

For His Juliet

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For His Juliet

by [MissPugLover24](#)

Summary

He breathed in deeply the scent of her. Lavender and vanilla. Perfection.

"You're ever so loyal, darling, even when those who hold your loyalty don't deserve it. That'll be the first thing that I'm going to have to do-show you that they don't deserve it. That I do. I want to possess your loyalty, your thoughts, your words, your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body, love. Everything that you are. And I will. It's terribly funny how you think you'll still hate me in three months. I'd be surprised if you lasted the month, no matter how much you try and cling to your hatred."

Draco Malfoy gets what he wants, no matter what he has to do to get it. And he has wanted Hermione Granger since the day they met.

Please read the tags. This is not going to be happy or have a happy ending.

Notes

Okay, so I want to put in a fair amount of warnings. This story will not be for everyone. This story will potentially be upsetting to you. Please, please, *please* do not read this story if you are sensitive to non-con/rape or dubious consent. This is not in any way a glorification of said topics.

In this fic, Draco Malfoy is not a good person. However, there might be parts where you might forget this, especially the parts told from Hermione's perspective, but please keep in mind that he is not a good person. If you want to read something happier and fluffier, I'd recommend reading another fic of mine called 'Snakes and Sunflowers'.

This story is canon up until The Half-Blood Prince, with a few exceptions that will be explained in the first chapter.

Fair warning, there will not be an ending in which Hermione escapes or snaps out of anything. So if you are expecting an HEA, I'm sorry but this isn't for you.

I'm estimating this fic to end up at about 25 chapters, though there may be more, and I have 10 1/2 already written. That being said, I'm not sure if I will be updating on a consistent basis, although I might be, depending on my inspiration to write. If you are interested in beta-ing this work for me, please comment that you would be able to, I'd really appreciate it :)

I do not own the Harry Potter Universe or any of the Harry Potter characters.

Before you read this chapter, I'd like to say that Harry, Ron and Ginny are not bad friends.

Hermione just has an anxiety disorder, although I don't state it explicitly. She's going to overthink things and be desperate for constant positive reinforcement and affirmation, and feel as if all of her friends secretly hate her when that is far from the case. Untreated, undiagnosed and unacknowledged anxiety disorders can quite frankly twist your life and your thoughts, and I speak from personal experience. If you find yourself identifying with any of Hermione's thought patterns in this chapter, I highly recommend seeking therapy or a doctor, and I promise, it will start to get better.

With all of that out of the way, here is the first chapter of **For His Juliet** .

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

Puppeteer

It all bitterly stung.

How Harry was cheating in Potions with his stupid book-and worse, not only getting away with it but getting praised by Professor Slughorn. How she and Ron were finally getting somewhere, until he found out that she had had her first kiss with Viktor Krum ages ago. Not that that had really meant anything, either, she and Viktor were barely even friends anymore, with his letters having dwindled since that summer, so what did Ron have to be jealous about?

How Ron was on the Quidditch team, because of her, and Harry had used his first opportunity to blatantly disregard the rules of the sport they were so obsessed with. To give Ron some of the Felix Felicis. Harry had sworn up and down to her that he hadn't done so, but Hermione was certain that he was lying, and that what he was doing was wrong.

And then there was how Ron was now snogging Lavender Brown, the girl that had utterly tormented Hermione for years. And Ron *knew* it. He *knew* how Lavender would pick at her hair, her teeth, her personality, her grades, her *everything*. He had heard the cruel remarks from Lavender that would go straight to Hermione's core, and hit her where it hurt the most. Ron had seen more than enough of Hermione's tears at the girl's words to know how casually Lavender would cut her down, without batting an eye. How easily and eagerly the girl would belittle her. And even still, Ron stuck his tongue down Lavender's throat.

So Hermione had fled the Gryffindor common room that was roaring with festivity, and down the corridors of Hogwarts, to a large bay window on the seventh floor that overlooked the grounds of Hogwarts. The bay window had been something Hermione had discovered in her third year when Ron and Harry had been angry with her - over the rat or maybe the broomstick- who knew. The window was a turn away from the Room of Requirements and the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy, and the area was quite secluded. In the last three years, Hermione had not seen a single person whenever she retreated into her sanctuary. So, comforted by the fact that she would be unseen and unheard, she settled into the crook of the window, her face pressed up against the glass. The tears that she had desperately tried to keep at bay came in, in full force, as she choked on her sobs.

Hermione cried for everything she had held back on - how Ron was snogging Lavender, how Harry was a cheat and saw nothing wrong with it, how she could never beat him in Potions, despite every single inch of her success was fought for and won over by her own work. How everyone picked someone or something else over herself every single time, with the exception of her parents; even though they would, at times, pick their Dentistry Practice over her. Oh god, her parents.

How she was a month away from Winter Break, which meant going home and Obliviating her mum and dad, sending them to Australia, so they could be safe. How after wiping her parents' memories, the chances of being able to reverse such a thing would be slim to none. But she needed them to be safe, and this was the only way. How with the wave of a wand, she

would become completely and hopelessly unimportant and unwanted to everyone, an afterthought, the last possible choice.

It harkened back to the time when she was a child, without a single friend. Too smart, too bushy, too enthusiastic; too much but somehow not enough. Never invited to birthday parties, sitting alone at lunch tables, and being picked last for every single team, all because she was simply too much and not enough. Even her parents would tell her to dial it back, or quiet herself. Worst of all was when they would suggest that she try to act a bit differently so she would finally make some friends. And that was without the bouts of accidental magic that would make everyone whisper about her as she walked by. Freak.

When she had gotten her Hogwarts letter, she had thought that perhaps she would be welcomed for once. She would finally belong. She would find someone who would choose her first. But all that hope, of course, was all for nought. 'Freak' turned into 'mudblood'. She was still far too much and not nearly enough. Even her friends, who she would move mountains for, she was never quite on the level with them she so desperately craved. The boys had chosen Quidditch and each other over her every single time, and each time it stung. How Ron chose Lavender over her. How Harry chose his stupid Potions book over her, despite the fact that it was dodgy and they didn't know who it came from. Not like they hadn't *already* dealt with a book that tried to *kill* people in second year. How Ron and Harry would very occasionally come to her first - but only for homework and essays, wheedling her into doing most of the work and she'd end up writing pages and pages for them. Hermione was not naïve enough to pretend that this wasn't exploitative and manipulative, and how it hurt every single time that they'd approach her would be for schoolwork, but by Merlin, she needed to be wanted, even if it was for something so self-serving on their parts. Hermione knew it wasn't intentional on Harry or Ron's part, but if anything, that made it sting all the more. She was but an afterthought, never the first choice.

And of course, there was always Ginny, but ever since Ginny started dating in her fourth year, Hermione's time with her friend was stretched thin between her latest boyfriend and quidditch. On top of that, Ginny was very popular within her own year, and had a lot of friends to keep up with. So Hermione barely ever even got to *talk* to Ginny.

And yet *still*, to her friends, she was too much. She talked too much about school or books or whatever she was interested in. She was too pushy, too emotional, too passionate, too much. She saw the eye-rolls from Ron and Harry whenever she mentioned Hogwarts: A History. She felt their eyes glaze over when she talked about what she had liked about in their classes that day. She heard the sighs of relief when she stopped talking about her latest passion. She knew they would rather talk about anything else than whatever she cared about, and it hurt. She listened to them talk about Quidditch for hours on end, could they not just listen to her talk about a book?

It all slowly ate away at her, bit by bit by bit.

Hermione's shoulders ached, her ribcage was shaking terribly, and her face was red and puffy as she cried for the hopelessness of everything, berating herself for her stupidity that she would ever think that anyone would ever choose her. Not Ron, not Harry, not a single soul in

the world. And in her misery, Hermione never once noticed the pair of quicksilver eyes, watching her. The pair of eyes that *always* watched her.

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Draco came out from the Room of Requirements, where he had recently repaired the Vanishing Cabinet, and put his wand into the holster that rested against his right arm. Repairing the cabinet hadn't been hard. After all, being a Malfoy, he was extraordinarily talented and intelligent. His family had not gotten their piles of riches through stupidity or mistakes. And, as Draco was a Malfoy, he did not make mistakes.

What had happened earlier in the year with the necklace was not an accident. No, it was very purposeful. It was to lure Dumbledore into a false sense of security; to think that Draco was just a stupid and sloppy boy, in over his head; a desperate and pathetic child who could be mostly disregarded, or perhaps even convinced to join the Order. Draco smirked to himself. That couldn't have been further from the truth. No, the necklace was most decidedly not an accident, and neither was the matter of the recipient.

Katie Bell. Ah, Katie Bell. A perfectly lovely and cheerful girl, by all accounts. Which was what made her the perfect victim for two reasons. First, nobody would suspect that someone would *ever* intentionally try to hurt sweet little Katie Bell, no the necklace *had* to have been meant for someone else. The second reason was that Bell was on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, and Draco needed her off. Why? Because she was a Chaser, and the Reserve Gryffindor Chaser was the mudblood, Dean Thomas. Dean Thomas was dating Weaslette, which was a doomed expedition from the start, and everybody knew it. Putting Thomas on the Gryffindor Team would have him spending more time with the youngest Weasley, fast-tracking their breakup, to propel Weaslette into Potter's arms. If Pothead was busy with Weaslette, he would have less time on his hands - less time to obsessively *stalk* Draco and act like he wasn't, and less time to spend with his friends. While the first was merely annoying as Potter had all the stealth of a baby elephant, the more important reason, at least to Draco, was that with a new girlfriend, Potter would have very little time to spend with his friends. Draco didn't care about whether or not Pothead spent time with the Weasel, but he *did* care about the time that Potter spent with Hermione Granger.

Hermione Granger. Draco had fallen in love with the girl the moment he laid eyes on her for the first time on the Hogwarts Express, and had not looked back since. She was, quite simply, the most extraordinary witch Draco had ever known. She was wickedly intelligent and powerful, and was incredibly beautiful, the kind that everybody noticed immediately, even if she didn't know it herself. The one thing Draco was at least *slightly* grateful to Pothead and the Weasel was for how rabidly they guarded his Hermione. It made him not have to worry as much about most of the male Hogwarts population panting after what was his. The problem with that, though, was how close *his* Hermione was to the two idiots.

Thankfully, Potter had never taken an interest in Hermione, truly idiotic as he was to not recognize what a special thing he had right in front of him. But Weasley had noticed, which had truly surprised Draco, as he was the stupider of the pair. Or perhaps, he shouldn't be so surprised. After all, Weasley was only in touch with his baser instincts. It was a wonder that

Weasley even had magic at all, as he acted no different than a Muggle. Draco sneered in disgust. Yes, Weasley would fit in amongst Muggles quite easily.

However, stupid as he was, Weasley hadn't noticed how beautiful Hermione was up until the Yule Ball, when Hermione's beauty was truly on full display. One would have to be utterly *blind* not to notice. But Draco had always known. Of course she was ethereal on the night of the Yule Ball, but she was quite nearly just as beautiful on a day-to-day basis. Of course, there was the slightly bushy hair, but that could be so easily fixed with the right products and enchantments, the kind that was typically hidden in family grimoires that Hermione did not yet have access to. And she did use to have two large front teeth, something Draco had known she had been rather self-conscious about, so he fixed them for her in fourth year. Well, he didn't shrink the teeth *himself*, but he did enlarge them, knowing that she would go to Madame Pomfrey to have them shrunk. And because she was so smart, he knew that she would take advantage of that, and get them to the size that she wanted.

But Weasley, the absolute moron, had noticed *his* Hermione. However, Draco wasn't a Slytherin for nothing, and over the past two years had taken steps to circumvent the Weasel from ever truly pursuing her. It wasn't all that hard to do, either, as the Malfoys had been pulling the strings of the Wizarding World and Hogwarts for hundreds and hundreds of years.

In fact, despite Dumbledore's pride in the fact that Hogwarts had no outside influence, that couldn't be further from the truth. Large chunks of Hogwarts were operated by the Malfoys, for instance, the entirety of Slytherin and most things that affected Hermione Granger, to name a few. Hermione's bed was made of the highest quality material, in contrast to her roommate's decade-old mattresses that were commonplace in Gryffindor. The house-elves always made her favourite foods, foods that weren't normally consistently offered at the other tables. Books she would complain about being missing or checked out in the library would mysteriously be there the next time she went, which was usually the very next day. There was a reason Hermione had been able to acquire a time-turner to attend more classes during third year, something that hadn't been granted to a student in eighty-five years. There was a reason that Umbridge didn't dare put her in detention.

When Rita Skeeter had initially written an article early in the Triwizard Tournament, insulting Hermione and insinuating she was romantically involved with Potter, the Malfoys, being a major shareholder in the Daily Prophet, had seen an early copy. Lucius had paid the reporter a visit and had *encouraged* Rita to change the article into something much more flattering, something that didn't romantically link her to Potter.

Skeeter had quickly changed the article to not mention Hermione, other than in passing as 'the top student of Hogwarts, a stunningly pretty girl,' and had doubled down on the Potter slander in the article to fill the gaps. The edition of the Prophet that covered the Yule Ball covered Hermione more in detail, with Rita singing her praises.

A few months later, Rita had sat her down for a 'Personal Interest' interview and Hermione had given the reporter scathing remarks, disparaging Skeeter and everything she had done in slandering Potter's name. The journalist had then skillfully spun the quotes into praises of every Triwizard Champion, with the notable exception of Potter. The article also included a

record of Hermione's impressive grades and reprinted the stunning pictures of Hermione from the Yule Ball on the front of the Societal Pages, as she spun in the light of the decorations, looking absolutely heavenly. The Malfoys had been so pleased with how the article turned out, they had made a *very* generous donation to the Daily Prophet. Hermione was to be one day, a Malfoy, and Malfoys deserved the best.

Even the things that were initially detrimental to Hermione were to help her in the long run.

Draco had been the one to slip her the page of the Basilisk, and his smart girl carried around a mirror. She was petrified, and therefore rendered safe for the second semester of their second year. While the Malfoys were the ones to cause the Horcrux to wreak havoc on Hogwarts, under the Dark Lord's orders from the back of Quirrell, it was never to target her. No, it wasn't even to kill those at the school unworthy of being there, or even Weaselette, whom the diary had been given to. It was a sign to the Dark Lord's followers that he was to return soon. That the Heir of Slytherin was to return.

The cat hair that had replaced Bulstrode's in the Polyjuice Potion - his *brilliant* girl - was to keep Hermione from coming to the Slytherin common room with the two dunces. While she was stuck in the bathroom, Draco 'practiced' hexing 'Crabbe' and 'Goyle', while they asked him questions on the Chamber of Secrets. Questions that he gave them very few useful or even *true* answers to.

The hideous Weasley sweaters that got sent to her for Christmas were annually intercepted by Malfoy House Elves and given to Draco to burn. It was quite possibly one of his favorite parts of the holidays, watching Molly Weasley's hard work blacken and shrivel up. Draco knew that Hermione thought that they had forgotten her, or had chosen not to give her one, and ached for a sweater. Ached to belong with the Weasley family - just as the Weasley family wanted to take her into its fold, but she deserved so much better, and he simply wouldn't allow for her to settle. Not like that, and not for the Weasleys. Hermione wanted to belong with the Weasleys, but Draco would slaughter the entire family before he allowed that to happen - not that it would really even take all too much to get Draco to want to permanently end the Weasley line.

And even though Draco had called her a mudblood in second and part ways through third year, it was to teach her that mudbloods were bad. That mudbloods did not belong. That for as long as *she* was a mudblood, she wouldn't belong. But of course, like with all things, he would fix that for her. Draco had even stopped calling her a mudblood in third year to endear himself to her, convinced that she had gotten the idea into her head at the very least on a subconscious level.

Of course, there were bumps. Not mistakes, never mistakes, just bumps.

One of the more minor ones was the stupid hippogriff and the even stupider Sirius Black in third year. His Hermione was so compassionate, which was something that he loved about her. Her compassion would be much better, though, when it was properly redirected, away from Black and away from the bloody chicken. The hippogriff was a stupid beast that needed to be put down, and Sirius Black wasn't any different. While Black and the hippogriff escaped, no doubt at the hands of Potter and Dumbledore, who likely dragged Hermione into it as well, the situation was not all negative. It was the first time that he and Hermione had

skin-on-skin contact, and while said contact was a slap, it hadn't hurt all that much, with Hermione being as small as she was. It was physical contact from her, something that Draco ached for, so whatever form it took didn't matter. As for Black, Aunt Bella had sent him into the Veil during the Battle of the Department of Mysteries last summer. Black was now trapped in limbo, stuck behind the Veil and unable to pass on to the afterlife or to see the living. The only way that his soul would ever pass onto the afterlife would be by escaping the Veil, something that would require someone on the other side performing some *very* Dark Magic. Dark enough that the Order would never even *think* to look for it.

And even if the Order attempted to retrieve his soul from the Veil in the future, it wouldn't be there anymore. Draco's mother had recently harvested Black's soul from the Veil and was planning to use it for a ritual. This was perhaps the worst fate Black could possibly face, as souls used in rituals would be husked of any happiness, any personality, and became Dementors. And the funny thing about Dementors? Well, they retained their human memories, but because they were Dark Beings, their soul would be twisted and contorted beyond recognition. Their mind was still there, at least in some semblance, but tucked away in a back room, where they could only watch their own actions. Even better was that Dementors tended to seek out those who were the most important to them during their lives, those that made them the most happy. So, in Dementor form, Black would be drawn to Potter and the half-breed Lupin, like a moth to a flame. Draco thought that it was a fitting fate for someone who had besmirched the Black family name.

One of the larger complications that the Malfoys had encountered was a man by the name of Viktor Krum. Draco had been well aware that during their fourth year, there had been nothing more than friendship between his Hermione and Krum. He had even let her go to the ball with Krum, because if she couldn't go with him, then she would go with the second most prestigious wizard at the ball. It had all remained well and good until the summer between fourth and fifth year, where Hermione visited Krum in Bulgaria. Just before she left, Krum had kissed *his* Hermione. While Hermione had pulled back and politely turned him down, Krum had touched what was not his to touch. Brainstorming and doling out Krum's punishment had been a nice father-son bonding activity for Draco and Lucius and in the end, they had arranged for Krum to break his leg pretty nastily in the middle of a game in a rather humiliating matter. They then cursed Krum to be physically unable to ride a broomstick, without feeling an immense amount of pain, comparative to the cruciatus. Unable to fly a broom, Krum was kicked off of the team fairly quickly, and his career was ruined. Draco had only then called it even and left Krum alone.

His mother, though, wasn't satisfied, outraged on the behalf of the girl who she had thought of as her daughter the moment Draco had first written home, informing his parents that he had found the girl who would be his wife. She had travelled all the way to Bulgaria to pay Krum a visit and had broken all of his bones slowly and methodically, in such a way that they couldn't be healed by magic. She then had Imperiused the Quidditch Player to stab himself with the sharpest object that he could find every time he thought of pursuing Hermione romantically.

While Bellatrix was thought of as the more vicious Black sister of the two of them - the blood traitor Andromeda excluded, naturally - Narcissa could more than hold her own, just as well as Bellatrix. The difference between the two was that she wasn't as loud about it, and she

only saved her tricks for those she hated. Not to say that Narcissa didn't hate many people, on the contrary, she did. Anybody who dared try and cross the Black family, the Dark Lord, who was Draco's godfather, or the Malfoy family made it onto her list. Narcissa was nothing if not fiercely loyal to her family, her son's godfather, her husband, her son, and Hermione, someone who had been, albeit unknowingly, a part of her family since Draco's first year.

Another major hiccup was Hermione coming to the Battle of the Department of Mysteries at the end of their fifth year. Draco wanted to kill Potter for dragging his Hermione into danger like that, where she had ended up being cursed by Antonin Dolohov, leaving a large scar. Of course, his mother would be able to heal the scar completely once she had access to his Hermione, being immensely skilled in Dark Healing as she was, but in the meantime, Hermione had seemed to be managing.

As for Dolohov, Bellatrix had taught Draco how to use the Cruciatus Curse, and they used Dolohov as practice. It was not until long after Dolohov's mind was completely shattered and Draco had become bored of the man's screams, something that had taken three months, that Draco cast the killing curse on Dolohov.

Not only had Potter gotten Hermione almost killed, the Battle of Mysteries had also gotten Draco's father imprisoned in Azkaban. While Lucius was discretely rescued only a few months into his imprisonment, Potter had still sent his *father* to Azkaban. Lucius Malfoy's arrest had made pulling strings a little more difficult, but only slightly so. Money was still money, after all, no matter how dirty the pockets it comes from.

While his father had been imprisoned, Draco had filled the role of the right-hand man to the Dark Lord, while Lucius was in Azkaban. It was a role that had long awaited Draco since his birth when he had been designated as the Dark Lord's Heir as the Dark Lord's godson.

During that time, Draco had also taken the initiative to suggest a plan for breaking into Hogwarts and killing Dumbledore. Draco's reward for the task was to be Hermione Granger, alive, unharmed and excused of any transgressions committed against the Dark, to be captured by his Aunt Bellatrix when Draco killed Dumbledore.

The Dark Lord had already been terribly interested in Hermione. He had taken notice of her while he had possessed Quirrell, and not only just for Hermione's immense intelligence. Hermione Granger, by Merlin-given coincidence, was incredibly similar to the Dark Lord's dead daughter, Madeleine Rosier, who had died in 1980.

The one concern that the Dark Lord did have though in swaying her to their cause was with Hermione's blood status. Not that he minded all that much that she was a mudblood, being a half-blood himself. No, power could easily erase the issue of blood, and Hermione was certainly powerful. The concern lay with Hermione's likely trepidation with a side that was full of pureblood supremacists, with her blood being less than pure.

However, in the Black Family Grimoire, there was an old, complicated, and incredibly Dark ritual that would completely purify Hermione's blood. It was something similar to a Blood Adoption, although it differed in the feature that the parentage could come from people who were long dead, given that you had their blood. In addition, it completely erased any and all traces of the previous parentage legally, magically or otherwise, and would magically replace

all records of the original parentage with the newly given parentage. As far as the rest of the world would know, according to all of Hermione's ministry records, she had *always* been a pureblood. The ritual was a Black Family Secret and involved such *controversial* ingredients such as a soul taken from the Veil, and the blood drained from a unicorn. In fact, the soul that was planned to be used was Sirius Black's, in some twist of irony.

The Dark Lord had agreed, his only condition being that one of the families that Hermione was adopted into was his own. He had then provided a vial of blood from Madeleine Rosier, his daughter and original heir. Madeleine had been born in 1960 to Hyacinth Rosier, and had remarkably similar colouring to Hermione Granger. They had the same golden brown hair, the same pale skin and the same tawny brown eyes. That's not where the similarities ended, either. Both were incredibly intelligent and magically gifted, with fiery tempers and passionate dispositions. And, even though she was directly descended from Salazar Slytherin, Madeleine, like Hermione, was sorted into Gryffindor. Madeleine had been killed by the Order of the Phoenix in the winter of 1980 and her relationship to the Dark Lord was only known by a select few people. In fact, only the Malfoys, the Blacks, Snape, Hyacinth Rosier, who had died in 1976, and the Dark Lord himself knew that Madeleine had been his daughter. While the Dark Lord was not a man of excess love, the love that he had was extended to a very short list of people, and his daughter had been on that list.

The other bloodline that was planned to be used was from Regulus Black, who had been the Heir to the House of Black before he had died in 1979. The purpose of this was to further cement Draco's claim over being the Heir to the House of Black. Draco's status as the Heir of the House of Black was only partially uncertain because Sirius Black III, who was the heir before he was disowned, had named Potter as his heir before he died. Although Black had been disowned from the Black family when he was sixteen, and had never been the Head of the House, there might be stronger resistance from the public in Draco inheriting the role of the Head of the House of Black over Potter, despite Draco's much stronger claim to the title. It also helped, of course, that Hermione's curls were similar to the curls of many of the Blacks, and her aristocratic features were similar enough to those commonly found in the Black family. In fact, Hermione was so physically similar to the two lines that the ritual wouldn't change her appearance at all.

Draco took this as a sign that it was meant to be. Hermione's capture would truly be a long time coming, and terribly useful to him, and to the Dark Side. She would provide a wife to Draco, a daughter figure to Narcissa, Bellatrix, and Lucius, and a non-existent, although much wanted, grandchild to the Dark Lord. Even still, that wasn't even mentioning the amount of plans she would be able to provide assistance with just by her existence. Propaganda to fully turn the public to their side, as well as financially securing the vast amount of wealth contained in the Black Family Vault, for example. Even his mother and his Aunt Bella had used the situation to their advantage, coercing Snape into an Unbreakable Vow as a part of a long-game effort to out the surly man as a spy. It was something both Black sisters had suspected for years, believing that he was at fault for Madeleine's death. While it was possible that Madeleine had been targeted simply for being such a skilled fighter for the Dark, it was highly likely that her true identity had been revealed to the Order. With the circle being so small, and consisting of Madeleine's family and closest of friends, it was more than likely that Snape was the leak. Narcissa and Bellatrix had been so close to

Madeleine that they may as well have been sisters, so after Madeleine's untimely death, they had vowed to make whoever was responsible pay dearly.

Draco's thoughts were interrupted by fast-approaching footsteps, and he disillusioned himself as he watched Hermione Granger tear through the corridor, and down to her bay window, she liked to sit in, as if summoned by his thoughts. The window was something she had probably thought that only she knew, but of course, Draco made it his business to know everything about her.

Draco had been particularly skilled in Legilimency, having been trained in the Mind Arts since he was a young child, and was highly proficient, even before coming to Hogwarts. He was something of a prodigy in the art of magical manipulation of the mind. Using a very subtle Legilimency probe, Draco walked through her thoughts. It was one of his favourite things to do. If he couldn't talk to her and know everything she thought, then he would simply read her thoughts.

Hermione's mind was completely preoccupied with the two halfwits she called friends. Potter and Weasley certainly didn't deserve her tears with their careless actions, beautiful as she was, even with puffy eyes and a red face.

Although, Draco chuckled to himself at the irony, he himself was partially responsible for said actions. For Pothead, the book he was so obsessed over was something Draco had stolen from Snape and had placed in the storage rooms of the Potions classroom. The book had a subtle compulsion charm keyed only for Potter to find, as he wouldn't have expected to be taking Potions, and therefore, wouldn't have bought a book for it. Draco knew that Potty would use the book to cheat through the class, and how that would irritate Hermione's sanctimonious ideals and drive a wedge between the two.

As for the Weasel, he was easily distractible. Draco had known how Lavender Brown had treated Hermione and had been waiting to get back at her for that for some time. Although this was only the beginning of his plans, he thought that spiking her drink with a rather dark and potent love potion that lasted eight months keyed to Ron Weasley was a nice start. The potion was fairly detrimental to the health of the drinker, but that was just an added bonus.

Draco knew that having one of her so-called best friends go out with one of her greatest tormentors would deeply hurt Hermione, but that was a necessary evil to ruin Weasley's chances. Still, he would make it up to her a thousand times over. But still, as a punishment to Weasley for being so weak, and for hurting his witch, Draco would make sure some poisoned mead would make its way into the hands of the ginger. It wouldn't kill him, even if nobody brewed an antidote or shoved a bezoar down his throat in time, but it would be unpleasant. When Draco killed the Weasel, he wouldn't make it nearly as nice and quick. No, he had multiple complex, drawn-out, and - most importantly - incredibly painful plans in his mind for Weasley's demise, just waiting to be used. While Potter was for the Dark Lord, the Weasel was for him. Even still, Draco hoped that as the Heir, the Dark Lord would allow him to spend some quality time with Potter.

Then, there was the Weaselette. In Draco's opinion, the bitch was a complete slag, nothing more than a cheap whore. And when he and the Dark Lord remade the Wizarding World, Ginevra Weasley's 'skills' would be put to use, and the girl would rue the day she ever spread

her legs. Not that the Weaselette would've ever turned out any different, between her equally whorish mother who got pregnant at the age of seventeen, who was *heavily* pregnant during her wedding, and her overall low breeding.

When Hermione's thoughts turned to the upcoming Obliviation of her parents, Draco was once again struck by her intelligence. In fact, this was incredibly helpful to Draco's plans. Hermione would not have any parents coming after her, even though they were Muggles and couldn't do much of anything, it would still be inconvenient. And he wouldn't have to set up a tragic fate to befall her parents, which would undoubtedly upset his Hermione. No, them forgetting all about her by her own hand couldn't have been more opportune.

Draco's heart broke a little when his little witch thought about the rejection she had always faced, both in the Muggle and Magical world. How she was never chosen first, was never anybody's first priority. What little she knew. She most certainly was his first priority, and she was more than just his first choice. In fact, just the other day, he had crucio'd Ernie MacMillian to hell and back, before obliterating him, after finding out about the Hufflepuff's plans to ask his Hermione on a date to Hogsmeade.

And when Hermione started thinking about how terrible her friends were, Draco's mouth curled upward into a smirk. There was his brilliant girl. While he knew that her friends lamented her passions, lofty goals, and whip-sharp intelligence, Draco celebrated it.

"Oh, darling," Draco whispered, "You'll simply be unstoppable when you're a Malfoy."

Sectumsempra

Chapter Notes

thank you all for the awesome response to the last chapter! still looking for a beta, although in the meantime I am editing my own work so if any mistakes slipped through, that's on me.

anyways, here's chapter 2!

As Draco sat in the hospital bed, he reflected on just how well the past few months had gone.

Hermione had successfully wiped her parents' memories over Christmas, although, as brilliant as she was, he had had no doubts that she would be able to do it without a problem.

Then, there was Weasley and the bottle of poisoned mead. Everything worked like how he had expected - Slughorn had filched the bottle, and had given it to his *favorite* student, Potter, and his best friend, Weasley. Weasley had drunk the mead, and the fast acting poison within gave him a very painful minute and a half while Potter searched for a bezoar. The Weasel had then been sent to the Hospital Wing, and consequently had missed his Quidditch game, something the ginger had lamented over quite loudly for the following week. Additionally, in his short hospital stay, he'd also managed to muck up his relationship with Lavender Brown, which was quite a feat, considering the chit was under a love potion. Even though Weasley and Brown had broken up, the Weasel had already irreparably ruined any chance he might've had with Hermione.

And as for Potter? He and the Weaselette were on the verge of getting together after Potty had been pathetically panting after Weaselette for the past year, as if she wasn't already a rotating door for every randy wizard in Hogwarts who wanted a quick fuck.

And finally, there was Potter's *Sectumsempra*. The curse had hurt like a bitch, although it wasn't anything in comparison to a *crucio*. Draco had been under the cruciatus curse just once, for learning purposes. It was under his Aunt Bella, and it was so he could get a true understanding of how the curse worked, so that his own *crucio*s would be highly effective. And Draco wanted his *crucios* to be comparable to those of his Aunt and of his Godfather's, so naturally, he would do anything to improve his ability to dole out pain.

But still, even though he had experienced the Cruciatus, Draco had still prepared for the *Sectumsempra*. After all, he had known that the curse was coming ever since he practically gave Snape's book to Potter. The summer before, he had gone through the book, and had cast the spell upon a prisoner who was being held in the Manor's dungeons to see what it did. He had watched, fascinated, as large cuts appeared across the prisoner's body. The man started bleeding heavily, and died, in what seemed to be a large amount of pain. Although the results

were nice, they were far too quick for Draco's liking for him to add the spell to his personal repertoire. There was no fun in killing somebody if it only lasted a few minutes. But still, lesson learned, he knew how to deal with the curse when Potter inevitably cast it at him.

So, Draco had taken the steps to ensure he wasn't killed. First was Moaning Myrtle, a whiny mudblood ghost who lived in a bathroom. He had charmed the bitch slowly over the course of the year, and had fed her an entirely false sob story. While that was time that he would never get back, Draco needed someone to scream bloody murder when Potter would hit him with a curse that would make him start bleeding out on the dirty bathroom floor. He didn't want to die because Potter would be too stupid to try and get Draco some help after nearly *killing* him. The second form of insurance was found in Severus Snape, who Draco had ensured would be over by the second-floor bathrooms when he was followed by Potter. While Draco personally despised the man, and hated the fact Snape would see him while he was weak, he fancied the idea of staying alive more. On top of that, his mother had made Snape take a vow that he would not allow Draco to die during sixth year, so there would be no way that Snape could let Draco be killed, at least not without dying himself.

After the *Sectumsempra*, there would be some scarring, but his mother's ritualistic style healing would take care of that much better than Pomfrey's pathetic attempts at healing Dark Magic. But the end goal of suffering through the *Sectumsempra* was to further alienate Potty from Hermione. It came from the book she had hated so much, and Draco knew that Hermione would be pissed that Potter used a spell without knowing what it did. And that wasn't even mentioning her definitive righteous anger that Potter had almost killed him, unprovoked.

In the meantime, Pansy was working her magic in what she excelled - gossip.

Perseus Parkinson had been in charge of the Dark Lord's propaganda since the early sixties, and had been one of the main reasons that the group had spread as quickly as it had. With that being said, Pansy was even better than her father at artfully spinning information. She was already promised high ranks with the Dark Lord once she graduated Hogwarts, and quite frankly, she deserved it. Pansy had the uncanny ability to make something completely ridiculous on Monday become a widely accepted truth on Tuesday. She had harnessed this power well in Hogwarts, masterfully stirring public opinion against Potter and Dumbledore slowly but surely over the past six years. Pansy had turned all of Slytherin and most of Ravenclaw against the two and was steadily taking pieces of Hufflepuff, bit by bit. She even had gotten some leeway through to those in Gryffindor she deemed worthy and useful, which was seriously impressive in it and of itself. On top of that, Pansy was co-writing an exposé book on Dumbledore with Rita Skeeter on his former relationship with Grindelwald and some of his other unsavoury actions. And as for Potter? The *Sectumsempra* was what Draco imagined would be her big breakthrough in completely turning Hogwarts against the Boy-Who-Wouldn't-Fucking-Die.

While it was widely assumed that Pansy and Draco were an item, that couldn't have been further from the truth. To Draco, Pansy was more of a sister to him than anything, and for Pansy, Draco was like her brother. Even still if that wasn't the case, Pansy didn't even swing that way. But, their perceived couplehood could be used, and so use it they did. Why waste a perfectly good tool just because it wasn't true?

Their dynamic was strikingly similar to the relationship between the Dark Lord and Draco's Aunt Bella, even down to Aunt Bella and Pansy's sexuality, and Bellatrix was incredibly fond of the younger witch.

It was at that moment Pansy sauntered into the Hospital Wing, looking like the cat who had caught the canary. She sat on the edge of Draco's bed, grinning. "Aren't you going to ask me how it went?" she crooned, with a fake pout.

Draco laughed at her dramatics. "I'm sure it went great, Pansy. You're good at what you do." When the witch sent a stinging hex his way, he rolled his eyes. "Fine. How'd it go, Pansy?"

Pansy summoned a bottle of nail polish and began to paint her nails. "I just *happened* to be telling the story of how Potter quite nearly murdered you, just by where your little witch was sitting," Pansy said nonchalantly. "I said that you almost bled out on the floors, and had blacked out, thinking you would die, and the last thing you would ever see was Potter's grinning face, taunting you as you faded in and out of consciousness." Pansy blew on her newly blood red nails. "She was pretending not to listen at first, but by the end, she was really quite angry. Walked off all in a huff, muttering how she was going to throttle Potter."

Draco grinned. "You're the best, Pansy."

"I know." The dark-haired witch hopped off of the bed and started walking out of the hospital wing. At the doorway, she turned around and winked. "I better be in the wedding party for how well I've set the two of you up."

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Draco burst through the door to the Astronomy Tower, and shouted "*Expelliarmus!*"

Dumbledore's wand flew into Draco's hand, and he grinned as he examined it. Sure enough, it was the Elder Wand, just like he had thought. Draco looked back up to Dumbledore to see the old man standing quite calmly. "Good evening, Draco."

Draco stepped forward, scanning the tower, as his eyes settled on two broomsticks, leaning against the wall. Ah, Potter was here. That was why Dumbledore had been preoccupied while Draco had disarmed him. Or perhaps the old coot had finally lost all semblances of sanity.

"Who else is here?" Draco decided to play dumb. For all Dumbledore knew, Draco was still the scared little boy he'd pretended to be the whole year.

"A question I might ask you. Or are you acting alone?" Avoidance. So that answered his question.

"No," Draco said. "I've got back-up. There are Death Eaters here in your school tonight."

"Well, well," said Dumbledore, as Draco forced himself to not roll his eyes at the patronisation in Dumbledore's tone. "Very good indeed. You found a way to let them in, did you?"

"Yeah. Right under your nose and you never realised!"

“Ingenious,” said Dumbledore. “Yet, forgive me, where are they now? You seem unsupported.”

“They met some of your guard,” Draco sneered. “Your little Order of the Pigeons. They’re having a fight down below. They won’t be long. But I came on ahead. I’ve got a job to do.”

“Well, then, you must get on and do it, my dear boy,” said Dumbledore softly.

Draco let his wand hand start shaking, as he smirked internally. No, of course, he wouldn’t do it that way - he was waiting for an audience, other than just Potter. Wouldn’t be much fun this way. He watched Dumbledore slowly smile, a bit feebly. And there was his victory.

“Draco, Draco you are not a killer.”

While Dumbledore would not be even remotely Draco’s first kill, he had a facade to keep up for the moment. “How do you know? You don’t know what I’m capable of. You don’t know what I’ve done!”

“Oh, yes, I do,” said Dumbledore mildly. “You almost killed Katie Bell and Ronald Weasley. You have been trying, with increasing desperation, to kill me all year. Forgive me, Draco, but they have been feeble attempts, so feeble, to be honest, that I wonder whether your heart has been really in it-”

“It has been in it!” Draco pretended to protest vehemently. “I’ve been working on it all year, and tonight –” He was interrupted by a muffled yell, and let out a bit of a sigh of relief. He wouldn’t have to pretend to be a pathetic little schoolboy to stall Dumbledore for much longer.

“Somebody is putting up a good fight,” said Dumbledore conversationally. “But you were saying... yes, you have managed to introduce Death Eaters into my school which, I admit, I thought impossible... how did you do it?” Dumbledore paused. “Perhaps you ought to get on with the job alone. What if your back-up has been thwarted by my guard?” Draco wanted to smirk. There was no way that Dumbledore’s little gang could do anything to the Death Eaters. “As you have perhaps realised, there are members of the Order of the Phoenix here tonight, too. And after all, you don’t really need help. have no wand at the moment, so I cannot defend myself.” He paused again. “I see. You are afraid to act until they join you.”

“I’m not afraid!” snarled Draco, restraining himself from killing Dumbledore right then and there. But no, he wanted an audience. “It’s you who should be scared!”

“But why? I don’t think you will kill me, Draco. Killing is not nearly as easy as the innocent believe...” The old man knew nothing. Killing was easy. Killing was satisfying. Watching the light die out of somebody’s eyes because Draco had willed it so? That was something he revelled in. “So tell me, while we wait for your friends...how did you smuggle them in here? It seems to have taken you a long time to work out how to do it.”

“I had to mend that broken Vanishing Cabinet that no one’s used for years. The one Montague got lost in last year,” Draco said.

“Aaaah.” Dumbledore’s sigh was half a groan. He closed his eyes for a moment. “That was clever- there is a pair, I take it?”

“The other’s in Borgin and Burkes,” said Draco, “And they make a kind of passage between them. Montague told me that when he was stuck in the Hogwarts one, he was trapped in limbo but sometimes he could hear what was going on at school, and sometimes what was going on in the shop, as if the Cabinet was travelling between them, but he couldn’t make anyone hear him. In the end, he managed to Apparate out, even though he’d never passed his test. He nearly died doing it. Everyone thought it was a really good story, but I was the only one who realised what it meant – even Borgin didn’t know –” Draco grinned proudly, in spite of the image he was trying to hold onto, if only just for a few moments longer. “I was the one who realised there could be a way into Hogwarts through the Cabinets if I fixed the broken one.”

“Very good,” murmured Dumbledore. “So the Death Eaters were able to pass from Borgin and Burkes into the school to help you ... a clever plan, a very clever plan... and, as you say, right under my nose. But there were times,” Dumbledore went on, “weren’t there, when you were not sure you would succeed in mending the Cabinet? And you resorted to crude and badly judged measures such as sending me a cursed necklace that was bound to reach the wrong hands, poisoning mead there was only the slightest chance I might drink,”

“Yeah, well, you still didn’t realise who was behind that stuff, did you?” sneered Draco, proud of how he’d pulled this all off. He’d fooled Dumbledore. Hook, line, and sinker.

“As a matter of fact, I did,” said Dumbledore. Draco wanted to smirk. “I was sure it was you.”

“Why didn’t you stop me, then?” Draco demanded.

“I tried, Draco. Professor Snape has been keeping watch over you on my orders –”

“He hasn’t been doing your orders, he promised my mother –”

“Of course that is what he would tell you, Draco, but –”

“He’s a double-agent, you stupid old man, he isn’t working for you, you just think he is!”

“We must agree to differ on that, Draco. It so happens that I trust Professor Snape-”

“Why?” Draco ground out. Here it was, what his mother and Aunt wanted.

“Love is a rather powerful emotion, don’t you think, Draco?”

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“Professor Snape was in love with Lily Potter. He wouldn’t stay on the side that killed the woman he loved.” And there it was. Draco’s memories would be more than enough to incriminate Snape, to put the final nail in the greasy bat’s coffin.

“He wanted to take all my glory, all the credit for my work,” Draco grouched. “But *I* did it. And I’ll be rewarded.”

“Very gratifying,” said Dumbledore mildly. “We all like appreciation for our own hard work, of course, but you must have had an accomplice, all the same-someone in Hogsmeade, someone who was able to slip Katie the – the – aaaah ...” Dumbledore closed his eyes again and nodded, as though he was about to fall asleep. Something was wrong with the old man. “... of course. Rosmerta. How long has she been under the Imperius Curse?”

“Got there at last, have you?” Draco taunted.

There was another shout, and Draco felt the enchanted coin in his pocket heat up. Aunt Bella had Hermione. Good.

“So poor Rosmerta was forced to lurk in her own bathroom and pass that necklace to any Hogwarts student who entered the room unaccompanied? And the poisoned mead? Well, naturally, Rosmerta was able to poison it for you before she sent the bottle to Slughorn, believing that it was to be my Christmas present... yes, very neat ... very neat. Poor Mr Filch would not, of course, think to check a bottle of Rosmerta’s. Tell me, how have you been communicating with Rosmerta? I thought we had all methods of communication in and out of the school monitored.”

“Enchanted coins,” said Draco. “I had one and she had another, and I could send her messages.”

“Isn’t that the secret method of communication the group that called themselves Dumbledore’s Army used last year?” asked Dumbledore.

And here and now, it was time for it to get fun. “Yeah, I got the idea from them,” said Draco, with a twisted smile. “Hermione Granger made them, didn’t she? I got the idea of poisoning the mead from her too. I heard her talking in the library about Filch not recognising potions. My little Hermione is rather smart, isn’t she?” Draco knew that wherever he was frozen, Potter wanted to scream.

“Your Hermione?” Dumbledore seemed confused. “Did Miss Granger help you, or are you two in a relationship of some kind?”

“No, not yet,” Draco smirked.

Dumbledore looked confused but seemed to wave it off and continued on. “Now, about tonight, I am a little puzzled about how it happened. You knew that I had left the school? But of course,” he answered his own question, “Rosmerta saw me leaving, she tipped you off using your ingenious coins, I’m sure ...”

“We decided to put the Dark Mark over the Tower and get you to hurry up here, to see who’d been killed,” said Draco. “And it worked!”

“Well... yes and no,” said Dumbledore. “But am I to take it, then, that nobody has been murdered?”

“Someone’s dead,” Draco grinned. “Or at least on well on their way. One of your people. I don’t know who, it was dark. I stepped over the body. I was supposed to be waiting up here when you got back, only your lot got in the way...” Draco could hear Potter’s brain whirring from across the room.

“Yes, they do that,” said Dumbledore. “There is little time left for us, Draco, so let us discuss your options. Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight to hide her likewise. Your father is safe at the moment in Azkaban... when the time comes we can protect him too. Come over to the right side, Draco. As for Miss Granger, I don’t believe she would be very inclined to be with you if you are on the side that wants her dead. You want her love? You must earn it... you are not a killer, Draco.”

Footsteps came thundering up the Astronomy Tower. *Finally* . First came the Carrows, then Fenrir Greyback, then finally Snape. Here was his audience.

“Dumbledore cornered!” Amycus said, turning to Alecto. “Dumbledore wandless, Dumbledore alone! Well done, Draco, well done!”

“Good evening, Amycus,” said Dumbledore calmly. “And you’ve brought Alecto too... charming”

Alecto giggled. “Think jokes will help you on your deathbed, Dumbledore?”

“Jokes? No, no, these are manners,” replied Dumbledore.

“I’m tired of all this posturing,” Draco snapped. “Dumbledore, what you *don’t* know is that I am not a scared little pathetic schoolboy you can convince to your side. I’m quite happy where I am, actually. I did not once make a mistake-Weasley and Bell were intentional and for personal reasons. The necklace and the mead were never supposed to make its way to you.”

Draco watched horror dawn across Dumbledore’s face.

“Oh,” Draco paused, “And I know that Potter’s in here. You froze him, didn’t you, just before I came in?” he chuckled. “Stupid decision on your part, Dumbledore. You’re robbing Potter of what’s probably his last chance to see Hermione. Aunt Bella has her now, and we’ll be taking good care of her. Potter, I hope you’ll try and pop in for a visit to see how prettily she screams.” Potter, the idiot, probably thought that Draco meant that he’d be torturing Hermione. The reckless Gryffindor that he was, Potter would come straight to the base of the Malfoy Manor to try and rescue Hermione from her perceived misery, from Draco. Hermione’s screams, though, would be of pleasure and of *his* name and would be surrounded by whimpers and pleas for him to fill her with his cock.

Draco tilted his head to where Potter was watching frozen in the shadows, making eye-contact with the Gryffindor through the dark. “I’d kill you too, here and now, but the Dark Lord has plans for how he wants to deal with you, Potter, and there are some things that even I cannot get away with. As for you, Dumbledore, your time is up.”

Draco lifted his wand, a cruel smile on his face. “*Avada Kedavra!*”

Felix Felicis

Chapter Notes

Reminder that Draco and like most of the main people that we'll be seeing on the dark side are absolutely terrible people. Just because they have love for their family and some other people doesn't mean that they're not absolute monsters to everyone else.

Hermione watched as the tiny bottle of Felix Felicis was passed around their small circle. Ron, of course, was the first to take a drink, before handing it off to Luna, who gave it to Ginny, before the bottle was handed off to Hermione. Hermione looked at the Felix Felicis, and to her horror, she realised that there was only enough of the potion left for one more person. She looked to her right, to Neville. Her first friend, magical or otherwise. Neville, whose hands were trembling ever so slightly. Neville, who would likely be seeing Bellatrix Lestrange tonight, the woman who effectively killed his parents. Neville, the last person in the circle, other than her, who had yet to take the Felix Felicis. With her mind made up, Hermione brought the bottle back, but didn't let a drop pass through the opened end, and passed it off to Neville, who finished off the last of it. Hermione smiled softly as she watched the boy's hands stop shaking, and his face become determined. Neville had needed the Felix Felicis more than she did, and so she was more than glad to have given her portion to him. Even still, it seemed almost poetic that the dose that was supposed to be hers had been wasted on cheating to win a stupid Quidditch game.

An hour or two later, Hermione found herself right outside of Snape's office with Luna, crouched off to the side, keeping watch for the sour professor. The blonde girl was swaying in an imaginary breeze, humming to herself. She smiled serenely at Hermione. "I've been dating a boy named Theodore Nott."

Hermione turned to Luna, still keeping her defensive position. She had to be ready for Professor Snape. "He's in Slytherin, isn't he?"

Luna nodded. "Oh, yes, yes he is. He's been rather nervous for this night, with his father and Draco and all. They're quite good friends, really."

"What do you mean Luna?" Hermione fiddled with her wand nervously. Luna started humming again. "Is...is Nott on the other side?"

Luna smiled, and said dreamily, "I always find sides so constricting. Some fight for bad things with good motives and other people fight for good things with bad motives. And who is to say what is *good* and what is *bad*? I don't think there's a true definition of either, so why fight over it? Like how Blibbering Humdingers fight Nargles. The Nargles might bite, but they're rather good for the rain and cleansing the land, and they help plants grow. Blibbering Humdingers might seem harmless to us, but sometimes they tend to hit Crumple Horned

Snorkacks on the head and make them itchy, but the bite of a Nargle can heal them. I wouldn't imagine a Crumple Horned Snorkack would fight for the Blibbering Humdingers. And sometimes, the Nargles would've been able to save a Crumple Horned Snorkack who got hit on the head by a Blibbering Humdinger, in ways that a Blibbering Humdinger would've called wrong. But why should a Crumple Horned Snorkack have to stay itchy and have a bump on their head just because the Blibbering Humdingers don't like the Nargles? And then there's the Moon Frogs, and well, they're very social creatures, I imagine, even though they're perceived as odd, coming from the moon, you know. I think they'd fight for whoever most of their friends are."

Hermione rubbed her temples, feeling an oncoming headache. "What do you mean, Luna?"

"Well if a Moon Frog was friends with one more Blibbering Humdinger than Nargle, but then the situations reversed, don't you think a Moon Frog would switch too?"

"Luna, is this really terribly important right now?" Hermione groaned.

"Oh, it is," Luna said, earnestly. "I quite like Moon Frogs."

Just then, Professor Snape came bursting out of his office, his eyes landing on the two girls. He seemed relieved, and barked out, "Professor Flitwick's in my office, he's just collapsed - you two need to take care of him. There's an attack on the school. Stay out of the way, and stay safe." With that, the Professor took off towards the Great Hall.

Hermione set into motion, rushing into the office where Professor Flitwick was unconscious on the floor. At first, she tried to shake the Professor awake at first, but it was to no avail. She drew her wand, pointing it at the Charms Master, and murmured, "*Rennervate* !" Professor Flitwick slowly came to, as Hermione heard a loud crashing noise echo through the corridors. Merlin, she had to do something, she had to help out with whatever was going on up there. "Luna," she directed, "You stay here and make sure Professor Flitwick is alright. I need to see-"

"Go," Luna said easily, "We'll see each other again, Hermione, don't worry."

Without pausing to try and comprehend the meaning behind Luna's words, Hermione raced off. She came to a stop in the Great Hall, where there was a huge battle going on. The Order of the Phoenix were there - thank Merlin - and were fighting off waves of Death Eaters...but they were *losing*. Losing badly. But at least the Felix Felicis had worked - Hermione could see Ron fending off MacNair, while Ginny was throwing curses at a short female Death Eater. And when she saw that Neville was defending himself from a man that looked rather wolfish, Hermione knew for certain that she had made the right decision with the Felix Felicis.

A high pitched giggle drew Hermione's attention from her friends, and her gaze landed upon a beautiful witch waving at Hermione from across the hallway as if they were old friends. From the abundance of her wanted posters hung up and down everywhere and posted in the newspaper, Hermione could recognise the witch in her sleep. Although the posters showed a beautiful woman, with messy hair and a dirty face, the woman here cleaned up and strikingly gorgeous and even looked a bit like Hermione. Bellatrix Lestrange. Bellatrix gleefully made

her way towards Hermione, as the younger witch frantically cast shields and threw stunners at Bellatrix.

“Hello, pretty little dolly!” Bellatrix cooed, “I’ve been trying to find you for ages. Wherever have you been hiding?” Hermione threw a hex at Bellatrix, but the witch easily deflected it. “You’re going to be a little dolly, you know that? We just have to clean you up a little bit first.” Despite the fact that they were in the middle of a battle, and Hermione was desperately trying to slow the approaching witch, Bellatrix seemed like a child in a candy story.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Hermione yelled, as she dodged out of the way of Bellatrix’s spells.

“Oh, it’s going to be such a fun surprise!” Bellatrix grinned. “I’ve been waiting for *ages* for this, Cissy’s been telling me about you since one of her visits in ‘91. I hoped you would be ready when I got out but it turned out we had to be patient and wait out your sixth year. That’s something I’ve never been all too good at. But we had to let Draco finish up some things first.”

“Malfoy? Is he involved in all of this?” Hermione narrowly avoided a spell, fear coursing through her veins.

“Involved?” Bellatrix giggled sweetly again, “He *planned* all this, little dolly! He has a lot of plans all just for you. Has for years and years.” The Dark Witch swooned, although whether it was mocking or genuine, Hermione couldn’t tell. “Isn’t young love just so sweet?”

And for a split second, Hermione froze. And that was the split second Bellatrix needed. The last thing that Hermione saw was the witch throwing her head back in laughter as the spell from her wand hit Hermione square in the chest.

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It was dark. It was dark, it was black, and her whole body tingled. Hermione felt a thick liquid be coaxed down her throat, with the distinct taste of blood burning through her system. It spread quickly from her throat to her chest and arms and legs, and it felt as if her whole body was alight with flame. It was all engulfing and consuming, and Hermione felt like she was burning from the inside out. She wanted to scream or cry, or just *move* but she couldn’t. It was all too much. Oblivion was a blissful release from the agony, and Hermione slipped into it gratefully.

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Draco examined the potion with great scrutiny. Something straight from the depths of the Malfoy Family Grimoire, he had hardly been the only Malfoy to love someone who did not *yet* love them back. That was where the potion came in.

Supramorsion. It had very few ingredients, although they were not particularly easy or cheap to come by. Pearl dust and powdered moonstone, and a few drops of the intended target’s blood were the first parts of the potion, but the main ingredient was the venom of a Veela.

Specifically, the venom taken from a Veela killed after its mate, upon the night of a new moon.

While Aunt Bella killing Bill Weasley as his Veela mate went absolutely wild from her iron chain confines had not been originally something Draco had been expecting, but it certainly made things convenient.

Draco chuckled to himself at how easy they had made it. If the two had been so foolish as to come to defend Hogwarts, on the night of a new moon, how was he to let the opportunity pass by? When he saw the oldest Weasley son choking on his own blood, as Bellatrix *imperio'd* him into carving into his body with a cursed blade, while Fleur Delacour struggled against the unbreakable chains that she was bound with, trying to transform into a harpy to protect her mate, the night sky dark - was he supposed to just let that go to waste?

Once Bellatrix was satisfied with her work with Bill Weasley, Fleur's death had been relatively quick, led by his mother. A simple *Avada Kedavra* to the chest was all that was needed, and the girl was dead. The girl had deserved something much worse, being a member of the Order of the Phoenix, but they were on a tight schedule. Narcissa had consoled herself with the fact that she would send bits of the Veela back to her family, piece by bloody piece. His mother had then delivered a swift death, before severing the Veela's head from her body, wrinkling her nose when the blood stained her shoes.

"It will be much easier to extract the venom this way," Narcissa had explained. "Much less messy as well."

And so he and his mother had brewed the Supramorsion. The effects of the potion did not induce love explicitly, but it certainly encouraged it. There were two main effects of Supramorsion. The first was that the drinker would be highly susceptible to developing intensely strong romantic feelings towards whoever the potion was keyed towards. The second effect gave the drinker an innate desire to please the target, and the effect took the form of specifically directed intrusive thoughts that spoke only to the subconscious mind, until the drinker started naturally thinking such things without prompting.

A less intelligent man would've decided to use Amortentia. Easier to brew, less dark ingredients, and 'similar' results. However, Draco was not an unintelligent man. There were key differences between the two potions, key differences that, in Draco's opinion, made all the difference. Unlike Amortentia, the love that was induced by Supramorsion was not *fake* or *forced*, rather encouraged. Another difference was that potion needed only be given once, and that the love was not instant. Instead, it slowly seeped into the drinker, slowly changing their feelings and thoughts. The more time the drinker spent with the target, the more quickly and intense the results of the Supramorsion. The Grimoire said that Supramorsion was the closest thing to natural love, and that the drinker wouldn't be able to tell the difference. Draco disagreed. Hermione *would* naturally be in love with him.

He looked up at the sleeping form that was lying in the bed. Hermione. She was beautiful as always, even in sleep. Her hair had been tamed into loose ringlets, that were splayed-out across the satin pillowcase like a halo, as they framed her face. Her chest steadily rose and fell, completely trapped peacefully in a magically-induced sleep. Draco sat down on the bed and pulled Hermione towards him gently, cradling her in his lap. She unconsciously settled

into his chest, and Draco smiled tenderly down at her. He slowly lifted up the side of her robes to inspect the now unblemished and healed skin, careful not to look at anything else. He would be able to drink in her beautiful body thoroughly, once she was ready for it. Her lips were slightly parted, and Draco wanted nothing more than to kiss her until her lips were swollen and bruised, but he restrained himself. He wanted their first kiss to be something that they both remembered, something that she wanted.

“Oh, love,” he whispered into her hair, “You are far too beautiful for your own good.”

Draco pulled the small bottle of Supramorsion from his robe pockets, and took off the cork of the bottle. The potion gleamed, shining like the stars that the Blacks were named after.

He raised the small bottle to Hermione’s pink lips and tipped it down, coaxing the liquid into her mouth. He then tipped her head back, and gently rubbed her throat as she swallowed the potion unwittingly.

“There you go, darling,” he murmured, “Everything’s going to work out perfectly, don’t you worry. We’ve got nothing but time, and I am a patient man.”

Deal With the Devil

Chapter Notes

Your chapterly reminder that Draco and co. are not good people.

Also, you'll see the starts of the Supramorsion in this chapter. Just like an explanation of how it works - it becomes more aggressive the more time passes, and when faced with a direct order, it is also usually very strong. I just wanted to explain that all really quickly, as it's going to be very important for the upcoming chapters.

Hermione awoke in what was the most ostentatiously beautiful room she had ever seen in her entire life - and that was including the field trip she had taken to Buckingham Palace in primary school.

She sat up in the bed, slowly becoming more and more aware of her decadent surroundings. The room itself was larger than Hermione's own dormitory that she had to share with Lavender and Pavarti. The walls were white, with silhouettes of ivy creeping up the wall that was coloured in golden hues, contrasting sharply with the dark wooden floor. The bed itself that Hermione was lying in was covered in silk sheets, various fur blankets, and a mountain of pillows. A tufted chaise lounge in baby blue was adjacent to a matching baby blue wingback armchair. Against one wall was a golden mirror that hung above a white vanity with golden accents. There were two large windows set against the head of the bed, where light streamed in from the outside. Three doors were situated on different walls of the room, two of which were open, and one was closed. The open doors led to a large closet filled with expensive looking robes and dresses, among other clothing items that would've easily cost just as much as Hermione paid in tuition to Hogwarts every year.

How in Merlin's name had she wound up here? Hermione rubbed her temples, trying to remember the events that had led her up to where she was. Her memories eluded her, like wisps of a ghost before it all started flashing before her eyes in reverse.

The fire, the pain, the burning, the battle, Bellatrix . The Order. Neville, Ron, Ginny. Luna. Professor Snape. Professor Flitwick on the floor. Luna. Felix Felicis. Not enough. Ginny, Ron, Neville, Luna. The Horcrux. Felix Felicis. Harry. Horcruxes. Harry. Dumbledore.

Oh Merlin, where was she? (Home. Safe.) This was not good. This was absolutely terrible. Where was she? Where was everyone else? Were they alright? If they weren't, it was all her fault. She could've - she should've - Where was Bellatrix? *Where was her wand?*

Hermione came to a start with the realization that she didn't know if she had her wand on her or not. Merlin, she was stupid. Had she not learned a thing from Moody at Grimmauld Place? Stupid, stupid, stupid! She could *never* do anything right.

Hermione patted herself down, searching for her wand on her body, or in her pockets. At some point, she had been changed into a set of silk pajamas, which raised questions that Hermione didn't want to think about. When she discovered her wand wasn't on her, her heart started beating erratically.

Hermione flung the pillows off of her bed, and searched through the sheets frantically, before tearing through her bedside stands, opening the drawers and desperately reaching for a wand that wasn't there. Her stomach lurched as her nerves heightened.

Hermione then thrust her hand under the bed, feeling around wildly for her wand. Her hands closed around nothing but air, and her stomach turned when there was nothing at all underneath the bed. She flew to the vanity, opening each drawer, but each was just as empty as the last. Hermione reeled slightly as she stood up, and she rushed to the closet. She searched through each item, reaching into the pockets and desperately searching through the piles of clothing for her wand.

The room began to spin as the pit in her stomach grew and grew, and she felt as if she were in a small boat in tumultuous waters. Hermione stumbled out of the closet and into the bathroom, her knees shaking and her head pounding. Her stomach turned wildly, as the world tilted and spun on the side, just a little bit too far.

Hermione grabbed the bathroom counter for a sense of stability, but it was to no avail. Just barely over the sound of her blood rushing in her ears, Hermione thought she might've heard a door open, but before she could think, she started heaving into the sink. The edges of her eyesight dimmed and went dark as she hopelessly tried to keep her legs stable out from under her.

As her vision went black and her legs collapsed, Hermione was vaguely aware of strong arms that kept her from hitting the floor, and a broad chest that she sank into, as she collapsed back into the darkness.

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Draco looked down at the unconscious witch in his arms.

Of course, the brash-headed Gryffindor that she was, she couldn't have stayed in bed. Couldn't have rested, or taken it slowly. No, she *had* to search for her wand. She wasn't *nearly* well enough to be moving around half as much or as fast as she had just been doing. And it had gotten her sick. At least there was no way that she could've purged herself of the Supramorsion, as it had been given to her over a week ago.

It was all Potter's fault, as always. If Hermione had never been influenced by Pothead or the Weasel, she wouldn't have had such tendencies to always be at the ready for battle, the unrepentant fear that something was always around the corner that she'd need her wand for to defend herself. She wouldn't have gotten sick because she had been moving far too quickly for someone who had been at rest for the past month. Was this what it was always like for her, after being hurt? Salazar, did Weasley and Potter even let her rest for a *day* after the Battle of Mysteries? Probably not. They had probably dragged her out of the hospital early, so she could do their revisions for them. And of course, they would've gotten away with

putting her health at risk because it was Saint Potter and his Blood Traitor sidekick. Saint Potter, who couldn't take care of the one person in Gryffindor that was actually worth giving a shit about.

Draco called out for an elf to clean up the vomit in the sink and the mess in the room, before he carried Hermione back into her bedroom. He laid his witch down onto the lounge, as the bed was still a mess. Merlin, the elf was incompetent. Could it not make the bed first? Before he could *crucio* the elf for its stupidity, his mother came through the door, and sat down in the chair.

"She created quite a mess, didn't she?" Narcissa said, mildly. "I'd rather she not do that kind of physical activity for another week."

"Should we then put her to sleep again, for the next week then?" Draco asked.

"I believe so," Narcissa nodded, "Although I would like to wait until her bed is ready before I cast the spell. Plum, dear?" she called out, her voice suddenly cool.

The house-elf came padding out from the bathroom. "Yes Mistress?"

"Are you inept or simply stupid?" Narcissa snapped, "Because you should've *known* to have fixed Hermione's bed first. For your punishment, I would like for you to iron your hands." Her voice switched back to the sweet timbre she normally spoke in. "Thank you, Plum. Please, do attempt to do better next time."

Once the bed was made, Draco laid Hermione down on it, before lying on it himself, drawing her in towards him. Narcissa murmured a spell under her breath, and Hermione relaxed and unconsciously settled into Draco's chest. A small smile wove its way across Draco's face, as he idly played with locks of her hair, curling the waves around his finger.

Narcissa watched on, with a light smile, at her son and his love, intertwined within each other, just as they should be. "I know I tell you this often, my Dragon, but you could not have chosen better."

Draco smirked at his mother's praise. "She really is something, isn't she?"

Narcissa hummed in agreement.

Draco looked down at his witch, adoration written all over his face. Here she was, in his arms, in his - no, in *their* home. It was just the way that he had always imagined it, when he had watched her in Transfiguration or in Potions, or in the corridors of the hallways. Her smiles, her attention, her *love* would be directed at him, not towards those who didn't even deserve to breathe the same air as her. Soon, she would love him back, just as how it was supposed to be.

"Draco, dear," Narcissa said, stirring Draco from his thoughts, "I believe that it might be a good idea for your father and I to stay with your Aunt and your godfather in the Dark Manor for a little while. Just until Hermione is ready to meet us. I don't want to overwhelm her at first, or introduce too many variables all at once for her to deal with. In any case, it should

allow for her to only have you to turn to or to talk to, which should help the Supramorsion along. Perhaps it might be best if we allow for Hermione to warm up to us and to the cause, before introducing her grandfather and Bella?"

Draco nodded in agreement, "As long as you can keep Aunt Bella from getting all too angry that she won't get to meet Hermione for another while."

"I can deal with her," Narcissa waved her hand, "I'll take her out to London or wherever and she can take her frustrations out on some Muggles. Besides, who says that we won't be visiting in using disillusionment spells?" Draco looked up sharply. "We will not be popping in randomly," Narcissa laughed, "It *is* young love after all. Your father and I were very much that way too."

"You two still are," Draco said dryly.

Narcissa shrugged lightly, unapologetic. "And your children will think the same thing. Nevertheless, we can make sure to let you know ahead of time so that we won't be seeing anything that you do not wish for us to see."

"Fine. As long as Aunt Bella doesn't try and interfere too much," Draco conceded. "She can be...fanatical to say the least, so I'd like to have Hermione at the very least comfortable, if not supportive of our ideals before she is able to meet Aunt Bella. I don't want Aunt Bella to scare her off from the Dark. As I've told you, Hermione is terribly compassionate, yet also logical, so we'll need to walk a fine line, appealing to both, but not neglecting the other."

"I think that Pansy's book might be a good place to start," Narcissa noted. "We can leave it out on the chair or table so that she can read it if she wants to without feeling as if we're forcing her to do so."

Draco chuckled, "It's a book, of course she'll read it. Although, she's probably going to be a bit stubborn about it at first. Have Pansy create a copy of the book and edit it so that it comes off as a bit less sensationalist, and double down on the emotional and logical appeals."

Narcissa nodded, "Alright, Draco. I'll leave the two of you alone." She smiled gently at her son, before leaving the room, and closing the door behind herself.

This time, when Hermione awoke, Draco was sitting in the room, waiting for her.

When he had felt her start to show signs of stirring, he had reluctantly untangled himself from Hermione, pulling her off of where she was lying on him. She unconsciously reached out for him, trying to regain the warmth that she had lost, and it took everything in him to not acquiesce what she was unknowingly requesting.

"I will soon, darling," Draco whispered, "I'll hold you until you wake up, and for the whole day if that's what you want, but not until when you won't be so angry when you realize who is holding you." He smiled down at her fondly. "I imagine you're going to be terribly irate with me, love, when you wake up soon, but I already forgive you." He kissed her forehead

softly. “I always will. It’s not your fault that your friends and professors have filled your head with pretty little lies. But we’ll work on that, together, love. We’ll get you all fixed up.”

He pulled back, and settled himself into the chair his mother had been in a week prior. About an hour passed before Hermione had truly started to wake up, but Draco didn't mind. He could spend years just watching her and he would be happy. As long as she was his.

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Hermione sleepily pulled herself up, stretching into the air, her eyes fluttering open. When they settled upon Draco Malfoy, she drew back in shock, as everything, yet again, came crashing back onto her like a tidal wave.

“Malfoy,” she growled, “Where the hell am I?”

When Malfoy smiled gently at her, she had to do a double-take. Was what Bellatrix said in any way true? The way that he was looking at her was almost like - no. No, it wasn't. (Was it?) There were so many things that she could accept - the existence of *magic* for one, but Malfoy supposedly being in *love* with her? No, that was too far out of reach. That was simply impossible. Laughable, even. No, this had to be a game of some kind. Putting her in some gilded room, before ripping the rug out from under her, for his own personal amusement. Maybe they were in the middle of a small house in the woods, so nobody would be able to hear her scream.

“You,” Malfoy said, “Are in Malfoy Manor.”

“No, I’m not,” Hermione snapped. Malfoy started to chuckle. “This isn’t *funny!*” She glared at him as his chuckles turned into uproarious laughter.

“Oh, but it is,” Malfoy said, once his laughter had finally settled down. “You, Hermione, are in Malfoy Manor. In fact, this room that we’re in right now has been waiting here for you since last summer.”

He has lots of plans involving you. Has for years and years. Bellatrix's voice echoed through her mind, but Hermione shook her head violently, dispelling the words from her thoughts.

Hermione searched blindly for the closest object she could find, her fingers closing around a pillow. She threw it at Malfoy as hard as she could. Hopefully that would be enough to antagonize him so that he could stop with all the false pretenses and get on with whatever he was planning. Unfortunately, Malfoy easily caught the pillow and began laughing again. Merlin, this was stupid. And she still didn't know where her wand was.

“Stop it Malfoy,” Hermione snarled, “Where is my wand?”

“You’ll get it back once you’ve proved to me that you can behave,” he said, a bit tauntingly.

Ha! She'd just fake her way into his good graces, and once she had her wand back, she would get the hell out of here. She'd play his little game and get her wand back. How long would it

take? A couple of weeks, maybe a month? It depended on how paranoid Malfoy was and how good of an act she could put on. Her thoughts were interrupted by Malfoy's laughter.

"I'm sure that you think you can just manipulate me into thinking you've changed your mind just to get your wand back and try to escape," he chuckled, "Hermione, that won't work, I'm afraid. You'll be here for a *very* long time. I'm quite good at telling if someone's faking. Even if I wasn't, darling, with me, you'll never have to worry about faking it."

It took a moment, but Hermione caught on to the double entendre. Civility be damned, she would *not* let Malfoy insinuate such things about her. Seeing red, she lunged at him, hitting every part of him that she could. "You *foul* bastard! You loathsome, spineless, half-witted coward! I will *never* -!"

Malfoy seemed bemused, and it seemed as if her blows felt like nothing to him. "You know what they say about never saying never, Hermione."

"Stop calling me that!" Hermione shrieked, lunging at Malfoy yet again. This time, he caught her, turning her around so that her back and head were held against his chest, his arms looped around her torso, holding her in something that felt like the hold of a lover. She hated it. (Did she?)

"Why? It is your name after all, is it not?" he smirked.

Hermione could have screamed in frustration. Whatever game he was playing at, she was not going to let him. "You don't get to call me that!" Hermione growled. "Only people that I *like* call me Hermione. And I *despise* you," she hissed, "With every fibre of my being."

"Do you?" Malfoy seemed bemused. "Well, we can see about that. You are absolutely *adorable* when you're angry, Hermione, did you know?"

"Stop it!" Hermione shrieked. "Whatever game you're playing, I don't want to play it!"

"Ah, but this isn't a game. And even if it was, it's not your choice if you want to play or not." She glared at him. "Even still you'll come to enjoy my games just as much as I do. Perhaps you'll even come to want my company."

"Like hell I will," she snarled.

"Why?" he smiled as Hermione struggled against his arms.

"You obviously know the reason!" she snapped, "Why are you even asking?"

"Tell me, and I'll let you go."

"Because I hate you!" she spat venomously. Malfoy let her go, and looked at her as if she was a kitten, angry from being forced to take a bath. "I'll hate you *forever*," she hissed.

"Forever is a long time," Malfoy said, idly. "Are you sure that you can last that long? I don't even think you can last the next three months hating me."

“And if I do, you’ll give me my wand and let me go?” Hermione raised her chin challengingly at Malfoy. This was something she could use. His pride.

He nodded easily, and grinned. “And if *I* win, I get to punish you.”

“What *kind* of punishment?” Hermione asked warily, as Malfoy started circling her.

He leaned in, his hot breath tickling her ear, and Hermione felt herself going a bit pink. “I don’t think you’d find it all too objectionable, Hermione. It’s the kind that you’ll enjoy *quite* immensely. The kind where I learn just how far down your blush goes. The kind where your legs are locked around me until they’ve given out, but I’ll still keep going and going and going. The kind where I spread you out on my bedsheets and make you come so many times that you won’t be able to see anything but me. The kind where you’re not sure where I end and where you begin and you’ve forgotten how to do anything but scream my name and beg for me. I can’t wait to hear you beg so prettily, just for me.” he murmured huskily. “The kind where there is not a single thought in your head that you can process, other than the sheer ecstasy that you are in.” He leaned in further, lowering his voice. “I bet you’ll still blush like an innocent virgin even after I’ve taken you on every surface of this house. I’ll make you come so many times that you’ll be just as hopelessly addicted to me as I am to you. Hermione, darling, I *will* ruin even the *thought* of any other man for you. That will be your punishment.”

Hermione felt something settle in her stomach, and the smallest little bit of her wanted to come undone to him just from his words. (Please, please come undone.) But the rest of her, most of her, knew that this was Malfoy. Even *if* he wanted her - which he didn't, she was *certain* he was just playing with her - he was Malfoy. He was loathsome and despicable and awful and cruel. There was nothing in her that could *ever* feel anything but hatred towards him.

“Fine. But you must know that it would take an Imperius to make me *ever* call for your name and *respond* to you,” she said distastefully. “For me to feel anything but hate towards you.”

“We’ll see about that,” Malfoy smiled wickedly. He offered her his hand. “Shake on it?”

She felt as if she was making a deal with the devil himself. But it was on such benign means of her hating him - something that would never change, and something that would win her her freedom. With any luck, she’d be out in three months and would find Ron and Harry and help them find the other Horcruxes Harry had talked about. And with that, she took the devil’s hand, and shook it, looking him straight in the eye.

“Deal.”

The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore

Chapter Notes

was going to wait until tomorrow to post this but what the heck, I'll post it today. Hope y'all enjoy it! Also, Hermione is going to seem a bit off kilter, but that's the point. She's been thrown way in the deep end and fighting against more things than she knows. So cut her a bit of slack. The parentheses represent her subconscious, and what's been affected by the potion, in case if that doesn't make sense just from the text alone.

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

Once she had shaken his hand, Hermione felt a bit suspicious. That had gone over far too easily for Malfoy to agree to let her go free in three months, with her wand. No, there had to be a plan of his, a loophole of some kind. Malfoy would use everything in his power to try and make himself win.

She glared at him, “You can’t dose me with a potion, either, to make me like you. I know what Amortentia smells like.”

“I would never dose you with Amortentia,” Malfoy reassured her.

Hermione frowned, still wary. “And you have to tell me when it’s been three months. I’m not able to keep track of the dates, and I’m not going to let you play on that. Swear to me that you won’t do those two things.”

Malfoy pulled his wand from his holster, and smirked at her as he raised his wand into the air. Hermione watched him warily, waiting for the moment he turned his wand on her, ready to jump out of the way. Malfoy frowned at her panic that she obviously hadn’t hidden as well as she thought she had.

“Relax, I’m not going to hurt you,” he promised. “I, Draco Lucius Malfoy, vow that I will not dose you with Amortentia, and I will reveal to you the outcome of the bet once the third month has passed. I will then follow through with whatever I have promised, based on the outcome of the bet. So mote may it be.”

Hermione nodded, satisfied. (Trust him.) It was at that moment, the sleeve of his robe that covered his left arm slipped down, revealing the Dark Mark, branded into his alabaster skin.

Oh Merlin, she had just made a deal with a Death Eater.

Hermione scrambled towards the window above her bed, and threw herself against it with all of her weight, hoping to feel the glass shatter from behind her. The glass didn’t even shudder, as she slammed against it, desperate to escape. Malfoy was a Death Eater. She was *dead*. Dead, dead, dead, dead. And that was the *best* possible outcome. No, it was more likely that

she would be tortured until her mind was mush and her world was nothing but pain, and she would be nothing but an empty husk when they were finally gracious enough to put her out of her misery. At that third month mark, Malfoy would toss her broken body out into the middle of the woods with her wand following her. Her back started to throb from the constant throwing of herself against the glass, but she didn't stop. (Stop.) She couldn't stop. Stopping meant death. Death and pain and torture.

Malfoy moved to grab her, but she darted right out from under his arms, and towards the bathroom. She slammed the door behind her, locking it, and moved to start getting through the window in the bathroom. But it was just the same as the one in the bedroom. Magically reinforced, unable to be broken. As Malfoy tried to open the door, she scrambled into the corner of the massive bathtub, holding herself in the corner into the tightest ball that she could. Perhaps he would make it quick. But she didn't want to see the curse that would, at best, end it all, or at worst, be the first curse that she would experience in her own personal hell. If she was particularly unlucky, he'd leave her alive, and lose what would be the remnants of her sanity when he let her go.

Hermione let out a small whimper as she heard Malfoy mutter “*Alohomora*,” from the other side of the door. This was it. This was the end. He was going to torture her and then kill her. Whatever he had gotten out of this sick game, it was over. That stupid bet that he'd just talked so much about was all a lie. There was no way that she would even live to see past today. And even if she did, even if the bet wasn't all a lie, Malfoy *knew* that there would be no chance of her ever *not* hating him, not with that mark on his arm. Hell, he hated *her*, and the proof was in the mark on his arm. She was a Muggle-born and he was a Death Eater. There was no way that he would just let her go, unharmed, alive, and armed, his vow and his bet be damned.

Draco Malfoy the student, the Slytherin, the bully? That was something she could deal with. Something she *knew* how to deal with. The slurs he threw at her in second and third year, the taunts to Harry and Ron, the cheating in Quidditch, the Potter stinks badges, the Inquisitorial Squad - those were all things that she could deal with, things she *had* dealt with. But Draco Malfoy the Death Eater? That was something she did not even know how to begin to deal with.

Harry was *right*. Malfoy was a Death Eater, god, she should've listened to him. It seemed like paranoid ramblings, and what with the book, but no! She had said that Malfoy wasn't a Death Eater. She had dismissed her concerns. Of course - whenever she listened to herself over other people she was wrong, and *Merlin* she should've listened to Harry. She was always so wrong and so stupid and useless! He *always* knew what she didn't and now she was about to die.

Would anyone even *care* if she was dead? Would they come and try to retrieve her body for a proper burial? It was something she knew Ron would do for Harry and that Harry would do for Ron, but what about her? Would they forget about her? Would they push it off to the side like she always was? (They would.) She thanked whatever god that seemed to hate her so much that at least her parents wouldn't even be aware that they had a daughter, much less that she was dead.

Malfoy burst into the bathroom, and she shrank into the corner of the tub even further, burying her head between her knees. She didn't want to see his triumphant expression. She didn't want to see the curses that would come from his wand and would, at best, end her short and pathetic life. When nothing came, she looked up at him, glaring, and was caught in a moment of recklessness. She didn't want to wait to be on edge for when the other shoe would drop. "Don't hold back, coward. Give me the worst that you've got. If it's information that you're after, I'll never tell you. I'll be *dead* and you won't know a single thing." (Will you?) She wouldn't.

Something flickered across his face, but before Hermione could read it, it was shuttered away. Malfoy then raised an eyebrow. "You are so *terribly* dense sometimes for someone so brilliant. I said that I wasn't going to hurt you." In one fluid motion, he picked Hermione up, and carried her back to her bed, bridal style. She wanted to hit him. (She wanted to be closer to him.)

"Spineless bastard," Hermione hissed, "You're going to wait for the right moment, won't you? You'll probably starve me until you think I'm ready to break, and then *crucio* me until I've gone mad. Keep me in suspense, right? That's why you offered me my freedom in three months. Why you said what you did. You'd never go through with either of them. First, you'll never let me go free, not alive and armed, and second, I'm just a m-mudblood to you, remember? You would never *lower* yourself to me. I'll be dead before the month's end, won't I?"

"Why do you find what I say so hard to believe?" (Why?)

Hermione refused to play further into what he wanted. She wasn't going to answer. When that became obvious, Malfoy sighed, placing her down onto the bed before starting to walk away. (Don't go.) "We can try this again some other time. I will not be hurting you, and the deal I made with you was genuine. And, contrary to popular belief, I don't hate you." He paused at the doorway. "Next time I see you, I'd like for you to call me by my first name. You're a smart girl, Hermione, figure it out." And with that, he left the room, closing and locking the door behind him. (Figure it out.)

Hermione flew to the door and listened to Malfoy's footsteps become quieter and quieter. Once she no longer heard them, she sprung into action. She forced all of her will forward, as she barked out, "*Alohomora*," at the door, praying that her wandless magic would work. She had excelled in her classes in wandless magic this year, but that was against simple situations. Not doors that were likely warded.

She felt her spell bounce back harmlessly from the door, the wards around it completely unharmed. (You won't escape.) Oh *god*. Hermione felt the door, feeling for the magic of the wards, and recoiled as if she had been burned. They were some of the strongest wards she'd ever encountered. Even the ones that Bill showed her that protected the Burrow that he had spent years and years setting up with the most obscure Egyptian curses and wards paled in comparison to what surrounded the door. She truly had no hope. She couldn't escape. And nobody would come and rescue her. Even if they did (and they wouldn't) it would take months to get through the wards on the door, maybe even years.

Hermione slowly dragged herself over into her bed, and curled into herself, sobbing for the hopelessness of it all. (But is it really that bad, being stuck here?)

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Draco came back into the room a couple of hours later, after he had sent a house-elf to make sure that Hermione was deeply asleep. She was caved in on herself, shivering and uncovered by blankets. Draco shook his head. Hermione was far too stubborn sometimes. But that was something he loved about her. As always, when he laid down next to her, she burrowed herself into his chest. Draco pulled her in close, covering the two of them in blankets. He idly stroked her hair, twirling the locks within his fingers.

“I’m not going to be able to visit you while you’re awake for the next little bit, darling,” he murmured, “It’s not a punishment, I promise, I’m not angry with you, love. It’s not your fault that the world has poisoned you against me, against us. Potter and the Weasleys deserve nothing less than hell for making you think that I would *ever* hurt you. The Dark Lord promised me a go at Potter as long as I don’t kill him, in retribution for how he’s turned you against me. And Weasley? He’s all mine. If you want, I’ll give you his heart, once he’s dead. It’ll take a while once I capture him, I’m going to play with him for a long time before I grant him the mercy of death. If you’re ready at that point and if you want to, I’ll let you get your revenge on him as well. For keeping you from me. I’m not sure though that you’ll want to torture him, even when you hate him. You’ve got such a big heart, love. I’ll never force you to do anything you don’t want to do.”

He breathed in deeply the scent of her. Lavender and vanilla. Perfection. “You’re ever so loyal, darling, even when those who hold your loyalty don’t deserve it. That’ll be the first thing that I’m going to have to do - show you that they don’t deserve it. That *I* do. I want to possess your loyalty, your thoughts, your words, your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body, love. Everything that you are. And I will. I’ll possess you, just as much as you possess me. It’s terribly funny how you think you’ll still hate me in three months. I’d be surprised if you lasted the month, no matter how much you try and cling to your hatred.”

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Hermione awoke to an empty room. This time, Malfoy *wasn’t* sitting in the chair, watching her creepily. (Where was he?) Good. (Where was Draco?) Instead, what occupied the chair was a thick book. Hermione approached it, wearily. She picked it up, and looked at the cover. It read “The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore”.

A picture of Albus Dumbledore was on the front, looking a little menacing. The twinkle in his eyes looked almost...sinister. Hermione rolled her eyes. This was stupid. (Was it?) The image was probably manipulated to look bad. (But he had always made you nervous as a first-year, though, didn’t he?) Sure, he had always made her feel a bit nervous as a first-year, but she had always been a little nervous around authority figures. She had always wanted to make them proud of her. To prove that she was good enough.

A note fell out of the pages and onto the ground. Hermione picked it up, scanning it quickly.

Read this book and you'll be free to explore the rest of the Manor

-DLM

(Read it.)

Ha! If Malfoy thought he was going to get her to read this book that he *obviously* wanted her to read, he had another thing coming. (Read it.) She almost threw the stupid book at the wall, wanting to tear out the pages, but even if the book was full of lies and slander, the book-lover in her couldn't let her do that. (She didn't want to do that.) Every book, no matter *how* awful and stupid deserved to be treated with respect. (This book deserved to be treated with respect.) So she wasn't going to destroy the book, but she wouldn't read it either. (Read it.) She wouldn't. (Read it.) Sure, she loved to read, but she wasn't going to fall for this stupid trap. (Read it.) No, today she was going to search the room again for any hidden compartments or keys or *anything*. (Read it.) Just a way to escape this godforsaken place. (There wasn't.)

The next time she woke up, it was day. Unfortunately, she couldn't see the position of the sun, so she couldn't tell if it was a new day, or just later in the day. The book seemed like it was staring at her, daring her to pick it up. (Read it.) She ignored it. (She wanted to read it.) That day, or the next few hours - who could really tell the difference - Hermione searched the room yet again for a way to escape. (There wasn't.)

The next day, when she awoke, it was night. Yet again, she searched the room for a way to escape. (There wasn't.)

The book seemed to watch her, laughing at her, as she collapsed against the wall, her body shaking with sobs. (She wanted to read it.)

The next time she woke up, the sun was out. She counted the tiles in the bathroom, instead of reading the book. (Read it.) Then she counted the planks of wood in the bedroom. (Read it.) Then the thread count on the bed sheets, and everything one could possibly count. Twice. (Read it.)

The next time she awoke, it was night again. (Read it.) She stared in the mirror at her tamed hair and realized that her scars had been completely healed, every single one of them. (Read it.) From the one on her knee that she got when she was five and fell off of her bike to the one that had spanned her entire torso, left from Dolohov's curse and the Battle of Mysteries. (Read it.) It didn't make any sense. (Read it.) Why had they healed her? (Read it.) Why had calmed her hair? (Read it.) *How* had they calmed her hair? (Read it.) The entire bottle of Sleakeazy's that she had used on the night of the Yule Ball didn't even last until the next morning, much less...well however long she had been here. (Read it.)

She was surprised that Malfoy hadn't come back. Not that she wanted him to. No. She *didn't*. Just that it would be different. (She was a little lonely.) She was *fine*. She didn't want to see Malfoy. The book watched her growing boredom that bordered on desperation. (Read it.) Was she going crazy? (She wasn't.)

When she fell asleep, she dreamed of destroying the book. (Read it.) Tore out the pages, shred them to pieces and then burned them. (Read it.) Ripped the cover, and watched it go up in flames. (Read it.) Danced upon the ashes. (Read it.) When she woke up, she wanted nothing more than to wholly and completely eviscerate the book, but held herself back. (She wanted to read it.)

Was it days or weeks that she had been locked in here, all alone? (Read it.) She couldn't tell by the number of meals she took. (Read it.) She just knew that they only arrived when she was hungry. (Read it.) At first, she wouldn't eat. (That didn't last long.) It could've been poisoned. (She knew it wasn't.) Even when she was hungry, she didn't eat all that much. (Read it.) And she couldn't base her guesses off of how many times she had slept, as she'd lost count what seemed like ages ago. (She didn't want to keep count. Every time that she tried, she made sure that she forgot.)

The next morning, when she woke up, Hermione decided that she would read the book. (She read it.) She wasn't reading it for Malfoy. (She was.) It wasn't like it would change her belief system or anything. (Would it?) No harm ever came from reading a book. (Did it?) Just because Malfoy wanted her to read it, it didn't mean that it meant anything. (He wanted her to read it. She wanted to read it. For him.)

It wasn't filled with obvious lies, as she had expected.

(It was bad.)

Dumbledore killed his sister. (It was bad.) He was friends with Grindelwald, lovers even. (It was bad.) They had practically come up with Grindewald's entire plan together. (It was bad.) He had always claimed he wanted equality, but he *lied*. (It was bad.) Was *that* why she was the only Prefect that was a muggle-born in her year and the year above? (It was bad.) Was *that* why there hadn't been a muggle-born House Boy or House Girl since Lily Potter? (It was bad.) He manipulated people. (It was bad.) He had wanted to take over the world. (It was bad.) He'd always hated the Slytherins for no reason. (It was bad.) Maybe he was the reason there were no Muggleborns in Slytherin (It was bad.)

Was it why he'd always meet with Harry, a half-blood, but never her, even though she was the top of the class? (It was bad.) Was it why *Harry* was his protege? (It was bad.) Was it why Harry could play on the Quidditch team during first year? (It was bad.) She couldn't imagine a *Muggle-born* being allowed to do it. (It was bad.) Was that why Ron was a Prefect as a Pure-blood, over Dean Thomas, a Muggle-born who had the second-best grades in Gryffindor? (It was bad.) Was it why he made sure Ginny, a Pure-blood, was okay after the Chamber of Secrets, but not her? (It was bad.) Hadn't Hermione just been Petrified? (It was bad.) Was that why there were no Muggle-born teachers at Hogwarts? (It was bad.) Was that why Professor McGonagall had looked at her a bit patronizingly in career-advice in fifth year when Hermione had said that she wanted to be Minister of Magic? (It was bad.)

He lied. (It was bad.) He manipulated people. (It was bad.) He used people and didn't care about what happened after. (It was bad.) He used her. (*He* was bad.)

She didn't like Dumbledore. (She hated him.) Dumbledore hadn't liked her. (He hated her.) He wasn't a good person. (He was evil.)

And at least with Malfoy, this didn't mean anything at all. (It did.) Just because he was right about this didn't mean he was right about the rest of any of it. Not about Ron or Harry or Ginny. He didn't know them, not like she did. (Did she really know them? She thought she had known Dumbledore.) And she had so many good memories with them. (She had lots of bad ones too.)

She hadn't noticed, caught up in her thoughts that the door, as promised, had opened. (Go find *him* . Take the book.) When she left the room, she brought her book with her without really thinking about it. (It was a good book.) She wanted to see what the rest of the Manor was like. (And well maybe, if she ran into Malfoy, she might talk to him.) If she saw Malfoy, she might talk to him. Probably not though. She still despised him wholly and completely. (Not really.) But she was terribly lonely.

Chapter End Notes

Lmk if there are any issues you find or questions you have. I just also wanted to thank all of you for the amazing response I've gotten to this in such a short time.

Undesirable Numbers One and Two

Chapter Notes

Reminder of the tag 'unreliable narrator'. Neither Draco nor Hermione are completely reliable as narrators, although I'd say Draco is somewhat more reliable.

Also, with Hermione's anxiety, it is not anybody's fault. Harry and Ron (at least in this story) are good friends. Hermione is just overthinking and her anxious thought patterns have convinced her that nobody likes her when this is far from the truth. Draco doesn't understand that Hermione has anxiety and that this isn't anybody's fault, so he blames her anxiety and her anxious thought patterns on Harry and Ron. He also uses her anxiety to manipulate her - people with untreated anxiety, or at least the kind of anxiety I'm portraying, want nothing more than to be reassured that they're loved and accepted constantly. That is something that Draco is going to be seemingly offering Hermione, so it's something that she's going to gravitate towards.

Okay so now that's out of the way, here's your chapterly reminder that Draco is not a good person!

Draco was alerted by the wards the moment that Hermione had finished the book and the door swung open.

It had only been five days since they had made the deal, but due to her erratic sleeping and eating patterns, Draco was almost certain that Hermione was completely unaware how much time had passed.

The first day, she had destroyed the room quite thoroughly no less than three times. While she was asleep, a house-elf cleaned the room, something that had seemed to thoroughly irritate her. After the third time of destroying the room, she had dissolved into tears and Draco wanted nothing more than to hold her and comfort her and whisper soothing words into her ear. But he himself back, as she wouldn't welcome that yet. Because of Potter and Weasley. Every single ounce of pain that she would suffer in her healing process, Draco would return it tenfold to the two Gryffindors.

The next day, she had counted everything in the room. And then the two days after that, she had seemingly done absolutely nothing. Then, on the fifth day, she read the book. Finally. She tore through it, devouring the contents of its pages. Draco made a mental note to send Pansy a thank-you note for the book.

Draco had relocated to the library, figuring that once she finally left the room, she would try and find the library first, like a moth to a flame. He wasn't disappointed when she wandered into the library perhaps a few hours later. He grinned to himself - he knew her better than

anyone. Enough to predict where she'd go and when. He knew her better than Potter and Weasley - her so-called friends. While they had been trying to break into the Manor on a nearly daily basis, the two were failing miserably. If the situations were reversed *he* would be able to get to her. But the wards of the Manor easily kept the two out, and without the brains of their operation, Pothead and the Weasel had no idea what to do. Even still, Hermione was *his*, not theirs. He wouldn't let them take her away from him and poison her against him. To drag her into even more situations that would nearly get her killed, as if they hadn't already done far too much of that already. He looked back at Hermione. No, she was going to be staying right where she was. Right where she belonged - with him.

Hermione was so caught up in the grandeur of the room, she hadn't even noticed that Draco lounged on a couch, watching her intently. He drank in her features, how her mouth parted ever so slightly, a small gasp escaping from her lips. How her eyes widened at the display of books, the immense wealth and knowledge at her fingertips. How she was finally in his library, a place he had wanted to show her for years.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Hermione jumped at his voice, her eyes searching for the source before landing on him. "Malfoy," she glared.

"Ah, ah, ah," Draco chided, "What did we say about names the last time?"

"If you think that I'm going to call you Draco, then you're out of your mind."

He shrugged lightly. "Try it out," his smile turned teasing. "You might like it."

"Hardly."

"Did you like the book?"

He watched as Hermione pursed her lips. "It was...informative."

"Care to elaborate?" She shook her head sharply. "Are you sure? I don't imagine that you've ever really gotten a chance to discuss a book intelligently with somebody before."

"I'm not talking with you more than I have to, Malfoy."

"Alright," he said, throwing his hands up in a 'don't shoot' gesture. "The offer stands until you one day decide you wouldn't mind talking about books with someone else who has a brain." She continued ignoring him. "Bet you didn't get that with Weasel or Pothead, did you?" he asked snidely.

"*Don't* call them that." There. That got a reaction from her.

"I can call whoever I want whatever I want, Hermione," he smirked, "I'm a Malfoy."

She spun on him, a somewhat triumphant look upon her face, "Then why don't you call me a Mudblood then? I'm sure that's what you think of me."

Once again, Draco shrugged lightly, smirking as she bristled. "That is a story for another time. If I told you now, I don't think you'd believe me."

Hermione snorted, "As if I'd ever believe a single word that comes out of your mouth."

Oh, she was just so adorable like this, angry and on the defence. "Why not?"

She started sputtering. "Why would I? I've not got any reason to trust you. For all I know, Death Eaters will waltz through the door and torture me."

Merlin, she had spent far too much time around selfish Gryffindors that led her into dangerous situations. Draco saw red, and he wanted nothing more than to find the nearest Weasley, and *crucio* them until their brains leaked out of their ears - not that most of them even *had* much of a brain in the first place. But now was not the time. He had to comfort her, make sure that she knew that she would be safe here. Safe with him.

"They won't."

"How do I know that though?" Hermione demanded, glaring at Draco.

"Because I'm telling the truth," he said, looking her dead in the eyes, willing her to understand. "I won't lie to you Hermione, I never will." Unless, of course, it was for her benefit. And even still, it wasn't like it would be a lie. He was a Malfoy. Whatever they said became a fact, whether it had truly happened or not.

"Uh-huh," she seemed unconvinced. "And how do I know you're not doing it on the orders of Vol-" She frowned as the word got stuck in her throat. "On the orders of Vol-," she paused, glaring at him. "Vol-. *Malfoy!* Why can't I say Vol-?"

Draco imagined her stomping her foot, and almost laughed, but he schooled his features. Now perhaps was not the time to anger her without reason. "There's a taboo on his name, Hermione," he explained. "Whenever somebody says it some entry-level Death Eaters called Snatchers will come and take whoever is found on site. Now, we can't just have Snatchers, dirty as they all are coming into the Manor willy-nilly all for you, now can we? They'd be making the trip all for nothing, and they'd ruin the floors. Mother would be furious," he laughed to himself. His mother would probably hang the Snatchers by their tongues in the dungeon for a week if they ruined her floors. "So I just made sure you couldn't say it, saving us all from the hassle. Slightly modified tongue-tied hex," Draco grinned at her. She glared back. "Anyways, all that to say that it's to catch the members of the little Order you used to be a part of."

"How do you know about the Order?" Hermione shrieked, "And what do you *mean* used to? And how did he put a taboo - he'd need the Ministry wouldn't he?"

"One question at a time, Hermione," he grinned at her, like the Cheshire-Cat. The outline of an idea formed in his mind, and he congratulated himself for his own brilliance.

She scowled at him, huffing out a sigh. "Fine. How did Vol - for *bloody* sake! How did *You-Know-Who* put a taboo on his own name?"

“Ah, ah, ah - information like this is rather exclusive, what do I get out of telling you this?”

“What do you want, Malfoy?”

“Another deal.” She looked at him warily. “For every question I answer, you must spend a day with me in the Manor. We can do whatever, but you must talk to me.”

“Fine,” Hermione ground out.

Draco smirked. He would have her just as she should’ve been her whole life in no time at all. Gryffindor that she was, she would stick to her deal to talk to him. And with all the talking that they would be doing, it would help the Supramorsion on significantly. Hopefully enough so that after the days that she was obligated to spend with him, she’d start spending them with her of her own choice.

While Draco had already been planning to spend each and every moment with her, Hermione having to talk to him hadn’t been guaranteed. While of course, he could definitely goad her into it, but in the long run, it would make everything take longer. No, their deal would speed up the process considerably.

He longed for the day when she knowingly allowed herself to fall asleep tucked into his arms, while he stroked her hair and held her close and whispered sweet nothings into her ear. For when she would cry *his* name in ecstasy and would wear the evidence of his love for her all over her body. For when he would memorize every inch of her skin with his tongue and teeth and hands. For when the center of her universe would shift to him, and she would revolve around him, just as much as he revolved around her. In the meantime, he would just have to wait until she was asleep to hold her in his arms, as the lies and propaganda that she had been fed would make her unwilling to sleep with him holding her voluntarily. It wasn’t as if it would be something she would object to in a month or two, anyhow. No matter whether she knew it or not, she would be by *his* side, with *him*. Just how everything was supposed to be. Draco avidly anticipated the day that she would love the fact that she belonged with him - as well as him with her - just as much as he did. But first, baby steps.

Draco looked up at Hermione, who was looking on impatiently, eager for her questions to be answered. Her thirst for knowledge was even more stunning when it was directed at him, *for* him. “The Dark Lord took over the Ministry of Magic perhaps a week or two ago.” Hermione’s hand flew to her mouth, her lips parted into a perfect ‘O’.

Draco continued on, “Pius Thicknesse is the new Minister, although he’s little more than a puppet on strings, not that the previous Ministers were truly all that different. The first order in office that he had was putting the Taboo upon the Dark Lord’s name. The second and third were naming Pothead and Weasel Most Undesirable Numbers One and Two. Weasley must be ecstatic, it’s the first time he’s ever been close to the top of anything.”

“Stop it!” Hermione snapped. “What do you get out of insulting my friends when they’re not even around?”

“Personal entertainment,” he smirked, snickering to himself at his own insults of Weasley. He would have to relay that one to his friends. Pansy especially would find it hilarious. “And by

the way, that counted as a question.”

She scowled at him. “Bastard.”

Draco laughed, “My parents were very much married when I was conceived.”

She threw her hands up in the air in frustration, “Fine. Fine! Next question, how the hell do you know about the Order of the Phoenix?”

“Oh this is a fun one,” Draco grinned, “You might want to sit down for it; it’s quite a story.”

“I’m fine,” she said, coldly.

“Well then, I just guess I won’t tell you.”

He smirked as she promptly sat. There was his quick little learner. His brilliant witch.

“You know our dear old Potion’s Professor, Snape? Well, he was our Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor this last year, but I still really think of him more as Potions. Greasy old bastard, looks a solid twenty years older than he is, one of the biggest pricks known to mankind - is this ringing any bells?”

“It’s a wonder you and Harry didn’t get along,” Hermione muttered under her breath.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Don’t insult me, Hermione. Anyways, I’m sure you are aware that he was a member of the Order of the Phoenix?” Hermione nodded stiffly. “Yes, well, turns out he’s also a Death Eater.”

“I know *that* Malfoy, everyone knows that he was a Death Eater in the first war.”

“Yes, well - here, how about I start from the beginning?”

“Somehow, I think you’re going to do that no matter what I say.”

“That’s not true,” Draco said earnestly, “Do you want to go in a different order?”

Hermione seemed to think for a moment before she rolled her eyes. “Fine, go chronologically.”

Draco smiled at her. Good. Baby steps.

“So there was this sad little boy who had a muggle father and a witch mother,” he began.

“His name was Severus Snape. He lived in a sad little muggle neighbourhood in a sad little muggle town, living his sad little life. One day, he saw a girl named Lily Evans at his park, doing magic.”

Hermione’s eyes widened.

“Yes, the very same Lily Evans that was Potter’s mother,” Draco confirmed, “Evans was a mudblood, so she knew nothing about the wizarding world. All of her first impressions came through the lenses of our dear old dungeon bat. The two became fast friends, and when it was

time, they went to Hogwarts together. Tragically, they were sorted into Gryffindor and Slytherin, two rival houses. However, they were determined to stay friends. In addition to Evans, Gryffindor received most notably a group of four boys. James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew. James Potter fell in love with the mudblood in their first year, but she didn't like him very much, because of how he and his friends treated Snape. Although, Snape gave just about as good as he got, so the mudblood really didn't have a leg to stand on with that argument," Draco snorted.

"Anyhow, around the same time, Snape realized that he was in love with Evans. While Potter took to declaring his love rather loudly and publicly, Snape kept it a secret, although anyone with half a brain knew it, other than Evans, of course. But still, their mutual love for the mudblood made their rivalry all the much worse. Snape hated Potter because he was rich, popular, and well-liked - everything that Snape wasn't and everything that he wanted to be. Potter hated Snape because Snape was friends with Evans, who wouldn't give Potter the time of day."

"So it went on like this, slowly increasing in intensity, as the Potter and Evans became more and more aligned towards the light, while Snape became more and more aligned with the Dark. It all came to a head at the end of their OWLs exams, when Potter hung Snape in the air by his ankle in front of their whole year. Evans eventually got Potter to stop, but Snape was still pissed. In a fit of anger, he ended up calling Evans a mudblood in front of everyone. Needless to say, that ended their little friendship."

"A year later, in revenge for Snape calling Evans a mudblood, Potter sicced Lupin - who we all know is a werewolf - on Snape on the night of a full moon. Unfortunately, Snape escaped completely unscathed, and unsurprisingly, none of the Gryffindors were punished. Then, at the beginning of seventh year, Potter and Evans became the Head Boy and Head Girl, and started dating. After graduation, they joined the Order of the Pigeons and Snape joined the Death Eaters. Evans and Potter got married, and nothing really changed until the night Snape overheard Dumbledore interviewing Trelawney for the position of the Divination Professor, while he was drinking in the Hog's Head. About halfway through the interview, Trelawney ends up giving a prophecy-"

He was interrupted by Hermione's snort of disbelief. "As if *Trelawney* could predict her way out of a paper bag," she said sharply, "If you're going to make up a lie, at least make it believable."

Draco waved her off. "*Trelawney is* a fraud, at least as far as she's concerned. She has, though, at least on this one occasion given a true prophecy, although she isn't even aware that she did. The prophecy that she gave was the prophecy that you went to retrieve from the Department of Mysteries back in fifth year. Anyhow, Snape overheard the first part of the prophecy, and was stupid enough to run out so he could tell the Dark Lord before he could hear it finish. The part he heard was 'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...'"

Hermione looked at him, her eyebrows flying to her forehead in shock.

Draco shrugged lightly, smirking. "I figured that you deserved to know part of the prophecy. I mean, you did get dragged into going to the Department of Mysteries by your *friends*."

Draco spat out the word ‘friends’ bitterly. Her ‘friends’ were not friends - they were parasites, they were a disease. They dragged her into situations such as these, putting her at risk for their own benefit.

“So, Snape tells the Dark Lord of the prophecy. The Dark Lord realizes that the prophecy had to be about one of two couples that were due to give birth that July - either the Longbottoms or the Potters. The Dark Lord decided that the Potters were the more likely option, and started planning his attack. It was only then that Snape decided to turn tail, because his precious Evans that *he had given up* was threatened. He went to the Order, told them everything he knew, but it wasn’t enough to save his mudblood. Halloween of 1981 rolls around, and the Dark Lord finally got a lock on the Potter’s location. He killed the Potters and then tried to kill Pothead, but for some reason, it backfired,” Draco scowled.

“Dumbledore knew, though, that the Dark Lord wasn’t truly dead. So, he ended up keeping Snape around for when the Dark Lord returned, to be used as a spy. What Dumbledore didn’t factor in was suspicions from the Dark Lord’s inner circle that Snape was disloyal to the cause, and they all slowly iced him out, leaving him with less and less information. But, if they wanted to kill them, they needed proof. The Dark Lord finally got enough evidence of Snape’s wavering loyalty just about a month and a half ago, and took action.” Memories of Snape’s screams rang through his head, and Draco smiled to himself. Snape had gotten everything that he had deserved. Fucking traitor. “Turns out that after enough *crucio* ’s, even the toughest of occlumences’ walls shatter,” Draco said lightly, “Of course, while there was recently a potion just recently developed that would do the same thing, but Snape didn’t deserve something so...painless. And treason and betrayal deserves the worst kinds of punishment.”

“The Dark Lord went through Snape’s entire mind, and discovered every single Order secret that there was. It turns out that Snape was actually quite dedicated to the Order, enough so that he knew just as much about the Order as Dumbledore did. Every plan, every safehouse, every contingency. And it was all for his precious Evans.”

Hermione was staring off far into the distance. “That’s - I...” she trailed off, “Wow.”

“It’s pathetic,” Draco sneered, “Snape couldn’t even properly chase after what he wanted. He let Potter take Evans and then continued to cry and whine and do nothing about it until she was dead.”

“But dedicating your life for someone you love?” Hermione said softly, “That’s noble, is it not?”

Was she honestly trying to see the good in Snape? Oh, she was too compassionate for the wrong people. Draco scoffed, “Maybe, if he could properly do it, but clearly he failed in that, just like he did with everything else.”

Hermione’s face hardened, “Got it. Forgot for a moment there that you were an emotionless prick.”

Draco smirked. Good. The Supramorsion was already taking hold then, if she was forgetting her preconceived notions about him, however briefly it may be. “I believe you had another

question?”

Hermione scowled. “About the Order of the Phoenix, what do you mean I *used* to be in the Order? As far as I’m concerned, I’m very much still a member.”

“It’s been classified by the ministry as a terrorist organisation. You, Hermione, are not a terrorist,” Draco chuckled to himself. His Hermione, a terrorist, like the rest of the Order pieces of shit? No, not at all. “So,” he continued, “You’ve been officially and personally pardoned both by the Minister and by the Dark Lord. So there you go, no longer a member of the Order. And it’s a good thing too. When the Dark Lord got into Snape’s mind, he found out every single member of the Order, and everybody even associated with it. The lists have been posted throughout the Daily Prophet, and Wanted Posters have been released for all members, and they are to be arrested on sight.”

He looked directly into her eyes, trying to stress the importance of what he had saved her from.

“Everyone who is found to be so much as helping a member of the Order is also to be sent to Azkaban. In addition to this, everyone who was a member of ‘Dumbledore’s Army’ is legally obligated to report for a trial to see if they are still loyal to Dumbledore or Potter. If they are found to be guilty, they are to be sent to Azkaban. The direct family members of those who are found guilty must go to the ministry to publicly and legally denounce the family member that was sent to Azkaban, as well as their beliefs, or they will be sent to Azkaban as well. Do you want to know just a few of the names of the people who’ve been arrested so far? I’ll even let you have this one for free, you won’t have to spend a day with me for this question.” Draco needed Hermione to recognise that he had saved her from this. He had saved her from Potter’s field of influence. But they both knew that what he was about to tell her would upset her.

Hermione, his brave little lioness, nodded her head, determined.

“Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour were the first two, although both were killed instead of being sent to Azkaban, as was Alastor Moody. Charlie Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Lavender Brown, Parvati and Padma Patil, Dean Thomas, Cho Chang, Susan Bones, Nymphadora Tonks, Hestia Jones, Oliver Wood, and Kingsley Shacklebolt have all been arrested and sent to Azkaban, and that’s just a small portion of the total number of people who have been sent to Azkaban, or are awaiting trial. We have most of the members of the Order’s location on lock, and it’s only a matter of time before we start going in on them.”

Hermione stood up abruptly, tears shining in her eyes that she was ruthlessly trying to hold back. “I’m going back to my room.”

Sundresses

Chapter Notes

Keep in mind the unreliable narrator tag when it comes to a few things in this chapter! Although most of what Draco says here is true, or at least aligned with 'his' version of the truth.

Hermione lay in the bed, curled in a fetal position, staring blankly at the wall. The sun had risen, and she could hear the birds twittering around outside, but she wanted nothing more than to scream. Scream at Malfoy. Scream at herself. Scream at the weather for being so goddamned cheerful when the entire world had gone to hell. (It wasn't hell.)

Bill and Fleur were dead. Killed. Murdered. Bill and Fleur who had families and siblings and *lives*. Bill and Fleur, who had just sent out their wedding invitations. A tear slid down Hermione's face as her mind flashed back to a memory of Fleur and Gabrielle Delacour singing in French, while Fleur braided flowers into her sister's hair. Of the summer before fourth year, when Bill patiently answered her every question about warding. When Fleur had offered her a tissue in the bathroom during the Yule Ball, while Hermione had been crying her eyes out over Ron. How had Bill given her the extra galleon that she needed at the Quidditch World Cup, when she was just short for a pair of omnioculars, and then refused to let her pay him back. They were gone.

And Moody. Cankerous, grumpy, old Moody, who shouted "Constant Vigilance!" far too early in the mornings at Grimmauld Place. Moody, who would tell stories about his time fighting against Death Eaters in his days as an Auror. Moody, who had a soft spot for Crookshanks, and would let her cat curl up in his lap, while he sat by the fireplace.

And then there were the people in Azkaban. Her *friends* in Azkaban. (Were they really her friends?) Hermione remembered just how much Azkaban had affected Sirius. How he would tell the most melancholy of stories, but only when he was blackout drunk. How he so bitterly described it, the cold northern winds and the salty air that ate away at you from the outside. The damp stone that the cell was made of, and how it seemed to never dry. (Did they deserve that?)

Charlie would be in there. Charlie, whose hands were always littered with scars and his stories full of dragons. Neville, who was her first friend. Neville who always lost his things and loved Herbology more than anything. Oliver Wood, who Harry had always looked up to endlessly. Padma Patil and Susan Bones, who had signed up to join the D.A. without hesitation. Dean Thomas, who was one of the few people who understood what Hermione was saying when she talked of the muggle world. Cho Chang, who Harry had spent the better part of fourth and fifth year mooning over. Tonks, who would visit Hogsmeade when she knew that it was a Hogsmeade weekend for the Hogwarts students, and would buy Hermione

a butterbeer whenever she felt down. Hestia Jones and Kingsley Shacklebolt, who had helped ward her parent's house back in the summer before fourth year, after Death Eaters had shown up to the World Cup. Lavender and Pavarti, with whom she had shared a room with for the past six years. While the girls had never been her *friends*, and they had most certainly hurt her feelings far too many times, Hermione wouldn't wish Azkaban on the pair. She wouldn't wish Azkaban on *anyone*. The prison was just inhumane. A violation of any number of Muggle International laws, in such flagrant defiance of the rules and regulations put in place by the United Nations. Now that they were at war, the Geneva Conventions were now added onto the growing lists of international laws that were being ignored in favour of the violent atrocities being committed.

Hermione heard a knock at the door, but ignored it. She knew that it would be Malfoy, coming to collect on what he had bargained for. Four days of *talking*. A month ago, she would've been certain that Malfoy wanted to talk to her just about as much as she wanted to talk to him - that was to say not at all. (Why did he want to speak to her?) But apparently not. She kept her eyes trained on the wall as she heard the door open and Malfoy come into the room.

"Hermione?"

"What?" she asked sullenly, not bothering to turn around. (Talk to Draco.) Although Hermione wanted nothing more than to simply ignore Malfoy, to never talk to him - much less *see* him - ever again, she had made a deal. (Talk to him.) And she would be damned if she broke her end of a bargain, whether it was with Malfoy or not. (Talk to him. Talk to Draco.) One of the very few things that she knew for certain that she still had left was her word, something she had always prided herself on keeping. (Talk!)

She felt the warm buzz of a diagnostic charm settle over her.

"All of your vitals are fine, and you're not sick. Why are you refusing to get up?" Malfoy sounded almost concerned and Hermione nearly let out a snort. (Was he concerned for her?) Malfoy, *concerned*. Sure. "Are you alright?"

"What do you *think*, Malfoy?"

"Are you alright? You seem upset." (It had been a long time since somebody had ever asked her if she was alright. Her stress and anxiety was always ignored, waved off. "That's just Hermione. Nothing to worry about.")

"Astute observation, Sherlock," Hermione snapped before sitting up. (Why did he care? Why did he care about her feelings, when nobody else did?) Malfoy sat on the edge of her bed, wearing a frown. His eyes searched hers, and he sighed.

"I'm assuming that this is over Azkaban?" he asked.

"Wow," Hermione said flatly, "How did you guess?"

"Why?" Malfoy asked, knitting his brows together in confusion.

Hermione seethed, "I have *friends* that are in *Azkaban* . And three people I've known for at least the past two years have been *murdered*. Why *wouldn't* I be upset?"

"They weren't murdered," Malfoy said simply, "They were killed in battle. There's a difference." (Difference. If it were to be murder, it would have to be premeditated.)

"Not really," Hermione scowled, "How are you not the least bit bothered that people we've gone to school with for six years are in Azkaban for no good reason? Do you not remember how terrible the dementors were in third year?"

"That's why there aren't any more dementors in Azkaban," Malfoy said. *What?* That was a *good thing*. Why was Voldemort (*You-Know-Who*) doing something so seemingly virtuous, when the Ministry of years prior had set Dementors on a school for a whole year? (Was he... were they-?) "The whole place has been remade into communal living for those deemed unsafe to society."

"Unsafe to society?" Hermione echoed in disbelief.

"They follow Dumbledore and Potter, two destructive terrorists who want to lead a violent insurrection against the Ministry. They believe in their ideas, follow their commands." (She remembered what the book had revealed about Dumbledore. That he was immoral, *wicked* even.)

"The Order wouldn't want to be complicit with the Ministry because Vol- because You-Know-Who is *in charge* of it! And how can you throw people into prison for their ideas and their beliefs?"

"Just as easily as they tossed most of the Death Eaters into Azkaban in 1981 for the same reason."

"The same reason?" Hermione started, "You ignorant *prick*! The Death Eaters were actively killing and torturing people!" (Did all Death Eaters kill? Did all Death Eaters hurt people? Were people within the organisation sent to Azkaban, when they were innocent of any real crime? They certainly seemed to all be prejudiced, but were they all criminals?)

"People were sent if they had the Mark, whether or not they had done anything illegal," Malfoy said.

"But they were probably *planning* to."

"So then you agree that we should do something preemptive against the Order, and Dumbledore's Army? Before they start torturing and killing innocent wizards and witches? That sending them to a remodeled, humane Azkaban would be much safer, in the long run?"

"It doesn't matter if Azkaban is humane if innocent people are in there! The Order and the D.A. would *never* do that!" Hermione snarled, "You don't have evidence or proof or even a leg to stand on, you complete wanker!"

"We do, though," Malfoy said smugly. "Remember, the Dark Lord saw all of the Order's plans in Snape's mind."

"That would never be an Order plan," Hermione retorted, "They would never do that."

"Really? It's not like Dumbledore and other members of the Order would break into the houses of suspected Death Eaters and kill them and their entire family in their sleep? Oh - but they *did* do that in the First War."

Hermione faltered. Was he telling the truth? (He was. Trust him.) She shook her head at her stupid question. Of course he wasn't. He was Malfoy. "And why would I ever trust you, Malfoy?"

"Dumbledore wanted to take over the world with Grindelwald and he murdered his sister. Do you really think he would have a problem with killing people on the other side of the war in cold blood?"

"They're not all like Dumbledore," Hermione shot back. (Are they all like Dumbledore?) "Most of them are like Professor McGonagall, and Harry, and Professor Lupin, who are just trying to fight for equality, and to *help* people!"

"Have we forgotten that Potter quite nearly *killed* me in May?" Malfoy countered. (Oh.) "This is the boy that the Order and Dumbledore's Army is supposed to rally around, to view as a leader. Do you still think killing and torture seem all that far off?"

Hermione was struck silent, trying to find a way to defend the rest of the Order, the D.A., and even Harry. "Harry didn't know what the spell meant," she said in rebuttal. (Harry was a good person, right?) She had to attempt to justify Harry's actions, even if she didn't agree with them. Harry was a *good person*. (Wasn't he?)

"Alright, so then he used a spell that he didn't know the consequences of. Then, when I started bleeding out on the bathroom floors within seconds, he didn't try and grab a Professor to save my life. He just stood there, frozen." (Was Harry good?)

"But Professor Snape *did* save your life," Hermione pointed out, "And he was a member of the Order, you said it yourself."

Malfoy scoffed. "He would've let me bleed out, just the same as Potter if he wasn't trying to keep his cover as a Death Eater. No, Snape would've let me die, as would have Potter. Not just for me, but for any person who wasn't a member of their precious Order. *That* is why it was necessary to start putting the members of the Order of the Phoenix into Azkaban, before they could try and kill any more people."

"You're absolutely despicable, Malfoy," Hermione hissed. Was Malfoy seriously trying to convince her that *Harry*, her *best friend*, was a bad person? (But was he? Was Harry a good person?)

"Are you going to continue to insult me?" Malfoy asked, unbothered.

“I don’t know, are you going to continue to brag about putting my friends in Azkaban?”

Draco tilted his head, “ *I* didn’t do any of it myself.”

“Right. Like that’s so much better,” Hermione said sourly.

Malfoy laughed to himself, and Hermione bristled. What part of this was a *laughing matter*?

“As much as I would love to continue this, we’ve got plans for today. Mauve!” Malfoy called out. A House-Elf popped into the room. “Help Hermione into some clothing that would be appropriate for walking around the gardens.”

“Yes, Young Master,” the elf said, nodding its head eagerly. When Malfoy left the room, Mauve grabbed a variety of sundresses, popping to and from the closet.

“Mauve, I’m not wearing any of these,” Hermione said firmly. The dresses that were being presented were beautiful, and something that she would love to wear in *any* other situation. But she was not going to be a little dress-up doll for Malfoy to play around with. (They *were* beautiful though.)

Mauve's tennis ball eyes turned shiny, and she began tugging roughly on her ears. “Why not, Miss?”

“Oh-” Hermione cried out, “Please, don’t hurt yourself, Mauve - I-I just was wondering if there were any pants I could wear or any jeans?”

Mauve's face lightened quickly, and she burst into laughter. “Miss is very funny.”

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “What? Why can’t I wear jeans?”

“Because pureblood witches do not wear pants,” Mauve explained patiently. (What did that mean?)

Hermione snorted, “I hate to break it to you, Mauve, but I am not a pureblood witch.” (What did that mean?)

Mauve burst into a fit of giggles. “Miss is very *very* funny.” (What did that mean?)

“I’m not joking, Mauve, I’m a muggleborn,” Hermione insisted. (What did that mean?)

“Whatever Miss says,” Mauve said, looking at Hermione knowingly. (What did that mean?) “Come, pick out a dress or Mauve will pick for you.”

“I’m not picking a dress,” Hermione repeated, trying to remain patient. (Pick a dress.) It wasn’t the poor elf’s fault that Malfoy was, well, *Malfoy* . (Was Draco Malfoy really *that* bad?)

Mauve's face fell, and she said, “Mauve is a bad elf.” Quick as a flash, the house-elf began hitting her head against the wall, with great sickening thuds.

“Stop! Stop!” Hermione cried out, horrified. Mauve paused and looked up immediately. “I’ll wear a dress, Mauve. Just - please don’t hurt yourself.”

As if nothing had happened, Mauve clapped her hands together, a grin aligning the elf’s face. “Which dress would Miss like?”

Refusing to look at the pile, Hermione just chewed her lip. “You can pick one out, Mauve. I don’t care. Whichever is fine.”

A few moments later, Hermione found herself in a light green sundress that fit her perfectly. The perfect sizing of the dress was not exactly something that Hermione wanted to dwell on, and she pushed it to the back of her mind. She was then shooed out of the door by Mauve, and into the hallway, in front of Malfoy, who was leaning against the wall.

“You look lovely,” Malfoy said, smiling. (He thought that she looked lovely. It felt kind of nice. Was Draco Malfoy...nice?)

“Save it,” Hermione snapped.

Malfoy shrugged lightly, and began walking down the hallway a few paces, before looking back to see if she was following. Hermione, who had been rooted to the spot, glared at him, before stalking up to where he was. This was going to be a long day. (Was it, though?)

Monet

Hermione stared at the painting on the wall. It was clearly a Monet - but that couldn't be right. Because Monet would not have been able to paint a bird that *actually* flew around his painting, while occasionally chirping. Monet could not have made the river in the painting *actually* run, with the light sound of running water that could be heard if one only listened closely enough. Monet had not made paintings where little frogs *actually* leapt around on lily pads, splashing into the water. Because Claude Monet was a Muggle. Wasn't he?

Malfoy would know. (Ask him.) But Merlin, did she not want to have to ask him. She had made her deal that she would speak to him, but she was *not* going to talk to him without his prompting. (Ask him.) Which was worse? Having to speak to Malfoy, or refusing to learn something new?

It had been a day and a half of this so far, with Malfoy dragging her around his grossly oversized Manor today, and part of his gardens the day before. (It was actually really nice.) A day and a half of having to talk with him. To a Death Eater. A Death Eater who was being weirdly kind to her. (Why was he being nice to her?) Why was he being nice to her? If it was a front, it was a good one, because Hermione had been pressing as many buttons as she could, trying to make him crack. But there was nothing. At most, something seemingly sympathetic, or sad, or even *longing* would flash across his eyes. (What did that mean?)

Though, with all of the changes with Malfoy, he was still the same Malfoy, more or less.

He still was irritatingly intelligent - he had always come second in class to her, which was something she had been able to ignore when his wit wasn't on full display, as it was here. (And Hermione had always found cleverness to be very attractive.) Like how in the gardens, she had offhandedly mentioned an obscure Arithmancy theory, and he had immediately caught on, and had given an interesting comment on it, which made Hermione fall into a conversation with him for half a moment. Until reality set in, and she remembered that this was Malfoy. Not someone to talk with about academia. She had abruptly stopped talking, and had ignored him in favor of a rosebush for a few moments, before returning to their walk, this time without the freely flowing conversation.

He was still full of unnecessary (and actually kind of funny) commentary and snark when he spoke. His biting remarks tended to focus on things, rather than people, when she abruptly would glare at him whenever he would start to insult her friends. When he would remind her that he was still Malfoy.

He was still terribly cocky, but the more she unwillingly (was it unwilling if she secretly wanted to know more?) learned about him, he almost seemed to have a right to be as proud of himself as he was. Almost. But not really.

Hermione's attention turned back to the potential Monet. (Ask him.) Fine. Fine, she would ask him. But only because there was nothing she hated more than *not* knowing something. She turned around to find where he was, but Malfoy was only a few feet behind her, looking

at her strangely. (Looking at her fondly.) He raised an eyebrow. *Merlin* , he was infuriating. But she wanted to know.

“Is this a Monet?” she asked finally.

Malfoy nodded.

“How?” she demanded. “Wasn’t he a Muggle? How could he paint a magical portrait?”

Malfoy ambled forward, looking closer at the picture. (Coming closer to *her*.) “He was a wizard. A half-blood - Muggle mother, Wizard father. He sold most of his work in the wizarding world, but he still was fairly active in selling painting works that muggles would be allowed to see.” (Fascinating.)

“That’s absolutely *fascinating* ,” Hermione breathed, before she could stop herself. She folded her arms, holding herself tightly, as if that would make her stop talking to him. As if it would make the words stop flowing from her mouth like water from a stream. What was wrong with her, that talking to Malfoy felt as easy as breathing?

“Do you want to stay in here, or move on?” Malfoy asked.

“Move on,” Hermione replied. It felt far too wrong to be admiring artwork in a private gallery, when there were people in Azkaban. (Why couldn’t she just enjoy it, though?) Even still, the rest of the Manor was just as ostentatiously beautiful as her bedroom and the library was. Hermione had always known that the Malfoys were massively wealthy, but this? This was just obscene. And Malfoy walked through the halls of his home like it was normal. Well, it was for him, she supposed. (Would it be normal for her, one day? Would she stay long enough for that to happen?)

“So are you a fan, then, of Monet?” Malfoy asked, curiously.

“A fan?” Hermione repeated, taken aback. “Malfoy, you are *so* pretentious. When people say that they’re a fan of something, it’s usually like a musician or maybe a movie franchise. Like the Spice Girls or Star Wars. Not a freaking *painter*.”

Confusion was written all over Malfoy’s face. “What in Merlin’s name is a Spice Girl?”

(He looked really cute, taken aback like this.) Before Hermione could stop herself, the corners of her mouth twitched upwards, just for half a second. Unfortunately, Malfoy caught it, and his eyes absolutely lit up. (Pure, unadulterated joy, directed completely at her.)

Hermione scowled. “If you wanted to know,” she said, her voice icy, “You could learn about it in the *Muggle* world. Godric knows you’d never set foot in it, because your head is so far up your arse.”

“Why would I even *want* to go into the muggle world? I’m sure it’s absolutely disgusting and dirty.”

“Could you be *any* more of a prejudiced berk, Malfoy?” Hermione asked. “Don’t answer that. I don’t want to know your convoluted answer.”

“Are you worried that it’s going to make too much sense?” Malfoy asked. (Would it?)

Hermione realised that somehow without her realising, he had come far too close to her while they were walking. She took a large, deliberate, step away from him, and continued on, “No, actually. I mean, it’s not like my *parents* are Muggles, and everyone I knew for the first eleven years of my life were Muggles. Or that I *live* in the Muggle world.”

“Lived,” Malfoy corrected. (Lived.)

“Live,” Hermione said firmly. (Lived.) “I *live* in the Muggle world when I’m not at Hogwarts. What do you even get out of all of this? It’s like you *want* me to win the bet and go free. So why don’t we just save us some time, and you can give me my wand, and let me *go* .”

“We both know that that’s not true, but whatever helps you sleep at night,” Malfoy said, shrugging.

“You don’t know anything, Malfoy. Fuck you,” Hermione bit back.

“Speaking of,” Malfoy said, before he stopped at a door. He opened it, and Hermione peered inside the room warily. It was especially opulent, but in a more understated way. The room was large and spacious, colored in deep greens and black. One of the walls was lined with bookshelves that were filled to the brim, and there were chairs, lounges, and couches scattered across the room. In one corner lay a large cabinet, filled with expensive looking bottles of alcohol. At the very end of the room, there was an Alaskan King sized bed. He smirked. “You can sleep in here whenever you like, Hermione.”

“It’ll be a cold day in hell when *that* happens, Malfoy.”

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The past three days had gone exceedingly well, at least in Draco’s opinion.

The night before the first day Hermione had promised to spend with him, Draco had spent half of the night planning it out into agonizingly perfect detail. While it had been necessary, he wanted to make up for upsetting her by revealing the members of the Order and Dumbledore’s Army that had been captured. Draco had eventually decided that the gardens would be the best place to start, as the flowers were all in full bloom this time of year, displaying a vibrant array of colours throughout the grounds. Yet, despite the immense range in shades, none of them clashed, and all blended seamlessly together.

That day, while he showed her around the sprawling grounds of the Manor, Hermione glared at him the entire time. Still, she kept to her word and talked to him. And, even though the words were hostile and rife with insults, she certainly was speaking to him - something he would take over her ignoring him any day.

And for the first time ever, Draco was grateful that his Hermione was a Gryffindor. She stuck to what she had promised to do - to talk to him. Even though she obviously didn’t want to speak to him, and was currently livid with him, she was talking to him. He, on the other hand,

rarely followed through with his promises if he had no desire to. At the end of the day, there were very few people who Draco would always follow through with on a promise that he made, and Hermione was one of them. Which is why he made their bet unwinnable for her. Now that he had gotten ahold of her, now that she was by *his* side, where she had always been meant to be, he was never going to let her go. But still, he wasn't going to break a promise to her. So the impossible bet was tantamount to keeping his word to her, while keeping her with him.

The second day, Draco gave Hermione a tour of the entire Manor. Just like the day before, they didn't stop in any one place, and although Draco wanted to take his time and to tell her the history of each and every room, they simply didn't have the time, with the Manor being as large as it was. That day, her insults were less sharp and her words less barbed, although she still wore a scowl more often than not.

However, there were moments, that even without his use of legilimency, Draco could tell that Hermione was just starting to crack. For example, at one point, she had spoken to him of her own violation, without any prompting from his part. Of course, it was for her to learn something - it seemed that her desire for knowledge would never be quenched, no matter what situation she was in. And then, there was her first smile for him. While it had lasted no longer than half-a-second, and was contained to the corners of her lips, it was her first one that was for him. *Only* for him.

Then today, they had revisited a small part of the garden. It had been the portion that she had seemed to be the most interested in on the first day, and he could tell that her mind had been brimming with questions, but she had said nothing at the time. Their revisit, though, had been the little extra push that she had needed, and Hermione had caved, and asked a few questions about the ecology of some of the plants in that specific part of the garden. It had developed into something one could call a conversation, before she had shut herself back off again. After that, though, she looked at him a bit less with hostility, and a bit more with curiosity - like he was a puzzle that she was trying to solve. When he dipped into her mind, Draco had discovered that her source of confusion was his kindness towards her.

That had made Draco absolutely seethe internally, before he shoved his anger away via Occlumency, for it to be resolved later. Did she not think that she deserved kindness? Why *wouldn't* he be kind to her? What had her little Gryffindor 'friends' done to her, to make her confused by his kindness? Draco wanted nothing more than to hold Hermione close, and to explain to her the depth of his feelings for her, and how her 'friends' were nothing more than poison-spewing liars. But, Draco knew, however unfortunate it may be, she wasn't yet ready for that.

It was late in the afternoon when Draco had led Hermione back inside, and into the tea room. Like the gentleman that he was, he pulled out her seat for her, before she sat in it. Hermione's brows knit together, and Draco almost chuckled out loud. Of course she wasn't used to manners, when she was used to the *Weasleys*. Well, he was here to rectify that.

"Ivory!" Draco called out. The elf popped in, standing at wait. Draco looked at Hermione. "What kind of tea do you like?"

“Earl Grey, with a splash of milk, and two sugars, please.” Draco refrained from rattling it off, alongside her. It was the exact same as the way that she normally took it in the mornings. Draco had watched her far too many times across the Great Hall, making her tea, and then sipping it, while engrossed in a book.

“And I’ll have what I normally have,” Draco directed to Ivory. The elf disappeared with a pop, and after a few moments of silence, came back, two cups in hand.

Hermione looked at her own cup with unmasked suspicion. “Is there anything in here?”

“Just what Miss ordered,” Ivory said. “Does Miss want Ivory to make another cup?”

“No, I just-”

“It’s alright, Ivory,” Draco said, cutting her off. “Go back to the kitchens, alright?”

“Yes, Master,” Ivory said, before popping out of the room, yet again.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Malfoy, if there’s any potions in here, I swear I’ll-”

“There isn’t,” Draco said. “Do you want me to drink from your cup to prove that it isn’t?”

Hermione wrinkled her nose, “That’s completely unsanitary.”

“Then just trust me when I say that it’s just tea,” Draco cajoled. When she hesitated, he shuttered away his growing anger with Occlumency. “Come on, Hermione, if I would’ve done something to you, I would’ve done it by now. Spiking your tea wouldn’t make any sense.”

“Forgive me for being wary,” Hermione said, her tone turning icy. “It’s not like I was *kidnapped* or anything.”

In his mind, Draco started putting chains around the box that was storing his anger. “Fine,” he said, calmly. “Don’t drink the tea then. I always thought you were far too cautious to be a Gryffindor.”

Hermione shot him a truly frosty glare, before impulsively grabbing the teacup and taking a sip. She paused for a moment, seemingly waiting for any effects to kick in, eyeing him with distrust the whole time. Draco sighed. There wasn’t anything in the damn tea. Why did she have to have such a hard time trusting him? Oh, of course. Potter and Weasley. The root of seemingly *every* problem.

When Hermione had retired to her room for the night, Draco had wasted no time in apparating to Muggle London. The streets were filled with disgusting muggles, and Draco sneered. How his Hermione came from these *animals*, he would never understand.

He wove through the crowds of the city until they started to thin out, and the buildings started to look more and more rundown. And then, there, right underneath a bridge, was a group of schoolboys, that looked to be his own age, sitting in a circle, smoking cigarettes. Draco studied them from afar, looking at each of them carefully. His eyes settled on one, who

seemed to be the leader of the group, who was drinking from a bottle of beer. Dark, messy hair, a wiry frame, and green eyes. All he was missing was a pair of glasses and a lightning scar, but the muggle looked enough like Potter that Draco was satisfied that he would do.

Draco crept up on the group, and quick as a flash, he cast *Sectumsempra* on each of the muggles, with the exception of not-Potter. Not-Potter reared back in horror, his cigarette falling abruptly out of his gaping mouth, and the bottle of beer falling onto the grass, the brown liquid spilling out, as his friends started to bleed out quickly. Not-Potter rushed over to each of his friends, frantically trying to stop the bleeding, but most of them were dead by the time not-Potter reached them. Looking up wildly, not-Potter pulled a knife from his jacket. His feral eyes landed on Draco, who was quickly approaching, and understanding dawned on his face. Not-Potter held his small knife in a way that was probably supposed to be threatening, but his face quickly turned to shock when the knife turned into a quill. While the muggle was caught off guard, Draco stunned him, and grabbed his body, before apparating into the Manor's dungeons.

He pointed his wand at the muggle. “*Rennervate.*”

Not-Potter blinked awake, before his eyes focused on Draco, who was standing over his body.

“What the fuck?” not-Potter screamed.

“Oh, no, no, no,” Draco tsked. “This won’t do. You need to be taught some respect. Now, hold still, or I’ll make this hurt even worse.”

Not-Potter froze in fear. “Look, man, my parents have money. We can give you w-whatever you want-”

“*Silencio*,” Draco snarled. Not-Potter began to gape like a fish, when Draco conjured a pair of round frame glasses and shoved it onto his face. The shock turned to complete horror when Draco conjured a knife. “*Finite Incantatem*,” Draco murmured. Not-Potter immediately started screaming, and Draco sighed. Of course he had had the misfortune to pick a *dramatic* one. “Hold still, and this won’t hurt as much,” he commanded.

Not-Potter scrambled backwards, trying to get as far away from Draco as he possibly could. Draco sighed. Could muggles not understand direct orders from their superiors? He brandished his wand. “*Imperio*,” Draco said smoothly, feeling a sense of satisfaction as the muggle’s brain bent to his will without even the slightest semblance of resistance. “You will be staying absolutely still until I tell you that you can move. You *are* allowed to scream, and beg for your pathetic life.”

Not-Potter did as such as Draco took his knife, and pressed it against the man’s forehead, hard enough to break the skin. Slowly, he carved it in a jagged lightning shape, and stood back, admiring his work. “You may move now, but you cannot try to run or fight.”

Fear finally truly began to settle into not-Potter’s eyes. “What the hell is this? How are you making me do this?” he asked, desperately. “Please, you don’t want to do any of this.”

“Don’t presume to know *anything* about me, you filthy Muggle.”

“Ple-”

“ *Crucio* .”

It wasn’t until four hours later that Draco finally killed not-Potter, before vanishing the body. He wasted no time in *scourgifying* himself, before taking a shower as well, to get the filthy muggle blood off of himself. His anger finally sufficiently abated, Draco snuck into Hermione’s room, and laid down, pulling her sleeping form into his chest.

“I don’t know how you lived amongst such filth for so long, darling,” Draco whispered into her hair. “You should’ve always been here, with me. Where you’ve always belonged.” He kissed the top of her head. “I have a surprise for you tomorrow. A gift, for how well you’ve been doing. I know that this isn’t easy for you, but I promise it’ll all be worth it in the end. Everything will be just the way that it should’ve been all along.”

One Large Oak Tree

Chapter Notes

Just to clear a couple of things up/answer a few questions -

If something is in parentheses and we're in Hermione's mind, she is not aware of these thoughts. They're more in her unconscious, more like instincts or gut feelings, if that makes sense.

As for Draco and how he feels about Hermione - he's never going to see any of her flaws or problems as her fault (not that her anxiety is her fault, anxiety is the fault of nobody, but in the wizarding world, I don't think they have the understanding of mental health that we do here and now.) This is because *he decided that she was the one for him, and since he believes that he has no faults, because in his mind, if she had 'flaws' of her own 'fault', then he wouldn't have 'picked correctly', which would be a fault/mistake of his. Since he believes that he can't make a mistake, there is no way that Hermione isn't perfect. Her 'faults' and 'flaws' are not her fault in his eyes. So every setback that he has, every thing that isn't absolutely perfect about Hermione is the fault of Harry and Ron. They're his scapegoat for when anything goes even the slightest bit off of his plan isn't Hermione's fault, or his fault, or the fault of his family. So it has to be Harry and Ron's fault.*

On the fourth, and final day that Hermione was obligated to talk to Malfoy, he led her into the library.

"I thought we could spend our day here, reading," Malfoy said. (*Our* day.)

Hermione nodded, "Alright."

This was great. She wouldn't have to talk to him. If she was being truly and completely honest, talking to him just made things a bit confusing. (Or a little bit clearer.) She still hated him, of course. (She didn't, not really.) But when they were having conversations, she saw sides of him that she never knew existed. Sides that she begrudgingly thought that she might like. And honestly, Malfoy had been nothing but nice, and almost even charming during her time she had been spending with him. That wasn't even to mention how she'd catch him staring at her and she'd feel...(her heart flutter.)

No. Nope. She was not doing this. (She was.) She was not going to waste her time thinking about Malfoy. (Was it wasting time?) She did not like Malfoy. (Did she?) She hated Malfoy. (Did she?) Malfoy was a prick. (Was he?) Malfoy was elitist. (Was he?) Malfoy was a Death Eater. (Was he *that* bad?) Malfoy would kill her friends and he wouldn't care. Malfoy was

sided with the people who were throwing her friends into Azkaban. Nope. She was *not* doing this. (She was.)

She was going to hate Malfoy until the end of time, and go free and get her wand back. (Would she?) She'd find Ron and Harry, and they'd find the Horcruxes and they'd defeat Voldemort. (Would they?) And then she'd marry Ron, and Harry would marry Ginny and they'd all settle down and raise their kids together and go to family dinner at the Burrow on Sundays. (Why did thinking of marrying Ron make her stomach feel like lead?) And Malfoy would go to Azkaban. (Why did that feel even worse?) And Hermione would still hate him, until her dying breath. (And why did that feel like the worst of all? No. No, she didn't want to do any of that.)

Shoving her thoughts out of her mind, Hermione started walking towards the bookshelves, to look for anything that could help on the hunt, but froze suddenly when she realised she didn't know where anything was. Merlin, she did *not* want to ask Malfoy. But she had to. "Where are the history books?"

"Do you mean books about history or historically significant books?" Malfoy asked from a chair, idly flipping through a book of his own. (He looked kind of handsome, sitting there.)

"Historically significant?" Hermione asked, caught off guard. "What do you *mean* by historically significant?" (Kind of *really* handsome.)

"Come on, I'll show you," he said, leading her to a section of the library where the preservation charms made the air thick with magic. "We've got first editions, original copies, historical documents, all sorts of things. We've got some of Ravenclaw's journals, though they're not all that interesting, the first Triwizard Tournament Contract back from the 13th century, and one of the first books ever written about Quidditch. There's Nicholas Flamel's birth records - although I've got no idea how *those* got in here. Then we've got one of the original copies of the Tales of Beedle the Bard, and loads of letters between various important figures. There's some of the earliest paperwork for Gringotts, and a bunch of other books and documents. But there is one that I think that you would be especially interested in." (He had something for *her*.)

"What is it?" (For her.)

"A first edition of 'Hogwarts: A History'." (Her favourite book, for her.)

Hermione's eyes widened, "Malfoy, where is it? Can I-" (Please, she'd do whatever.)

"You can read it as long as you do one thing, Hermione." (Do it. Whatever it is, do it.)

Hermione glared. What could he be asking for now? "What, do you want my *soul* now or something?" (He could take it. If he wanted to.)

"Nope," Malfoy grinned, "I just want for you to call me Draco." (Call him Draco.)

Hermione buried her head in her hands. "You're kidding." (Call him Draco.)

“Well I guess this book will just sit here collecting dust then...” (Call him Draco.)

God, was he really doing this? (Call him Draco.) She did *not* want to call him Draco. (Call him Draco.) It was bad enough that he called her by her first name. (Call him Draco.) Making it a two-way street would be even *worse* . (Call him Draco.) But what was the harm in it? (There’s no harm in it, call him Draco.) Still, it felt like she was making yet another deal with the devil. (Call him Draco.) She didn’t want to do it. (Do it, do it, do it, do it. Call him Draco. Do it.)

“Fine,” she snapped. “ *Draco* , can I read the book?” (Draco, Draco, Draco, Draco.)

“Of course, Hermione,” (Hermione, Hermione, Hermione, Hermione.) Draco smiled at her. (His smile was beautiful. How hadn’t she noticed it before in school?) “What’s mine is yours.”

What the hell did *that* mean? (Ours. His and mine, and mine and his, and *ours* .) She shook her head. Whatever it meant, it didn’t matter. (It mattered so much.) Draco silently summoned a book, handing it to her with a roguish smirk. (Handsome. It was something she had noticed for years and years, but how had she never appreciated it? How had she brushed it off so easily?)

Somehow, his smirk didn’t bother her half as much as it normally did. (She liked it a bit.) She almost didn’t mind. Almost. And as she read through the book that day, she felt Draco’s eyes on her the whole time, watching her, but it didn’t bother her half as much as it normally would have. (She liked it a bit.) She almost didn’t mind. Almost. And when he walked her back to her room, the conversation wasn’t half as awful as it normally was. (She liked it a bit.) She almost didn’t mind. Almost.

“You know, you can eat in the dining room with me, if you like,” Draco offered.

“I’m good,” Hermione said, although the words lacked the usual level of malice.

“Some other time then?” (Yes. Yes. Yes.)

Hermione wasn’t sure what possessed her to speak, but before she could think, she found herself saying, “Maybe.” But it wasn’t like she was ever going to follow through on that. (But in the back of her mind, she knew that she would.)

The next morning, when Draco didn’t collect her as he had for the past four days, Hermione went to the library. (Was he in the library?) She wasn’t going to let Draco keep her out of it with his general *existence* , even if he *was* in there. (Would he be there?) With any luck, he wouldn’t. (With any luck, he *would* .)

Hermione had grabbed the journals of Ravenclaw off of the shelf, and when she was about halfway through the first one, Draco came into the library and sat down on the couch across from her. (She didn’t mind.) They sat in comfortable silence, each reading their own book, until she had finally finished the last of the journals when night was starting to fall, and yawned. (Talk to him.) She looked over at Draco, who was reading a book of his own. (Talk

to him.) She almost wanted to discuss the journals with him. (Talk to him.) Almost. (Talk to him.)

“You were right,” she heard herself say. “These are terribly dull. You would think Rowena Ravenclaw would write about more interesting things, instead of the daily dramas of the students at Hogwarts and *divination* .”

Draco’s laugh rang out through the library. (She liked how his laugh sounded.) She had never heard him laugh before. She kind of liked how it sounded.

The next day, she moved onto one of the earliest written biographies on Morganna. It was certainly a unique take on the sorceress, and had Hermione wondering if history had been written in a way that her name was unfairly raked through the mud. Hermione closed the book, and looked at Draco, who was on the same couch as the day before, reading another book. (Talk to him.) She wanted nothing more than to discuss the book with *anyone*, but did ‘*anyone*’ include Draco Malfoy? (He had offered to do so before.) She flipped back through the pages, completely stuck onto what she should do. (Talk to him. Discuss the book with him.)

“The offer stands until you one day decide you wouldn’t mind talking about books with someone else who has a brain.” (Talk.) Draco’s words from days ago swam through her mind. (Talk.) She looked back over to him. Why did Draco Malfoy have to be smart? (Talk.) Why couldn’t he have been as thoroughly unappealing on the inside and outside as the Dark Mark on his arm was? (Talk.) It simply wasn’t fair. (Talk, talk, *talk!*)

Hermione snapped the book shut and stood up abruptly, walking as quickly as she could back to her room - away from the library, and *away* from Draco Malfoy. When she was about halfway through the halls, her eyes fell on a door that led to the gardens. Hermione paused, and turned towards the doors, the pace of her footsteps gradually picking up. She tore past the gardens, and through the maze, and out past the open fields of grass that surrounded the Manor. She ran until her lungs began to ache and her ankles throbbed and her knees were weak.

Hermione’s pace slowed, and she took in deep breaths, hunched over, with her hands on her knees. Slowly, the air returned to her lungs, and Hermione looked up. The field of soft grass seemed to taper off only just a tenth of a mile away, where trees began to litter her view, sparsely at first, but the further she looked, the more trees that there were, and it seemed that maybe a half of a mile away, the area turned into something comparable to the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts.

The buzz of magic crept through the air, and Hermione tentatively crept forward, closer to the source of the power. By the time she reached the first tree, a large, sturdy oak, that reached into the sky, the magic in the air practically sang.

Hermione ran her hand against the bark of the tree, and felt the same wards that she had felt on her door on the first day. (Stay.) This - this had to be the edge of the property, where the wards were set. (Stay.) She hesitantly reached out, her fingers trembling, feeling for the line. (Stay.) For the ward. (Stay.) When she touched it, she let out a small gasp of surprise, and jerked her hand back in shock. (Stay.) Hermione looked around wildly, to see if anyone was

approaching. (Stay.) Yet again, she reached out her hand for the line. (Stay.) When she felt it, she uncertainly reached out just a little bit further, and could feel her fingers pass through the wards. (Stay.)

Hermione pulled her hand back, as if she had been stung. (Stay.) She could pass through the wards of the Manor. (Stay.) She could escape. (Stay.) Her breath caught in her throat. (Stay.) Should she run? (Stay.) She wouldn't have her wand. (Stay.) She could use somebody else's, right? (Stay.) But another wand wouldn't work as well as her own. (Stay.) She could use wandless magic, right? (Stay.) But so far, she was really only proficient in a handful of wandless charms, and a few wandless transfigurations. (Stay.) Being able to wandlessly change the colour of an object wouldn't do her very well in battle. (Stay.) She could help in other ways, though, couldn't she? (Stay.) No, she would just be a liability. (Stay.) And that would be *if* she would be able to find Harry and Ron without a wand. (Stay.) She had no idea where they were now. (Stay.)

It was dangerous out there, and people were probably getting hurt. (Stay.) Badly. (Stay.) Wouldn't her friends want her to be safely tucked away from the danger? (Stay.) If the situations were reversed, she would've wanted them to stay safe, stay alive. (Stay.) But she could help them! (Stay. Stay safe. Stay home. Stay.) But - she felt *safe* here. (Stay.) Hermione choked on an inhale. (Stay.) When had that happened? (Stay.) How did she feel safe in the Manor? (Stay.) And - and a large part of her *wanted* to stay. (Stay.) When had *that* happened? (Stay.) What was wrong with her? (Stay.) *What was wrong with her?* (Stay.) Hermione's breathing became shallower and shallower. (Stay.) Was she going insane? (Stay.) Why did she feel safe here? (Safe.) What was wrong with her? (Safe. She was home. She was safe.) There was something wrong with her. (Safe. She was home. She was safe.) *What was wrong with her?* (Safe. She was home. She was safe.)

Hermione pressed her back against the oak tree, trying to hold onto something - *anything*. Everything was just smaller and all closing in on her and tighter and tighter and tighter and tighter and-

Hermione tore at the buckles on her shoes, frantically trying to get them undone. They were too tight. Everything was too tight. Too small. Too close. Too tight, too tight, *too tight* . As one shoe came off, she threw it wildly and began fumbling with the other. Even when that shoe came off, everything was far too small and tight and tight and tight and -

Hermione sank against the base of the oak tree, taking in deep, rattling breaths that didn't fill her lungs with enough air, her hands shaking uncontrollably, and she grasped her hands into the grass, digging her fingers into the soil beneath, and trying to breathe, trying to breathe, trying to -

She couldn't breathe, she couldn't breathe, she couldn't breathe and everything was small and tight and tight and tight and she was suffocating and the sky was too close and the world was falling and closing in on her and she was going mad and -

She was too hot and too cold and shaking and trembling, and shivering and her hands just *wouldn't stop trembling* , and her ears were ringing and everything was just *so bright, too bright*, and her ears were ringing and her hands wouldn't stop trembling, and she was hot and

cold and it was bright and she was too hot and it was tight and hot and cold and couldn't feel, couldn't see, couldn't breathe, too tight, too tight, too tight, too tight, too-

"Hey. Hey, *hey* ," a calm, soothing voice slid in amongst the tidal waves of her thoughts. (Safe.) Too bright and too cold and she couldn't breathe and it was tight and tight and tight and tight and the world was falling apart and her hands wouldn't stop trembling and -

She felt someone's hands wrap around her own. "Hey, it's alright, Hermione. It's alright." Too bright and she couldn't breathe and it was tight and tight and tight and tight and -

"I need you to open your eyes and look at me, Hermione. Can you do that?" Hermione wrenched open her eyes, and it was Draco, and she tried to breathe, tried to breathe, her lungs wouldn't work, it was too tight and -

"Hermione, I'm going to count to ten, and on each number, we're going to breathe in and out together, slowly. Okay?" Too tight and couldn't breathe and shaking and the world was -

"One. Breathe in, and breathe out," Draco instructed, his eyes connecting with hers. Hermione took in a shaky breath. Couldn't breath, couldn't breathe, couldn't breathe and -

"Two. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another shaky breath, but it didn't stick in her throat as much as the other ones did. But it was hot and cold and too tight and everything was blurry and-

"Three. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, that was just a bit less shaky. Trembling and bright and hot and tight and breathe and breathe and breathe and-

"Four. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, that reached the bottom of her lungs. Couldn't breathe and tight and tight and cold and hot and hot and cold and-

"Five. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, that was a little bit fuller. Tight and tight and tight and hot and tight and tight and tight and -

"Six. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, and Draco seemed to come into focus a little more, and she grasped onto his wrists, as if they were a lifeline. They were the only things that were stable, he was the only thing she knew was real right now. Hot and shaking and tight and ringing and-

"Seven. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, and her eyes were glued to him and he was the one thing that made sense and the one thing that was spinning and it was so tight and hot and cold -

"Eight. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, and the tremors in her hands slowed. Tight and tight and -

"Nine. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, and the tremors stopped, and the world started to slow its spinning and tight-

"Ten. Breathe in, and breathe out." Another, and she could finally breathe again, and the world crept back out again, and she no longer felt claustrophobic. (Safe.) "Do you want me to

do that again?" Draco asked, as Hermione's breathing slowly returned to normal.

She shook her head minutely. He smiled softly at her, and looked over her as Hermione tentatively grabbed each of her fingers, one by one, and squeezed them, as if to reassure herself that they were real. That *she* was real. (Safe.)

"I'm going to cast a few spells on you to see how your heart rate is doing, is that okay?" Draco asked. At her shaky nod, he burst into action, whipping out his wand from the holster, and cast a variety of spells in rapid succession. A faint buzz overtook the air, in addition to the hum of the wards, but was far too exhausted to notice or even care. "Alright. I think your heart rate is returning to normal, which is good." Draco paused. "I don't think you should be walking right now, but we should be getting back to the Manor. I can carry you, if that's alright." (Safe.)

Hermione, too exhausted to think, nodded her head. Draco picked her up, carefully, as if he was afraid that she would shatter at any moment. Once she was in his arms, she buried her face into his chest, and clung onto him, onto the one thing that she knew was real. (Safe.) Draco stayed still for a few minutes, as Hermione began to ground herself back into the world. He then turned off, and started to walk back towards the Manor. He carried her in silence, for a while, until Hermione felt a breeze brush on her bare feet, and she looked up, out from where she had buried her head in his chest. (Safe.)

"I took off my shoes. Before you came. They - they felt too tight," she said quietly, looking up. "We should go back and get them. They - they're probably going to be dirty though. I - I'm sorry."

"Hey," Draco said gently, "It's okay. We don't have to go back and get them. You've got other shoes, and I can purchase you another pair if you want me to."

"Oh. Okay, thank you."

A few moments of silence passed.

"I tore up a bit off the grass, too."

"Don't worry about it," Draco assured her.

Another moment.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?"

"No," Hermione said, in a small voice. "Thank you though."

Silence.

"It's... it's just something that happens to me sometimes." She paused. "Nobody else has ever seen it happen before though."

A moment of silence passed. The Manor appeared in the distance.

“When I first started getting them, I thought that I was going mad. And... and usually I think that I’m going mad, when I’m in the middle of one.”

And then another.

“It feels like I can’t breathe and the world is collapsing in on me.”

“Do other people know about them?” he asked.

Hermione shook her head. “No. I didn’t want to worry anyone.”

“What did you do then, normally, to get out of one?”

Hermione took in a breath, and let it go. “I don’t. I just wait until it’s over.”

“How long does it usually last for?”

“Depends. Sometimes ten minutes. Sometimes an hour. Time never makes sense when I’m having one.”

“And how often do they happen?”

“Sometimes a couple times a week. Sometimes once a month. It depends.” The Manor started to grow on the horizon, as they neared the maze. “Thank you, though. For helping me through it. I... I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem.”

“But it *is* - ”

“You are not a problem, Hermione,” he said firmly. She said nothing. “Really. I mean it. I’m sorry it happened to you. That I wasn’t there earlier.”

“Don’t apologize. It’s not your fault that there’s something wrong with me.”

“Nothing’s wrong with you.”

(*Nothing’s wrong with you .*)

“Thank you,” she whispered softly.

(*Nothing’s wrong with you .* She was safe. She was safe with Draco.)

Classical Conditioning, or Pavlov's Dog

Draco watched from the corner of his eye as Hermione slammed her book shut, and fled the library. While that was mildly concerning, he was fairly sure that she was probably just going to go back to her room. She was still in the period of adjustment, and it couldn't have been terribly easy for her. Still, she was dealing with it beautifully so far, and he couldn't have been more proud of her. Of his Hermione. Ten or so minutes passed, and he felt the light buzz of the Manor's Wards across his skin alert him that she had left the Manor.

Draco shrugged it off. She was probably just going through the gardens then. It wasn't that much to worry about. Besides, going after her when she was probably trying to reconcile the lies of the Order with what he had been telling her, how he had been treating her, would just confuse her even more, and he didn't want to overwhelm her.

He returned to his book, until another prickle alerted him that she had gone past the maze. Shit. She was headed towards the wards.

When he had taken her from Hogwarts, Draco had changed the outer wards of the Manor, so that Hermione could enter them freely. Unfortunately, it meant that she could also *exit* freely. Which wouldn't have been as big of a problem as it was now, if Potter and Weasley hadn't been camped out in the woods that surrounded the outer layer of the wards, waiting to kidnap *his* witch. So they could try and contaminate her again, to reverse all of the work Draco had been putting in since June to *fix* her.

Draco grabbed his wand. "Point me, Hermione!" His wand spun in his hand, and Draco followed the direction of the wand, until it started spinning again when he was halfway down the main hall of the Manor. The tip pointed towards a pair of French doors that led to the gardens, and Draco shoved the doors open, not slowing his pace for a second. The wand spun again, and Draco tore through the garden, and past the maze.

The past two Quidditch seasons, Draco had been Captain of the Slytherin team, and his first action as Captain was that he started making everyone on the team run five miles, every day. While that exercise had been purely an attempt to improve the team, Draco couldn't have been any more grateful that he had started that, as the grounds of the Manor that were protected by the outer wards sprawled out in nearly four miles in each direction. He was able to easily chase after the direction Hermione had gone in without breaking a sweat.

As he cleared the top of a hill, he could feel the buzz of the outer wards. He looked down at his wand, to see if it had started pointing in any other direction, but it stayed stubbornly straight. Then *there*. There was his Hermione, collapsed against a tree. She was *just* on the edge of the wards - another five feet and Potter and Weasley could grab her *so* easily. But worse, even from a distance, Draco could tell that her whole body was shaking.

"Oh, darling," he murmured.

Draco ran the rest of the way, and neared Hermione cautiously. Her breaths were more like rattling gasps, and it seemed to take all of her energy for her to breathe.

“Hermione,” he called softly.

She didn’t look up, still caged in her own personal hell.

“Hermione,” he repeated, a little louder. Still, there was no response.

Draco crouched down, so that he was at level with Hermione, and placed his hands gently on her arms. “Hey. Hey, *hey*,” he said softly, trying to soothe her. He looked down at her hands and realised that they were shaking relentlessly. Draco put his hands around hers, trying to stop the trembling.

“Hey, it’s alright, Hermione. It’s alright.” He took in a deep breath. “I need you to open your eyes and look at me, Hermione. Can you do that?” Her eyes flew open, locking on his face, although they seemed to be far away. He dipped into her mind ever so slightly, and was barraged by a hurricane of incoherent thoughts. The only one that made sense was her desperately trying to breathe.

“Hermione,” Draco said slowly, “I’m going to count to ten, and on each number, we’re going to breathe in and out together, slowly. Okay? One. Breathe in, and breathe out,” he said gently. Her eyes seemed to finally lock in on his own, and they seemed to calm, if only just a bit. Hermione took in a breath that was more coordinated than the desperate gasps of moments ago, although her breath was shaky at best. “Two. Breathe in, and breathe out.” Hermione breathed in again, this time, a little more stably. “Three. Breathe in, and breathe out. Four. Breathe in, and breathe out. Five. Breathe in and breathe out.” Her breaths started to stabilise. “Six. Breathe in, and breathe out.” On six, Hermione’s eyes focused on his own, and relief washed over her. She grabbed at his wrists frantically, clinging onto him like she couldn’t bear the thought of letting him go. “Seven. Breathe in, and breathe out. Eight. Breathe in and breathe out. Nine. Breathe in, and breathe out.” On eight, the trembling in her hands began to slow, and on nine, they stopped. “Ten. Breathe in, and breathe out.”

Draco dipped into her mind, and this time, it was much more clear, much more coherent, but she was absolutely exhausted. Draco drew out of her mind. “Do you want me to do that again?” he asked.

She shook her head, just the smallest amount. Draco smiled softly at her. She was alright, she wasn’t hurt. That was what was most important. The next item of business was figuring out if Potter and Weasley had heard what had just happened.

Draco looked up, searching the woods for any sudden movement, and to his horror, he saw two figures begin to emerge from the trees. Potter and Weasley. *Fuck*. He needed to do something about that. While they wouldn’t be able to get through the wards, they would be able to make noise, alerting Hermione to their presence. They would then spew their poisonous lies and try to turn Hermione against him, and that simply wasn’t an option.

“I’m going to cast a few spells on you to see how your heart rate is doing, is that okay?” Draco asked, maintaining his calm. He didn’t want to alert her that there was something approaching from behind her that needed to be taken care of, so acting as normal was paramount.

The moment she nodded, he immediately took his wand from his holster, and cast a non-verbal *Silencio* around the area, so that Hermione wouldn't be able to hear the two Gryffindors. Then, he shot a quick *Expulso* at them, causing them to slam backwards into the trees. That bought him some time. He returned his attention to Hermione, checking her vitals for anything wrong. Her heart rate, while high, was slowing and returning back to what it normally was, and Draco let out a sigh of relief. Now all he had to do was keep Hermione from *seeing* the two. He looked back at her, and thankfully, she had been anxiously fiddling with her hands, rather than watching what he had been doing. "Alright. I think your heart rate is returning to normal which is good. I don't think you should be walking right now, but we should be getting back to the Manor. I can carry you, if that's alright."

Hermione slowly nodded her head, and Draco picked her up with caution. He didn't want to shock her with any sudden movements back into what he had just gotten her out of, but he *also* didn't want her to be able to see over his shoulder - to be able to see Weasley or Potter, who were currently getting to their feet unsteadily.

The moment that Hermione was tucked safely into his arms, clinging to him with her head curled into his chest, Potter and Weasley started running towards the ward line, shooting spells at him frantically, but each bounced off the boundaries like it was nothing.

As Draco stood up, Potter and Weasley ran into the wards, and were thrown back a few feet. Their screams and shouts were rendered completely mute with the silencing spell, even though they didn't seem to realise. Weasley scrambled to his feet, going red in the face, and began to throw himself against the ward, desperately trying to get through, again and again. Each time the wards would throw the Weasel backwards, with a variety of spells, with increasing increments of pain. The fifth, of course, was the cruciatus curse. Draco watched with a smile as Weasley slammed into the ward the fifth time, and reared back, screaming in pain. He writhed upon the grass, his back arching and his entire body contorting in agony. While Draco would've loved to hear Weasel's screams, now wasn't the time - not with Hermione in such a fragile state. He looked down at his witch, who was still buried into his chest, with no desire to let go - like she was finally beginning to recognise that he was the one who cared for her, who wanted the best for her. Not Potter, and certainly not Weasley.

While Weasley was so stupidly trying to get through the wards with brute force, Potter was throwing spell after spell at the wards, each bouncing off, one after the other. Eventually, Potter got careless, and one of his slicing hexes caught him on the rebound, and slashed diagonally across his face, blood streaming from one of his temples to the lower side of his jaw. Potter tried to stem the flow of blood with a healing spell, but the spellwork was lackluster at best, and the skin only partially knit back together, and Draco could tell that it would scar badly. Draco wanted to laugh - Potter truly would become Scarhead now. Potter looked at his two friends, misery etched across his face; first at Hermione, who was tucked into Draco's arms, completely unaware of anything going on, then Weasley, who had tears streaming down his face, as he cried out in anguish, and then finally back at Draco.

Draco smirked at Potter. '*She's mine* ,' he mouthed, hoping Potter wasn't too dim to not be able to his lips. To his delight, Potter seemingly got the message, and angrily shot one last spell at Draco, before turning back to Weasley, on whom the curse was finally starting to taper off on. The red-headed boy was still twitching wildly, and with one final scowl, Potter

turned his attention away from Draco and Hermione, and towards Weasley, trying to help his friend to stop convulsing.

Draco turned around and started to carry Hermione back towards the Manor. Even still, with her silence, Draco felt triumphant. Here she was, in his arms, awake and wanting to be there. With her clinging to him, unwilling to let go, with Potter and Weasley injured just behind them. While Draco suspected that Hermione would fight this development the next day, it was still a large step in the right direction. With his witch continuing to remain silent, Draco had nothing to do but to think.

What the hell had Weasley and Potter done to Hermione that she was having an episode where she felt unable to breathe, over two months after having last seen the two? How deeply rooted were the insecurities that they had planted? And then they dared to try and come and steal her away, for what? Just so that they could make it worse? It was one of their worst offenses yet, and it had taken everything in Draco to just let the two of them live in relative peace. Draco took at least solace in the knowledge that he and his Godfather and family would punish the two to the extent that they deserved the moment that Draco returned to work.

After a while, Hermione finally looked up, and started tugging on a lock of her own hair. "I took off my shoes. Before you came. They -they felt too tight," she confessed, her voice soft. "We should go back and get them. They - they're probably going to be dirty though. I - I'm sorry."

No - there was no way that they were going back there, not while Potter and Weasley were prowling about. "Hey," Draco said gently, "It's okay. We don't have to go back and get them. You've got other shoes, and I can purchase you the same ones again if you liked that pair."

"Oh. Okay, thank you."

Why did she seem so embarrassed that she had discarded her shoes? He could buy her thousands of pairs of shoes, just to make her happy. He could afford it easily. He was a *Malfoy*, for Merlin's sake, not a *Weasley*. That was another thing that he would have to help her adjust to, from only knowing the Weasleys as a wizarding family. It was like comparing a gnat to a tiger - one was quite obviously better than the other, as it was deemed by nature. And as such, it was a sin against nature that a family of *gnats* would try to drag a tigress down to their level, to keep her ignorant of what nature intended.

Hermione, after a bit of silence, spoke again. "I tore up a bit off the grass, too."

"Don't worry about it," Draco assured her. A moment later, a memory flashed into his head; of the time when Hermione had been crying on the seventh floor. It seemed far too similar to what had happened for Draco's liking. Was this a common occurrence? Had Weasley and Potter caused her to go through this more than just this once? What had they *done* to her? How badly had they hurt her? "Do you want to talk about what happened?"

"No," Hermione said, in a small voice. "Thank you though."

Was she still protecting her abusers? The two pathetic excuses for wizards, that had caused her so much strife? What had they told her, what had they conditioned her into believing?

“It’s... it’s just something that happens to me sometimes.” She paused. “Nobody’s ever seen it happen to me before though.”

Draco stared stonily at the approaching Manor, as he fantasised about ripping Potter and Weasley’s poisonous tongues out of their heads.

“For a while, at first, I thought that I was going mad. And... and usually I think that I’m going mad, when I’m in the middle of one.”

They had made her think she was going mad? That she was the one in the wrong?

“It feels like I can’t breathe and the world is collapsing in on me.”

“Do other people know about them?” he asked. Did Weasley and Potter even care about the damage that they had done?

Hermione shook her head. “No. I didn’t want to worry anyone.”

Draco blew out a breath, composing himself. She didn’t want to ‘worry anyone.’ She didn’t want to ‘raise a fuss’. She didn’t want to be a ‘burden’ on the two that had put her in this position in the first place. When she was easily worth a hundred of them.

“What did you do then, normally, to get out of one?”

“I don’t. I just wait until it’s over.”

Draco seethed. She just normally had to sit them out? To feel as if she was unable to breathe?

“How long does it usually last for?”

“Depends. Sometimes ten minutes. Sometimes an hour. Time never makes sense when I’m having one.”

They put her through that, for ten minutes to an hour at a time, without break?

“And how often do they happen?”

“Sometimes a couple times a week. Sometimes once a month. It depends.” Draco suddenly had to control his anger as they passed by the maze. A couple times a week, they put her through this hell? Her voice cut through his cloud anger. “Thank you, though,” Hermione said quietly, “For helping me through it. I... I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem.”

“But it *is* - ”

“You are not a problem, Hermione,” he said firmly. Hermione didn’t respond. “Really. I mean it. I’m sorry it happened to you. That I wasn’t there earlier.” And he meant it. Draco was sorry that he hadn’t been able to rescue her sooner. That he had allowed her to be left with Potter and Weasley for that long.

“Don’t apologise. It’s not your fault that there’s something wrong with me.”

“Nothing’s wrong with you,” Draco promised. How did she not realise that she was perfect, just like him? That it only made sense for the best wizard and the best witch to be madly in love?

“Thank you,” she whispered softly.

When Draco deposited Hermione into her bed, she fell asleep almost immediately, completely exhausted from her episode. For a few minutes, Draco sat on the edge of her bed, watching the gentle rise and fall of her chest, how her forehead relaxed, and her face released the tension that it had been holding. She looked peaceful. Just how she should look at all times. Just how she *would* have looked at all times, were it not for Weasley and Potter.

Making sure not to disturb her, Draco got up quickly, and left Hermione’s room closing the door behind him. He stormed to his father’s office, and sat down, grabbing the nearest quill and parchment, and began to write furiously. He wanted to get this letter written as quickly as possible, so he could go into the nearest town and take out his anger at Weasley and Potter on one of the muggles. There were just a few more months until he would finally be allowed to get his hands on the pair, but his rage from their actions had to be sated somehow.

Dear all,

First, I would like to send my love to all of you. I miss you all, and I am hopeful that I will be able to see you again soon, and to officially introduce Hermione to our family. I know that you all are anxious to meet her properly, as I am for her to meet you.

Unfortunately, there was a slight bump today. Nothing truly detrimental, but all the same, a bump. At one point today, Hermione had an episode, where she began to tremble, and seemed like she was trying very hard to breathe, but couldn’t get in enough air. Afterwards, she confessed to me that this was a common occurrence, that took place as often as multiple times in one week. I have no doubt that these episodes were caused by the influence of Potter and Weasley in her life, although she claims that they have no knowledge of these episodes. They have seemingly thoroughly lessened her self-worth to the point of non-existence. Mother, I’m sure that you would be able to instill the self-confidence in her that is befitting of a witch of her caliber. I have no doubt that this will become your latest project once I am able to introduce you and Father to her. While this was just another item of a long list of sins that the two have committed, I’m sure that we will be able to punish them accordingly.

However, this episode was not the cause of my letter. When Hermione had her episode, we were outside, on the edge of the outer-wards. As you know, Potter and Weasley have been camping out in the woods upon our property, just outside of our wards. Hermione unknowingly alerted Weasley and Potter to our presence, and the two came rushing out, to try and steal her away. Luckily, she was completely unaware of them, as her back was turned

to them, and I had thrown up a silencing spell, so that we wouldn't be able to hear them either.

While they now definitively know that Hermione is where they suspected her to be, this isn't a problem. They won't be able to break through the wards any more successfully than they have been attempting to do on the daily - that is to say, not at all. The only way that this could potentially affect anything would be if Potter and Weasley were able to manage to communicate to the Order Hermione's location. While the Order would be incredibly easy to fend off, it would be an unnecessary waste of time, and some of their members would die, instead of being sent to Azkaban, which would be a bit of a waste. I believe that the best way to combat this would be to intercept any form of message that the two would try to send. I would do it myself, but I do not want to leave Hermione alone for very long after an episode like this, lest she have one again.

In more positive news, and something that I hope will make you all laugh, Weasley threw himself against the wards - and was thrown back no less than five times. Of course, you all know what the penalty was for forcibly trying to get past the wards five times in such a short time span. As for Potter, a spell caught him on the rebound, and managed to slice his entire face. While I unfortunately could not hear either of their screams, the visuals were thoroughly entertaining nonetheless, and Weasley's face turned shades of red that I did not think could be possible. Father, you owe me a hundred galleons, as it seems that Weasley has never been under the influence of a Crucio before today, although I do find it surprising that nobody has found him annoying enough to hit him with one him up until this point. Still, if his reaction today was of any indicator, he will be truly fun to break, and I hope that gives you all something more to look forward to. Aunt Bella, you'll just adore the way that he shakes even after the curse has ended - by the time I left the two, he was still twitching worse than Pettigrew.

On a related note, I also believe that we could try an experiment on Weasley as well. Mother and Godfather, I'm certain that you would enjoy conducting this experiment, and I look forward to pursuing more cutting-edge knowledge alongside the two of you. I was struck with inspiration when I saw how his face contorted in agony, and I thought to myself, would there be a way to condition someone into feeling the pain of the cruciatus each time the word 'crucio' is uttered, whether or not the spell is actually cast? Theoretically, it could work, as the curse only affects the neurons, causing the sensation of pain to be given by signals from the brain. I believe it would be an interesting hypothesis to explore, like a continuation of Pavlov's dog. Just something to think of.

I look forward to seeing you all as soon as we are able to, and I hope you all are doing well.

All my love,

Draco

Romeo and Juliet

Chapter Notes

This is one of the first chapters I wrote for this fic, and as you can tell by the title, it is the namesake of For His Juliet. Originally it was my Chapter 7, but I kept adding in chapters in between to flesh things out and for plot purposes. I had originally intended for this fic to be about 20-25 chapters, but I can tell you for a fact that that's not happening anymore. But you all seem to be enjoying reading this just as much as I enjoy writing this and the response has been wonderful, so I hope you all won't mind that this fic will be longer than I originally estimated ;)

Also, in a response to a few comments I've been getting - Ron and Harry are wonderful friends. Hermione just views everything through a different lens because of her anxiety, and when she is narrating, and we're in her head, it's portrayed as being the truth, because to her, that *is the truth. She truly does think that they care more about each other than they do about her, and that they secretly dislike her. These thoughts are generated by her untreated anxiety, as her insecurities of feeling as if she isn't enough is exasperated by minute actions that truly don't mean anything, but she overanalyses them, and her anxiety twists it into something that it isn't. She craves constant reassurance and constant positive feedback, something that Draco is giving her, so that's pulling her in as well, on top of the potion, and the constant closeness. If you have any questions, I'll try and answer them as best as I can in the comments.*

Hermione's being tugged between two extremes, so she's going to be a little bit emotionally all over the place in this chapter. Also, another reminder that whatever Draco says to Hermione might not be entirely true, or key parts and facts might be missing, in order to achieve what he wants. To him, the truth is flexible.

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

The next day, Hermione stayed holed up in her room. She didn't want to go out - to see Draco. To face someone, anyone, who had seen her in her weakest moment. She had always been able to keep herself composed in front of others. She had never had to know that someone had seen her when she was a weak, pathetic, trembling mess. (Nothing's wrong with you.)

But Draco had been so *nice* about it. (Draco was always so nice to her.) He had helped her. He didn't look at her like... like there was something *wrong* with her. She had always thought - no, she had always *known* that anybody who caught her in the middle of an episode would think that she had gone mad - that they would send her to St. Mungos and she would be locked up there for the rest of her life. (But he didn't.) But Draco didn't seem to think that she was mad. He had told her that she wasn't a problem. He had *promised* her that there was nothing wrong with her. Nobody had ever told her that before. Nobody had ever assured her

that she wasn't a problem or a nuisance, or nothing more than a second thought. Even if that was all she had ever felt like. (She wasn't like that to him.)

And Merlin, she had never realised just how much she craved to hear those words until Draco said them to her. (He cared. He actually liked her. Someone actually definitely liked her, without being frustrated or annoyed by her.) He had told her that he was *sorry*, even, for not being there sooner. Nobody had ever known about her episodes before, nobody had ever tried to help her. (If they had known, would they have helped her? Would they have cared like Draco did?) She had always kept it hidden from them, from everyone, but she had never told Draco about them before either, and yet he sprung to help her the moment he saw her. He didn't judge her or pity her, and it didn't feel as if he wanted to be somewhere else. (They would've judged her, pitied her. They would've wanted to be elsewhere.)

And when he had held her, he hadn't minded that her tear-stained face was buried in his shirt, the saltwater probably ruining whatever expensive material it was made out of. (He cared about her. He made her feel safe.) He had just held her closer, allowed her to cling onto him, the one thing that she had known was real. (He was real. He was safe.) He had felt so... so *safe*.

The next day, Hermione went to the library, after much deliberation. Would Draco still feel the same way as he had when she got to the library? Would he still care for her, tell her that there wasn't anything wrong with her? But Hermione told herself that she was a Gryffindor, and she was going to be brave. (Draco would still care.) Even still, as she walked down the halls towards the library, she was filled with worries that he wouldn't want to see her, that he would have stopped caring, that he would think she was mad.

When she arrived, Draco was already there, waiting on her. A smile broke out onto his face. (He still cared.) A rush of relief fell over Hermione like a blanket. He still cared.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked. (He cared.)

Hermione gave him a small nod. "Yes. And...thank you, again. What you did, well, it really helped."

"I can do the same thing for you should it happen again," Draco said.

"I wouldn't be bothering you?" Hermione asked, nervously.

"Oh, Hermione," Draco murmured, "I don't ever want you to ever have to go through that alone, ever again. I don't want you to think that you're a problem or a burden or that there's something wrong with you, Hermione, because I promise there isn't."

"That would be nice," she said quietly.

He smiled again at her. "So, are we back into history again today then? Did you like the Morgana book you were reading two days ago?" he asked.

Hermione flushed, thinking back to the reason she had stormed the library in the first place. Not being sure if she had wanted to talk to Draco about the book or not. "I did. I - I thought it was truly insightful. I never thought that Morgana had been seen as somewhat of a heroine."

"Ah, yes. I've always found it very interesting to read different biographies on Morgana, written in different times. She was actually quite revered up until the late 1700s, when a group of witches used her as a symbol to try and get equal rights in the wizarding world. The group of witches were demonised by the Ministry, and in turn, so was Morgana, along with the magic that Morgana used. It was classified as 'Dark Magic', and made illegal by the Ministry. At first, it was only on rituals, which they found to be 'Dark', because some of the ingredients used were taboo. But the rituals were usually pre-emptive for diseases, and performed on children, so that they wouldn't get the disease in their lifetime."

"Like a vaccine?" Hermione asked. She realised Malfoy probably didn't know what a vaccine was. "Oh - a vaccine is like a -"

"It's alright, I know what a vaccine is," Draco said. Hermione furrowed her brow, confused. "My Mother and my Godfather have always been interested in science, Muggle or otherwise, and so I grew up learning all about it. I've always thought science was fascinating. But yes, the first rituals that got banned could be compared to a muggle vaccine. The most notable ritual that was banned was one that prevented a child from ever getting Dragon-Pox."

Hermione's eyes widened. "I never knew that there was something like a vaccine for Dragon Pox! That makes absolutely no sense - Dragon Pox is the second leading cause of death in wizards and witches over the age of 100, right after old age, because the cure doesn't work on them."

"Exactly," Draco nodded, "But it was 'dark' because Morgana had created it. Over time, more and more of her spells, and spells that she used were classified as dark. There was a sudden sharp increase in the 1948 of the banning of a large number of spells, and rituals were banned altogether. It was one of the first things that Dumbledore pushed for as the head of Wizengameot. He managed to convince the population that any kind of magic that he personally disliked was 'dark', and that anything 'dark' was inherently evil. Ever since the 1700s, when magic began to start being banned, progress and growth within the wizarding world slowed, and by the early 1900s progress barely even crawled forwards. By 1948, there wasn't even that much progress left to stifle."

Hermione's eyes widened. "Can you tell me anything more about that?"

Draco smirked at her expression. "Certainly."

The moment she returned to her room that night, Hermione was suddenly wracked with waves of guilt. Malfoy was a Death Eater. Malfoy wasn't someone to feel safe around or to discuss things with. How had she been able to take comfort in him? What was wrong with her? (Nothing was wrong with her.)

The next day, Hermione intended to ignore Draco, but when she got to the library and saw him, her resolve fell.

“Do you know if there are any Muggle books in the library?” she asked, before scowling at herself. Hadn’t she decided to not talk to him? Well, what was done was done. At the very least, today, she wouldn’t talk to him any more. And if she did, she wouldn’t be nice - because Malfoy was a Death Eater. And what would that say about her, if she went out of her way to talk to him? (It wouldn’t say anything bad. She should talk to him.)

“Of course there are,” Draco grinned. “Why wouldn’t there be any?”

He led her through the winding maze that was the library, and they ended up at a section filled with shelves stacked to the brim with books. Hermione rushed over to the shelves, looking at each in every book in the section, with awe. Merlin, she felt like she was back inside her favorite library in London, back where she had lived. Priceless books lined each of the shelves - rare books, first editions, original copies, all absolutely *perfectly* preserved. *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Little Women*, *Dracula*, *War and Peace*, *Don Quixote*. Manuscripts of Edgar Allen Poe, first copies of Charles Dickens. Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Leo Tolstoy. There were even positively ancient copies of *The Odyssey*, the Christian Bible, the Jewish Torah and the Muslim Quran. But, what drew Hermione in the most, was a shelf full of original actor’s scripts of Shakespeare’s entire body of work.

“Have you ever read any of these?” she asked, turning to Draco. (You can talk to him about these.)

“No, are they any good?” (Read them with him!)

“Are they any good?” Hermione gasped, “They’re some of the best works of literature of all time! You can’t tell me you don’t know any of them? Not even Shakespeare? Jane Austen? Charles Dickens?”

“My father probably would,” Draco shrugged, “He’s rather a fan of Muggle Literature. I’ve never really read any of it.”

“*Lucius Malfoy* loves Muggle Literature?” Hermione shook her head. (Read them with him.) “Whatever. You are *so* uncultured. Come on, we’re going to introduce you to Shakespeare.”

She carefully pulled the script of *Hamlet* off of the shelf, and looked at it with reverence. On the front page, Richard Burbage’s name was scrawled at the top, with a flourishing signature. “These are authentic?” Hermione asked, in disbelief.

Draco nodded his head. “Of course they are. Why would we get anything less than?” He peered over her shoulder, at the script. “Who is Richard Burbage?”

“He was the original lead actor for some of Shakespeare’s most famous plays,” Hermione explained. “Shakespeare even wrote some shows for Burbage to play the lead.” She led Draco over to a couch, and sat down. “Anyways, Shakespeare’s work is written in some of the earliest modern English. He was the first to write down seventeen hundred new words, and invented over four hundred of them himself. At the time, Muggle Scholars believe that

there were only fifty to sixty thousand in the English language, and Shakespeare used over thirty thousand in his writings. They think that Shakespeare knew most of, if not all of them.”

Draco looked at her, bemused. “So what words did this Shakespeare invent?”

“I couldn’t sit here and list all of them off the top of my head, but some words that I do know he invented are cheap, restraint, exposure, countless, informal, farmhouse, moonbeam, leaky-,” her eyes fell on his exposed Dark Mark, and she cut herself off. She was softening to him too much. She had to remember who he was. Even if he made her feel safe, he was still a Death Eater. He was still a horrible person. (But with the way that he was looking at her, she wanted to forget. It was so easy to forget. Why didn’t she just forget?) “I’m rambling,” she said sharply. “You don’t care about any of that.”

“I do,” Draco said, almost tenderly. “I care about everything you have to talk about.”

Hermione pointedly ignored him. (He *cared* .) “Anyways, like I said, four hundred words,” she continued, the bite in her tone a little less sharp than before. “The point is, he was one of the greatest contributors to the English language.” She looked at Draco. “It’s a play, so it’s supposed to be read aloud, and I’m not reading it all by myself. I’ll read for the women if you read for the men.”

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Hours later, when the script was closed, Hermione turned to Draco and asked, “So? What did you think?”

Draco relished her question, her desire for him to enjoy something she had shown him. She was talking to him, asking him questions, starting a conversation with him of her own choice. Obviously, she was still struggling to reconcile the fact that he was a Death Eater with her feelings for him. With how safe he knew that he made her feel, how much he knew she wanted to talk to him. “I really liked it,” he answered.

Hermione’s face lit up at his answer, before she immediately schooled her features. Even still, to Draco, it was a small victory. There she was, smiling for him. Smiling for *only* him.

“What did you think about the Ghost?” she asked, “Did you think it was a demon, or actually the deceased spirit of Hamlet’s father?”

Oh his poor darling. She had never had an intelligent discussion about literature with someone before, something that she so clearly was starved for. It was terribly unfortunate that she had been stuck with the idiots in Gryffindor, especially so with Pothead, Weasel, and Weaselette. Weaselette, who Draco was quite certain had never cracked open a book in the past year, Pothead, who wouldn’t be caught dead in a library, and the Weasel, who probably couldn’t even read.

“His Father’s spirit,” Draco answered, raising an eyebrow. “Why? Do *you* think the ghost was a demon?”

Hermione shrugged, “No, but I think it’s worth thinking about. I mean, Hamlet thought that it was a demon at one point, and the ghost encouraged Hamlet to get revenge, which led to the Kingdom of Denmark being completely taken over by the end of the story. Wouldn’t that be something a devil would do?”

“But revenge is justified in such cases as this, isn’t it?” Draco asked, “Besides, Hamlet was never the smartest, so I’d take his thoughts on the ghost with a grain of salt.”

“Not the smartest?” Hermione echoed, affronted, “How so?”

“Well, he clearly had no sense of self-preservation, and was completely unable to get ‘revenge’ without killing everyone, and himself, in the process. That’s not the ghost’s fault that Hamlet led to the downfall of his own kingdom.” Draco explained.

“Well isn’t the whole point of the story to warn against revenge?” Hermione asked pointedly.

“You’re such a Gryffindor,” Draco said, his tone teasing. Hermione rolled her eyes. “Revenge isn’t the problem, he just went about it stupidly.”

“Alright then, *Draco Malfoy*,” Hermione challenged, “Explain what *you* would do, if you were Hamlet.”

“The problem is that Hamlet took far too much time to act,” Draco stated. “Once he learned of Claudius’s murder of his father, by the ghost, he should’ve asked the ghost a question that only his father would know the answer to. Once he ascertained that the Ghost was indeed the spirit of his father, he should have murdered Polonius in his sleep, and planted two letters in Polonius’s office. One would be a letter sent from a palace guard, who would claim to have overseen Claudius murdering King Hamlet. The second letter would be addressed to Laertes, in which Polonius would write that he had learned of Claudius’s treachery, and that he, Polonius, was going to seek justice. These letters would pin the death of Polonius solely on Claudius. Hamlet could pretend to stumble upon the letters that he had forged, and release them to the public. Then, he could kill Claudius, claiming that it was to be avenging Polonius, as he was the father of Hamlet’s beloved Ophelia. With Claudius dead, Hamlet’s father would be avenged, and Hamlet would be able to ascend to the throne and marry Ophelia. While Ophelia would lose her father, Polonius would be a necessary death, and his position could be filled by Laertes, who would be loyal to Hamlet, as Hamlet had been the one to avenge Polonius. And furthermore, since Hamlet had avenged Polonius in the name of Ophelia, Laertes would finally approve of their union, and realise that Hamlet’s interest in Ophelia was not passing, as he had claimed in Act I.”

Hermione scowled, “God, you’re such a Slytherin. Anyways, these are *supposed* to be sad, and their plans are *supposed* to fail. Hamlet’s *has* to die, and Ophelia’s *has* to go mad. It *is* a tragedy, afterall.”

The next day, Hermione perched herself on the couch, a script for Othello in hand. “Let’s see you try and fix *this* one, Draco,” she said.

When they were through with Othello, tears were streaming down Hermione’s face. Draco offered her his handkerchief and she stubbornly shook her head, swiping away her tears with

her hands. "Othello always makes me cry," she said defiantly, "It's just so *sad*."

Draco smirked wryly, "Well, this *is* a tragedy."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Prat," she sniffed. "Well, how are you going to solve *this* one, Draco?"

Draco grinned and simply said, "Othello should've just asked his wife what was going on. He was far too trustful of Iago, for no reason. I'd even say he deserved his own downfall for being so stupid."

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After Othello, Hermione and Draco proceeded to work their way through each of his plays, in no particular order. Throughout reading each, they discussed the plays, the characters and the love stories, and Draco, to Hermione's chagrin, continued to 'solve' each of the plays. But, Hermione had to admit that it was nice to discuss books and plays with someone, on an intellectual level. To be able to talk about how revolutionary the stage that was used was during that time. Or to talk about the historical events behind the stories. For someone who didn't read Muggle fiction, Draco Malfoy knew quite a lot of Muggle history. Verbal spars began to soften and over time, became something akin to banter. When he teasingly called her sappy for crying again during Macbeth, it felt less like an insult, and more like a term of endearment. And Hermione felt herself truly warming to the Slytherin, even though she tried to fight it. (Don't fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.)

But, most strangely of all, something truly incredible started to happen. Somewhere in the middle of Macbeth, Hermione had started sitting just a bit closer to Draco. (Closer, closer, closer.) During The Tempest, it was close enough that their shoulders brushed and their legs touched. (Closer, closer, closer.) Two acts into Henry IV, Hermione had begun resting her head on Draco's shoulder, so that she could read while he spoke. (Closer, closer, closer.) And finally, halfway through Antony and Cleopatra, Draco had looped his arm around Hermione, drawing her in so that she was resting directly against his chest. (Closer, closer, closer.) It felt just as safe as it had on the day of her episode. *He* felt just as safe.

Weeks into their study of Shakespeare, just after finishing Anthony and Cleopatra, while the sun was just starting to set, Hermione had offered Draco a smile. "Come on, we're going to read his most famous play of all time. I've been waiting to show you this since King Lear. It's called Romeo and Juliet."

Hours later, when Hermione was lying on Draco's chest, his voice gently lulling closer and closer to sleep, as he read the final words of the play. "A glooming peace this morning with it brings. The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head. Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things. Some shall be pardoned, and some punished. For never was a story of more woe, than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

"So?" Hermione asked, yawning, as he closed the book, laying it to rest on the table.

"They had terrible families. Families are supposed to support each other's interests, to help you achieve whatever you're after," Draco said resolutely. "Romeo's parents should've

helped him marry Juliet. They should've done whatever it took to allow the two the two of them to be together."

"Mmm," Hermione said drowsily, "But what about the feud? What about what the Capulets wanted?"

"They were destined to be in love though, weren't they? So what did it matter what the Capulets thought? They wouldn't have ever allowed Juliet to marry Romeo, or to love him back. At least never on Romeo's terms. They were hurting Juliet by not letting her be with Romeo. Was Romeo supposed to just let that go?" Draco finished his thoughts a bit bitterly, although Hermione was far too tired to really notice.

"If you were Romeo, would your parents help you get your Juliet?" Hermione sleepily mumbled. (Are you his Juliet?) "Would your Montagues build a world just for you and your Juliet to live in?"

As Hermione slipped into sleep, Draco whispered into her hair, "They already have." Hermione's breathing slowed as she relaxed further and further into him, before falling asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, I am not going to be able to post this Monday like I normally am. With that being said, the next chapter should be up by next Friday the 19th at the very latest, and then I'll continue on with my normal posting schedule for this fic.

Blurry

Chapter Notes

Hi, I'm here and glad to be back! I would've posted this a little sooner (Wednesday-Thursday-ish) but I've been having a really rough week so I wasn't able to come back early, but hey, I still made it on time!

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

The next morning, Hermione didn't leave her room. For once in her life, she didn't want to go to the library. Why? Because *he* would be there. And if *he* was there that would just mess everything up. (But it would make everything right.)

What had she been doing, spending time with him, talking to him? Draco Malfoy was the enemy. (Draco wasn't *her* enemy.) That should've been crystal clear. But somehow, it had gotten so blurry along the way, and that was all her fault. There had to be something wrong with her. (Nothing was wrong with her. She shouldn't worry.)

She had gone into an easily winnable bet, and somehow, she was *losing*. (And yet, she was going to win.) Hermione hated herself for it, but it wasn't so easily clear cut to her that she *hated* Draco Malfoy. (She didn't hate him at all.)

Stupid. Stupid, stupid, *stupid*.

Here she was, in the lap of luxury and reading *Shakespeare* with a Death Eater, while Ron and Harry were out there, looking for Horcruxes, or maybe even trying to rescue her. (They hadn't tried to rescue her yet. How long had she been here? However long it was, they hadn't tried to come.) She was the worst person alive. What was wrong with her? (Nothing was wrong with her. She shouldn't worry.)

Why did she like talking to Draco Malfoy? A Death Eater? How was she able to just sit with him and discuss Shakespearean tragedies and dramas and romances, like he was - like they were *friends*.

Hermione had been certain that Draco Malfoy hated her. Absolutely positively certain. But she honestly couldn't believe that anymore. If Draco Malfoy hated her, he wouldn't have been so nice to her, without fail. Of course, there was the teasing and snarky remarks that were Malfoy's trademark, but they were accompanied with a smile that looked fond, rather than a vicious sneer or a taunting smirk. It threw her off balance. Because when Draco Malfoy was sneering, he was actually really quite handsome. Stupidly, annoyingly, infuriatingly handsome. But when he was smiling? (Smiling at *her*?) He was more than simply handsome. (He was irresistible.)

She had always known that he was handsome - but it had never mattered before. It was something she could ignore. Because what good was his looks when he was the biggest prat at Hogwarts ?

But Merlin, ever since she had been taken here, he was witty and smart and charming and it was just so... (*perfect*) *confusing* .

And every day, it was harder and harder to fight. The feelings that were building inside of her that she was viciously trying to tamper down grew like weeds. It was like fighting a Hydra - every time she shut down one thought about him, two more sprung up in its place.

Worst of all, it wasn't a simple divide either, between her emotions and her mind. Everything was blurred over, fighting for one thing, and then another, and then switching back again, pulling her in so many different directions, Hermione felt like she was getting vertigo.

Logically, she knew that Draco Malfoy hated her. It was obvious with every past action he had taken against her and Ron and Harry. He had wished her *dead* in second year. (And Ron had called her a nightmare during first year.) But of course, *everyone* said stupid things in second year. She had fancied herself in love with *Lockhart* during second year. So should she really hold him to what he said that long ago, as his feelings for her, when it so obviously contradicted the present?

Then, if Hermione was to consider the past two school years, Draco Malfoy hadn't really done much to *her* specifically. But he had broken Harry's nose, and had made a song to bully Ron in front of the whole school. And if Draco hated her best friends, then he had to hate her. Not only did he have to hate her because he hated her friends, but he had to hate her for her blood - he was a Death Eater, and she was a muggleborn - that was plain and simple. But then, logically, he *couldn't* hate her. They read Shakespeare and they had intelligent discussions and they even had *banter* for Merlin's sake! The way that he looked at her, logically, he couldn't hate her. It was a conundrum.

And then, there was the matter of her episode, which made things even more convoluted. He *cared*, and he didn't think she was mad. He had looked at her and promised her that she would never have to go through another episode alone ever again. And Hermione believed him. Because somehow, when Hermione was with Draco Malfoy, she felt *safe* . (He had become her home.)

During A Comedy of Errors, she had jokingly asked when the other shoe would drop. And he had looked up at her with earnest eyes and had assured her that there *was* no other shoe to drop. Why did part of her scream that he was lying, while the other part insisted that he was telling the truth? And why did the part that wanted to trust him grow stronger and louder every day? Hermione knew that she was flying far too close to the sun - far too close into Draco's orbit, and his gravity was pulling her in, further and further, but she just *couldn't escape* .

None of it made any sense, and yet it all still made far *too* much sense. Her guard lowered and raised like the tide, and the tug of war between suspicion and trust was honestly exhausting. Every single time that she was lulled into feeling as if she could trust him, feeling that she liked him, she was suddenly reminded of all the horrible things that he had done.

And then when she decided that he was a terrible person, completely irredeemable, he would smile at her and all of her walls would come crumbling down. How could he cut through her defenses like a knife through softened butter?

On a daily basis, Hermione would vow to herself that she would *stop* talking to him, and ignore him, and power through whatever was left of the three months, and leave. And then she would see him and her resolve would fall apart right in front of her. Weak. She was so *weak*.

She heard a knock on her door, and looked up, startled from her thoughts. Draco entered the room slowly, and she looked away quickly. "Are you alright? You're normally out of your room by now."

"Well maybe I don't want to spend time with you," Hermione snapped half-heartedly, refusing to look at him.

"Want to talk about it?" He offered.

Hermione considered holding out, but she looked up and her eyes met his and she sighed. Resistance felt so pointless. (Don't fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.) "You're so *confusing*."

"How so?" Draco asked.

Hermione groaned, "It's just that like - at school, you're a complete prat, and then here, you're so much nicer. And it makes absolutely no sense. Because three months ago, if someone asked me if you hated me, I'd be absolutely certain that you did. But now?" she cut herself off, "It's just so infuriatingly baffling." She looked away, focusing on a spot in the corner.

"Go ahead Hermione," Draco said, encouragingly, "You can tell me anything. We're friends."

"Are we?"

"I'd like to think that we are, after spending the past month and a half together," Draco shrugged.

"Friends don't kidnap friends," Hermione scowled, refusing to look him in the eye. If she did, her resolve would crumble. As if he sensed her thoughts, Draco moved closer and placed his hand under her chin, gently tilting her face up, so that their eyes met.

"And I'm sorry that I had to do that," said Draco, "But I promise, it was all for a very good reason."

"Am I bait then?" Hermione asked, a bit of bite in her tone.

Draco shook his head, "No, no. Nothing like that, I swear."

"Then explain it to me."

"I can't," Draco said, "Not yet."

"Can't or won't?" Hermione asked sullenly.

"I can't," Draco said, "I'm sorry, Hermione, but this is so much bigger than just you and me. Besides, Miss Brightest-Witch-of-Our-Age, if you didn't want to be here, I'm absolutely certain you would've found a way to escape by now. You've had plenty of opportunities to run. But you feel safe here, don't you?" (Don't fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.)

"That's not true," Hermione lied weakly. Even though she knew that both she and Draco knew she was lying, she couldn't admit the truth. Yes, for some reason, the Manor felt safe, but there was no rhyme or reason to it. (Because Draco was here. It felt like home.) She would've escaped the day she had her episode if she had an opportunity to grab her wand first. (She was lying to herself.) But - but *would she*? And now, if she found her wand, would she escape? Would she leave? She'd *have* to leave, so she could help Harry and Ron defeat You-Know-Who. It was the right thing to do. But she *couldn't* leave, if she didn't hate Draco Malfoy, because that would be against the deal that they had set, and Hermione was not going to break her word. And - oh *Merlin* - she realised that she didn't hate Draco Malfoy. She didn't even *dislike* Draco Malfoy. (She actually really liked him. Really *really* liked him.)

But he was a Death Eater. And for that, she *should* hate him. Because if she didn't, she wouldn't be able to leave, and then that would mean she wouldn't be able to help on the Horcrux Hunt, and that would mean that the whole war could be *lost*. And it would be all her fault, because out of all of the members of the Order, she, along with Harry and Ron, were the only ones who knew about the Horcruxes. The only ones *allowed* to know about the Horcruxes. But - there was Dumbledore. Dumbledore could help Harry and Ron, couldn't he? But at what cost? What ulterior motive did Dumbledore have? He couldn't have been doing this out of the goodness of his heart, or his love for muggleborns, because he *had* none. And - and Harry had *always* been Dumbledore's protege. What if Dumbledore was trying to make Harry just like *him* ?

"Hey," Draco teased, "I can hear your mind going a mile a minute all the way from over here. What are you thinking about?"

For a moment, Hermione panicked. She obviously couldn't tell Draco of anything she had just been thinking. He was a Death Eater, so he would have to tell You-Know-Who whatever she told him. "I just want to know why you treat me so differently here versus Hogwarts. How can you go from hating me to not, in the blink of an eye?" While that wasn't what she had just been thinking about, it was still a question she needed the answer to. Maybe, hopefully, it would clear things up. Hopefully, it would be something truly awful, that would make her hate him again. (Don't fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.)

"I've never hated you," Draco said.

That had not been the answer Hermione had been expecting. She raised a skeptical eyebrow.

Draco held his hands up, "No, it's true. I've always admired you. Granted, I never went about it the right way, but I-" he took in a deep breath, "I was jealous that Potter and Weasley were friends with you and I wasn't. You were the best witch at our school, and Malfoys always have the best."

“So I was just some little prize, then?” Hermione asked, coolly.

Draco shook his head, “No, you’ve always been so much more than that.” He cut himself off. “I always wanted to get to know you, but you were friends with Potter and Weasley, and they hated me. I mean, if I had gotten to you first, you would’ve never hated me. But that didn’t happen, and I was angry for that, so I took it out on you in second and third year, and I said some things that I wish I had never said. About midway through third year, I realised that what I was doing wasn’t fair to you.”

“So you started taking it out even more on Harry and Ron,” Hermione said, slightly bitterly.

“Hermione, I was never going to be friends with Potter and Weasley, and they were never going to like me. I won’t apologise for what I said to them, because I meant every word of it - just like how they meant every word that they said to me. I’m just sorry that you got caught up in the crossfire.”

“What about my blood?” Hermione asked pointedly.

“There were some things I didn’t know and didn’t understand yet, and for that, I’m sorry.”

Hermione didn’t know how to respond to that. (Don’t fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.) She shoved any potential thoughts and feelings about his apology to the back of her mind, to be dissected later. “Well, were you always so much of an enormous prat as you seemed to be?” Hermione asked, a bit wryly.

“Pansy would’ve smacked me upside the head,” Draco laughed. (*Pansy*. Wasn’t he with Pansy?) Hermione’s face fell slightly, before she steeled herself. Why did she care about Draco and Pansy Parkinson? “We were never together though.”

“I didn’t ask,” Hermione said a little bit too quickly. (But she wanted to know.)

Draco raised an eyebrow, and Hermione looked away from him. He smirked at her lightly, “She’s like my sister. Even still, she doesn’t even swing that way.”

“Oh,” Hermione said dumbly, “Then why were you...” she trailed off and waved her hand, “Like that? Everybody thought you were together. Albeit very on-and-off, but still together.”

Draco chuckled, “That was the point. I didn’t want to have girls trying to get into a betrothal contract with me, and Pansy didn’t want to have to deal with guys asking her out.”

Hermione nodded. “I guess that makes sense. And it’s fairly smart, too, I suppose, with the way that the Hogwarts rumour mill works,” she laughed to herself. “You wouldn’t *believe* the things Lavender and Pavarti would spend half of the night talking about. They always kept me up with their chattering.” Hermione rolled her eyes.

“I don’t know how you managed to put up with the pair of them for six years,” Draco said.

“Me neither,” Hermione laughed softly. “Especially not last year. It - with Ron -,” she went red. “Lavender is very descriptive,” Hermione said, ducking her head.

“Ah,” Draco said, in a controlled voice. “Charming.”

“Yeah, well,” Hermione said quietly, “She’d usually talk about things that she knew would upset me. And she’d always make sure that she was loud enough that I would hear her. What Ron would say to her, what Ron would do with her - she always made sure I could hear what she was saying.” She let out a sigh before coming to a start. Death Eater. Draco was a Death Eater. She had to remember that. (Did it matter? Why should it matter that much?) “I have a headache,” Hermione lied. “Can you please let me be alone for the rest of the day? I think I’m going to lie down.”

“Do you want a headache potion?” Draco asked.

Hermione shook her head, “No, no thank you.”

“I hope you feel better then,” Draco said, looking at her with a half-smile on his face.

The moment he left the room, Hermione let out a sigh - although she wasn’t sure whether it was one of relief or of discontent.

(Don’t fight it. Give up. Give in. Give in to him.)

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is going to be up as normally scheduled, but in addition to that, I think I'm going to start an additional work to make this into a series somewhat of different stories from different character's perspectives from in universe. It can just be to give some context to some things and talk about what the characters aren't exactly saying in the most truthful way, but if you guys like the idea and enjoy it, I can add in just little one-shots from in-betweens and little ideas that weren't long enough to make it into a chapter. Like I can do some things from Harry and Ron trying to rescue Hermione from the forest, or Chapters 10/11 from their perspective, how Luna and Theo got together, etc. stuff set before and during "For His Juliet" in the same universe. If y'all have anything you want to read about - I know how Lucius and Narcissa got together is one of them - put a request in the comments! The stories might be very graphic and potentially upsetting, or something 'sweet', at least in the way that everyone in this fic can be 'sweet', and everything in between. I hope you all like this idea :)

Could've

Chapter Notes

I could not write this chapter for the life of me, so it's a little on the shorter side, but I've finally gotten to a point where I'm satisfied with what I'm posting. When you're done with the chapter, please read the notes at the end for an update on my companion piece to "For His Juliet".

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

The next day, Hermione sat on the edge of her bed, twirling a strand of hair. Out or in? Out or in? Out or in? (Out.) Draco would probably come in, whether she stayed in or went out into the Manor. (Out.) So everything would be just as muddled, either way. (Out.)

With a sigh, Hermione decided that she would leave her room. She'd see Draco either way, at least there would be books in the library to go along with him. To distract her from *him*. (Give in. Why couldn't she just talk to him? Why did she have to resist?)

As she got ready, Hermione heard a knock on the door. (Draco?) "I'll be right out Draco, just give me a moment," she shouted. The knocking stopped, and a moment later, Hermione heard the door swing open. "Draco, you impatient *prat* -" she started, but the words died in her throat when she turned around, ready to berate him for barging in on her.

"Hello, Hermione," Luna Lovegood said serenely from the doorway.

Hermione's face lit up, and she flung herself at the blonde Ravenclaw, hugging the girl tightly, as if she were afraid that she wasn't truly there. "Merlin, Luna! How are you here? How did everything go? Are you alright? Where's Draco?" The last question flew from Hermione's lips, and she went crimson. (But where was Draco? Was he alright?)

Luna smiled down at the smaller girl. "I'm glad to see you too. I hope you don't mind me visiting. You see, it's Pansy's seventeenth birthday, and Pansy said that she would be very cross if Draco didn't show up. I was thinking that I might go along with them, but then I decided that I would spend the day with you instead. You see, Draco was very anxious about leaving you alone. Is it because he's afraid you'll have another episode where you can't breathe?"

Hermione drew back in shock, and felt a wave of hurt and betrayal. Draco had told other people? (He wouldn't hurt her, not like that.)

"Oh, I'm sorry," Luna apologized with a reassuring smile, "You're probably feeling very upset right now, but I promise that Draco didn't tell any of us." (See - he *cared* . Give in.)

"How - how did you *know* about it then, Luna?"

"I *Saw* it," Luna said simply.

"You saw me have one?" Hermione asked, her panic creeping back in.

"No, no, you misunderstand," said Luna. "I didn't see it with my eyes. I *Saw* it."

It took her a moment, but Luna's intended meaning registered with Hermione. "Divination, Luna? *Really*?"

"Do you remember when we first met, Hermione?" Luna asked, undeterred. "When I said that I saw the Thestrals, you didn't believe me at first, did you? You just thought that they were made up creatures." As Hermione flushed, Luna shrugged with a smile on her face, "I don't mind. You had so much to learn. You still do. I think that everyone does. Isn't the point of life to learn?"

Hermione sighed, "Luna I can't do your riddles right now - I just don't have the energy for it."

Luna gave Hermione a small smile. "And that's why you would've made a terrible Ravenclaw, Hermione. I mean no offense - I don't think most people sorted into Ravenclaw are proper Ravenclaws. You could be one - a proper Ravenclaw, I mean - but in order for you to do that, you need to open your mind so much more. See, your problem is that you see things in black and white. You're finally beginning to see in greys, but you still need to be able to see in blues, and reds, and all the other colours, too." She waved her hand, "I'm getting ahead of myself. I was at the Thestrals, wasn't I?"

Hermione nodded, "I think so."

"Thank you. The Thestrals. You thought that they were imaginary at first, but I know that you went to the library to research them the very next day, just to make sure that you were right. And it was deemed credible only when it was found in a book - which is a ridiculous notion, as there's so much out there that isn't in books. Anyhow, then, when you found out that you were wrong, I imagine you struggled with it for a little bit, but once you accepted that you had been wrong, you had approached me one day, and asked me who it was that I had seen die."

"You told me about your mother," Hermione recalled.

"And then, you apologised. Said that you were sorry that I had seen that, and told me that if I needed anyone to talk to, you would be there for me. You were one of the first few people that have ever expressed their condolences to me."

"Oh Luna..."

"Everyone that matters to me has done it by now," Luna said. "I don't care about the rest." They sat in silence for a moment.

It must've been awful," Hermione whispered, "Not being able to do anything."

Luna's eyes flashed. "Oh, but I *could've* . I could have done something. Daddy and I *could've done something*. But we *couldn't* . We were about to bring her back, when Arthur and Molly Weasley caught us and were going to have us thrown into Azkaban, just because we were using ritualistic magic. So we had to Obliviate them." Luna looked up at Hermione, her eyes wide and knowing, "But you understand, don't you? It's something we've got in common. We've both had to have people obliviated so we could keep our families safe."

"How did you-?"

"Because I *Saw* that too," Luna said. "I think I knew that it was going to happen before you did. I know you don't believe in Divination, but it's because you don't understand it, and Hermione, you don't like anything you don't understand. Think of it like how there are certain animals who can see in infrared or in ultraviolet - they're born with the ability to see it, and if you aren't born with it, there's not a way for you to see in such colours. But just because we can't see it doesn't mean that those colours don't exist. Then there are other things that you don't understand, but that you can *learn* . It's like another language, you see? *Seeing* is your infrared, but Divination is your Arabic. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"I think," Hermione said slowly.

Luna grinned brilliantly. "See, there's the Ravenclaw in you. I was almost worried it might be gone, that the Blibbering Humdingers had taken it. You know, they sometimes try to make you think like they do." She looked at Hermione and cocked her head. "Just like how people like the Order want you to think anything they don't understand is evil, and that they're always the ones that are right. Do you remember what I was saying, about seeing in only black and white? That's what they see in. A ritual is evil to them, even if it would've brought my mummy back."

"I'm sorry, but why can't you bring your Mum back now?" Hermione asked. "If the Weasleys interrupted the ritual, why couldn't you just try again?"

Luna smiled ruefully, "You can only bring someone back through that ritual an hour after they've died. Afterwards, it just won't work. Time is funny like that." She stayed quiet for a moment. "Now come on, we're not going to stay in here all day. I want to find the Sphinx in the maze. We had quite a lovely conversation the last time I was here at the Manor."

Hours later, Hermione was sprawled out on the soft grass in the gardens, right next to Luna, looking at the clouds.

"Luna?" she asked, tentatively, "Why - how did you and Theo meet each other? I've never seen you together before in Hogwarts."

"There weren't a lot of people who came to my mother's funeral," Luna said after a moment of silence. "See, even though Daddy obliviated the Weasleys, they still always thought that there was something off about us, and they wouldn't come to Mummy's funeral."

“Who did then?”

“The Malfoys, the Notts, and the Parkinsons came. Lucius Malfoy is Daddy’s cousin, and Perseus Parkinson is one of my daddy’s good friends. Thoros came with Theo because Theo’s mother had passed when he was five, and she had been friends with Mummy. We had all met before, but after that is when we really became friends.”

“I’m glad that there were people there for you when you needed it,” Hermione said softly.

Luna hummed, “Thank you, Hermione. You know, you were there, too, in a way.”

“What do you mean?”

“When my mum died, I started getting Visions, and you were the first person I ever saw in one of them. And I knew that it would be okay.” She paused. “I know you don’t believe in Divination, but I think that’s because of Professor Trelawney. You see, her head is infested with Wrackspurts. I think it’s from all of the drinking that she does, but you shouldn’t let her affect how you view Divination. You didn’t know that magic existed for eleven years because you didn’t have any proof yet. I just think that you haven’t found your proof for Divination yet. But you know that you can ask me about it. If you ever want to.”

Hermione bit her lip. While she wouldn’t believe in Divination until she had tangible proof, she could try to be open minded. “How do they work? Your visions?”

“I see people, flashes of images,” Luna said, “And I’ll usually get a feeling along with it as well.”

The two sat in silence for a few moments. (Draco. Talk to her about Draco.)

“Can I tell you something?” Hermione asked. “You have to swear that you won’t tell anybody else. I-I just need to talk to someone about it.”

“Of course, Hermione.”

“I don’t hate Draco Malfoy. I like him, really. I like him a lot.” Hermione said, and it was like a dam burst in her mind at the admission. Every feeling she had tried to hold back just came rushing forward. “We made a deal that if I hated him after three months, he would let me go and give me my wand back. But I don’t hate him,” she confessed, the words spilling from her mouth faster and faster, “Not anymore, at least. And I just feel awful, you know, because I should be out there, helping Ron and Harry, because of the war and all, but I learned about Dumbledore, right? And if he was that awful, why would the cause that he created be any different? Wouldn’t it be just like him? Looking amazing and wonderful on the outside, but underneath, it was completely rotten? And shouldn’t Death Eaters be evil? Because that’s what I’ve always thought and that’s what I’ve always been told, but then Draco isn’t evil - right? He can’t be, because he’s just so... amazing with me and then I’ll remember that he’s a Death Eater and then I’ll feel so guilty, and then once I feel guilty, I’ll just spiral into this need to hate him, because if I can’t hate him, then there’s something wrong with me - right? He’s a Death Eater, I should be able to hate him, or what does that say about me? Does that say that *I’m* a terrible person? Because it definitely feels like it. And then I’ve just got all

these feelings that I keep pushing down and pretending that I don't have, because the moment I acknowledge them I feel like a horrible person!"

"What kind of feelings?" Luna asked, patiently, a small, comforting smile on her face.

"I *like* him," Hermione cried out. "I mean I *like* him! He's just so insanely attractive that it's not even remotely fair. And that sounds so shallow, but I swear that it's not just his looks, it's his *mind* and the discussions we have and how I just feel so *safe* when I'm with him, and everything just feels so *right*. *But I shouldn't feel that way about him!*"

"Why?"

The corners of Hermione's eyes stung. "Because he's a Death Eater, and that would be wrong. Wouldn't it?" Wouldn't it? (Please say that it wouldn't, please. She just needed one person to tell her that she was allowed to give in.)

"Who's to say what's right and what's wrong?" Luna asked. "What's wrong for one person might be right for another. The Weasleys think that rituals are bad, and I think that they're good. Who's to say who is right and who is wrong? Morality is all subjective, so why should it matter?" Luna rolled over, so that she was right next to Hermione. "I just think that you should do what makes you happy, whether you think people will think that it's right or wrong. Whether or not *you* think it's right or wrong. Right and wrong changes. Choosing something that will make you happy lasts."

"He's a Death Eater though," Hermione said. (Give up. Give in.) "And if he's a Death Eater, then he has to hate me, because my parents are muggles."

Luna hummed, "Maybe, maybe not. I don't think he hates you." She paused. "Hermione, do you truly feel that he hates you? Has his actions in the recent past made it seem as if he hates you?"

No. No, it didn't seem like he hated her. That maybe this wasn't some sort of trivial game to him, that he actually enjoyed spending time with her. Finally, Hermione whispered, "No."

"And does he make you happy?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "Yes."

"Then I don't see why you don't just give in to what you're feeling."

Chapter End Notes

Check out my companion piece, "With a Kiss, I Die", Chapter 2 - "Helen", to read the story of how Luna's mother died, told from Luna's perspective.

Something I really like to play with in this fic/series is the idea of perspective, and how something that might be presented as a fact might not always be the truth, or parts may be omitted. I think that "Helen" is a great example of this, and I hope it illustrates what I'm trying to do with how I tell my story from such a limited perspective at certain points. And even without that, I really like "Helen", and it's something that I really enjoyed writing, and reading it back, I think I like how it comes across. Anyways, go ahead and check that out.

UPDATE: I will be posting with my normal schedule, but the uploads might be spaced out between 'With a Kiss, I Die' and 'For His Juliet', but you WILL be getting two new pieces of content from this universe on Mondays and Fridays every week. Make sure to subscribe to 'With a Kiss, I Die' to make sure that you don't miss out on any content. I'll try to double post again this Friday, but that depends on my workload this week, as I want to squeeze in an entirely new chapter in between this one and the one that I have written as Chapter 14 (but I would like to be Chapter 15) to make things flow just the smallest bit better. It'll be completely a Draco POV, and I know that y'all like those, so you have that to look forward to.

ALSO - Luna's advice is wonderful advice, just NOT IN THIS SCENARIO. It would be great advice in most situations (to do what would make you happy, don't care about what others think) but this is not a typical situation. Remember, Draco is a Death Eater, and you're really going to get to see the darker bits of that as we get further on into the story.

And sorry if this note didn't make much of any sense, my brain is kind of fried right now, so comment if you have any questions, and I'll try and explain it better.

Push

Chapter Notes

Highly recommend reading Chapter 2 of "With a Kiss, I Die" (a companion piece) of one shots within the same universe from different perspectives other than Draco and Hermione (and some of them are from their perspectives as well). Chapter 2 is from Luna's POV and it's how her mother died, so it'll give this chapter as well as the last chapter a little more context. Of course, you can still very much read "For His Juliet" without reading "With A Kiss, I Die," and still understand it just as well, but I do recommend reading both. 4

I'll probably be trying to post about one chapter there a week, and one chapter here a week, but depending on my schedule and how much work I have, I'll try to post more, but there might be weeks where I end up posting less. As of right now, my schedule has been very irregular in terms of amounts of work, so that's why I wasn't able to post on Friday of last week, like I had been planning on doing. I love writing this, and it's something I enjoy doing immensely, and if it was up to me, I'd be posting as much as possible, but my schedule kind of restricts that right now. That doesn't mean I won't be trying to post as much as possible, just that there's a possibility that it might not be as consistent.

Anyways, this chapter is entirely from Draco's perspective, and I know how much you all like them, so I hope you'll enjoy!

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

When Draco returned to the Manor from Pansy's birthday outing well past midnight, his skin prickled. Something was wrong. Someone was here. It couldn't have been Potter or Weasley - the wards would have alerted him if someone had managed to forcibly enter, or at least had broken through in such a crude way that would've been immediately obvious that they had been the ones behind the break through. It could be Luna, but Draco wasn't sure if she had decided to stay until he returned.

A sudden flicker of movement caught his eye, and Draco trained his wand on the general area, and crept closer. A form took shape through the darkness, and quick as a shot, Draco had his wand pointed at the throat of whoever was there.

Bright, pearly laughter filled the air, and the lights came back on. Draco realised that his wand was pointed at Luna, who looked like she was enjoying herself immensely. "You know I would've told you if there was going to be someone breaking into the Manor tonight. There's no need to be so paranoid."

Draco glared at his cousin. "Well?" he asked, expectantly.

“She’s going along very well,” Luna said, “I noticed that she doesn’t have any scars anymore, at least none that I could see.”

“Like the one from the Department of Mysteries?” Draco asked caustically.

Luna frowned. “You’re still a bit sore about that, aren’t you?”

Draco shot her a scathing look.

A bit sore was an understatement, and they both knew it. After the end of the Triwizard Tournament, when the Dark Lord had been resurrected, Draco had asked Luna to befriend Potter and his merry crew of lunatics to keep an eye on Hermione, in case if the Boy-Who-Lived decided to run off and get into his usual life-threatening situations that would get everyone - but him - hurt in the process. While Draco was a firm believer in the idea that if you wanted something done well, you did it yourself, unfortunately, he wouldn’t be able to penetrate Potter’s friend group to keep an eye on Hermione. Even still, he probably would’ve snapped halfway through one of Potter’s brooding monologues and *crucioed* him then and there, and that would be a bit of a mess to clean up. Luna, however, was much more patient when it came to dealing with Potter and Weasley, and she had taken to the task splendidly. None of the Gryffindors suspected a thing, and Luna had managed to keep Potter from running off to the Ministry for most of the year. That was, at least until the History of Magic final, with Potter’s vision of Black’s torture. Luna hadn’t been able to stop Potter from dragging Hermione off to the Department of Mysteries, and she wasn’t able to stop Dolhove from nearly killing Hermione.

Objectively, Draco knew that this wasn’t entirely fair to Luna - she had done a very good job keeping an eye on Potter in their 5th and 6th year, but Hermione had gotten hurt under *her* watch.

“There was only so much that I could do and you know it,” Luna sniffed. “Besides, would you have rather that I had started doing a Dark Healing Ritual on her right in front of Dumbledore and Fudge?”

“If she was going to die-”

“If she was going to die I’d do the ritual in front of Wizengameot, Draco, you *know* that,” Luna snapped, the feeling of light and airiness that she normally carried around suddenly gone. “I have just as much riding on getting her on our side and with you as much as anyone else. She’s the key to avenging my mother’s death, to getting even with the Weasleys. I can’t get my mother back, but I sure as hell can make Arthur and Molly Weasley pay for being the reason my mother is *dead*, and for that, I need you to be with Hermione. You can’t have one without the other, you *know* how my visions work just as well as I do. I’ve been working on this just as long as you have, and I’m tired of you acting like I haven’t.”

“Fine,” Draco ground out.

“Thank you,” Luna said, her tone returning to its signature blitheness. “Besides, if I wasn’t there when Harry realised he needed a date to Slughorn’s party this year, who do you think he would’ve asked next?” She paused, and shrugged lightly. “Anyhow, I understand why you’re

still upset about the Battle of the Department of Mysteries, but I do believe I've made it up to you with my visit. So you can consider us even."

"Even?" Draco echoed, raising an eyebrow.

"She's very close, and I just gave her a little push in the right direction. She admitted to me that she's falling for you. I could give you the memory, if you like," Luna said, with a knowing smile peeking through her aloof veneer.

"Fine, then."

"We're even?"

"We're even," Draco confirmed, sighing. The things that he did for the sake of family. "Anything else that I should be aware of?"

Luna began to pick at her corkscrew necklace, twisting the bobs. "You know, her major hang up is on the whole Death Eater thing. I'd think that if you were able to make that not so much of a difficult pill for her to swallow, there really wouldn't be much of anything left that would hold her back. You just have to thoroughly ruin any allegiances she has to the Order. She really is starting to question things, but again, what she really needs is a push." She paused, tilting her head. "I think you'd know what would be the best way to give her that little push."

Draco nodded curtly. "I do. As for the Weasleys, I'll let you know the moment the Dark Lord gives the go-ahead for storming in on them."

"I don't understand why you can't just capture everybody now," Luna sighed. "It's wholly inconvenient. You know where all of them are, why don't you just go ahead and get them?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "It's to send a message. To let fear spread through the Order as we pick them off one by one. When people are afraid, they make stupid decisions, making it all that much more easy to capture them without having to do half as much legwork ourselves. It's much easier to grab them when they try to escape via International Portkey than to stake out their house and burst in on them. Besides, I'm sure that it's worse for Potter and Weasley to listen to that little radioshow the Weasley twins run and get to fully savor each name of the captured. If it was just everyone they knew listed all at once, I don't think they'd really get to appreciate it."

"Psychological warfare," Luna said, understanding dawning on her face. "Lovely. Daddy's always been a fan of that tactic." She glanced up at a clock. "I suppose I should get going now. Theo's probably waiting for me. He did bring a Muggle home for me, didn't he?" At Draco's nod, she beamed. "Oh, he's terribly sweet that way."

"You promised me the memory," Draco said, a bit impatiently.

Luna pointed her wand at her temple, and slowly withdrew a wispy blue memory, and Draco conjured a vial for her to put it in. The moment the vial was filled Draco put a stopper on it. Luna offered him a smile, and skipped over to the fireplace, throwing some floo powder in.

She turned around and looked at Draco. “You know, you’ve still got a bit of blood on your face. You might want to take care of that before you see Hermione.”

As Luna shouted for ‘Nott Manor’, Draco wiped his face furiously. Disgusting muggle blood. He checked a mirror to make sure that his face was clean, and once he was satisfied, he turned on his heel, vial in hand. He strode through the halls of the Manor, and down into the dungeons.

As he walked past the cells, his footsteps echoed, bouncing across the wall. It was almost sad how quiet the dungeon was - normally, it was teeming with at least a few mudbloods, blood traitors, or even muggles in a pinch, but all of the prisoners had been relocated to the Dark Manor for the time being.

While the screams from the dungeon wouldn’t reach the rest of the house, Draco didn’t need Hermione to accidentally wander down here and stumble upon anyone. No, she wasn’t ready for that, not yet. One day, though. One day.

Draco knew that his witch was vicious with a wand, and with proper encouragement of her talent, Hermione would make what she had done with Marietta Edgecombe look like butterfly kisses. Unfortunately, the Order had stifled those parts of her magical abilities, but Draco knew that he could coax them out of her. She would look beautiful covered in blood, blood that she had spilled. And then of course, there was the rush of lust that had a tendency to permeate air recently touched by Dark Magic.

With a smile on his face at that thought, Draco pulled open a heavy wooden door, and entered the room, rubbing the vial that contained Luna’s memory. The room was on the smaller size, though perhaps that was just from the shelves crowded in on each other, not even four feet of width pressed between the rows. Each of the shelves was crowded with vials, filled with wisps of different colours, some shimmering, some neon, but all meticulously labeled. The Memory Room.

In the center of the maze of memories, some hundreds of years old, was a pensieve, the size of a large bathtub. Draco emptied the blue memory from the vial into the pensieve, and it raced across the clear surface, and without waiting a moment, Draco fell into the memory.

The memory was bright and sunny, a stark contrast to the darkness of the dungeon, and Draco had to blink his eyes a few times to adjust to the shift in light. Then, when everything came back into focus, he could see Hermione and Luna, lying out on the grass in the fields just past the gardens, neither saying a word.

Luna looked wholly content, as she pulled a flower apart, bit by bit. Hermione, on the other hand, looked anxious. She was worrying her bottom lip between her teeth, something Draco always loved watching her do in school. He had always known that the way that she bit her lip was her unknowing way of begging for him to kiss her, to take her right then and there.

“Can I tell you something?” Hermione asked. “You have to swear that you won’t tell anybody else. I-I just need to talk to someone about it.”

“Of course, Hermione,” Luna replied, and Hermione pushed herself up into a sitting position. Draco sat down beside her and wished he could place his arm around her shoulder, but unfortunately Pensieves didn’t work that way. Otherwise, he would’ve spent an unhealthy amount of time in memories, reliving certain moments between the two of them.

“I don’t hate Draco Malfoy. I like him, really. I like him a lot.” Hermione said, and a smile wormed its way onto Draco’s face. Luna had done just as wonderfully as she had implied. The ability to coax that kind of an admission out of his stubborn witch was more than enough to make up for Luna’s shortcomings in the Department of Mysteries.

Hermione’s cheeks flushed deep pink as she continued. “We made a deal that if I hated him after three months, he would let me go and give me my wand back. But I don’t hate him,” she confessed, and Draco laughed.

“What did I tell you darling,” he crooned, to the oblivious shadow of Hermione. “A month, just as I predicted.”

“Not anymore, at least,” the memory-Hermione continued on, “And I just feel awful, you know, because I should be out there, helping Ron and Harry, because of the war and all, but I learned about Dumbledore, right?” At the mention of the Gryffindor’s names, Draco sneered. Weasley and Potter. She was still clinging onto Weasley and Potter. Well, he would have to remedy that.

“And if he was that awful, why would the cause that he created be any different? Wouldn’t it be just like him? Looking amazing and wonderful on the outside, but underneath, it was completely rotten? And shouldn’t Death Eaters be evil? Because that’s what I’ve always thought and that’s what I’ve always been told, but then Draco isn’t evil - right? He can’t be, because he’s just so... amazing with me and then I’ll remember that he’s a Death Eater and then I’ll feel so guilty, and then once I feel guilty, I’ll just spiral into this need to hate him, because if I can’t hate him, then there’s something wrong with me - right?”

“Oh love,” Draco whispered over the shell of her ear, “There’s nothing wrong with you. We’re fixing you all up, remember? Sometimes, the process hurts, but you’ll come out the other end all the much better.”

“He’s a Death Eater, I should be able to hate him, or what does that say about me? Does that say that *I’m* a terrible person? Because it definitely feels like it. And then I’ve just got all these feelings that I keep pushing down and pretending that I don’t have, because the moment I acknowledge them I feel like a horrible person!”

“What kind of feelings?” Luna asked, patiently, a small, comforting smile on her face.

At the same moment, Draco teased, “What kinds of feelings, pet?”

“*I like* him,” Hermione cried out.

“There you go,” he murmured. “Give in and just admit it, Hermione.”

“I mean I *like* him! He’s just so insanely attractive that it’s not even remotely fair. And that sounds so shallow, but I swear that it’s not just his looks, it’s his *mind* and the discussions we have and how I just feel so *safe* when I’m with him, and everything just feels so *right*. *But I shouldn’t feel that way about him!*”

She said the last part with great conviction, but Draco was able to detect a strong undercurrent of doubt just beneath the surface, *just* ready to burst through and take the reins. All she needed was a little push.

“Why?” Luna asked, a smirk upon her face.

“Because he’s a Death Eater, and that would be wrong. Wouldn’t it?”

“Who’s to say what’s right and what’s wrong?” Luna asked. “What’s wrong for one person might be right for another. The Weasleys think that rituals are bad, and I think that they’re good. Who’s to say who is right and who is wrong? Morality is all subjective, so why should it matter?” Luna rolled over, so that Hermione was sandwiched between the two blondes. “I just think that you should do what makes you happy, whether you think people will think that it’s right or wrong. Whether or not *you* think it’s right or wrong. Right and wrong changes. Choosing something that will make you happy lasts.”

“He’s a Death Eater though,” Hermione said, a note of defeat in her voice. “And if he’s a Death Eater, then he has to hate me, because my parents are muggles.”

Luna hummed, “Maybe, maybe not. I don’t think he hates you.” She paused. “Hermione, do you truly feel that he hates you? Has his actions in the recent past made it seem as if he hates you?”

Hermione whispered, “No.”

Draco shot to his feet, his chest swelling with pride. *There* she was. Finally giving into the way everything was supposed to be.

“And does he make you happy?”

Hermione took a deep breath. “Yes.”

“Then I don’t see why you don’t just give in to what you’re feeling.”

Draco was thrown from the memory, and back into the darkness of the dungeon, but the triumphant smile on his face remained, and had he been any lesser of a man, he would’ve crowed.

He, Draco Malfoy, had won. Now it was time for the rest of the world to realise it.

A few days later, when Hermione came down to the library in the morning, she stood in the doorway, nervously twirling a strand of hair around her finger.

“Are you just going to stand there all day?” Draco teased. He watched in delight as a light pink spread across her cheeks. Oh, but he could make it all the more pink if she just let him...

“It’s really nice outside today,” Hermione said, still blushing. “So I thought we could read outside and have a picnic. Unless you’re afraid you’ll get grass stains on your pants,” she added, a challenging note in her tone.

“I’ll just buy another pair,” Draco said, as he stood up.

“You are *such* a snob,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes.

“Benefits of being a Malfoy,” Draco shrugged, smirking, as they began to walk. “I could buy the Crown Jewels, and it wouldn’t make the slightest dent in my Gringotts account.”

“Then why don’t you?”

“What use would I have for the Crown Jewels of England?”

“What use do you have for half of the stuff that you do have?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Would you rather I throw out hundreds of years of history?”

“No,” Hermione said, “I just think that there should be a museum or something. I mean, most ludicrously wealthy muggles will donate art or historically significant objects to a museum, either because they’re philanthropists or because they want a tax write-off. I don’t know, I just have always found it strange that the only way one can learn Wizarding History is through a book or in a class.”

“Why don’t you start a Wizarding Museum then?” Draco asked.

Hermione snorted, “Sure. As if I could afford that.”

Draco almost laughed. She really had no idea of just how much of the wizarding world was at her fingertips. “I’m sure you would find a way. I mean who could say no to you?” He smirked, and conjured a picnic blanket for the two of them to sit on.

Hermione frowned as she sat down. “A lot of people. I mean, come on, who would donate money to bring something that probably nobody else besides me cares about? I tried to help the House Elves, but that was a resounding failure.”

Damn the stupid House Elves.

“That’s probably because nobody cared to explain to you that House Elves rely on their owner’s magic. It’s a symbiotic relationship of sorts - they cannot survive unless they are bound to a wizard or a witch,” Draco lied. No, House Elves by nature were inferior, so why wouldn’t wizards use them to do meaningless tasks? It was a mutual understanding between the two species - the House Elves knew that they were inferior. If only mudbloods were half as reasonable. But unfortunately, the inferiority of House Elves was not something Hermione would understand yet, and Draco refused to lose any ground with her over something as meaningless as pathetic House Elves.

“Oh,” Hermione exclaimed, her eyes widening. “Merlin, it’s no wonder why they didn’t want to be freed. They must’ve thought that I was trying to kill them!” Her eyes shone with tears, and Draco blinked. This was certainly not a turn that he had been expecting her to take, although it wasn’t an unwelcome one.

“Hey,” he said, his voice soothing. “It’s not your fault.”

“They must hate me,” she said, quietly. “I didn’t *mean* to, I really didn’t-”

Draco pulled her close to him, and began rubbing circles onto her skin. “Hermione it isn’t your fault.”

“Merlin, I was going to kill them!” she said, as a tear slid down her cheek. “Did everyone know? Did everybody know about the House Elves? And they just *let* me go on, trying to kill them? So they could make fun of me? Let’s all laugh at Hermione again, it’ll be a great time!” her voice hitched. “And Ron? Why didn’t Ron tell me? We’re friends, why couldn’t he just explain to me what was wrong with what I was doing instead of just making fun of me over it behind my back?”

“You deserve better friends, Hermione.”

Hermione let out a watery laugh, “Sure, as if anyone else would want to be friends with the Know-It-All.”

Draco let out a sigh. “I’ve noticed Gryffindor tends to be constricting in the kinds of people that they let into their little club. They’re intimidated by your intelligence because they just can’t compete with it. Gryffindors don’t value intelligence, which makes no sense to me. Statistically, the median grade of Gryffindors is much lower than any of the other houses. Gryffindor only just barely beats out Hufflepuff if you take your grades into account - and that’s only because of how incredibly high your grades are. I mean, you’re really the only reason Gryffindor gets any points throughout the year. So if they see someone as brilliant as you are and reject them, that reflects more on them than it does on you.”

The words seemed to sink in, and Draco hoped that she would *finally* start emotionally distancing herself from Potter and Weasley, and stop holding herself to the standards of blood traitors.

“Maybe you have a point,” Hermione admitted softly. Oh, she was just so close. All she needed was one more push.

“Now what book are we reading today?” Draco asked.

Hermione’s eyes lit up, and pulled out a green hardcover book that read ‘Anne of Green Gables’ on the front in golden letters. “This was one of my favorites when I was little, so I hope that you’ll like it,” she said, blushing a bit.

“Oh,” Draco said, “I’m sure I’ll love it.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I'm pretty excited for the next chapter. It was one of the earlier chapters I wrote, before I began to add chapters in between what I had already written to flesh things out. But Chapter 15 is a pretty big turning point in the story, so you all have that to look forward to.

Orgio Revelare

Chapter Notes

As promised, a very important chapter. Just a reminder that Draco Malfoy doesn't always/usually/ever tell the truth, especially in this chapter.

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

“Can you show me the Manor again?” Hermione asked, a week later. “I want to know the history of it, like what you did in the garden about a while ago.”

And so that’s what they did.

When they came to the room that held the family history, Draco watched as Hermione went through it slowly. Finding the family tapestry, she trailed the Malfoy line all the way from the top, from those who had been worshipped as gods, to Roman Emperors and Centurions, to noblemen and royalty, and important wizarding figures of history.

“This is really impressive-how do you track all of this?” Hermione asked, turning to him, her eyes sparkling.

Draco smiled at her enthusiasm. This was something he could use. This was what he had been counting on, when she had asked for him to show her the rest of the Manor. Learning of her bloodline somewhat organically was something that she needed in order to move forward. He’d tell her of the story that he and his family had concocted, a lie that would in a few moments, become the truth as far as everyone else was concerned. Most importantly, the indisputable truth to Hermione, the proof that would bring her to him, to his side.

“Here, I can show you.” He led her through the manor to the Potions Lab, and started pulling out ingredients. “It’s a potion called *orgio revelare* which roughly translates to ‘reveal lineage’. It’s fairly quick and easy to make, although the ingredients are a bit on the expensive side,” he explained, as he threw various ingredients into the cauldron, stirring clockwise, as the fumes rose into the air. “The final ingredients are parchment and the blood of whomever you’re trying to map the family tree of. It greys out at Muggles, though, but I have something I want to test out. Is it alright if I use some of your blood?”

Hermione looked at him confused, but Draco knew she’d say yes. His Hermione was just far too curious to say no. And that was exactly what he was counting on.

“Sure,” she said, “Although I’m not sure what you’re trying to do. You’re just going to get the name Hermione Granger and two greyed out Muggles.” Still, she held out her hand, and Draco ever-so-carefully cut into her palm with the knife. His brave little lioness didn’t flinch, and let the blood drip into the cauldron as the fumes turned various colours.

Draco pulled a piece of parchment from the storage cabinet and slowly poured the potion onto the paper, holding his breath as the liquid started to take shape.

Just as it had done the first time that he had tested it, the parchment began to spell out Hermione's new name. Her true name. He watched her carefully, watched how her eyes widened, her eyebrows flew up, and her mouth popped open, and heard the sharp intake of breath from the girl beside him. From Hermione Black.

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Hermione watched, completely frozen as the words unfurled onto the paper faster and faster. (Hermione Black. Black Black Black Black.) A line led up from the name (her name), splitting off into Regulus Black and Madeleine Rosier. (Her parents.) Regulus Arcturus Black - a name she had only known for being Sirius's brother. A name that she had only heard Sirius say maybe twice. Regulus. (Her father.) The Black family line shot up further and further into the parchment, faster and faster. Hermione tore her eyes from the Black line (From her father's line, from *her* line), to the line of Madeleine Rosier. Madeleine Rosier came from Hyacinth Rosier - that was strange, why would she have her mother's last name? - and Tom Riddle Jr. Oh.

Hermione turned around, to see Draco staring at her, gauging her reaction. He seemed... unsurprised. Hermione bit the inside of her cheek. "Draco, did you know about this?" Despite her best efforts, her voice began to tremble. When he nodded, Hermione felt her eyes start to well up with tears. "How long, Draco? How long have you known?"

"Since the very beginning of fourth year."

"Why - why didn't you tell me?"

His eyes were soft and open. (Safe.) He gave her a rueful smile. "You wouldn't have believed me."

"Who else knew?" she asked, her voice wavering.

He gave her a pitying look, "I only found out because I overheard Potter and Dumbledore talking about it. My family paid a private investigator to find out more about it, and to report back to us. She ended up discovering that the Weasley family knew about your true parentage, as did Potter." He looked on sympathetically as Hermione choked back a sob. (Don't blame him.)

"You're sure?" she asked, hoping, praying that this wasn't true. That her friends hadn't kept something like this from her. (Were they her friends, if they kept this from her?)

"Dumbledore manipulated your whole life, Hermione. He set an imperiused troll on you in first year, to give Potter and Weasley a way to pretend to save you, so you felt like you owed them. So you'd be loyal to them, to him. I mean, come on, three first years could never take on a full grown troll, not even one as talented as you. I mean there's no way that Weasley, who couldn't lift a *feather* two hours before, was suddenly able to lift a club and maneuver it

so that it fell on the troll's head. And Potter? If the troll wasn't imperiused, he would've been smashed to bits."

"Why would they go through all that trouble to gain my loyalty?" Hermione asked, as another tear fell.

"We've theorized that it was for two reasons. The first would be to try and manipulate the law into giving Potter the Black Family Fortune, with your unknowing consent. The second would be to use you as an emotional and psychological weapon against the Dark Lord whenever he rose again." He paused, and brushed away the lone tear with his thumb. "I'm sorry, but your friends knew who your family was. While the friendship might've been somewhat real, it's looking more and more like it was all just a lie, complete manipulation on their part.

"How - why - my parents? How was I taken?"

"Dumbledore kidnapped you in December of 1980 on the night that he killed your parents in their sleep. He then took you to a random pair of muggles, who he memory charmed into believing that you were their child. He gave you a small glamour - bushier hair, and slightly larger teeth - to make it harder to recognise you in the wizarding world. I'm sure he would've gone with a stronger glamour, but a full body glamour would need to be reapplied weekly, time he simply didn't have. Hermione, with the glamour on your hair and teeth broken, you look so much like a Rosier and a Black that most purebloods would recognise you immediately. And if I showed you a picture of your mother and father, you'd be able to tell just how much you look like the both of them."

"They all knew? The whole time?" Her voice was small. (The whole time, the whole time, the whole time.)

With his nod, tears started to trickle down her face. (No wonder they didn't like her. They didn't *want* to like her. They didn't *care* about her.)

She had never gotten a Weasley sweater, not like Harry did. (They never cared about her.) Why she was never quite welcomed into the Burrow. (She wasn't even a human being to them.) Why Ron never liked her back, but kept on leading her on. (She was just a pawn for their chessboard.) She had been in *love* with him, wanted to *marry* him and have a family with him one day, and he couldn't even tell her that he wasn't interested. (It hurt so badly.) Why had they decided to do this to her? (Because they were bad.) She couldn't control who her parents were. (They were bad.) And even if she could, why did they have to take it out on her? (They were bad.)

Why was she never ever let in? (It hurt so badly, please could somebody just let her in?) Why did everyone always hate her? (Please, could someone just love her, for once?) Nobody *ever* put her first. (Could someone ever put her first?) Was she truly that unlovable? (She just wanted someone to love her.) Could someone ever just want to be with her, spend time with her, without some ulterior motive? (She just wanted someone to love her.) For once, just once in her life, she wanted to be loved. (She just wanted someone to love her.) To be liked. (She just wanted someone to love her.) To be cared for. (She just wanted someone to love her.) Just for once in her *goddamned life*, she wanted to be important to *somebody*. (She just wanted

someone to love her.) Anybody. (She just wanted someone to love her.) For *once* . (She just wanted someone to love her.)

Through her tears, she looked up at Draco, who had encased her in his arms, pulling her up against his chest, and swayed ever so slightly, rubbing circles onto her skin. (She just wanted someone to love her.) “Why didn’t you tell me?” she whispered. (She just wanted someone to love her.)

She tore herself from his arms, turning around to face him, tears running down her cheeks. (She just wanted someone to love her.) “Why didn’t you tell me, Draco?” she asked, her voice rising. (She just wanted someone to love her.) “You should’ve told me,” she whispered hoarsely. Why couldn’t anybody love her enough to tell her the truth? (She just wanted someone to love her.) Refusing to look at Draco’s face, she whipped around, and ran off, her sobs echoing through the hallway. (She just wanted someone to love her.)

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Bullocks. Fucking bollocks. Draco had known that Hermione wasn’t going to take this well but why was she upset with *him* ? It wasn't *his* fault that she wasn't taking it well. No, the responsibility for that, as usual, lay at the doors of Potter and Weasley.

Weasley. Fucking Weasley. Draco had known that Hermione had thought that she had fancied the Blood-Traitor, but he had never realised just how deep it went. Marriage? Children? What kind of bullshit fuckery was that? Had Weasley been slipping her infatuation potions? It was the only way that *his* Hermione would’ve ever even looked at the prick. Merlin, Draco would tear the Weasel apart, bring him to the brink of death, just to bring him back again and again and again. Perhaps he’d obliviate him, so that his spirit stayed alive, and he was able to break it, over and over. Before, Draco had thought that he might eventually kill Weasley, but now, he wouldn’t even be given that small mercy. For Weasley to try and drag down a woman who was born to be a Malfoy down to his own level? To try and trick her? That was the worst crime he could’ve committed. Worse than being a Blood-Traitor or aiding Potter or fighting for the Order. Hermione was *his*.

For a moment, he contemplated trying to go after Hermione, in case if but he figured that she might want some time to herself. However, the threat of her having another episode loomed on his mind, so he barked out, “Azure!” A House Elf popped into the room, waiting expectantly for an order. “Keep an eye on Hermione. The moment she seems like she has trouble breathing, I want you to come to me immediately. You are *not* to be seen by her. If she so much as suspects somebody is watching her, you are to shut your ears in the oven and leave them there for the following three hours. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master Draco,” Azure squeaked, before popping out of the room.

Without waiting another moment, Draco apparated into downtown London, and over the next few hours killed quite a number of homeless Muggles. Draco particularly targeted redheads, ripping them apart bit by bloody bit, and imagining that they were Weasley. They were a poor substitute, but they would have to do for now. Weasley and Potter were not to be captured until Draco was off of summer vacation, not until after Hermione was completely and utterly

his. Until she hated Potter and Weasley enough to not object to their torture. Enough that eventually, she would want to join in herself.

Eventually, his rage sated, Draco *scourgified* himself and apparated back to the Manor. But if Hermione was in the middle of an episode when he found her, Draco would make ash of Azure's bones.

After casting a Point-Me, Draco was led to the Wine Cellar, and Hermione sitting on the floor, nursing a bottle of hard liquor. His anger at Weasley and Potter flared back up - they had driven her to this? - but it tampered down when she looked at him and smiled. She was captivating, even more so than she normally was, when her smile was for him.

"Draco!" she called out, before she frowned. "Wait, I'm supposed to hate you though aren't I? Wasn't that the deal or something?" Draco gently pulled the bottle of alcohol from her hands, smiling down at her softly. "But I'm going to lose that though," she whispered loudly. "Really badly. Don't tell anyone though, shhh. It's a secret!" she drunkenly collapsed into giggles.

Draco picked Hermione up, and carried her out of the room, bridal style, as she nestled herself into his chest. "I don't like the taste of it, you know," she confessed, "I just know that Sirius used to drink when he didn't want to feel so sad. And I was feeling-" she hiccuped, "really sad."

"Mhm," Draco murmured.

Hermione continued on rambling, "It's just that you know, nobody ever loves me. Nobody likes me, Harry and Ron always picked each other first. I'm never anybody's first choice. Nobody's ever nice to me, not without wanting something. They never have a nice reason. Sometimes it felt like Harry and Ron only really ever stayed friends with me because I do their schoolwork for them, and well now... *that*." she trailed off, and Draco's temper flared up, yet again. "And then there was Ginny but she never really had any time for me. But you're nice to me, Draco."

Hermione looked up at him with her big doe eyes, and Draco's temper was pushed off for later. "I really like your eyes Draco. Sometimes I want to just stare at them for hours and hours... or maybe just stare at you. You're very handsome," she slurred.

"Am I?" Draco asked, bemused.

"Mhm. I always knew you were handsome back in school but I pretended like it didn't matter. But now I don't have to, right?"

"You don't have to pretend anything with me, Hermione."

"You're so nice to me. Why are you nice to me, Draco? Bellatrix Lestrange told me that you're in love with me but that can't be true."

"Why not?"

“Because nobody’s ever in love with me. Nobody ever even *likes* me. I mean, for all Ron and Harry know, I’m being tortured. Have they even tried to rescue me, Draco?”

Draco shook his head apologetically, “No, Hermione, I’m sorry, but they haven’t.”

“You rescued me, Draco,” Hermione said softly, “Do you like me?”

He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I do, Hermione. More than like, really.” He took a deep breath. One little push. “I’ve loved you since first year.”

“Really?” she asked, hopefully, “Even when you thought I was a muggle-born?”

“Yeah.”

“Why’d you call me a m-mudblood then?” Hermione asked, her voice simply curious.

“I didn’t know how to get your attention,” Draco admitted, pretending to be sheepish. “I wanted you to acknowledge me, to know that I existed, and even if you hated me, at least you were looking at me.”

Hermione looked up at him, and said as solemnly as someone who was a drunk as she was could, “Boys can be so stupid in showing how they like a girl. Why can’t they just say that they like her?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I think I like you too,” she whispered, “But that’s another secret!” Hermione paused, and hiccuped again. “If you like me, and I like you, can you be my Romeo, and I can be your Juliet? But I don’t want to be the ones that die. I want to be your versions, the ones that you were talking about...”

Draco smiled down at her tenderly, “We can be whatever you want to be, love.”

“Really?” She looked up, her eyes wide and hopeful.

“Really.”

They reached her room, and he lowered her into the bed.

“Draco?” Hermione asked tentatively, “Can you please sleep with me?” She went red and immediately hastened to correct herself. “Not like - not like that, just like in the bed with me. I-I just don’t want to be alone, Draco.”

“Love, I’m afraid if I do that, you might get the wrong impression when you wake up.”

She wasn’t easy to refuse, not with the way that she was finally looking at him with unmasked adoration, feelings that she had been trying to hide for the past month.

“What if I promised I wouldn’t?”

But he was patient. He wasn't even going to let the possibility of anything even mess this up.

"Hermione, I will do whatever you ask me to do with you, just the moment that you are sober. I'm not going to take advantage of you."

"But *I* want it," Hermione slurred, "It's not fair that I have to wait." She paused. "Wait, wait. I think I have an idea. We can make another deal, right? Like the ones we've made before?"

"What are you proposing?"

"Well," Hermione blushed, "I kind of really like it when you call me love. So you can keep calling me that and I won't put up a fuss - I promise - if you stay in my room tonight."

"It seems like you're getting an awful lot out of this deal as opposed to me, Hermione," Draco teased.

"I can have dinner with you from now on," Hermione suggested.

Draco smiled. "That seems fair to me. And it works for you?"

"Sure," Hermione nodded, "But I think maybe you should write because things are a little bit spinny for me right now. It's like I'm on one of those rides from the county fair. I used to go to them with my par - my *not* parents when I was little."

"Could you tell me more about that when we have our dinner tomorrow night?" asked Draco, as he conjured a quill and a piece of paper, writing down the terms of the agreement. "I'd like for you to get some sleep, first."

"Okay. We can make a pinky promise over the deal, too."

"What's a pinky promise?"

Hermione giggled, "It's when you kiss your finger, and then you lock it with whoever you're promising whatever to. And you're not allowed to break it."

"Or what?"

"Or else, I guess." Hermione kissed her pinky, and Draco, bemused, followed suit. She locked their pinkies together, and gave them a small shake. "There." She paused. "I think I'm gonna go to sleep now, I'm really tired. But you'll still be here, when I wake up though, right?"

"Of course, love," Draco had a small smile on his face. "I promised, didn't I?"

I know all of you have seen this coming, I mean I've been pretty obviously building up to a breaking point for the past few chapters so well, here it is! Hope you all liked it :)

Absolutely Perfect

Chapter Notes

God sorry about this week being so weird. I can't promise it'll get any better. This Sunday, my best friend, who is more or less a sister to me, got a really bad health diagnosis, and that completely threw everything for me. And then, on top of that awfulness, my computer broke, and needs to go in for repair. In the meantime, I'm using a spare, but I'm not sure how that will affect everything. This is on top of a large work load I'm dealing with right now. I love writing this fic, and writing is my stress relief, but the free time I have right now fluctuates a lot. I'll be trying to keep on top of things, but if I don't post, I hope you'll all understand why. <3

Hermione blinked herself awake, her head throbbing. As she clenched her eyes shut, trying to shut out the light, last night came flooding back, piece by piece.

Hermione Black. Weasley sweaters. A bottle of liquor that tasted awful. Being picked up. How safe she felt in his arms. "I've been in love with you since first year." "We can be whatever you want to be, love." Promises. The deal. Love. Love, love, love, love.

It felt good. *She* felt good. Hermione slowly opened her eyes, adjusting to the light. Her head still hurt but it was nowhere near the sheer amount of pain she had been feeling when she had first woken up. Scanning the room, her eyes fell on Draco, sitting in the chair, fast asleep. (He stayed.) His head was resting on his shoulder, and his hair was tousled from sleep, a far cry from how neatly styled it was on a day to day basis. (He stayed, like he had promised.) Hermione found that she rather liked it this way. (He stayed for *her*.)

She crept up to the edge of her bed, careful not to make a sound. She didn't want to wake him. She ended up sitting at the edge, studying Draco. After a few moments, he slowly awoke, and silver eyes met tawny brown. A small smile crept onto Hermione's face.

"I think I really like your hair this way," Hermione whispered.

Draco smirked, "I can wear it this way more, if you're so partial to it." Hermione nodded mutely, blushing. "How's your head?"

"Hurts pretty badly," Hermione admitted.

"Come on, love, we can get you a hangover potion then. Do you know if you can walk, or are you too dizzy?"

"I don't know, I haven't tried yet," Hermione said. Slowly she lowered her feet onto the ground and stood up, putting weight onto her unsteady legs. The moment she did, her ankles

gave out beneath her, and in a flash, she was caught by Draco, his Seeker reflexes kicking in. "You saved me," she murmured.

"Anytime, Hermione," he said softly. He placed his other arm underneath the backside of her knees and picked her up, carrying her close against his chest.

"This is becoming somewhat of a pattern between the two of us," Hermione commented wryly.

Draco looked down at her, "I can stop, if you want. If it makes you uncomfortable."

"No," Hermione said far too quickly, then blushed. "No...I like it," she confessed, "I like being close to you." She looked down, her face red, afraid to see what Draco's reaction was. Did he mean what he had said last night? (He did, he did.) Did he really like her? (He did.) Did he really love her? (Love her.)

"Hey," Draco said softly, gently tilting her chin up so that she was forced to look at him. "You don't ever have to feel embarrassed around me, or about your feelings."

"Oh good," Hermione flushed, "I was worried I had embarrassed myself last night. I've never really done any of this before. Talking about my feelings to someone...it's really hard. I feel like it's hard for people to like me. That I'm too much and not enough all at once."

"Then they're fools," Draco said, "No matter what you do, you'll always be perfect to me." He slowly lowered her onto a couch, propping her head up with a pillow, before rifling through a cabinet, and pulling out a potion, handing it to her.

Without hesitation, Hermione downed the bottle, and felt her headache quickly subside. As Draco sat down, Hermione leaned against him. The sleeves of his robes were rolled up, and Hermione studied the Dark Mark on his left arm. Instead of feeling fear or revolted...well, she wasn't sure *what* she felt. Slowly, she started tracing the outline of it with her finger. "Did it hurt?" she asked quietly.

"Not as much as you think that it would."

"Why'd you do it?" She bit her lip. "Were you forced into it? Or did you want to do it?"

Draco drew in a deep breath. "I was born into it, although I would've chosen it."

"Why? How were you born into it? Why would you have chosen it?"

"It's a long story," Draco sighed.

"We've got time," Hermione said softly.

"Are you sure that you want to hear it?" Draco asked. "It... a lot of it has to do with you, and your family. Your *real* family. And it might change the way that you look at some people you've known for a long time."

Hermione bit her lip. (Yes. Yes. Yes, she wanted to know.) She nodded. "Tell me everything."

Draco offered her a slight smile. “Alright. It all started back in 1944, when the Dark Lord became Head Boy of Hogwarts, alongside Hyacinth Rosier, who became the Head Girl. The two developed a quick friendship, although it was strictly platonic. The Dark Lord left for the continent after graduation, and Hyacinth was able to work in the Department of Mysteries due to her family’s connections, in spite of her gender. When the Dark Lord returned from the continent, he worked as a shopkeeper for a short amount of time, before he reformed the Knights of Walpurgi, a group that he had formed back in Hogwarts. This time, though, the Knights were called Death Eaters. Hyacinth became the Dark Lord’s advisor, and led him to political success, and aided him in forming connections with many other influential families. In 1960, the Dark Lord decided that he wanted an Heir, and who better than Hyacinth could provide one? It wasn’t born of love, but of a mutual deep respect for each other, high magical potency, and a friendship that the two had shared for over twenty years. And, while the Dark Lord did not love Hyacinth in a romantic sense, the two had a deep connection. Your mother, Madeleine Rosier, was born on November 30th, 1960, and the moment the Dark Lord saw her, he truly loved his daughter.

Draco glanced at Hermione. “I know that Dumbledore likes to say that the Dark Lord is unable to feel love, but he loved Madeleine more than anything in the world. Funnily enough, when Madeleine went to Hogwarts, despite being the Heir of Slytherin, she was sorted into Gryffindor. Unfortunately, in 1976, your grandmother, Hyacinth was murdered by the Prewitt Twins. Madeleine lived with my Mother and Father after Hyacinth’s death, and in her sixth year, she fell in love with your father, Regulus Black. The two eloped during the winter break of their last year at Hogwarts, in 1979, and you were born that September, and everyone who knew of you adored you. Your parents, the Dark Lord, my parents, Bellatrix, Walburga, Orion- they all adored you with their whole hearts. For a while, all was seemingly well, despite the ongoing war, until in December of 1980, when there was a raid upon Rosier Manor by the Order of the Phoenix. The mission was devised by Dumbledore, and Mad Eye Moody led the raid. The other members that were brought along were Severus Snape, James and Lily Potter, Remus Lupin, and Sirius Black. We had always known that the Manor had been burned to the ground, with your parents trapped inside, but from the memories found in Snape’s mind, the Manor was looted, and Regulus and Madeleine were tortured before being left to die. The only reason that they didn’t kill you was because Dumbledore wanted to use you against the Dark Lord.”

Hermione winced into Draco, and he started to rub small circles into her back. “For the next decade, it was assumed that you were killed in the fire alongside your parents. While we obviously found out later that you were abducted instead, everyone truly believed at that time that you were dead. The Dark Lord was absolutely grief-stricken and vowed revenge upon anyone involved in the plot to kill his family. Still, he needed a new Heir, and as he was my Godfather, the title and responsibilities all fell to me. In the meantime, the Dark Lord focused most, if not all of his energy into his revenge. Have you ever wondered just how Moody got all of his scars, how he lost his eye and his leg?”

Hermione looked up at Draco, “That was...”

“The Dark Lord, yes,” Draco nodded. “He went after the Potters on Halloween 1981, partially because of the Prophecy, but also because of what James Potter had done to him, to you.”

“He was dead for thirteen years, for me?” Hermione asked. (He died for you. He *cared* enough to die for you.) When Draco nodded, a tear slipped from her eye. “And all I’ve done was try to kill him for the past six years,” she whispered, brokenly, “I’m a horrible person, Draco.”

“Shh, shh, shh,” Draco shushed Hermione gently, drawing her into his arms. (Safe.) “You didn’t know. He was so incredibly happy the day that he found out that you were still alive. That’s why Quirrell always called on you in class - your grandfather wanted to get to know you. He doesn’t blame you, I promise. It’s not your fault that everyone in your life was turning you against him, against all of us.”

“What about Harry?” Hermione asked quietly, looking up at Draco. The more thought she gave to it, the more her theory seemed plausible. (Or it was blind hope. Stupid, naive blind hope. She didn’t need Harry. She didn’t need Ron. She had Draco.) “Don’t we need to save him too? His Muggle guardians are awful, that’s what he’s always said.”

Draco’s eyes hardened and turned cool. “I’m sorry, love, but he was lying to you as well. He was raised by the Weasleys, and they all had more than enough money to go around, despite what they tried to lead you to believe. Do you really think that Dumbledore would let his little Saviour live in anything but luxury?” he spat out, coldly, “It was all a ploy, to make you more sympathetic towards Potter. Dumbledore thought that if you thought that you both were raised in the Muggle world, you would be more likely to befriend him, that you would have more in common. They *all* knew. All of them. They were all taking advantage of you. *Using* you.”

Another tear fell from Hermione’s eye, and Draco softened immediately, and wiped her tear away with his thumb, tenderly.

“What’s the fight all really about then? What do each of the sides want?”

“The so called ‘Light’,” Draco scoffed, “Wants control. They want to restrict all kinds of magic, making the population dumber and easier to control. They want nothing to change, to stay in the Victorian era. The Dark Lord wants innovation and intelligence; he wants change. He wants to take those born to Muggles into the Wizarding World immediately after their birth, and have them adopted into Wizarding families. He wants to integrate science into magic, and make all kinds of magic legal. The best are allowed to be the best, to explore whatever they desire. Everyone has a use, nobody lives a life without meaning, without contributing to society as a whole. If the people are given every tool available to them, I believe that our world would become more wondrous than we could ever possibly imagine.”

His eyes were far away as he painted the picture. (It was beautiful. Useful. Everyone would feel useful.) Nobody would feel left out. (Nobody would feel like she had.) Everyone would have a purpose, be able to grow to their fullest potential. (They wouldn’t be held back, like she was.)

“Draco,” Hermione murmured, chewing her lip, “I have something that I should probably tell you. And I think you might have to go and...and tell someone after I do. With - with everything...” she trailed off, “Where is Dumbledore? What has he been doing?”

“Dumbledore is dead,” Draco murmured.

Hermione sat up abruptly. “What? When?”

“It happened the night that we left school.”

“Oh.” Hermione settled back into Draco, and stayed silent for a moment. Her thoughts echoed back to that night and what had happened after. The words she had said to Draco, how she had treated him. *Evil. Coward. I hate you. I’ll always hate you.* (He’d been trying to save her. And she had hated him for that.) “I’m sorry,” Hermione apologised quietly, “For what I said when I first got here. You were just trying to help me and I... I didn’t... I didn’t know what I was saying, what I meant. I’m so so sorry, Draco,” she whispered, her tears starting to fall freely, “And if you hated me for what I said, what I did...I wouldn’t blame you.”

“Hey,” Draco said softly, “It wasn’t your fault. It’s never your fault, I promise. There is nothing in this world that could ever make me stop loving you.”

Hermione looked up at him through her lashes, and her heart started to pound. (Kiss him.) God she wanted to (kiss him)- needed to (kiss him)- ached to (kiss him) --.

Gathering all of her Gryffindor courage, she slowly leaned in, her stomach fluttering. Realisation dawned on Draco’s face, and he placed his hand behind her head and leaned in quickly and - (He was kissing her, *he was kissing her!*) Hermione leaned into the kiss, and warmth spread throughout her body. (He was kissing her!) It was amazing, incredible, wonderful, indescribable. (He was kissing her!)

A soft moan escaped her lips, and Draco took advantage of it, plunging further into her mouth. It was the first time walking into Diagon Alley all over again, new sights and sounds and feelings; things she had never even dreamed of, things she had never even dared to hope for, the ends of her nerves light on fire in the best possible way. It was being swept into a rip-current, scared and excited, and swept up into a new feeling, with no choice but to go along. And even if there was a choice to resist, Hermione was certain she wouldn’t have even wanted to try. It was being lost and found all at once, the final brushstroke on a beautiful painting, the alignment of the planets, the vastness of the night sky in the countryside, the stars dotting the night sky like freckles, blooming and gleaming and competing for attention. It was beautiful.

When Draco drew back, Hermione slowly opened her eyes, and saw Draco looking back at her, smiling softly. “Was that okay?”

Hermione blushed. “Was that okay?” she echoed, her cheeks stained pink. “Draco, that was absolutely *wonderful* . I could do that with you forever.”

“Then you won’t mind,” Draco grinned slyly, “If I kiss you again,” he leaned into her for a quick kiss. “And again,” another kiss, “And again,” and another, “And again,” and another, “And again,” and another. At that point, Hermione was leaning back on her pillows, and Draco was huddled over her, caging her between his arms. (It felt safe. It felt wonderful. It felt so right.) “And-”

This time, Hermione cut him off with a deep kiss, grasping the front of his robes and pulling him in, so that he was practically on top of her. Hermione felt his hands in her hair, pulling it, stroking it, running through it, and when she mewled helplessly, lost in the kiss, she felt a deep, husky growl vibrate from Draco. When he finally pulled back, Hermione blushed deeply. “Was that okay? Was I okay?” she asked, self-consciously.

“You’re absolutely perfect.”

He thought she was perfect. She was perfect to him. God, she could *fly*. (She could fall in love with him.)

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Merlin, she was perfect. Draco revelled in the way that she was looking at him. It was everything he had ever imagined, everything he had ever hoped for with her and more.

While he was in Hogwarts, Draco had perfected his technique, from everything as innocent as kissing to sex and giving pleasure, so that when he was finally with her, she would be addicted to him. To the way that he made her feel. The long list of girls that he had fucked had been beautiful and wonderfully talented, Hermione far surpassed them without even having to try. None of them were good enough. None of them could compare to her. Gods above, just the sounds that Hermione made were enough to make him harden. She sounded so needy in the best way. She was needy for him and for him alone. He was the only person able to make her make those sounds. Those sounds belonged to him. Those desperate whimpers and breathy sighs and wanton mewls were his. *She* was his, just as much as he was hers. And the way that she blushed so prettily, pink from *his* kiss; how her curls were tempestuously beautiful, ruffled from *his* hands? She was his, only his, *forever* his, and she was finally starting to realise it.

“Like I was saying,” Hermione smiled playfully, nudging his shoulder, “Before I lost my train of thought - not that I’m complaining,” she blushed.

“Go on,” Draco said, encouragingly. This was it, this was going to be her first step over. Her first signal that she was no longer the Order’s puppeteer. That she would be *his*. Only his.

“Dumbledore was giving Harry lessons at night, during the school year,” Hermione revealed, “And Harry said that he was telling him about-” she bit her lip, “You-Know-Who’s childhood and his life and all that. And the point of all that was to find where the Dark Lord’s horcruxes were, and to destroy them. So that he could be killed once and for all. On the night of the Battle, Dumbledore and Harry went to retrieve a Horcrux, and I think they got it.”

Fucking shit. While Draco had already known through some Legilimency with her that the Order knew of the Horcruxes and had notified his godfather, he hadn’t been aware that Potter had managed to get his hands onto one. Well, at least they knew now that the Order potentially had a Horcrux, so that the Dark Lord could adjust his plans accordingly. Draco kissed Hermione, and held her face in his hands. “Thank you so much, love, for telling me. This...this will win us the war, or at least ensure that we will not lose.”

Hermione looked up at him with her big doe eyes. “Really?” she started fiddling with her fingers, “You’re not mad, right, that I didn’t tell you sooner?”

“Don’t you blame yourself for a moment,” Draco said gently - *Merlin*, he would punish the Weasel and Scarhead for making her feel as if she needed to doubt herself. “I might have to go back into work a little bit earlier than I was expecting, but everything will turn out alright in the end. I’m going to have to go now, though, to tell the Dark Lord.”

“And he won’t be angry with me either?” Hermione asked, her voice small, “He’s the only family I’ve got left.”

“I promise that he won’t,” Draco reassured her. “You can wait right here, if you want, and I’ll be back as soon as I possibly can, love.” One last time before going, he kissed her deeply, before heading to the fireplace across the room. He picked up a handful of floo powder, and stepped into the fireplace, calling out for The Dark Manor.

Inconvenient Truths and Easily Digestible Lies

Chapter Notes

Hi! Thank you all for your patience and well wishes. Everything in my life (should be) back on track/normal, and thankfully the surgery for my best friend went incredibly well, despite the slim chances of success. Hopefully I should be able to post more frequently now, although I have fallen a little bit behind on the buffer that I try to keep between the chapters I post and the chapter I'm writing, as I've not really had much of a chance to write lately. But, like I said, I should be able to catch up now.

Anyways, this is where the story starts becoming really really dark, so if you're sensitive to the issues mentioned in the tags, I would suggest to stop reading now, because this is where it starts to begin to feature in the story. I'd like to say again that I do not agree with or stand behind anything that is said in this story, and this is not a story that you should draw any kind of morals from. If you enjoy reading these kinds of stories - I do as well, there's no need to feel like there's something wrong with you for enjoying them. Other authors have gone into much more eloquent, well written explanations, and I would direct you to read those if you feel guilty in any way about enjoying darker fics.

With all of that said, here's the next chapter.

Draco watched the area outside of the fireplace change and morph into the art-deco styles that were prominently featured throughout the Dark Manor. He stepped out of the fireplace, and headed through the hallways, the blacks, silvers and greens of the Manor standing out regally. When he reached two tall doors at the end of the hallway that stood proudly against the luxury of the surroundings, Draco knocked on the door.

“Come in,” called a rich, deep voice.

Inside the study, tall bookshelves lined the walls, filled to the brim with stacks and stacks of books. The wooden floors were dark, and were decorated by black, velvet rugs on which Slytherin green chairs and lounges sat. At the end of the room, backlit by large windows, was a desk the colour of ebony, lined with rows of neatly arranged scrolls of parchment, tomes, and blueprints. At the head of it all, in a Sacramento green chair, sat the Dark Lord.

While when he appeared in battle, the Dark Lord wore a glamour of parchment white skin and slits for a nose, in most cases, the Dark Lord dropped the illusion for his natural appearance. He was a tall man, with dark, carefully styled hair, a few silver streaks lining the edges of the sides of his hair.

“So, Draco,” said the Dark Lord, “What is currently dragging you all the way here, away from my lovely little *granddaughter* ? I know that it’s taken you more than long enough to

get her, so I can hardly believe that you would leave her side so soon into her *rescue*. ”

Draco sighed, “I’ll tell you if you grab a bottle of scotch.”

The Dark Lord smirked, drawing out two glasses from behind his desk and going to the liquor cabinet and pulling out a bottle of scotch. He poured the scotch into the two glasses, and placed it on his desk. Draco grabbed his glass, and took a sip, letting the scotch hit him. “First, I’d like you to tell me how it all is progressing,” said the Dark Lord. “I have a bet with Bella riding on when you two are having your first kiss - winner gets McGonagall.”

Draco rubbed the bridge of his nose, “Why must my family be all so invested in my love life?”

“Because we care,” the Dark Lord chuckled. “And not just about you, Draco. Hermione piqued my interest the moment she came into Quirrell’s classroom, looking and acting as if she could’ve been Madeleine herself, and has yet to prove me wrong in just how extraordinary she is. I would’ve believed our own bullshit if I did not know for a fact that Madeleine had never even had a relationship with Regulus Black, much less a child with him. Without even knowing it, Hermione made it onto the very short list of the few people I give a damn about at the age of eleven, which is impressive enough in its own right. On top of that is her proximity to Potter. Even if she had just been a blistering idiot, I would’ve ripped her away from him just for the hell of it. And then, of course, I saw the way that you looked at her in your first year. By then she was engaged to you and didn’t even know it. You know just as well as I do that once a Malfoy falls in love, they don’t fall out. And I’ve known Lucius and Abraxas before him for long enough to know that Malfoys always get what they want.”

Draco smirked. “That we do.”

“Well?” the Dark Lord asked, “Start at the beginning, Draco. I want to know everything from you.”

“At first she was a little spit-fire,” Draco chuckled, “She was so angry with me. Called me a very impressive array of names, so if you were thinking of getting her a thesaurus for her birthday, she doesn’t need it.”

The Dark Lord threw his head back in delighted laughter.

Draco grinned and then continued, “She tore her room apart a handful of times, looking for a way to escape. Oh, and when she found out that I had her wand...you should’ve seen her face. She’s like a little kitten when she’s angry. Violent little thing, too, though she couldn’t do much damage to me without a wand if she tried - and she did. I made a deal with her that if she still hated me in three months, I would give her back her wand and let her go free.”

“Draco,” the Dark Lord admonished, his tone light-hearted, “That’s not fair and you know it.”

“I know,” Draco waved him off, “But when we hit that three month mark, she’ll quite enjoy what I do to her.”

“Mmm,” the Dark Lord hummed, “You Malfoy men and your women.”

Draco shrugged lightly. “Guilty as charged. The way to her heart though, was books. As soon as I took her to the library, all of her defenses crumbled after a few weeks. If William Shakespeare was still alive today, I’d write him a thank-you note, Muggle or not. After a while of going through a chunk of his catalogue, we ended with Romeo and Juliet. Yesterday, she asked for me to tell her the history of the house. Of course, I led her to the room where the Malfoy Family Tapestry is, and I was able to convince her to take an *Orgio Revelare* potion.”

“How did she take it?”

“Not well at first,” Draco admitted, “All I’ll say is that I found her in the wine cellar, and to make a long story short, she cannot hold her liquor. Anyways, today, I started introducing her to the cause, and she took to it very well.”

“Do you think she might want to start working with us?” the Dark Lord asked curiously.

“If I were to guess, she’ll ask to join in in a month or two,” Draco replied. “Although, I don’t want her out on the front lines, like Aunt Bella. While I don’t believe that anything would change her mind, it might be distressing for her to fight against people who were once her friends. And on top of that - not that I think it would happen - I do not want her to get hurt or be possibly captured. They wouldn’t be able to undo anything that we’ve done, but again, I don’t want her to be unnecessarily distraught, and I don’t want to have to clean that up if I don’t have to. Personally, I think she’ll end up doing something alongside my mother - both a hands-on method in the dungeons if she pleases, and otherwise, in research and in spell development. But, as I said, at least a month or two before that should become a possibility. She seems uncomfortable with the idea for the time being, but I’ll be able to make it fade.”

And Draco truly had no doubts that he would be able to coax Hermione over, slowly but surely. She seemed to take well enough to the few ideals of their side that he had presented earlier.

Of course, so far, Draco had only told her of the rosier side of the Dark Lord’s plans. The rest, he would ease her into later. The less...morally light side of the ideology was not something he could start right out the gate with. The best would be allowed to shine, of course. But the rest?

Some of the plans were well underway already. There was a reason that anyone affiliated with the Order was to be sent to Azkaban. Azkaban had been completely torn down, the prison transformed into the home for one large building that spanned the entire dozen square kilometer island. White walls, floors, rooms; not a single colour penetrated the island. It was based on, quite ironically, Muggle techniques of brainwashing infused with magic. The moment the ‘prisoners’ arrived, they were force fed a potion that completely destroyed any mental walls or barriers that they might have. Even a master occlumence’s mind would become easier to read than a children’s picture book. A team of Death Eaters, trained in the art of legilimency would then search through their minds for any information that might be helpful to the Dark Lord. Once that process was over, the prisoners were each given a small

white room to live in. They were then given an immensely strong slew of potions, however, there were two that were of the most importance.

The first was an incredibly strong calming draught that would rid the prisoners of any pesky ideas of rebellion or resistance. It was highly addictive, so much so that the prisoners would crave the potion above all else. The addiction took a frightening hold in as early as five doses, depending on the body weight of the prisoner. The potion robbed the drinker of their emotions, putting it away in a far corner of their mind. They would then be in an intense state of calm, all of their horror and fear and distress at their situation firmly tucked away. They were reduced to nothing more than to their primal wants and needs, and would willingly and easily accept any information they were told. If the potion were to be withheld from the drinker, once they were addicted, the newly learned ideas would still be wired into their brains, but after a day or so, their negative feelings would start to creep back in, leaving them desperate for the state peace that they were used to experiencing. Once hooked, the drinker would never give up the potion, were they given a choice. It was strong enough that it could've made Dumbledore become apathetic, at best, to his own cause that he had spearheaded, or to make Harry Potter himself eagerly worship fanatically at the feet of the Dark Lord for just one more dose.

The other main potion was a lust potion infused with a fertility potion. The effects of the potion would arouse the drinker to the point of near pain, giving them a 'need' to release the pressure. To combat self-relief, each prisoner would be adorned with a shock collar, to prevent any kind of alleviation without fucking. The women would only face semi-permanent relief once they had conceived, and the men simply wouldn't face any relief at all. Draco was aware that this would create a supply and demand problem between willing women and wanting men, but he couldn't give less of a shit. Whatever happened happened. The prisoners could barely even be considered people - much less wizards or witches. They deserved worse, quite honestly.

And what was the point of all this? What was the point of getting blood-traitors like the Weasleys to produce even *more* spawn? Population growth.

The plan was that once the child was born, it would be tested for how potent their magic was. Then, they would be split up into two different categories. The first category, the *less* magically potent, would be put on a diet of calming potions and sent straight to be raised by the undesirables that were too old to procreate. They would be spoon fed propaganda, and once they were of age, they would send them out to the part of the island with the other adults, to reproduce and to grow the population as much as they possibly could. They would have children over and over and over again until they were infertile, which for witches, tended to be around the age of sixty five, and for wizards around the age of eighty. The men would be used in one of two fields. The comparatively smarter and more magically gifted would provide prenatal and postnatal care, as well as delivering children. The lesser so, the absolute bottom of the Wizarding population, would become assistants to the house-elves, and would clean and cook, as well as doing other general maintenance of the day-to-day activities of Azkaban's population, or be sent out to be virtually House-Elves. The smarter and more magically gifted of the women would join their male counterparts in the medical field for Azkaban Island's population. The others would be the ones who took care of the children that were to be used for reproduction.

The second category of child were the ones who were highly magical, and only ten to twenty percent of the children would be considered to be enough to clear the hurdle. These children would either be blood-adopted into a Wizarding family in the United Kingdom or sent into a group Wizarding Children's home, which again, depended on their level of magical prowess. Those who were more magically potent would live as normal children and be sent to Hogwarts, and become normal citizens of the Wizarding World, able to choose what they wanted to do. Their loyalty to the Dark Lord would be received via family teachings and beliefs, as well as subtle propaganda when they went to school, as well as in the media. The other children, the ones sent to a Wizarding Children's Home, who were still fairly good at magic, would be given nothing but propaganda to inspire their loyalty to the Dark Lord, and then they would be sent off to be foot soldiers, the entry-level Death Eaters.

And of course, there were the children that were born to the normal Wizarding Citizens. Of course, you could have a child without any magical assistance and just hope for the best, but if they didn't clear the bar, the child would be lower level Death Eaters, just a step or two above the foot-soldiers, yet nowhere near the top. Who would want that? No, instead, there was a regimen of potions that one could take during one's pregnancy, that would ensure that your child would have enough magical talent and prowess to 'clear the bar' per sae. The potions would be mildly expensive, although ultimately affordable to anyone with a job.

Finally were the mudbloods. There were plans for an initiative to be set up so that all newborns born to Muggle parents would be tested for magical abilities. The most of them would be Muggles, but the ones that weren't would be removed from their homes. Depending on their magical abilities, they would either be sent to Azkaban for reproduction, or they would be blood-adopted into a Wizarding family. The only chance that they would be adopted would be if they were complete flukes, like his Hermione had been. And they too would be fixed. The flukes would have their blood cleansed, and would become the purebloods that they had obviously been meant to be. But the true mudbloods would go to Azkaban, to be treated like the animals that they were.

Azkaban was already far underway, a multitude of rebels, Blood Traitors and Mudbloods having been moved there, who were now completely and utterly compliant. But, there was one person that Draco was truly itching to get into Azkaban as quickly as possible.

"Has anyone been able to get a hold of Weaselette yet?" Draco asked. "She's Potter's little girlfriend, and I wouldn't mind dragging her out in front of Potter and her brother while she's high as a kite and stuffed up the duff with another man's child. She's got quite a temper on her, and I would give quite a bit just to see her watch Potter and Weasley getting tortured and not give a flying shit."

"If anyone ever doubted you were a Black, Draco," the Dark Lord grinned, looking delighted. "You truly are your mother's child Draco. Anyhow, you're about a day ahead of me. We've finally been able to get a pin on the house that she and her parents have been hiding in and your father and Aunt are going to raid in on it tomorrow night. I believe they might be calling in Greyback towards the end."

Draco smirked. "Good."

“And don’t think I haven’t forgotten how you’re avoiding my question of if you’ve kissed Hermione yet. I’d quite like to break McGonagall, Draco, and if you answer correctly, I can let you in on some of it as well. While Bella might let you watch, I don’t know if she’ll let you join in on the fun. She always particularly disliked Transfiguration.”

“It’s hard not to when you’re stuck with a shrew of a professor who’s lodged halfway up Dumbledore’s colon,” Draco grinned wryly, “But to answer your question, I finally got to the point where I kissed her today for the first few times today.”

The Dark Lord clapped Draco on the back, “There you go, Draco. Being patient pays off, and now Bella owes me fifty galleons.” He took a sip of scotch. “Now, what happened that you came in here to talk to me? I can’t imagine that it was your first kiss with Hermione.”

Draco chuckled, “No, I wish.” Draco downed the rest of his scotch. “Hermione started opening up to me about things that she had known from Potter. She was very worried that everyone would be upset with her and blame her for not telling us sooner.”

“Bah,” the Dark Lord mumbled, “Does the girl not know how truly patient you are? Does she doubt her own intelligence and skill? It was enough to make me take notice of her when she was eleven, and I do not notice simply ordinary people.”

“Potter and Weasley’s fault, I say,” Draco grumbled. “But like I was saying, she told me that Potter and Dumbledore knew of your horcruxes and retrieved one on the night of the Battle.”

The Dark Lord downed the rest of his glass of scotch and scowled into the distance. “Damn, that is a bit of a problem. It’s no matter, I’ll just make another to replace that one, and I’ll have the rest somewhere more secure. But I highly doubt Potter and Weasley will be able to find anything, what with the actual brains of the operation with us, and Dumbledore dead. And even if they somehow managed to idiotically stumble their way upon one, they’d have no means to be able to destroy it.”

Draco let out a sigh of relief. “Good.”

“And when am I to meet Hermione, officially?” the Dark Lord asked, raising an eyebrow. “She is officially my granddaughter now, is she not? Besides, I would like to see just how similar to Madeline she really is. Madeline truly had a knack for spell creation, which always proved to be useful in a time of need.”

“I’ll try and see what she feels about meeting family, and I’ll owl you whatever she decides on,” Draco said. “However, it is a delicate balance so it might just be Mother and Father at first. It’s important that we don’t change all too much for her too fast, or she might be overwhelmed.”

“Alright,” the Dark Lord acquiesced, “And I’m sure you want to get back to your little Hermione, so I won’t be keeping you here much longer.”

“Godfather, before I leave, would it be alright if I go along with Father and Aunt Bellatrix tomorrow night to where the Weasleys are hiding out?”

“Why exactly do you want to go along on the mission?”

Draco grimaced. “The more I learn about Hermione, the angrier I get at Potter and Weasley. And while I can’t take my anger out on them right now, I think Ginevra Weasley would be a good temporary substitution.”

The Dark Lord looked at Draco, seemingly calculating something in his head. “I don’t see an issue with it,” he said, nodding. “Your parents have requested the elder Weasleys for personal reasons, so the two of them will not be going to Azkaban. The Weasley girl though, will be, so you must make sure to not harm her enough that she becomes infertile. If the Weasleys are good at one thing, it is reproduction, and I intend to use that.”

“Thank you, Godfather,” Draco bowed his head.

“They’ll pick you up from the Manor at seven tomorrow night, so be ready to go.”

“Seven’s a little early for a night-raid,” Draco said, raising an eyebrow.

The Dark Lord chuckled. “Yes, but Bella has been complaining that she’s not been in enough action lately, so I figured the least I could do would be to give her more time to play with them.”

Fairytales

Chapter Summary

hi, I'm back! Hope y'all didn't miss me too much :))

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry I took such a long break from this - part of it was writer's block, the other part of it was psyching myself out and worrying I wouldn't be able to write anything you guys would enjoy.

I was so overwhelmed by all the love I've received on Tumblr and in the comments from you guys and how much you love this fic. I love it so so much too, even when it's hard to write - and believe me, the upcoming chapters were not easy for me to write, in content or in just getting over writer's block.

I'm sure this chapter is riddled with grammatical errors and I spent the longest time worrying about my characterization before I thought that I just needed to post it and stop thinking about it. So I hope you all like it, errors and all.

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

Hermione stared at the fireplace, chewing on her nail. (Draco, Draco, Draco.) Would the Dark Lord - would her *grandfather* be mad at her, or at Draco? (Draco, Draco, Draco.) Would he take it out on Draco? (Draco, Draco, Draco.) Even though what she had been told today pointed otherwise, she had spent half of her life thinking that her grandfather was the Devil himself. (Draco, Draco, Draco.) All the while he was the only actual family she had left. (Draco, Draco, Draco.) Her stomach churned with anxiety as Hermione toyed with the fibres on the couch. (Draco, Draco, Draco.)

Draco's form started flickering through the fireplace, and Hermione sat up, alert. (Draco, Draco, Draco.) When his form solidified, and he stepped out of the fireplace, Hermione frantically searched his body for any bruises or cuts or tremors that would indicate that the Dark Lord had hurt him. (Oh god, what if he was hurt? Draco, Draco, Draco.) If he was hurt it would be all her fault.

"What are you so worried about, Hermione?" Draco's voice cut through her fog, bringing her back to Earth. (Draco.)

“You’re okay?” she asked, a bit frantically. “He didn’t hurt you? He wasn’t angry with you?” “Oh, love,” In a few strides, Draco was across the room, and sat on the couch, pulling Hermione into his lap. (Closer.) “My Godfather would never hurt me. I won’t say that he doesn’t hurt other people, because I would be lying, but only his enemies.”

She felt a stab of guilt for instinctively thinking that the only person left in her family was the monster she’d always thought him to be, even after learning the truth.

“Really?” Hermione asked in a small voice, flipping around to straddle him so that they were face to face. (Closer.)

“My godfather has a very small list of people who are alive that he genuinely cares about, and I can count them all on one hand,” Draco said, holding up a finger. “First, my Aunt Bella. She’s always been his protege of sorts.” He held up another two fingers. “Second and third, my mother and father. The Dark Lord has always been something of a mix between an older brother and an uncle to my mother, due to his close friendship with Bellatrix, and he is also very close friends with my father.” He held up a fourth finger. “Fourth is me. He’s my godfather, and although he hasn’t been there physically for a large part of my life, he watched me grow up. The first time I ever met him was when he was possessing Professor Quirrell in our first year, but he had been watching over me as a spirit for the majority of my pre-Hogwarts years.” He held up one more finger. Hermione felt another stab for being the reason that the Dark Lord had died. “And finally, there’s you.”

“Me?” Hermione echoed. She knew that Draco had said that the Dar- *her Grandfather* loved her, but it felt so hard to believe. (He cares about you. People care about you. People *love* you. The Order doesn’t love you, but *they* do. They love you.) “But it’s my fault that he died-”

“It’s Potter’s fault he died, not yours,” Draco cut her off, his voice hard. “Don’t *ever* blame yourself for that.” His voice softened. “And, Hermione, you’re his granddaughter, his own flesh and blood. The only member left in his family. Even if you weren’t related, you caught his attention back in first year when he taught us all Defence Against the Dark Arts through Quirrell. He was rather impressed by you and your mind. Do you know just how rare that is? The only other time he’s ever been surprised like that was with Aunt Bella.”

Hermione worried her lip between her teeth. (Was she really that important?) “I’m nothing all that special, Draco. Not enough to-”

“You are,” he cut her off again, this time more gently. “You are strong and beautiful and wickedly intelligent, Hermione. You perform difficult spells without blinking an eye. The Protean Charm you used with the galleons, back in fifth year? That’s not something someone unimpressive can do. You’re an incredibly talented witch, love, don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” Before she could say anything further, he cut her off by kissing her slowly and softly.

Within a moment, Hermione melted into the kiss, melted into the acceptance and love that Draco was offering her. (It was safe, and secure, and reassuring. She was worth it. It felt comfortable and happy) And for the first time in a long while, she believed that maybe, just maybe, she was worth it. (Love. She was good enough for love and for acceptance.) That she

was good enough. (She wasn't too much and she wasn't not enough.) That she wasn't too much, and that she wasn't not enough. (She wasn't *'too much'* .) She wasn't too enthusiastic or too smart. (She fit in.) She wasn't a freak or an outsider. (*Love* .) She was loved. (Love. She was important. She was cared for. She was put first. Love.) She was important and cared for and put first. (Love. It was warmth, it was a shield. Love.) It was like a wool blanket on a cold wintery night, a raging fire that shielded her from the blizzard.

Hermione had never felt this loved before.

While Hermione had a love for all things logical and pragmatic, deep down, a part of her had always yearned for the romantics found in fairytales. When she had been much younger, her p-the *Grangers* (the Grangers, the Grangers, the Grangers - *not her parents*.) would read her fairytales before falling asleep. Hermione remembered sleepily confessing to *Helen Granger* (*not* her mother) that she wanted a love like that one day. Helen had chuckled and shook her head ruefully, telling Hermione that no matter how wonderful it seemed, true love didn't exist in the real world like it did in fairytales.

But Helen Granger was wrong.

Because this? This *feeling* that she had with Draco? It simply *had* to be true love - there was no other way to describe it. Well, perhaps they weren't quite there yet - but there was no other way that this could be heading. It was improbable, illogical even, to think it could be anything else, because if this wasn't what love felt like, Hermione didn't know what did.

What was love, if it wasn't cuddling while reading antique books together? (Nothing. This was love.) What was love, if it wasn't Monet paintings and tours of gardens? (Nothing. This was love.) What was love if it wasn't a daring rescue from certain doom? (Nothing. This was love.) What was love if it wasn't picnic lunches on bright sunny days - if it wasn't *this*?

Hermione looked up from the book she was reading, only to see Draco staring intently at her. It was moments like these where she wanted to never leave. (Perfection.)

He smirked when he noticed her blush, unabashed at being caught. "Go back to reading. I'm just enjoying the view."

Hermione went even pinker. She couldn't help but fall back on old habits though, retorting cheekily, "That is *such* a line, Draco."

"Is it a line if it's true?"

Even though she rolled her eyes, Hermione couldn't help the slight smile that grew on her face. After he had returned from the Dark Manor yesterday, after he had pieced her back together once again, they had spent another day in the library. In contrast to their Shakespearean studies, that particular day had been much more quiet, muted. While it was simply because Hermione was too tired to strike a conversation, she found that she missed their previous banter. While she had softened considerably towards him since their confessions that morning, she still wanted that sharp push and the pull that she enjoyed with

him. Today, though, this felt like their previous rhythm of teasing that they had shared in the library when they had read Shakespeare. But now, Hermione felt so much less conflicted about the back and forth tug between the two of them, not shirking away at his responses. She couldn't help the thrill that ran through her when he smirked like that, the excitement that she got when he had teased her this morning about her book choice of "Pride and Prejudice," despite having read it the day before. What thrilled her the most was that he wasn't treating her like glass, despite her numerous breakdowns in front of him. (Not like Harry and Ron, who would've tiptoed around her for weeks. Was that because they were afraid she would lash out at them with dark magic?)

"Did you just roll your eyes at me, love?" Draco asked, incredulously. She looked up at him and noticed his eyes were glinting with humour. Hermione's smile grew wider.

"How else should I respond to that kind of a line? *You* called me sappy when I cried during Macbeth, but here you are with an 'enjoying the view' line!"

"Would you rather I be more creative then?"

Suddenly, unbidden, a memory came back to Hermione.

"What kind of punishment?" Hermione asked warily, as Malfoy started circling her.

He leaned in, his hot breath tickling her ear, and Hermione felt herself going a bit pink. "I don't think you'd find it all too objectionable, Hermione. It's the kind that you'll enjoy quite immensely. The kind where I learn just how far down your blush goes. The kind where your legs are locked around me until they've given out, but I'll still keep going and going and going. The kind where I spread you out on my bedsheets and give you orgasm after orgasm, and you're so caught up in ecstasy that you won't be able to see anything but me. The kind where you're not sure where I end and where you begin and you've forgotten how to do anything but scream my name and beg for me. I can't wait to hear you beg so prettily, just for me." he murmured huskily. "The kind where there is not a single thought in your head that you can process, other than the sheer ecstasy that you are in." He leaned in further, lowering his voice. "I bet you'll still blush like an innocent virgin even after I've taken you on every surface of this house. I'll make you come so many times that you'll be just as hopelessly addicted to me as I am to you. Hermione, darling, I will ruin even the thought of any other man for you. That will be your punishment."

Hermione felt her core clench at the memory, her cheeks absolutely red. Before she had time to think about it, she blurted out, "Well you were quite creative on the first day."

Heat flickered in his eyes. "You might have to jog my memory." Despite his words, the smirk on his face told Hermione he remembered *exactly* what he had said. She glared at him and as his eyes flickered to her lips. "Maybe I can help you remember," he said, before surging in.

This kiss was a bit unlike their first few. Instead of Draco immediately taking control of the kiss, Hermione fought back a bit. While she wasn't entirely sure why she did it, she was curious to see how he would react. Her question was answered when he quickly noticed and she felt a chuckle rumble through his chest. He began putting more force into the kiss, which Hermione began to match. It escalated rather quickly until Draco's hands were behind her

back and around her ribcage and Hermione had draped her arms over his neck. One of Draco's fingers brushed against the side of Hermione's breast and even through her layer of clothing, even though it was the lightest of brushes, Hermione felt a jolt of electricity course through her, causing her to fall back just a little and completely melt into him, a moan falling from her lips.

No, Helen Granger could not have been more wrong. Because if this wasn't fairytale love, nothing was.

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Draco slowly ended the kiss, drawing away from her. His chest warmed as he noticed how his lioness was flushed and out of breath. He watched her breasts rise and fall - the same breasts he had merely brushed, and she had practically fallen to pieces. The little fight she had attempted to put up was absolutely adorable and indicative of her fire still burning strong, despite the blows of Weasley's and Potter's treachery had done to her. But the fight had made her submission taste all the more sweeter. It was something he would have to further explore. She looked up at him, expectantly.

"As much as I would love to continue this, I have something that I need to do for the Dark Lord."

She sobered almost immediately, her big doe eyes turning searching. "What? And when?"

"We need to raid a house that has a lot of Order plans tonight," he said smoothly. While that wasn't the *reason* the raid was happening, it was likely some Order Information would be in the little house the Weasleys were hiding out in. "It was just going to be my father and my aunt, but I volunteered to go along and help them, in case anything unexpected happens and they need an extra set of hands."

"You'll be safe, right?" Hermione asked, worriedly. "I don't want you getting hurt at all."

"I should be fine," Draco reassured her, "But Hermione, this is a war, and in wars, people can get hurt, or worse."

"Please, just be careful," Hermione pleaded.

"They'd never be able to catch me," Draco said, shooting her a roguish grin. When she still looked worried, his heart caught a bit. Despite her bounce back to the lioness he knew and loved, her anxiety was still so present underneath the surface. He would fix that. He would fix what Weasley and Potter had broken. He would fix *her*. Draco grabbed her gently, his hands framing her face. He caressed her cheek with the pad of his thumb and said softly, "But, for you, Hermione, I'll be careful."

The trepidation written all over her face lessened, and the mischievous glint returned to her eyes. "Good, because tomorrow we're going to start reading *Les Misérables*, and you're going to need to know the ending."

“And what is the book about?” Draco asked warmly. She was fighting against the damage Potter and Weasley had done - her spark fighting against the fear they had instilled in her to naturally cling to - with help from him, of course.

“A French man who steals a loaf of bread.” Draco raised an eyebrow and Hermione grinned at his reaction. “There’s a musical adaptation of it as well that made me cry like a baby when I saw it on the West End with my - with the Grangers.” Her quick correction warmed his chest. She was adapting.

“I’ll be back in one piece tomorrow night so that we can read your *Les Miserables*,” Draco said, smiling softly. The spark of an idea lit through his mind, and he thrust his hand into his robe pockets, his fingers closing around a wand. Her wand. He pulled it out, and watched her face light up. “I was thinking that while I was out, if anything were to happen, you could have something to defend yourself. While the wards on the Manor are incredibly strong, I’d like to give it to you anyway. I imagine it’s more likely that you’ll be using it to summon books that you can’t reach,” he teased.

Hermione’s hands closed around the wand as her face split into a grin, and she placed the wand in her own robe pockets, before throwing herself at Draco. He caught her, and held her securely as she peppered kisses across his face. She slowly pulled back, and blushed prettily, before looking back up at him. “Thank you, Draco.”

Chapter End Notes

Promise that the next chapter **will** be up next week and we will be returning back to our schedule. I’ve already written the next 2.75 chapters and they are ready to go! I missed writing and you all so so much. Also - fans of Snakes and Sunflowers, the next chapter for that will be up sometime this week or next as well.

All my love to you guys xx

And as always, find me on tumblr at allyficpics.tumblr.com

End Notes

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