when we were walking here. Is it awfully expensive?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh," he said, frowning. "Don't worry about it. My treat."

Hermione opened her mouth in protest but then Draco smoothly cut in and asked what she thought the research implications of discovering *Divine Dualities* would be, and she was quickly distracted.

"—and fifthly, I do believe it's the only surviving book that was once housed in the Library of Alexandria," she said, eyes shining.

"Is it now?" Draco said. "This is the restaurant, by the way."

Hermione blinked. They had been standing outside the Italian place for what was probably at least five minutes without her noticing. She flushed.

"Sorry—I got distracted. That happens sometimes, feel free to just interrupt next time."

"Don't apologize," Malfoy said with a frown. "Do people make you feel bad about talking about things that you like?"

"Ha," Hermione said. "I can be a bit much. Don't worry, I'm well aware."

She stepped into the restaurant and sniffed appreciatively as the scents of warm tomato sauce and mozzarella wafted over them. Draco, still frowning, entered after her.

They were greeted with two glasses of champagne and an apology. The restaurant was rather busy tonight so they were giving out drinks while the patrons waited. Hermione and Draco took a seat at one of the couches in the lounge area.

Malfoy seemed more relaxed than usual, likely tired from the long day, and he leaned back in his seat to stretch his legs out before him. His arm went around the back of the couch, not quite around Hermione but very close. He smelled like sandalwood and some warm spice.

Hermione drained her glass nervously.

The waitress appeared instantly with a refill. Draco had finished his glass and took another as well.

“I don’t drink much,” Hermione said, feeling pleasantly buzzed. “You might have to pull my hair back later.”

Draco coughed into his glass, and she smacked him on the back as he regained composure.

“Let’s try to avoid having me *hold* your hair,” he said weakly, finishing his new champagne in one gulp.

After their third glass, a hostess approached apologetically.

“Unfortunately, the only seats we have are at the bar,” the hostess said. “There’s a large party here tonight and they’re not finished yet.”

“That’s fine,” Hermione said at the same time that Draco said “That’s unacceptable.”

“Oh, Draco, don’t,” Hermione said hurriedly. “The bar will be fun.”

“Mmm Draco now, is it?” he asked with a sly smile. His eyes were a little clouded from the wine and Hermione flushed furiously. “Whatever the lady wants is fine, then.”

At the bar, they were surrounded by couples on dates. Everyone was dressed up and gazing at each other raptly.

“If we pretend we’re engaged we might get free dessert,” Hermione whispered.

Malfoy watched with a small smile as she giggled.

“We could do that,” he said softly. Then, clearing his throat, he looked away and focused on the menu.

“Appetizers?” he asked.

“Anything but escargots,” she said absently, distracted by the way his grey eyes were watching her.

“Why’s that?”

“Ugh,” she said. “*You must try the escargots, I tell all my dates to get the escargots,*” she mimicked. “Archie.”

“That man is an idiot. He’s been hounding me about some useless investment opportunity for months. Can’t believe you went on a date with him.”

“Ginny set me up with him,” Hermione said glumly.

“Does she set you up often?”

“All the time. She’s dead set on finding me my husband.”

“Are you looking that intently?” he asked casually.

“Well I don’t very well want to die alone,” she said with a sigh. “Which is what I’m currently on track to do. Anyways, I don’t want to talk about it. Let’s dive into your sordid love life - I’m sure it’s much more exciting.”

“I can’t imagine what you mean,” Malfoy said, smirking.

“I see you in the society pages with beautiful women all the time!” Hermione said, tipping her drink back. “Let me guess. Threesomes with Russian ballerinas. Public sex with socialites! Being tied up by foreign princesses?”

“A very active imagination you have there, Granger,” Draco purred. “Might you be jealous?”

“As if! You can keep your exciting sex life,” she said, waving down the bartender for a cocktail. “Honestly, I’m too inexperienced to even know what I’m missing.”

“Is that so?” Malfoy asked. The waiter arrived right then and Hermione was diverted by the specials for the evening.

Say what you would about Malfoy, she thought later, as her mouth closed around a bite of gooey, fresh mozzarella, but he had a great eye for restaurants. The food was excellent and the drinks were copious. By the end they were both happily soused.

After a delicious dessert of warm chocolate cake and vanilla ice cream (“A divine duality!” Hermione had giggled to Draco’s amusement) they started walking back to the hotel.

“Ooh, that was *fun*!” Hermione cried, swinging her purse back and forth. “Thanks so much, Malfoy. I really had a good time. And you were sweet to pay. I’ll get the next one.”

Malfoy followed behind, picking up the trail of chapstick, spare bits of paper, and coins that she was leaving behind from her swinging purse.

“Anytime,” he said, catching his breath. “Say, maybe stop swinging that purse. You dropped your notebook in a puddle.”

Hermione spun around quickly, eyes round.

“Oh, I’ll take that,” she said loudly. “Don’t bother—”

Draco had flipped it open to the wet part and was pointing a drying charm at it. His head turned slightly as he read the text.

“Hermione’s Hus—”

Hermione snatched the book out of his hand, turning red. She fumbled with it and dropped it again, and had to bend over to pick it up. Hermione felt her dress ride up to her bum and heard a short intake of breath from behind her. She pulled the dress down anxiously and spun around.

She needn’t have worried. Draco was looking anywhere but her. He seemed strained.

“Let’s hurry,” he said hoarsely, adjusting his trousers. “It’s rather cold, isn’t it?”

Shortly after, they reached the hotel and bade each other goodnight, retiring to their respective rooms.

Hermione smiled as she ran a hot shower. Through the wall, she could hear the water turn on in Draco’s room too. She was still feeling pleasantly buzzed and blushed at the thought that his wet body was only feet away from hers, separated by a thin wall. She sighed, allowing herself to idly imagine what it might be like to be beautiful and glamorous enough to attract Draco Malfoy.

His shower was still running after she finished toweling herself off.

As she fell sleepily into bed, head buzzing warmly, the last thought she had was that tonight had been the most fun she’d had in months. Perhaps it wouldn’t be the worst if the hunt for *Divine Dualities* took a little longer than expected.

Chapter 4

Of course, they were hungover the next day.

Hermione woke with a wince. Her head felt like it was stuffed full of kneazles. She checked the time and groaned; it was already past ten. Pulling on some clothes, she shuffled into the hallway to knock at Malfoy's door.

"Malfoy?" she asked weakly. "Are you up?"

A long, miserable groan came from inside the room.

"I'm coming in," she said.

She pushed the door open to find Malfoy tangled in his covers, face down and blond hair in disarray.

"Malfoy," she whispered. "We've got to get going. The book is only going to be in town for another day or two."

"Maybe the book is here," Malfoy said, his voice muffled in his pillow. "And the only way to get it is by lying down quietly and not moving."

"We drank too much, didn't we?" she asked morosely. "I never drink, you should have warned me we were en route to a terrible hangover."

"And you should've warned me that you drink like a thirsty hippogriff and would challenge me to keep up," he said hoarsely.

"I'm going to throw up and then go downstairs," Hermione said, swaying slightly. "Meet me in the lobby, alright?"

"Shops," Draco moaned.

"What?"

"We've got to go to some shops. I don't have any clothes, remember?"

"Oh," she said. "Okay, we can make a quick stop. I'll get us coffee."

She returned to her room, retched, brushed her teeth and then went downstairs.

"Miss Granger?" the front desk clerk waved her down. "Miss Granger, an owl came in for you yesterday."

Hermione turned faintly green. She rather wished the clerk wouldn't wave her arm around so much.

“Thank you,” she said queasily.

It was from Ginny.

Hermione,

UMM?! Thanks for telling me you're off traveling – I had to find out from Mr. Fletcher! He says you're with Malfoy?! Is he still a pointy little ferret? Do let me know.

While you're in Edinburgh, I wanted you to meet my friend Mark. He used to work with Bill and he's sweet (and very handsome). I already told him you'd meet him at The Ruby Phoenix tonight at 8.

Love!

Gin

“I thought you said you'd have coffee,” came a grumpy voice above her.

Malfoy loomed over her, looking decidedly worse for wear. He had bags under his eyes and was looking queasy in the rumpled clothes he had been in the day before.

Hermione tucked the letter into her bag.

“There's a coffee place right across the street – let's head over together.”

Twenty minutes later, Hermione was feeling much more like a human being. The morning was already slipping between their fingers and she wanted to begin searching again.

“By the time we finish getting clothes for you it'll be half the day gone,” she said anxiously. “Maybe we should split up and I can go to some churches while you shop?”

Malfoy was also looking less nauseous, but still winced as he frowned.

“I suppose,” he said slowly. “Will you be alright?”

“Of course. We can meet for lunch.”

“What if something happens? How will I find you?”

Hermione had to concede that was a reasonable concern. She reached into her bag and pulled out two pens and her gray notebook. Careful not open it to the page marked with the ribbon, she tore out two sheets. She waved her wand over them quickly and muttered a short incantation.

“Take this. If you write on it, it will show up on my paper. And vice versa. You can let me know if plans change.”

“Clever bit of spellwork.”

“Thank you!” Hermione beamed. “Let me know when you’re done and we can meet up. Try not to be too long about your shopping. If I do find the book I won’t even be able to touch it without you there.”

Malfoy nodded. With a quick smile, Hermione waved goodbye and sped off down the street, eyes glued to her amplifier.

By noon, she was in low spirits. She had a throbbing headache and after visiting four more churches did not feel anywhere closer to discovering *Divine Dualities*.

She also had to admit that the whole escapade was rather less fun without a certain smart-mouthed blond by her side. She wondered how his shopping was going, and amused herself with the vision of a very hungover Draco trudging through luxury boutiques.

She was walking to her fifth church of the morning when a burst of warmth in her pocket alerted her to a message from Draco. She stopped in her tracks and pulled out the enchanted parchment.

DM: Clothes shopping done. I look incredible. Women falling at my feet everywhere I go, send help.

She smiled widely and pulled out her pen to write back.

HG: And you didn’t even need an impressive-looking book. Turns out just a few hundred galleons in suits will do the trick?

DM: You are mistaken. The good ones only fall at my feet if I have both the suits AND the books.

Hermione, giggling, was just about to scribble another response when she suddenly stopped to take stock of what was happening. She was blushing. And smiling. And her heart was thumping.

Did she... *like* Draco Malfoy?

Eyes wide, she put the paper and pen back in her pocket at once.

Malfoy was attractive, that much was obvious, but having feelings for him was a different matter entirely. The last thing she needed was to make a fool of herself by getting attached to a man whose romantic diet consisted solely of models and heiresses and model-heiresses. Malfoy was here as a favor to Mr. Fletcher, that was all. And it would be awfully pathetic of her to develop a crush on him just because he was forced to spend time with her.

Her pocket heated again and despite herself she rushed to pull out the paper.

DM: Take you out to lunch?

Butterflies exploded in her stomach and she huffed, annoyed at herself. For a few minutes, Hermione stood there, brow furrowed, trying to come up with a logical way out of this mess. Then, suddenly, it was obvious.

The husband checklist.

She dove into her bag and pulled out the gray notebook. The entire reason the husband checklist existed was to prevent her from wasting time on men who were certainly unsuited to her. Which, of course, Draco Malfoy was. With a wave of her wand, she started a new page titled with his name and copied the checklist to it. She bit her lip in focus as she started crossing out the criteria that he fulfilled. Then, she smiled triumphantly. It couldn't be clearer that he wasn't the one for her.

Malfoy:

- Kind – unclear
- ~~Reads a lot – Check~~
- ~~Punctual – Check~~
- Enjoys travel – unclear
- Likes animals – almost certainly not
- ~~Funny – Check~~
- ~~Tall – Check~~
- ~~Well-dressed – Check~~
- Good in bed – irrelevant as it won't get that far
- He's in love with me – certainly not
- I'm in love with him – certainly not

Okay, so it wasn't the most damning list she'd ever created. And, sure, a lot of the criteria that he did not fulfill were open questions. But the fact was that at present, Draco Malfoy was at a 5/11 on her husband checklist. And he needed all 11 points to be a concern.

With a relieved sigh, Hermione tucked the notebook back in her bag and wrote to Malfoy asking where they should meet for lunch.

It was good that she had gone through the husband checklist exercise, good that she was now completely, utterly immune to Malfoy's charms through the power of Logic, because Malfoy had really not been lying about looking incredible. A morning of luxury shopping had done him good, the spoiled git. His hair was carelessly swept to the side once more and he was

wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and crisp blue trousers that hugged his long, leanly muscled legs.

As Hermione approached, she saw a pretty, dark-haired woman stop to talk to Malfoy. He leaned down with a polite smile to hear her better, his blond hair falling over his eyes. The woman trailed a hand playfully down his exposed forearm.

Hermione decided that she was still feeling queasy after all.

“Granger!” he called with a smile, spotting her. He excused himself from the woman and made his way over.

“I can’t believe you weren’t kidding about the women at your feet,” she grumbled.

Malfoy flagged down a waiter, who led them to a nearby table

“You’ll never believe the first thing she said to me,”

He pulled out a chair for Hermione.

“What?” she asked curiously, taking a seat.

Malfoy leaned in and Hermione felt a shiver run down her spine as his breath fluttered against her ear.

“She said I must have a very impressive-looking book,” Malfoy whispered. He pushed her chair the rest of the way in.

“Oh,” Hermione muttered, turning pink. “You’re an animal.”

Draco smiled smugly.

“We ought to make a plan for the rest of the day,” Hermione said quickly, trying to steer the conversation to safer waters. “I went to four more churches – here, I wrote them down on this page – and we still have more than a dozen left to go.”

“It’s two o’clock,” Malfoy said, checking his watch. “We can probably hit another four churches today. But in all likelihood the book will have gone to its next destination by midday tomorrow.”

Hermione huffed.

“Well, I suppose it would have been too much to hope for that we’d find it right away.”

“We’ll find it,” Malfoy said soothingly. “No matter how long it takes. Now – want a sandwich? You should really eat something.”

The rest of the afternoon was very fun, if not very productive. Both Malfoy and Hermione seemed to have accepted that they would not find *Divine Dualities* in Edinburgh. As a result,

they still wandered from church to church but took plenty of short breaks to walk through parks, or peek into shops, or stop for snacks.

“You’ve got ice cream on your nose,” Malfoy said. “Which is no wonder, considering how savagely you’re eating it. You do realize it won’t disappear if you have it slower, right?”

“But it’s soo good! Is it gone now?”

“Yes, you got it.”

They walked side by side through a quiet street enjoying their frozen treats.

“Should we head back to the hotel and take a break before dinner?” Malfoy asked, checking his watch. “There’s this Thai place I thought we c—”

“Oh!” Hermione gasped. “Oh shoot!”

She shoved her ice cream cone at Malfoy to hold and started digging in her bag, looking for Ginny’s letter.

“Ginny set me up on a date tonight,” Hermione said hurriedly, pulling out the paper. “I’m so glad I remembered, I would have stood him up... okay it’s at eight o’clock, there’s still plenty of time. And it’s at the Ruby Phoenix which I think is close to the hotel.”

She smiled with relief and looked up at Malfoy. His face was suddenly carefully neutral, the relaxed smile he had been wearing all day gone.

“A date?” he asked. “With whom?”

He handed her back her cone and they resumed walking.

“Some guy named Mark that used to work with Bill. I don’t know. I hope he’s better than Archie.”

“Isn’t it an impediment that he lives here and you’re in London?”

Hermione laughed.

“Honestly, I think Ginny would match me with someone in America if she thought there was a chance she could marry me off. It’s a bit much. But she’s a good friend. She knows that I’m lonely, I think.”

Malfoy stopped walking and looked down at her.

“You’re lonely?” he asked softly.

Hermione turned red.

“Not lonely, I didn’t mean that. That sounded pathetic, didn’t it? I guess—I mean—well, don’t you sometimes feel like maybe your person is somewhere out there? And you just

haven't met her yet?"

Malfoy's eyes were dark and intent on her.

"No. I don't feel that way."

Hermione frowned.

"Well, then – why are you always out with different women every week?"

"They're distractions."

Hermione stilled. A painful memory rose unbidden in her mind.

"You didn't fall in love did you?" Henry scoffed. "Just because we fucked? Grow up."

"So you go out with these girls for their *distracting* properties, but you have no intention of pursuing something serious with any of them?" she asked shakily.

"That's correct."

"Did it ever occur to you how hurtful it is to be on the other side of that, Malfoy?"

"Everyone is responsible for themselves," he said. "I manage my feelings and they should manage theirs. We're all adults. Plus, the women that—"

But Hermione could only hear Henry's mocking voice echoing relentlessly in her memory: *Grow up. Grow up. Grow up.*

"Well you should at least tell them!" she said loudly. "Otherwise they're left feeling like rubbish when you move on to the next, and all the things you said to them—all the promises—they all meant—"

Hermione wasn't sure when she had started shaking. She wiped at her face angrily and her hand came away wet.

She felt his hand on her arm, bringing her a little closer.

"Hey," he said softly, "Are you alright? I didn't mean to upset you—"

"Get away!" she spat, shoving at his chest. He took a step back, face pained.

She apparated away, leaving him standing alone in the park.

Chapter 5

Back at the hotel, Hermione buried her face in her hands.

She had met Henry only a month after she and Ron had broken up. He was one of the most charming men she'd ever encountered and she was too naïve back then to know to be wary of overly charming men. He took her to dinner twice—they talked and they laughed and they kissed and Hermione thought: *this could be it*. She had never had sex outside a committed relationship before but when he said that he couldn't wait – that he knew she was special – she believed him. He took her to bed and then kicked her out before morning.

“You didn't fall in love did you?” Henry scoffed. “Just because we fucked? Grow up.”

She knew Malfoy was a playboy, of course. Anyone who had a subscription to Witch Weekly or the Prophet knew that. But to hear him talk about the women he went out with like they meant *nothing* to him triggered a response in her she hadn't realized she still carried. The fact that she'd started harboring a crush on him only made matters worse.

With a groan, Hermione remembered her date with Mark.

The last thing she really felt like doing was going to meet a new man, but she stood up and started getting ready all the same. After all, Mark might be the one, she thought hollowly. She hoped he was. She didn't think she could bear any more blind dates and confusing feelings.

Hermione took a shower and then painstakingly styled her rambunctious curls until they turned into glossy waves. She put on her pretty yellow sundress and strapped a pair of brown heels to her ankles. And although she never wore much makeup, she carefully applied a subtle wing to her eyes and a dash of pink to her lips. Five minutes before eight, she picked up her purse and stepped out the door.

Malfoy was waiting outside.

He took one look at her and let out a little exhale. Neither of them spoke for a moment.

“You look nice,” he said quietly.

“What do you want, Malfoy?” Hermione asked.

“I want to talk to you,” he said. “You're upset.”

“Well now's not a very good time,” she snapped. “I'm off to meet the love of my life.”

“Don't go.”

“And why wouldn't I go?”

“I don't know. Because you're mad at me. And I don't want you to be mad at me. And we should talk about that.”

“If you’re that bored, Malfoy, maybe you should go out on a date too. Break some poor girl’s heart tonight – I’m sure that would be very satisfying for you.”

“Do you really think that little of me?”

She scoffed.

“You said it yourself, Malfoy. You—”

“No,” he interrupted. “You said it. All I said was that I never seriously date anyone. And you inferred that I was cruel about it – which I’m not. At all. All the women I go out with know exactly what I can and can’t give them.”

This ought to have made Hermione feel better, but for some reason something inside her crumpled even further.

“Oh good,” she said sarcastically. “Well, unlike you, I can’t simply snap my fingers and conjure up a dozen people who want to marry me and are willing to be strung along until I change my mind. So if you’ll excuse me I need to go on this date and see if I can’t find a sodding husband before I die.”

She wasn’t even sure what she was arguing with him about anymore, or why she felt as hurt as she did. She shoved past him and made to rush down the stairs but one of his arms caught her around the waist. He pulled her back to look at him.

“Will going on this date make you happy? Is this what you want?”

She glared up at him, then nodded stiffly.

He let go of her. She watched as his throat worked for a moment.

“Can we talk tomorrow, then? I can’t... I can’t have you upset at me.”

Hermione nodded again, then turned and left. She felt him staring at her all the way down the stairs until she turned onto the street.

She fought back tears all the way to The Ruby Phoenix. In the fresh air, away from the confusing proximity to Malfoy, she could acknowledge that she had been unfair to him. She paused on the sidewalk. Maybe she should go back. Maybe she should talk to Malfoy, and—

“Hermione?”

She looked up into a pair of warm brown eyes.

“I’m Mark.”

He was handsome. He was tall. He was on time.

“Oh! Hello, Mark,” she smiled. “I’m excited for dinner.”

--

Mark could be the one.

She thought these words to herself over and over.

Mark was funny. He really was. He told clever stories, and made subtle jokes, and Hermione liked him well enough. He was sweet, and shyly held her hand under the table. He bought her whatever on the menu she wanted. He complimented her and asked to hear about her childhood.

So why did Hermione feel so lonely with him?

She had four fizzy fruit cocktails even though a voice in the back of her head warned her that she didn't drink enough to be able to handle four fizzy fruit cocktails. At the end of the night, she let him walk her back to the hotel and leaned against him as she swayed. She even let him kiss her outside the building and tolerated his clumsy fondling.

"Can I come up?" Mark whispered.

"Maybe next time," she slurred, already heading up the stairs. "Goodnight."

It was sort of an accident but sort of not that she ended up knocking on Malfoy's door.

He opened instantly.

Malfoy's blond hair was disheveled as though he had been running his hands through it all night, his eyes had dark circles underneath them, and he was holding some papers in his hand. He dropped them, pages fluttering and swooping all over the floor, when Hermione swayed into him and he had to reach up to catch her.

He felt so nice. A warm, spicy smell... the hard surface of his chest... She tucked her nose into his neck and inhaled deeply, rubbing her face against him.

Malfoy let out a ragged breath. She could feel his heart start hammering under her.

"What—Hermione—are you okay?"

"I didn't like him," she pouted.

Malfoy froze.

"Did he hurt you?"

"No," she said, and he relaxed.

“He was boring,” she giggled.

Malfoy’s eyes crinkled at the corners and she smiled at the sight of his smile.

“Come here,” he said. “Sit down. You should probably have some water. Merlin, I can’t believe you drank again tonight after yesterday.”

“I was mad.”

He turned to fill up a glass from the sink.

“I know,” he said quietly. “I wanted to tell you I’m sorry.”

Hermione flopped back on the bed, giggling. Her glossy waves spread out all around her and she felt like a mermaid. Malfoy took a seat next to her and handed her the water.

“What are you sorry for?” she asked.

“For being dumb.”

“You’re so dumb.”

“So dumb,” he agreed.

“Come here, I want to tell you something,” Hermione said, trying to keep her face straight.

“Okay.”

She waited until he leaned in close enough then, giggling, threw her arms around him and pulled him forwards so he toppled against her on the bed.

She felt him inhale in surprise, felt his body tense where theirs made contact, where his hard muscles pressed into her soft curves. He started sitting up, trying to disentangle himself.

“Hermione,” he said, laughing. “What are—”

“I think I like you, Draco,” she whispered conspiratorially.

He stilled. There was a long silence.

“Don’t say that,” he said, voice thick. “You’re just drunk. Have more water—”

She ignored him and ran her hands down his chest, down the hard muscles of his stomach. His breath hitched and he groaned. He gently pushed her hands away.

“Hermione,” he pleaded.

She laughed at the game, getting closer to him again as he tried to put distance between them. She pulled herself to him and crawled into his lap, lost in his delicious scent and the warm heat from his body. Malfoy’s chest rose and fell quickly, his breathing becoming erratic. He

stopped trying to push her away and now just seemed to be trying to keep his hands as far away from her as possible.

She knew that she was being too forward, that he didn't even like her. But he was so handsome. And nobody would care, right? If she just gave him a quick kiss? She was drunk, after all. They would laugh about it later. A small voice in the back of her head was ringing the alarm, was telling her to stop making a fool of herself, but she ignored it.

Leaning in, she pressed quivering lips to the pulse point on his neck and sucked lightly on the pale skin.

A shudder ran through Malfoy's whole body and he let out a deep moan. His hand, which he had been so careful to keep off of her, reversed course and firmly grabbed the flare of her hip, yanking her in.

Delighted with the reaction, Hermione let her fingers wander into his hair and play with the silky strands. She ran a teasing finger down Draco's leanly muscled forearm, was just about to press her lips to his neck again, when he shot up as though she had burned him. His breathing was ragged and his pupils were blown wide open. His hand was clamped around his forearm - between his fingers she could see the faded black ink of his Dark Mark.

"Let's get you to bed," he said hoarsely, still breathing hard.

She whined in disappointment, reaching for him.

He caught both her wrists firmly in one large hand and scooped her up with his other arm, then he was carrying her down the hall to her room.

He deposited her gently on the bed. With a flick of his wand he conjured a small blue bottle.

"This is hangover potion," he said gently. "So you won't feel so bad tomorrow."

Now that she was in her own bed Hermione was feeling rather sleepy. She took the potion gratefully.

"Thanks, Draco," she murmured, eyes closing. "Did I upset you?"

"No. You're a good girl."

"Will I remember this tomorrow?"

He laughed hoarsely.

"I don't know. I hope not."

"Will you remember?"

"I don't think I could forget if I tried."

She yawned.

“You should go to sleep now, too.”

“I will. I just need to take a shower first.”

Chapter 6

Hermione blinked awake with a small smile.

She yawned and checked the clock: only eight in the morning. Perfect, they would have plenty of time to look for the book today. With a contented hum she rose and went to the bathroom to brush her teeth, then froze in front of the mirror.

Hermione was still wearing last night's yellow sundress. The one she remembered putting on for her date. Why hadn't she changed into pajamas..?

Her eyes widened.

No. No, no, no – that had been a dream. That had only been a sweet, silly dream of teasing and touching Malfoy, of kissing his neck, of cuddling with him, of giggling when he tried to get her to stop.

“Oh no.... No, no, please,” Hermione moaned anxiously, eyes round and hands flapping.

She closed her eyes tightly, trying to remember everything she could about last night. She had gone to dinner with Mark. Mark! Maybe he was the one she had been kissing and cuddling? But no, she could remember him awkwardly pawing at her chest and her bidding him goodnight...

Hermione could vaguely remember knocking on Malfoy's door. After that it was rather fuzzy. Just flashes of memory: his shirt against her cheek and the hard planes of his chest behind it, the smell of him, him smiling indulgently while she giggled. His hand pushing hers away. A vague sense that they were playing a game where she wanted to touch him while he tried to evade her...

Someone knocked at the door.

“No, no, no,” she whispered. Then, louder, shrilly: “Who is it?”

“Who else could it possibly be?” came Malfoy's voice through the wood.

“Go away,” Hermione said miserably.

A long pause.

“What do you remember about last night?”

“Oh, not much, just that I assaulted you,” Hermione said hysterically, walking round and round in a tight circle.

“Let me in.”

“I'd rather die, but thank you.”

“Granger.”

“What have I done? What have I done?! What—”

“Granger!” Malfoy repeated, louder. “I have chocolate croissants.”

She paused.

“Leave them outside the door.”

“Obviously not. Let me in.”

Face burning, stomach growling, Hermione opened the door.

“Good morning,” he said with a smirk, holding out a paper bag of pastries.

“Thanks,” she muttered, accepting them and trying to shut the door again.

“As if,” Malfoy said, pushing his way in. He took a seat on her bed and looked up at her with a lazy smile.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered, staring at him. “I’m so embarrassed.”

“Why are you embarrassed?”

“Because... because...”

“Because you’d rather spend an evening with me than with your boring date?” he asked smugly. “Because you came to my room after your tedious dinner and wanted to snuggle?”

His eyes were crinkled at the corners and his smile was infectious.

“Oh!” she cried angrily, throwing a croissant at him. “You are beastly! I can’t believe you would take this opportunity to make me feel worse!”

“Godric,” he said, face tilted up to the heavens. “How do I bear this burden? The women, they just won’t stop falling at my feet—”

She shoved him and he fell into the bed with a crowing laugh.

“It was rather cute, you know,” Malfoy whispered later as they looked between the pews of their final Edinburgh church.

“I have an idea,” Hermione hissed. “Let’s never talk about this ever again.”

Hermione’s red-hot embarrassment simmered down to a resigned sort of acceptance by the end of the day. Malfoy seemed to have taken the whole thing in stride, which helped a lot. In fact, he seemed to find the thing far more amusing than she would have expected; he spent the day in a sort of jubilant glee. Though this was better than him being awkward or weird, it still didn’t help her sour mood.

At the end of the afternoon, Malfoy and Hermione agreed that the book was unlikely to still be in Edinburgh, and decided to take a portkey back to London to touch base with Mr. Fletcher. It was also a good opportunity for them to get some rest and pack before their next destination, Greece.

Malfoy went directly back to the Manor to take care of some business with his estate and Hermione went home to start packing and send an urgent letter to Ginny. Hermione only had one day in London before she was leaving again and desperately needed some girl time.

Ginny, Merlin bless her best friend, delivered with aplomb. She showed up at Hermione's flat that evening with a box of chocolates, a carton of popcorn, a large wooly blanket and a whiteboard.

"You brought the whiteboard!" Hermione laughed.

"We *always* need a whiteboard when you call an emergency girls night," Ginny said. "So – spit it out. What's the situation?"

Hermione sighed.

"Oh, Ginny. I don't know what I've gotten myself into."

Ginny uncapped a dry-erase marker.

"Talk."

Two hours later the once-pristine whiteboard was covered in scribbles and lists.

"The thing is," Ginny said, shoving a handful of popcorn into her mouth. "He obviously likes you too."

"How can you say that, Gin?" Hermione moaned, wringing her hands. "I assaulted the man. And he *rejected* me."

Ginny nodded.

"That's true, I suppose – but look at the other facts." She started pointing to different parts of the whiteboard. "He takes you out to dinners. He spends all his time with you. When you drunkenly came onto him, he teased you the next day instead of being awkward..."

"All of that's only because we have to work together!" Hermione interrupted. "And regardless, him not liking me isn't the problem. The problem is that I like him even though he's all wrong for me. He's only a five out of eleven on the husband checklist, Ginny."

"Let me see that checklist," Ginny said.

Hermione opened the notebook and they pored over it together, foreheads scrunched in focus.

"Ok," Ginny said. "I have a plan."

“Thank Godric. Tell me.”

Ginny cleared off a section of the whiteboard and wrote four new bullet points under a bolded heading.

Malfoy’s Unknown Qualities – Husband Checklist

1. Kind
2. Enjoys travel
3. Likes animals
4. Good in bed

“Your checklist is misleading,” Ginny explained. “According to the list, Malfoy doesn’t pass these four criteria. But the truth is that you just don’t *know* whether he does or doesn’t – look, you wrote ‘unclear’ or ‘probably not’ next to more than one of these.”

Hermione nodded slowly, understanding.

“So you’re saying that’s why I still like him – because he hasn’t definitively failed the checklist.”

“That’s right,” Ginny said. “So all we have to do is prove that he fails just *one* of these items. Once you know that he’s definitely not a match, you’ll get over him.”

Hermione tilted her head thoughtfully. Ginny made a good point. If Malfoy had a for-sure incompatibility with her on any of those points then she would know he did not pass the bar she designed for herself years ago. She smiled.

“It’s a great idea, Gin.”

Hermione eyed the list again, carefully looking at each item. She felt confident that Malfoy would fail at least one. She knew he was a nicer man now than he had been a boy, but wouldn’t be that surprised if he still harbored some pureblood bias or kept unpaid house elves, which would violate the kindness criteria. He had whinged about staying in Edinburgh the first night, so she felt fairly confident that he didn’t love traveling. She was less sure about whether he liked animals and whether he was good in bed. Her cheeks tinted slightly and she made eye contact with Ginny, who smirked at her.

“You might have to bend your rule on casual hookups in order to gather data on point number four,” Ginny said innocently.

Hermione tossed a handful of popcorn at Ginny and hid her burning cheeks in a throw pillow.

--

The next morning, Hermione waited at Fletcher's Rare and Unusual Books for Draco. She flipped through her papers carefully, going over the plan for the day.

"It looks like we're approaching a more chaotic period with *Divine Duality*'s pattern of coordinates," she said to Mr. Fletcher, frowning at her notes. "In Edinburgh we knew to look in churches but it seems we won't have anything so concrete for our time in Greece."

"Mr. Malfoy works with a rare bookstore in Greece from time to time, advising them on their manuscripts and such. I believe the shop is called Gilded Ages. Perhaps you two could visit and ask for their expertise."

"That's a great idea! I'll ask him when he gets here."

"And how has working with Mr. Malfoy been?"

Hermione looked up quickly at Mr. Fletcher. His face was only politely interested but his eyes sparkled knowingly.

"Fine. Good," Hermione said. "He's smart and helpful."

"Very nice of him to offer so many weeks of his time to us," Mr. Fletcher hummed. "He's rather busy, isn't he?"

Hermione was spared having to respond to Mr. Fletcher's amused and pointed questions by Draco's arrival at that moment. He was wearing a loosely fit white linen shirt and dark, olive green trousers, and Hermione was reminded of him at Hogwarts, green and silver tie loosely fitted around his neck.

Malfoy greeted Mr. Fletcher before turning to Hermione with a smile.

"Morning, Granger. Do you have any bags other than your bottomless purse? I'm sending them over to the hotel now."

Hermione shook her head, surprised.

"I didn't realize we had a hotel already," Hermione said. "Did you book one?"

"Yes. As delightful as it is to stay in the nearest hotel to where we happen to be wandering at end-of-evening-time, I thought we could try something new," Malfoy said drily. "You'll like it."

"I can't really afford hotels in your price range, Malfoy," Hermione said, frowning.

"Don't worry about it. I got them at a very steep discount, they were hardly anything."

“How much?”

“I’ll check the receipt later. Where do you think *Divine Dualities* is going to show up?”

Hermione’s eyes shone and she lunged for her notes to show Malfoy. Mr. Fletcher smiled and walked away.

“Good luck, you two! My fingers are crossed,” he called jovially behind him.

--

They decided to start at Gilded Ages.

“The owner is a colleague of my father’s,” Draco explained as they walked the few blocks from the Portkey station to the bookstore. “Marcus Payne.”

“What kind of colleague?” Hermione looked askance at Malfoy.

He returned the look sourly.

“Not the Death Eater kind,” he grumbled. “The rich pureblood kind.”

“Hardly better,” Hermione mumbled, but she grinned when Malfoy huffed.

Gilded Ages was far more posh than Hermione anticipated, and not at all like any bookstore she had ever seen. It felt more like an elite service agency – the building had dark tinted windows for privacy and was decked out in sleek granite and ash-colored wood.

A severe-looking receptionist led them to a waiting area where they were invited to have coffee or champagne while she fetched Mr. Payne.

Mr. Payne, to Hermione’s surprise, was a handsome man their age.

“Malfoy,” he said in greeting moving forward to shake Draco’s hand. “I’m Eric. I believe you usually work with my father. He’s currently away on business but asked me to help in any way I could...”

Hermione smiled as Eric’s dark blue eyes found her.

“And who is this?”

Eric studied Hermione appreciatively, a crooked smile on his face.

Hermione extended her hand. Eric took it gently, eyes burning holes into hers.

“Hermione,” she said. “Granger.”

“Ah, the Golden Girl,” Eric responded, smiling. “And radiant you are. I am charmed.”

Next to Hermione, Malfoy stiffened slightly.

The three of them walked together further into the building. It continued to look less and less like a bookstore, and Hermione remarked on the fact.

“We’re a boutique service that pairs interested witches and wizards with hard-to-acquire relics and goods, primarily rare books,” Eric explained to Hermione as they passed a temperature-controlled glass library. “Though it is a bit of a running joke that we’re technically a used bookshop.”

They stopped at a large office with borderless floor-to-ceiling windows. Eric led them inside and took a seat at the large leather chair behind his desk.

“So you’re looking for *Divine Dualities*?” Eric asked. “And you know it’s here in Greece at the moment. Impressive.”

“Do you know anything that might help us?” Malfoy asked tersely.

“I may,” Eric said, speaking to Draco but smiling slyly at Hermione. “Tell me why you want the book.”

Hermione's eyes went wide. What a silly question.

“The same reason as anyone else!” Hermione exclaimed. “It would usher in a whole new era of the understanding of ancient magic. And it’s never been properly studied despite being one of the oldest still-functional ancient texts. It’s the only surviving book from—”

“—The Library of Alexandria,” Eric finished. “You’ve done your homework.”

Hermione huffed.

“Of course.”

Eric looked at her appraisingly for a moment.

“I have information that I believe could be helpful to you,” he said, finally.

“Believe it or not, we’d love to hear it,” Malfoy said sardonically.

Eric examined his fingernails for a moment.

“Dinner. With Miss Granger,” he looked up coolly at Malfoy.

It did not escape Hermione’s notice that Eric was not asking *her*. She frowned. Why was Eric addressing Malfoy?

“That’s what I’d like in exchange,” Eric continued, still speaking to Draco. “I’m more than happy to share the information then. Unless you two are..?”

Draco's face worked quickly, his mouth tightening into a grimace and his eyes narrowed. He slowly shook his head.

Eric directed his attention back to Hermione. His eyebrow raised playfully in question.

"That sounds lovely," Hermione said cautiously. "But I'll be expecting the information to be good."

Eric's eyes glinted at her, his crooked smile smug.

"I fully intend to leave you satisfied."

Malfoy's arm twitched.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Please see the end for notes! There are some new elements in this chapter that I wanted to put TW for.

Chapter Notes

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

Malfoy didn't talk much on their way back to the hotel. His eyes continued to look hard as flint and Hermione, despite her curiosity, decided to give him some time. There was certainly some sort of bad blood between him and Eric, though she didn't know how it was possible so soon after they had met.

Finally, at the hotel (a beautiful, luxuriously appointed building that smelled of jasmine) she decided to say something before she went to her room.

"So... what do you think that was all about?" she asked.

Malfoy looked at her, his eyes softening.

"Not sure," he said. "He definitely has some other motive that he's not sharing. He was goading me pretty transparently."

"Thank you for being so careful on my behalf," Hermione said. She had read between the lines and clocked Malfoy's aversion to her going on a dinner alone with Eric. "But don't worry – I can take care of myself."

Malfoy grimaced at her, a flash of something appearing in his eyes.

"I don't trust him," he said after a moment. "Just be careful."

"What should I wear?" asked Hermione, trying to lighten the conversation. "The restaurant he picked sounded like it has a dress code."

Malfoy muttered something under his breath.

"Hm?" Hermione asked, fumbling for her room key. They were standing in the hallway outside their two rooms.

"La Mer is nice," Draco said stiffly. "It's a nice restaurant. Not the kind of place one usually goes for business."

Hermione frowned, running through the list of dresses she had brought in her mind. At least she was better prepared this time.

“Want me to take you for a coffee before your dinner?” Malfoy asked. “You still have some time. And it might be nice to unwind a bit.”

Hermione smiled. Malfoy could certainly be sweet. She tamped down on the traitorous fluttering of her heart.

“Sure. Random question – do you keep house elves still?”

Malfoy laughed.

“Yes but they’re paid a wage and free as birds. How could I forget S.P.E.W?”

Hermione sighed and morosely checked off an item from her husband checklist.

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Malfoy and Hermione went to a little coffee shop next to the hotel and got cappuccinos. Hermione’s eyes were wide as she took in the ocean bordering their hotel. She breathed deeply, taking in the scent of the salt water and the warm smell of sand.

“This is wonderful,” she said softly, staring out into the horizon.

Malfoy watched her.

“It is.”

“Have you been here many times?”

“My mother and I used to come sometimes in the summers. Some of my fondest memories.”

Hermione decided she couldn’t possibly bring herself to ask more probing questions about whether he liked to travel as a rule. That would be for another day, when the sun wasn’t so perfect and the air wasn’t so balmy and lovely.

They sat in companionable silence. The day was cooling as evening approached but the sun still warmed them enough that Draco rolled up the sleeves of his shirt.

His Dark Mark stood out starkly from his pale skin. Feeling her eyes on it, he tilted his forearm away from her so she couldn’t see. His face shuttered and he looked pained.

“Malfoy,” she said softly, eyes still looking for the dark ink on his arm. There was a memory fluttering at the edge of her consciousness but she couldn’t find it for the life of her. “Can I see?”

He stiffened.

“You shouldn’t have to look at it,” he said firmly.

He was silent for a moment, his eyes downcast.

"Eric doesn't have one," he said bitterly, almost as if to himself. "That's one good thing about him."

She didn't fully understand but didn't push him.

--

Malfoy lingered outside Hermione’s door as she prepared to enter her room to get ready for the dinner. She looked at him questioningly.

“Let me know if—” he started, then quieted, his mouth in a frustrated line. “Enjoy dinner. Let me know if you need anything.”

Hermione had to admit she was a bit excited for dinner. Eric was unusually good-looking, after all, and she would be lying if she said his attentions weren’t extremely flattering.

In her room she pulled out the dress she had in mind. She wanted to wear something that felt beachy, felt like sunshine, languorous evenings and being somewhere new.

It was a gold dress, but not too sparkly. It draped like water down her front into a delicate cowl neck and was fastened around her neck with a thin gold ribbon. The dress was long enough to be classy and drapey enough to look relaxed instead of stiff.

She scrutinized herself in the mirror.

Nobody would think that she hadn’t put effort into her appearance, and she blushed at the thought that Eric would scoff at the idea that Hermione might have thought this was a date. She decided to don a loose cardigan over the dress to offset the effect a bit.

She carefully did her hair and put on dark lipstick. A pair of low but strappy heels later and she was ready to go. It was a bit of a walk to the restaurant and she didn’t want to stumble in stilettos. She stepped into the hall and found herself disappointed that Malfoy wasn't waiting there as he had been before her dinner with Mark. She shook herself. He had no reason to do so.

The walk took fifteen minutes and Hermione indulged in the ocean air, the setting sun, the lovely light feeling of being on a trip to a new country. By the time she arrived outside the glittering restaurant front she was feeling like it was a distinctly magical night.

Eric was waiting outside, hands in his pockets, smiling crookedly at her.

“Golden Girl in a golden dress,” he said, taking her hand and brushing his lips over it. “Could this all be for me?”

Hermione’s belly tingled and she laughed uneasily, not knowing what to say. She supposed it had been for him.

He led her into the restaurant and they were brought directly to a central table – Eric had clearly requested a spot already before she arrived.

He pulled out his chair for her and she was reminded of Malfoy.

They made friendly small-talk for a bit as the waiter came and brought water and complimentary amuse bouches. Eric leaned over to the waiter and requested a specific bottle of wine. Hermione’s stomach turned a bit at the thought of drinking again so soon after her last experience, but she decided a glass or two wouldn’t hurt.

“I hope you’ll excuse how forward I was, requesting this dinner,” Eric said, leaning towards her after the waiter left. “It’s not every day I meet a beautiful, intelligent woman interested in the same things as me. A war heroine, no less.”

Hermione blushed.

“It’s not common I meet someone in the rare book field myself,” she said.

The wine arrived and Eric poured Hermione a glass but did not take one himself.

“Taking a break from drinking,” he smiled. “But this wine is too special for you not to try.”

Hermione accepted the glass with a smile.

“I hope you’ll forgive *my* forwardness,” she said. “But I have to admit I can’t wait to hear your information on *Divine Dualities*. My curiosity is insatiable.”

“That’s okay,” Eric purred. “I like a woman with appetite.”

Hermione knew he was being deliberately vague as to what kind of appetite, but it felt like they both knew which he meant. Her chest fluttered anxiously. He was certainly being more blunt than she had expected.

“Since you’ve come with me to dinner, I can share the information now. But you have to promise to sit through the whole thing anyway,” he winked. “Not too arduous of a request, I hope.”

Hermione laughed. She was sure that more than one pureblood heiress would kill to be at dinner with as eligible a bachelor as Eric, and his confident smile said he knew the same.

“The book is currently at an ancient monastery,” he said. “It’s called Meteora. It appears there whenever it’s in Greece – a rarely known fact.”

Hermione buzzed with excitement.

“Oh my goodness,” she said breathlessly. “I’m sorry, let me just write that down...”

She pulled out the enchanted parchment she had brought and scribbled a note to Malfoy quickly.

HG: He spilled. It’s at a monastery called Meteora.

Hermione took a large gulp of wine, feeling a warm tingle down her throat.

Eric’s eyes were on her, suddenly hungry and calculating.

“That’s fascinating,” she said to Eric with genuine excitement. “This is invaluable information to us.”

Eric smiled but didn’t say anything.

Hermione took another sip of wine and felt her lips warm up unnaturally.

“Is there...” Hermione began, clearing her throat nervously. “What kind of wine is this?”

“Cabernet franc,” Eric said smoothly. “Tell me about your friendship with Malfoy.”

Hermione tensed. She felt that they were getting to the root of Eric’s motivations.

“He and I were not colleagues until recently,” she said carefully. “He has grown on me since our school days,” she added with a laugh.

“And his... history does not bother you?”

Hermione took another gulp of wine. She was starting to feel a bit buzzed, and she frowned in confusion. She had only taken three sips.

“No,” she said, a warmth crawling up her belly into her chest.

“The Death Eaters killed my mother, you know,” Eric said. His easy, friendly demeanor was gone. “During the war. My foolish father forgave the Malfoys for their part long ago, but I am less easily placated.”

Hermione registered the words but her head was spinning.

“Eric—is there something in this wine?”

She started breathing heavily and her eyelids fluttered.

“This is a poor substitute for a true revenge,” Eric said, seeming to not hear her. “But I couldn’t give up an opportunity to hurt Draco.”

“The wine?” Hermione asked again, desperately, nonsensically. “The wine?”

“It’s a bit of an aphrodisiac,” Eric murmured, smiling at her. “Just a touch of one. I like you a lot, you know.” It sounded like an unkind joke coming from him.

He reached over and grazed a hand over her hers. She gasped at the touch. There was heat pooling in her core and she gazed at Eric with a new hunger. He was so handsome, all raven hair and piercing blue eyes.

“That’s,” she breathed heavily, struggling to get her words out. “Eric that’s illegal. Did you dose me with a lust potion?”

“Don’t pretend you don’t like it,” he said, baring his teeth in a harsh smile. His face looked different, crueler. “What do you say we get out of here?”

“No,” Hermione said, though her belly coiled and the thought of Eric on top of her came unbidden into her mind. “No, Eric...”

He stood up, waving away a waiter.

“Put the wine on my tab,” he said, still looking hungrily at Hermione. “We’re leaving.”

He walked over and pulled her up by the arm, adjusting his trousers as she panted at his touch.

“You look so delectable like this,” he crooned, letting a hand wander to her backside and pressing himself to her. He pulled at the dress she had so foolishly fretted over. She felt his hard length against her hip and she groaned. “That’s it... just relax. I like you flushed and ready. Are you going to be obedient, Golden Girl?”

She fumbled at her pocket as Eric pulled her out of the restaurant, trying to pull out the enchanted parchment, trying to get help. Eric grasped her firmly by the wrist.

“You won’t need your wand, sweetheart,” he said, misunderstanding her intentions. “I’ll take good care of you. You’ll be on your knees begging for more by morning.”

Outside the restaurant, Hermione registered absently that there appeared to be photographers. She was distracted by the growing dampness between her legs and she clenched her thighs automatically, moaning softly.

Eric leered down at her and pulled her into his arms. They felt like a vice around her.

“I thought we could put on a bit of a show,” he whispered, voice shaking with an animalistic excitement. “Golden Girl and pureblood bachelor... something for your boyfriend to read about tomorrow morning.”

She pushed at his chest, trying to force him away from her.

“Please,” she whimpered. “Get off.”

Even as she begged she felt her breasts tense at the contact with his chest, felt her eyes glaze as she imagined him grasping her in other positions, driving into her...

A camera flashed.

“Mr. Payne!” the photographer yelled. “Miss Granger!”

With a final, calculating look, Eric grabbed the back of Hermione’s head. She felt her whole body shudder with pleasure as his fingers wrapped themselves around her hair.

“Smile, darling,” he said roughly.

Hermione tried to pull her head away but Eric pushed forward. He mashed his mouth roughly into hers, forcing her mouth open and his tongue inside. She gasped and pushed at him and trembled, her core clenching violently around nothing as the cameras flashed.

Chapter End Notes

Non-consent (not between Malfoy and Hermione)

Chapter 8

Eric pulled his mouth off Hermione's just as a flash of white-hot light shot past.

He lurched back as though struck with great force, an ugly red gash on his face. It stretched from his eyebrow to his mouth and he howled, grasping at the wound and dropping Hermione.

Hermione slumped to the ground. She turned her head. Malfoy was storming towards them, face contorted in rage. He waved his wand and a protective ward dropped over Hermione, but he didn't stop moving. His grey eyes were wild as he moved towards Eric, who staggered back in fear.

Malfoy lifted his wand arm and brought it down sharply, slashing one, two, three times through the air, causing as many red slashes to appear on Eric's face and torso. Blood bloomed out from them and Eric screamed.

"You fucking—" Malfoy snarled, reaching Eric. He punched him once, hard, in the jaw. Hermione heard the sound of bone cracking. No sooner had Eric hit the ground that Malfoy yanked him back up by his collar, holding him in the air as though he weighed nothing.

Eric started laughing, delirious.

"You're pathetic," he said, head lolling and blood dripping from his cuts. "Kill me. Like your Death Eater friends killed my mother."

Malfoy didn't miss a beat, his face empty of remorse. His eyes narrowed in hatred and he flung Eric so hard that the other man flew back in an arc through the air, landing with a sickening thud in a heap.

"She said—", Malfoy gritted out through clenched teeth, slashing his wand furiously, recklessly, through the air. "To get—" cuts appeared on Eric's legs, his arms, his clothing ripping to shreds. Malfoy sliced once more, "Off of her." A gash appeared on Eric's chest, right over his heart, and the man slumped to the ground.

Hermione whimpered as her core continued to flutter and as her vision blurred. People were screaming but she didn't care. She wanted to leave, wanted to go to the hotel, go back with Draco.

"Draco," she rasped. "Draco, please. Leave him for the Aurors. I need you."

Malfoy turned as though trained to, as though she had blown a whistle or said the magic words. His head whipped around and in five long strides he was by her side.

"He drugged me," Hermione cried, shaking. "There was—in the wine—I didn't—"

Malfoy's face convulsed in fury. He leaned over and softly brushed a thumb over her lip, split where Eric had bitten it too hard. Hermione moaned and leaned into his hand.

"Help me," she managed to choke out. "Please—"

Malfoy stood her up gently and wrapped his arm around her waist. She felt the world spin and shudder as they apparated away. Hermione leaned her face into Malfoy's chest and tried to find equilibrium.

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Hermione woke up on a soft bed, a warm glow of light reflected on the pale blue ceiling above her. She was in the hotel. The sheets smelled like Draco.

From a few yards away, by the fireplace, Hermione could hear a deep voice, the tones ebbing and flowing like water. Hermione blinked blearily, trying to situate herself. Draco's words came into focus.

"I took her to the hospital, they gave her some fluids but then told me to let her rest at the hotel."

"Is she still unconscious?" a man's voice asked.

"Yes, is that unusual?"

"She'll likely wake up within an hour or two."

"It's a lust potion—I—I don't want her to feel—"

"Most if not all of the effects should have worn off, and if not once she regains consciousness you can leave the room. Based on her described behavior she was not overdosed."

"Alright. Thanks Nott. Let me know if any more of her diagnostics come back."

Hermione turned her head to look at Malfoy. He continued to stare into the now-empty fireplace for a few moments before turning on his heel to walk back to Hermione's side. He stopped in his tracks when they made eye contact.

"Thank you," Hermione whispered.

Draco didn't say anything. His face was pale and his hands started shaking.

"I shouldn't have let you go," he said roughly. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I—"

Hermione could barely register his words, closing her eyes and letting the hum of his voice wash comfortingly over her. She felt safe. She frowned as she remembered Eric.

“Eric..?” she asked tremulously.

Malfoy stiffened instantly. His eyes narrowed and Hermione watched as his mouth set in an angry line.

“Alive, unfortunately,” he said shortly. “In custody.”

Hermione relaxed.

“Hold me?” Hermione asked. She reached out to Malfoy and watched in dismay as he flinched.

“I—I’m going to leave,” Malfoy said quietly. “You’ll feel like yourself in an hour or so. I’m next door. Let me know if you need anything.”

He moved towards her, brushing a gentle hand over the hair hanging over her forehead, before leaving the room. He closed the door quietly behind him, leaving Hermione with words caught in her chest.

It’s not the potion asking, it’s me.

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The Daily Prophet had a field day.

Heir to Payne Fortune Drugs Hermione Granger

Our Greek correspondents captured exclusive footage of Hermione Granger under influence of lagnia, an experimental Greek lust potion presently banned under government regulation. Eric Payne, heir to media conglomerate Payne Entertainment, was apprehended at the scene. Draco Malfoy was credited with subduing Payne.

Within an hour of publication, Ginny, Ron and Harry were all in Hermione’s hotel room.

Hermione had never seen Harry so angry. He was on a Floo call to the Minister of Magic within minutes of arriving, bellowing to Shacklebolt about the trial delay and the attempts at interference by Eric’s father. Ron paced back and forth in agitation, wearing a light line into the carpet.

Hermione was no longer bedridden. She sat by the window, her head leaning against the cool glass. Ginny sat next to her, her fingers intertwined with Hermione’s.

“You should come home,” Ginny said quietly to Hermione.

Hermione’s mouth twisted. This was where all the conversations with her friends had led. And though she understood their intention, could even see the appeal of returning to London,

she hesitated.

The fact that returning to London would mean giving up on a goal that meant so much to her, would also mean no longer having a daily reason to see Malfoy, was a non-trivial part of her feeling.

“Malfoy will come back with you,” Ginny said, reading Hermione’s thoughts. “He’s only on this goose hunt because of you.”

“I want to keep looking,” Hermione said. “We know where the book is now, and I’ll be fine after another day of rest...”

“If Eric was even telling the truth!” Ginny interjected. “Why would you trust anything he said?”

“It’s too odd of a thing to make up,” Hermione said, shaking her head. “And he had no reason to tell me anything. He could have just waited.”

There was a quiet knock on the door. Harry paced over and opened it, stilling when he saw Malfoy.

Draco looked at Harry and swallowed once. His chin lifted in an imitation of defiance and Hermione was reminded of the many times he had seemed so prideful in school. A mask. Malfoy had clearly been steeling himself for an unpleasant welcome and Hermione noticed his arm with the Dark Mark twitch and angle away from Harry.

Harry strode forward and grasped Malfoy in a tight embrace. He was followed shortly by Ron, who did the same. Malfoy froze, eyes wide, as his arms awkwardly came up to return each of their holds.

“Thank Merlin you were there, mate,” Ron said gruffly.

Harry clapped Malfoy on the back twice and then returned to his call with Shackbolt.

Hermione smiled weakly at Malfoy. He came to sit beside her, and Ginny tactfully stepped away to give them some privacy.

“Portkey booked for tomorrow morning,” Malfoy said quietly. “This will all be over soon.”

Hermione looked back at him, surprised.

“You too? No - I want to keep looking. I don’t want to give up now.”

“Hermione...”

“I’m not some fragile flower just because this whole thing happened. Need I remind you I survived through a war. We came here to find *Divine Dualities* and that’s what we’re going to do.”

Malfoy ran a hand through his already unkempt hair. His eyes were wild and he had dark circles beneath them.

“I can’t,” he said hoarsely. “I need to take you back. I have to—this whole thing is my fault —”

“Please,” Hermione said softly. “You told me in Edinburgh that we would look for as long as it takes. I need you.”

Malfoy’s gaze shot to hers and Hermione was viscerally reminded of the last time she had spoken those last three words, the last time that Malfoy had come to her as though summoned.

“As long as it takes,” Malfoy repeated slowly. “Did I really say that?”

“You did.”

He paused, gazing at her through stormy grey eyes.

“I always say too much around you, don’t I?”

Malfoy brought a hand up to her chin, gently tilting her face up to look at him.

“As long as it takes, then.”

He left the room, nodding curtly to Harry, Ron and Ginny as he did so.

Hermione took a moment to catch her breath before noticing Harry and Ron were staring at her, shock written all over their faces. Ginny was looking too, but with a beaming smile.

“What the bloody hell was that?” asked Harry.

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Ginny had conjured up a whiteboard.

Harry and Ron sat at her feet, the picture of rapt pupils.

“So that’s the husband checklist,” she explained to them, pointing to the list on the board. “And Malfoy is still missing three qualities.”

“But they like each other,” Ron said dumbly. “Don’t you, ‘Mione?”

Ginny clucked her tongue in impatience.

“Honestly, Ron. Of course they like each other – but the question is *is Malfoy her husband.*”

Hermione picked up the burger in front of her. They had ordered room service and made a little night of it. It was rare that she and her friends had time to spend a whole evening together, these days, and she couldn't help the warm feeling in her heart. It felt like Hogwarts again.

"He needs to like animals, enjoy travel and be good in bed," Harry repeated slowly. "What the hell kind of criteria is that? You two made those up? What if he's allergic to fur?"

Hermione winced. It wasn't the first time that it had occurred to her that her list might have been a bit... hurried.

"Well those things are important to me," she said defensively. "And anyway, there are other things that he checks already. He's kind, and he reads, and he's respectful of my time... these are just the stragglers."

"He's pretty obviously into you," Ron said, chewing on French fries. "I mean, I read the St. Mungo's report on Eric. Malfoy nearly killed him."

"Then why hasn't he made his move?" Hermione despaired.

Ginny cocked her head thoughtfully.

"That's what we'll have to find out, isn't it?"

Chapter 9

Draco Malfoy did not fall in love with Hermione Granger at first sight.

His was the kind that loved slowly - whose love grew and burned and coiled over years. Such had always been the way of Malfoy men: long generations of silver-eyed heirs who were slow to love but jealously and loyally devoted once they fell. And fall they always did.

So when Draco first encountered Hermione Granger on the Hogwarts Express he saw her only as a witness to his humiliating exchange with Harry Potter. And when Malfoy saw Hermione's name at the top of the high-performers' list at Hogwarts, and his own name second, he saw her only as fierce academic competition – one that had no business challenging his pureblood right to unrivaled excellence. And when Hermione slapped Draco across the mouth in their third year, leaving his face stinging and something in his stomach heating, he saw her only as a puzzle. How could someone so clearly inferior to him – a Mudblood, a Gryffindor – hold him in such low regard?

The one thing that could always be said about Hermione was that Malfoy *couldn't not notice her*. She was always there, outsmarting him. Always there, clever eyes shining. And even when he looked down his nose at her, he simply couldn't shake the feeling that it was she who thought she was better. Knew she was better.

And she was beautiful.

Malfoy was not so stupid as to lie to himself there. He could still vividly recall the moment he saw her at the Yule Ball in fourth year, heart-stoppingly lovely in that blue dress. His hands had started sweating and he stared at her as though he was the one who would be taking her on his arm, his stomach flipping as though he was the one who would be nervously thinking of ways to make her laugh. He watched as she danced with Krum all night. Later, Draco got drunk and lost his virginity to Pansy, visions of honey-brown eyes and periwinkle dresses dancing behind his eyelids.

It stung that she found him loathsome, but he told himself it didn't matter. They could never be together anyway. He was Draco Malfoy, sole heir to the Malfoy fortune, responsible for continuing the line of one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight pureblood families that carried the weight of the wizarding future on their shoulders. His would be a pureblood wife, icy and perfect.

But there were no rules against who he could or could not think of late at night, certainly? And so, lying in his four poster deep in the Slytherin dungeons, it was not an icy and perfect pureblood wife that Draco thought of as he thrust into his hand. And it was not Pansy or Astoria or Daphne's name that he bit back as pleasure rolled through him.

Draco could not help that he started to notice when Hermione was in the room, or that he started craning his neck in the library to see which books she was burying her nose in. And if he borrowed those same books after, trying to peer into the workings of her beautiful brain, what did it matter? Just a temporary infatuation.

He wrote of her to his mother, complaining about her incessantly.

“The Mudblood did something stupid today...”

“Miss Granger beat me on the Potions examination but I am unconcerned, for I believe my mistake was merely...”

“Potter and his stupid friends keep following me. Miss Granger is especially...”

He had been surprised when, one summer, his mother sat him down in the Manor’s sunroom.

“You speak too often of Miss Granger,” his mother said, matter-of-factly. “Others will notice. You will put her in danger.”

“I do not care about Miss Granger,” he shot back at once, uncomfortably aware of the red flush on his cheeks. “She is—she is a Mudblood—”

At once he felt a cold, sharp pain in his forehead as his mother dove into his memories, his thoughts. By this time he had been training in legilimency with Professor Snape for a year, but he was not skilled enough to ward off Narcissa.

Hermione laughing in the Great Hall with her friends – how he *wished* she could hear his jokes, they were certainly funnier than the Weasel’s. Hermione’s chest quivering as she raised her hand in class. Hermione’s eyes glaring at Draco with hatred, her mouth twisted in a sneer, and the things that being the focus of her emotion did to him. Daydreams of Hermione underneath him, writhing in pleasure, calling out his name...

Draco hung his head and shook with humiliation.

“Mother—mother, she is nothing, I know—I know my place is here, I know my duties—”

“Draco,” she interrupted softly. “If those on our side learn of your weakness, they will kill her to teach you a lesson. She will die if you do not keep her safe.”

The nature of his life changed after that conversation. Draco was a boy who was accustomed to getting exactly what he wanted, and to doing exactly what those more powerful than him told him to do.

Now he knew there was one thing – one beautiful, perfect thing – that he could not have. And the highest order of his duty was to her, for it was his own wrong thoughts - his dirty lust, his incorrect infatuation - that would put her in danger were they to be revealed. She was his responsibility.

The night that he had to watch Bellatrix torture Hermione was the worst of his life. He could do nothing for her that would not put her in further danger, could only watch as the girl that he loved twisted in pain and shrieked in agony. Her screams echoed inside his skull for years after. The worst part was how each time Bellatrix threw her head back and laughed in joy and pleasure at the pain inflicted on Hermione, the Dark Mark on Draco’s arm had buzzed and echoed her joy.

His mother found Draco the next morning covered in blood. He had tried to cut the Dark Mark off his arm. It grew back, as it was designed to.

During the trials, Hermione had spoken in defense of Draco. He nearly died from the shame twisting in his gut, the disgust he felt towards himself. Benefiting from her goodness even after everything. It was a relief to later learn that she was with Weasley, that the tantalizingly painful prospect of her availability was gone. Some time later, Draco heard a rumor that she and Ron had gotten married. That night he drank to excess and bedded a curly-headed brunette socialite, hating himself all the while. The next morning he stared, pale-faced, at his reflection in the mirror and wondered if he would ever recover from Hermione.

Over the years, Draco did better. As the pain from the war faded, as his self-loathing and his shame hardened his character without destroying it, he put his energy and time into the business of growing his family's wealth. He focused on his work, and on his respectable social life. He saw women, he hosted parties, he sponsored charity galas. He tried twice to date someone seriously and both times felt the deep, wrong sense that he was betraying someone. There was a bitter sort of humor in the fact that he felt an obligation to be loyal to Hermione when she didn't even want him.

So when Draco Malfoy walked into La Vie and saw *her* - the only her there had ever been, for him - on a first date with that absolute idiot Archibald Velton, when he learned that she and Weasel had split up years (*years!*) ago and that she was, by some miracle, still on the market, he nearly declared himself right then and there. Perhaps a more sentimental man would have. But Draco did not deserve to be sentimental. The war was long over, the imminent danger to Hermione long gone, but he was not so stupid to believe that he deserved her any more now than he did back then. So he simply watched as she left the restaurant and tried to drink in the sight of her in that lovely pale green dress, her hips swaying as she scurried out the door.

And, three weeks later, when Draco stepped into Fletcher's Rare and Unusual Books and saw Hermione – his lovely, brown-haired, honey-eyed Hermione – head bent low over some books, scrawling some notes, a smudge of ink under her left eye, he knew the smart thing to do would be to leave at once. Mr. Fletcher had other advisors that he could call upon, after all. But after all was said and done Draco was a Slytherin, was selfish, and could not help himself. He walked up to her and hid his shaking hands in his pockets. He teased her when he should have known better, allowed himself to flirt and relished the faint flush of attraction he saw bloom on her cheeks. His good looks had done something meaningful for him finally.

It was meant to be something small, something he could keep for himself for the next however many years that he would be forced to stay away from her. Surely he deserved a crumb of her attention? But there was some ironic magic in the air that day and he had been roped into a weeks-long project with her instead, and Draco continued to choose selfishness each day.

Taking her out to dinner.

Listening to her talk about things that excited her.

Buying her coffee and pastries.

Touching her arm, pulling her to his side as they apparated.

It was a farce of a situation, a foolish mimicry of courtship. But Draco would never get to actually have her, so what harm was there in this? He could buy her dinners, he could make her laugh. He could make her blush, could watch her bite her lip and imagine what she would look like flushed in other situations. He wanted to do more, wanted so much more, but even just this was enough. Anything was enough, when it came to her – or so he had thought.

His control continued slipping.

When she knocked on his door after her date, drunk and warm and giggly and touching him (*he had been in agony at how she had touched him, running her little hands over his chest, his stomach, unknowingly teasing him to the brink of sanity*) he had almost broken, had almost given in. If it weren't for the fact that she ran her hand against his Dark Mark and he was brought forcibly back to the night when she was writhing on the dungeon floors as his Dark Mark sang, he would have destroyed years of work he had put in, carefully building walls around his feelings for her and keeping his distance.

And then Eric.

When Eric had almost stolen Hermione, had drugged her, had almost *taken from her against her will*, Malfoy felt certain that his life had been building to this exact moment of murdering Eric Payne and going to Azkaban for the remainder of his days. The only thing that could have possibly stopped him happened. Her shaking voice: "*Draco, I need you.*"

Because if there was one thing Draco Malfoy knew for sure it was that even though he could not have Hermione, he would be devoted to her until his last breath. Such had always been the way of Malfoy men.

Chapter 10

Narcissa Malfoy Floo'ed her son at eleven in the morning, thirty minutes before he was set to meet with Hermione and head to Meteora.

“Good morning, mother,” Draco said warily, taking a seat in the armchair before the fireplace. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Narcissa’s face wore a very sly expression that Draco could read even through the green flames of the Floo.

“Draco, dear,” she began. “When were you planning on telling me that the reason you’ve taken weeks off work was to help none other than *Miss Granger*?”

Draco winced. He knew it was only a matter of time before his mother read the article in the Prophet and contacted him about it. For years Narcissa had been trying to push Draco into pursuing Hermione. The war was long over, Narcissa would say. It was time to choose happiness. She steadfastly ignored Draco’s claims that he no longer had feelings for Hermione.

“It’s not like that,” Draco said quickly. “It’s for her job. I’m just helping Mr. Fletcher.”

“And it has been a very professional experience so far, has it?”

“Say what you’re trying to say, mother.”

Narcissa smirked.

“Well I wish you’d told me sooner, that’s all. I have some bad news. I took the liberty of reaching out to Mr. Fletcher. I was very curious about the project you two have been on. We did some research and I wanted to let you know that we don’t think you two will be able to touch *Divine Dualities*, even if you do find it.”

“You’re mistaken,” Draco said with a frown. “We fit every criteria neatly.”

“Friends with each other, are you?”

“Of course. I have nothing but the highest respect for Miss Gr—”

“*Just* friends?”

Draco paused.

Narcissa smiled lazily and continued.

“The seekers are outside the criteria if even one of the two has a romantic interest in the other.”

Draco's eye twitched.

"I am not—I don't—"

"I would just hate," Narcissa cut in, ignoring Draco's stammering. "For you two to get all the way to Meteora only to see the book disappear between your fingers. Miss Granger would certainly have all sorts of questions..."

Draco was still for a long moment. Then he shot to his feet and began pacing, running his hands through his hair in agitation.

"For fuck's sake—okay. Alright, you win, blasted woman. I am still... *lightly* interested in Miss Granger."

"Lightly interested, are you?" Narcissa muttered.

"How do I get out of this?! She's dead set on finding the book, Mother, and I can't very well tell her—I can't explain that the reason—"

"Luckily for the two of you," Narcissa said. "I have offered my help to Mr. Fletcher. I have a procurement team waiting on the sidelines to go fetch the book as early as this afternoon. Three pairs of seekers, a primary pair and two back-ups, all of whom fit all the criteria. Cost me a small fortune but worth it, I think. For a resource as rare as *Divine Dualities*, I mean."

Draco sagged in relief.

"Thank you, Mother. She'll be thrilled. I am grateful."

"Not so fast, dear. I don't intend to just give the book to her for free."

Draco stilled. He looked at his mother out of the corner of his eye.

"I am, of course, happy to purchase it from you—"

"I will be throwing a ball at our Greek villa this evening," Narcissa said, ignoring Draco entirely. "*Divine Dualities* is a very significant artifact, and I'd like to announce that we're donating it to academic research at an appropriately formal event. You two are to attend and then afterwards stay the night in two of the guest suites."

"This won't work, mother," Draco said flatly. "I see what you're trying to do."

"And what am I trying to do, Draco?" snapped Narcissa. "See my only son be happy? Give him a chance at love?"

"I'm not having this conversation."

Narcissa snorted.

"I am only trying to be a gracious host," Narcissa said. "It's not as though I'm asking you two share a bed."

Draco choked.

“Look—fine. I’ll tell her. We’ll be there tonight.”

“You certainly will.”

Before Draco could say anything else, his mother disappeared.

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Hermione was incredibly nervous.

The surge of joy she had felt when Draco told her that the book was taken care of, that a professional team had gone and fetched it, that it would be *donated to research under her direction*, was starting to fizzle. In its place she was starting to feel anxious and rather sweaty.

She wanted to leave a good impression on Narcissa.

Part of it was that she wanted to prove herself worthy of being in charge of such an important research project. But the other part had a lot to do with the warm tingling Hermione felt in her chest whenever she thought of Draco. She wanted his mother to like her. She chided herself for her foolishness, knowing that Draco’s mother could be passionately obsessed with Hermione for all the good it would do. Draco had yet to show even an iota of interest in pursuing her, instead reverting to their cheerful banter and playful teasing. Her stomach turned uncomfortably at the thought that once this whole thing was over they might never spend time together again.

Draco was presently off helping Narcissa look at the catering menu prior to the big event, leaving Hermione to settle into her spacious suite. The walls were a pale, powder blue and the floors were ivory-colored wood. Huge windows showed off a glittering expanse of ocean, framed on either side by the olive trees that surrounded the house.

Hermione washed her face and unpacked the dress she brought for the evening, hanging it up so it wouldn’t accrue more wrinkles. Her mind wandered to the conversation that she had with Harry, Ron and Ginny earlier in the week.

Hermione knew she liked Draco. Perhaps more than liked. She was increasingly unable to think of anything other than how tall and handsome and funny and sexy and... it was all beside the point. Draco continued to show no indication that he wanted her. Hermione's only solace was that perhaps he wasn’t even "the one" anyway. After all, there were two question marks on her husband checklist still - namely: if he enjoyed travel and if he liked animals. She knew that it was hilariously petty to be hanging it all on whether or not Malfoy liked vacations and petting zoos, especially with her feelings as strong as they were, but she didn’t really know what else to do.

There were still 3 hours before the party began, and seeing as how Narcissa and Draco had left her to her own devices for the afternoon, Hermione decided to wander around the villa and see if she could find clues as to the last two items on her husband checklist.

Though it was not entirely unexpected given their vast wealth, Hermione was still amazed at how beautiful the Malfoys' villa was. The hallways were all white marble, the ceilings were at least forty feet high, and lovely, lush leafy plants accented every room. The entire building was bathed in natural light, and every window boasted views of white sand and shimmering blue ocean. She wandered for almost an hour – peeking into parlors, kitchens, sunrooms and empty guest suites – when she came across a small library. While the rest of the villa was tastefully decorated with modern art and sweeping light fixtures, the library was cozier and filled with more personal effects.

Generations of Malfoys lined the walls as portraits. Hermione walked past them, looking up into various different grey eyes that watched her with curiosity. A painting of a teenage Draco gave her a caddish wink and she blushed furiously, nearly running into a vase. Hermione shook herself and turned to the bookshelves, where she found stacks of family photo albums. She was just about to peer into one that had a drawing of a seashell on the front when a voice made her jump.

“Something you’re looking for, my dear?”

Narcissa stood in the doorway, a coy smile on her face. Hermione turned red.

“I’m sorry – I just – I was just looking.”

“That’s one of my favorite photo books that you’re holding, you know.”

Narcissa walked to Hermione’s side, her heels clicking softly on the marble floor. She took the book and opened it to the first page: a photo of Draco at the beach, ice cream all over his face and a wide grin stretching from ear to ear. The moving photo showed him laughing at the photographer before turning to gaze in wonder at the ocean. Hermione’s heart quivered.

“He always loved coming here,” Narcissa murmured, eyes misting at the sight of the photo. She shut the photo album softly and put it back on the shelf, even though Hermione wanted to see more.

“But you won’t find what you’re looking for in there,” Narcissa said firmly. “You need to ask me.”

Hermione blinked.

“I’m sorry..?”

“You’re trying to learn more about Draco,” Narcissa said matter-of-factly.

Hermione blushed.

"I know it was wrong to snoop—I just—" she stammered. "Your son saved me. And I... I've been feeling... you'll think me stupid, but I have this list."

"A list?" Narcissa asked politely.

"A husband checklist," Hermione said, nearly laughing at the absurdity of the conversation. "After my last boyfriend I made a list so I could be sure that any future men would be compatible with me."

Narcissa smiled.

"Ah..." she said softly. "Considering Draco, then?"

Hermione laughed a little bitterly.

"It's more for fun than anything else at this point. He's not—I don't think he feels the same way."

Narcissa's eyes twinkled.

"I can't fault you for the list, darling," she said. "We women need to be choosy. I did the very same."

Hermione's mouth dropped.

"What was on *your* list?" she asked, before she could stop herself.

"Oh, you know. Funny, handsome, wealthy, loyal. A big..."

Narcissa trailed off and gave Hermione a smirk. Hermione choked.

"But enough about Lucius," she said primly, once Hermione regained her composure. "You're snooping for answers. What are your questions?"

"I just... I just wanted to know if Draco liked travel. And animals," Hermione finished weakly.

Narcissa nodded as though these were normal, crucial husband criteria.

"Draco has loved to travel since he was a very young boy. A sort of therapy for him, I think, to see how different places could be from one another. He's always been a bit of a dreamer... I think the idea of wholly unusual worlds pleased him. He used to say he wanted to visit other planets one day."

Narcissa paused, gazing out the window, lost in memory.

"As for animals, well, that's an easy one. He didn't let a week go by as a child without bringing home a bird or a lizard or some awful beetle. We'd put them in cages or jars for him but he'd always feel guilty and set them free later. He'd cry all the while, though, watching them fly or scamper away."

Narcissa laughed softly.

“That’s the thing about Draco,” she said, looking at Hermione. “He loves with his whole heart. And if loving something *right* means that he’ll get hurt, then so be it.”

Hermione had the feeling they weren’t talking about bugs or birds or lizards any longer. She looked open-mouthed at Narcissa, a strange feeling of warmth in her chest at the thought of tiny Draco. Tiny Draco crying even as he set his pets free.

Narcissa smiled softly at Hermione.

“He’s a good one, dear.”

Then she left the room, leaving Hermione feeling as though her heart were breaking and bursting into song all at once.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

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Chapter Notes

Accidentally deleted this chapter - reuploaded!

“Don’t be nervous,” Malfoy said, fastening a tie around his neck. His eyes, crinkled at the corner, met Hermione’s through the mirror.

Their suites were adjoining, connected by a door Hermione hadn’t noticed earlier, and when she returned from the library she had found Malfoy just returning to his suite as well. Picking up on her anxious energy, he offered to keep her company as they got ready together.

Hermione didn’t know how to say that her nerves had much more to do with the tall, blond wizard presently looking at her than with the ball they were about to attend, so she just smiled weakly at him.

Malfoy frowned.

“What’s wrong?” he asked gently.

“It’s just—” Hermione started. “Isn’t it a little sad that this is all over so soon? *Divine Dualities* and everything, I mean.”

Malfoy’s eyes softened.

“Yes,” he said. “It is sad.”

“Maybe we can still spend time together,” Hermione said boldly. Her cheeks flushed. “You can help me with the research.”

Malfoy stilled.

“Would you like that?” he asked. He sounded open to it. Hopeful, even.

Hermione was pleased with this reaction. She had been anticipating more pushback.

“Yes,” she said at once. “Yes, Draco—I could really use your help analyzing it. It would be fun to work together, don’t you think?”

Malfoy’s eyes fluttered for a moment and he laughed shakily.

“I like when you call me Draco,” he said. “Of course I’ll help.”

“Dra-co,” Hermione repeated, teasing. “It’s a nice name. Can’t imagine why I haven’t been using it more.”

She felt giddy – Malfoy had agreed to spend time with her, even after this adventure was over! Her heart fluttered. Maybe they would become friends – *real* friends – and then... who knew what could happen.

Malfoy finished knotting his tie, then ran a hand through his hair. He turned away from the mirror to face Hermione.

“I would say to not overuse it,” he said softly. “But somehow I don’t think the effect will ever wear off.”

He moved closer to her. He was much taller and, like she’d had to do many times in the past, when they were in close proximity, Hermione tipped her head back to look up at him. The sight of him looking down, eyes soft, watching her. She was sure that would never get old, either.

"I'll call you Draco a lot, then."

That made him laugh.

"Be careful," he said quietly.

"Of what?"

Malfoy hummed noncommittally. His eyes raked over Hermione – she was in a bathrobe, had finished doing her hair and makeup but hadn’t yet gotten dressed. She felt her cheeks flush under his gaze.

“I just might get the urge to do a lot of... research,” Malfoy whispered with a sly smile. He turned back to the mirror, cocky grin on his face as Hermione struggled to catch her breath.

At that moment, a knock sounded on the door.

Both Malfoy and Hermione turned to see Narcissa peeking her head in. She took one look at the two of them and smiled smugly.

“Well, hello you two,” she said.

Hermione smiled.

“Hello, Mrs. Malfoy,” she said politely.

“I came by to drop off some champagne,” Narcissa said. “The ball has been delayed for a little bit – nothing to worry about, just some trouble with the caterers – but I thought I’d bring you by some festivities to tide you over while we wait.”

She waved her wand and an ice bucket with champagne floated into the room, coming to a rest next to Hermione. Two flutes followed.

“Don’t fret about the party,” Narcissa said. “It’s more important that you two celebrate, ball or no ball!”

With a final, smug smile at Malfoy (who flushed and avoided her eyes), Narcissa swept out of the room.

Hermione looked at Malfoy questioningly.

“So is there a ball or no?” she laughed. She reached for a bottle of champagne. “Either way, I’m pouring us some wine.”

Malfoy took the flute she offered him.

“To *Divine Dualities*,” Hermione declared, brandishing her glass high.

“To impressive-looking books,” Malfoy added, clinking his flute to hers.

They each took a sip and hummed appreciatively at the taste.

“Do we have lots of time to kill, then?” Hermione asked. “Your mother wasn’t exactly clear on the new schedule.”

“Let’s assume we don’t have to be anywhere for a long while,” Malfoy said. He took a seat on the couch near Hermione and stretched his long legs out. “My mother’s parties are known to start fashionably late.”

“This is actually good – you can help me decide what to wear,” Hermione said. “I have a blue dress and a yellow one, I couldn’t decide.”

Malfoy cocked his head.

“I have fond memories of you in both those colors,” he said.

Hermione looked at him, surprised.

“When?”

“Well,” Malfoy said. “You wore blue at the Yule Ball. A very pretty, pale blue, if I recall...”

Hermione’s eyes widened. How had he remembered?

“And you were in that yellow sundress that night you came to my room after your boring date,” Malfoy continued softly. He smiled at Hermione, who bit her lip in response. She watched as his eyes flitted down to her mouth. “I’ll never forget that bloody dress.”

“That night is a fond memory for you?” Hermione asked breathily.

Malfoy laughed.

“Yes, I’d say so.”

They were very close to each other now, close enough to where Hermione could feel Malfoy’s body heat. Suddenly, all she could think about was how they had nowhere to be, nothing to do... were left to their own devices. His cheeks were flushed and his lips slightly parted.

Neither moved for a long moment.

Then, Hermione slowly moved closer.

“You... liked when I tried to touch you?”

Malfoy’s eyes widened and he pulled back a fraction as though to move away, but Hermione was choosing bravery. She knew enough about Draco now to know that he would tease her, would flirt, but would pull back when it became too real. She reached out and grabbed his tie, stilling his movement.

A shudder went through Malfoy’s body. Hermione reached up and traced the line of his jaw with her finger and his eyes fluttered shut. He swallowed tightly.

“Did you like when I tried to touch you?” she repeated.

"Yes," he said, sounding choked. "Yes."

An excited thrum went through her.

“And you liked when I kissed your neck?” she asked breathily, inching closer.

“Hermione,” he said roughly. “Don’t *play* with me.”

Hermione could feel the tense heat radiating from his body and was suddenly aware of how little she was wearing under her robe.

“I was afraid that you didn’t like it,” she said softly, running a hand along the soft skin of Draco’s neck. “But if you did... we can do it again...”

Draco bit back a groan, his eyes fluttering shut at Hermione’s touch.

“I’ve waited, Hermione,” Malfoy breathed. “I’ve waited so long. If this is a joke—if this is just for fun to you—”

“It’s not a joke,” she managed to say. “I want it—I think I want it—”

In an instant, he had reversed their roles. He leaned forward aggressively, pressing into Hermione’s space and laying hot kisses down the length of her jaw. She gasped, letting go of him. He crowded over her, his arms caging her in.

“What do you want?” he whispered. “Tell me... I’ll give it to you. Anything.”

“I want...” Hermione had dots on her vision. “I just want you.”

He groaned at her words, pushing himself against her. Hermione could feel the hard outline of his cock through his trousers already, and her stomach twisted at the sensation.

“Kiss me,” she pleaded.

Malfoy grabbed Hermione’s jaw in one strong hand and his lips crashed into hers. Hermione gasped at the contact, her center fluttering frantically at all the sensations. He smelled so good, his lips were so soft, his hands curling around her hair at the back of her head, pulling her face up towards him.

Suddenly, Malfoy was standing, had picked up Hermione with him. She wrapped her legs around him, excitement pooling in her stomach. They remained connected at the mouth, their kiss turning hungry and desperate. Hermione’s mouth opened in another moan and Draco’s tongue flicked in, sending jolts of pleasure running through her.

“Draco...” she gasped.

“I’m going to make you feel so good,” he promised, breathing hard. She had never seen him like this before. He was walking them over to his bed, hands firmly gripping Hermione’s thighs, securing her against his hardness. He nudged her head up and pressed hot, open-mouthed bites against her exposed throat.

Draco deposited her on the bed and she lay back on the covers, staring hungrily at him as he shakily undid his tie and his shirt buttons.

Malfoy watched her all the while, eyes reverent, as she panted at the sight of him undressing.

“Take off your robe,” he asked her breathily, a plea. “I want... I want to see you.”

She unfastened the tie and shrugged it off at once.

Malfoy let out a deep groan and moved closer, his grey eyes starving as they slid over Hermione’s exposed body.

“So beautiful,” he said. He reached out and dragged a finger gently over her hipbone, up her waist, ending by cupping her breast. “Perfect. I can’t believe this...”

He leaned forward then and let his tongue follow the same trail his finger just had. Hermione exhaled sharply at the contact, eyes rolling back.

He crawled on top of her then, and the feeling of the rough fabric of his trousers against her made her nerve endings sing. She could feel a growing wetness between her legs and she squirmed.

“You said you were inexperienced,” Malfoy said throatily, his voice a deep rumble. He leaned forward and caught a nipple in his mouth, sucking lightly. “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it since.”

He brought one hand to Hermione’s stomach and trailed it gently downward until it hovered right above her cunt. Hermione thrust up, trying to make contact.

“Please, Draco—” she gasped. She watched as her words sent a shudder through him.

He pressed his hand firmly down on her and rubbed in a tight circle. She saw stars.

He was so strong – his touch so sure and firm. Hermione looked at him through slitted eyes, staring in fascination at Malfoy slowly losing control.

“I’ve had lots of time to become experienced,” he rasped shakily, almost to himself. He pulled her underwear to the side and let one large finger trail against her folds, skin to skin, unblunted. “I wanted to make sure that if I ever had a chance with you, you’d want me again and again...”

He inserted a finger into her and she groaned at the sensation of just this – just his finger – filling her up. His touch was expert, deft.

“For me?” she sighed. Her vision was starting to blur. She felt Draco’s finger curve slightly inside her and press upwards in a gentle hooking motion. “*Ah-*”

“You look more delicious than I dreamed,” Malfoy said hoarsely. He crawled down her body, opening her thighs with his hands, pressing kisses to the sensitive folds, now fully wet. He kissed her clit.

“P-please, Draco,” she whispered. “I need... I need...”

Malfoy worked his tongue slowly against her. Firm and steady. One of his fingers slid down to enter her, and then he added a second finger.

Hermione whined as he hit that spot inside her with each slow, deliberate pump of his hand. She felt her orgasm dancing out of reach, just out of reach, and she was losing control. Malfoy’s tongue flicked against her clit once and she jumped as though electrocuted.

“You going to come for me, darling?” he whispered against her. “Like a *good girl*?”

That did something to her.

Hearing him talk like that—coaxing her over the edge. Bright stars appeared behind her eyelids. And when Malfoy captured her clit tightly between his lips, then groaned her name right there, with his mouth against her, Hermione felt herself fall apart.

It was too much, too much. The vibration of her own name against her cunt, the sight of Draco's handsome face, pushed flush to her, his mouth at her cunt. Hermione could hear herself crying out. Finally, her walls clamped around his fingers and she broke apart with a long cry.

As she came, Hermione felt Draco's mouth against her clit twist into a smirk.

He carried her through her orgasm, mouth working softer as the sensitive aftershocks shuddered out of her.

"Good girl," he whispered soothingly. He lapped at her cunt. "Good girl."

When she was done, the contact too much, she mewled and tried to close her legs. Draco stood up. She watched him hazily through half-lidded eyes as he wiped his face with the back of his hand. Draco Malfoy, eyes black with desire, mouth dripping wet with the evidence of her orgasm, was perhaps the hottest thing she had ever seen.

"I've waited fucking years to do that to you."

Hermione could only laugh shakily in response. Her body was still tingling. She didn't know how to wrangle the tide of pleasure hormones coursing through her.

She had never come like that before. She would have to repay him now – make him feel as good as he'd made her feel – she curled to her side and made to sit up but Malfoy caught her ankle with his hand, pulling her open again so she lay flat on her back once more.

"I'm not nearly done, sweetheart."

Chapter 12

Malfoy tipped his head to the side, staring at her. At her soaking and swollen cunt, at the wet slick of her thighs.

He was fully hard. Hermione could see his hard length through the tented fabric of his trousers and she watched, mesmerized, as he began to undo his belt. He unbuttoned and unzipped but did not pull his trousers off, instead letting them sit slackly around his waist as he palmed himself. His trim waist, his tall, muscular frame, his hungry grey gaze – Hermione's breath caught.

"Let me see," Hermione pleaded softly, still awash in the afterglow of her pleasure. She reached out as though beckoning Malfoy to her. "Let me see you, Draco."

"Impatient," he whispered. "If you knew what it was like to wait this long... how many times I'd imagined this... you'd let me tease you..."

Hermione's stomach began to coil again as she imagined him touching himself to the thought of her.

"Did you think of me often?" she whispered.

"It would scare you to know, I think," he said with a wry smile.

She laughed.

"What did you imagine?"

Slowly, Malfoy closed the distance between them. He looked down at her from his full height, and she felt vulnerable and exposed lying naked and open on the bed, still dripping from the last orgasm he'd given her.

"All sorts of things," he said quietly.

Hermione's eyes dropped to his stomach, to the hard outline of his cock under his pants. She looked up again at him, eyes pleading.

Malfoy slid his hand down under the band of his pants, shifted his trousers down. And then his cock was in front of her. Long and thick, bobbing slightly as he ran his large fist down his length.

"I imagined what you'd look like naked, of course," he said softly. His eyes wandered from her face down to the soft curves of her, and he smiled. "Beautiful, by the way."

Hermione blushed.

"I imagined what you might look like when you came," he said next, tipping his head slightly to the side. "How tight and hot you'd feel around me. Your sweet little voice, begging..."

Hermione's thighs clenched together of their own accord. Malfoy didn't miss this. He ran his hand up and down himself once more, quickly, then said:

"Turn around, sweetheart."

Hermione did. She crawled onto her stomach, feeling the wet spot on the bed she'd made only minutes earlier.

"There's a good girl... so good for me, aren't you?" Malfoy said. "Why don't you stick that pretty arse in the air."

Hermione did as she was told, even though she had never been bossed about like this in bed before. Malfoy telling her what to do sent a hot wave of pleasure through her and she felt a trickle of arousal run down her thigh.

On her knees and elbows, baring herself for him, Hermione whimpered at the lack of contact. He was walking around the bed, taking her in. She wiggled impatiently. Malfoy tutted and let one large hand caress her backside, rubbing soothing circles into the skin.

She felt the bed dip behind her as he got on the mattress, hand still smoothing her buttock.

"When's the last time someone fucked you?"

Hermione quivered, embarrassment heating her cheeks.

"It's been a long time," she said. "But—but I'm ready, I want it—"

"Such a good girl," he whispered breathlessly, almost to himself. "What a good girl."

Hermione felt the tip of his finger slide gently into her entrance. Not deep enough—her walls fluttered but there was nothing for them to clench at.

Malfoy slid his finger over her clit once more, moaning quietly when her hips shivered, before removing his hand from between her legs and squeezing her hip instead.

Then, there was something larger at her entrance.

He dragged it slowly, up and down her folds. Hermione tried to sit herself backwards further, tried to get the pressure where she wanted it, inside her.

Hermione hardly recognized herself. She felt wanton and crazed, but knew that she *needed* him. She had wanted him so much these past few weeks.

Draco shuddered behind her when the tip of his cock caught on the wet center of her, when she shifted her hips up and back again.

"Impatient," he whispered. His voice barely controlled. "You want it that bad?"

"Yes, please, Draco—"

“Ask me again... I love hearing you ask for it...”

“Please, please—”

His hands tightened on her hips and he thrust very lightly forward. He broached her then, just an inch or two, but Hermione's words caught in her throat. It was the widest thing that had ever been her.

She was so full. He was so *large*, his cock so big and full and the thought that it was handsome, clever Draco Malfoy who was currently groaning softly behind her was nearly enough to make her come right then and there.

He entered her another inch and she whimpered.

"Go faster," she said. "A little faster—"

"I can do that for you," he said, shifting back and entering her again. "You just stay right there, sweetheart. I can take care of it."

His hips started snapping faster, the rhythm less controlled.

"I don't deserve you," he groaned breathlessly. "Never thought—God, you're so tight. You're so good for me—*fuck*."

With one hard thrust, Malfoy entered her to the hilt and she cried out. His cock hit her inner wall at *just the right spot*, hard and unyielding, and Hermione clenched tight around him.

"I'm going to come," she managed to say. "Draco, please—please, faster, faster—I think I'm going to—"

“You impatient little thing,” he muttered wildly.

"Come inside me," Hermione begged.

That seemed to break something in him.

Malfoy seized her hips and lifted them higher. He thrust into her, fast, urgent. He seemed to be worried about coming before she hit her own climax—his hand wound down over her hip and stomach, finding her clit, pressing it in time with his thrusts, and—

Hermione screamed. Her vision went white. Her core tightened and released, around Malfoy, drawing pleasure out of him with every squeeze.

He fell apart right after her. His rhythm grew ragged and his breaths desperate.

With two final, erratic thrusts, Malfoy came inside of her.

"God," he said, his voice shaking. Even his hands on her hips seemed to be shuddering from the aftershocks. "*God*."

They lay there panting for a few moments before Hermione curled to her side and started shivering. She had never had such an intense orgasm in her life. She felt blissed out, overwhelmed, confused. And the fact that Malfoy had come like that too, inside her, more out of control than she'd ever seen him before. Her brain was a soup of dopamine and afterglow.

In an instant, Malfoy crawled over her, covering her body with his. His strong arms wrapped around her shoulders and he drew her close to his chest, letting her nuzzle into his neck.

“Shh...” he said softly, rubbing her back as her shivers subsided. “Are you alright, darling? Was that okay?”

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“Yes,” she whispered. “It was so good.”

She felt his mouth curve into a smile and his hand clamped possessively around her hip.

“Good enough to let me do it to you again sometime?” he asked. His tone was teasing but she could sense the undercurrent of uncertainty to the question, the hopefulness.

Hermione twisted in his embrace to look up at him. His gaze was soft, adoring. He traced the line of her cheekbone with a finger.

“Is this,” she began anxiously. “This is... not casual, right? I’m not another distraction?”

Malfoy looked at her for a long moment, his grey eyes wide. Then, he threw his head back and laughed.

Chapter 13

“You’re not another distraction,” Malfoy said, nuzzling into her neck. “Not casual. Not for me.”

He told her over and over, sensing her uncertainty. He peppered her with kisses and ran large, comforting hands over her skin.

They never went to the ball. Malfoy warded the suite – not that he needed to, Narcissa Malfoy would later take one look at the closed door and set strict orders for the room to remain undisturbed – and he and Hermione twisted together again and again in the sheets, a view of the sea shining in through the window.

Draco delighted in making her come. Making up for years of frustration, he told her.

“I love the way you look like this,” he said. Hermione’s eyes focused and unfocused as she attempted to regain her hold on reality. She felt him cup her cheek and leaned into the touch. “So beautiful. I’ve waited so long to see it.”

“You’re a sweet talker,” she said with a laugh.

“I’ll talk to you however you like,” he said, pushing her back down and starting again.

When it was dark outside and Hermione heard the faint whispers of music from the party they opened the windows to hear better and watched the sheer curtains flutter in the nighttime breeze, the smell of saltwater and hyacinths permeating the room. Later, when Hermione’s anxiety rose again, she voiced the concern that wouldn’t leave her mind.

“You’ll get tired of me,” she said. She was certain. “You won’t stay interested.”

Draco tutted gently.

“You’re wrong,” he said. “Give me a chance.”

He nipped the skin at her throat.

“A chance?” she asked shakily.

“I want you so much I’ll be whatever you want me to be,” he said. “I could be your friend, if that’s the only way I’d get to be around you. I could be casual, if you don’t want me seriously – could make love to you when you’re bored and leave when you’re satisfied. But... if it were up to me...”

He pressed a long kiss to her lips and his hand wound into her hair, pulling her head back and exposing her throat.

“If it were up to me, I’d want a chance to make you mine. Mine for real.”

Hermione's breath caught, heat pooling in her core.

"Say you'll give me a chance..."

Draco's fingers found their way between her legs and pressed against her. Hermione moaned.

"Say it," he said, smile curling against her skin.

"Yes," she said, voice shaking. "Yes - a chance, Draco, oh..."

She felt his exhalation on her skin, felt the tremble of excitement that went through his body. He pushed her back onto the bed, pulling her legs open and crawling down between them.

"Good girl," Draco purred. He pressed open kisses to her thigh, her mound, her clit. "I'll take care of you..."

He ate at her until Hermione was on the brink again, until her legs shook and her breaths came as fast gasps, then positioned himself between her and entered her once more. She came around him, calling his name.

--

The next morning, they cuddled groggily, in and out of waking consciousness, until Draco gently pulled Hermione up and told her it was time to go. He had plans for them in the evening back in London. They took the first portkey out of Athens and though Hermione had fussed over the fact that they had left without even saying goodbye to his mother, Malfoy assured her that all would be forgiven once Narcissa got wind of the good news.

"Besides," Draco said. "I don't think I can handle her gloating quite yet."

Hermione was in a sleepy, happy haze. Malfoy dropped her off at her flat with a promise that he'd be back that night – he had to kick off the logistics around signing her the research rights to *Divine Dualities* and make plans for their evening. Hermione was happy to have some time alone to shower and revel in her new happiness. She decided to wait a little longer before telling Ginny, wanting to keep the news to herself for just one more day.

As evening approached, Hermione put on her laciest black lingerie in anticipation. She assumed Draco's plans for them involved a lot more staying in bed, so she wrapped herself in a robe and poured two glasses of wine. But when the doorbell rang at half past six and Hermione ran up to open it, she found Draco standing outside her front door dressed all the way up. His blond hair was swept neatly to the side and his tailored gray suit was sharp and formal, a dark tie knotted around the neck and silver cufflinks gleaming at his wrists. In his right hand he held a bouquet of roses.

"Oh!" Hermione said, taking the flowers with a pleased smile. "I didn't think we would be going out—I should have gotten ready. What's all this for?"

Draco pulled Hermione in for a kiss.

"I think I've waited long enough for our first date, don't you?" he asked. "I'm hoping it'll be good enough to be your last."

"That's very confident of you," Hermione teased.

"Well, I've heard the kinds of noises I can make you make now."

Hermione blushed but let herself be pulled forward when Draco tugged at the ties of her robe. The garment dropped open and Draco groaned at the sight.

"We really shouldn't be late for our reservation..." he said, running his hands down the curves of her hips. "I booked out the whole place; they're waiting for us."

"Y-yes, punctuality is important," Hermione said.

"So important," Draco agreed. He leaned down to nip at her neck.

He moved them towards her bedroom, humming with pleasure as Hermione ran her hands down his chest. He slid a thumb under the lace of her panties and Hermione trembled as his finger grazed her sensitive skin.

"Then again, I could wait to eat," Hermione said. "Unless you're in a rush to get to the restaurant?"

Draco shook his head and turned her around, pressing himself against her backside. He groaned and then pushed her onto the bed.

"I'm a patient man," he said with a smirk, reaching up to unknot his tie.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A festive, holiday-ish epilogue for you <3

It's a wrap!!! Thank you for coming along for the ride :) I hope I did this little love story justice. Your comments have meant the world to me.

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione sat curled on the armchair, quill in her mouth as she tried to think of the solution to her crossword. The fire roared merrily behind her but her feet were still cold, even in their wooly socks. She tucked them beneath her.

It was a month until Christmas and she and Draco had just decorated the flat the night before. A big, beautiful tree stood in the corner of the living room, filling the air with the lovely wintry scent of pine needles. Two stockings were pinned above the fireplace - one red and one green - the H and the D embroidered upon them glinting with golden thread. Hermione wasn't technically moved in, though Draco had asked and asked. She knew how badly he wanted her living with him and was planning on surprising him by moving in on Christmas. She could hardly wait - she felt so safe and comfortable in the red brick townhouse Draco had purchased to be closer to her.

The clock gave a soft chime and Hermione looked at it, frowning. Draco was supposed to have been home by now, and she nervously chewed the end of her quill. He was never late.

She was just about to send an owl to his offices when, a few minutes later, she heard the front door open and the sound of Draco's boots in the foyer. She jumped to her feet, a relieved smile stretching across her face.

"You're late!"

"I know, I know—I'm so sorry, every possible thing went wrong."

Hermione shivered slightly as the brisk air from outside landed on her skin. Draco had a large box in his hands that he was struggling with, but he bent down for a kiss and she arched up eagerly to meet his lips. She frowned when she noticed that Draco looked tense, paler than usual.

"What happened?"

"I—I meant for this to be perfect, and—can you sit down?"

Hermione sat back on the armchair, worried by Draco's unusual behavior. He never seemed this flustered, this unsure.

"Did something happen, Draco?"

He was wrestling with the box, trying to place it gently on the floor before Hermione. She noticed for the first time his hands were covered in scratches.

"I'm sorry I'm late—you know I hate keeping you waiting. There was a delay with the—well, nevermind. Are you comfortable, sweetheart?"

Hermione nodded, still perplexed.

Draco licked his lips nervously.

"I know this won't replace—well, you'll see, I suppose. Go ahead and open it."

Hermione leaned forward, about to touch the box, when it gave a wiggle. Her eyes widened in surprise. Draco gently nudged it towards her again and she pulled the top off.

Inside, looking extremely disgruntled, was a squash-faced orange kitten. It meowed angrily and leapt out of the box into Hermione's lap.

"Oh!"

The kitten looked up at her with fierce orange eyes, stripey tail flicking back and forth. There was a long moment as they assessed each other—the kitten skeptically, Hermione in adoration—and then the small furry creature flopped down onto its side and began purring.

Hermione looked up at Draco, eyes shining. He was looking nervous, his blond hair still in slight disarray from being outside.

"Draco, he's beautiful. Is—is he for me?"

"Yes. Although I'll happily send him back if you don't want him," Draco grumbled. "The thing's as much of a monster as Crookshanks used to be."

"Oh no he's perfect!" Hermione cried, protectively leaning over the kitten, who glared at Draco triumphantly.

Draco's face softened and he leaned forward to tuck a strand of Hermione's hair behind her ear.

"You've been saying you missed Crookshanks. I just... wanted you to have a perfect holiday."

Hermione laughed, kissing him through a smile.

"You're incredible. I love you."

Draco's cheeks turned faintly pink, his grey eyes lighting up as they always did whenever Hermione told him she loved him. Like he couldn't believe his luck.

"I love you," he repeated back softly, running his thumb over her cheek. Hermione looked back down at the kitten, tracing the tiny patterns in its soft fur.

"But this is very early for a Christmas present! It's only November, Draco."

She heard him take a steadying breath.

"Well... it's not a Christmas gift."

Hermione was busy playing with the kitten's paws. She barely registered Draco reaching into his pocket, didn't notice as he dropped to a knee before her.

When she looked up his face was open, nervous. She noticed every detail suddenly, as though the world was coming in at perfect resolution. The light glimmer of snow dust on his shoulders. How his pale throat worked as he swallowed nervously, the faintest tremor in his fingers as he opened the little velvet box.

"I—I wanted this to be perfect for you, Hermione. But I didn't know how. I didn't know how to be everything you deserve, to make this as special as you are. But here I go, anyway. Selfishly."

Draco took a little breath, his eyes widening a fraction in anticipation.

"Will you marry me, darling?"

Time stopped.

Hermione's heart pounded in her ears, a warm bubble of joy slowly expanding in her chest until it threatened to burst. She felt a joyful laugh escape her lips, felt a faint prickle of tears in her eyes that she barely noticed. Hermione's eyes found Draco's and she searched for any sign that this was a joke, a dream, but she found none. Draco's grey eyes were earnest, his lips slightly parted as he waited with bated breath for her answer. As though she could possibly deny him, as though he was not everything she had ever wanted. As though there were any answer other than:

"Yes. Oh Draco—yes!"

Chapter End Notes

If you liked my writing style and want more!

- Check out my other fic [His Girl](#) if you are interested in something with more twisted fantasy vibes (and an obsessive Draco).

- [Imbalance of Power](#) is something more smut-forward and darker elements.
- My new bodyguard AU fic is here: [Castle Guard](#) ♥ ^ _ ^

I made a [Twitter](#) too~*~

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!