

Ten out of Ten

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/38829984) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/38829984>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship:	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy
Characters:	Hermione Granger , Draco Malfoy , Lucius Malfoy , Narcissa Black , Malfoy , Kingsley Shacklebolt , Harry Potter , Ginny Weasley , Ron , Weasley , Original Muggle Character(s) , Nilly the House Elf
Additional Tags:	Post-War , Harry Potter Epilogue What Epilogue EWE , Forced Marriage , marriage law , Magical Bond , Enemies to Lovers , Forced Proximity , Unredeemed Draco Malfoy , Slow Burn , Sexual Tension , Unresolved Sexual Tension , Tension with Plot , Angst , Fluff , Domestic Fluff , Banter , Eventual Smut , Smut , Praise Kink , Spit Kink , (mostly just spit as lube but also extra?) , (listen you'll have to take it up with the characters i just work here) , Possessive Draco Malfoy , Hermione is a good neighbour , draco is good with kids , Draco Malfoy in the Muggle World , Angst with a Happy Ending , Dirty Talk
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Ten out of Ten and Counting
Collections:	I want to read this ... but it's a WIP , Gunna come back to you , Dramione by Lady Polina , Favourite stories , earning that E rating , dramione i'll read soon , Heartfelt Dramione , Absolute best of Dramione , fuel for dramione obsession , ultimate dramione rereads , Dramione GOATS , Favorite Hermione Ships and Fics , Best Dramione , Dermione I like to remember , Dramione short stories I love , all-time greatest Dramione ❤️, DramioneForMe , Dramione_Favs , Good Potterhead Shit , DH for a (not so) light read , A book worm and a dragon , Best Dramione Fics , fave dramione , Cherry on Top , fics that... transcend , draco + hermione <3 , Dramione re-reads 😍, best dramione , Works I NEED to bind , To read , To melt my heart , K80 DHR Faves , god-tier dramione , Completed Fics I Love , Lions Among Men , Dramioneotp , My faves , KatahdinsRead , My Dear Sweet Child Its What I Live For , keep off i'm trYing not to dIE , Read well , Best of DMHG , Dramione_all , FavRo Stories , Dramione TBR , GOAT Dramione , would sell my kidney for , lit rally rail me pls , Dramione fanfics that NEED to be read , Top Tier Harry Potter , Read , Dramione to Read
Stats:	Published: 2022-05-09 Completed: 2022-07-18 Words: 61,559 Chapters: 16/16

Ten out of Ten

by [morriganmercy](#)

Summary

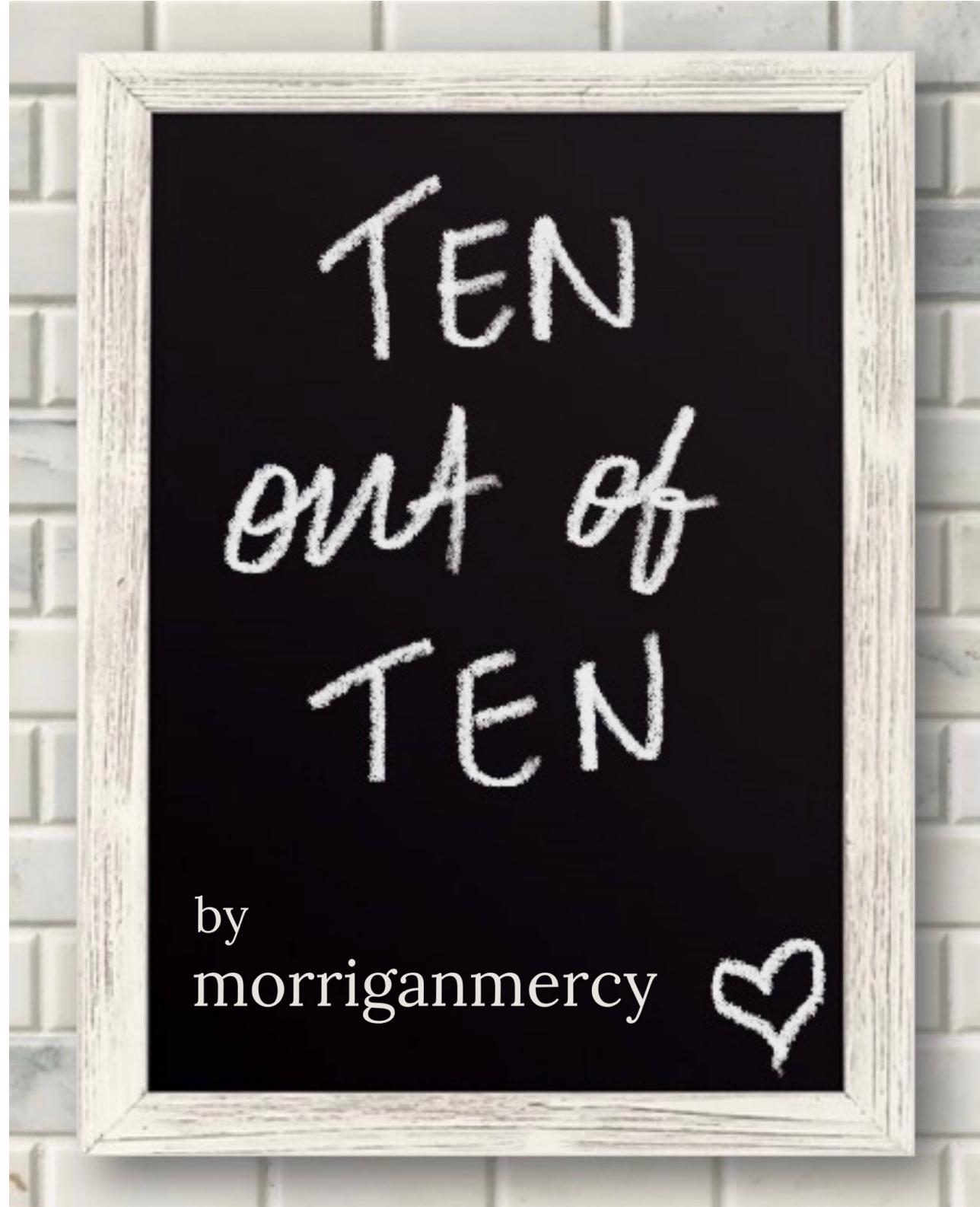
"On a scale of one to ten, how comfortable would you say you are with me physically?" she asked.

"Zero."

Hermione's lips pursed in annoyance because she really should have seen that coming. How charming that the extent of his arseholery could still surprise her.

In which Hermione is determined to find a loophole to free her from a forced marriage with Draco Malfoy. But with only two weeks until they are legally required to consummate, it

would be irresponsible not to prepare for every contingency.



TEN
out of
TEN

by

morriganmercy



Notes

Hello and welcome! The most important tag on this fic is "Tension with Plot." This story is 100% an excuse to write two entire weeks of sexual tension between my favorite idiots. Sixteen chapters spanning sixteen days of forced proximity. It is a slow burn in terms of actual smut, but it is filthy once they get there.

All my love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta editing!

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Prologue

Chapter Notes

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

Lucius Malfoy was yelling.

It seemed an altogether unsophisticated sort of display for someone who prided themselves on social superiority, but Hermione was glad of the noise. Despite the deeply unsettling fact that she found herself in complete agreement with the Malfoy patriarch, there was a kind of profound relief in listening to someone express their outrage in such an explosive manner. Hermione's had yet to progress past silent, disbelieving despair.

An outburst would come later for her, of that she was sure. But by then, this meeting would be long adjourned, and her complaints would fall from the Minister's deaf ears. She would probably come to regret not taking this chance to say her piece, but the mere moments in which she'd been able to pry her eyes from the parchment in her hands were more than sufficient to recognise the carefully blank expression stretched over Kingsley's features. He was delivering a masterclass in indulging a grown man's tantrum. Nothing anyone in this audience had to say would sway him.

Hermione's thumbnail slipped once more into the tear near the top left corner of the page in her grip—the rip that had developed around two o'clock this morning, a few hours after the letter was delivered by certified owl. Constant worrying between her fingers in the meantime had advanced its progress nearly to the letterhead stamped across the top of the sheet. In a few minutes' time, there would be an irreparable schism between Ministry and Magic on the page.

Ironic, given that the words on the parchment spoke of making bonds rather than breaking them.

It took Hermione several seconds to register the sudden silence in the room, and she glanced sideways in time to see Lucius collapsing back into the chair next to his wife. Narcissa Malfoy sat ramrod straight, eyes fixed pointedly ahead as though she was determined to take in as little of her surroundings as possible.

Kingsley sat still for several seconds, marked by the quiet ticking of an ornate gold clock on his oversized desk. He seemed to be waiting for the next barrage of complaints, but when none came, he spoke.

“I appreciate your concerns, Lucius,” he began, hands clasped comfortably over his middle, “but as you know, the stipulations of the legislation are clear: your son has been assigned to marry Ms Granger, and he will do so if he does not wish to return to Azkaban.”

The sound of the prison's name uttered in Kingsley's deep baritone seemed to rumble straight through the youngest Malfoy. He shuddered in his chair, the first sign of life since he'd entered the room five minutes ago.

Hermione hadn't had any idea what to expect when she'd received a second letter, this one written on Malfoy stationary rather than Ministry, requesting her presence at an appeal the following morning. She had mostly been too preoccupied with the idea of being forced into marriage with Draco Malfoy to consider the fact that he would be just as displeased with the idea of marrying her. She had been surprised that the Malfoys were able to secure a private meeting with the Minister on such short notice, but given the intensity of Lucius's displeasure, perhaps Kingsley had actually been taking the path of least resistance by hearing him out without delay.

"This *assignment* is a travesty," Lucius hissed. "We were told that matches would be based on magical compatibility."

"And so they are," Kingsley returned.

Draco snorted.

A flash of indignance cut through the frigid dejection in Hermione's chest at the noise. Of all the thousands of people she could have been paired with, it had to be someone who considered her inferior. She was tempted to be grateful for the match just to spite him.

Though she hadn't heard anything of Malfoy since his release from Azkaban, as soon as she'd laid eyes on him that morning, she could see that nothing in him had changed. Despite the fact that they were gathered there to discuss a decision that would alter the entire course of *both* their lives, his gaze had skated over the chair in which she sat as though it were empty. The only evidence that he was aware of her presence was in the haughty set of his shoulders, the faint curl of disdain on his lips. And though they sat close enough now for their arms to nearly touch, rather than the warmth of an actual human body next to her, all she could feel was a shroud of arrogant indifference.

"Kingsley," she started, her voice hoarse with disuse. "Surely compatibility is a spectrum. There must be other suitable pairings."

"Suitable, yes," he agreed. "But not ideal. We are talking about the fate of the wizarding world, Hermione, and individual sacrifices must be made for the greater good."

She bristled at the phrase, but he ploughed on. "We are asking all eligible citizens to give of themselves for future generations."

"Give of themselves?" Hermione repeated in disbelief. "I gave my entire childhood to the war, and it wasn't enough? You need the rest of my life, too?"

"*Gave your childhood,*" Malfoy mocked with a sneer. "Merlin, spare me."

"And yours was stolen," she snapped. "You've already served a sentence for your crimes. Are you so eager for another one?"

"That depends," he drawled. "Are you referring to being married to you or returning to prison?"

“Either,” she spat.

“Good point,” he said with a smirk.

Hermione rolled her eyes, turning back to the Minister. “This sentence is absurd, Kingsley, I mean—”

“Twenty years—”

“Is the minimum for *murder*,” she complained.

“Maybe you can just kill me, then, and do us both a favour,” Malfoy offered.

“I’m not ruling it out!” she shouted.

“This is not a negotiation!” Kingsley boomed suddenly. Hermione felt her chin draw back in surprise. He continued in a lower voice, but the tone was no less severe. “You will marry or you will spend twenty years in Azkaban. There are no alternatives.”

He eyed each of them in turn, but no one spoke. The heavy weight of hopelessness slid back into Hermione’s gut as the Minister looked down at the legislation in front of him again.

“Now,” he went on, “consideration has been given to the fact that many matches will be comprised of strangers. For that reason, you will have two weeks after the ceremony in which to get acquainted before you are required to consummate your union—”

“This is fucking disgusting,” Malfoy burst out, sounding truly angry for the first time. Hermione watched as he got to his feet and stormed out of the room.

It hurt.

It shouldn’t have—she knew what he thought of her—but it did.

Hermione never could have imagined a future for herself in which she would marry someone who was disgusted by her, but two days later, that’s exactly what she does.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

You can also find me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

The Wedding

Chapter Notes

TW: overindulgence in alcohol

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

Hermione spent her last night of freedom mourning with a mockery of a hen night. Though entertaining was the last thing she wanted to do, she refused to leave the house and Harry, Ron, and Ginny refused to leave her to drown her sorrows alone. They arrived through the Floo, fortified with a bottle of firewhiskey each, and when added to the one Hermione had already started on, the evening proceeded with double the alcohol and none of the partying one would normally expect from such an event.

She was sandwiched between Harry and Ron on the sofa, Ginny in an armchair nearby, and all Hermione could think about was how strange they looked in her sitting room. She'd been living alone in the house for three years now, and she couldn't remember a single time they'd been there. Weasley red hair clashed horribly with the khaki leather of the furniture, and she was sure she would have noticed it before. It wasn't as though it was an unusual scene in general—neither Grimmauld Place nor the Burrow lacked sofas—but compared to those inherently magical places, Hermione's childhood home felt Muggle in a way it never had to her before. She didn't blame Harry for how strongly he'd renounced all reminders of his early life, but with her wizarding friends out of their element to be in her space, it seemed to emphasise rather harshly the ways in which she was still an outsider.

Her eyes roved around the room as she considered its contents, and they snagged on the set of lettered blocks perched on the mantle. Three wooden rectangles stacked atop each other, boldly proclaiming the key to life in a variety of whimsical fonts.

*Live
Laugh
Love*

Her stomach twisted as the words mocked her. She had lived—survived a war waged specifically to exterminate her kind. She didn't exactly laugh much anymore—none of them really did—but she had healed enough that occasionally the spectre of all she had lost faded to the point where she could feel levity again. Surely it would come back eventually. Or it would have. Her eyes burned with the threat of tears as she lamented the loss of a love she hadn't even wanted until the chance at it was taken away. It would have been nice someday, she thought, to fall in love. To have a little piece of what had saved them all for herself.

Instead, she would have a constant reminder of the past and all the ways her adopted world considered her inferior. She couldn't for the life of her think what she'd done to deserve it.

The grandfather clock in the corner struck three, and the tears spilled onto her cheeks at the sound. “God,” she muttered. “I’m running out of time.”

“We’ll stay with you,” Ron offered, turning on the sofa and taking her hand. “Through the night.”

Hermione shook her head, feeling as though her brain was sloshing around inside it. They had each offered condolences in their own ways; nothing truly comforting, but appreciated all the same. She supposed she would be doing the same for them someday, though any of them having it nearly as bad as she did was hard to imagine. She supposed one of the boys could get Pansy. That would be bad. Not *Malfoy* bad, but nearly.

Unable to oversee more than several dozen arranged marriages at a time, the Ministry would be announcing the matches in waves. Hermione had made the first round. Ron would be in the third, Ginny the fifth, and Harry the tenth. They all tried not to speculate on whether that meant Harry and Ginny had already been deemed a less than ideal match.

She squeezed her eyes shut, not having the energy to cry over anyone else’s misfortunes at the moment. “No,” she murmured quietly. “I should... try to sleep.”

“We’ll come back tomorrow, then,” Harry said. “Be with you for the ceremony.”

“No!” Hermione nearly shouted. “I don’t want—” Her voice broke. “I’d rather go through it alone.”

“Are you sure?” Ginny asked, speaking softly as though Hermione was something fragile. “We want to support you.”

Hermione shook her head again in answer, grimacing as the room began to spin. She was getting married, but it was *not* a wedding. It was a sham. The more pomp and circumstance there was, the worse she would feel. It was just the next step she needed to get through before she could figure out a way out of this.

“Thank you all. I appreciate it,” she said as earnestly as she could while slurring her speech. “I just... need to sleep now.”

Now turned out to be quite literal, and her eyes drooped closed before the others had even gotten to their feet. She vaguely registered someone helping to ease her down onto the sofa while someone else arranged a pillow under her head.

She drew in a deep breath through her nose as murmured goodbyes filtered into her ears, and she hoped her friends would understand that it wasn’t the best idea for her to open her mouth and reply.

She just needed the blissful dark of unconsciousness.

A few hours later, nothing was blissful nor dark. Hermione dragged her eyelids open, groaning as a shooting pain lanced through her skull. Sunlight from the open blinds was shining like a laser into her eyes, and she could hardly—

She shot upright, clenching her teeth as her temples throbbed and her stomach churned.

Sunlight.

It was morning.

It was—

She had no idea what time it was.

Scrambling up off the sofa and dragging her knuckles through the grime in her eyes, she blinked at the grandfather clock.

8:12 AM.

She was already twelve minutes late for her own wedding.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” she muttered, clutching her head as she snatched up her bag and wand. She lurched over to the hearth, grabbing a handful of Floo powder and calling out for the Ministry Atrium as she tossed it in.

Green flames erupted around her, and she pinched her nostrils closed with her free hand as she spun away. The usual trick for avoiding the nausea of inebriated Floo travel did *not* work, and Hermione was forced to brace herself against the shiny black tile wall for several long moments after exiting as bile crept up the back of her throat.

“I really hate today,” she whimpered, resting her forehead against the cool surface.

But the trouble was, today was only the beginning. Once she made it through the marriage ceremony, then she would be *married*. Potentially for *days* as they tried to figure a way out of it.

Hermione straightened up and clutched her head again. She would burn that bridge when she got to it. Right now, she just needed to buy herself a two week stop-gap on her trip to Azkaban.

The door to Kingsley’s office was open, and all of the occupants looked up as she entered. Malfoy’s parents were occupying the same seats to the side of the room that they had been at

their last meeting. The Minister was seated behind his desk, chin resting on steepled fingers, and Malfoy stood in front of it next to a Ministry officiant.

As she approached, Malfoy glanced down at his wristwatch before running his eyes over her bedraggled appearance.

“Cold feet?” he asked with mock sympathy.

“Fuck you,” she snapped.

He smirked. “All in good time, love.”

“Do not call me that,” she seethed.

“Sorry. *Wife*,” he corrected.

Hermione charged forward, brandishing her wand and jabbing it under his chin. “There’s still time for me to fucking kill you—”

“Actually, there’s not,” Kingsley said, getting to his feet. “We’re behind schedule, so if you two are quite finished...” He trailed off, gesturing to the officiant.

Malfoy’s eyes glittered maliciously as he looked down at her, seemingly entirely unphased.

“Hermione.”

The warning was clear in Kingsley’s voice, and while she doubted he would actually have her dragged off to Azkaban for delaying, the Minister was clearly no longer the man she’d thought he was.

She dropped her hand, glancing over at the officiant. He stepped forward, tall and thin with light green robes and a mass of tufty hair sticking straight up from his head. He looked like a stalk of celery. Hermione decided that she hated him.

“If you would please stand and face each other,” he began in a warbly voice.

They already were, so Hermione dropped her purse onto Kinglsey’s desk, not caring that it knocked over a tin of paperclips. She kind of hated everyone in this room.

“We are gathered here on this tenth day of July in the year two thousand and one, to witness the binding of...”

Hermione stared straight ahead as the officiant began his speech, her eyes fixed on the top button of Malfoy’s black robes. Dress robes, she realised. How embarrassing for him. As if this occasion merited them. She was glad all he got from her was bedhead and yesterday’s jumper. It was exactly what he deserved.

As the officiant’s voice droned on in the background, Hermione became increasingly aware of the shaking in her hands. She still held her wand—she knew they would need them for the

binding—but the harder she squeezed the vine wood against her palm, the more the tip seemed to vibrate.

Words began to filter in from the meat of the ceremony. And phrases like *honour, trust, care* made her stomach feel as though it was shaking as well.

She hadn't lifted her eyes to Malfoy's face until—

"Do you have the rings?"

She glanced up, caught off guard. No one had mentioned rings to her. Was she supposed to have procured a ring for Malfoy?

But her *betrothed* didn't seem surprised at all. He reached into the breast pocket of his robes and withdrew two gold bands, one nearly double the thickness of the other.

Hermione stared as the officiant waved his wand over them, muttering a quiet incantation. Had these come from the Malfoy family vaults? Had someone bought them new? How did he know her size? *Jesus fuck*, she was going to have to wear a wedding ring.

They glowed brightly for a moment as the incantation came to an end, and the officiant plucked Malfoy's ring from his palm, leaving only hers behind.

"Please repeat these vows as you place the ring on her finger."

Hermione blanched. Did they really have to say vows? Couldn't they just give some kind of blanket agreement? Or sign something? They were here weren't they? Surely that was enough.

The seconds ticked by incredibly loudly as she stood there frozen, staring down at the little gold band. She felt each one like a blow to the sternum.

The officiant cleared his throat. "If the bride would please—"

Hermione let out a choked noise at the word *bride*, and the man seemed to change tack.

"Please raise your left hand, Miss," he said gently.

Her arm felt leaden as she raised it in front of her; it seemed to require every ounce of her strength. Malfoy was gripping the ring between his fingertips, but Hermione's hand danced ridiculously in the space between them with the force of her shaking. He had to steady her palm with his wand hand to align the ring over the first digit of her fourth finger.

Once it was there, she saw him look to the officiant from her periphery. She didn't dare meet his gaze.

The officiant spoke the first line, and Hermione closed her eyes as Malfoy's voice repeated it.

"I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow..."

“... to honour you as my wedded wife...”

“... to protect you from any harm...”

“... to provide you with children...”

“... and to care for you from this day until my last.”

The cool metal slid gently over her skin as Malfoy settled it at the base of her finger. As soon as he removed his hand, the ring grew warm and malleable, shrinking to a perfectly snug fit.

The officiant held out Malfoy’s ring, and Hermione took it, feeling tears well in her eyes.

“Please repeat these vows as you place the ring on his finger.”

Malfoy raised his left hand to waist height between them, and Hermione placed the ring over the tip of his fourth finger. She couldn’t hold it steady as he had done, and the metal bounced continuously against his skin like the world’s worst game of Operation.

“I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow...” The officiant began in a leading tone.

Hermione opened her mouth—

—but no sound came out.

She stared down at the smooth, pale skin of Malfoy’s hand. A perfect picture of composure. Not twitching and clammy like hers. She’d been too focused on the words of the vows to notice the fact that his voice never wavered. It had been calm and flat. Emotionless.

Maybe he’d been resigned to an arranged marriage for a long time. Maybe it was nothing for him to make vows he didn’t—*couldn’t possibly*—mean. But that wasn’t Hermione.

Maybe she had never been truly conscious of it before, but in that moment she knew that she had dreamed of this. Of promising herself to someone for the rest of her life. Someone she loved and trusted beyond anyone else in the world. Someone that felt like home.

But like so many things, that belonged to another time and another world. Another life unmarred by loss and destruction. Hermione was left with this.

“I g-give you this ring as a s-symbol of my vow...”

Her voice had never sounded so small to her own ears.

“... to honour you as my wedded h-husband...”

“... to protect you f-from any harm...”

“... to provide you with ch-children...” Hermione swallowed heavily as the remnants of the previous night clawed their way up her throat. Her mouth tasted like whiskey and death.

“... and to care for you from this day until m-my last.”

She was sucking in frantic breaths through her teeth by the time she finished the last line, and her sweaty fingers slipped over Malfoy's ring as it bunched against his knuckle. He pulled his hand back and pushed it on the rest of the way himself. Hermione felt near to fainting.

"Please place your wand tips together."

Hermione lifted her wand. She held it as still as she could, but the officiant reached for both of their wrists to help unite the tips. She sincerely hoped that was a normal part of the ceremony and not an improvisation made necessary by the fact that she was on the verge of a complete meltdown.

When the contact was successful, a bead of golden light ignited between hawthorn and vine wood, and Hermione shuddered as magic rippled through her.

"By the power vested in me by the Ministry of Magic and Magical Decree 25.2354, I hereby declare you bound in matrimony. Now, you may kiss."

"No." The syllable slipped past Hermione's lips in a hoarse moan of despair.

The officiant cleared his throat and glanced over to where Lucius and Narcissa were seated behind their son. Hermione had almost forgotten they were there, but she saw Lucius give a single, curt nod.

"My apologies," the officiant amended. "Now, you *must* kiss."

Hermione looked up at Malfoy for the first time, thinking that surely he would not agree to this debasement. He looked back at her, and she searched his eyes, but... there was nothing there. They were flat. Emotionless. Like his voice. Like his steady hands. Her heart broke suddenly in a way she hadn't even known was possible.

He was Occluding. Heavily. He probably had been the whole time. She had just married not only someone who was disgusted by her, but someone who couldn't even bear to feel his own emotions as he did it.

Wanting nothing more than to end the moment as soon as humanly possible, Hermione stepped forward and lifted her chin, pressing her closed lips against Malfoy's for one single second. She listened for it on Kingsley's clock. A pulse of energy like a gentle static shock passed between them, and Hermione leaned back as it faded.

Then, she bent over and vomited at his feet.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading and for the amazing response to the prologue! I'm so happy to have all of you along for the ride!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

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Day 1

Chapter Notes

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

The next few seconds passed in a bit of a blur as several things happened at once: Hermione sank down into an empty chair, Kingsley stood from behind his desk and Vanished the mess from his rug, the officiant scurried from the room, and Narcissa Malfoy burst into tears. Malfoy didn't react at all, but that was probably due to the Occlumency.

As Hermione wiped the sleeve of her jumper over her mouth, the three Malfoys turned to look at her. She actually felt much better after the purge and she gave them a wide grin. At least now they had good reason to be disgusted by her.

“Well,” Kingsley started, leaning his hands onto his desk, “onto the next item, I suppose. You are required to cohabitiate from here on out—”

Hermione interrupted, “If you think I’m setting one foot in Malfoy Manor—”

At the same time, Lucius said, “If you think a Mudblood is setting one foot in Malfoy Manor —”

Hermione broke off as she realised that she and Lucius had spoken in unison, and said nearly the same thing. Lucius’s face twisted in displeasure as he came to the same realisation. Apparently he had been willing to make allowances in the case of prisoners only.

“That’s settled, then,” Kingsley said, looking smug—the *fucker*. “Hermione, I assume you have space for Mr Malfoy at your house?”

She chewed her lip and considered vomiting on Kingsley’s desk this time. But she knew the magic she had felt flow through her was laced with Ministry monitoring spells. They would know if she and Malfoy tried living apart, just like they would know if they refused to consummate.

As much as she detested the idea of having Malfoy in her space, she supposed one of them might as well be at home. It would only be for a few days anyway.

“Yes,” she said finally. “That’s fine.”

“Fine,” Kingsley replied with a nod, raising a hand in a gesture to the hearth. “Please feel free to use my personal Floo.”

Hermione snorted. More like, *please feel free to fuck off immediately*.

If she hadn’t felt like her internal organs were currently dissolving, she would have been tempted to loiter just to piss him off. But as it was, the sooner she left, the sooner she could brush her teeth and sleep the rest of this godforsaken day away.

She retrieved her bag from the desk before going to the hearth. Kingsley didn't meet her eye.

When she turned, she saw the three Malfoys gathered in quiet conversation.

Narcissa seemed to be attempting to yell at her husband in a whisper, tear tracks still visible on her delicate cheeks. Hermione caught “—all your fault!” before Lucius silenced her with a stern look. Malfoy was looking thoroughly miserable, so Hermione supposed he had stopped Occluding.

“Draco, there’s something you must understand—” Narcissa began.

“Not now,” Malfoy said with a shake of his head.

“You must listen,” she insisted.

“Later,” he said emphatically. “I just...” He dragged a hand down his face. “I just need a few days.”

Hermione busied herself with collecting a handful of the green powder, dragging her fingers through it several times as though gauging the appropriate amount. She only looked up when she heard footsteps approaching.

Malfoy’s face was carefully arranged back into its haughty veneer, and he held out his arms as he reached her.

“Shall I carry you over the threshold?”

She shot him a withering glare. “Not if you fancy keeping your bollocks.”

He tsked in feigned disappointment as he took a handful of Floo powder. “Better skip it, then. There’s a lot riding on those little fellows now.”

Hermione grimaced in disgust as he stepped past her into the fireplace, green flames bursting up around him.

Then, he raised a finger as if in thought, “When I said *little*—”

Hermione called out her address, gritting her teeth as he swirled away.

She allowed him a few seconds to move out of the way before following.

When she emerged into the sitting room, the first thing she saw besides Malfoy was the empty whiskey bottles still strewn across the table from the night before. She immediately gagged, and though she clapped a hand over her mouth, Malfoy noticed.

His brows rose as he looked between her and the bottles.

“Well,” he said with a broad grin, “that makes me feel loads better about me.”

Hermione drew in a slow breath, swallowing heavily before pulling out her wand and Vanishing the containers. Malfoy was rummaging around in his pocket. His arm disappeared into it nearly to the elbow with what must have been an extension charm, and Hermione watched as he produced a small black case. He set it on the table and enlarged it with his wand. The gold fasteners clicked open, and he ran a finger over the multitude of vials inside. Settling at last on a mauve one, he plucked it out of the case and handed it to her.

Hermione recognised it at once as a hangover potion. She glanced back at Malfoy’s face and he arched a brow as though in challenge. Would she risk being poisoned by him for the potential relief from feeling as though she was dying slowly one cell at a time? The pounding in her head picked that particular moment to ratchet up a notch, and Hermione popped the cork, downing the potion without another thought.

The effect was instantaneous. Like a cool cloth being laid over her forehead and a fuzzy blanket wrapped around her stomach. The shaking in her hands eased at once, and the morning light no longer made her want to claw her eyes out.

“Thank you,” she sighed, holding out the empty vial. Perhaps there was a trace of compassion in him after all.

He rolled his eyes as he took it, gesturing at his shoes. “That was for my benefit, Hermione. These are dragon leather.”

She gaped at him. *Hermione?*

He slipped the vial back into its place, and the case shrank again with a tap of his wand. He glanced up at her silence, smirking when he saw her expression.

“Well, I can’t very well call you *Granger*, now can I, Mrs Malfoy?”

Hermione gagged again, all the goodwill of the previous moment disappearing as quickly as her hangover had. “Don’t—” She choked. “Just... don’t.”

He simply continued looking smug.

“I’ll show you to your room,” Hermione bit out, turning her back on him. She had briefly considered making him sleep on the sofa, but then he would be right in the middle of everything all the time. If he had his own room, hopefully he would stay locked in it for vast portions of the day.

He followed her up the stairs, past her parents’ old room, which she kept the same for when they visited, and to the door of the spare room across from hers.

“Just in there,” she said, pointing inside.

He nodded as he peered through the door, nose slightly wrinkled.

“The linens are clean,” she said rather defensively.

He glanced at her then. “More than I expected. I thought you’d have me sleeping in the back garden.”

Hermione was privately annoyed she hadn’t thought of that. “Sorry to disappoint, but I like spending time in the back garden. I’d rather you out of my way.”

His lips curled into a devious smile, and she immediately resigned herself to tripping over him for the entire duration of his stay. Speaking of which—

“Do you have luggage?” she asked, gesturing vaguely in the direction of his extended pocket.

“An elf will bring some trunks later,” he replied, sounding bored.

She bristled at once. “I will not have elves here.”

“Well, I’d have to call her here to cancel the instruction, so why don’t we just let her bring the luggage and save her a trip?”

Hermione gritted her teeth, well aware that every second she spent in Malfoy’s presence was only giving him further ammunition with which to annoy her. “Fine,” she bit out. “One trip. I don’t want to see her after that.”

“Of course.” He gave her an indulgent smile.

“I’m going to bed,” she said abruptly, turning for her own door, “so I’d appreciate quiet.”

Malfoy’s sarcastically saccharine voice followed her inside.

“Sweet dreams.”

As it turned out, Malfoy was a dab hand with a hangover potion. With all of her other symptoms taken care of, she was easily able to catch up on the night of sleep she had missed, and when she woke—after a particularly *sweet dream* in which Harry showed up to tell her this had all been an elaborate prank—it was nighttime.

She brushed her teeth (again) and changed into fresh jeans and a t-shirt before pulling on a pair of thick socks. Her feet were perpetually cold, summer or not.

Malfoy’s door was closed—thank Merlin for small mercies—and she padded down the stairs and into the kitchen. She was brought up short, however, at the sight before her. Quickly exchanging her thanks to Merlin for a curse, she peered over Malfoy’s shoulder where he sat surrounded by pieces and cards and slips of pastel paper.

“What is this?” she asked.

He spoke without even looking up from the instruction sheet in his hands. “It’s a game of real estate and property. There are varying degrees of value as you move about the board. You pay taxes and levies with this sham currency. Sometimes you can be imprisoned, but don’t worry, there’s a card for that.”

“I know what Monopoly is, Malfoy,” she sighed. “Why is it on my kitchen table?”

He shrugged. “This house is small and boring.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, and in doing so, caught sight of the disarray around her. Every kitchen cupboard was open, and the contents were spread across the counters. Several food items from the pantry were mixed in as well.

She ducked around the corner into the sitting room and found a similar situation. Every cabinet open, books off the shelves, games and puzzles spread across the floor.

“Have you just spent all day rifling through my things?” she shouted as she entered the kitchen again.

“They’re my things now, too, *wife*,” he said placidly.

“That’s not how this works!”

He turned in his chair to face her then, bracing one ankle across his other knee. She registered that for some reason, he was still wearing his dress robes. “Actually, it is,” he said with a sneer, “and I can think of about a billion reasons you have to be grateful for it.”

Hermione stared at him, brows furrowed. She couldn’t think of a single reason, much less a billion—

And then the realisation hit her like a bludger to the gut.

When she finally found her voice, it was breathy with indignation. “If you think I’ll touch one knut of Malfoy money, you’re out of your goddamn mind.”

“I daresay you’ll come around.”

“Oh, you *daresay*?” She mocked his stupid, poncey accent. “Well, how about you *don’t say*—anything else about it.”

Any retort he might have made was cut off by a loud crack, and Hermione’s eyes widened at the sight of a house elf appearing in her kitchen. She wore a downy white pillowcase and bits of lace trim tied like ribbons at the base of her ears.

“Nilly has put the trunks in Master’s bedroom,” she announced in a squeaky voice.

“Thank you, Nilly,” Malfoy said, getting to his feet. “This is my wife, Hermione.”

“Stop calling me—” She broke off, not wanting to seem rude. “Hello, Nilly,” she said with a smile, bending slightly at the waist. “It’s very nice to meet you.”

“Oh, Mistress!” Nilly cried. “The pleasure is being all mine.” She bowed so low that her ears nearly brushed the floor.

“Please tell her not to call me Mistress,” Hermione said quietly to Malfoy.

“Tell her yourself,” he returned. “She answers to you now, too.”

Hermione glanced between Malfoy and the little elf in dawning horror. Having the creature do Malfoy’s bidding in her home was one thing, sharing in the ownership was entirely another.

“Absolutely not,” Hermione declared resolutely, bending down to strip off one of her socks. She held it out towards the elf, but Nilly shrieked as though it was made of fiendfyre.

“No!” she screamed, diving behind Malfoy and clutching at his robes. “Please not clothes!” She burst into hysterical sobs.

Hermione stared in shock as Malfoy immediately dropped to one knee and gathered the elf close. “Please, sir!” she went on wailing. “Nilly is caring for you since you were a baby! Anything but clothes! Nilly will do *anything!*”

“There, there,” Malfoy said, patting gently between her tiny shoulders as they heaved with sobs. “She didn’t mean anything by it, Nilly. You don’t have to take clothes if you don’t want them.”

“She doesn’t know any better—” Hermione began indignantly, but she broke off at a warning look from Malfoy.

“Mistress has only been Mistress for one day,” Nilly sobbed, “and already Nilly is displeasing her.”

“No, no,” Hermione said earnestly. “You haven’t done anything wrong, Nilly. Mistr—oh, for Merlin’s sake—I am not displeased with you at all.”

Nilly turned her cheek against Malfoy’s chest, blinking up at her with bleary eyes. “Mistress is pleased with Nilly?”

Hermione winced, but Malfoy cleared his throat meaningfully.

“Yes,” she choked out. “I’m very pleased. So pleased, in fact, that I wanted to give you this sock as a reward—”

“Granger,” Malfoy warned as Nilly sucked in a shaky breath.

“B-But perhaps we can discuss that at a later time,” she finished with a weak smile.

Nilly's eyes went even rounder, if that was possible, and she spoke to Malfoy in a rush. "Master will please call for Nilly if he needs anything else." Then, she Disapparated, seemingly before Hermione could decide that *later* was now.

"Well, nicely done," Malfoy spat, getting back to his feet. "Very tactful."

"Don't talk to me about tact," she shot back. "I'm not the one choosing to participate in slavery. It's despicable!"

He stepped forward so he could hiss directly into her face. "Has anyone ever told you that you sound like a complete fucking idiot when you pretend to know everything about everything?"

"I know enough about this!"

"No, you don't!" he shouted. "There are parts of this world that you will never truly understand no matter how hard you try, and I will not allow your blundering ignorance to terrorise anyone under my care!"

"My ignorance?!" she repeated in disbelief. "You invented ignorance, you arrogant prat! There are parts of *your* world I have no wish to understand. Freedom is right and enslavement is wrong, do you understand that?"

He narrowed his eyes at her. "More and more every second."

Her nails dug into the soft cotton of the sock she still held, but before she could respond, he turned on his heel and left. Hermione stood there, breathing heavily in her rage and listening to his retreat. She didn't move until she heard the sound of his bedroom door slamming shut.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

Unsurprisingly, Hermione spends a lot of time avoiding Malfoy in the early chapters, so because they are organized by day, they are shorter by nature. That's part of why I'm going to try to keep up this twice a week update schedule for a bit! The chapters get progressively longer as they start to have more interactions throughout each day :)

The premise of forced cohabitation (and more specifically a two-week period of semi-isolation) was loosely inspired by a wonderful Drarry marriage law fic called [That Old Black Magic](#) by [bixgirl1](#). The circumstances are quite different in several ways (most prominently that marriage law including a magical compulsion to consummate immediately) but still, making them roommates is fun in all situations :)

Many thanks and much love to [naginiLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

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Day 2

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione woke the following day with a terrible crick in her neck. She had fallen asleep on her bedroom floor in the early hours of the morning, surrounded by reference texts and a copy of the marriage law legislation. Though the page was covered in notes and several portions were underlined and highlighted, she had made little headway in discovering a loophole that would free them from the arrangement. The last time the British magical government had instituted a decree of this kind was after the Black Death had left the population dangerously small. But records from that time were notoriously spotty, and she couldn't find a single instance of any couples refusing the partnership the Ministry had assigned to them. Kingsley's administration had done a good job of making it ironclad—damn him.

Hermione had been largely supportive of the harsh measures the Ministry took to stamp out any remaining unrest in the wake of Voldemort's fall, including sentencing someone like Malfoy to Azkaban regardless of the fact that he had taken the Mark under duress and only committed serious crimes when forced to. But in truth, she had never expected something as far-reaching as this. She was vehemently opposed to such aggressive control over the choices and lives of the magical population, even if it was at risk of further decline.

There had been rumours of some kind of legislation to address the birth rate problem for years, but Hermione had assumed it would be something along the lines of financial incentives for couples to have more children. Maybe housing vouchers for newlyweds. Government-subsidised fertility potions at every apothecary.

But no, they had skipped straight to forced marriage and breeding for all single people. While Hermione did not appreciate the comparison Malfoy had made the night before to house elf enslavement, she couldn't deny there were similarities: they were bound against their will to commit acts desired by their binders under the threat of punishment. In the harsh light of day, it was hard to see the difference at all.

Feeling thoroughly discouraged, Hermione dragged herself down to the kitchen. She didn't let Malfoy's closed door get her hopes up this time, and indeed, he was sitting in the same chair he had been yesterday with her mother's blender disassembled on the table in front of him. She noted that he'd forgone robes today and simply wore a white button-down and plain black trousers.

"Don't you have anything better to do with your time?" Hermione asked in lieu of a greeting.

"Like what?" he snapped, clearly still testy from their fight the night before.

Hermione set to fixing herself a bowl of cereal. As bizarre as it was to converse with Malfoy in her kitchen—to have him living in her home—it was oddly reminiscent of the vast portion of her life during which she had seen him every single day. She was out of practice from the

last few years, but before that, he was always present at her meals, in most of her classes, all too often in her corner of the library. They had barely exchanged more than a few dozen words in that span of time, though, and with the contempt neither of them could conceal from their voices, it was no mystery why.

"I would have thought you would be researching," she said dryly. "Surely you have access to far better resources than I do."

He turned to look at her, confusion overriding his anger momentarily. "Researching what?"

Her spoon hovered in front of her open mouth. "Oh, I don't know, marriage decrees, binding laws, precedence for an appeal process? Does any of that sound relevant to you?"

Malfoy's face fell into a scowl at her tone, but she could see the comprehension behind it.

"There must be some way out of this, right?" she went on. "I mean, we have two weeks before..."

His eyes flicked back to hers.

"Well, we have two weeks," she finished, clearing her throat. "Surely we should be able to find some kind of technicality to exploit. Seems like the sort of thing Malfoys would excel at."

He rolled his eyes, but his posture was noticeably more rigid as he turned back to the table.

"I'll have Nilly bring the relevant volumes from the Manor library."

Hermione's tongue clicked as she opened her mouth to object, and Malfoy looked over. His brow raised slowly in that same challenging way, as though he was waiting to see if she would agree to the use of an elf to serve her own means.

Would she?

Hermione debated. Technically, Malfoy could return to the Manor himself; they weren't restricted from leaving the house. But the Ministry would be alerted, especially so soon after the ceremony, and if Kingsley got wind of the texts Malfoy was after, he would know immediately what Hermione was up to. The last thing she wanted was to tip him off and leave time for him to shut down any potential escape route they found.

"Very well," Hermione said. "I'm sure Nilly will be as pleased as anyone to be out from under my ownership."

Malfoy scoffed as though that was the absolute weakest rationalisation she could have possibly come out with, and because it really rather was, Hermione took her cereal and left the room.

The sound of Nilly coming and going was clearly audible throughout the quiet house. Two cracks sounded in close succession as Malfoy called her to give the instructions about the books and sent her off, then two more several hours later as she returned to bring the volumes and then left. Hermione waited until she'd heard the final one before returning to the kitchen.

Malfoy had reassembled and put away the blender in the intervening time, and the table was covered with short stacks of antique tomes. He didn't look up when she entered, so Hermione quietly surveyed the collection without touching anything.

They seemed to be grouped into the three categories she had mentioned: the theory behind marriage laws, matrimonial and soul bonding magic, and historical accounts of previous similar decrees.

"May I?" Hermione asked as she reached for one of the histories.

Malfoy didn't acknowledge her, and she nearly repeated herself before she remembered what he had implied earlier: these books belonged to her now, too.

A sharp thrill of excitement ran down her spine as she imagined the scope of the collection that must be housed in the Manor library. It surely couldn't hold a *billion* reasons to be grateful for the marriage, but perhaps several million...

She blinked, shaking herself out of her reverie. Not that *any* amount of books could make her grateful for the marriage, she thought tersely. It was more a silver lining. A very thin one considering she would hardly have time to make a dent in them before she was the *former* Mrs Malfoy, Merlin-willing.

She picked up the first volume and sat down at the table. Malfoy looked up for the first time.

"What?" she snapped as he stared at her.

"Do you have to sit there?" he asked.

"I'll sit wherever I like, thank you very much."

"I was here first," he said.

"This is my house. I've been here my whole life."

"There's not a desk in my room."

"Oh, my deepest apologies. I didn't have time to adequately prepare your chamber, Your Majesty."

The pages of his book snapped as he slammed it shut. "Do you get off on being extremely unlikable?"

"You're the only one who dislikes me," she returned.

Malfoy barked a laugh. “That is absolute bollocks and you know it. You are fucking insufferable. Even Weasley didn’t want to be your friend at first.”

“That is not true!” she shouted, though she knew full well it was. “That was a long time ago. You—you bring out the worst in me.”

“Oh, darling,” he said with a leer. “It’s mutual.”

“Don’t *call* me that! God, you’re the worst. I can’t imagine doing this with someone I was *incompatible* with.”

A strange look came over Malfoy’s face at that—half shocked, half confused.

“You don’t—” he started, breaking off to shake his head as though he couldn’t believe what he was saying. “You don’t actually think we’re compatible, do you?”

“I meant magically compatible, of course,” she snapped.

He blinked, continuing on even more slowly. “Yeah… but you *don’t* believe it, right?”

Hermione could feel heat rising in her cheeks. “Is it so unbelievable that you might be compatible with someone like me?” she hissed.

“Yes,” Malfoy said simply.

“Christ, I really hate every inch of you.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on, Granger, you’re smarter than this. Magical Decree number whatever-the-fuck has absolutely nothing to do with repopulating the world and everything to do with ending the Sacred Twenty-Eight.”

Hermione just stared at him for a moment. Then, “Excuse me?”

“I’m not saying that we *couldn’t* be magically compatible,” he went on as though she were being painfully stupid on purpose, “Just that whether we are or not has as much to do with this law as our hair colour does.”

“I don’t—”

“Let me put it this way,” he cut in. “If a single member of a Sacred Twenty-Eight family *isn’t* paired for marriage with a Muggleborn, I’ll *Avada* myself and save you the trouble.”

Hermione could only shake her head in disbelief. The letter she’d received from the Ministry identifying her match—

... after extensive testing, you have been found...

But, extensive testing of what? She hadn’t submitted her wand, nor any kind of sample. She’d assumed they had something on file, maybe from Hogwarts? But what?

Malfoy was looking equal parts smug and exasperated. “This is the end of Pureblood wizards, and you’re the poster child for it.”

“Me?” she croaked.

“Of course,” he said, leaning back in his chair, “The Child Death Eater and Potter’s Muggleborn—it’s the shit Rita Skeeter’s wet dreams are made of.”

Hermione felt cold. A deep, hollow, numb ache. And yet—

“You said Muggleborn.”

Confusion flickered across Malfoy’s face, but it was quickly stifled by a mask of indifference.

“Well, you are, aren’t you?”

He went on before she could answer, dropping his head dramatically into one hand. “Salazar, don’t tell me you’re secretly a Pureblood? Ugh, Mother is going to be unbearable. She’s definitely going to insist on a proper wedding.”

Hermione’s lips pursed in annoyance. “You know I am, I’ve just never heard you say it.”

He smirked. “Don’t let it go to your head, Hermione. Even Skeeter can’t print *Mudblood* in the Prophet.”

He said the slur with relish, but for the first time that she’d heard, it felt put on. An act rather than a reflex. If he intended for it to shock her, he was going to be disappointed. Hermione was much more concerned with what he’d just explained. It made too much sense not to be true, but how could they do that to her? How could Kingsley? It was one thing to enforce an unlucky match, but to knowingly put her into this position for publicity...

“Hurts, doesn’t it?” Malfoy asked, sitting forward again. “Everything you did for them, and they see you as nothing more than a tool to be used in the punishment of the Malfoy family.”

Hermione felt like crying. Or screaming. Or punching someone. Preferably Kingsley, but Malfoy would do in a pinch. After all, they wouldn’t have been able to make an example out of her without someone so hateful to pair her with.

As if to prove her point, Malfoy decided to deliver one final blow. “You must be so proud of the role you played in bringing about this new world order.”

It was exactly what she needed to snap out of her spiral. If what he said about the marriage law was true, then it was heinous, but it was nothing compared to a magical world under Voldemort’s rule.

She closed her book and got to her feet. “Shockingly, I would rather be married to you than in an unmarked grave somewhere.” She looked down her nose at him, narrowing her eyes. “But just barely.”

A muscle in Malfoy's jaw twitched, but Hermione barely saw it. She was pushing past his chair and out of the room on deadened legs. She gripped the bottom of the bannister as she passed the stairs, but the thought of going up them made her stomach twist. She needed more space than the four walls of her bedroom could provide.

Wrenching on the handle of the back door, she stumbled down the porch steps and out onto the lawn. She was at the fence marking the back of the yard before she knew it. She balanced the book she still held on one of the flat-topped posts and braced her hands on the wooden planks. The paint was peeling; it grated beneath her palms, threatening splinters. She would need to redo it soon. Just another item on the long list of adult duties she'd never expected to be taking on so young.

A rough laugh choked out of her throat at the thought that re-painting the fence was somehow on par with getting married, starting a family. But as she retrieved the book and turned to face the house again, that mundane task was almost worse. It was a stark reminder that she was here, taking care of her childhood home, alone. She had hardly given any thought to the prospect of being a mother, but the idea of doing it without help, without her own parents to guide her was like cement in her lungs. The urge to call them, to ask for advice was nearly overwhelming, but she couldn't give in. She would find a way out of this, and they would never even have to know about her brief entanglement. And if she couldn't... well, surely if it came down to her actually having children, they would come back. Her chin wobbled in a faint nod. Surely, they would come back.

Her feet dragged slowly over the grass, and she sank down onto one of the swings still hanging from the ancient playset in the center of the yard. The seat was brittle with age, but the black rubber had been soaking up the morning sun, and it warmed her pleasantly through her jeans.

She lifted her head and tried to draw in a deep breath. It wouldn't last, she realised as she looked at the sky. The morning sun, that is. Thick, grey clouds were already filling the space above her, blocking out the light. It would rain soon.

Hermione sighed as she dropped her gaze to the antique volume in her lap, her fingers tracing idly over the edges. *The Magic of Marriage* was inlaid into the faded cloth in gold filigree and Hermione was flooded with a violent urge to destroy a book for the first time in her life. It was like the whole world was mocking her.

She thought of Malfoy's tensed jaw, that minuscule indication that maybe she had wounded him. But any potential satisfaction in that knowledge was far overshadowed by the inescapable fact that their fates were linked. The more they hated each other, the more they would hate each other. Their spouses. Forever.

The first raindrop spattered against the cover of the book, and Hermione shook her head. She couldn't think like that. She would find a way out. She would not be forced into a lifetime of this.

Two more heavy drops splashed onto her hand, and her shoulders tensed against the coming downpour. It took her several long moments to realise they were actually tears.

Chapter End Notes

A few people were wondering why the Ministry wouldn't allow established couples (like Harry and Ginny) to marry voluntarily. Ideal magical compatibility leading to the best chances at conception would be the reason on paper, but here's a little intrigue for the conspiracy folks ;)

Thank you so much for reading! Let's see if I can get another two updates in this week since I missed my second one last week!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

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Day 3

Chapter Notes

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

The rain had come eventually. It lasted through the night, and the following morning dawned grey and dismal, perfectly suited to Hermione's mood. It was past ten and she was still laying in bed. She was awake, of course—had been most of the night—but it was still a strange sensation to be lounging about on a weekday. The lassitude and the lush greenery outside her windows gave such an overwhelming impression of *summer* that Hermione realised how long it had been since the season held real significance for her. When she was working full-time, every weekday was much like any other, and it wasn't since Hogwarts that the month of July had meant long stretches of time without any responsibilities.

Mandatory time off from work was one of the stipulations of the marriage decree—a honeymoon period for those who were lucky enough to enjoy the company of their new spouses. For someone like Hermione though, all it meant was hours locked away with an unwelcome house guest and no work to distract her from her situation.

Although, if she was honest, her work at the Ministry hadn't been near as fulfilling as she'd hoped it would be. And the thought of returning when the two weeks were over held little appeal. It had already been hard enough to make people care about the deplorable treatment of many magical creatures, but with the government now trampling so blatantly on the rights of its human citizens, too, she didn't see it getting easier anytime soon.

That thought was rudely interrupted when Malfoy knocked on her door. Well, perhaps knocked wasn't quite the right word. Hammered was more what he did. Three sharp bangs followed by a short declaration in his best drawl.

"We've been granted visitation rights."

Hermione sat up on her bed as a sheet of parchment slid under the door. The creaky floorboard outside her room remained silent, so she assumed Malfoy was waiting on the landing for her to retrieve it. She swung her legs off the bed and reached for the page.

It was a short missive on Ministry letterhead recommending that close friends and family be received in the newlyweds' home in lieu of the formal wedding reception they had opted not to have. The suggestion was clearly a thinly veiled command, and Hermione heaved a sigh at yet another intrusive aspect of this charade.

Malfoy seemed to have heard the noise through the door. "The Ministry owl is waiting—I assume to take our invitations. Shall we say 1pm?"

"Yes, fine," she muttered, going to her desk and drafting a quick letter to Harry. Ginny was still living with him at Grimmauld, and they could pass the info along to Ron. Hermione folded it into quarters before sliding it under the door.

The floor creaked as Malfoy retrieved it and left without another word.

Though Hermione never had visitors, she did have enough tea and biscuits on hand to make a passable attempt at offering refreshments. Preparations for five guests nearly tapped her out though, and she added both items to the running shopping list she kept on a chalkboard tacked to the kitchen wall.

At exactly 1pm, she and Malfoy stood on opposite ends of the sitting room as green flames erupted in the fireplace. Hermione shifted uncomfortably as Lucius and Narcissa stepped out onto her rug. She expected them to cast disapproving looks around her Muggle house, potentially turning up their noses at the feeble luncheon she'd provided, but neither of them even glanced in her direction. Malfoy stepped forward to greet them, and both parents seemingly only had eyes for their son.

"Hello, Father," Malfoy said quietly, extending a hand to be shaken. "Mother," he added when Lucius released him, and Hermione watched awkwardly as he kissed the air beside each of Narcissa's cheeks.

"Are you quite well, Draco?" Narcissa asked, reaching forward to straighten the already immaculately pressed lines of Malfoy's tie and robes.

"Fine, Mother."

She gave a little nod, patting him lightly on the chest, and then she looked at Hermione. Lucius turned to her as well, and Malfoy followed their gaze.

Hermione said nothing, shifting nervously under the combined weight of their stares. She clasped her hands together in front of her, realising belatedly that she was fiddling with the wedding band on her finger. She dropped her hands at once, but the damage was done. All three of the Malfoys had clearly caught the movement.

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest instead. It wasn't her fault that she rarely wore rings and found herself distracted by the little gold band. Of course knowing that she couldn't remove it only made it worse. She'd discovered that little trick immediately after shutting herself in her room the first night, and it led her to believe that at least some of the Ministry's monitoring of them was tied to the rings in some way.

"There's tea," she said abruptly, unable to stand the silence any longer.

To her surprise, Narcissa gave her a shaky smile. "Thank you," she said quietly before bending down to pour a cup from the teapot.

Hermione glanced at Malfoy, but he was watching his mother prepare her tea. Or rather, watching her fail to prepare it. Narcissa added neither milk nor sugar, and when she

straightened up with the cup rattling lightly in its saucer, Hermione doubted the woman planned to drink it at all.

Further consideration of that oddity was put on hold as flames burst up in the hearth again.

Hermione felt her lips pull into a reluctant smile as Harry stepped through, followed closely by Ginny and Ron.

“Hey,” Harry said softly, casting a wary glance at—*Sweet Jesus*—her in-laws.

“Hi,” she returned, holding her arms out.

All three of them crowded around to hug her at once.

“How are you holding up?” Ginny whispered.

Hermione shrugged. “Not too bad.”

“Has he been all right to you?” Ron asked, looking stern.

She glanced sideways, but the Malfoys had squeezed onto one end of the sofa and were talking together in hushed voices.

“He’s been... well, he’s been Malfoy, I suppose,” Hermione answered. “But I’m fine. He brought some books from the Manor library to research a way out, so I’m—you know—holding out hope.”

“Good,” Ron said, managing a weak smile. “That’s good.”

Hermione tried to return it, but her lips felt fixed. She found herself glancing over at Malfoy again. He was bracing his forehead in one hand as Narcissa spoke.

When Hermione looked back at her friends, they were watching her expectantly. While she was eager to share the possibility of the marriage decree matches being based on blood status, that wasn’t a conversation she wanted to have in front of the Malfoys. She would make an excuse for them to sneak off after a moment.

“Erm, what’s new with you all?” she asked in the meantime. “Tell me about something happening outside of this house.”

Harry gave a small chuckle, glancing between the other two. “Well, we played a bit of Quidditch on Sunday.”

“Oh?” Hermione said as though she found this both unexpected and interesting.

“Yeah, well, Dean and Seamus came round the Burrow,” Ron said. “And we worked on a new manoeuver.”

“Do you remember the Trojan Horse formation?” Ginny put in. “Named for the Irish chaser Troy. You saw him fly at the Quidditch World Cup.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” Hermione lied through her teeth.

Harry picked up the story again just as a low exclamation sounded from the other end of the room.

“No,” Malfoy said forcefully.

Hermione shifted on her feet, trying not to listen as Narcissa responded.

“If you run out of time—”

Malfoy’s voice rose sharply. “I’m not going to *force* myself on—”

“Draco!”

Hermione’s insides turned to ice. She watched Ginny’s mouth move as she explained how Seamus had buggered up their early attempts at the manoeuver, but Hermione couldn’t process the words.

The Malfoys were discussing the consummation. They only had eleven days left. Hermione had tried to push that eventuality as far from her mind as possible, but Malfoy’s words had rattled her. She promised herself in that moment that if it came down to it, she wouldn’t fight him on it. If she had to, she would give him her consent.

She cut her eyes to the side enough to see Narcissa wringing her hands in her lap, teacup long forgotten.

“—know you can’t,” she was saying hurriedly. “Besides, it must be mutually beneficial.”

Malfoy scoffed, looking angry, but Narcissa was undeterred.

“Please, you must understand. During the act, only joint pleasure will suffice—”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Malfoy burst out, getting to his feet.

“Draco!” Lucius snapped, “Don’t you dare speak to your mother that way.”

The commotion was impossible to miss, and Harry, Ron, and Ginny were staring openly now. Hermione was swallowing repeatedly as a single phrase spiralled through her brain.

Joint pleasure.

Narcissa’s eyes welled as she pleaded with her son, not caring about the inadvertent audience.

“Please, Draco, you have to try. I c-can’t watch you go back.”

Hermione felt like vomiting again. And suddenly, she was struck with the memory of the last time she had. Of the way Narcissa had burst into tears when Hermione was physically ill mere moments after being forced to kiss Malfoy. For some ungodly reason, Narcissa seemed to be under the impression that if the consummation was not *pleasurable* for Hermione, too,

she would lose her son to Azkaban again. For twenty years this time. Hermione could understand her bleak outlook on the situation.

Malfoy glanced over at her then, looking truly stricken, and Hermione's knees nearly buckled. Allowing him to fuck her in exchange for their freedom was one thing—granted it was one thing she had tried very hard to avoid thinking about—but it didn't take much thought at all to know that having anything even remotely approaching an orgasm in his presence was *entirely* something else.

“Hermione? Are you okay?”

She blinked as Ginny's hands came up to grab her shoulders, and she realised she had been slowly collapsing against the side of the chair next to her.

“No,” she said feebly, bracing her hand on the leather armrest. “No, I-I’m not feeling well. I think—I think you all should go. I’m sorry.”

“Are you sure?” Harry asked, reaching for her, but Hermione was already stumbling out of the room.

“Yes, I’m sure,” she said over her shoulder. “Thank you for coming.” She only made it as far as the bottom of the stairs before she sank to the floor. Her hands were shaking again, and her teeth chattered despite the warm day. She squeezed her eyes shut as the Floo roared to life, taking her friends away.

The muffled voices of the Malfoys arguing were audible for another few minutes, followed by the Floo igniting once more. Hermione knew she should move out of the way, but her legs refused to work.

Malfoy came rushing around the corner, nearly tripping over his own feet when he spotted her blocking the stairs.

“Is it true?” she asked desperately.

His jaw clenched for a moment before he gave a jerky nod.

“What the fuck?”

“It’s a Pureblood thing,” he said, rubbing a hand over his face.

“What the *fuck*?”

“I don’t know, Granger,” he sighed in exasperation. “Most Pureblood women still have little say in marriage contract negotiations. It’s a way to ensure they get something out of the arrangement.”

“How progressive,” she spat.

“It wasn’t my fucking idea,” he shot back.

“You didn’t know about it?”

He paused, taking a deep breath before blowing it out through pursed lips. “I… had read something. But I misinterpreted it.”

“What did you read?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Well, how can you be sure it’s real?”

“I’m sure.”

Hermione swallowed. He looked sure. Narcissa had looked sure.

“The Ministry doesn’t care, right? About my… experience? They just need us to procreate.”

“Right,” Malfoy said, staring at his feet. “It’s not the Ministry, it’s me. The Malfoy magic won’t recognise it as consummation without…”

“Shit,” she said.

“Yeah,” he agreed.

“But we’re—we’re going to figure something out. Something else. A way out. We still have time.”

He raised his eyes slowly to look at her, crumpled at the foot of her own stairs.

“Right?” she asked, biting the inside of her lip to stop it trembling. Like it or not, they were in this together.

His head dipped in a nod, but he glanced away from her when he agreed.

“Right.”

Chapter End Notes

Twists! And! Turns! These two can't catch a break ;)

Thank you so much for reading! I love seeing your reactions and theories in the comments <3

Many thanks and much love to [naginiLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

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Day 4

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione ventured reluctantly from her room on the fourth day, but for once, Malfoy was nowhere to be seen. Gladly taking advantage of the respite, she quickly grabbed a handful of Floo powder and kneeled in front of the fireplace. Flames roared around her head as she called out for the Burrow, but it was only a few seconds before Molly appeared before her.

“Hermione!” she called in surprise. “Is everything all right, dear?” Her careful expression let Hermione know that at least one of the Weasley siblings had mentioned Hermione’s odd behaviour the day before.

“Fine,” Hermione answered, her voice tight. “I just wanted to ask Ron if he would be able to come round again today. I figured no one would be home at Grimmauld.”

“No, of course,” Molly said with a nod. “They’ll be at work, too. Yes, I’ll tell Ron when he gets home and ask him to pass along the message.”

“Thank you, Molly.”

The other woman gave her a warm smile, but Hermione could see the concern written into every line on Molly’s face.

“Are you sure you’re all right, dear?”

Hermione nodded weakly, but Molly continued on. “It’s perfectly understandable if you’re upset. If there’s anything we can do—”

“No,” Hermione interrupted. “I mean, thank you,” she added to cover her rudeness. “But no, I just need to speak with the others, and that’s... there’s nothing...”

The waver in her voice was intensifying with every second Molly spent bestowing that supremely compassionate, *maternal* look on her, and Hermione shook her head to convey what her words couldn’t. Then, she heard the sound of Malfoy’s door opening upstairs.

“I have to go,” she said quickly. “Thank you, Molly.”

“Of course, dear—”

Hermione stood before the word was fully out, rushing to the side of the stairs and hiding next to them like a child as Malfoy descended. She could only hope he would bear left for the kitchen when he reached the bottom. If he turned for the sitting room and saw her—

But she would avoid certain death by mortification this time. As soon as she heard the sound of a kitchen cupboard opening, she dashed up the stairs and resolved to wait in her room until the coast was clear.

That evening, the sound of voices from downstairs roused Hermione from her reading. She jumped up, having forgotten that her friends would come through the Floo. She wished she'd told Molly to have them Apparate directly into her room, but in all honesty, that request would have done little to convince the Weasley matriarch that everything was *fine*, as Hermione had so vehemently suggested.

She quickly unlocked her door and poked her head into the hall.

"Up here, please!" she called out.

After a moment, she heard three sets of feet on the stairs and retreated, leaving the door cracked. Ron pushed it open, Harry and Ginny following behind. As soon as they crossed the threshold, Hermione rushed forward to close and lock the door again, adding a silencing charm for good measure.

"Well, I'd ask how you are," Ron started, brows raised at her paranoia, "but Mum's already told us you're *fine*."

"Looks like the same kind of *fine* she was during OWLs," Harry observed, taking in the floor covered with books and parchment.

"Hilarious," Hermione deadpanned. "I'd like to see either of you live with Malfoy for four days and still be *alive* much less *fine*."

That sobered them both.

"At least he's fit," Ginny put in.

Hermione's head snapped to the other girl where she was casually inspecting the knickknacks on Hermione's bookshelf.

"Excuse me?" she said.

Ginny shrugged. "I'm only saying, you could have gotten Goyle. Or that little creep Avery from my year—he looks like a cricket."

Hermione blinked. "You think Malfoy is fit?"

Ginny raised her brows. "You don't?"

"Eugh, Ginny..." Ron complained with a grimace.

Hermione mouthed soundlessly, looking around the room as though she might find a suitable answer pinned to one of the beige walls. All she found was Harry sitting on the edge of the

bed, staring resolutely at the carpet with his cheeks going pink.

“No,” Hermione burst out in an indignant rush of breath. “He’s *Malfoy*.”

“Well, I didn’t ask if you were attracted to him,” Ginny reasoned. “That would certainly be swayed by his personality, but objectively...” She trailed off as though Malfoy was so good-looking it hardly needed stating twice.

Hermione thought she might feel a fever coming on.

“I hadn’t seen him up close since his trial,” Ginny went on, now flipping absently through a book as though they were discussing the weather. “He’s certainly grown into his features. Filled out. You know.”

She looked over at Hermione who, for some reason said, “He’s tall.”

Ginny gave her a sympathetic smile. “No one will judge you if you think he’s fit.”

That was bold seeing as Hermione was incredibly busy judging Ginny at the moment. And Ron looked like he had food poisoning.

“Isn’t that right, Harry?”

Harry’s head snapped up at the sound of his name, and he flushed even deeper. “Er, right.” He took off his glasses and used his t-shirt to clean the lenses. “Wouldn’t blame you,” he muttered.

Ginny smirked.

“Well, thank you,” Hermione said, feeling completely nonplussed, “But it’s not necessary, since I don’t, and even if I did, which I don’t, that’s not—there was something else I wanted to talk about.”

Ginny closed the book in her hands, still looking smug, but giving Hermione her full attention. Harry and Ron both looked relieved.

Hermione took a deep breath and set off pacing along the foot of her bed, trying to regain her train of thought. “Malfoy thinks that the Ministry is lying about the marriage matches being determined by magical compatibility. He thinks it’s political.”

Her three friends stared at her.

“Based on what?” Harry asked after a long pause.

“Well, maybe nothing,” Hermione admitted. “But the letters we received with the name of our match spoke about extensive testing that was done to determine compatibility, but we didn’t undergo any testing. He thinks it’s actually a cover for a plot to breed out Purebloods, specifically the Sacred Twenty-Eight—by pairing all of them with Muggleborns.”

Harry and Ginny exchanged looks.

"That's... a thought," Ron said slowly, his brows drawing together. "It would certainly make recruitment harder for the next war if all the Death Eaters had Muggleborn sons- and daughters-in-law."

"And half-blood grandchildren," Harry added.

"Exactly," Hermione agreed.

"But how *are* they determining the matches then?" Ginny asked. "I mean, we're Sacred Twenty-Eight. Why wouldn't Kingsley pair you with Ron?"

Hermione glanced over at Ron, and though he looked decidedly awkward at the suggestion, they all knew it would have been so much easier that way.

"Malfoy thought that being paired with me would send the strongest signal to the other blood supremacists," Hermione said. "That with my notoriety, I would be the worst punishment for the Malfoy family."

"He said that to you?" Ron demanded, anger quick in his voice.

"Yes!" Hermione answered. "He said a lot of gross things. It's *Malfoy*," she repeated, seeing as everyone else in the room seemed to have forgotten who she was dealing with.

"Arsehole," Harry murmured, shaking his head.

Hermione gave a thankful nod in his direction. That was more like it.

"Anyway," Hermione continued. "If the Ministry is lying about the compatibility tests, then we have excellent grounds to get this marriage annulled. But we'll have to prove it. I need your help to look into it while I'm stuck here, but please be careful. Kingsley will have every reason to want to maintain the cover story. They may already have fabricated test results at the ready."

Harry got to his feet, looking at the other two. "Yeah, we can ask around at least. Find out who else was in the first round and who they were paired with. If any matches don't fit the pattern, then we'll know."

Hermione nodded. "Thank you. I'm going to keep researching as I have been. Just in case he's wrong."

"In case you actually are compatible?" Ginny asked.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "*Magically* compatible, yes."

"Right." The smug expression was back on the redhead's face, and Hermione crossed her arms.

"We'll let you know what we find out," Ron said, stepping forward and placing a conciliatory hand at her elbow.

Hermione smiled, feeling truly heartened for the first time; she had reinforcements now.

“Try to stay positive,” Harry said, wincing as though it pained him to offer the same trite advice she might have once given him.

“I’ll try,” she said.

Ron was first out the door, followed by Harry, but Ginny stopped in front of Hermione for a moment. “Good luck,” she offered, glancing out into the empty hall. Then, she leaned in and lowered her voice. “And don’t be too hard on yourself. Whatever happens...”

Hermione let out an indignant scoff with every intention of insisting that *nothing* was going to happen, but Ginny raised her brows again.

“I mean anything, Hermione,” she said gently. “If you can’t find a way out of this, it’s not your fault.”

Hermione’s mouth snapped shut as she took in the other girl’s words. Whether she had been hand-picked as a match for Malfoy or not, neither of them should have ever been put in this position. It shouldn’t be Hermione’s responsibility to find a weakness in her government’s laws to maintain her autonomy; they should be protecting it for her.

Her chin wobbled dangerously as she fought the urge to cry with anger *yet again*, but she nodded her thanks, and Ginny gave her a final reassuring smile before leaving through the door.

Though the distraction of research kept her hunger at bay for most of the afternoon and evening, by the time ten o’clock rolled around, Hermione could no longer ignore the hollow ache in her stomach. She marked her place in the book she’d been referencing, and kicked back her bed covers.

Pulling on a cardigan over her tank top, she quietly opened her bedroom door and peered out. The crack beneath Malfoy’s door was dark, and the house was quiet. Hermione’s mouth twisted back and forth as she considered her odds.

Malfoy’s room had its own attached bath, and she suspected he kept a silencing charm up since she never heard the shower running. As such, she didn’t have a good idea at all about his usual schedule. Add that to the time she’d spent actively hiding from him, and there was no telling whether he would be asleep at this hour or not. Figuring there was nothing for it, she closed the door behind her as gently as possible and started down the stairs.

Breathing a sigh of relief at the continued darkness of the bottom floor, Hermione turned into the kitchen and flipped on the light switch.

The crash of breaking china drowned out Hermione's scream as she nearly swallowed her own face in shock. Malfoy loomed large, directly in front of her.

"Bloody fuck, Granger!" he snarled, stepping backwards out of the pool of tea spreading on the floor between them.

"Why were you in the dark?!" she demanded, hand over her racing heart.

Malfoy's eyes flicked to the light fixture in the center of the ceiling and then to the switch on the wall behind her. She realized belatedly that he was gripping his wand in one hand, and the tip was glowing with a faint *Lumos*.

She rolled her eyes and stepped back to the wall, flipping the switch on and off several times.

"Light," she said flatly.

"Clearly," he seethed, eyes narrowed at her condescending tone. He extinguished his wand and used it to Repair the shattered mug and Vanish the spilled tea. He finished with a quick *Scourgify* across the sticky tile.

As Hermione watched the spellwork, her eyes were drawn to where Malfoy had rolled back the sleeves of his shirt, revealing toned forearms. Each flick of his wand sent the tendons rippling, prominent veins dancing under his porcelain skin as—

"What."

Hermione jerked her head up. Malfoy was regarding her cagily. He crossed his arms over his broad chest before tossing a lock of hair out of his face with a flick of his head. It didn't work, and the same section fell back over his brow, giving him a sort of pleasantly tousled look that—

Oh.

Oh no.

Hermione was going to *kill* Ginny Weasley.

"What are you looking at?" Malfoy snapped, advancing a step.

Hermione shrank back, wrapping her cardigan tighter around her as she became painfully aware of her lack of bra.

"N-Nothing," she stammered, staring at the floor between them. "Sorry about your tea."

Even from her peripheral view, she saw how the apology took Malfoy aback.

Taking advantage of his stunned silence, she slipped past him and over to the pantry. "I'll just—" She rummaged for a second before unearthing an ancient package of Jaffa Cakes. "—get out of your way," she finished, skirting back by him and clutching her bounty to her chest.

She didn't dare look back over her shoulder as she executed the tactical retreat.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! The next update will be Monday, and I am so excited for it!! It marks the beginning of Act II and an official turning point for these two. Definitely one of my favorite chapters :) I hope you enjoy!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

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Day 5

Chapter Notes

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

When Hermione woke on the morning of the fifth day, she resolutely determined that her reaction the previous night had been a fluke of some kind; simply the power of suggestion combined with possible hunger-induced hallucinations. Whether or not Malfoy was conventionally attractive—a subject on which she had no personal opinion—mattered little in the scheme of what she needed to do. And it certainly had no bearing on the proposition she planned to make to him that day.

As she passed by the sitting room, she found Malfoy standing in front of the powered-off television with his arms crossed.

He looked up as she entered and indicated the black screen with a jerk of his head. “If this is supposed to be art, I don’t get it.”

Hermione sighed as she took in the dozens of open VHS and DVD cases spread over the carpet. Luckily he didn’t seem to have actually separated any of them from their covers, he had just opened each one to look inside.

“It’s not art,” she said simply. There was no way she was explaining television to Malfoy before coffee. “At least, not when it’s like that.”

His brows rose at that cryptic statement, but he didn’t ask for clarification.

Hermione turned her back on him, trusting that he would clear up the movies the same way he had restored everything else he had inspected throughout the house so far. She put the kettle on and began spooning coffee grounds into the french press.

“Hermione.”

Her shoulders tensed. “What, *Malfoy*?”

“What’s with the signs?”

She glanced up to find him looking past her head at the wooden placard above the doorway leading into the little room that housed the washer and dryer. Stamped across it were the words *Bless this mess* in artfully faded block letters.

Before she could answer, his eyes shifted to the one on the wall next to her. It read *But first... coffee* with the ‘o’ in the shape of a little cup.

She had already noticed him eyeing the one above the kitchen table that proclaimed *Together is our favorite place to be*.

“Erm, my aunt lives in Arkansas,” she said as though that was explanation enough. “She sends them. She thinks they’re funny.”

“Are they?”

Hermione looked back at him. “Are they what?”

“Funny.”

“I don’t know,” she said in exasperation, switching off the kettle. “They’re silly, but that doesn’t mean some of them don’t have good advice.”

“There’s one in my room that says *Be the reason someone smiles today.*”

“Yeah, well, I won’t hold my breath,” Hermione muttered.

He chuckled, and she turned to face him while the coffee steeped.

“Have you had any luck?” she asked, suppressing a yawn. “With the volumes on marriage bonds?”

The smirk slid off his face at once. “No, I haven’t.”

Hermione shook her head. She’d been up most of the night again, but she hadn’t found anything either. Other than a knot of anxiety which seemed to have taken up permanent residence in her gut. She hadn’t realized how much she’d been relying on the idea of a quick and impersonal consummation until the prospect had been taken away from her. She hadn’t really thought about the details, but she’d assumed that it wouldn’t be *so* terrible to just let it happen. With the lights off. Mostly still clothed. Probably from behind.

Okay, maybe she had thought about it a little. No matter how it happened though, she had assumed it would be her choice if it did. Fuck or Azkaban. But she couldn’t just *choose* to come during sex. Especially not with Malfoy.

The threat of twenty years in prison had never felt more tangible, and for the first time, she was actually scared.

“I think—” she started and had to clear her throat. “I think maybe we need to work on a contingency plan.”

Malfoy stared blankly at her. “Contingency plan?”

She nodded. “In case we can’t find a loophole.”

“What kind of plan?”

“A plan for successfully consummating.”

He grimaced. “Surely that’s overachieving even for you, Granger. It’s pretty basic.”

She straightened her shoulders. “On a scale of one to ten, how comfortable would you say you are with me physically?”

“Zero.”

Hermione’s lips pursed in annoyance because she really should have seen that coming. How charming that the extent of his arseholery could still surprise her. “Exactly,” she said flatly.

He looked surprised.

“I don’t know how much experience you have with pleasuring women—”

He let out an indignant scoff.

“—but I can tell you that for most of them, and certainly for me, it’s not going to happen just like that.” She snapped her fingers for emphasis. “And certainly not with someone I would rate as a *zero* in terms of being comfortable with.”

“I should have known you would make this as difficult as possible,” he griped.

“I’m not being difficult,” she shot back. “I’m being realistic.”

“Can’t you just lighten up? For once in your goddamn life?”

“No, I can’t!” she shouted. “I’m facing Azkaban over this!”

“You’re not going to Azkaban, Granger.”

“I very well might!” she said, now feeling quite hysterical. He hadn’t reacted at all like she’d hoped he would. If he wasn’t willing to help her work up to it, then they were both absolutely fucked. She pressed on, letting her voice climb. “And if I’m getting sentenced to prison, I’d much rather it be because we took a stand as conscientious objectors and not because we can’t fuck properly!”

“Oh, I can fuck you properly!” he yelled, matching her tone. He pushed off the counter toward her. “And you’ll like it!”

“I don’t just need to like it, Malfoy! I need to come!”

“And you will!” he screamed. “I’ll make you come if it’s the last thing I do!”

“Great!” She shoved past him towards the door.

“Perfect!” he yelled after her.

“Looking forward to it!” she screamed from the hallway.

“Can’t wait!” floated around the corner.

Hermione stopped at the foot of the stairs, red-faced and panting, replaying what she’d just said. She charged back into the kitchen.

“I didn’t mean that last part!” she shouted.

“Me neither!” Malfoy yelled, looking every bit as manic as she felt.

“And I forgot my coffee!”

“Fine!” He stormed past her into the hallway and out the back door.

Hermione flipped the sink tap to cold and stuck her face under the stream.

Determined to avoid Malfoy even more assiduously than she already had been, Hermione elected to make an impromptu midday shopping trip. Pulling out the little notepad she kept in her purse, she quickly copied down the items listed on the kitchen chalkboard.

-onions

-tea

-biscuits

-sense of humour

-peas

Hermione’s head snapped back up. Sure enough, Malfoy had desecrated her list with his infernal scrawl.

“Absolute arse,” she snarled under her breath as she swiped the eraser over the dusty surface.

She carefully avoided the little chalk heart in the corner, drawn by her mother shortly before her parents had left for Australia. It was stupid, but Hermione treasured the small reminders of their life before. She didn’t allow herself to wallow in the loneliness or the guilt, but she allowed herself this. A little harmless sentimentality every now and again.

The shop was crowded and Hermione was frustrated. In her annoyance with Malfoy, she hadn’t conducted a proper survey of the food situation before heading out. Her list was short and didn’t include items for a single cohesive meal. She had mostly been subsisting on cheese and crackers and other snack items that she could take back up to her room before Malfoy appeared to engage in his favourite pastime other than ransacking the house: aggravating her. She hadn’t had a proper meal since the marriage ceremony, and come to think of it, she hadn’t seen Malfoy eating anything at all. Maybe he was some kind of emotional vampire, able to subsist purely by sucking the happiness out of her.

Remembering that she had actually spent several years seeing him eat in the Great Hall, she dismissed that theory and added several bags of crisps to her basket.

The mystery of Malfoy's eating habits was unravelled later that evening, when Hermione returned from the shops to find him seated at the kitchen table, tucking into what looked like an expertly prepared beef wellington.

Hermione dropped her bags onto the counter with a thud.

"I told you I don't want elves here."

Malfoy gave an exaggerated startle, glancing quickly over both shoulders. "Oh, no! Do you see one?"

She rolled her eyes. "Do you expect me to believe that you cooked this from what we had in the house?"

He placed a particularly delectable looking piece into his mouth and chewed slowly. Hermione cleared her throat to cover the sound of her stomach growling.

"Whatever little lies you need to tell yourself to make it through the day are none of my business, Hermione." He smirked at her before washing down the bite with a swallow of rich, red wine that she also didn't recognize.

"However, if you're willing to set aside your misplaced morality for an evening," he went on, gesturing to the seat across from him, "you're welcome to join me."

"That sounds lovely," she said brightly, grinning as his face fell. The elves had already gone to the trouble of preparing the food after all, and nothing would annoy him more than her taking him up on his facetious offer.

He didn't even try to suppress his scowl as she set another place at the table and served herself a generous portion of beef. It really did look amazing.

"Mmm," she gave a ridiculous moan of pleasure as the first bite melted on her tongue. "This is excellent."

Malfoy's grip tightened around his wine glass, but he lifted it toward her. "You should try it with the wine."

"I think I will," she said smugly, pouring herself a generous helping. Her mouth was full of the decadent liquid when he spoke again.

"It's elf-made."

Hermione choked, snatching her napkin out of her lap and pressing it to her dribbling lips as she tried to cough through her nose. Malfoy grinned.

“Good, isn’t it?” he asked lightly.

“Very,” she gasped, wincing slightly and setting her glass aside. “But maybe a tad *rich* for my tastes.”

“A shame,” he tsked. “But you like the wellington?”

“Mm,” she hummed, wishing it wasn’t actually the best thing she’d ever tasted.

“Wonderful. Nilly!”

Hermione choked again as the little elf appeared next to the table. Nilly’s eyes widened at the sight of Hermione, but she quickly averted her gaze in a little bow.

“Nilly,” Malfoy said in a remarkably sweet voice, “your Mistress would like to offer her compliments on dinner if you’d like to hear them?”

The elf straightened up at once, clapping both long-fingered hands over her mouth as though she was overwhelmed by the mere thought.

Hermione kicked Malfoy as hard as she could in the shin. He cried out, slopping a fair bit of elf-made wine onto his plate which was mildly satisfying. But Hermione’s heart clenched painfully as she looked at the little elf.

“It’s delicious, Nilly,” she said gently. “Thank you very much for making it.”

Tears pooled at the rim of Nilly’s eyes. “Oh, Mistress is most welcome. Nilly will bring anything Mistress desires: A treacle tart? Toffee pudding? Custard eclairs?”

“Er, no!” Hermione said quickly, “Don’t bring any desserts, Nilly. It’s fine.”

“Maybe some of each,” Nilly said absently before Disapparating.

Hermione glared at Malfoy in the handful of seconds it took for the elf to return.

“Here you are, Mistress!” she squeaked, setting a large platter of assorted treats onto the table. “You is please calling on Nilly for anything else you need.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said with a sigh. “I will.”

The elf made another low bow to them before popping out of sight again.

Malfoy reached forward and plucked an eclair off the plate, meeting her eye with relish as he took a bite.

“I hope that tastes good enough to warrant twenty years in prison,” Hermione seethed, “because I swear to Merlin if you use her to antagonize me again, I will go with a smile on

my face just to know you're in there, too."

"Oh, ho," Malfoy replied, licking his lips. "Big talk for someone who's never set foot in the place."

"It can't be worse than spending the rest of my life with you."

"I assure you, it can."

Hermione shook her head, the heat of her anger fading rapidly into a roiling, sickening dread.
"Is it really that bad?"

Malfoy's eyes flicked up from his plate at her tone. She'd meant to say something scathing, some comparison of a lifetime with him to the soul-sucking horror of being in the presence of dementors, but what came out was a pathetic whimper that showed all her cards.

His eyes hardened as she watched, the glint of malice fading to a sullen dullness.

"You're not going to Azkaban, Granger."

It didn't sound any more reassuring than when he'd said it that morning, and she was furious to feel tears stinging her eyes. They would both go if he refused to help her, and while she wasn't surprised he hated her enough to sentence her to such a fate, it rather burned that he hated her enough to condemn himself, too.

Potentially, that same thought had just occurred to him, because he cleared his throat and dabbed at his mouth with his napkin.

"What did you have in mind for the contingency plan?" He folded his hands in his lap and leaned forward slightly as though to bolster the change of subject with a change in posture.

Hermione scoffed. "You're joking."

"I'm not," he said seriously. "While I don't appreciate having my skills in the bedroom called into question—"

"It's not about your *skills*!"

"—I get it," he finished, holding up a hand against her outburst. "I appreciate your concern."

"How magnanimous of you," she snapped.

His face remained impassive. "So, where do we begin?"

Hermione couldn't believe the nerve of him. Did he really think she was going to cooperate with him *right now* just because he suddenly decided to get with the program?

The answer was obviously *yes* based on his continued expectant expression. And she realized with a painful twinge that he was right. Because they only had nine days left.

Hermione heaved a sigh. "Well, *apparently* we start at zero."

His lips twitched just enough to let her know that he didn't regret his earlier quip, but he managed to restrain his usual smirk.

"All right," he said, inclining his head slightly. "What does that look like?"

She eyed the space between them for several long moments before extending her arm and laying her hand on the table, palm up in invitation.

Malfoy looked down at it, then back up to her face, then back down again.

She waited.

They both knew the stakes, and as much as she hated to be dependent on him, whatever happened next was entirely his choice. She probably should have felt more degraded that he seemed to need an entire minute to decide whether he was willing to touch her, but vomiting in front of someone delivers a rather lasting blow to one's dignity.

Finally, he reached out and laid his palm over hers. His eyes found hers again as his fingers curled around her hand. They stared at each other as they held hands across the table, and it was...

... *the* most awkward thing Hermione had ever experienced.

She was painfully aware of each of her digits, and her face seemed to be twitching with the strain of holding her hand still. Despite her best efforts, her thumb slid over the edge of his palm, and his own grip loosened in response to the movement. She wasn't sure whether he was trying to let go or just reacting instinctively to her shifting, but as she debated, he rotated his palm against hers and spread his fingers, pressing them between her own. He squeezed lightly as her fingertips curled to rest against the back of his hand, and Hermione was mortified to feel a flush creeping up her neck. She held his gaze as they sat there with their fingers laced together, her cheeks flaming as though she had never touched a boy before. The pad of Malfoy's thumb traced a purposeful path down the side of her own and Hermione swallowed.

She didn't know how long they stayed like that, but some milestone must have passed for Malfoy because he gave a small nod and slipped his hand from hers. He didn't speak, but she watched his gaze focus on something over her shoulder.

He stood from the table, and though his body was blocking it from view when she looked back, she recognized the sound of chalk sliding over the blackboard.

When he moved out of the way, Hermione drew in a shaky breath as she processed the numeral he had drawn.



Chapter End Notes

Not quite a title drop, but certainly a title set-up ;) Visual representations of Hermione's wall signs can be seen [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 6

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione was drawn from her room on the sixth day by a strange sound. Well, not strange necessarily—she was fairly certain she knew exactly what it was—but it was strange that Malfoy would be producing it.

His door was closed, but the one at the end of the hall, leading into her parent's old room was open. She wasn't nearly as bothered by the evidence that he had rummaged through everything as she would have been on the first day; clearly he was intent on investigating the entire contents of the house.

But when she rounded the corner to the attached bathroom, she was brought up short by what she saw. Because, indeed, Draco Malfoy was using an electric hair dryer... on his face?

He was clothed in his usual uniform of white shirt and black trousers, and his hair was dry. But his head was tilted back and his eyes closed in apparent rapture as he directed the air over his face. It was such an odd and somehow strangely intimate display that Hermione couldn't tear her eyes away. As she watched, he directed the air down the length of each of his arms and over his chest and stomach. He seemed so pleased by the sensation that he didn't even look angry when he caught sight of her watching in the mirror.

"Look at this!" he shouted over the noise of the fan's motor. "Like a combined drying and warming charm! But prolonged!"

Hermione nodded, feeling some foreign sensation building up in her chest. He pointed the dryer at her then, and she squinted against the sudden burst of hot air in her face. It wasn't until the giggle spilled past her lips that she recognized the sensation as *laughter*.

Horrified, she reached out blindly, fumbling for the off switch. The sound died immediately, and she dropped her hand quickly from where it was wrapped around Malfoy's on the handle. He gave her a look that indicated he found that reaction to be incongruous with the number on the chalkboard downstairs, but she didn't care.

"How did you know how to use this?" she asked out of genuine curiosity.

He reached over to the wall and removed the plug from the socket. "These things are attached to lots of items around the house." He tapped the metal prongs. "The light goes out of the lamps if you remove it from the wall."

Hermione was somewhat impressed. "Anything with one of these plugs runs on electricity," she explained. "It's kind of like magic, but it's channelled through the walls of the house. That's why the light switches are on the walls, too."

Malfoy nodded, looking appraisingly at the electrical socket. "Clever."

Hermione's gaze dropped to the assorted items he'd removed from the bathroom cupboard for inspection: a curling iron, a tray of assorted nail lacquers, about fifty sample toothbrushes, and a box of tampons.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked, gesturing vaguely at the counter.

He shrugged. "I'm learning about Muggles."

"But why?"

When she met his eye in the mirror, he smirked.

"Well, my wife was raised by Muggles, for one."

She rolled her eyes.

"And I'm currently living in a Muggle house, for another. I'd like to be comfortable here."

She glanced back up at that, and he shifted on his feet. "As much as possible anyway."

She wondered suddenly if he missed the Manor. Then she wondered why the fuck she was wondering that.

"Well, I'll, erm, leave you to it, then," she said, backing quickly out of the overheated room.

Despite the fact that Hermione was supposed to be endeavouring to get more comfortable with Malfoy, she still spent most of the day locked in her room researching. Actually consummating the marriage was still Plan B, and she wasn't giving up on escaping the entire arrangement until it was absolutely necessary.

She was flipping slowly through a heavy volume, the sound and aroma of freshly mown grass drifting in through the open window, when she heard a twittering hoot.

A feathery blur was just visible as she glanced up, and then an envelope dropped onto her head.

"Hello, Pig," she said fondly, reaching out a hand to the little owl. He lighted upon it at once, weighing no more than an equal volume of marshmallow fluff, and let Hermione scratch a finger beneath his beak. After a single quiet second spent with his eyes closed in enjoyment, Pigwidgeon gave another little hoot and fluttered down onto the bedspread to hop with impatience.

"Okay, okay," Hermione said soothingly, picking up the letter.

She recognized Ron's writing at once and skimmed quickly over the page.

Hey, hope things are okay. I'm not sure if this is good news or bad, so I'll just get straight to it. Everyone that Harry, Gin, and I have been able to find in the first round fit the political pattern.

-Dennis Creavey (MB) is in the newest class of trainee Aurors and he married Astoria Greengrass (S28) yesterday.

-Harry ran into Hannah Abbott (S28) in Int'l. Magical Coop. on a case and she is set to marry Justin Finch-Fletchley (MB) tomorrow.

-Hannah told him Susan Bones was matched with Leonard Smith (older brother of that git Zacharias) and they're both half-bloods.

-Ginny works with Terrence Higgs (HB) in Games and Sports and he's been paired with Cho Chang (HB).

-The only potential outlier is Dean. He's been out sick for a few days, or so we thought. Turns out he's been matched with Millicent Bulstrode (S28) and didn't want to tell anyone. As you know, he's not sure of his blood status, so there's a chance that it doesn't fit. Or it's a weird kind of confirmation that he's Muggleborn. Wouldn't that be mental?

Anyway, we'll keep asking around. Have you found anything? I guess you'd Floo if you had...

Let us know if you need anything.

Ron

Hermione sighed, rubbing a hand over her eyes. She would be hard-pressed to say whether it was good news or bad, too. The matches between half-bloods didn't refute the conspiracy theory, but they didn't really support it either. Half-bloods made up the vast majority of the wizarding population, so statistically the majority of matches would be between two of them. But the potential of three pairings between someone of the Sacred Twenty-Eight and Muggle heritage within the first round was definitely suspicious.

She said as much in her reply to Ron before thanking him and asking him to pass on her appreciation to the others. Pigwidgeon had just disappeared over the neighbouring rooftop when Hermione heard the obvious sound of Nilly arriving and departing from the kitchen downstairs.

She ignored it because, surprisingly, she really wasn't in the mood to fight, and several minutes later, her traitorous stomach gave an unmistakable gurgle of curiosity about what delicacies the elf may have brought for Malfoy's dinner.

She was deeply ashamed of the fact that she had snuck downstairs in the middle of the night to sample two of the custard eclairs, but holding hands with Malfoy had been stressful!

Plus, she didn't want Nilly's work to go to waste.

Bracing herself for the disgustingly smug expression Malfoy would undoubtedly adopt at the sight of her, Hermione drifted down the stairs. She would just see what was on the menu; no harm in that.

She poked her head into the kitchen and *oh, motherfuck*, it was chicken piccata.

Malfoy was currently slicing through what appeared to be an impossibly tender chicken cutlet, and the tantalizing aroma of a fresh and briny lemon sauce hung like perfume in the air.

He glanced up at her entrance, and all the preparation in the world was inadequate for the smarmy delight painting his features.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to have started without you, sweetheart." He laid his cutlery carefully on the edge of his plate. "I wasn't expecting you."

"Please don't call me that," she said through a fixed smile. She slid into the place he had set for her with all the grace of someone who was currently pissing on their principles. All for a few measly capers.

"Wine?" he offered, holding the bottle over her glass. She pursed her lips, and he gave her an indulgent smile. "It's not elf-made."

"I think you're lying," she replied.

He made a sympathetic hum. "Yes, that does seem like something I would do, doesn't it?"

She sighed as her eyes dropped to his own glass. The wine was white this time, perfectly chilled according to the slight condensation, and apparently lightly effervescent; a thin stream of bubbles was rising steadily from the center of his goblet. Hermione had never seen anything look so enticing.

"You could always call Nilly and ask her," he suggested.

Hermione shook her head. "Has anyone ever told you that you're a right prick?"

Malfoy grinned. "Yes."

"Very well," she sighed, gesturing for him to pour it.

As soon as he lifted the bottle away, Hermione grabbed the glass and drained it in three large gulps.

His brows rose sharply, but she waved for him to fill it again. "I have a very low tolerance for dealing with pricks."

He made a choked sound, and Hermione's cheeks flushed. "I-I didn't mean it like that."

“Of course not.”

She stared determinedly at the glass as he poured it, and it was with the utmost restraint that she stopped herself from immediately finishing it again. Neither of them spoke, which left the spectre of her having to deal with *his* prick someday soon looming over the table.

She didn’t meet his gaze again until she had served herself a portion of the chicken and a little pile of linguini.

Circe’s tits, it was good. She hated herself a little bit for every bite, but she tried to focus on how pleased Nilly would be if she knew how much her Mistr—how much *she*, rather—was enjoying it.

Hermione didn’t even pretend to have the strength to protest when Malfoy Summoned two little dishes of panna cotta from where Nilly had apparently left them on the counter. The pudding was topped with a dollop of lemon curd, and the first bite exploded with flavour on Hermione’s tongue. She completely failed to stifle a whimper of delight.

“Something to share with the class, Hermione?” Malfoy looked nearly beside himself with glee at her downfall.

“Why does it have to be so good?” She pouted openly as she shoved another bite past her lips.

“Because Nilly wants the best for her new Mistress, of course.”

“Don’t...” Hermione whined. “I feel terrible.”

“Really?” he said as she savoured another bite. “You look like you’re enjoying yourself to me.”

“I’m good at faking it.”

Malfoy made the choking noise again, and Hermione dropped her spoon. “I didn’t mean it like that!”

“Good,” he said, hiding what she was sure was a smirk in his napkin. “Because that won’t be helpful for anyone at this point.”

She braced her elbow on the table and covered her eyes with one hand. Manners be damned.

“Fucking hell,” she muttered into her wine glass.

“Yeah,” he agreed.

She peeked at him through her fingers and realized he was finished with the meal. Once she swallowed the last sip in her glass, she was, too.

He eyed her speculatively and then placed one hand on the table. “Well. Shall we...?”

Hermione's cheeks were permanently hot at this point, but she reasoned that was mostly from the wine. She shook her head.

"I have a better idea."

Hermione bit back a smile as Malfoy inspected the television. He paced back and forth in front of the black screen, peering at his reflection before poking his head around the back to look at the cords.

"It must have some purpose," he mused, running a hand through his hair. "It has a... plug." He looked over his shoulder to where she was seated on the sofa, and she nodded in confirmation.

He tapped his index finger against his lips. "But what does it do?"

She clicked the power button on the remote in her hand, and Malfoy toppled backwards over the coffee table as noise and colour burst into the room from the screen. He fell wedged against the sofa, his legs still bent over the wooden surface.

Hermione snorted a laugh, but he was too preoccupied with staring wide-eyed at the moving pictures to notice.

"What is it?" he breathed, shuffling around until he could crawl up onto the sofa next to her.

"It's called a television."

He nodded slowly, and then glanced at her. "How did you—I didn't see your wand?"

"It has its own," she said, holding the remote out to him. He took it gingerly, and she showed him the button to change the channel.

"Brilliant," he murmured, swishing the remote dramatically as the image on the screen changed with every press. Hermione thought about telling him that he only needed to point the remote at the TV, but he looked so fucking stupid waving it around that she felt happier than she had in weeks.

She noted that Malfoy must be left-handed as he held the clicker, which meant that his right hand lay innocently on his leg a few centimeters from her own. Hermione bided her time, and when he seemed to settle on a nature program featuring a family of foxes, she casually slipped her hand under his.

He glanced down at her touch, but she kept her eyes fixed on the screen. Even as she felt his gaze move to her face, she looked resolutely forward.

After a moment, he shifted his attention back to the show, and she let out a shallow breath as he adjusted his fingers and relaxed into her grip.

Okay.

So they were holding hands. Again. Hermione reasoned that it was slightly more intimate because the back of her hand was resting on his upper thigh rather than a table, but it was also *less* intimate because they were looking at the TV instead of each other. Not that they necessarily needed to look at each other to have sex—*dear God*—but that was beside the point. They were only doing something they had already done the day before, and though Hermione felt slightly more comfortable with it this time, she also felt they really needed to be progressing more quickly with only a little over a week to go.

Making up her mind, she shifted slightly, tucking one leg up under herself and using the movement to sort of *lean* against Malfoy. He didn't react that she could see, so she stayed there, with her arm tucked under his, pressed against his side.

It wasn't *uncomfortable*. He felt solid and much warmer than she'd anticipated. Not that she had really thought about what he might feel like—and if she had, she would have remembered that men tend to run hotter than women by a fair few degrees—but really he was just so *very* warm.

After a few minutes, she could only conclude that prolonged exposure to his particular brand of heat was putting all sorts of ideas into her head. His hands were large. That wasn't really an *idea* per se, but it was something she hadn't noticed before. Even when they had held hands last night, she hadn't been aware of it in a conscious way. But now, all she could think about was how his hand was dwarfing hers and that it was just as warm as the rest of him... and what it might feel like for that big, warm hand to be on *her* thigh instead.

Figuring that was as good a next step as any, Hermione slowly extricated her fingers from where they were twined with his and guided his hand until his palm slid flat over the top of her denim-clad leg. Malfoy looked down again at the change, and she couldn't resist peeking as well. His fingers lay curled against the inside of her thigh, and as she watched, he stretched his thumb back across until his hand was spanning the entire width of her leg.

And then he squeezed.

She sucked in a sharp breath, and when she glanced up, he was smirking.

"Everything all right, Hermione?"

"Y-Yes, fine," she stammered, looking quickly back at the TV. "That just... tickled."

He hummed. "I'm sure."

His hand inched higher and she shot to her feet. "I think that's enough for one day," she blurted, backing slowly out of the room. "That felt like a two, don't you think? Certainly more than a one. We can try for three tomorrow?"

“Whatever you want, Granger.”

She bristled at the poorly concealed humour in his voice. “It’s not what I *want*—”

He arched a brow, and she abruptly abandoned that dangerous trajectory.

“Well, anyway, I think it’s working, so, erm, thanks. And... goodnight.”

She bumped into the doorframe and hastily turned to scamper upstairs. Hopefully he could figure out how to power off the television on his own.



Chapter End Notes

Smooth sailing for these two? For now... hehe. Next update will be Monday, and it is another one of my favorite chapters! It also includes a very extra special surprise that I have been dying to share!!

Thank you so much for reading!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

You can also find me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 7

Chapter Notes

Lots happening on this day! I hope you enjoy a longer one :)

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

The seventh day proceeded much the way the previous one had. Hermione entered the kitchen to see the chalkboard where Malfoy had updated their progress to 2, but instead of researching in her room all day, she moved her books to the kitchen table.

He joined her intermittently throughout the day, reading a bit and taking some notes, but she could tell he hadn't found anything promising. At one point, he reached for her left hand where it rested on the table and laid his right one over it. She turned her palm up to accommodate him, and they sat for several long minutes with him running his thumb absently over her knuckles as they worked. She appreciated his initiative and noted pleasantly how convenient it was that neither of them had to give up the use of a dominant hand to maintain the contact.

When he got up, he squeezed her fingers lightly before releasing them and then dropped a hand onto her shoulder as he passed.

She sat staring at her page after he left the room, considering that small touch. It was something different, but certainly not more intimate than him touching her leg. She shifted slightly in her chair. Still, it was good that he was willing to extend the boundaries, even if had felt more friendly than anything.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud thump from the upper floor. She looked up at the ceiling and her brow furrowed in confusion as the noise continued—a decidedly rhythmic thumping. She assumed it was somehow related to Malfoy's perusal of the house, but she couldn't imagine what he could be doing that would cause such a ruckus. Just as she was about to get up to investigate, the noise stopped. She waited for several more moments, but it was quiet.

Shrugging, she focused back on her book. This history was a case study of one couple's experience with a marriage law instituted in eighteenth-century Switzerland, but Hermione had a feeling the translation was—

She looked up as the noise started again.

What the hell was he doing?

She glanced at the clock above the stove, and the thumping continued for roughly the same interval as the first occurrence—about two minutes. Then, it was quiet again.

After the third cycle, Hermione was determined to make sure her house wasn't undergoing any permanent damage, but when she was halfway out of her chair, she heard the sound of Malfoy descending the stairs.

She had a question ready on her tongue, but when he entered the kitchen, her jaw was too busy dropping to articulate any human speech.

Malfoy was shirtless and sweating and panting. Because of course he was.

She watched, completely stunned, as he retrieved a glass from one of the cupboards and filled it at the sink. He tilted his head back and chugged the water before refilling it from the tap. He repeated this twice more before his thirst was satisfied enough for him to look at her, and when he did, he smirked.

"I know, it's hardly fair," he said with mock exasperation, drawing a hand down his torso. "All this and then the scars, too? If Potter knew how much they would do for me, I'm sure he would have picked a different curse."

Hermione gaped at him. Well, she gaped even more openly to be exact. While it was true that he was in incredible shape and the network of thin white scars branching from shoulder to hip did somehow seem to accentuate the breadth of his chest and definition of his abs, she could hardly believe he was referencing his physique so flippantly. And to her.

"You almost died," was all she could come up with.

His brows flicked up in amusement. "Well, beauty is pain. I'm sure there's a sign around here somewhere with that on it."

Her lips pursed. In fact, it was stamped on a ceramic dish in her bathroom that had come as part of an at-home bikini waxing kit. After the first attempt at using it, however, Hermione had decided that she would rather be *Crucio*'d again.

Malfoy leaned a hip against the counter and her eyes slid helplessly over the thin trail of blonde hair leading into the waistband of his green sweatpants. *SLYTHERIN* was stamped in silver letters down one leg.

"What were you doing?" she asked finally.

He paused with the glass halfway to his mouth. "Seriously?" He wiped a hand along his forehead where the hair was darkened with sweat.

She shrugged.

"I was exercising."

"How?"

His brows furrowed, and she went on. "I heard a noise."

"Ah, that would have been the burpees."

The incomprehension must have shown on her face because he explained. "They're press-ups but with jumping."

Hermione nodded, though she had no idea how one could possibly jump while doing a press-up. She quickly stifled the urge to ask him to demonstrate.

"What else were you doing?"

Malfoy's lips pulled into a sinful smirk and Hermione immediately regretted the question.

"Nevermind," she said quickly as he braced his hands on the counter and leaned forward slightly, the muscles of his arms flexing. She assumed that if he was doing fancy, jumping press-ups then he was probably doing regular press-ups as well, and imagining that was really quite enough to be going on with.

"Don't you get antsy just staying in this house all the time?" he asked. "I haven't gone this long without flying in years."

Hermione glanced down, trying to remember when was the last time she had purposefully engaged in physical activity.

"I burn energy in other ways."

"Oh?" He arched a brow, smile widening.

She cringed. "I didn't mean it like that."

The trouble was, though she *hadn't* meant to insinuate anything sexual, it was the truth. She had one standard method for solitary stress relief and it did not involve press-ups.

Miraculously, Malfoy seemed to take pity on her flaming cheeks for once and simply brought the glass to his lips again. As he tilted his arm up, her eyes were drawn to the black lines of the Dark Mark twisting over its surface. It hadn't faded like she'd assumed it would have; it looked remarkably fresh.

"Have you ever thought about covering that?" she asked.

He glanced down at his arm and shook his head as he swallowed. "Glamours don't work on it."

"Oh, no, I meant like with another tattoo," she explained. "Not cover it necessarily, but change it in some way. Make it your own."

His brow furrowed, and Hermione drew in a deep breath.

Before she could second-guess herself, she hooked her thumb under the hem of her shirt and lifted the middle up to her throat, displaying the long purple scar between her breasts and the tattooed flowering vines that decorated it.



The glass clunked loudly against the counter as Malfoy set it down, and he took several steps forward, gaze locked on her chest.

"The scar is courtesy of Dolohov. From the fight in the Department of Mysteries," she explained. "The flowers are morning glories—the flower of my birth month. They're beautiful, but when they grow wild, some people consider them a pest. They're stubborn... Hard to kill."

His eyes lifted back to hers at that, and she was pleased to note that he looked slightly dazed. Whether from the fact that she had essentially just shown him her tits—safely ensconced in a lacy white bra, but still—or from the fact that there was a tattoo on them, she didn't know, but it was nice to have given him at least a little taste of his own medicine.

She lowered her shirt, and he looked down at his arm again.

"I'll think about it."

She gave him a small smile.

The atmosphere in the room had turned incredibly charged in that short span of time, and Hermione wondered idly whether they had earned a 3 without even touching each other.

“I’m going to go finish,” Malfoy blurted. “My workout, I mean. Outside.”

He gestured to the back door, and Hermione nodded. “Oh, yeah, right, sure.”

He filled the glass with water again and took it with him when he went.

When Hermione closed the door to her bedroom, she leaned back against it for several long moments. Her heart was thudding rather noticeably in her chest, and while some of that was likely due to climbing the stairs—*Godric*, when had she gotten so out of shape—she knew it wasn’t the only explanation.

Especially when its tempo increased as she edged over to the window overlooking the back of the house. It wasn’t that she was *trying* to see what Malfoy might be doing. She had just gone up to her room. Perfectly normal thing to do. If the two back bedrooms happened to face the garden, well, it’s not as though *she* had designed the house. It was just a happy coincidence.

Happy, indeed.

He was doing pull-ups on the top bar of the swing set. Because of course he was.

He was too tall to hang completely below the structure, so his knees were bent at ninety degrees, and they still brushed the grass as he lowered himself each time. It was an altogether remarkable display.

Not that Hermione was watching. She was merely... supervising. The swing set was intended for children after all; surely he was exceeding the recommended weight limit. If it was to collapse, well, she wouldn’t want him lying out there injured, scorching to death under the summer sun.

She wasn’t precisely sure when that had become something she wouldn’t want, but that hardly mattered. Especially when said summer sun was causing rivulets of sweat to run down

Okay, she might have been watching a little. Or a lot. Enough that she didn’t notice the other person entering the yard until they spoke and attracted Malfoy’s attention.

Hermione’s eyes widened in shock as he dropped from the bar and turned to face the newcomer—the little Muggle girl who lived next door.

Hermione stood frozen at the window while they conversed. What the hell could they be talking about? But when Malfoy took a step toward the girl, Hermione sprang into action. She bolted from the room and down the stairs. It wasn’t that she thought he might attack a

child, even a Muggle one—Merlin, what a horrible thought—but she didn’t know what he might do either.

The back door swung open and Hermione flew through it, nearly tumbling down the porch steps as she struggled to comprehend what she was seeing.

The girl was swinging on one of the swings. And Malfoy was pushing her.

“Hi, Hermione,” she said brightly.

“Hi, Gemma,” Hermione said, closing the back door before descending onto the lawn. “How are you?”

“Fine,” she answered, her auburn pigtails swinging with her motion.

“You know you’re not supposed to talk to strangers,” Hermione admonished lightly.

“He said his name is Draco.”

Hermione glanced at Malfoy for the first time. He seemed slightly confused as to how he had ended up where he was.

“It is,” Hermione confirmed.

“That name sounds made up.”

“Yes, it does,” Hermione agreed with a smirk.

“He said he was your husband.”

She felt the smirk slide off her face at once. For all the times Malfoy had referred to her as his wife, she had yet to conceptualize *him* as her husband. But sure enough, that same summer sun was currently glinting off his wedding band as pushed against Gemma’s back.

“He is,” she admitted.

“I didn’t know you had a husband.”

“He’s new.”

“I didn’t know you even had a boyfriend.”

“I didn’t. He’s... new.”

“Oh.” Gemma pumped her legs, swinging in silence for a few passes. Then, “Can I see your wedding dress?”

Hermione gave her a sad smile. “I didn’t get to wear one.”

Malfoy glanced up at that, but Hermione kept her focus on the little girl. She seemed deeply disappointed, but all she said was, “Oh.”

Hermione walked over and sat on the end of the playset's little plastic slide where she could be in the shade. "How was your swim lesson last week?"

"Good," Gemma said confidently. "I can do backstroke without getting water in my nose now. And I can hold my breath for two minutes."

Hermione rather doubted that, but she didn't doubt that Gemma would try. She was a Gryffindor through and through—Muggle or not. It would still be another few years before she might get a Hogwarts letter, but a small part of Hermione was hopeful.

"That's very impressive," she said.

"I'm best in the class," Gemma proclaimed.

Hermione did meet Malfoy's look then. "That's a very good thing to be."

He rolled his eyes. "It's perfectly fine to be second best sometimes," he said.

Gemma glanced back over her shoulder, twisting on the swing as though she'd forgotten he was there. "Were you ever second best?"

He nodded.

"Who was first best?"

Hermione snorted a laugh as Malfoy pasted on a placid smile. "My wonderful wife, of course."

Gemma looked between them for a moment. "It doesn't bother you that your wife is better?"

Hermione covered her mouth with one hand. Merlin, she'd forgotten how much she loved this little girl.

"I'm better at some things," he said with a sniff.

"Like what?"

Hermione raised a brow as he pursed his lips. He couldn't very well say *flying on a broomstick*, which Hermione would have absolutely conceded any day of the week, nor *brewing potions* which she would have argued with but admittedly it was closer than any other subject. Potentially the last thing she expected him to say was—

"Dancing."

Gemma looked intrigued. "You're good at dancing?"

He shrugged. "Of course, but more importantly, Hermione is terrible at it."

Gemma's head swung round to see whether Hermione was going to allow this slander to stand.

“Terrible is a bit strong,” Hermione muttered.

“Let’s see then,” Gemma chirped, reminding Hermione painfully of herself at that age.

Now, Malfoy was the one smirking.

“I can’t just... dance,” Hermione argued.

“Dance with him,” Gemma suggested as though it was obvious.

Hermione swallowed. “There’s no music,” she said weakly.

“I’ll sing.”

Malfoy barked a laugh, and Hermione couldn’t help but smile, too. Gemma would sing so they could dance. Children were such ridiculous creatures.

Malfoy stepped out from behind the swings and held out his arms in a taunt. Hermione rolled her eyes, but she got to her feet and went to him.

“Ugh, you’re so sweaty,” she complained as she draped her arm over his shoulder.

“Time to get *comfortable* with it,” he replied, wrapping his arm at her upper back and pulling her close.

“That’s low,” she grumbled, placing her other hand in his waiting palm.

He didn’t respond but glanced at Gemma and gave a little nod. *Cue music.*

Gemma began warbling a series of notes from her perch on the swing. It wasn’t lyrics but rather an approximation of instrument sounds. Hermione thought vaguely of the Nutcracker.

Malfoy waited, getting a feel for the rhythm. “A waltz, then?”

“Apparently,” Hermione replied.

“Very well.”

He stepped forward, arm pressing against her back to turn her already and she stepped on his feet. He shot a look at Gemma as if to say, *I told you so*, and Hermione gritted her teeth. She did know *how* to waltz, it had just been a long time.

He forged on, stepping lightly and turning them in a quick circle as they moved around the yard. Hermione was hopeless. She tripped constantly when she tried to anticipate his movements, and even twirled the wrong way once, nearly dislocating his elbow.

Gemma paused the soundtrack. “Didn’t you dance together at your wedding?”

“No,” Hermione replied, reaching up to swipe the hair out of her face.

“Oh.” Gemma seemed to be doubting the veracity of the entire affair, and Hermione couldn’t blame her.

“The problem,” Malfoy explained smugly, “is that Hermione has a hard time giving up control. She doesn’t want to let me lead, but she doesn’t know the steps well enough to follow without it.”

“I’m not doing it on purpose,” she snapped, squirming in his hold.

“What it should look like,” he went on as though she hadn’t spoken, “is this.” He gave another nod to Gemma who began the song from the beginning.

Before Hermione had a chance to protest, Malfoy bent and lowered his grip to her waist, pulling her tightly against him and lifting until her toes left the ground.

“Malfoy—” she warned, but she broke off as he began sweeping over the grass in a series of graceful turns. Her legs dangled uselessly, and with them out of the way, he was able to execute the steps flawlessly.

She didn’t appreciate being dragged around like a rag doll, chin bumping against his sweaty shoulder, but Gemma was beaming and it was admittedly better than getting stepped on.

As the sequence came to a close, he set her back on her feet and twirled her under his arm, catching her back and lowering her into a dramatic dip. He arched a brow as he leaned over her, looking entirely too pleased with himself.

“You stink,” she said.

He let go, and she toppled onto the grass.

Gemma let out a peal of giggles, clapping wildly. “You are definitely first best at dancing,” she announced.

Malfoy made an exaggerated bow, sweeping his arm low over his waist as he bent.

Gemma stood up from the swing. “I’m also very good at dancing.”

“Is that so?” Malfoy asked.

She nodded, skipping forward and placing herself directly in front of him.

Hermione chuckled from her seat in the grass. Definitely a Gryffindor.

Malfoy cast her a glance as if asking for guidance, but Hermione merely shrugged.

He looked back down at the little girl and cleared his throat. “Well, Gemma, would you like to dance with me?”

“Okay!” she said at once.

He offered her his palm, and she placed her hand delicately into it. He crouched in front of her, and Hermione snickered as he spoke in a stage whisper. “I must warn you. Apparently, I stink.”

Gemma giggled. “That’s okay.”

“If you’re sure...” He scooped his other arm behind her legs as he stood, seating her in the crook of his elbow. “All right?”

She grinned, gripping him tightly around the neck with her free hand. “Yes.”

He just stood there, and Gemma’s smile faltered for a moment before she seemed to remember that she was providing the music.

“Oh!” She broke into song again.

Malfoy moved at once, quick-stepping as he turned them around, and Gemma immediately lost the thread of the music as she was overcome with giggles.

“No laughing, now!” Malfoy pretended to scold. “Waltzing is very serious.”

Gemma laughed even harder, and Malfoy gave an exasperated huff. “You’re lucky I’m first best at dancing,” he said as he placed her on the ground for a twirl. He spun her once, twice, three times until she nearly stumbled, and then he grabbed her under both arms and tossed her quite a bit higher than was strictly necessary for a traditional waltz. Gemma shrieked with excitement.

Something very strange was happening inside Hermione as she watched. She was laughing along with them, and there was a sort of fluttering lightness in her chest as she took in the wholesome nature of the scene. But there was also a sharp, pinching pain building low in her abdomen—almost like a cramp. She actually pressed a hand over her stomach as it twinged again, and she wondered if she was about to begin her monthly cycle. But that couldn’t be right, she had only just finished it. The pain was similar though, definitely localized in the same area.

She looked up again as Gemma made another valiant effort to continue singing the waltz, and Hermione nearly cried out from the strength of the twinge it elicited. Shock flooded through her as she realized that the sensation was coming from her ovaries. Her body was reacting to watching Malfoy interact with a child.

“Holy shit,” she whispered, clutching at the grass in an attempt to ground herself as panic set in. Despite the fact that increasing the population was the entire purpose of the marriage law, she had been so convinced that she would find a way out that she had never even let herself consider the idea of actually having a baby *with* Malfoy. Even if she couldn’t figure it out before they had to consummate, they had a year before she would need to get pregnant. She was willing to admit that it didn’t seem like two weeks was going to be enough time, but a *year*... surely she would find something before then.

But if not... Her chest tightened with emotion as she watched them spin back toward her across the yard. She would never have guessed in a million years that Malfoy would be good with children, but Gemma looked ecstatic. Granted, a lot more than dancing and teasing went into raising a child, but based on the limited exposure she'd had to Malfoy's parents, she would have expected him to be much more rigid. More stuffy. Potentially a harsh disciplinarian.

She smiled as he came to a stop in front of her, still holding Gemma. She certainly hadn't expected this.

"Now a dip!" Gemma cried.

"Ah, but of course," he said, gripping her around the waist and leaning her back until she turned completely upside down. She squealed as her pigtails skimmed the grass.

"Don't drop me!"

Malfoy gave an affronted scoff. "Never, m'lady." He pulled her back upright and set her gingerly on her feet.

Gemma collapsed on the grass next to Hermione, face red with the head rush. She pulled Hermione's hand into her lap and ran a finger over the thin gold band on her fourth finger.

"You're lucky your husband is such a good dancer."

Hermione swallowed roughly, but before she could respond, a voice rang out from next door, calling Gemma's name.

"Got to go! Bye!" She jumped to her feet and ran across the yard, closing the open gate behind her.

Hermione stared down at the ring, not having any idea how to proceed.

After a moment, Malfoy spoke. "I should go get cleaned up."

She nodded, but she didn't look at him. "Okay."

She stayed there on the grass for a long time after he left.

Hermione heard the sound of the shower turning off just as she was passing Malfoy's door. She took her time in undressing and brushing through her hair in case he'd used up all the hot water, but by the time she turned on the spray in her own bathroom, it was plenty warm.

She ran a loofah over her body in a kind of daze, trying to reconcile the fact that she was washing Malfoy's sweat off of her skin. Granted, her clothes had taken most of it, but it was slightly disconcerting that she wasn't more put off by the idea.

As she stepped out of the shower and dried off, she supposed that was the whole point of the contingency plan.

She was pulling on a fresh t-shirt over her jeans when she heard Malfoy laugh—loud enough that it carried all the way from downstairs. She hadn't heard him laugh like that before today, and she wondered if Gemma had come back over for something.

Stepping quietly into the hallway, avoiding the creaky spot, she listened as she made her way down the stairs. He was definitely speaking with someone, and when she was close enough to hear it, the squeaky nature of the answering voice gave away their identity at once.

"Nilly gives this one... an E, sir."

"Exceeds expectations, eh?" Malfoy replied. "Go on, then."

Hermione leaned into the kitchen doorway in time to see Nilly handing him a crisp from the bag she held. Malfoy took it and munched thoughtfully.

"Hm, pretty good," he agreed. "E it is. What about this one?"

He handed Nilly a crisp from his bag and watched with an expectant smile as she tasted it.

"Oh, no," she said at once, grimacing. "This one is dreadful, sir!"

"A D?" he repeated, popping one into his own mouth. "Surely, it's an acceptable at least."

"No, no," she repeated, snatching the bag from his hand. "Dreadful!"

He chuckled. "You're too harsh. Not all of us have such a discerning palette."

"Nilly was trying one in a purple bag yesterday. That was the best one."

Malfoy rummaged through the open cupboard above the counter. "This one?" He held a bag down for her inspection.

"Master is forgetting the colours Nilly taught him?" she asked with a disapproving look.

Hermione bit back a laugh as the little elf crossed her arms over her pillowcase. Today's was a powder blue, again with matching lace at her ears.

"This is purple," Malfoy argued. "A reddish purple."

It was more of a reddish *red*, Hermione thought, and clearly Nilly agreed.

Malfoy tsked at her continued stern silence. "Fine, why don't you look for it then." He bent down and lifted the elf so she could see the items on the high shelves.

At the gesture, Hermione felt the smile freeze on her face. Nilly was seated on his arm, seemingly perfectly happy to be able to rifle through the packets of crisps, but the pose was so reminiscent of the way he had held Gemma that Hermione felt suddenly sick.

She had let part of her believe that he couldn't be so kind to a Muggle child if he still held his same beliefs. That he wouldn't have been willing to interact with her at all, much less touch her if that was the case.

But here he was, treating Nilly in much the same way, a creature she knew for a fact he deemed lower than himself. He viewed her as a *thing* to be owned and ordered around. But he was still able to treat her with friendliness, if not downright affection? The cognitive dissonance made Hermione want to scream.

When she stepped into view, her thoughts must have shown plainly on her face because Malfoy's expression hardened at once. He set Nilly carefully on the counter and took the packet of crisps from her hand. The elf turned to follow his gaze, and her eyes widened with fear at the sight of Hermione.

"That's all for now, Nilly," Malfoy said gently. "You're welcome to go if you'd like."

Nilly looked back at him just long enough to give a small nod before she Disapparated.

"What is wrong with you?" Hermione spat as soon as they were alone.

Malfoy shot her a glare as he began returning the assorted snacks to the cupboard. "Right now? I can think of one thing."

"How can you treat her like that?" Hermione went on. "Like you see her as a person?"

"I thought I made it pretty clear that I am not interested in hearing your opinions about Nilly."

"I don't care what you're interested in," she said, advancing on him. "I told you I didn't want to see her here, and this is why! You claim to care about her, but she is your *servant*. It makes me ill—"

"You need to stop talking right now," Malfoy said in a dangerous tone.

"No, you need to start listening," she shot back. "It's perverse! There's no reason—"

"Granger, I'm warning you—"

"Why don't you just *free* her?!"

"Because she's already free!" he shouted.

Hermione froze halfway across the kitchen, her hair dripping onto the tile.

"She's... free?"

“Yes,” Malfoy hissed. “She has always been my personal elf, and her ownership passed solely to me when I came of age. I freed her the same day.”

Hermione blinked. “But… the way she reacted… when I offered her clothes.”

Malfoy looked murderous. “I still can’t believe you did that. I almost fucking hexed you.”

“But—”

“What you fail to understand, Granger, is that when an elf is freed, their connection to their family magic is broken. Nilly’s ancestors have served the Manor for centuries. The Malfoy magic is as much a part of her as it is me.”

Hermione’s thoughts stalled to hear Malfoy speak about sharing magic with an elf that way.

He continued in the same harsh tone, an angry flush working its way onto his cheeks. “I worked for months to find a way to free her from the bonds of servitude without severing her link to the ancestral magic. I poisoned myself again and again designing a potion for the ritual. And even though I was successful, I still had to present her with clothes.”

Hermione’s breathing was growing shallow, but Malfoy’s ire seemed to be increasing with every word.

“As fucked up as it sounds, house elves live to serve their Masters,” he explained. “It’s their primary purpose in life; the one thing from which they get satisfaction. So, for elves who love their Masters, clothes is the worst possible punishment, the most severe rebuke. It is the incarnation of all their worst fears: they have failed in their service and they are not wanted anymore.”

Hermione felt sick again, but this time, it was guilt slithering horribly through her stomach rather than disgust.

“Nilly wanted to be free,” Malfoy went on. “She helped me design the spell that would preserve our link.” He paused, and Hermione saw his throat bob with a swallow. “But she still had to take clothes from the person she trusted most in the world. And it was the most traumatic moment of her life.”

Tears that Hermione hadn’t even noticed were forming slipped suddenly down her cheeks, and Malfoy shook his head in disgust.

“And then you shoved a sock at her not thirty seconds after she’d appeared in the room.”

Hermione felt wretched, and the cowardly urge to deflect was too strong to suppress.

“You said she would answer to me, too,” she said in a small voice.

Malfoy gave a humourless chuckle. “I was fucking with you, and believe me, I haven’t forgiven myself for what happened after. I was *going* to explain that Nilly would answer to you because you are my wife. I thought that would annoy you sufficiently, even if you knew she was freed.”

“But why would she?” Hermione asked, shifting under the heat of Malfoy’s glare.

“Because she has been waiting to have a Mistress since the day I was born. She was probably more excited about the idea of my wedding than even my mother was. She should have been there to help you get ready, to help you dress, but not only did she not get that, her Mistress tried to dismiss her at the very first meeting.” He looked so angry he could hardly get the next words out. “We’ve been working for a long time on deprogramming her brainwashing and that little stunt probably set us back a year, so thanks for that.”

“I—I didn’t...”

“You didn’t what?” Malfoy spat. “Know?”

Hermione shook her head.

“Oh, my god!” He clutched his chest dramatically. “Maybe if we hurry we can make the Evening Prophet.” He waved his hand as if mapping out a headline. “Breaking news: Hermione Granger admits to something she doesn’t fucking know.”

He slammed the cupboard door and turned to leave the kitchen, but for some reason, Hermione couldn’t bear to let him.

“You’re right,” she said quickly, stepping forward and grabbing ahold of his hand. “I’m sorry for what I did. I jumped to conclusions and I assumed and I—I never would have done anything to intentionally hurt her.”

Malfoy drew in a deep breath and let it out before speaking, still not looking at her. “I know.”

“You were right,” she repeated since it seemed like something he would probably want to hear twice. “I knew about the ancestral magic, but I didn’t understand.” She gripped the side of his shirt in her other hand. “I couldn’t grasp why an elf would want to keep it. What it could mean to them.”

Malfoy nodded stiffly, and Hermione stepped closer, snaking her arms around his waist and leaning against his chest.

“Thank you for freeing her,” she murmured against his shirt.

Malfoy let out a short breath and she felt his head shake again. “Fuck off, Granger, I didn’t do it for you.”

There wasn’t any heat behind the words, and Hermione didn’t loosen her grip. “I know that, I just mean, I’m glad she’s free and that it was what she wanted.”

There was a long pause before Malfoy said, “Me too,” and it wasn’t until his arms wrapped around her that she realized she was hugging him. And now he was hugging her back.

He let out a noise of discomfort as his arms pressed over the sopping curls at her shoulders. “Ugh, you’re really very wet, you know.”

She smiled. "Now you know how it feels."

There was an indistinct grumbling against her ear, but he didn't let go.

"You could have told me sooner that she was free," Hermione felt obligated to mention.

Malfoy chuckled. "And miss out on watching you squirm as you sacrificed your morals for a good meal? Absolutely not."

"I suppose I deserved that."

"You really did."

"She still obeys your commands, though. She didn't seem free."

"I don't make commands," Malfoy argued, "I make requests. She fulfills them if she wants to. In fact, the only person who has delivered a direct order to her in this house is you."

Hermione drew back to look at him. "I have not."

Malfoy looked smugly down at her. "Two days ago at dinner, you told her 'don't bring any desserts,' and what did she do?"

"She brought them anyway," Hermione breathed.

"Directly disobeying you," Malfoy agreed, "But you'll notice she didn't expect any punishment, nor was she compelled to do it herself. We've made good progress."

"That's remarkable," she said earnestly.

"Yes, well, I'm very impressive in most respects."

"And so humble," Hermione said flatly.

"Humility is for unimpressive people."

Hermione laughed in spite of herself. "That's good. Maybe we should put it on a sign."

"It could go well by the front door."

"There's already one by the front door."

Malfoy grimaced. "I know, but really, Granger? *Find joy in the journey?* It's so corny."

"I think it's hopeful."

"No, you don't, you just enjoy being contrarian."

"I guess we have that in common."

Malfoy heaved a heavily put upon sigh. "Well, I suppose I can tolerate one thing."

Hermione smiled up at him. She felt surprisingly comfortable standing there with his arms around her, and she glanced at the chalkboard. They had certainly earned a 3, but then again, there wasn't any reason why they could only progress one number per day, was there?

"Would you like to watch a movie?" she asked him.

Malfoy looked speculative. "That depends. What's a movie?"

"What about this one?"

Hermione leaned forward on the sofa to see the heavily bearded face of Tom Hanks on the cover of *Castaway*.

"Ah, well, the main character is in an airplane crash," she explained. "An airplane is—"

"I know what an airplane is," Malfoy snapped from where he was kneeling on the floor, surrounded by the film selection. "It's like a flying bus, right?"

"Sure. Anyway, the plane crashes in the ocean and he's stranded on a deserted island."

Malfoy seemed to catch the hesitance in her tone. "You don't like this movie?"

"No, it's good, it's just... very long. He's on the island for like four years, and it feels like it."

"Hm," Malfoy hummed as he considered the other options. "What about this one?" He held up *Titanic*.

"Christ, that one's even longer."

"Fine," Malfoy said, running his hands over the cases again. "This one?"

He held up *101 Dalmatians* and Hermione couldn't help laughing at the juxtaposition.

"What?" he snapped, clearly getting annoyed with the task.

"Nothing," she said lightly. "It's just, that one's for children."

"Oh. Why? What's it about?"

"Well, this couple has to rescue a bunch of Dalmatians because the villain is a fashion designer who wants to kill the puppies and make coats out of them."

"What the fuck?" Malfoy looked horrified.

Hermione cringed. “Erm, yeah. I’ve never really thought about it before, but it’s actually quite an awful concept.”

He stared down at the cheerful cartoon dogs adorning the cover for several long moments before carefully placing the case back on the shelf. “Fucking nightmare fuel,” he muttered.

“Er, no, that would be *James and the Giant Peach*,” Hermione said emphatically. “We will not be watching that one.”

Malfoy cast a wary glance at the cover depicting the giant peach in question. “Well, which one then?” he whined.

“I’m sure whatever you pick next will be fine,” she said.

Which is how they ended up watching *Miss Congeniality*.

After Hermione instructed Malfoy on how to insert the disc, he settled next to her on the sofa. Like the previous night, Hermione took his hand and snuggled close to him as they watched. It was almost nice, except—

“Who’s that man?”

“I think he’s a suspect.”

“Oh... How did she know where to go?”

“I think they had a plan before.”

“I see... Where are they going—”

“Malfoy,” Hermione finally interrupted. “It’s like a play, you have to wait to find out the story.”

“Hm.” He didn’t seem convinced, but he left off with the questioning for the moment.

Hermione shifted around, taking advantage of his distraction as the plot progressed to get a little more *comfortable*. She let go of his hand and reached back to wrap his arm around her shoulders instead. Then, she pulled her legs up and angled her feet toward him, placing them gingerly on the sofa between his spread legs. She was entirely curled into his side, her head nestled just under his shoulder, and she couldn’t remember ever feeling so snug.

“This is ridiculous,” Malfoy declared suddenly. “They get someone in to straighten out her hair and suddenly everyone realizes she’s gorgeous? Absolute rubbish.”

Hermione chuckled at his outrage. “Liked her hair better before, did you?”

“Well, not necessarily. It *was* a bit on the frizzy side.” He glanced down at her, bringing the hand around her shoulder up to tousle her curls. “Of course, some people like that in a girl.”

Hermione swatted at him. “Don’t be a prat. I didn’t have time to dry it properly.”

“Yes, that must be it.” His hand went back to her shoulder, squeezing slightly, and then he seemed to notice their position for the first time.

“Cosy, are you?”

She wiggled slightly. “Yes. Is this okay for you?”

He seemed to consider for a moment. “Yes, but I think it could be better.”

She gave a little squeak as his other arm scooped under her knees, pulling her up onto his lap. She stayed curled against his chest as both of his arms wrapped around her.

“There.”

She nodded. “Yes, erm, this is good, too.”

“Worthy of a four?”

“Well—”

His right hand slid down the back of her thigh, coming to rest on the curve of her arse. “How about now?”

Hermione swallowed. “Y-Yes, probably.”

“Lovely.”

They watched quietly for a while as Malfoy’s hand traced slow patterns over her leg. His fingertips followed the seam of her jeans, and he stopped occasionally to deliver a light squeeze to her bum. Hermione tried to maintain a normal breathing pattern as heat bloomed over her lower body.

Thankfully, the tension was dissipated somewhat when Cheryl Frasier described her perfect date as April 25th because, “it’s not too hot and not too cold; all you need is a light jacket.”

Malfoy snorted a laugh. “Merlin, what a Hufflepuff.”



Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

In my mind, Gemma sings the main theme from the Waltz of the Flowers from the Nutcracker :)

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

And endless appreciation to Circe for bringing my image of Hermione's tattoo to life!
Go give her some love on [Instagram](#)!

You can also find me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 8

Chapter Notes

TW: discussion of hypothetical sexual assault including the word r*pe (nothing detailed)

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

Hermione woke early on the eighth day. She spent several minutes flipping through the hangers in her wardrobe, looking for her favourite fitted blouse. Once it was located, she took a bit of time to put on some makeup. Not for any particular reason; it just felt like a makeup sort of day.

Though Malfoy's closed door was in no way a reliable indicator of his presence inside the room, she still stepped over the creaky spot on the landing in case he was asleep. She padded quietly down the stairs, and her lips pulled into a soft smile as she eyed the chalkboard she had updated before bed the previous night.

4

She debated for a moment on what to have for breakfast but eventually decided on cereal again. She was standing at the counter, halfway through peeling a banana to slice on top, when she heard Malfoy on the stairs. A little thrill of excitement rippled through her, and she tried desperately to rationalize it in the few seconds before he appeared.

Any progress she made, however, was immediately obliterated at the sight of him. He was shirtless again, because apparently that was a thing now, and in grey sweatpants this time.

Hermione tried her best to give him a casual smile. "Good morning."

He returned the smile as he approached, and she looked back down at the fruit in her hands as he passed behind her.

Except that he didn't. He *stopped* behind her and braced his hands on the counter, bracketing her between his arms. She sucked in a breath as he leaned forward, pressing flush against her back. The heat of his bare skin enveloped her, and she dropped the banana as he kept pushing further, and further, until the granite edge dug into her hips with the force of him behind her. Her breath hitched as his hands swept underneath hers, smoothing up over her stomach.

"Good morning, honey," he murmured against her ear.

"D-Don't call me that," she breathed, her palms sliding flat against the cool surface of the counter.

He gave a disappointed hum as one hand came up to gather the hair away from her neck. “That’s the fifth one you’ve shot down,” he said with his lips against her skin. “I’m running out of things to call you.”

“There’s always my name,” she reminded him.

“Hermione?” he purred.

Her eyelids fluttered shut. “The other one.”

“Malfoy? Could get confusing.”

“Gods, you’re—”

Infuriating was what she had meant to say. But what came out was more of a strangled sigh as his fingers caught the hem of her blouse and slid beneath it. She melted against him as his hands teased across the band of her jeans, over her belly button, along the bottom of her ribs.

“Don’t worry,” he said, pressing a kiss just below her ear, “I still have a few more to try.”

And then he was gone. As quickly as he came, he left her sagging against the counter with shaky arms and shockingly damp knickers.

Before he left the room, however, he stopped at the chalkboard to update their progress. As she watched him change the **4** to a **5** she couldn’t believe how well things were going.

That really should have been her first clue that it was all about to fall apart.

About ten minutes after finishing her lunch, Hermione found a loophole.

It was buried in a footnote: a reference to another footnote in which the author of the original work’s name was misspelled. One extra letter kept her cross-referencing spells from finding what they should have days ago.

Hermione spent the next several hours poring over every detail, examining every angle, determining exactly what would need to be done. She let the familiar single-minded need for information consume her completely, blocking out every confusing emotion that threatened to surface in the wake of her revelation.

Distantly, she was aware that Malfoy probably knew something was wrong. It had been days since she’d failed to leave her room for so long, and she couldn’t bring herself to answer the door when he knocked to invite her down to dinner. She knew he wouldn’t hear the sound of her Disapparating from her Silenced room, but once he noticed she was in the back garden, it

would be painfully obvious that she had gotten there without having to pass through the house and see him.

But she couldn't worry about that. She needed space to think. The kind of space that only the warm night air and cloudless sky could provide.

The toe of her trainer scraped a rut below the swing as she sat there trying to come to some kind of understanding in her mind. She gripped the chains like lifelines as doubt threatened to drag her under.

She had thought that when she found a way out, she would take it no matter what. She would do anything, pay any price to have another option besides the path she was on.

But this...

“Need a push?”

She glanced up to see Malfoy leaning against the railing. He was backlit by the bright porch light, casting his face in shadow. That was probably the main reason she said, “Sure.”

Her eyes dropped to the ground in front of her as he crossed the yard, and she didn't look up again until his hands pressed against her back. She lifted her feet and let him push her, the rhythmic creaking of the chains blending into the symphony of cicadas.

“Why do you still have this?” Malfoy asked.

She assumed he meant the swing set, and a reluctant smile tugged at her lips with the memory.

“My dad built it for me when I was younger,” she said quietly. “Before we knew how much I would be gone for school. Gemma's older sister, Shannon, was my best friend growing up, and she still came over to play on it while I was away.”

Hermione trailed her fingers over the links, lightly dusted with rust.

“It was hard for my parents to have me gone so much,” she went on. “I think it helped my mum especially to have other kids coming round still. They had kind of an open-gate policy with the kids in the neighbourhood, and then once Gemma came along, she brought a whole new generation with her.”

Malfoy listened silently behind her, still catching her momentum against his hands and pushing her away again.

“Where are your parents?”

Hermione swallowed. With as much snooping as he had done around the house, she was surprised he hadn't asked more questions before now.

"In Sydney," she answered. "Australia."

"What are they doing there?"

She could have said, *being dentists*, the same thing they had done in England, but she knew that wasn't what he was asking.

"Being away from me," she said. "Safe from the war."

Malfoy must have pushed her ten times before he spoke again.

"The war has been over for a long time, Granger."

"Not for them."

She could have left it at that, and by his silence, maybe Malfoy would have let her, but the words rose up and out of her throat as though the still, dark air needed to have them.

"I knew they wouldn't leave me," she explained. "And they wouldn't be safe if they stayed. So, I erased myself from their memories and created new lives for them on the other side of the world."

Hermione glanced back at the house, at the flicker of moths in front of the porch light.

"It takes a long time to restore 17 years' worth of memories," she went on. "You can't do it overnight. They have most of me back, but—"

Her voice broke, and she gritted her teeth against the burning behind her eyes.

"My dad told me a little while ago that I still feel like a dream. A good dream, but... still something separate from them. When I made their new identities, I didn't want them to regret not having had a child, so I gave them reasons for why they hadn't. Rationales. That was my mistake—"

She shook her head in frustration. She had wanted to be thorough. If something happened to her, she hadn't wanted them to be lonely. It wasn't until now, faced with the prospect of having children herself, that she could really understand what a monumental decision it was. The way it had changed them at their core.

"I think eventually, the realness will come back," she said softly, not wanting to scare the idea away. "And maybe they will, too. But for now, I think it's easier for them to stay where they are—loving me from a physical distance to match the emotional one."

Hermione didn't notice that Malfoy had stopped pushing her until she came to rest at the center again, the toe of her trainer back in the dirt. His hands wrapped around hers where she still held the chains, and her chin trembled with her wavering resolve.

By the time he stepped around the swing to face her, her cheeks were streaked with tears.

She felt his thumbs smear them as they brushed against her skin, but the surprising tenderness of his lips eclipsed every other concern.

His fingers pressed against the back of her neck as he lifted her face to his. And then she was lifting herself, standing from the swing and raising onto her toes as she sought the comfort of his kiss.

He gave it willingly—meeting her touch for touch as she tasted and took—and his mouth on hers felt like the night itself: warm and dark and full of all the things you can only say when it feels like no one's there to hear them.

She breathed heavily against him, fingers twining in his hair as she slanted her lips over his again and again. His grip was tight on her jaw, and when he pulled back to look at her, she had nowhere to go.

The words spilled out as soon as she saw his face.

“I found a way out.”

It seemed to take a few seconds for her words to register, but gradually his expression clouded with confusion.

“What?”

She swallowed, trying very hard not to look at the way his eyes were shining in the light from the house. Because it felt like he had kissed her not because she needed them to get comfortable with it, but because she had needed him to kiss her. Like maybe he had wanted to.

And suddenly, she didn't want him to be trapped with her.

“I found a loophole,” she said. “A provision to dissolve the marriage.”

That's when his hands dropped away from her face.

“The entire purpose of the law is to increase magical fertility,” she said in a rush, “and the most heinous, traumatic crimes can injure the magic of the victim, compromising fertility at least temporarily, but potentially permanently. A severe enough action can warrant a nullification of the marriage bond.”

Malfoy hadn't moved since she started speaking, but his eyes were running over her face as though he couldn't quite keep up with the words spilling out of it.

“You would need to plead guilty to sexual assault. First degree.”

The words tasted like ash in her mouth. He would bear the brunt of the sacrifice—a minimum sentence of five years instead of twenty and the addition of a new moniker to his rap sheet. *Rapist.*

They would both face a year sentence for perjury if they were caught lying, but more than that, Hermione would have to live with a lifetime of guilt for falsely reporting a rape.

It was a ghastly thing to even consider, but so was a government willing to strip its citizens of every decent alternative. Though somehow, in the last few days, the need for an alternative at all had begun to seem more and more remote.

Which is why she wasn't surprised by the flood of relief she felt when Malfoy finally said, "I can't."

"Okay," she said at once, reaching for him again. "I understand."

He shook his head, seemingly needing to steel himself. "Granger, I can't rape you."

"I know," she said quickly, clutching at his shirt. "I'm sorry for even suggesting you might be willing to let people think that you had, I just—I wanted you to have the option."

He reached up and pulled her hands away from him, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment. "I'm not speaking about my morals," he said in a pained voice. "I would never do that, but even if I w-wanted to, I am physically incapable of it, and there are people who know that. People who would know we were lying."

Something horrible was spreading through Hermione. A twisting sense of dread, seeping up through her arms from where he'd removed her touch from his body.

"What are you talking about?"

Malfoy actually took a step away from her then, and she watched numbly as he pressed the heels of both hands against his eyes. "Fuck," he muttered before taking a breath. Then, "Fuck," much louder.

"What's going on?" Hermione asked, and her voice sounded very far away.

When Malfoy looked at her again, he seemed on the verge of being sick. "I never thought you would actually find something."

"I don't understand—"

"I cannot seriously injure you without doing extreme harm to myself," he said. "I don't know what it would do to me to... assault you, but it would be horrible if I could even manage it."

"Why?" Hermione demanded.

"Because when we married, our magical cores were bound."

The dirt beneath her feet turned to quicksand.

"No."

No, no, no.

He just stood there.

She felt her head shaking. “I never agreed to that.”

“You did. By undergoing the marriage ritual.”

“No,” she said firmly. “There was nothing in the law about core binding, I never would have —”

“It wasn’t because of the Ministry,” he said, looking suddenly exhausted. “It was because of me. The Malfoy magic is old, and core binding was the way of things for a long time. We can’t marry without it.”

“But—there’s—that’s… permanent.” Hermione felt on the edge of fainting.

He had the audacity to nod. “Malfoys mate for life.”

“I am not a fucking swan, you arsehole!” she screamed. “There must be a way to undo it.”

“It can be undone,” he said evenly. “Before consummating, we would lose our magic and probably die. After consummating, we would definitely die.”

Hermione clutched her chest as her stomach lurched into her throat. It wasn’t true. It couldn’t be. There had to be something. *Why*—

“Why would you agree to that?” she asked desperately. “To forever?”

“I didn’t have a choice.”

“Yes, you did!” she cried. “Twenty years—”

“I couldn’t let you go to Azkaban, Granger.”

“Yes, you could!” she choked on a sob. “It’s not that long—”

“No,” he said, shaking his head firmly. “For you, in there, twenty years might as well be a hundred. I couldn’t let that happen. I couldn’t *imagine* you in that place—”

“Why didn’t you tell me before the wedding?” she pleaded. “I should have had a chance to choose.”

Malfoy regarded her sadly. “You would have chosen wrong.”

“Fuck you,” she sobbed. “That was my choice. You had no right. You stood there and watched while I was violated without me even knowing. My magic—”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t you dare!” she screamed. “You don’t regret it. You would do the same thing again.”

He didn’t deny it.

“This past week,” she murmured, her mind reeling. “Why did you let me research? Why didn’t you just tell me there was no hope?”

He looked down at the ground. “I thought it would be better to wait until—”

“Until I trusted you even more?!”

He seemed to deflate at that, and Hermione couldn’t bear to watch it. She turned and ran into the house, up the stairs, and into her room, slamming the door behind her. She warded it with every spell she could think of from her time on the run until the air was thick with magic.

And then she did something she thought she never would.

“Nilly.”



Chapter End Notes

Last plot twist I promise!

Thank you so much for reading! Your comments give me life <3

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 9

Chapter Notes

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

Nilly had been clearly alarmed at Hermione's swollen and tear-stained face when she appeared, but she had brought the volumes Hermione requested all the same.

Every book making mention of Malfoy marriage traditions in the Manor library was currently spread across her bedroom floor in a layer nearly a foot thick. Biographies of notable family members, diaries of young Malfoy wives—all of them confirmed what Malfoy had told her. When marriages were made for a multitude of reasons other than love, permanence was a virtue; unbreakable marriage bonds had formed the cornerstone of the Malfoys' consolidation of alliances and power through the centuries.

Though, interestingly, they hadn't become required until the twelfth one. The hopelessly romantic Tenerus Malfoy had decided that any man worthy of the Malfoy name should be so entirely devoted to his wife that he would share his magic with her along with his life. Core binding was still commonplace at the time, and no one questioned the ritual that would force all future descendants to carry on the tradition, regardless of changing norms.

Hermione also found an explanation for the need of joint pleasure to consummate the bond. What Malfoy had told her when he explained it as a *Pureblood thing* was true in essence, but the core binding was the piece she had been missing. Because Malfoy marriages could no longer be ended, Tenerus had wanted to make sure that no Malfoy wife would find herself stuck with a lifetime of unfulfillment. The binding of their magic would be incomplete until sufficient consummation occurred, giving both spouses an incentive to work toward a mutually beneficial relationship. Though it would take months, if they refused or failed to consummate properly, the incomplete bond would begin to weaken their magical cores. Left untended, it would eventually kill them both.

Hermione slammed closed the book she was reading, and a snowglobe on her shelf exploded. She quickly Repaired the knickknack with her wand, and then picked it up and hurled it at the wall as hard as she could.

Malfoy probably would have explained the last part if she had given him a chance, but with the anger currently coursing through her in white-hot waves, it was probably safer for them both that he hadn't. She wasn't eager to learn what would happen to her if she hexed his bollocks off.

Unless the Ministry was willing to give them a joint cell in Azkaban, their situation had just been upgraded from *fuck or prison* to *fuck or die*. They would never last a twenty-year sentence with an incomplete bond. And Hermione only had five days left to decide.

She added another layer of silencing charms to her room and screamed as loud as she could.

Obviously she was going to fuck him. She may be stubborn, but she was never about to go to Azkaban over it, and she certainly wasn't going to let it kill her.

The fact that she would have made the same decision *he* had chosen for her made her want to burn the fucking house down. He had made it sound noble, like he was saving her from her own vindictive self. Yet, he had conveniently failed to acknowledge that it was his arse on the line just as much as hers. Whether or not he actually gave a shit about her getting sent to Azkaban was entirely irrelevant. Agreeing to this marriage had saved him from prison as well.

From the beginning, he had held all the cards and kept her in the dark. The core bond, Nilly being free. Would he have even told her about the need for her to orgasm if she hadn't overheard the conversation? Or would he have just assumed it would be no problem for the Slytherin sex god and chosen to roll the dice?

"Arrogant, egotistical arse!" she screamed, pummeling one of her pillows.

Her head snapped up as another thought occurred to her. She had just taken him at his word about Nilly. She didn't know that it was true. She had believed him because she wanted to.

"Nilly."

The elf appeared after a moment, looking apprehensive. Hermione swiped the hair back from her face and straightened the pillows on the bed.

"Erm, hello," she said awkwardly.

"Hello, Mistress," Nilly replied, twining her fingers nervously in her pillowcase. This one had a pink paisley pattern, but Hermione noticed she had forgone lace today.

"I like your... outfit," Hermione offered.

Nilly glanced down, quickly smoothing her hands over it. "Oh, thank you, Mistress."

"I have some things that might go with it," Hermione said, crossing the room and pulling out a box from her desk. "If you wanted to look?" She didn't know whether jewellery qualified as clothes.

Nilly followed cautiously behind her, and her eyes went wide as Hermione lifted the lid of the box. She didn't seem frightened though, and Hermione picked through the collection looking for a particularly gaudy brooch that had belonged to her grandmother.

"Maybe this?" she said when she'd spotted it. It was fashioned of braided gold strands coiled around a cluster of large pink pearls, giving the impression of birds' eggs in a nest. Hermione pointed to it but didn't offer it to Nilly herself. The elf reached out and ran a dainty finger over the pin.

"Oh, Mistress," she breathed. "Nilly cannot accept this."

"Okay," Hermione said quickly, not wanting to upset her. "That's completely fine."

“But!” she squeaked as Hermione went to close the lid. “Nilly would be honoured to wear it—just for today.”

Hermione beamed at her. “That sounds perfect.”

She watched as the elf retrieved the piece and carefully pinned it over her chest. Hermione knew she couldn’t ask Nilly directly about being free—she would never risk another meltdown like the one she had caused that first day—but there was something she had been curious about.

“Nilly,” she began gently, “Was the red wine that you served with the beef wellington elf-made?”

Nilly looked apologetic. “Ah, no, Mistress. Master is not drinking elf-made wine, but Nilly is told that it is still of the highest quality that wizards can buy. That one was coming from the Zabini vineyards in Tuscany where they use the native Sangiovese grapes, and Nilly is hoping that Mistress still found it to her liking even though elf-made would be better—”

“Yes,” Hermione said quickly. “It was very good. Thank you for telling me about it.”

So Malfoy really had been fucking with her the whole time.

The elf looked thrilled. “Nilly can bring some for Mistress right now!”

“No, no, that’s not—”

Nilly’s face fell.

“Oh, what the hell,” Hermione muttered. She could use a drink. “Actually, that would be lovely. Thank you.”

Nilly popped out of sight, returning only moments later with not one but *two* bottles of non-elf-made wine. Hermione tried not to take the implication personally.

And it would have been a bit rich if she did, because a few hours later, she was tapping her wand against the neck of the second bottle and watching the cork pop across the room.

There was one aspect of the core bond Hermione was still researching, and her anger built again with every line that she read. While they hadn’t been soulbonded—that required the free will of both parties—there would be some physical and emotional manifestations of their connection. Hermione’s hand pressed over her abdomen as she remembered the pain in her ovaries. Her body was now expecting to carry the next Malfoy heir. And for his part, Malfoy’s body would be expecting to give it to her.

She took a long swig from the bottle as she read one ancient Malfoy’s account of the way the bond manifested emotionally for him: a fierce protective streak where his wife’s safety was concerned and a kind of possessive rage at the thought of another man touching her.

“Chauvinist pigs,” she spat, utterly incensed at the idea of Malfoy feeling like he had any claim whatsoever over her body, even if he couldn’t control it.

And then, Hermione had a truly terrible idea.

As with most bad ideas, the addition of alcohol rarely helps. In this case, Hermione's rage might have been strong enough to give her the nerve she needed to carry out her plan, but the wine certainly filled in the gaps.

She held tight to the bannister as she descended the stairs, wobbling only slightly in the stilettos she had selected for the night's performance. She was pleased to see that Malfoy was in the sitting room; she wouldn't need to seek him out.

His head shot up at once when he heard the sound of her approaching, and if she wasn't still tempted to fucking murder him, she would have laughed at his expression.

His face went utterly slack with shock, and she watched with malicious satisfaction as his eyes slid over her body. The dress she wore was a vestige of the truly dark times right after the war. When the only thing that brought her relief was the anonymity of a dimly lit club and music so loud that she couldn't hear the memories. When the only thing that made her feel less numb was a stranger's touch against her skin. It was a deep red, and so tight that it looked painted onto her. The low, square neckline left her with an impressive amount of cleavage and the slit at her thigh reached nearly to her hipbone.

She stowed her wand in the black clutch she carried and made her way to the front door.

"Where are you going?" Malfoy asked, getting suddenly to his feet.

Hermione glanced back over her shoulder and gave him a sickly sweet smile.

"Wherever the fuck I want."

He took a step toward her, but she was already turning on the spot.

Apparating while drunk was Hermione's latest terrible idea, and she was forced to squeeze her eyes shut and breathe deeply for several long moments after landing at the Apparition point. Pain radiated out through her limbs like pins and needles as her magic fought to keep all her parts together. She did a cursory check for minor splinching, and, finding nothing, carried on her way.

The bar she had in mind was only a short walk up the street and she shook out her curls as she stepped through the door. It was relatively crowded for a weekday night, and she let her eyes adjust to the dim light before making her way to the back and slipping into the bathroom.

It was a single stall and she set her clutch on the edge of the sink before leaning forward to look in the mirror. She was pleasantly surprised with how her makeup had turned out given the state of her inebriation, and she gave her reflection a sultry smirk before drawing out her wand.

She hadn't been entirely sure that this spell would work for her intended purpose; before tonight, she had only used it to siphon off smoke or steam from over a cauldron during brewing. But her practice attempt earlier in the evening had gone swimmingly.

She tilted her chin up and placed the tip of her wand on the side of her neck, about halfway between her shoulder and jaw. She spoke a quiet incantation and tried to hold still as a tickling sensation spread into a little circle of her skin.

The suction from the tip of her wand was weak, and it took more than a minute to pull enough blood to the surface to bruise. After two minutes though, she was left with an impressively realistic-looking love bite.

A simple charm would easily heal it, just like the practice one she had produced in her bedroom, but she would let this one remain for the night.

She left the bathroom and ordered a drink, nursing it slowly at the bar for the next couple hours. She politely declined the few men who approached her, and ironically, she showed off her wedding ring to discourage the most persistent one. After what she deemed was enough time for Malfoy to have sufficiently stewed, she called a Muggle cab.

Despite the late hour, all of the lights were still on when she entered the house. She didn't see Malfoy right away, so she proceeded into the kitchen, pouring herself a glass of water before hopping up onto the counter and kicking off her heels.

The sound of the shoes clattering over the tile must have alerted him to her return because he appeared a minute later.

"Where have you been?" he asked from the doorway.

She took a sip of water and crossed her legs before responding. "Here and there," she said lightly, pulling the hair back over her shoulder.

He was across the room in a second.

"What the fuck is this?" he demanded, fingers hot on her throat.

"What do you mean?" she asked innocently, letting him tilt her head in his grip.

His eyes were dark with fury, and she watched as he took in a deep breath, seemingly trying to restrain himself.

“Who did this to you?”

Hermione laughed. “No one.”

Malfoy’s hands closed over her upper arms and squeezed hard. “What are you playing at, Granger? You are my wife!”

She gave a sympathetic pout, running her hands up his chest. “Aw, and how terrible it must be for you to be married to someone you can’t trust.”

“Granger—”

“Being bound to someone who would go behind your back and keep secrets,” she went on. “It must be *awful*.”

A muscle ticked in Malfoy’s jaw as she spoke, and she spread her legs, pulling him forward between her knees by the tie. She hadn’t seen him wear a tie since their impromptu wedding reception, and she wondered vaguely if he’d met with his parents.

“This is how you’ve decided to get even with me?” he seethed, covering the mark on her neck with his palm as though he couldn’t stand to see it. “Fucking around with some Muggle bloke?”

She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him tight against her. “Who said it was a Muggle?”

His wand was in his hand before she could blink, and when she felt the tip press against her stomach, she grinned. His knuckles were white on the handle, but no magic touched her.

Neither of their wands would work to cast a contraceptive charm anymore.

“What’s wrong?” she cooed, sifting her fingers through his hair.

His wand clattered onto the counter. “This is not a game, Granger! You are my wife, and it will be my children you carry!”

She shook her head sadly. “If only you could trust that was true.”

“What the fuck are you trying to prove?”

She leaned forward until her lips nearly brushed his as she spoke. “You thought you would marry me, pump a couple kids into me, and we’d live happily ever after—all on your terms. You never considered that trust is a two-way street and you might spend the rest of your life never really knowing where I am or what I’m doing... or who I’m doing it with.”

He gripped the counter as she continued.

“You thought I was your ‘get out of jail free card.’” She tsked lightly, wrapping the tail of his tie around his neck and pulling it tight. “Baby, I’m your ball and chain.”

He was breathing heavily against her lips, nearly panting in his anger, and as Hermione watched his eyes jump back and forth between hers, searching her, she felt her bravado fading fast. She'd made her point and she'd said her piece, and now that the anger was gone, all she had left was the pain.

She pushed him away and slid off the counter, grabbing her still-full glass as she went.

On her way out of the room, she tossed the water over the blackboard and watched their progress drip onto the floor.

Then, her eyes widened with sudden shock. She reached out, the empty glass shattering against the tile, but it was too late. Because of her carelessness, her mother's little chalk heart went, too.



Chapter End Notes

My deepest condolences to those who have been worried about the fate of Little Chalk Heart :(Was it worse than you expected?

And for anyone who is disappointed not to have a reconciliation in this chapter, I would argue that any characterization of Hermione would need at least one (1) day to just be incredibly angry and petty. I think we can give her that.

Also, there were a lot of really interesting comments on the last chapter where people were surprised that Hermione would even consider taking advantage of the loophole. I tried to make it clear that it was very unlikely that she would and that she was very much debating even mentioning it to Draco. She only does so because she is caught off-guard by the very genuine moment between them and realizes that she cares about him having a say in his freedom from the situation too. Ironic, that. Obviously she has no way of knowing that he's been resigned to it all along. (And for those who commented on earlier chapters that Draco seemed surprisingly agreeable to the marriage in comparison to Hermione, now you know why! He knew there was no alternative.)

And finally, for anyone who is interested in a little insight into my writing process: I have talked on twitter before about visualizing important scenes from the entire course of the fic before I start writing, and the confrontation in this chapter was one of the earliest ones that came to me. I knew that I wanted Draco to have the progression of using "wife" [antagonizing] to "wife" [possessive] to "wife" [endearing] throughout the course of the story, and having Hermione do something to intentionally stoke his possessiveness worked very nicely with her need for 'revenge'/demonstrating to him how hurtful his secrecy was. The image of her sitting on the counter and wrapping the tie around his neck while saying the "ball and chain" line was very important to me, and the first half of it ("get out of jail free card") inspired Draco examining the Monopoly game on his first day in the house. I knew I wanted him interacting with the Muggle house/world to be a theme, but the level of his rummaging through things really grew to support this key scene, and it actually ends up being an important factor in how things progress between them when we get to the smut. Anyway, I have no idea if anyone will find this interesting, but I thought I would share just in case :)

As always, thank you so much for reading and interacting!!

Many thanks and much love to [naginiLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 10

Chapter Notes

Okay, I've done something a little different in this one. I had always planned to write Draco's POV of this story, and I have had several scenes mapped out since the beginning, but due to life things, I'm not sure now that I will have the time to write all of it. Because of that, I'm including a scene directly after the end of the last chapter in Draco's POV at the start here. If you would prefer to just have the seamless Hermione POV then skip to the first set of asterisks :)

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

Draco watched, numb with shock, as Granger backed quickly out of the kitchen, a bare foot crunching over the remains of the glass. The bond gave an insistent tug behind his ribs as his eyes dropped to the small smear of blood she left in her wake—evidence that his wife was injured.

He brought a hand to his chest and rubbed absently at the phantom pain, willing his feet to stay firmly planted on the floor. Rationally, he knew that she could easily take care of the cut herself, even while drunk, and going after her would do no good tonight.

With a sigh, he crossed the floor and sank into a chair at the kitchen table, burying his hands in his hair. He had tried to steel himself, to remain calm when she returned no matter what, but the sight of the mark on her neck had sent every reassurance his mother had offered spiralling immediately out of his brain.

“How does the core bond impact... fidelity?”

Narcissa’s lips parted on a tiny intake of breath before she glanced over to where his father stood behind his desk. Lucius gave a single, curt nod.

*“A meaningful romantic connection with another is out of the question,” Narcissa explained.
“Emotionally, she won’t have the capacity for it.”*

Draco swallowed the bile creeping up the back of his throat. “And what about a meaningless connection?”

Narcissa’s brow furrowed. “Draco... did something—”

“Please, Mother,” he interrupted, squeezing his eyes shut. “Just tell me.”

"Well," she began, glancing at his father again. "When the bond is complete, it will be extremely unlikely that she would... stray. She certainly would not be able to derive any enjoyment from it."

"And while it remains incomplete?"

Narcissa looked tempted to pry again, but she restrained herself. "I won't say it's impossible, Draco, but even at this point, I imagine she would find the touch of another to be quite aversive."

Draco let out a shaky breath. It was better than he had hoped for.

But he had forgotten. The instant he saw the evidence on her, blinding rage had dropped over him like a curtain. It wasn't until he watched the fire fade from her eyes, revealing the hollow, aching despair beneath, that clarity returned.

It was an act. All of it. But her carefully crafted performance had proved more points than one.

A lovebite was not evidence of sex, but it *was* evidence that she had let someone put their mouth on her even though she likely found it to be *aversive*. It was evidence that his betrayal had pushed her to that.

He looked down at the cloudy puddle on the floor beneath the chalkboard. He wasn't surprised that she had erased their progress, but her reaction after had been completely unexpected. He hadn't given much thought to the little heart that she left in place in the corner, but now, a vague sense of familiarity was tickling at the edge of his awareness.

He got slowly to his feet and trudged up the stairs, casting a glance at the darkened space beneath Granger's door. He didn't approach it, nor his own room either, but turned instead for the room that had belonged to her parents.

He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled open the drawer of the nightstand. Inside were the same personal effects he had seen before: a pair of reading glasses, a novel of historical fiction, a few pairs of cufflinks, a diamond inlaid tie pin.

And the stack of greeting cards.

He had only glanced inside the first one (*Happy Anniversary*), feeling that reading the handwritten message was a step too far.

But his eyes dropped to the signature again, and his face creased in a wince as he registered the name of Granger's mother and a painfully familiar set of curved lines.

He pulled out the rest of the stack, flipping slowly through each one. Twenty years of marriage, twenty anniversary cards, and twenty *Jeans* signed with twenty little hearts.

Draco replaced the cards in the drawer before closing it and made his way quietly back down the hall. He rubbed a hand over his chest as he tried desperately not to hear the sobs coming from Granger's poorly Silenced room.

Hermione woke on the tenth day to the sound of Nilly arriving in her room. She rubbed her hands over her eyes, grimacing at the gritty evidence that she had cried herself to sleep.

"Nilly is very sorry to wake you, Mistress," the elf said quietly from next to the bed. "But Master is insisting that I bring this."

Hermione squeezed one eye shut as she tried to sit up, and she wasn't ashamed to admit how glad she was to see the hangover potion in Nilly's hand.

"Thank you," she croaked, taking it as soon as Nilly placed it into her outstretched hand.

"Mistress should be drinking this as well," she said and handed Hermione a glass of water.

Hermione drank it gratefully, falling back against her pillows when the glass was empty.

Nilly gathered the glass and the empty vial and seemed to be about to leave, but Hermione suddenly wished desperately that she wouldn't. Now that she was awake, she felt entirely unprepared to face this day, and the barren chalkboard downstairs, alone.

"Wait," she said without thinking and immediately winced at having inadvertently delivered an order. "I mean, if you aren't busy, would you like to stay with me for a little while?"

The elf looked surprised, but she gave Hermione a bright smile. "Of course, Mistress." She set down the empty containers and paused for a moment as she glanced around the room.

"Erm, you could sit here if you like," Hermione said, indicating the other side of the bed.

Nilly nodded and crawled up onto the duvet, settling herself next to Hermione's head on the spare pillow. Hermione's hair was everywhere from her fitful sleep, and Nilly had to move some to avoid sitting on it.

"I'm sorry," Hermione murmured. "It's such a mess."

"Oh, no," Nilly said reverently, draping a section of curls across her lap. "Mistress has such beautiful hair."

Hermione pressed her lips together against a sudden burst of emotion as the little elf began working her fingers gently through the tangled strands. "Thank you," she whispered.

Nilly nodded absently, working her way up the length and toward Hermione's scalp.

"It's been many years since Master is letting Nilly care for his hair," she said after a moment, nimble fingers working at the back of Hermione's head.

"You used to do that?" Hermione asked.

"Oh, yes," Nilly said softly. "Before leaving for school when he was keeping it long like Mas—like Master's father."

Hermione noted the hitch in Nilly's voice at the mention of Lucius, and she wondered painfully at the treatment of the other elves under his ownership.

"He wore his hair long?" Hermione had a hard time picturing it.

"Mhmm," the elf hummed. "It was the most beautiful hair you is ever seeing on a little boy, and Nilly was always putting it in curls when he was playing as a French nobleman or in plaits when he was playing as a Viking warrior."

Hermione's lips pulled into a reluctant smile at the image.

"And then Master is going off to school and being much too grown up and important to need Nilly's help anymore." She chuckled fondly, and Hermione thought of the harsh, slicked-back style Malfoy had worn in those early years. Clearly Nilly thought she could have done better.

"You should ask him to show you the electric hair dryer," Hermione suggested. "Maybe he would let you try a new style with it."

The elf made a small noise of intrigue. "Nilly will do that. Thank you, Mistress."

"You're welcome," Hermione said softly, her eyelids drifting closed as Nilly's hands smoothed over her hairline.

"Nilly is also happy to help anytime Mistress is wanting something done with her hair," the elf offered, a little shyly. "Of course Mistress is already having curls, but Nilly can do other things, too."

"This is very nice," Hermione said, her voice coming out husky. She could feel moisture pooling at the corner of her eye. "It reminds me of m-my mum."

The backs of Nilly's fingers stroked gently across her cheek. "Mistress will be feeling better soon," she said quietly.

Hermione seriously doubted that, but she nodded against the pillow all the same, letting the elf's tender caresses lull her into a sense of peace.

Hermione woke the next time to the sound of the phone ringing. She didn't know how much time had passed, but Nilly was gone. She dragged herself across the room and lifted the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Hermione."

"Hi, Gemma," she said with a smile, sitting down at her desk and drawing the curtains back so she could wave to the little girl in the window across the way. "How are you?"

"Fine." Gemma waved back, the phone clutched tight in her other hand, and Hermione watched her speak into it. "How are you?"

"I've been better," Hermione sighed.

Gemma propped her elbow on the window sill. "Did you have a fight with Draco?"

Hermione grimaced, sincerely hoping that Gemma hadn't heard them arguing outside. "Yes, I did. How did you know?"

"He seemed sad," Gemma said simply. "And he said you were angry with him."

"Oh." Hermione wasn't sure that was entirely appropriate, but she knew how persistent the little girl could be. It wasn't as though Malfoy would have sought her out to talk about it. "Well, yes, that can happen sometimes."

Hermione watched as Gemma fiddled with the lace curtain of her sister's old room. "Do you think you'll have to get the divorce?"

Hermione's heart squeezed in her chest. Gemma's dad had moved out last year. "No, we won't," she said quietly, guilt churning in her stomach as she knew that she had been desperately searching for a way to do exactly that. "We'll work it out."

They didn't have a choice.

Gemma seemed heartened, but Hermione knew she would probably call her sister next. Shannon was going to have a cow when she found out that Hermione had gotten married from Gemma. With the older sister in New York for school, Hermione had assumed she would find a way out before ever needing to mention it, but she hadn't accounted for the little spy next door. She would have to come up with some explanation.

Hermione watched as Gemma glanced back over her shoulder at someone in the doorway. "I got to go. Bye."

"Bye."

Hermione set the phone back down, but before she could pull the curtain closed, Pigwidgeon appeared on the other side of it. Hermione quickly pushed open the panes and removed the scroll from the little owl's leg.

The letter was from Harry this time, detailing more matches they had tracked down. All of them continued to fit the political pattern. Hermione gave a dejected sigh and shooed Pigwidgeon from the room without replying. She would need to tell her friends about the futility of her situation at some point, but she couldn't manage it just then.

She was on her way back to the bed when a soft knock came from her door.

"Granger?"

She stood there staring at the white wood.

"I know you can hear me," Malfoy added.

"No shit," Hermione said.

"Your silencing charms have worn off. I can hear you, too."

Hermione ground her teeth.

"But you don't have to say anything," he said, sounding exhausted. "Just—please, listen."

He paused, maybe waiting to feel the ripple of magic as she silenced the door, but she just crossed her arms and sank down onto the mattress.

"I'm sorry," he began. "I'm not sorry we're married because it was the right choice, but I am sorry I let you go into the ceremony without knowing the consequences."

Hermione watched his shadow shift slightly in the space under the door.

"This isn't an excuse," he went on, "but it really fucking sucked to think that someone might want to spend twenty years living with dementors instead of me. I know my ego seems indestructible, but taking that choice away from you was selfish for more reasons than one. Yes, it kept me out of prison, too, but it also kept you from choosing prison over me."

Hermione picked up the edge of the duvet and wrapped it around her shoulders.

"I guess all I've done is demonstrate why that would have been a valid choice."

"Don't be self-deprecating," Hermione chided, unable to restrain herself. "I have better things to do than listen to you mope."

"I said for you to just listen!"

"Fine."

She heard the sound of him heaving a dramatic sigh and then a thump against the door which she sincerely hoped was his forehead.

"I swear I didn't know about the joint pleasure thing," he continued. "I assumed mutually beneficial was meant much more generally. I was going to tell you about the core bond

eventually... I just thought it would be better after some time. Maybe when it wouldn't have seemed like such a terrible fate anymore. I never thought I would have to earn your trust in two weeks and now we're—fuck—”

Another thud. “And now we’re back to zero.”

Hermione swallowed, chewing on her lip to keep from speaking.

“You were right about what you said last night,” he went on, sounding pained. “I don’t deserve your trust, and you can make my life hell if you want to—far more than you probably even know.”

His shadow shifted again and something brushed against the wood of the door.

“I’m sorry they did this to you. I’m sorry it’s me.” His voice was quieter now, and Hermione stood from the bed, dragging the covers with her.

“I know you think you could have survived Azkaban, but it was built to house dark wizards. Going there as someone innocent, someone who believes in a better world, someone with hope...” He swallowed audibly. “Your goodness would have been like a beacon.”

A shiver rippled through Hermione.

“I told myself that it was worth the cost. I had the power to prevent that. I had the chance to *do something*, for once—”

He broke off, and she strained to hear his next words.

“It shouldn’t have taken me a week to understand. The dementors don’t deserve your magic, but neither do I.”

Hermione leaned against the door.

“I’m not asking you for happily ever after, but I am asking you to, please, let me keep you alive. Whatever I need to do in the next—fuck—four days to make that happen, I’ll do it... If you’ll let me.”

Hermione waited, but it seemed he was finished. After a moment, she heard the creaky floorboard and then his quiet steps on the stairs.

She replaced the duvet on the bed and washed her face before following him down.

He was seated at the kitchen table with his head in his hands when she entered. He looked up at once, but she didn’t stop or speak. She just walked straight over to the blackboard and picked up the chalk, scraping it determinedly over the clean surface.

1

She replaced the chalk in the tray and turned to leave, but Malfoy stood from his seat, moving in front of her. There was plenty of room for her to skirt around him, he wasn’t

blocking her escape, but she stopped anyway. And when he stepped forward and pulled her into a hug against his chest, she let him.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured into the top of her head, arms gripping tight around her shoulders.

“I forgive you.”

He scoffed against her hair. “No, you don’t.”

“Yes, I do,” she sighed. “I don’t have time to hold a grudge, which is really a shame because I could have dragged this one out for a good long while.”

She felt his chest sink on a long exhale.

“Besides,” she continued, “*Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.*”

A chuckle rumbled beneath her cheek. “Where’s that one?”

“In the attic,” she answered. “Mum thought it was too depressing to have out all the time.”

“Well, it might be my favourite one so far.”

She leaned back to look at him, and he smiled. She pulled out of his grip and went back to the blackboard, updating it accordingly.

3

She started to set the chalk back in the tray, but Malfoy stepped forward and took it gently from her hand. He hesitated for a moment, rolling the dusty cylinder between his fingertips, and then gave a little nod as he seemed to come to a decision.

He reached out and re-drew her mother’s little chalk heart.

Hermione blinked rapidly against the sudden burning in her eyes. There was no way he could have known what that meant to her, but clearly he knew it had meant something. And that was enough.

She gave him a tremulous smile and he placed the chalk back in the tray, looking somewhat apprehensive.

“I have a proposition,” he said. “I’m not allowed to brew Veritaserum.” He gestured to the Dark Mark visible below the sleeve of his t-shirt. “But I will tell you anything you want to know.”

“You would be willing to take Veritaserum?” Hermione asked, feeling slightly bewildered. Though without any on hand, it was easy for him to say.

“I owe you some honesty, don’t you think?”

She did. And she would be happy to help him get there.

"I hope that wasn't an empty offer," she said smugly. "Or we're going to be off to another bad start."

His eyes widened. "You have some?"

She nodded.

They sat across the kitchen table from each other, a crystal vial of clear liquid between them.

Malfoy didn't look thrilled at the prospect, but he hadn't backed out yet either, so Hermione was rather impressed.

He looked shocked when she reached out and took the first swallow.

"Trust is a two-way street," she said in answer to his look. Then she pointed to the mark on her neck. "This is fake. No one else touched me. I used a spell to give it to myself."

Malfoy was speechless. His mouth opened, then closed, then opened again. Finally, he settled for dragging a hand down his face. "You fucking Slytherin," he muttered.

"You deserved it," she said confidently, feeling thoroughly pleased with herself that she had been able to make her point without actually doing something to break his trust.

"I know, but fucking hell, Granger. I felt like *killing* someone when I saw it." He glanced back at the mark again and grimaced. "Can I—can I heal it? Seeing it still kind of makes me feel like killing someone."

Hermione rolled her eyes but turned her head to grant him access. "Brute," she murmured as she felt his wand press against the spot.

"I won't deny that."

He laid his wand back on the table when he was finished, and then reached for the vial. He took a deep breath before swallowing a mouthful.

Hermione pointed at his Dark Mark. "Did that hurt?"

His brow furrowed. "That's what you want to know?"

She shrugged. She'd always been curious.

"Yes," he said, looking down at it. "Worst pain of my life."

"Worse than *Crucio*?"

His eyes flicked back to hers, and she wondered if he could still hear the echoes of her screams.

“Like *Crucio*,” he said after a moment. “But concentrated in my arm.”

She nodded. “Was that the worst moment of the war for you?”

“Merlin, Granger, don’t hold back,” he groused. Then, “No, it wasn’t.”

“What was?”

He looked as though he was thoroughly regretting this entire thing.

“When I thought Bellatrix was going to kill you.”

Hermione blinked in surprise, but he wasn’t done.

“When I realised that I wasn’t going to try to do anything to stop it. That I didn’t even want to.”

“Dark,” she said.

He huffed a laugh. “Yeah, well, I wasn’t expecting to have to live very long with my guilt at that point. I was willing to try to help Potter because I thought he was the best shot at defeating the Dark Lord. I didn’t care about you.”

“I would have let someone kill you, too,” she offered.

He smiled. “Thanks, Granger.”

“Mine was at the final battle,” she said quietly. “Harry thought that he needed to let Voldemort kill him to destroy the last horcrux, but I wasn’t sure that would work.” She drew in a deep breath. “In fact, I was pretty sure that he was never going to come out of that forest and Voldemort would still be unkillable, but I let him go anyway. Just because I didn’t have any better ideas.”

Malfoy nodded. “War is... super unhealthy.”

Hermione tapped a finger against her chin. “That might go better on a t-shirt than a sign.”

The corner of his mouth lifted, but she could see he was apprehensive about her next question.

“Why were you Occluding at our wedding?”

His lips tightened, whether from surprise that she had noticed or unwillingness to answer, she didn’t know, but answer he eventually did.

“I never expected to marry for love, but I also never expected to marry someone who was disgusted by me. Hopefully you can forgive me for not wanting to be fully present for it.”

Hermione's jaw dropped in shock. "You were the one disgusted by me!"

Malfoy's brows drew together. "Pardon?"

"I thought you were doing it because you couldn't stand having to marry a Mudblood."

He scoffed. "You know I don't give a fuck about that."

"Do I know that?" Hermione challenged.

He reached out and took another swallow of Veritaserum for emphasis. "I don't give a fuck about your blood status, Granger. I'm perfectly capable of hating you for who you are as a person." At her eye roll, he smirked. "I'm very open-minded that way."

"Congratulations on joining the rest of the civilised world," she deadpanned. "You'll understand if I don't throw you a party."

"Better late than never."

"Barely."

He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest, looking far too content. Hermione decided to push.

"If you hadn't planned to marry for love, why was our arrangement so upsetting?"

Malfoy seemed to think that was a cheap shot because his face clouded with anger.

"I understand it must be difficult for you to imagine, but for any of the eligible witches my parents might have sold me off to, I still had quite a lot to offer despite being the youngest-ever Death Eater." He leaned forward again as he ticked off the items on his fingers. "Money, status, connections, sparkling wit, and a truly spectacular cock, but of course, I had to find myself standing across from potentially the only witch in the entire country who literally couldn't give a single fuck about any of it."

Hermione mouthed soundlessly for a moment. "Well, not *any* of it—I mean—spectacular?"

"Granger," Malfoy snapped, bracing his forehead in his hand. "Focus, please."

"Right, sorry," she said, feeling her cheeks heat. "That must have been very hard. I—I'm just glad to see that your ego remains intact."

He shook his head with a laugh. "It's this bloody house. I have to stare at a sign that says *Hello, gorgeous* every time I take a piss. What do you expect?"

"That your neck will snap under the weight of that giant head any day now."

"That would solve a lot of problems," he mused.

“Are you nervous about consummating?” she blurted, finally voicing a concern she’d long had.

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Terrified.”

Her mouth twisted. It was plainly intended as sarcasm, not a lie, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t truth to it—

“I understand you’re under quite a bit of pressure,” she said. “To, erm, perform.”

“Perform?” he repeated, looking amused. “If you’re expecting circus tricks, I’m sorry to say that you’ll be sorely disappointed.”

“I mean that you’ll need to be—I mean—you’ll need to—” she broke off, gesturing vaguely.

“Get it up?” Malfoy asked incredulously. His face seemed to indicate that he could hardly believe she was mentioning it.

“Well, that usually helps,” she snapped.

He looked deeply offended. “I am twenty-one years old, Granger. I assure you, that will not be an issue.”

“I didn’t mean that you might struggle physiologically!” she argued, face flaming. “But mentally, if it’s not—I mean, if *I’m* not—if you don’t—”

Want me.

When she chanced a glance at Malfoy again, his face was still marked by confusion. His level of bafflement triggered another realisation.

“Oh, of course,” she said, shaking her head in mortification. “I’m sure you’ll be able to just think of some—something else.”

For some reason she couldn’t bring herself to say *someone* else. She hoped it might be like it was for her—just a random collection of images that had worked in the past. Though admittedly, she had never discussed the mental aspects of masturbation with a boy bef—

“Granger.”

She dropped her palm from her face, not remembering when she had covered it.

Malfoy leaned across the table and took her hand, squeezing gently. “Please let me be perfectly clear about this.”

Her breath caught.

“When the time comes, I will have everything I need right in front of me.”

She swallowed at the heat behind his gaze, her lungs seemingly refusing to fill. “O-Okay,” she whispered with what little air she had left.

He nodded before asking his next question. “How many people have you slept with?”

Hermione debated whether the Veritaserum should have worn off by now for her. “Three,” she answered honestly.

“And how many of them made you come?”

She licked her lips. “One.”

To her surprise, Malfoy smiled. “Working against the odds, eh? How thrilling.”

Hermione shook her head. “You seem very confident about it.”

“I am.”

“Well, I suppose one of us should be.”

“You’re going to have to trust me.”

“I do.”

Malfoy sat back in surprise, eyes dropping to the potion between them as though he couldn’t believe that was true.

“There’s one last thing I need to tell you,” Hermione said, reaching for the vial and taking another small sip. “My real name is Albus Dumbledore.”

Malfoy blinked in confusion, his brows drawing together.

Hermione offered him the last sip in the vial.

He swallowed it and then after a moment, said, “My name is Harry Potter.”

Hermione smiled.

Malfoy looked between her and the empty vial several times, and then he reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“That was water.”

“It was water,” Hermione confirmed.

“You fucking *Slytherin!*”

“You’ve had a bad influence on me,” she said with a grin.

“I fucking *wish* I could take credit for that,” he said, tossing the vial onto the table. “That was diabolical.” He shook his head as he looked at her. “But… I could have been lying.”

“But you weren’t,” she said simply. “You would have known it was fake if you had been. And now I know you *want* to be honest with me even when you don’t have to be. That’s worth more than anything the real potion might have compelled you to tell me.”

His head was still shaking, but he smiled. “And what about you?” She watched his eyes find the spot on her neck where the fake love bite had been.

Figuring that he deserved a little goodwill to make up for her treachery, she picked up her wand and placed the tip against the thin skin on the inside of her wrist.

“*Exsugo*,” she said, and Malfoy leaned forward. They both watched the pink blush of a bruise slowly begin to form.

Malfoy reached out and covered it with his hand, interrupting the spell, and Hermione set her wand back down. “As for the rest,” she said, “you’re going to have to trust me.”

His thumb brushed gently over her wrist.

“I do.”



Chapter End Notes

Writing for perceptive readers is so freaking fun. Bessie, here's your three even though I'm sure it wasn't exactly the way you thought the numbers would go!

And yes the burn is slow, but never fear! Next chapter they're doing hella numbers ;)

Oh, and for those who are curious, that is indeed a new graphic to represent the new heart and my mental health is tip top thanks for asking 😊

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 11

Chapter Notes

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

After lunch on the eleventh day, Hermione walked out of her bathroom, still wet from a shower, to find Malfoy standing in her room.

“Malfoy!” she shouted, clutching the flaps of her dressing gown tighter around her.

“Hermione,” he replied. He sounded completely unbothered as he stood at her bureau, rummaging through the open drawers.

“What if I had come out naked?” she demanded.

He chuckled and glanced over at her for the first time. “If only. I may have led a privileged life, but I’ve never been a lucky person.”

Her lips pursed. “What are you doing in here? What about trust?”

“What about it?” he asked, holding up a pair of lacy black knickers. “Did you really trust I wouldn’t inspect this room after doing all the others?”

In truth, she hadn’t really thought about it. “I don’t know,” she said, striding across the room and snatching her underthings from out of his hand. “It just seems like common courtesy.”

“Maybe for other people,” he said, smiling down at her. “But we’re married. I’ve already told you I’m learning about Muggles... and my wife.”

He gestured to an assortment of items he’d placed on her bed, and Hermione’s heart stalled in her chest as she spotted her vibrator among them.

“So many fascinating solutions that Muggles have developed for so many different problems.”

Hermione stared at her bedspread, praying that he might be referring to the pencil sharpener or the eyelash curler, but with the smirk spreading across his face, she had no real hope. Unable to stand it any longer, she reached forward and swiped the purple toy off the bed, stomping over and throwing it unceremoniously into the bedside table drawer it had come out of.

“I was particularly curious about that one,” he said. “A power switch but no plug?”

“It has a battery,” she said, trying to keep her voice even. “It’s a portable form of electricity.”

“How interesting. And what might one use that device for, I wonder?”

“It’s a massager.”

"I see," Malfoy said, nodding slowly. "Bit of a suspicious shape though, isn't it?"

Hermione growled in frustration, fists clenching at her sides. "Why are you asking if you already know what it is? Do you enjoy torturing me?"

He chuckled. "Well, you know I do," he said, coming to stand in front of her. "And I don't know what it is, but if it is what I *think* it is, then this is very helpful information to have."

"And why is that?" she said, staring defiantly up at him. Her cheeks were burning, but she refused to be shamed for tending to her own needs.

He stepped into her, his hands trailing lightly up the sides of her thighs, and his skin scorched her even with the lingering heat of her shower. "Because clearly the problem was with your other partners," he said in a low voice, ducking his head to speak near her ear. She braced her hands against his chest as his fingers teased low over her back. "Now I know that *you* know what you like... I just need to convince you to tell me." She sucked in a shaky breath as his palms smoothed down over the curves of her arse. "Or show me," he added, and she could feel the smirk against her cheek. "Whatever you prefer."

Heat was flooding through her as his hands shamelessly explored her through the delicate fabric. She gripped his shirt in her fists as his fingers traced the crease where her arse cheeks met her thighs.

"Right now?" she squeaked.

"No, not right now," he said gently. "When you feel comfortable, pet."

"Don't call me that," Hermione said, smiling at the now-familiar routine.

Malfoy leaned back to smile at her, his hands coming up to cup her face. "There she is," he murmured, the pad of one thumb rolling over her bottom lip. "Feel better?"

She nodded numbly, her eyes on his mouth. He dragged his lip between his teeth before leaning down and—

"Good," he whispered against the corner of her mouth.

Hermione stumbled forward as he stepped away from her, a shocked whimper spilling out into the quiet room.

He was out the door before she even knew what was happening.

When Hermione entered the kitchen, now fully dressed, Malfoy was standing at the counter eating a satsuma.

She noted that he had taken it upon himself to update the board to **5**—the number they had been on before they kissed the last time.

She leaned back against the counter across from him, and he turned to face her.

“I thought you were going to kiss me,” she said plainly.

He swallowed the piece of fruit in his mouth and licked a drop of juice from his thumb.
“Really?”

“Yes,” she said, slightly irritated. Obviously she had thought that.

“Do you want me to kiss you?”

She drew in a sharp breath, not expecting him to ask like that. He raised his brows.

Her heart thudded against her ribs, but there was no point denying it. “Yes.”

He pushed off the counter and crossed the floor at once, pressing himself flush against her front. His hands gripped tight at her waist.

“Like this?” he asked against her lips.

“Y-Yes,” she sighed.

His mouth closed over hers, and her mind went blissfully blank as she tasted the sweet tang of citrus still on his tongue. He pulled her against him, his thumbs lifting to graze the sides of her breasts, and a moan escaped her lips as she twined her arms around his neck.

“Like that?” he said, pulling away for a second to press a little kiss to each of her lips separately.

“Yes,” she whined, gripping his jaw and running her tongue back along his. He groaned against her lips, and the vibration seemed to travel through her entire body. Her hips rolled against his as much as they could with him pinning her, and he dropped his hands to the back of her thighs, quickly hoisting her up onto the counter.

She moaned in earnest as she pressed herself against him, a rush of anticipation flooding through her core. His fingers dug into her thighs as he pulled her lower lip between his teeth, and she broke the kiss as he had done, changing the fit of their lips and kissing him again and again and—

A loud knock came from the back door.

They pulled away at the same time, panting into the shared space between their mouths, and Hermione licked her lips.

Malfoy loosened his grip on her and seemed to be about to say something when the knocks repeated.

“It’s probably Gemma,” Hermione said quietly. “I think she was a little worried about us.”

Malfoy nodded, stepping back. “I meant to tell you, she asked me about—I probably shouldn’t have—”

“It’s okay,” Hermione said, “She asked me, too.”

“When?” he asked, brow furrowed. “You haven’t left the house.”

“She rang me yesterday before you came to apologise.”

“Rang you?” he repeated.

The series of knocks came again, and Hermione hopped off the counter, patting him on the chest. “I’ll explain about phones later.”

She headed toward the sitting room, stopping just long enough to update the board to a **6**.

When she glanced back over her shoulder, Malfoy was smiling.

And sure enough, Gemma was there, waiting at the back door, dressed for swimming.

“Hi, Gemma,” Hermione said as she pulled open the door.

“Hi, Hermione,” Gemma answered. She leaned to peer around Hermione in a very unsubtle way as if to see if there was any evidence that Malfoy was still living in the house.

“Swim lesson today?” Hermione asked, though it wasn’t the usual schedule.

“No,” Gemma said. “Just wanted to go to the pool. Do you want to come?”

Hermione smiled down at the little girl. While it was an innocent enough invitation, Hermione knew it likely meant that Gemma’s mum had told her she would be too busy to take her to the pool today, and with Gemma’s big sister out of the country, Hermione was the next best choice for adult supervision.

As Gemma’s face split into a wide grin with Malfoy’s appearance in the room, Hermione also suspected that the little girl might be struggling with suddenly only seeing her dad at the weekend.

“Would you like to go swimming?” Hermione asked him as he approached the doorway.

He smiled warmly at Gemma standing there with her swimming costume and her towel.

“Love to.”

Hermione sent Gemma back home with a promise to collect her in ten minutes, and after getting changed, she was descending the stairs, rummaging in her beach bag for a bottle of sunscreen.

She glanced up as Malfoy made a very undignified squawking noise.

“What?” she said as she entered the sitting room.

He stood from the armchair where he had been waiting, already dressed in a t-shirt and trunks.

“What is that?” He gestured vaguely to her.

“What?” she repeated, glancing down at her bikini. “This?” She plucked one of the straps of the triangle top.

“You’re not wearing that?” He sounded slightly frantic.

“Of course I’m wearing it. It’s what I just went to put on, isn’t it?”

“But it’s...” He made the same vague gesture as before running one hand roughly through his hair.

“Surely you’ve seen Muggle swimwear before?”

He shifted uncomfortably. “Well, yes, but only in pictures, and not on...”

Hermione smirked. “Your wife?”

He gulped. “I just thought the usual kind would be more... well, *more*.”

“The usual kind? What sort of pictures were these?”

His cheeks flushed a brilliant pink, and Hermione remembered she had been looking for the sunscreen.

“Well, sorry to disappoint you,” she said, setting the bag down on the coffee table to search more thoroughly, “but this bikini looks very cute on me and I will be wearing it.”

At Malfoy’s silence, she straightened back up.

“You disagree?” she asked, running a finger over the curve of one breast. “You don’t think it looks good?”

“Of course it looks good, Granger,” he snapped. “You’re practically naked.”

“Oh, I see,” she said, stepping closer and trailing her fingers down over her stomach, onto the little bottoms. “Is it the bond? Is it making you terribly uncomfortable with the idea of dozens of strange men seeing me like this?”

He swallowed roughly, eyes on her hand, and then gave a jerky nod.

Hermione pushed up onto her toes and kissed him gently on the corner of the mouth.

“Good.”

He let out a pathetic whimper, highly reminiscent of the one he had dragged from her earlier, and she patted his cheek affectionately.

“No killing anyone.”

“No promises,” he grumbled.

Hermione turned back to her bag and pulled on a sundress, shooting him a sideways glance.

He shook his head. “Good to know you enjoy torturing me, too.”

“Only emotionally,” Hermione said, finally producing the sunscreen. “I don’t fancy being married to a lobster, so take off your shirt and turn around.”

After the promised ten minutes, Hermione knocked on the neighbour’s front door.

Gemma opened it at once, her mother hot on her heels.

“You’re a lifesaver,” the older woman proclaimed, reaching out to grip Hermione’s arm.
“Thank you so—oh.” She broke off as she spotted Malfoy.

“Maureen, this is my... *husband*, Draco Malfoy. Mal—er, Draco, this is Gemma’s mum, Maureen Walsh.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Malfoy said, holding out a hand.

Maureen shook it numbly, glancing between them. Hermione shifted on her feet.

“I’m sorry,” the woman said after a moment, giving a shocked little laugh. “It’s nice to meet you too, I just—when Gemma said Hermione had married someone—named Draco no less—I, well.”

She left off shaking his hand and looked back at Hermione. “You know she has such an imagination, I never thought—” She placed her hands on her hips, looking suddenly stern. “Hermione.”

Hermione winced, knowing that the other woman had picked up on the grave oversight that Gemma had missed as a child. Undoubtedly, the whole family should have been invited to the wedding.

“It’s a bit of a long story,” Hermione said.

Maureen's eyes dropped very obviously to her midsection. Lack of subtlety rather ran in the family.

"Nothing like that," Hermione said firmly, crossing her arms. "It was just fast. And the wedding was extremely small. Just us."

"Hm." Maureen seemed unconvinced, but to her credit, she smiled warmly at Malfoy. "Well, you're a very lucky young man. Hermione is quite the catch."

Malfoy returned the smile, placing his hand on Hermione's back. "That she is."

"Mum," Gemma complained from below the conversation. "Can we go now?"

"Yes, all right. Off with you," she said fondly, shooing them with her hands.

Gemma ran down the drive and immediately climbed into the backseat of the car Hermione had decided to keep after her parents left.

"Just pull on the handle," she told Malfoy as he stood awkwardly next to the passenger side.

He did, sliding into the seat through the open door.

Hermione turned to check that Gemma was buckled and then, smiling to herself, reached over Malfoy to draw the seatbelt across him.

He watched as she snapped the buckle into place on his seat but seemed to realise that this wasn't the time to ask questions about it.

"Why are you driving, Hermione?" Gemma asked as Hermione backed out onto the street.

Hermione smirked. "Well, unfortunately, since it's not feasible for Draco to *waltz* us there, it's down to me." She met Gemma's eye in the rearview mirror and gave her a wink. "I'm first best at driving."

The little girl looked deeply impressed, and Hermione considered it a win for feminism.

That win was short-lived, however. The pool was crowded, and the second Hermione removed her dress, Malfoy looked on the verge of having a complete breakdown.

"Put these on," Hermione snapped, shoving a spare pair of dark sunglasses into his hand as Gemma ran to jump in the pool. "And quit looking at me like a bloody caveman."

His lips pressed into a thin line, but he put on the glasses. Hermione tied her hair up into a bun, and Malfoy seemed much more relaxed once they were in the water and her body was

largely obscured from view.

Gemma was inexhaustible, as usual, and she spent the first half-hour demonstrating all of the techniques she had learned in her swim lessons. The second half-hour was spent challenging each of them to various contests: who could hold their breath the longest, who could swim the fastest, who could float the floatiest. The third half-hour was spent with Malfoy repeatedly lifting Gemma to sit on his shoulders so that she could shriek with surprise whenever he pushed her off again.

Thankfully, in the fourth half-hour, several kids from Gemma's school arrived, and Hermione and Malfoy were quickly ditched for newer and more exciting prospects.

Hermione was resting with her elbows on the edge of the pool—reading a book she had protected with a very subtle impervious charm—when she felt Malfoy lean against her back with a sigh.

"I don't think I ever had that much energy," Hermione said in commiseration.

"I'm sure you did when you were *almost nine*."

She smiled at his impression of Gemma's self-important chirp. "She's been saying it like that for months, and she still has nearly four to go."

"Surely you can relate to that," he murmured against her shoulder. "Or were you not planning to be the youngest ever Minister for Magic as soon as you found out that was something you could be?"

She hummed. "That I was. Until a horrible little boy came along and told me my place."

"Is that right?" he asked, twining his arms around her waist.

"Yes. Then I was determined to do it even sooner."

He pressed a chaste kiss to her neck, making her shiver. "You're welcome."

"Don't thank yourself yet," she groused. "I only have twelve years left, and now I'll have our three mandated children to consider."

She quickly ran the numbers in her head. The Ministry allotted one year to get pregnant with the first; three years after that for the second; and five years after that for the third. She would still have three kids under the age of ten by then.

"I'll help you, of course," Malfoy said. "My parents always dreamed of seeing a Minister Malfoy, but they really should have been more specific."

Hermione smiled in spite of herself. "And you'd be content to be Mr Minister Malfoy, would you?"

"Let someone else do all the hard work while I skate by on the name?" he mused. "Sounds like what I was born for."

She closed the book and turned to face him, casting a glance at Gemma who was currently leading an army in battle against a giant inflatable seahorse. “I find it slightly concerning that you don’t think raising our children will be hard work. Has the last week taught you nothing?”

“In fact, it has,” he said smugly, kissing the tip of her nose. “I’ve learned that children are strange but also rather fun. Plus, I’m sure Gemma will make an excellent baby-sitter someday.”

Hermione sucked in a short breath. It was easy to joke about becoming Minister—a dream she had long since changed her mind about—and even easier to joke about being Minister *Malfoy*. If she ever did end up with the top job somehow, she would snap her wand before she let a single placard be printed without the name Granger.

Surprisingly, it was also somewhat easy to joke about the three hypothetical children they would someday have together. Even if that day was far sooner than Hermione ever expected and the hypothetical father was no longer hypothetical but... entirely inevitable.

But for some reason, his implication that Gemma would still be their neighbour in ten years' time had Hermione's chest constricting painfully.

“What?” he asked, his eyes searching her face.

“You—you want to stay in the house?”

He seemed confused at the suggestion that they might do otherwise. “Don’t you?”

“Well, yes, but...” she trailed off, shaking her head. “I don’t know. I always assumed at some point you would want to go back to the Manor.”

“I didn’t think you would ever want to return there.”

“I don’t really,” Hermione said honestly. “But I will have to at some point, right? I mean, you’ll want your children to at least visit where you grew up?”

He nodded slowly, seeming to consider. “I suppose so, but for now, I like your house.” Hermione smiled, and he leaned down to whisper against her ear. “Though eventually we will probably need to share a bedroom. To make space for the children, you know.”

Her cheeks heated as the reality of their current situation flooded back in. “Yes, well, perhaps we can discuss that in a few days.”

Malfoy’s hands tightened on her hips. “Three days, maybe?”

“Give or take,” she breathed.

He pressed a kiss to her cheek. “It’s a date.”

As it turned out, the only thing more inexhaustible than Gemma's energy supply was her appetite. Though she had eaten her way through the fruit snacks and granola bars Hermione had packed by the time the pool closed, they still made a call to Maureen asking if they could stop for hamburgers on the way home.

"That was Caleb," Gemma said around a mouthful of chips, halfway through a story about one of the boys from the pool. "He lives up the street. We could ride our bikes there tomorrow if you want to see."

Hermione bit back a smile at Malfoy's slightly panicked expression.

"I don't think Draco knows how to ride a bicycle," she said gently.

Gemma looked perplexed. "You don't?"

He shrugged, taking another bite of hamburger and looking put out.

"Well, my dad taught me," Gemma said consideringly. "But you might be too old to learn now."

Hermione stifled a laugh.

"We could watch TV instead," she offered.

"I've watched things on the television," Malfoy announced proudly, as though he was happy to have something to contribute. "Shows and a movie."

"What's your favourite movie?" Gemma asked.

He looked put out again. "Well, I wouldn't say I have a favourite," he muttered, picking morosely at his chips.

"Mine's *101 Dalmatians*."

Malfoy choked. "Really, Granger?" he said, looking absolutely outraged. "You showed her your dog murder movie?"

"It's not *mine*, and it's not as bad as I made it sound," she said quickly. "It's more dog attempted murder."

His face went flat as though that was hardly better.

"Not even that!" she quickly amended. "Conspiracy to commit dog murder is what it is. Mostly."

Gemma glanced back and forth between them and then said, “I always wanted a dog, but Mum said no.”

Hermione gave a sympathetic hum, sipping on her milkshake as Malfoy finished his burger in scandalised silence.

When they reached the motorway, Hermione lowered the windows at Gemma’s request, and the little girl giggled as their hair was tossed about in the buffeting currents. Hermione looked sideways at Malfoy and met his surprised smile with one of her own. Blonde strands flickered in front of his eyes as he stretched a hand out the window, testing the air resistance against his palm. The sun was only just beginning to sink in the cinnamon sky beyond, and Hermione breathed deep and slow as the warm light washed over another interminable summer day.

As the car turned onto their street, Hermione smiled fondly in the rearview mirror at Gemma’s lolling head. She pulled into the drive and shut off the engine, turning in her seat to look. Malfoy did the same, and he chuckled at the sight of the girl sleeping with her neck bent at an impossible angle.

“That looks horribly uncomfortable,” he said quietly.

“Well, you know how it is. You’re indestructible when you’re *almost nine*. ”

They got out of the car, closing the doors as quietly as possible, and Hermione helped to extricate Gemma from the seatbelt as Malfoy gathered her into his arms. She clung to him instinctively, looking like a koala with her head resting on his shoulder. Hermione tucked an auburn strand behind Gemma’s ear as they waited for Maureen to answer the door.

When she did, her face broke into a soft smile.

“Thank you,” she whispered, stepping forward so Malfoy could transfer Gemma into her arms. “She’s going to be too big for this soon,” she said as she hitched the girl up onto her hip. “And I’m going to miss it.”

Hermione leaned inside the door to set down the bag with Gemma’s swim things and said softly, “Me too.”

As soon as they were inside the house, Hermione stripped off her sundress and put the damp garment in the hamper next to the wash. When she turned back around, Malfoy was staring at her bikini again.

“I just need you to know that you are a bloody hazard to public safety in that thing.”

“Well, I’m very impressed with your restraint,” she said blithely. “Though I was a touch worried that your face might stick permanently in a scowl.”

“I’m not scowling now.”

And he wasn’t.

Instead, he was looking at her like she was something he rather wanted to devour. Gooseflesh rippled over her skin as she became aware of the chilly air against her, and she was sure that he could see her nipples harden through the thin fabric.

He took a step toward her and she swallowed. “Do you want to watch something before bed?”

He paused and then nodded. “All right.”

“Okay,” Hermione said. “We can just, erm, get changed first?”

“Sure.”

He didn’t move, so she was forced to pass by him on her way out of the kitchen, and she was intensely aware of the fact that he was following her up the stairs. She could practically feel his eyes on her arse as it shifted back and forth with each step.

She didn’t look back at him when she reached the landing but just continued down the hall to their rooms. She was reaching for the handle of her door when he spoke.

“Fuck.”

Perhaps *spoke* wasn’t exactly the right word for what he did, but that was the syllable that fell from his lips as he grabbed her by the hips and pulled her back against him.

“Fuck, I thought I could take it,” he said roughly against the back of her neck. “But I can’t.”

Hermione braced her hands against her door as her eyes dropped closed and heat flooded through her belly. “Take what?” she gasped as his teeth scraped over her shoulder.

His hand came up to tangle in the ties at her back. “Knowing that you’re about to walk into that room and tug on these little strings and let those tiny scraps of fabric barely covering your fucking tits fall onto the floor.”

She pressed her lips together to stifle a moan as that image and those words sent a jolt of arousal through her cunt.

“Go ahead,” she breathed.

He paused with his lips on her neck, and she felt his head draw back.

“What?”

“Go ahead and pull the strings,” she said.

“Granger—”

“If you want,” she added.

“*Fuck.*”

She felt him pull away just enough to watch the bow unravel as he slowly pulled one end of the tie across her back. She was practically panting by the time the knot gave, and he groaned as he smoothed his palm up over the bare expanse of skin.

“Now the other,” she said, leaning forward to brace her head on her forearms against the door.

“Fucking hell,” he murmured as his fingers closed over the tie at her neck. He pulled it straight down, his knuckles grazing the length of her spine as he went, and she felt like she might burst into flames before it finally pulled free.

Though that was nothing compared to how she felt when the strap actually unravelled, the fabric slipping off of her chest and landing on the floor in front of her with a barely audible rustle.

Malfoy’s breaths were heavy against the back of her neck, and she could feel his forehead pressed against her hair. He wasn’t looking. He could have easily looked over her shoulder, but he didn’t, and somehow that made the whole thing even more unbearable.

“Go ahead,” she whispered again.

“Fucking *Merlin*, Granger,” he groaned. But she didn’t have to tell him twice this time.

His hands trailed slowly up over her ribs, sliding forward, and finally, coming up to cup her breasts.

“Oh, god,” she moaned as his thumbs grazed over her nipples. They were painfully hard with arousal and the chill of the damp cloth she’d been wearing, and she arched into his touch as he circled them.

“*Fuck,*” she whined, pressing back against him.

“Gods, you’re gonna kill me, Granger,” he said. “How do you expect me to—” He broke off on a groan as he let the weight of her breasts fill his hands. “With these fucking tits.” One hand slid down her cleavage, his fingers tracing the ridge of her scar. “And this fucking tattoo.”

Oh, fuck. She had suspected he liked it, but hearing that was like warm honey in her veins.

She rocked her arse back into his hips as his fingers touched and teased her, and suddenly, she realised she was seeking a rhythm against him. Maybe if she bent over far enough she could feel—

No. No, no. None of that. She needed to regain the upper hand somehow.

“Malfoy?”

“Yeah?”

“If you’re ready before me, why don’t you pick out the movie?”

His hands paused in their perusal of her chest as he tried to digest her words.

“W-What?”

“You still want to watch one, right?”

His hands dropped to her hips, and he pressed his face into her hair. “Fuck, I mean—sure—if you want. Fuck.”

She reached for the door handle and pushed it open, stepping into her room and turning to give him an unobstructed view of her breasts for one second.

“Great.”

Then she closed the door in his dumbstruck face.

When Hermione heard the floorboard creak between their rooms, she waited another minute before poking her head out of the door. She could see light flickering over the bottom of the stairs from the TV, and she crept across the hall and pushed open Malfoy’s door.

She hadn’t really known what to expect, but there wasn’t anything extraordinary about his presence in the space. The walls were the same neutral beige as her room, the linens the same slate grey as they had been the first day. The only indication that someone magical had taken up residence was a miniature potions laboratory set up along the back wall. But even that was extremely tidy and so well contained that it didn’t seem out of place among the rest of the Muggle decor.

Hermione pulled open a few drawers of his bureau, quickly finding what she was looking for and closing them again. She poked and prodded at a few of the personal effects around the room, and then ventured into the en suite.

It was also exceptionally tidy, and she noted that the shaving kit looked recently used. She hadn't considered it before, but any time she had touched his face, it was completely smooth—even when they had kissed late the other evening.

Her head shook slightly with bemusement to think that he was in the habit of shaving twice a day—how very *Malfoy*—but no sooner had the thought crossed her mind than an accompanying one steamrolled after it. A very *vivid* thought about how delicious it would be to feel that smooth skin against her nipples or her thighs.

She quickly turned to leave the room but caught sight of the sign Malfoy had mentioned above his toilet. Sure enough, a cheerful little wreath of flowers and greenery surrounded the words *hello, gorgeous* in flamboyant calligraphy.

Smirking to herself, Hermione quickly snuck down the hall and replaced the sign with one from her parent's room that she thought might serve to help temper his ego.

Enjoy the little things.

When Hermione stepped into view of the sofa, the double-take that Malfoy performed was well worth the *SLYTHERIN* currently emblazoned across her chest.

His mouth dropped open in shock as he took in the sight of her standing there in his t-shirt, her bare legs extending from beneath it.

She gave him a satisfied smirk as she settled next to him on the cushions and nestled into his side.

“Comfy?” he asked, still watching her.

“Very, thank you,” she answered, stretching her arm across the front of his waist. He didn’t have much room to talk seeing as he was shirtless and in the green sweatpants again. In fact, their outfits were each one-half of a matched set.

“What are we watching?” she asked with amusement when he simply continued staring.

“I’ve forgotten the name,” he said, “but I can already tell you it’s going to be my new favourite movie.”

“I thought you didn’t have a favourite.”

His fingers trailed along the hem of the shirt, brushing over her bare thigh. “I do now.”

It turned out that his new favourite movie was to be *The Lion King*. Hermione privately thought that Gemma would be thrilled to find out, though maybe they could gloss over what

had been the deciding factor in elevating it to the top of his list.

Hermione found it quite adorable that he had been drawn to another children's movie, but it turned out to be a great benefit. Malfoy was much less perplexed by the inner workings of the fictional animal society than he had been by the world of American beauty pageants, which actually made a lot of sense. Hermione decided that it would be better to sprinkle in the films containing more complex or foreign Muggle concepts. Luckily, her Disney collection was very robust—they would have plenty to fill out the bulk of the programming lineup.

As they watched, Hermione found herself leaning further and further against Malfoy with the exhaustion of the day. Finally, she decided to give it up and simply lay down with her head on the sofa armrest and her feet tucked against his thigh. He gave her a smile as he pulled her feet onto his lap.

"*Ohh,*" she moaned loudly as he dug his thumb into the arch of her foot, pressing hard.

He paused, glancing back over at her with raised brows.

"Sorry," she mumbled. "That... feels nice."

He resumed his rubbing, looking amused. "Don't be sorry, but... you remember what I said about faking it?"

"I wasn't!" she insisted. "I just wasn't expecting it."

"If you say so."

He continued massaging her feet, and slowly one hand drifted to her ankles. She tried to keep her noises to a minimum, but as he squeezed over her sore calves, she couldn't restrain the contented hum she gave. Plus, she didn't want him to think she wasn't enjoying it and stop. Especially when he reached her thigh, kneading firmly just above her knee. His hands were so big, but she could hardly believe the strength of them as he worked over her tired muscles like it was nothing.

By the time she realised that the brush of his fingertips over her inner thighs was making her breaths draw shallow, his hands were nearly at the hem of the shirt. Regardless, it felt like the most natural thing in the world to roll onto her back and move one leg behind him, bracketing his hips.

Malfoy turned on the sofa to face her, drawing one knee up under him as he did so, and though Hermione felt slightly guilty about the idea of snogging so soon after Mufasa's death, really isn't that what the circle of life is all about?

Her heart pounded as Malfoy's hands slid upward, bunching the shirt around her hips, and she broke into a grin at the look on his face as he registered the black boxer-briefs she was wearing underneath.

She had seen people described as looking *feral* before, but that was the first time she had ever witnessed it first-hand. His eyes darkened and his nostrils flared. His teeth sank into his

bottom lip and his fingers dug into her thighs.

"Granger," he croaked in a broken voice as he slid one palm up over the fabric covering her.
"These are mine."

Hermione tsked. "I never knew my husband was such a hypocrite," she said, giving him a coy smile. "They're mine now, too."

He groaned, shoving the shirt up to her ribs and smoothing his hand over the skin of her stomach.

"Merlin, witch, you really are going to kill me."

"Maybe that's been my plan all along," she whispered.

His hand slipped up under the shirt, and she let out an uneven sigh as his fingers found her nipple again. "It's fucking working."

Her hips rolled, and he shifted forward until her thighs were draped over his. She licked her lips as her eyes traced over the planes of his chest, his stomach, and when he braced his hand by her head and leaned over her, she trailed her fingers up along his arm.

He kissed her slow and deep, pressing her head back against the cushion, but when she tried to return it, he drew back. He was just out of her reach, and her neck strained as she tried to chase his lips. She sighed when he leaned back in again, but he only ran his tongue across her lips, pecking them with teasing kisses. She whined, and he smirked as her hips twitched against him.

"Open your mouth," he said.

She did it at once, hoping he would kiss her properly after. She was entirely unprepared for the flood of pleasure that would rush through her when he licked hard across her exposed tongue.

A moan echoed into his mouth as he closed it over hers, and she kissed him desperately, arching up beneath him.

"You like that?" he asked.

She didn't answer but moaned again as his hand moved under the shirt, teasing her other nipple.

"I think you do," he told her. His open mouth hovered over hers as though he wanted to breathe in the sounds escaping her. He didn't kiss her, but their lips caught against each other as she writhed beneath him. The cool, fresh scent of his aftershave was tinged with just the faintest hint of lingering chlorine, and she had never smelled anything so intoxicating.

Heat pulsed through her cunt as he rubbed and pressed over her nipple. She wondered what she would have to do to get his mouth on it.

Ask, her brain supplied helpfully. But that seemed far too difficult. So, she stuck out her tongue and he licked across that instead.

She gave a ridiculous groaning whimper as her cunt clenched, but she had never felt anything like that before. She had kissed with tongue, of course, but never in such a filthy, wanton manner. It made her feel like he would do anything she wanted. If she could only find the words...

“You like the way I touch you?” he asked against her lips.

She nodded fervently.

“Here?” He pinched her nipple.

“Yes,” she panted.

“And here?” He bit down on her lip.

“Yes, *fuck*.”

“You want me to touch you somewhere else?”

A moan tore out of her throat as he rocked his hips forward and she felt him hard against her center. She was wet—ready—she could feel the dampness as he pressed against her.

“Yes,” she said again.

He sat back onto his heels, his hands trailing slowly down over her front. The shirt was still covering her breasts, and she wondered if he had left it like that for her comfort. Or maybe, he found being able to feel but not see as hot as she did.

She suspected that might be the case when he ran his fingers gently under the flap of fabric covering the opening in the front of the shorts she wore.

“You know the thing about wearing my underwear, Granger, is that they come with easy access.”

She sucked in a shaky breath as his thumb brushed over her swollen clit through the thin material.

“Want me to touch you properly, princess?”

“Don’t call me that,” she whimpered as he repeated the same teasing stroke.

He smirked. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Fuckfuckfuck. Her entire body came alight as he moved the fabric enough to press directly onto her clit. Her knees fell open and her hips lifted in an involuntary thrust against his thumb.

“Time to tell me what you like,” he whispered.

Her eyes squeezed shut at the thought. It felt so good already, just having him touch her there. But she knew it wouldn’t be enough. She thought about what she would do if she was alone.

“W-wet,” she said after a moment. “I like it wet.”

His hand came up to his mouth at once, and she watched as he placed a generous amount of saliva on his fingertips. She was tempted to mention that he would find she was perfectly wet if he checked a few centimeters lower, but then the warmth of it slid over her, and she nearly saw stars.

“Good girl.”

Her cheeks burned at that endearment, but for some reason, it never occurred to her to tell him not to call her that. Especially as his thumb began to glide across her slick skin, circling her gently.

“What else?”

Her hands gripped his forearms, her fingers digging in. “Slow,” she told him. “Slower—and
—”

She broke off on a moan as he slowed his pace.

“And?” he prompted.

Her hips rolled again, dragging herself under his touch the way she liked.

“Up and down,” she said, imitating the movement with her thumb on his arm. “Right over top of it.”

His eyes glittered as he stared down at her, and he licked his lips before touching her the way she described.

Oh, motherfucking fuck. Her eyes nearly rolled back in her head as he pressed perfectly over her. She could feel the swollen nub catching against the pad of his finger on every smooth stroke, and her cunt clenched desperately, begging to be filled.

“Fucking perfect,” he said, sounding almost in awe.

“Yes,” she couldn’t help but agree.

He added another dollop of spit onto her before he leaned forward again, planting his free hand next to her head and keeping up the same motion as he pressed his erection against her.

“Oh, my god,” she moaned as she felt the head of his cock nudge against her entrance through their clothes. She had soaked through his underwear, which was stupid fucking hot, and the little grunt of pleasure he let out as he pushed against her went straight to her core.

“More,” she begged.

It was a terribly vague instruction, which she immediately realised when he pressed harder onto her clit.

“No, no,” she said frantically—his pressure had been perfect before. “I meant more like...” Words were eluding her so she demonstrated again, sliding her thumb against his arm in a wider stroke, covering more distance on each pass.

He quickly followed her example, his thumb sliding higher over her hood and then gliding down to the top of her slit.

“Oh, fuck—oh my—*god*—”

“Like that?” he asked, lips brushing hers as he slowly rocked against her.

“Yes, *fuck*.”

“Right there?”

“Uh-huh.” She felt like crying as he licked over her lips again.

“That’s what you need?”

“Yes, *please*—”

The pleasure was tightening within her, drawing taut like a sting with every pass, and she sank into it, moving with him.

“Would this work?”

Her eyes popped open as she registered that question. *Would this make her come?*

“Yes,” she whispered.

It was perfect, but... was she really about to have an orgasm? With him staring at her, completely lucid, not even caught up in his own pleasure? An orgasm right there in the sitting room with all the lights on and fucking *Hakuna Matata* playing in the background?

His hand slowed to a stop, and he smiled. “Good.”

Then he stood from the sofa.

“W-What?” she gasped, watching as he adjusted himself in his sweatpants. He smirked down at the wet spot staining the front.

He didn’t answer but walked out of the room and into the kitchen.

Hermione stared up at the ceiling, panting heavily, cunt twitching with unfulfilled anticipation.

“I think that warrants an eight, don’t you?” he called.

Her teeth ground together. “Seven,” she called back.

He chuckled. “Absolutely not.”

“Seven and a half,” she conceded. It was quite a bit further than they had gone before, and she *had been* about to come. Maybe.

He appeared behind her head, leaning over the armrest of the sofa. “Eight.” He kissed her soundly and then said, “Goodnight.”

Hermione seriously doubted that it would be.



Chapter End Notes

They say following a WIP is like getting edged right? ;)

Thank you so much for reading!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

You can also find me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 12

Chapter Notes

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

Despite everything, Hermione woke on the twelfth day feeling particularly pleased with herself.

After Malfoy had left her high and dry, she rushed up to her room and crawled into bed. But not before retrieving her trusty vibrator.

Just because her *husband* didn't seem particularly bothered with finishing the job, there was no reason she couldn't take care of it herself. That's what she had been doing for a long while anyway.

Of course, normally she wasn't exactly shaking with need when the mood struck. It was more likely to be boredom. Or trouble sleeping.

But as she slipped the silicone into the opening of the boxers, and it slid inside her with ease, she couldn't help thinking *this* was how it was supposed to be. Her body had thrummed with pleasure, her walls gripping it greedily, and she flipped the switch.

The vibration had seemed incredibly loud in the silent house, and she Summoned her wand to her hand immediately, casting a hasty silencing charm. She didn't know if it was actually loud, or if it was just that fact that she had never used it with someone else in the house before, but either way, with a cloak of privacy cast over her, she was free to indulge to her heart's content.

It hadn't been difficult at all to build the pleasure back up; Malfoy had done an exceptional job of bringing her to the edge. Though, of course, some credit should surely go to the exceptional guidance he had received. Feeling smug, Hermione had slicked up her fingers with spit and mimicked the way he touched her clit as she worked the vibrator in and out in a matching thrust.

She didn't try to hold back the moans that spilled from her mouth as she fucked herself. She might have even allowed a sighed *yes* or two to slip out as she remembered the way Malfoy had asked her, *like that?* and *right there?*

It had been intimidating to look up and see those grey eyes watching her with such intensity as he touched her. Even though they had been burning with arousal, and clearly his erection had indicated he was enjoying himself, she had spent so long assuming that he would never look at her with anything but disgust.

In the safety of her mind, however, it was easy to picture him looking at her and thinking that she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Maybe next time she would take off her shirt since she knew he liked her tattoo.

Fuck, maybe he would lick it like he had done her tongue. Gods, why was that so hot? Surely something was wrong with her, but even just thinking about it made her hips twitch. Yes, she would definitely take off her shirt, and *fuck* the way he would look at her then. Maybe he would call her a good girl again. Maybe he would put his mouth on her. *Oh, yes*, he would suck on her nipple while he stroked her clit and his cock—

She had come with a cry, shoulders lifting off the mattress with the spine-bending strength of her orgasm.

“Holy Christ in Heaven,” she had breathed, rolling onto her stomach and grinding against the mattress through the rest of the aftershocks until she fell into a sleep bordering on comatose.

Now, laying there in the light of day, Hermione was willing to admit that she had never pictured something so vividly while she pleasured herself before. That knowledge was making her slightly hesitant to venture down into the house where she would be forced to face the object of her fantasy. Especially considering that it hadn’t really been a fantasy at all.

She tossed back the covers and swung her feet out of bed, reminding herself that he didn’t need to know what she had done after he left her alone.

Malfoy was already seated at the kitchen table when she entered, tucking into quite the impressive spread. Courtesy of Nilly, Hermione assumed.

“Good morning,” she said brightly, though she did allow herself a small scowl at the chalkboard—boldly proclaiming: **8**.

“Indeed, it is,” Malfoy said, regarding her over the rim of his orange juice. “How did you sleep?”

“Never better,” she said smugly. “You?”

“Great,” he answered. Then added, “Eventually,” with a smirk.

“Had some trouble, did you?” She served herself a slice of french toast from the platter between them, hoping he had been up all night with blue balls.

“Not exactly.”

She glanced up, but he didn’t seem inclined to elaborate. She shrugged and munched on a slice of bacon.

After another moment, however, he cleared his throat. “In the interest of trust,” he began, setting down his juice. “I need to tell you something.”

Hermione paused in her chewing, and then swallowed roughly. Her pulse seemed to trip in her veins.

“Oh?”

He dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. “I think your magic might be destabilised from the incomplete core bond... because your silencing charms are rubbish.”

Hermione blinked.

“Excuse me?”

He pursed his lips and then grimaced as if saying, *sorry I had to be the one to tell you*.

She felt her face burn crimson, a shocking contrast to the cold panic that was spreading through her gut.

“Y-You heard me?”

He nodded.

She dropped her eyes to the table, hands clenched in her lap. “Oh, my god.”

“No need to be embarrassed.”

Her head shot back up. “No need? *No need*?!”

“It certainly didn’t bother me.”

Her mouth dropped open. “And I suppose it never occurred to you to silence my room! Or I don’t know... not listen?”

He smirked. “Definitely not.”

“Ugh!” She tossed her napkin down on the table. “This never would have happened if *you* had made me come—”

“Oh, but I did,” he said with a grin. “Didn’t I?”

She gaped at him. *Of all the arrogant, egotistical—*

Her eyes dropped back to the table as she realised it was true. While she had done the same procedure she normally used to bring herself off, imagining Malfoy doing those things to her had given her an orgasm unlike anything she had ever achieved on her own. Not to mention with anyone else.

As she looked back up at the self-satisfied twinkle in his stupid eyes, another realisation struck her.

“You did that on purpose!” she gasped.

He folded his lips between his teeth as though to suppress a smile. “It worked, didn’t it?”

“It would have worked before, too!”

“No, it wouldn’t have,” he said, shaking his head lightly. “You’re not ready.”

“I’ll bloody decide when I’m ready or not!” she shouted.

“We’re both entitled to our opinions.”

“You absolute arse.” Her palms came down onto the table with a judder as she got to her feet.

Where did he get the audacity? As if his opinion on what she might or might not be ready for held anywhere near the weight that hers did.

She stormed out of the kitchen and back up the stairs, slamming her door shut behind her. She paced across the room for several laps before she realised she hadn’t made any coffee. The last thing she needed was a caffeine headache on top of everything else and she wrenched the door back open, nearly barrelling straight into Malfoy in the hall.

“I got off, too,” he said casually, holding out a cup of coffee to her. “In case you were curious.”

“I wasn’t,” she snapped, snatching the cup from him and immediately returning to her room.

She took a large sip of the coffee, grimaced at how perfectly prepared it was, and then yelled, “Thank you,” through the closed door. She wasn’t a *complete* bitch.

“Anything for you, angel.”

Her lips quirked, but she pressed them tightly together. “Please, don’t call me that,” she said quietly, leaning back against the door.

“Never again,” he promised, and she wished that she hated the smile she could hear in his voice.

After Malfoy left her with the coffee, Hermione continued her pacing. She really *hadn’t* been curious about whether he had got off last night; she hadn’t considered it at all. But now that she knew he *had*, curious was the only word to describe how she felt about it.

It made sense. He had been hard. Obviously he would have needed to take care of it. She wondered if he had already decided to do that before he heard her. He had said it didn’t bother him to hear, but had he liked it? Had it helped him get off? Despite her embarrassment

at being overheard—and her outrage at him dictating whether or not she should try to come with him—she couldn't deny that the thought of him being turned on by hearing her was deeply satisfying.

She knew he had to be at least somewhat pleased with how she looked. He had certainly liked seeing her in the bikini—privately at least. But maybe that was just the overall revealing nature of the outfit. When she had expressed concern about him being able to get hard, he had assured her that he would have everything he needed with her. But what if any naked girl would be what he needed? Although she hadn't been naked last night. In fact, he had left her completely covered.

It would be nice to know one way or the other.

She knocked on his door.

He seemed surprised when he opened it to let her in, and she felt unaccountably nervous as she stepped past him. She loitered in the space in front of the door, and he sat on the edge of the bed, looking expectant.

"I was just—well." She swallowed, looking away from him. "I was wondering about last night. When you said you got off, as well. Were you—I mean—what did you think about?"

He was silent for a moment, and she glanced up, finding his brow furrowed in confusion.
"Do you mean specifically?"

"Erm, yes," she said.

He seemed to consider and then flexed his hands where they rested on his thighs. "Well, I was thinking of how sexy you looked wearing my clothes; the fucking filthy way you like to be kissed—you sticking your tongue out for me; your nipples showing through the fabric of my shirt like a little tease of what I'll get to see when you show me them properly; the sounds you made as I played with your clit; the fact that I didn't know someone could actually be that wet; and mostly, how badly I wanted to drag that underwear off, sink my cock into you, and fuck you into the sofa."

Hermione stared at him, trying unsuccessfully to draw breath as her heart galloped below her ribs.

"Is that specific enough?" he asked.

She nodded numbly. "Y-Yes, that's—very helpful. Thank you."

He watched her for another moment before quirking a brow. "Was there something else?"

"No," she said vaguely, taking a step toward him. "I just..." She trailed off as she closed the space between them, coming to stand between his legs. In truth, she didn't really know what she wanted until she was climbing onto his lap.

"I just wanted to show you them properly," she said quietly when she settled with her knees bracketing his hips.

He had followed her progress with his eyes, and his hands came instinctively to her hips, sliding over the loose fabric of her shorts.

“Yeah?” he asked.

“If you want,” she added.

He squeezed the cheeks of her arse, pulling her against him, and she gasped when she felt him hard already.

“I want,” he said in a low voice.

She raised her arms. “Then go ahead.”

He smiled as his hands swept up along her sides, drawing the t-shirt up and over her head. She watched his eyes drop to her chest, scanning over the cups of her bra. She reached behind her back and unclasped it before slowly pulling it off and dropping it onto the floor.

His eyes were hot on her skin, taking in every inch of her bare flesh, and she was moments away from reaching up to cover herself when his hand smoothed up over her stomach.

He touched her tenderly, just brushes of his fingertips, but her entire body shuddered at the contact. His other hand came up as well, and he cupped her breasts as though savouring the fit in his palms.

“Fuck,” he breathed, letting her nipples slide between his fingers.

Hermione kissed him then, wrapping her arms around his neck and rolling her hips against his erection. He groaned into her mouth, pinching and plucking at her chest until she was whimpering.

“Like that?” he asked, breaking the kiss, and she thought those might be her two new favourite words.

“Yes,” she breathed. “And—”

She cried out as his hands squeezed her arse again, his fingertips slipping up under the fabric to tease between her legs.

“And?” he asked.

Her head rolled on her neck as he rocked her against him, her nipples grazing over his chest.

“And... I like—ah—your mouth.”

“I know you do,” he said, kissing her again. She whined as he dragged her bottom lip between his teeth.

“Here,” she amended, bringing both hands up to cover her nipples with her fingers.

“Here?” He pressed a chaste kiss to the curve of one breast.

“Yes,” she breathed.

“What about under here?” he asked, kissing over her hands.

She nodded, slowly spreading her fingers, and his tongue immediately slipped between them.

“Oh, fuck,” she gasped, watching as he teased over the sensitive bud of her nipple. Her hands slid into his hair, and she pressed shamelessly against his mouth as he licked and sucked at her.

Pleasure was building again in her cunt as she rolled her hips against the evidence of his arousal. She thought of what he had said about sinking it into her, and she clenched.

“It feels so good,” she whispered, her cheek bumping against the top of his head. “Fuck, I feel—”

She broke off on a moan as he lifted his head, replacing his mouth with a thumb on each nipple and rubbing slowly over them.

He kissed her deeply before pulling away to watch her face as he touched her. She felt like liquid in his hands, heat flowing through her in currents. Her hips stuttered as she found the perfect angle against her clit.

He was so good at this, she could hardly believe it. Unbidden, the thought suddenly occurred to her that he must have had a lot of practice. Probably with girls a lot prettier than her. He seemed to know exactly what to do, and the thought of him touching someone else like this filled her with a hollow ache.

But of course he would touch someone else like this. Anyone else. Because this was Draco Malfoy, and he wouldn’t even be there if the Ministry hadn’t required it. He never would have looked twice at her. She was writhing in his lap, practically begging him to touch her, probably looking pathetic and desperate, and he hadn’t even chosen her. He would have chosen someone else.

The bond had given her a possessive streak, too, but instead of anger, the thought of him giving someone else the baby that should be hers made her feel like her heart was shrivelling in her chest. It was so irrational. She didn’t even want to have a baby. But she wanted so desperately for him to *want* to give her one. Her and no one else. Ever.

“Hey,” he said gently, one hand coming up to cup her cheek. “Where did you go?”

She squeezed her eyes shut as the pleasure seeped out of her like a leaky balloon.

“I’m sorry,” she said, shaking her head.

His arms circled her back, holding her tight to his chest.

“I don’t think I can do this,” she said brokenly.

“Of course you can.” He reached up to the back of her head and pressed her face into the curve of his neck. She breathed in deeply, taking in the comforting scent. Warm skin and cool aftershave. “We have time.”

“Barely,” she whispered, feeling tears prick her eyes. It was so unfair.

“What’s really wrong?” His hands were smoothing up and down over her back, trying to soothe her, but anger was boiling up in her chest.

“I’m just so mad!” she burst out. “I shouldn’t have to second guess myself because I never should have been forced into a marriage with someone who doesn’t want me. It’s not fair to either of us. It’s fucking cruel and despicable and I—”

She sucked in a long breath, shaking against his chest.

“Who are you mad at?” he asked quietly.

“Kingsley,” she answered at once, mouth twisting around the name. This stupid marriage law had been his pet project. He had paired her with a known enemy without giving her any warning as to the consequences.

“What do you wish would happen to him?”

“I don’t know,” she muttered. “Something bad.”

“I think he should have to suck a dick.”

Hermione sat back at once, glaring at Malfoy. “I’m being serious,” she snapped.

“So am I,” he said gravely. “You don’t think he should have to suck a dick?”

She tsked in annoyance. Of course that was the worst punishment a straight man could come up with. “Maybe he likes sucking dick,” she argued.

“It’s possible,” Malfoy allowed. “But I rather doubt it.”

Hermione doubted it, too. “Fine, yes. He should have to suck a dick. A big one that chokes him.”

“Just one?” Malfoy prompted.

“No,” she said emphatically. “Kingsley should have to suck an entire bag of dicks.”

Malfoy nodded, looking sincere.

“And one of them should come in his eye.”

Malfoy choked out a laugh. “Merlin, Granger.”

“That really hurts,” she insisted, hands going to her hips.

“I’m sure it does,” he said, lips twitching.

“I’m serious,” she said, her own lips quirking. “It’s the fucking worst.”

Malfoy began vibrating with the force of his suppressed laughter. “I don’t doubt it for a second.”

Her own shoulders shook as she tried to contain herself. “He deserves it.”

“Absolutely. The whole bag should come in his eye.”

Hermione slumped forward against his chest as she laughed at the preposterous image. Malfoy’s laughter echoed beneath her, and the warm, rich sound seemed to melt away her anger and doubt. When she wiped at her eyes, for the first time in far too long, it was tears of mirth she swiped away. Eventually, she got herself back under control. When she did, Malfoy picked up her shirt from where he had dropped it on the bed and pulled it back over her head.

“Thank you,” she said as she fished her arms through the sleeves. Ostensibly she meant for the shirt, but as she looked at him, she thought he understood that she meant for everything that had just happened.

He nodded, tucking a curl behind her ear.

“I should go,” she said.

“Are you sure?”

She nodded. “I need to be alone for a little bit.”

He rubbed gently over her legs before leaning forward to kiss her.

“I’ll be here when you need me.”

Hermione gave him a warm smile before standing again and going to the door. She had just stepped over the threshold when he spoke.

“I know it’s my fault.”

She turned back to look at him in surprise, but he was staring at the carpet in front of him.

“I know you aren’t the type of person for whom vulnerability comes easily, and I’m sure you’re just waiting for me to go for the throat. To use anything you’ve shown me against you.”

He raised his eyes to look at her, and Hermione was startled to see them wet. “But you have been vulnerable in front of me before.”

Her eyes darted over his face as she considered his words. The past few minutes had been particularly vulnerable. And when she told him about her parents. Her breakdown at their wedding. The torture at Bellatrix’s hands.

He had been present for some of the worst moments of her life, but for all of the cruelty she'd endured at his hands, he had never used any of those things to taunt her. He had never mentioned them again at all.

"I know it's my fault," he repeated quietly, "that it's easier for you to show me pain rather than pleasure. And I am so sorry for that."

Hermione swallowed against the lump in her throat, giving him a feeble nod. She could feel his eyes on her back as she crossed the hall, and she closed the door to her room behind her before sinking down against it.

Chapter End Notes

I just sprinted out of the lake and came to upload this chapter because I forgot it was a Monday with the holiday, so I hope you enjoyed it! My darling WIP readers, I treasure you and your comments so I will tell you--that's the last false start, I promise! Next chapter is basically 6,000 words of smut (with orgasms lol) so the wait will be rewarded very soon ;)

As always many thanks and much love to [naginiLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta editing.

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 13

Chapter Notes

TW: Description of dub-con sexual fantasies. Hermione ~likes~ hearing about them, but I wanted to warn just in case. What can I say, he was unredeemed.

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

When Hermione entered the sitting room on the morning of the thirteenth day, Malfoy was seated in the armchair by the window.

“Are you... reading the phone book?”

He didn’t look up but casually turned a page. “I am *looking* at the phone book. Very different.”

Hermione bit back a smile. They had discussed the concept of telephones over dinner the night before, even placing a practice call to Gemma. They had stood in the window with their heads pressed together so that Malfoy could listen in on the receiver. He had seemed completely bewildered by the sight of the little girl’s mouth moving in time with the words he was hearing through the strange device. Hermione couldn’t imagine who he might be trying to reach.

“Did you need help finding something?” she asked.

“If I require your assistance, I will ask for it,” he said snootily.

“Suit yourself.”

Hermione left him to it and went into the kitchen.

“Nilly,” she called.

The elf appeared at once, dressed in a pale green pillowcase and with flour up to her elbows.

“Oh!” Hermione said at the sight. “If this is a bad time—I mean, please don’t feel like you have to come right away when I call. I’m sure it won’t ever be an emergency.”

Nilly smiled brightly. “Thank you, Mistress, but Nilly is always happy to come when Mistress calls.”

Hermione looked doubtfully down at the little elf. “But surely you were in the middle of something... Perhaps if it’s very important that I see you right away, I could call twice?”

“Very well!”

Hermione had a feeling that she was being indulged, but there was only so much she could do about it.

“Well, if you aren’t busy, I was thinking about making some breakfast.”

“Oh!” Nilly said. “What is Mistress wanting? Nilly will bring it at once!”

“I’d like to help,” Hermione said firmly. “Or if you’re willing to teach me how to make those little pastry egg cups then you could—”

Hermione broke off at the sound of a throat clearing behind her. She turned to see Malfoy standing in the doorway, and he quickly shook his head.

When she looked back, tears were welling up in Nilly’s eyes.

“Mistress is not wanting to need Nilly’s help anymore?”

Hermione winced. “That’s not it at all. I just wanted to offer—”

“Mistress is already doing her own washing up and making her own bed every day.” The elf gave a small hiccup. “Making the bed is Nilly’s favourite.”

“I didn’t—”

“And now Mistress is wanting to do all her own cooking?” Her eyes were swimming with tears. “Nilly will always remember fondly the times when she was needed.”

“Oh, dear,” Hermione said, grabbing for a tea towel and bending to kneel in front of the elf. “Please don’t cry, Nilly. I didn’t mean to upset you.” She offered the towel and watched as Nilly dabbed at her eyes.

“I promise it’s nothing to do with you,” Hermione went on. “It’s just... I’ve lived in this house by myself for a long time now, and I’m used to doing things on my own.” She swallowed as the elf blinked up at her. “I’m not very good at asking people to do things for me,” she admitted.

Nilly reached forward and gripped Hermione’s shoulders in her little hands. “But this is exactly what Nilly is telling Master,” she said earnestly. “Mistress is needing someone to care for her sometimes.”

Malfoy cleared his throat again, but this time, it was obviously meant as a signal to the elf. Nilly’s brow furrowed resolutely as she spoke over Hermione’s shoulder to Malfoy. “Master could be taking better care of his Mistress, but he is not listening to Nilly when—”

“All right,” Malfoy said, stepping forward. “That is clearly a separate discussion.”

Nilly narrowed her eyes at the interruption, flipping the tea towel over her shoulder before crossing her arms over her chest.

“What your Mistress is trying to do,” Malfoy went on, unperturbed with the glare he was receiving, “is ask you to make her your miniature quiches for breakfast.”

“I am capable of speaking for myself,” Hermione said as she stood to her full height again.

“Not without causing a scene apparently,” Malfoy returned.

Nilly glanced back at Hermione, her expression softening at once. “It would be Nilly’s great pleasure to make miniature quiches for her Mistress.”

Hermione sighed. “If you’re sure it’s not too much trouble...”

The elf gave her a wide grin before disappearing with a crack.

“I know it’s hard for you to accept,” Malfoy said gently, reaching out to brush the flour handprints from Hermione’s shoulders, “but she really does enjoy doing those things. Especially for you.”

Hermione gave a reluctant nod. “I really didn’t mean to upset her.”

“I think she’s still a little sensitive,” he said, looking slightly uncomfortable. “She’s not sure that you want her.”

“I just want her to be happy.”

“Does she seem unhappy to you?”

Hermione smirked. “She didn’t seem particularly happy with you, now that you mention it.”

Malfoy’s cheeks coloured slightly. “Well, perhaps you can understand why I might think she’s not particularly qualified to be giving relationship advice.”

Hermione blinked in surprise. “Relationship?”

Malfoy blinked back. “Yes?”

Hermione opened her mouth to speak but was interrupted by Nilly’s abrupt return.

“Here you are, Mistress!” she proclaimed, brandishing a platter of crisp pastry cups filled with fluffy eggs.

Hermione thanked her, and the three of them set to preparing the table for breakfast. Hermione was pleased to note that Nilly didn’t seem perturbed when she and Malfoy helped to make the place settings or retrieved accompanying items from the refrigerator. Hermione supposed that she should try to allow the elf a little more leeway; it wasn’t as though she insisted on waiting on her hand and foot.

Hermione’s eyes slipped closed on a groan of pleasure as she took her first bite. There really wasn’t much room to complain about Nilly doing the cooking when she delivered such delicious results, and the way her eyes shone as she watched them tuck into the meal

certainly seemed like genuine joy. Hermione resolved to find out what other things brought the elf happiness and accommodate them the best she could.

After Nilly returned to the Manor, Hermione felt Malfoy's eyes on her more than once during their breakfast. She wasn't exactly sure how to address the odd moment that had just occurred between them. It had caught her off guard to hear him refer to their situation as a relationship. Obviously a marriage is a type of relationship and they were married, but... that wasn't something either of them had chosen. Neither of them were willful participants in it.

Her eyes drifted to the chalkboard over his shoulder. It was still marked **8**, making yesterday the first day they hadn't made any progress since they had started over. She knew that Malfoy was treating her a certain way in order to expedite the intimacy between them, and she was grateful for his cooperation. But she couldn't help wondering what things would be like between them afterwards. They would still be required to live together, and they would be expected to conceive, but neither of those things necessitated a real relationship nor even the level of closeness they had already been demonstrating.

It would be somewhat awkward to regress into a sort of pseudo-roommate situation after everything they had done. And Hermione liked the things they had done. And a not-small part of her was very curious about the things they might still do.

But if Malfoy wasn't interested in that—if he was just doing what she needed to *keep her alive* as he had promised—she wasn't sure how she would handle it.

When she glanced up from her plate, he was watching her. He didn't seem inclined to question her though, and Hermione was impressed with the respect he had shown for her request for space. After telling him that she needed to be alone yesterday, they had simply enjoyed dinner together and retired to their separate rooms. He hadn't tried to force any progress, and she was thankful for how well he seemed to be able to read her.

As they cleared up their dishes and presumably prepared to go their separate ways again, Hermione felt the sharp hint of expectancy in the air. Despite Malfoy's insistence that they still had time, she felt stuck. Nothing new had happened to make her ready to be that vulnerable. To let him see her—

She glanced up sharply to find Malfoy watching her again. She shifted on her feet, chewing her lip as she thought about what she wanted to say.

“Are you about to ask someone to do something for you, Hermione?”

A short breath puffed out of her at his teasing tone, but she nodded.

He brought a hand to his chest. “I’m so proud.”

She ignored the way she kind of wished he meant that.

“I know what I need next.”

He waved his hand in an invitation for her to continue and she dropped her eyes to the floor.

“I need to see you first.”

“See me?” he repeated.

She drew in a deep breath before lifting her chin to meet his gaze.

“I need to see you come.”

If Malfoy was surprised by the request, he didn’t show it. His lips pulled into a smirk and he leaned a hip against the counter.

“Are you requesting a special showing or would you like to attend the regularly-scheduled performance tomorrow morning?”

She glanced away again as she felt her cheeks heating at that piece of information. “Well, of course, whenever you’re comfortable, but tomorrow is our last day...”

“Special showing it is.”

Hermione gulped as he stepped forward and took her by the hand. “Right now?”

“Right now.”

He towed her out of the room and pushed her up the stairs. She hesitated on the landing, but he led her insistently to his room, closing the door behind him when he entered.

“Make yourself comfortable,” he said, gesturing to his bed.

Hermione sat uncertainly on the edge, and Malfoy turned to face her. Her fingers twisted in her lap as she ran her eyes over him. The memory of how he had felt beneath her, under her hands, as she’d sat on his lap in that very spot the day before was exceptionally clear in her mind. The solid line of his shoulders, the comforting weight of his arms, the all-encompassing warmth of his body.

Malfoy must have been watching her look at him because he smirked as he reached behind his head to grip the neck of his t-shirt and tug it up and off. The gesture was so aggressively attractive that it felt like a personal attack.

Hermione swallowed heavily as he pulled his belt through the loops with a snap.

“Should I...?” She plucked at her own shirt.

“You don’t have to, but I certainly won’t complain.”

It seemed only fair for her to provide some sort of visual stimulus, so she pulled the garment over her head. Malfoy stared at her as he unfastened his trousers, and her heart thudded in her throat as he stepped out of them.

He was wearing a pair of black boxer-briefs, just like the ones she had borrowed, and already a significant bulge was visible as he dropped his hand over it and squeezed.

She watched the muscles of his thighs shift as he approached her, and Hermione stuck her thumbs beneath the elastic waist of her shorts and shimmied out of them.

Malfoy's eyes widened appreciatively at the sight of her normal cotton knickers, and she squirmed against the bed as he removed the last of his clothes.

She was hardly a connoisseur, but as his cock came into view and he pumped it slowly with his fist, only one word came to the forefront of her mind.

Spectacular.

She drew in a shaky breath as he came to stand directly in front of her.

"What should I do?" she asked, her voice coming out far too soft.

He shook his head as his eyes raked over her body. "You don't need to do anything."

"But—" She shifted. "Will this be en—"

He reached out and gripped her hard at the back of the neck, forcing a muffled gasp of surprise from her lips as he leaned down and covered her mouth with his own. The kiss was punishing, leaving her lips feeling bruised when he wrenched away.

"You are *enough*," he said hotly, emphasising the last word with a tight squeeze to her nape. His other hand kept up the rhythm over his cock. "Enough to get me hard. Enough to get me off."

He kissed her roughly again, licking hard into her mouth and making her moan.

"I want you," he said against her lips. "I want to look at you. I want to fuck you. I want to make you come."

Hermione's chest was heaving, but doubt was still clouding around her heart.

"But you didn't choose me," she said in a small voice.

He stood back to his full height, working his cock nearly level with her face.

"You didn't choose me either. But you still want me." His eyes searched her. "Don't you."

It was technically a question, but his tone and the curl of his lips told her he already knew the answer.

“Yes,” she admitted, and something in her chest unclenched. Draco Malfoy was potentially the last person she would have chosen, but if he wanted her half as much as she wanted him in that moment, then it was still ten times more than anyone had ever desired her before.

“That’s right,” he crooned, working his hand faster. “You want me to fuck you. Not because we have to, but because you want to know how good I can make you feel.”

The fingers of his free hand came up to trace over her lips, pinching the bottom one between his thumb and forefinger. His nail skated across the front of her teeth as his breaths grew heavy.

“Yes,” she whimpered. It was true.

“Fuck, it’s gonna feel so good,” he went on, eyes dropping to her knickers. “I promise you. That fucking wet cunt—”

She spread her legs and rolled her hips over the mattress as arousal burned through her. “I’ve never been that wet before.”

His fingers slid down over her throat, squeezing at the top of her breast. “We’ll do it again. I’ll tease you for hours if I have to. Until you’re fucking… dripping.”

He groaned, and when Hermione looked down at his cock, her lips parted in shock as she saw it coated with something slick and shiny.

“First wandless spell any wizard learns,” he said with a leer. “Followed closely by *Scourgify*, but it’s a messy few weeks in between.”

“That’s disgusting,” she complained, eyes trained on the way his hand was gliding over his length.

He tutted. “What’s the matter? Don’t like the idea of me ruining the sheets of my four-poster over you?”

Hermione’s head snapped back up. “You did?”

“Oh, precious. Surely you don’t think the other night was the first time I got off thinking about you?”

“Don’t call me that,” she breathed, her eyes searching his. “What did you think of?”

He chuckled darkly, dipping his fingers into the cup of her bra. “All sorts of terrible things a husband should never do to his wife.”

“I might like it,” she said. She had liked everything he did so far.

“I bet you would, you dirty girl.”

“Tell me,” she said, moaning as his thumb circled her nipple.

"For starters, wasting my Pureblood seed all over these fucking tits." His fingers dragged down over her scar. "I didn't even know what I was missing."

She reached behind her back and unclasped her bra, pulling the fabric quickly from her chest.

"Fuck," he groaned. "Such a good girl."

Her eyelids fluttered and she rolled her hips again, dragging her center over the bed.

"Is that what you want?" he asked, his pace quickening as he tweaked her nipples taut. "Want me to add to your artwork? Paint these pretty tits with my come?"

"Yes," she moaned. "Please, I want to see."

"Oh, you will," he said, pushing against her chest until she was flat on her back. He raised one knee onto the mattress, leaning over her.

"Fuck, you're gonna make me come," he ground out. Her eyes raced over the pink blotches blooming across his chest, the tendons standing out in his neck.

He gripped her chin roughly, bringing her focus back to his face. "Do you hear me? No one else. Just you." His strokes grew erratic, and she watched his mouth fall open. "You're enough—fuck—just like this."

Her back arched as the first pulse hit her chest, and she watched him pour the rest over her on a long, low groan. The tension drained out of his body, his face, and she watched his eyes grow hazy.

And that was it: Malfoy with no walls and no pretence, completely unguarded as he took his pleasure from her. Like it was nothing. Like it was easy.

He blinked slowly down at her, dragging a finger through the mess he'd made. "Shit," he sighed, collapsing onto his back next to her.

"Is that what you needed?" he asked when his breathing had slowed somewhat.

"Yes," she said softly.

"Did it turn you on?"

She squirmed against the covers, feeling the ache of need between her legs. "Yes."

"Do you want to come?"

She looked over to find him watching her again. She nodded.

He licked his lips before moving further up the bed.

“Come here,” he said, grabbing her under the arms and dragging her up so that her back was pressed to his chest. He laid down, shifting her on top of him until her head was resting next to his, his softening cock just below her arse. His fingers trailed up over her stomach.

“Show me.”

Her skin tightened with exhilaration under his touch, and the need for pleasure, for release, hummed in her veins. She could do it like this, just like she usually would. And he wouldn’t see her face.

She started slowly, dragging her fingertips through the come on her chest and sliding her slick fingers across her nipples.

“You play with your tits?” he asked low against her ear.

She nodded. “Through the fabric of my shirt. So it feels like someone else’s hands.”

“Fuck.” His fingers ghosted over her skin, bumping against her own as he started rubbing her. “Like that?”

“Yes,” she sighed.

He closed his lips over her neck, kissing and sucking while she breathed into his touch.

“What next?”

She slid her hand down into her knickers. “Here.”

“Do you keep those on?”

She shook her head. “Not usually.”

He didn’t respond but kept up his same teasing strokes across her chest, and after a moment’s hesitation, she hooked her thumbs under her waistband and pulled the knickers off. When she settled back against his chest, her hand drifted along her thigh, up between her legs.

“How does it feel?” he asked her.

Her breath hitched as she slid her fingers along her slit. “I’m w-wet but... I liked when you spit on me.”

He groaned against her neck, bringing his hand to his mouth at once. “You can have as much as you want.” She shivered as a cool strand dripped over her stomach when he reached back down. His fingers pressed onto her clit, spreading his saliva over it, and he whispered, “As soon as you let me, I’ll put my mouth on that cunt and you can have it straight from the source.”

Her hips jolted with pleasure as his first two fingers moved over her, following the method she had shown him.

“Fuck, that’s so good,” she breathed.

“I had an excellent instructor.”

She smiled widely at that, glad that he couldn’t see it.

“Did you ever think about that?” she asked. “Putting your mouth on me?”

He hummed. “Catching you in the back of the library. Putting my head under your skirt and sucking your clit until you begged me to stop.” She moaned, rolling her hips under his hand. “And then removing your silencing charm at the last second so everyone could hear you scream.”

She sucked in a gasp as her cunt clenched.

“So naughty,” he gloated, broadening his strokes. Her legs shook as his fingers dipped further into her slit on every pass.

“I would have been humiliated,” she murmured.

“No more so than if I fucked you in the middle of the Quidditch pitch with your arse in the air for the entire school to see.”

“Gods, that’s—*ah*—terrible.”

“I told you.”

She tilted her hips, and his fingers sank into her, dragging his palm over her clit. She whined with pleasure.

“Yeah?” he said against her ear.

She nodded fervently. “Yeah.”

He worked his hand, squeezing over her clit and pressing inside her, rolling in a languid motion.

“Fuck, fuck.” She gripped his arm.

“Right there?”

“Yes, god—what else did you think of?”

He sucked her earlobe between his teeth. “Oh, I don’t know, just tying you up, spread-eagle, to my four-poster and leaving you there all day so I could play with you between classes.”

“Oh, my—“ Her eyes squeezed shut at the blaze of heat that went through her. “What would you do?”

His hips were rolling under her now, matching the pace of his hand in a pantomime of fucking.

“Leave you there naked and helpless with the hangings open, praying that none of the other boys came in.”

Hermione gave an affronted gasp, and he chuckled. “You weren’t my wife then. Just a desperate little slag waiting and ready for anyone who walked by.”

“I wasn’t,” she whimpered, clenching around his fingers.

“You would have been for me,” he said. “Waiting all day for me to sink my fingers into you. Or play with your tits. Or tease you with my cock, just for a few minutes.”

“Please—“ she arched against him as he squeezed her nipple with his free hand.

“Fuck, I can feel you tightening up,” he groaned. “You’re gonna come for me, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” she sighed. “Yes, yes, please don’t stop.”

His pace didn’t waver. His fingers stroked against her walls with every slide over her clit. “Shit, you feel so good, Granger.”

The tension tightened in slow motion, leaving her hanging suspended.

“More, please,” she begged. “Just a little harder.”

His fingers pressed into her g-spot, and she cried out.

“There?”

“Yes—*gods*—like that.”

His thumb rolled over her nipple again, circling it before squeezing. Her nails dug into his arms as she coiled tighter, searching for the peak.

“I’m—I’m so close.”

“That’s it,” he told her. “Just like that, don’t stop. That’s perfect, keep going.”

She let his encouragement wash over her, every word pushing her higher and higher until—

“Oh, fuck, I can feel you coming.”

And she was. She could hardly believe it. Her mouth dropped open on a cry as pleasure flooded through her, pulsing through her cunt in powerful waves. She turned her head and pressed her face into his neck as her body shuddered above him.

“Good girl,” he whispered, slowing his hand but leaving his fingers inside for her to squeeze. “That was so good.”

She hummed against his throat, revelling in the warmth of his skin. She pressed a sloppy kiss to the underside of his jaw and tasted salt.

When he finally withdrew his fingers, the slide along her walls triggered a clenching aftershock, and she rolled off of him onto her stomach with a moan, grinding her front against the bed like she usually did.

“What’s that about?” he asked, reaching down to grip the flesh of her arse as it tightened with the movement.

She shrugged, too hazy and content to be embarrassed. “Just something I’ve always done. Before I really knew how to—you know,” she waved a hand in a vague gesture to what they’d just done, “I used to just rub against things.”

“Well, it’s fucking hot,” he said, rolling onto his side to press his damp forehead to her shoulder. “You would just rub against the bed?”

“Usually a pillow.”

“*Fucking hell.*”

He reached past her suddenly, grabbing a pillow from the top of the bed. She gave a muffled protest as he lifted her hip and shoved it beneath her.

“That’s what the fantasy should have been,” he murmured, getting to his knees between her thighs and sliding his hand back between her legs. “You tied spread-eagle, *face down* to my four-poster with nothing but a pillow to tease yourself on all day.”

She moaned, grinding down instinctively as he pushed two fingers back into her.

“I just came,” she reminded him.

She felt the firm length of his cock press into her skin. “You’ll come again.”

He pumped his fingers into her, his palm against her arse, and her stomach tightened as she moved over the pillow, seeking friction for her clit.

“*Shit.*”

The word fell out on an uneven breath and she realised he was working his cock in the other hand. Excitement tingled over her skin at the thought of making him come again.

She spread her legs further, and he pressed his hand flush against her. She moaned as his fingers hit deep in her cunt. “You would have wanted me like that?” she asked, imagining herself with all four limbs bound, completely at his mercy.

“You have no idea,” he muttered. “I thought of fucking you all the wrong ways: faster when you said slow; harder when you said no; stopping when you begged for more.”

Her heart pounded in her throat as she listened, but her nipples drew into taut peaks, making her shift her chest to graze them against the covers.

“You hated me,” she said.

He leaned over her back to whisper against her ear. “Exactly.”

She squeezed her eyes shut as gooseflesh rippled down her arm.

“I thought about doing all that... and still making you come,” he went on. “Wrenching it from your body just because I could.”

“You can,” she panted. Wetness was seeping around his fingers again, heat curling at the base of her spine. She knew he couldn’t hurt her, and she believed that he wouldn’t, but knowing that those despicable desires had been there—maybe still would be if things were different—was spreading something dark and delicious through her.

He worked his fingers faster, pushing into her hard, again and again. “I would have come back at the end of the day to find you waiting for me: cunt swollen pink, dripping all over your little pillow, aching for my cock.”

She let out a guttural moan, knees pressing into the mattress as she rocked against the fabric between her legs.

“And then I would have fucked your arse instead.”

“W-What?” she gasped even as she clenched around his fingers.

“Like the sound of that, do you?” he taunted, leaning over her again. He left off stroking his cock to spread her cheeks. “I’m going to spit on you,” he warned her.

“Oh, fuck—”

“I know how you like that.” He pressed a kiss to the base of her spine.

She let out a whine, her toes curling into the blankets, as a warm stream of saliva dripped slowly over her hole. She thought she would lose her mind from the teasing tickle of it. And then his thumb swept over her, catching and spreading the slick, and *that* would surely be what did it.

“Such a dirty girl,” he scolded, stroking her rim gently with the pad of his finger.

It felt like her entire body contracted with the strength of the jolt that went through her. Those words; him touching her *there*—pulling something from her that no one else had even dared to look for, least of all herself. Her very soul stretched to accommodate the size of the sensation.

The noises that fell from her lips weren’t even close to words, but any remaining shame evaporated as she thrust herself back onto his fingers, seeking faster, harder, *more*.

“That’s right,” he coaxed, voice low and rough. “You don’t have to pretend with me.” His thumb was relentless against her, pressing and sliding across that sensitive skin until she could feel it through every inch of her body. “I know you’ve always been a stuck-up tight arse, but...” She moaned as he pushed even harder against her hole, “we can fix at least one of those.”

“Fuck you,” she bit out at the sound of his smirk, even though she nearly laughed herself.

“That’s the idea, baby.”

“Don’t—*nngghh*—” She broke off as he leaned down to spit on her again.

“What’s that, baby?”

“Fuck,” she sobbed. The slip of his finger was like liquid magic seeping into her core. “Don’t—” She tried again, but he pressed forward, sliding just inside her rim.

“Oh, gods, don’t—”

—*call me that*.

“—stop. Please, don’t stop.”

He didn’t, and the pleasure sharpened almost painfully. She writhed under it, grinding against the pillow and dragging his fingers in and out of her on every thrust. She was so caught up that it almost surprised her when he said—

“Gonna come on your arse, Granger.”

She realised suddenly that she could feel the rhythmic graze of his knuckles, jostling against her cheek as he worked himself.

“Yes,” she gasped, picturing it immediately. “Do it.”

“Yeah?” The hitch in his breath brought her right to the edge.

“Yes, yes, I’m—fuck—”

“Right there?”

She cried out as he replaced his thumb with his cock, pressing the soft skin of his head against her clenched hole.

“*Oh*—” The pressure flickered as he jerked himself against her, slipping over her with the slick of precome. He twisted his fingers in her cunt, pressing down against her front wall, and the tension inside her snapped.

“Oh, fuck, baby. That’s so fucking hot.” His voice came out choked as the spasms racked through her. “You’re gonna... make me come again.”

A groan tore out of her chest as he grunted, his fist bouncing against her arse, the first pulse of warmth coating her. He didn’t paint her with it like he had last time, but kept the head of his cock pressed flush to her rim, fucking his come onto her.

Her hips rolled against the pillow with the aftershocks, forcing long moans out of her, and she felt a now-familiar twinge of painful pleasure low in her abdomen as his come dripped down

over her cunt. He would fuck her for real tomorrow. And he would finish inside her.

Perhaps the bond had just triggered the same thought for him because when he drew his fingers out of her, he dragged the head of his cock down through the mess, teasing along her slit. She shivered.

“*Fuck*,” he muttered before collapsing back onto the bed beside her again.

That about summed it up as far as Hermione was concerned. She felt entirely wrung out, so past the point of overstimulated that every sensation was blurred into a general haze of euphoric exhaustion.

It took all the strength she had left to keep her eyes open, watching Malfoy’s chest rise and fall, his staggered breaths the only sound in the quiet room.

After a moment, he let his head fall to the side to look at her. He pulled his bottom lip between his teeth before smiling.

She returned it, peeking out over her arm where she still lay hunched over the pillow, and he shook his head slowly.

“Merlin, Granger.”

She might have blushed if she could have summoned a single ounce of effort to care, but despite the fact that she probably should have felt mortified about what they had just done, she really didn’t. If anyone was going to be embarrassed, it should have been him; he had been the one to escalate at every opportunity. But as she looked over his smug and sated expression, shame was clearly the furthest thing from his mind.

So, Hermione let hers go, too. All she had done was respond to his provocations. And *gods*, had she responded.

He rolled onto his side, reaching over to smooth his hand down the curve of her back.

“Who knew I would be the one to finally get the supreme swot to... *loosen* up.” He punctuated the innuendo with the quick slip of a finger back into the cleft of her arse, making her squeak.

“Shut up!” she said, wishing she had the energy to swat at his arm. Instead she just laid there shaking with poorly suppressed laughter.

He waggled his eyebrows. “I always knew you’d be into some kinky shit.”

“Well, that makes one of us,” she chuckled, burying her face against her arm.

His hand came back up to stroke over her hair, and after a moment, his fingers slid into it, turning her head gently. When she looked at him again, his thumb ghosted along the edge of her temple.

“Next time, I get to see your face.”

Her heart tripped into a heavy thud at his sudden intensity and the revelation that those positions hadn't been a coincidence.

She nodded with certainty. She would be comfortable with that now.

“Would you like to do the honours?”

Malfoy held out the chalk to her, and Hermione took it, stepping forward to erase the **8** and draw a **9**.

He gave an approving nod, but she shot him a quick smile before adding two more numbers next to it.

9 ¾

He huffed a laugh. “Very cute.”

“I’m adorable,” she said cheekily, replacing the chalk in the tray.

“You are like this,” he agreed. He stepped closer and let his fingers trail up her thigh to the hem of his shirt she wore.

She caught his hand before it could cross into dangerous territory and placed it resolutely on her hip. “Given our extremely productive morning,” she said, twining her own arms around his neck. “What would you like to do now?”

His eyes immediately flicked in the direction of the television, and Hermione laughed. “I guess there’s nothing wrong with partaking in simple pleasures.”

He smirked. “Let’s just say I’m trying to *enjoy the little things.*”

When Hermione entered the sitting room, Malfoy was already seated on the sofa, clicking through the channels with the remote.

She crept up quietly behind him, drawing her wand and aiming it at the television.

He paused for a few seconds on a replay of a football match and then clicked on. Hermione flicked her wand, changing the channel back.

Malfoy glanced down at the remote as though checking that his thumb was on the proper button and then clicked again.

She let him pass two channels this time before switching back to the match.

“What?” he muttered under his breath, raising the remote in front of his face and banging the side of it against his hand.

Hermione pressed her lips together, holding back a laugh.

He tried stubbornly, again and again, to move past the football game, but no matter how far he made it, Hermione flicked back to the players scurrying over the pitch.

“Stupid, useless—” He banged the remote against the sofa cushion before resuming the dramatic waving he had done when she first showed him the device.

Hermione’s eyes were watering. She didn’t know how long he would keep trying, but—

“Granger!”

She jumped in surprise as he suddenly bellowed.

“Your bloody television won’t stop showing me ground Quidditch, and I’m—”

He broke off as he turned his head, finally spotting her behind him.

“You!” he hissed as he lunged for her. He didn’t reach for the wand but belted an arm around her waist instead, hauling her bodily over the back of the sofa and down onto the cushions.

She gave a yelp of surprise that quickly devolved into breathless squeals as his grip tickled her side.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re a bloody menace?” he asked, digging his fingers into her ribs.

“Yes.” She grinned as she squirmed, trying to trap his hands, but he just shook his head.

“What am I going to do with you?”

The question was rhetorical, but now that Hermione was beneath him again, chest heaving with his hands on her body, she was suddenly very aware of the fact that even with everything they had done earlier, they had hardly kissed at all.

She licked her lips, looking up at him through her lashes. “I can think of something.”

He leaned down over her, brushing his nose along hers as he spoke against her lips. “And what’s that, baby?”

She gasped. “Stop calling me that.”

His face broke into a wolfish grin. “Bit of a delayed reaction, hm?”

She stammered as he began pressing tiny, chaste kisses over her lips, too quick for her to respond. "I-I was distracted."

"I think maybe you like that one," he whispered.

Her eyelids fluttered closed as he covered her mouth with his, opening it with his lips. Part of her was glad he didn't leave more time for her to have to deny it.



Chapter End Notes

Whew! Was it worth the wait? :)

Thank you so much for reading and for all of the wonderful comments! I am going to be so sad to post the final chapter next week. Thanks for making this such a fun ride!

Many thanks and much love to [naginisLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

Come hang out with me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

Day 14

Chapter Notes

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

They spent the morning of the last day snogging.

Hermione's back hit the wall hard as Malfoy lifted her, hitching her legs over his hips. She clung to his shoulders, kissing him furiously as he ground his erection against her center. Distantly, she wondered if there were any long-term health risks of being hard for nearly twenty-four hours straight.

She whined high in her throat as he broke the kiss to lick hard against the underside of her jaw.

"Fuck, you taste so good," he murmured, sucking at her neck. "Are you going to let me taste all of you tonight?"

Her fingers raked through his hair as his teeth closed over the sensitive skin. "Yes," she gasped. "Wherever you want."

"Good girl."

She moaned against his lips as he kissed her again, and part of her wanted to check the time. She wasn't exactly sure how it had been decided that they would wait until the last night to finally consummate, but the build-up had been its own kind of exquisite torture.

Malfoy seemed to be of the opinion that now he had proved there was no reason she shouldn't be able to have an orgasm with him, there was no sense wasting any more of them before they actually had sex. She had spent the previous afternoon and evening in a sort of lust-fueled haze, floating somewhere just below conscious awareness of the world outside of his lips and hands.

It was another tactic; she was sure of that. But with the way he kissed her, Hermione could hardly complain. Her body seemed hyper-attuned to the approaching event, and the pent-up anticipation could only help to achieve their ultimate goal.

Plus, it was really fucking fun to snog all the time.

"Ah—" She bit down on his lip as his thumb brushed over her nipple. "Don't tease me."

"You like being teased," he said, pulling away to suck on her neck again.

"I know, but..." She flushed at that admission. "But I'm going to want more."

He rocked his hips forward, pressing her damp knickers against her. "You can wait."

"We don't have to," she argued weakly, pressing her chest into his hand. "We could—"

What they could do was lost in the abrupt roar of green flames from the hearth.

They both glanced over, and Harry's voice shouted from within. "Hermione? Are you there?"

She groaned, pushing at Malfoy's shoulders, and he dropped her back onto her feet. She quickly straightened her clothes before kneeling in front of the fire. "Hi, Harry. Yes, I'm here."

Instead of responding, however, Harry's head disappeared from the flames.

"Harry?"

She barely had time to scramble out of the way before the fire hissed and roared again, admitting Harry, Ron, and Ginny into the sitting room.

"What's going on?" Hermione asked, getting to her feet and wiping the dust from her knees.

"What's going on?" Harry repeated, sounding bewildered. "Hermione, you haven't responded to our letters in days and it's—" He cut his eyes to Malfoy for the first time. "It's the last day."

"Yes, thank you, Potter," Malfoy said dryly, stepping forward and winding an arm around Hermione's waist. "We are quite aware."

All three of her friends dropped their eyes to the fingers curled possessively at her hip, and Hermione cleared her throat.

"I'm sorry I haven't responded," she said honestly, thinking of Harry's last letter and one from Ginny that still lay unopened on her desk. "I guess I've been a bit distracted." She ran her fingers nervously through her hair, and Ginny's brows rose.

"So it would seem," she said.

"Was that all?" Hermione asked, trying for a casual tone. "As you mentioned, it's the last day
___"

"Actually," Malfoy interrupted. "I have somewhere I need to be. You should spend some time with your friends."

Hermione turned to gape at him. Where could he possibly need to be?

He just smiled placidly, leaning down to press a chaste kiss to her frozen lips.

Harry gave a choked sort of gurgle.

"Have a nice visit, sugar," Malfoy said quietly, though not quietly enough.

Hermione's face flamed as she responded through clenched teeth. "Don't call me that."

Malfoy winked before turning and leaving the room. The four of them simply stared after him until he disappeared through the front door.

“Sugar?” Ron asked, breaking the silence.

Hermione shifted on her feet. “It’s an inside joke.”

His face visibly paled, and Hermione considered whether she and Malfoy having an inside joke together was more disturbing than the idea of him actually referring to her as *sugar*. She supposed from an outside perspective it might be about equal.

Clearly either option was too much for Harry because he staggered slightly before falling into an armchair.

“So, I take it things are going well?” Ginny asked, brows still raised.

“Erm.” Hermione shifted again. “Well, it hasn’t necessarily been smooth, but yes, we are making it work.”

Ginny nodded slowly. “But you haven’t...”

“No,” Hermione said quickly. Then added, “Well, not exactly.”

Harry winced. “I really don’t want to know what that means.”

Hermione dropped onto the sofa, bracing her head in her hands. “It means that things are more complicated than I originally anticipated—something to do with the ancestral Malfoy magic—but we’re managing it.”

“We?” Ron repeated, taking the seat next to her.

She glanced up at him, and after a moment, she nodded. “Malfoy has been very... helpful.”

A breath of a laugh gusted out between Ron’s lips and he shook his head. “There’s a sentence I never thought I’d hear you say.”

Hermione gave him a weak smile. “None of this is exactly what we’d planned for ourselves, but...” She let out a sigh. “I think it could be okay.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

Hermione looked over at him. “Yes,” she said. “It has to be.”

Her friends exchanged confused looks, and Hermione steeled herself. “That’s one of the reasons I didn’t respond right away,” she admitted. “I wasn’t sure how to tell you that even if we’re able to prove that the matches are politically motivated, it’s become moot.”

“Moot?” Ron repeated.

"For me, at least," she clarified. "I'll still help look into it. This law is unethical all the way around, and I'll protect anyone else from it that I can, but..." she trailed off, twining her hands in her lap. "This is it for me."

"Malfoy is it for you?" Ginny repeated as though she just wanted to be sure.

Hermione nodded, feeling a reluctant smile tug her lips. "Yes, he is."

Ginny glanced back and forth between the two boys, but none of them seemed able to process this new development. "All right," she said, sitting on the edge of the coffee table and leaning forward. "Explanation. Now."

They were mostly understanding.

There was a bit of an outburst when Hermione explained about the core bond, but it seemed all three of her friends were in reluctant agreement with Malfoy about the choice Hermione would have made if she'd known about it ahead of the marriage ceremony.

And the fact that she was now looking forward to the potential future they had together rather than dreading it with every fiber of her being probably went a long way towards keeping any of the three of them from tearing off to go hex Malfoy within an inch of his life for trapping her in a lifelong commitment.

Hermione was incredibly thankful that they seemed to take her assurance that everything was going to be okay to heart.

Of course it would only be okay if her husband decided to show back up at some point.

Hermione tried not to be rude while she talked with her friends, but as long as Malfoy was elsewhere, it seemed part of her mind would be, too. After far too many times of catching her checking the clock, Ginny finally took the hint.

"Well, I'd wish you good luck," she said with a smirk as she pulled Hermione in for a hug. "But I hardly think you'll need it."

Hermione blinked in confusion until Ginny reached out and touched the side of her neck. "Not with such an *enthusiastic* partner," she finished.

Hermione clapped a hand over the spot where Malfoy had been sucking earlier that morning. "Right," she said weakly, not quite managing a laugh.

Ron and Harry both avoided her eye as they hugged her farewell.

"I'll let you know how it goes," she said and then promptly snapped her mouth shut.

Ron flushed crimson.

"I meant," Hermione said quickly, shaking her head, "I'll make sure to let you know that I won't be dragged off to Azkaban."

"Right, thanks," Harry said brusquely.

"Feel free to let *me* know how it goes," Ginny said with a grin.

Hermione stifled a laugh as Harry strong-armed Ginny into the fireplace and called out for Grimmauld Place.

Ron gave Hermione one last look as the other two were swept away. "I'm glad you're—" He broke off, reaching up to rub the back of his neck. "Well, I'm glad it—"

Hermione smiled as he gave a helpless sigh. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but I guess I'm just glad," he finished.

Hermione could relate. Despite everything, she was glad that she wasn't going to prison. Glad that it wasn't someone worse. Glad that everything was going to be all right.

She nodded. "Thanks, Ron. Me too."

That feeling of confident contentment only lasted so long into the afternoon though. As the hours passed and Malfoy failed to return, anxiety began to seep in around the edges. Irrational worries formed in her mind as she puttered about, nibbling at her lunch and tidying up the already neat house.

Her gaze lingered on her reflection in the black television screen as she ran her wand over it, banishing non-existent dust from around the edges. Surely Malfoy hadn't changed his mind about going through with the consummation; he had seemed quite committed to the idea that morning. The arrival of her friends couldn't have changed anything.

Her eyes flicked over to the front door for the hundredth time. What if he wasn't staying away by choice? What if something had happened to him in the Muggle world? She swallowed involuntarily as a horrible image of him being struck by a car as he crossed the street unfolded in her mind. He wouldn't have any identification on him. If he was injured, she would have no way of knowing.

She realised that the fingers of one hand were unconsciously rubbing over her breastbone, and she shook her head firmly. No, if something had happened to him, she would feel it. She didn't know what it would feel like through the bond, but undoubtedly a mortal wound would feel like *something*.

Focused as she was on the steady hum of her magical core, Hermione failed to notice the commotion happening outside and dropped her wand when someone knocked loudly on the front door.

She flew across the room, wrenching the door open and staring for a moment at the empty space beyond it. She blinked in confusion for the span of a second before her eyes dropped several feet to Gemma's upturned face.

"Hi, Hermione," she said brightly.

Hermione returned the little girl's smile, feeling her heart unclench. Of course Malfoy wouldn't have knocked.

"Hi, Gemma," she said and reached out compulsively to tighten the chin strap of the girl's lopsided helmet.

"Is Draco here?" Gemma asked, shoving her fringe back under the yellow plastic shell. "I can show him my bike. So he can see if he wants to learn."

"That's very nice of you to offer," Hermione said, "but actually, he's not here."

Gemma's brow immediately creased with concern.

"He's just out at the moment," Hermione quickly clarified. "He'll be back soon." *Our lives literally depend on it*, she didn't add.

"Where is he?" Gemma asked, rather nosily.

Hermione sighed. "I don't know."

The little girl's lips pursed with disapproval as though Hermione really should be doing a better job of keeping track of her husband. In this particular circumstance, Hermione couldn't help but agree.

"I'm sure he'd be happy to see you ride your bike another time," she added.

"Will he be here tomorrow?" Gemma asked hopefully.

There was a sudden crack of Apparition from the upper floor of the house, and Hermione's grip on the door handle loosened as relief flooded through her.

"Yes," she replied with an easy smile. "He will be here tomorrow."

Gemma seemed satisfied, and with a nod that sent the helmet sliding down her forehead again, she turned and bounded down the front steps. Hermione watched her scoop up her bicycle from where it lay discarded on the lawn before closing the door and leaning back against it for a moment.

Her eyes trailed up the stairs to the mouth of the dark hallway, but Malfoy didn't appear. She took a deep breath before starting up the steps on slightly trembling legs. She wiped her

palms down the sides of her jeans as she traversed the well-worn carpet of the landing, feeling ridiculous at the nervous anticipation tingling through her chest.

The door to Malfoy's room was open, and she stopped in front of it, surveying the scene for clues to his previous whereabouts.

He was standing in front of the bureau, fiddling with the cuff of one sleeve, and he looked exactly as he had done that morning. Same black shirt and trousers; hair still in its standard coif. Her eyes ran over the various surfaces of the room but there were no bags of shopping, no parcels or packages. She couldn't see any immediate evidence of what he had been up to.

The floor creaked beneath her as she leaned to peer further into the room, and Malfoy glanced up. His lips pulled into a smile at the sight of her, and her stomach somersaulted.

"Where have you been?" she asked, trying for accusatory and coming out needy.

He tutted sympathetically as he stalked toward her, and Hermione took an instinctive step back. "Were you worried I forgot about you?"

"No," she said honestly. Of all the scenarios she had considered, the consummation simply slipping his mind hadn't been one of them.

His brows lifted momentarily. "Just missing me then?"

"No," she repeated, wincing when her voice cracked. Her shoulder knocked the door frame as he backed her out of his room and into hers.

"It's all right," he said in a low voice. He reached forward and hooked a finger through one of her belt loops, reeling her in. Her breath hitched as his free hand slid into her hair and his lips brushed against hers. "I missed you too, baby."

"Don't—" She swallowed the rest as he opened her mouth under his.

Any doubt Hermione had about whether it was going to happen *now* was swept away by the flood of intent coming off of him. As her hands wrapped around his neck, she could practically feel it seeping between her fingers. He gave a satisfied hum as she pulled him down to her.

She was still curious about where he had been, but she supposed it could wait. Especially when liquid heat was dripping down through her belly as he slid his tongue against hers again and again. Her eyes squeezed tight shut as she gripped the smooth skin of his jaw and cursed his horrible, perfect mouth. He gave a delicious groan as she sank her teeth into his lip, his hands raking up under her shirt.

She drew back just long enough for him to pull it over her head, and she could barely suppress the whimper that threatened to slip out at the sight of his lips shining with the evidence of her kiss in the golden evening light. They were back on hers in an instant, trapping her hands between their bodies as she worked open the buttons of his shirt.

The clasp of her bra slipped free as she finished the row, and she broke the kiss again to watch his face as he reached a hand up to her shoulder. She held her breath as he paused for a moment, nudging the strap painfully slowly with one finger. When it finally slid off down her arm, letting the cups fall away from her, he let out a long exhale through loosely pursed lips and shook his head.

“Fucking incredible.”

Her eyelids fluttered as both of his hands grazed up over her stomach, lifting the weight of her breasts in his palms, his thumbs finding her nipples.

A sigh caught in her throat, coming out loud and broken as the first strokes sent a jolt through her cunt. His mouth closed back over hers as though to taste the sound on her tongue, and she fed him a desperate whine as he pinched and plucked at her chest. Arousal blazed through her, twitching her hips to rub against him. He stepped forward again, and she thought for a moment that he was accommodating her need for friction, but then the backs of her legs hit the bed and she sat.

She was tempted to complain for a second, but the sight of him sinking to his knees in front of her ripped the urge directly from her chest before the words could form. His fingers on the button of her jeans promised something even better, and her breath stuttered through her shaking throat.

He glanced up, and she felt her face burn with the knowledge that she was probably sucking and gasping like she’d run a marathon. But as he let his tongue roll slowly between his lips to the soundtrack of her zipper lowering, she couldn’t bring herself to give a fuck.

Let him see, she told herself as she lifted her hips enough for him to peel her jeans down. Somehow he was able to turn her on more than anyone ever had, and why should she hide it? That was exactly what they needed. It was a good thing. She was lucky.

As he pulled the denim from her ankles, he looked up at her again.

“On or off?” he asked, tucking one finger into the top of her sock.

She bit her lip, feeling oddly shy. “Off,” she said quietly.

He gave a short nod and stripped them off, catching her completely by surprise when he squeezed her feet hard with both hands, digging his fingers into her arches.

She moaned loudly, as she had the last time, and he gave a lopsided grin at her look of wide-eyed outrage.

“Just wanted a refresher on what I’m aiming for,” he said smugly.

She shook her head, but her lips pulled into a smile despite herself. It was difficult to maintain the desire to kick him when his hands felt like heaven incarnate on her feet. Her eyelids dropped closed as she marvelled at the strength of his fingers, her hips rolling unconsciously against the mattress as they worked up the insides of her calves to her thighs.

He leaned forward suddenly, wrapping his arms at her waist and hugging her so tightly that his cheek pressed hard into her stomach. Her eyes popped open as her legs bracketed his ribs, and her hands landed gently on the top of his head below her. There was something so intimately tender about the embrace that she felt her chest tighten with emotion. Her fingers sifted lightly through his hair as he placed an open-mouthed kiss below her belly button.

Her hips twitched forward again as he pressed the next kiss lower, and his hands shifted to grip her arse in response. She let out a quiet moan as he kissed over the front of her knickers, but it finished in a gasp when she felt his teeth on her waistband.

Throwing caution to the wind, she dug her fingers into his hair and moved against his face as he licked and nipped at the cotton covering her. He answered her with a groan as his movements became more frenzied, his fingers digging almost painfully into the flesh of her thighs. The gust of heat from his breath pooled between her legs until she felt nearly slick enough to slide off the bed.

A yelp squeaked out of her throat as the elastic band snapped against her skin, and he murmured with his nose pressed into the crease of her hip.

“I need to taste you.”

Her head swam at the immediate prospect of having his tongue on her. “Yes. Okay,” she breathed.

He yanked her knickers down before she could even begin to lift herself, stinging the backs of her thighs.

“Fuck,” she gasped, falling back onto the bed.

When her feet were free of the fabric, he leaned back in, forcing her legs open wider and wider with the breadth of his shoulders. She panted at the ceiling, fingers twisting in the covers as he breathed over her.

Her heart clamoured against her ribs as she waited, and her hips jolted at the graze of his lips against the skin above her pubic bone.

“It’s okay,” he murmured, reaching up around her leg to slide a warm palm over her belly. She raised her head to look for a moment, and her eyes widened at the sight of his spread fingers nearly spanning the entire space between her hips.

“Oh, god,” she whined because it wasn’t okay at all. He placed another kiss just above her clit, his chin pressing against it, and it was possibly the furthest she had ever been from being okay in her life. She was absolutely wrecked and he hadn’t even—

“Oh, my—*fuck*.” A moan wrenched out of her as he placed his open mouth onto her cunt. The sheer enormity of the sensation pressed her head back into the mattress and the air out of her lungs.

His tongue traced a slow path up the length of her slit, and Hermione felt ridiculously on the verge of tears. Her fingers sank helplessly back into his hair as her hips rolled, and he gave a hum of approval, closing his lips gently over her clit before opening them onto her again.

“That’s—*god*—so good,” she panted, wanting him to know.

“Good, baby.”

“Fuck,” she nearly sobbed as her stomach clenched, drawing one knee up in reflex.

Malfoy caught it, palm against her shin, but instead of guiding her heel over his back like the other was, he kept her knee bent until her foot settled on top of his shoulder.

She pushed against it instinctively and let out a guttural moan as she realised the steady base he had given her to press against as she thrust her hips. She mirrored the position with her other leg at once.

“Oh, my god, it’s—you’re—”

Words failed her as he pressed his tongue exactly where she’d shown him she liked to be touched. Ankles perched by his ears, she rolled against it over and over.

In the past, her partners had always tried to do so much when they went down on her, but now, Malfoy was doing almost nothing. He was simply providing her with his mouth—warm and wet and perfect—to rub against, and *fuck* if it didn’t feel beyond incredible.

You know what you like, he had told her.

“You’re fucking brilliant,” she panted, not caring about his already problematic ego.

That earned her a chuckle and a nuzzle against her clit with his nose. It was probably meant to be a tender gesture, but she nearly blacked out.

“So sweet, baby,” he murmured fondly. “I think you deserve something special.”

She raised her head in time to see his cheeks hollow briefly as he gathered the saliva in his mouth. Her jaw dropped on a heavy moan as he opened his mouth and let the tip of his tongue drip directly onto her clit. A thick, glossy strand stretched between them for several seconds before he lowered onto her again, and she actually felt her eyes roll back as he swirled the slick over her swollen nub.

“Fuck—oh fuck,” she cried, rocking against him as he pursed his lips and began sucking steadily.

The hand on her belly stretched up to graze over her nipple, and Hermione’s gaze caught on the glint of gold on his finger. She retrieved her own left hand from his hair and laced her fingers between his. Their wedding bands clicked quietly together, and suddenly, her orgasm was on her in an instant.

“Oh, god, I’m—wait—Malfoy, stop!”

He lifted off just in time, likely thanks to the desperate yanking on his hair, and she suppressed a whine as her clit throbbed with the need to come.

“Yeah?” he asked, wiping the back of his hand over his glistening chin.

“Yeah,” she said, nodding fervently. “I’m—yeah.”

He shot her a smirk before pressing a chaste kiss to the inside of one thigh, and she whimpered as he leaned back from between her legs.

“Don’t worry, baby,” he cooed over the jingling of his belt buckle. “After this time, you can come on my tongue whenever you like.”

Despite her current discomfort, that promise was quite comforting. Especially since she had already seen his spectacular cock and was very much looking forward to coming on that instead.

Malfoy got to his feet to remove his trousers, but as soon as he stood, he leaned over with a groan, one hand braced on the mattress, the other palming his still-clothed cock. He took a couple of deep breaths before shaking his head and shooting Hermione an accusing look.

“I’ve never been so hard that I got light-headed before,” he said as he stripped off his trousers and pants. “Your fucking cunt is going to give me brain damage.”

Hermione couldn’t help the grin that spread across her face as he tossed his clothes away. “Is that right?”

“That’s right.” He stroked his cock with a loose fist for a moment as she scooted further up toward the pillows, and though she was hardly an expert, it did look exceptionally hard.

He crawled onto the bed over her, lowering himself between her legs.

“If that’s the case,” Hermione asked coyly as she stroked a finger along his cheek. “Why are you smiling?”

“Because I get to make my wife come—”

“You’ve made me come before,” she argued.

She gave a grunt of surprise as he suddenly shoved the middle two fingers of one hand into her mouth.

“And if you’d quit being so mouthy,” he hissed, “I might do it again.”

A moan vibrated around his fingers as he rubbed slowly back and forth across her tongue.

“I was going to specify—before I was so *rudely* interrupted—” he went on pompously, “that I get to make my wife come on my cock.”

He shifted his hips as he finished reprimanding her, and she felt the smooth head of his cock nudge against her entrance. Her eyes dipped closed as he continued fucking her mouth with his fingers.

“Would you like that, baby?” he asked.

She nodded desperately as her cunt clenched.

He gave her a devious grin. “I didn’t hear you.”

She whimpered and gurgled *yes* the best that she could with her mouth full. A trickle of drool escaped the corner of her mouth, and he quickly withdrew his fingers and leaned down, catching the drip with his tongue and tracing it back to her lips.

“Good girl.”

Her hands went to his face at once, tugging his mouth to hers, and she moaned into the kiss as he dropped his weight onto her. She writhed beneath him, lifting her hips in a desperate bid to pull him inside her. As it was, grinding against the hard muscles of his abdomen felt pretty amazing, too. She felt him smirk against her lips as her kissing grew broken and breathy.

“Ready?” he murmured.

She answered, “Yes,” (though it sounded like *please*) clutching his shoulders as he reached down to position himself.

Her fingers dug into his skin as he dragged the head of his cock between her slick folds, and her back arched on a moan as he began to push inside.

“Fuck—” His mouth went slack around the edges as he rocked into her with shallow thrusts. “You feel... so fucking good.”

She could only nod her agreement as he slid slowly between her walls, working her open. Her chin lifted on a whine as he bottomed out deep in the back of her cunt, and she felt his fingers brush her temple as he paused for a moment.

“Are you comfortable?”

She opened her eyes to find him looking down at her with intense consideration, but that particular word choice brought a smile to her face as she was reminded of how far they had come—of the progress they’d made.

She reached up to trace a fingertip over his lips as she answered him with a grin. “Ten out of ten.”

It only took a second for him to place the reference, and when he did, his smile rivalled her own. He leaned down to kiss her, pressing forward, and she returned it the best she could with her jaw dropping in pleasure. He mostly got messy breaths and clumsy lips against his cheek as he began moving over her.

It wasn't thrusting exactly; at least not in the sense that it was limited to his hips. Instead, the motion seemed to originate lower, more from his knees, driving into her with his entire body. He braced his weight on one elbow, leaving a hand free to caress every inch of her that wasn't already pressed against his chest or stomach or legs.

She shuddered under his touch: a gentle graze along her arm, a palm covering her ribs, the dig of fingertips behind her leg. His ministrations were slow in a way that would have seemed lazy if they weren't so methodical. But instead, the drag of his nails up her neck felt... *patient*. Like they had all the time in the world.

He was replicating the slide inside her along the entire length of her body, dipping his tongue into her mouth like he wanted to savour her taste.

All of it made her feel *wanted* in a way that was so profound it was almost cruel.

She sucked in a breath as his thumb brushed her nipple. "So... good," she got out between uneven sighs, tilting her hips up to meet him.

"You like that?" he asked, circling the sensitive skin until it drew tight.

She moaned as her cunt clenched with the way she loved those little checks he did. The questions he already knew the answer to. Excuses for her to vocalise her pleasure.

"Yes," she told him, watching shamelessly as he touched her.

"Want a little more?"

His tone was like smoke, low and solicitous, seeping through her brain and smothering the last of her inhibitions.

She whimpered for him. "Uh-huh."

He brought his hand to his mouth, swiping saliva into his thumb and smoothing the slick pad back over her. She cried out as the sensation zipped like an electric shot straight to her cunt.

"Oh, god—it's—it feels like..."

"Like what, baby?" he prompted when she trailed off.

Her eyes rolled as he grazed the very tip of her nipple in a deliberate tease. "Like touching my clit," she admitted.

He made a little appreciative sound in the back of his throat before ducking his head and licking across her breast.

"Shit," she sobbed, eyes squeezing shut.

"How's that?" He closed his lips around her nipple, his hips snapping forward.

"Good—fuck—so good."

“Like kissing your little clit?”

She nodded desperately, curls scraping over the pillow, as he pressed kiss after kiss against her. “Yes, yes. God—” He sucked lightly, flicking with his tongue, and she let out a heavy moan. This was almost better. This way she still got to feel his cock sliding in and out of her. Every ridge dragging against her walls before filling her perfectly again.

Her breath caught as she recognised the space between her hips tightening with tension. It filled her belly, feeling somehow heavy and light at the same time.

It was going to work. She was going to come. They would achieve joint pleasure.

Her eyes snapped open on a gasp. *Joint* pleasure.

“Oh, my god, I’m—” She gripped his arms. “Do we need to—together? Are you close?”

His pace faltered as he blinked at her panicked rush of words, and terror seized her heart. Why hadn’t they planned for this? She was so close; if she lost it now...

He crushed his mouth to hers again, grinding his hips hard and deep. His head dropped next to hers on a groan as she clenched around him in reflex. “*Fuck*, you don’t have to worry about that,” he ground out, lips pressed against her ear. “Yes, I’m close. Of course I’m fucking close.”

She shivered as every word sent a rush of warm breath over her neck, pooling in the crook of her shoulder. He sounded almost pained as he went on, “I’ve been *close* for fucking days, Granger.”

Gooseflesh rippled over her arms, and she moaned as his chest grazed her taut nipples on every thrust. Her hands slipped down to his back, urging him just a little bit faster.

“Keep going,” she whispered.

Whether he misunderstood her request or he couldn’t stop now that he’d started, she wasn’t sure, but though she was referring to the pace he had set, he also continued talking.

“You think you can just give me this perfect cunt and then ask me if I’m close?” His voice was low and rough, and she cried out as his teeth scraped the shell of her ear. “You think I could stand to feel you fall apart—squeezing me, soaking my fucking cock—and not come?”

He groaned like he could already feel it happening, and she shuddered as she felt his tongue on her earlobe, the hinge of her jaw. She thought her hair must be getting in his mouth, but he only pressed closer, sounding half-crazed and too far gone to care.

“You’re mad,” he muttered, seemingly more to himself than her at this point. He sucked hard over the pulse in her neck, his forehead rolling against her jaw as he drove into her again and again. “Out of your fucking mind if you thought that.”

“I didn’t—” she gasped, barely able to keep up.

He released the suction on her throat with a *pop* and raised his head to look at her again. “Come for me and see what happens.”

She whined as his hand dropped to the back of her thigh where her knee was inching along his side. He pressed it up and open, sliding even deeper. “Come on, baby,” he whispered, the words slipping out soft and sweet. He let the tip of his nose brush along hers. “Come for me and I’ll come for you.”

“I—I will,” she promised, clinging to him as it welled within her again.

“I know you will.” He nodded against her forehead, his voice going tight. “Because you’re—*fuck*—such a good girl.”

Her nails dug into his back as her hips drew tight. “Fuck,” she breathed, riding the crest. “Oh, fuck, I’m going to come.”

“That’s it, baby,” he said, and he sounded so *proud*. Like she’d *earned* it.

Her mouth fell open on a cry as the first pulse ricocheted through her. Pleasure flooded out from her core in sharp, relentless waves, and she watched Malfoy register the sensation through heavy lids.

The effect was immediate, just as he’d told her it would be, and even if she hadn’t been able to see it in the tension of his neck, the ripple of gooseflesh across his chest—if she hadn’t been able to hear it in the hoarse groan from his throat—if she hadn’t been able to feel the throb of his cock joining her own echoes—she still would have known.

Energy was shimmering behind her breastbone, more intensely than she’d ever felt before, but unmistakable nonetheless. She met Malfoy’s eyes, wide and clearly reflecting the awe she felt too as the bond between their magical cores was completed.

One of her hands came up between them, pressing over his heart, and wordlessly, he mirrored her. A blissful contentment, bone-deep and far beyond the realm of a normal orgasm, seeped outward from his touch, dousing her limbs in heavy satisfaction. Her eyelids dropped in a slow blink and she vaguely registered the trickle of moisture down over her temples.

She didn’t know how long they stayed like that, simply staring at each other, but Malfoy’s breathing had returned to a normal rate by the time she had regained her faculties enough to form words.

“It worked.”

As far as commentary went, it fell woefully short of encapsulating the literal mind-body-spirit transformation they had just undergone—looking into each other’s eyes as their magic knit together, binding them irrevocably. Forever.

Not to mention the earth-shattering orgasms.

Apparently, Malfoy was not so changed that he could resist the opportunity to rib her. “Told you so,” he said with a smirk.

When she rolled her eyes, he shook his head in exasperation. “*Are you close?* Merlin, Granger.”

“I didn’t want to assume!” she said defensively. “I suppose that’s why you like so much foreplay.”

To her surprise, he laughed loudly at that. “What?” she snapped as he shook on top of her.

He was regarding her with a kind of fond pity, the sort of expression one might bestow upon a little turtle that found itself stuck shell-side down. She didn’t care for it one bit.

“I truly cannot believe that someone has to tell you this,” he said. “But *you* are the one who likes foreplay so much. Potentially more than anyone else in the world. So much so that your master plan was to engage in nearly two weeks of it.”

Her head drew back in confusion. “That’s not—it wasn’t...”

As his words sank in, however, she supposed that *technically* their progression through the number scale could *maybe* be lumped into a similar category.

She gave an indignant huff. “Well, it’s not like there was another option for getting here.”

His lips pressed together as though to suppress a smile.

“You would have proposed something else?” she asked in disbelief.

“As a man, yes.”

“Like what?”

He shrugged the best he could while still laying over her. “Start fucking on Day 1. Pack in as many attempts as possible, and spend the two weeks allowing the kinks to work themselves out.” He smirked. “So to speak.”

She mouthed soundlessly for several moments. “But—well—but, why didn’t you suggest that?”

The fond look was back. “For the same reason I didn’t let you try to force yourself to come before you were ready: a bad experience would have set us back much further than simply taking it exceedingly slow.”

Her eyes flicked back and forth between his, but he seemed completely sincere. Something shifted in her chest as she thought back to the night he’d left her on the sofa to take care of herself.

“You really knew I wasn’t ready?” she asked in a small voice.

His chin dipped in a nod. “I saw the moment you went distant—clear as day. At least getting off by yourself to the memory still put the image of coming with me in your head. Perfectly respectable progress for one day.”

“And you let me think that you were just edging me for your own amusement,” she said, her chest feeling oddly tight.

“I was perfectly comfortable playing the villain if that’s what you needed.”

“I had no idea I was being so transparent with my needs.”

His face broke into a grin. “Oh, trust me, I know. It’s actually incredibly convenient. The fact that you’re unaware of it is just an adorable bonus.”

She scrunched her nose as he pressed a kiss to the tip of it.

“How embarrassing for you to be so low maintenance,” she said with a sniff. “Apparently all it takes to render you completely useless is a *perfect cunt*.”

His brows shot up his forehead. “You’d better watch it with talk like that or you’ll find out how little it truly takes.”

She laughed, pushing against his chest and rolling him off of her. He went without protest, hissing slightly as he slid out, and though both of them clearly felt the mess between her legs, neither of them made any move to cast a cleaning charm.

It’s the bond, she told herself as Malfoy propped himself on his side and trailed a gentle hand over her belly. *It must be.*

“It won’t—” She broke off as he glanced up at her. “I mean, I won’t—” Her throat clicked as she swallowed. “It’s past the right time. For this month.”

His hand fell to the blanket between them, and she regretted voicing her thoughts. It was a stark reminder that they had only cleared the first hurdle required of them. This was really only the beginning of their trials.

“We can try to use that—the timing, I mean—to… put it off,” he suggested. “For a while, maybe.”

Turning onto her side to face him, one hand nestled beneath her chin, she gave him a small smile. “Yeah, maybe.”

She appreciated the offer even though it was a bit of a risky proposition. There was no guarantee she would get pregnant right away, and every month they intentionally skipped would be one less opportunity during the year allotment.

She wasn’t ready to be a mother, but that wouldn’t change in twelve months’ time. In the moments when she was feeling particularly honest with herself, she wasn’t sure she was really suited to parenthood at all. But as Malfoy looked at her with such a painfully *soft* expression on his normally haughty features, she thought that her husband probably was. And if the last two weeks had shown her anything (other than the fact that she probably had a few more dormant kinks waiting to be discovered), it was that he would do whatever he could to help her be ready when the time came.

They would take it on together.

She raised a hand to his face, brushing the slightly damp fringe from his eyes. Her lips quirked in a smile as she spotted a piece at his hairline that the moisture had coiled into a tight ringlet.

“Did you really let Nilly curl your hair when you were young?” she asked, plucking the strand and watching it bounce.

The way his mouth dropped open in shock was answer enough.

“She told you that?” he asked, though there was no other way she could know.

Hermione nodded.

He gave an indignant scoff, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. “So much for loyalty. If she wasn’t already free, I’d give her clothes for that.”

Hermione smacked his arm. “Don’t joke about that.”

He smirked at her, apparently completely returned to form by the opportunity to be an absolute bastard, and she shook her head. But despite the fact that there was every chance he would be incorrigible about it, Hermione couldn’t help asking something she’d been wondering about for days.

“Why did you free her? You already treated her well.”

Malfoy looked away, and Hermione held her breath as she watched a muscle work in his jaw.

“I wasn’t willing to have someone bound to me in subservience,” he said after a long moment. “Compelled to do my bidding against their will. I—” He swallowed heavily, and Hermione suspected that if his left arm wasn’t hidden from view beneath the pillows she would have seen it twitch.

“I understand,” she said quietly.

He met her eyes again, and though he looked sceptical that she could really understand what that felt like, he nodded all the same. She debated pressing the issue further, but she had never really been good at letting things lie.

“Do you think more house elves would be amenable to freedom if they could keep the link to their ancestral magic like you’ve done for Nilly.”

“Yes,” Malfoy said simply.

Hermione chewed her lip. Their honeymoon was technically over; she would be expected back in Magical Creatures tomorrow. But with the way her progress in elf rights had been all but stalled by bureaucratic nonsense for the past several months, she hardly saw the point.

“Would you be willing to tell me about the spells you used? The ritual you designed?”

“Yes.”

She drew in a nervous breath. “And if other families wanted to follow your example, would you consider helping me to—”

“Yes.”

“I’m not sure how it would work outside the Ministry, but—”

“Hermione,” he interrupted, curling a hand over her hip. “Yes.”

She nodded shakily at the sudden heat in his gaze. Like he would indulge her in anything.

“What else?” he asked.

“Will you let Gemma teach you how to ride a bicycle?”

He breathed a laugh. “Sure.”

“Can I pick the next movie we watch?”

He nodded, and she lifted her hand to trace over the lines of his chest. “Will you still let me sit on your lap?” she whispered.

His hand slid down over her arse. “Only if you’re good.”

Her eyelids fluttered as he squeezed hard, and she filed the potential of what he might do if she was bad away for later. Heat was pooling between her legs again, and the sight of his cock growing hard against his hip made her voice come out breathless.

“Will you make me come again?”

She sucked in a gasp as his arm wrapped around her waist, yanking her on top of him. His lips were rough against hers as he murmured, “I thought you’d never ask.”

Hermione hadn’t really been concerned that their first time was some sort of fluke, but she was pleased all the same to find that the sex continued to be inordinately good and that Malfoy was more than willing to get her off even when it wasn’t strictly necessary.

In fact, he’d done it twice in short order. She wasn’t exactly sure *how* short, but as a charmed envelope swooped into the room and landed on the bed next to them, she figured it was approximately the time it took for an owl to reach her house from central London.

“That is exceptionally disturbing,” Malfoy intoned from where he was laying between her legs.

“I couldn’t agree more,” she said as she scowled at the addressees.

Mr and Mrs Draco Malfoy

“Do you mind?” she asked him, thumb already sliding beneath the flap.

“Be my guest,” he said with his chin against her stomach.

She unfolded the parchment and quickly scanned the page.

“Well?”

“... heartfelt congratulations on the successful consummation of your union...” Hermione read in a bored voice. “... sincere wishes for a lifetime of continued harmony in your marriage.” She snorted. “... no greater blessing than compassionate partnership... hopeful for the swift addition of a child... duty to the Wizarding World... penalty for non-compliance...”

She tossed the letter over the side of the bed. “A lot of words for *congratulations on shagging, don’t forget you’re just a broodmare.*”

When she settled back against the pillows, she noticed Malfoy watching her intently. She didn’t even realise she’d been fiddling with her wedding band until she followed his gaze to it. She dropped her hand, and his eyes lifted back to hers.

“Will you marry me?”

Her breath caught. “W-We’re already married.”

“Will you marry me properly?” he amended, shifting higher on her chest. “With vows we write ourselves and your father walking you down the aisle. Where Nilly can fix your hair and you get to wear a real gown.” Her heart pounded in her chest as he pressed his lips to the bottom of the tattoo between her breasts. “As long as it’s cut down to your fucking belly button so I can see this the whole time.”

The ghost of a laugh puffed past her lips. “That sounds highly inappropriate.”

“It’s highly necessary,” he murmured, slowly kissing his way along the thick scar. “These flowers remind me of all my favourite things about you.

“Beautiful.” Kiss.

“Wild.” Kiss.

“Pest.” Kiss.

“Stubborn.” Kiss.

He lifted his head to look her in the eye. “Hard to kill.”

The words hung between them as she blinked against the sting of tears. It was terrifying to consider how close they had actually come to letting this mess destroy them. Especially after everything they had both survived before.

But though they hadn't chosen each other the first time, there was nothing stopping them from doing it now.

"Yes," she breathed. "We may have to compromise on the dress, but... yes."

His teeth flashed in a wide grin, and she returned it as he shifted forward to kiss her. His hand sank into her hair, pulling her against his mouth, and she gave a contented sigh through her nose. He pulled back after a moment, breathing with his head resting against hers. She nuzzled into his palm, pressing a kiss against his wrist, and opened her eyes to the sprawl of black ink over pale skin. She gazed at the Dark Mark in front of her face, idly tracing the lines with her eyes and—

Her head drew back in surprise. "What the hell is that?"

Malfoy glanced down and then chuckled. "Oh, I almost forgot."

She stared as he shifted around, sitting up with the sheet across his lap and extending his forearm for her inspection.

The Mark itself was the same, but next to the serpent's open mouth, the thin outline of a speech bubble had been added. Inside it, three words were tattooed as though the creature was speaking them.

*Live
Laugh
Love*



CIRCEIAN
2022

Hermione let out a shocked laugh. "That is the stupidest thing I have ever seen."

Malfoy beamed at her. "I know. Isn't it brilliant?"

She shook her head as she looked down at the most infamous symbol of evil in magical history seemingly espousing the most *basic* tenets for finding happiness in this dark and depressing world.

"It's perfect," she said, feeling suddenly like crying again. Her fingers slid over the lines, freshly healed with a charm. "This is where you were today?"

He nodded. "The tattoo bloke thought it was hilarious."

"I can only imagine."

"But a wise person once told me that just because it's silly, doesn't mean it's not good advice."

Hermione looked up to find him watching her again. "I did say that," she agreed quietly.

He reached out and took her hand, squeezing gently. "I've kept you alive, and I can make you laugh, but... I think I can help with the third one, too."

Her chest heaved as she resisted the urge to look back down at his arm. She knew what he was referring to, of course, and so she held his gaze as she considered whether love might be a part of their life together.

He had told her once that he wasn't asking her for happily ever after, but that didn't mean she couldn't try to give it to him anyway.

She thought maybe he was remembering that conversation, too, because he added, "If you'll let me."

Hermione smiled.

And she let him.



Chapter End Notes

That's all folks! :')

Update 7/19/24: Now a series!

Firstly, I want to thank Circe for doing such an incredible job with my crack-treated-seriously idea for the art in this chapter! Please go give her some love on [Instagram](#).

Thank you so much for reading this story, and for those of you who have been here since chapter one, I can't tell you enough how much your comments, kudos, and love on TikTok/Twitter/the RoR Discord have meant to me! I am so thrilled that so many of you enjoyed this entirely self-indulgent tension timebomb with me <3

I have gotten questions about a potential epilogue/sequel, and in addition to Draco's POV of this story (cries in only 24 hours in a day), it is definitely something I'm considering. Mostly I think y'all just want an excuse to see Draco playing with Gemma with a one-year-old strapped to his chest, but, hey, who am I to judge? ;)

And finally, if anyone is left feeling like they wish there was more attention paid to the past between these two and the things they will likely still need to talk out regarding Hogwarts and the war, I understand the sentiment. But, that was something I focused very heavily on in my last long fic and I wanted to tell a different kind of story here. Please remember that this is only spanning the first two weeks of their relationship--there will be lots of time for that kind of deep-diving in their future. With that said, if you are looking for something to satisfy that hurt/comfort, healing, bared-souls-conversation itch, then I humbly recommend giving [Meet Your Match](#) a try. I would love to see you over there :)

As always many thanks and much love to [naginiLinguini](#) ([TikTok](#), [Twitter](#)) for beta work!

And you can also find me on [TikTok](#) and [Twitter](#)!

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