

Immaculate Misconception

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Immaculate Misconception

by [malfoyesque](#)

Summary

Hermione's husband wants an heir, but he can't get her pregnant.

Draco Malfoy's blood curse has him desperate to get someone pregnant, but doesn't want a legitimate heir.

It's a match made in heaven, and nothing at all is going to go wrong.
Nothing.

At.

All.

Malfoy let his head fall back, closing his eyes as he took a deep breath from the ceiling.
“*You* are a woman of child-bearing age. *You* are looking to become pregnant. And you have told me that your husband has failed to make that happen. It is being triggered *right now* and it’s being triggered by *you*.”

His eyes flicked quickly over her body, before stopping himself.

“And from the moment you stepped foot in my house, I have been so fucking hard I can’t feel my toes.”

Notes

Prompt:

Character A has a breeding kink with Character B.

Before you start:

This story is largely about falling pregnant. Yes, it's a funny, smutty fuckfest of a fic, but it also involves some realistic depictions of trying to get pregnant, including some bad parts. While there are no major triggers such as miscarriage or other pregnancy loss, the disappointment of not falling pregnant IS there. The dread of the two-week-wait IS there. The blame, the ‘it’s your fault’, and the anxiety about dates and ovulation windows and about why it’s not happening IS there. If that’s a big deal for you, read with caution. I’m going to tread lightly, but I’m also speaking from experience, so I’m not skipping over it either. Protect yourselves first. Love you all.

- Translation into Italiano available: [Immaculate Misconception \(TRADUZIONE ITALIANA\)](#) by [silmjller](#)

Chapter 1: "It's being triggered right now and it's being triggered by you."

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione raised her hand an inch. The Floo powder shifted and slipped in her palm as she stared into the fireplace.

He was expecting her.

She took a deep breath.

But it didn't make her any less nervous.

Whether she'd wanted to appear like she was taking it seriously, or whether it was her lingering self-consciousness that he would make fun of her looks, she wasn't sure. But either way, Hermione had somehow found herself selecting a rather pretty floral sundress to wear, her hair tidied into a low bun and a touch of makeup on.

Getting dressed up for Draco fucking Malfoy.

She was going to *kill* Pansy.

Hermione hadn't spoken to Malfoy in *years*. And now, out of the blue, she was supposed to...

How was she even supposed to greet him?

'Hello, Malfoy, will you fuck me please?', she wondered to herself. It was an idiotic way to open a conversation. *'Hi, Draco, how've you been, and before you sit down, would you mind awfully bending me over?'*

She took another deep breath.

'Good Afternoon Malfoy, I know that you despise me down to the very blood that runs in my veins, and that I'm also already married to someone who's not you, but would you be so kind as to please impregnate me?'

If her hands hadn't been full of Floo powder, she would've covered her face with them.

Pansy had *sworn* this was a good idea. That this was, quote, a '*tidy little solution*' and she was a '*genius for thinking of it*'.

And now Hermione was standing at the Floo, on the edge of running late, because Malfoy was a colossal fucking prat and even if he agreed to this, he was going to make her life absolute hell over it because that was what he *did*. He was an *arse*.

A third deep breath.

This one to stop herself from slamming her forehead into the bricks.

It wasn't Malfoy's fault that she was struggling to fall pregnant. It wasn't even *hers*. Not that things like these involved fault, but...

She exhaled heavily.

She and her husband had been trying, but the never-ending line of negative tests had begun to put a strain on their marriage. He wanted an heir, and there was only so much 'lying there while he tried to do it the natural way' that she could take. They'd tried potions. Charms. Different vitamins and healers and exercises and positions. Nothing had worked.

So Hermione Granger-McLaggen needed an alternative option.

And that, along with Pansy's insistence that she wouldn't *spontaneously combust* if she were to enter the building...

Was how she ended up stepping out of the Floo at Malfoy Manor.

He was waiting for her on the other end, looking as impeccably put-together as he always did. He'd grown significantly taller than the last time she'd seen him at Pansy and Ginny's wedding, held in the Manor's very own orange garden. His hair was a little shorter on the sides than it had been then, the harsh lines likely forbidden in photographs as part of the bridal party.

Man of honour—Hermione almost rolled her eyes. *Unlikely*.

She reminded herself why she was here.

Be pleasant, be pleasant, be pleasant.

She gave him her fakest possible smile.

"Granger," he greeted her, his voice strained and almost tight in his throat. "Welcome back."

His eyebrow twitched as he said it.

Oh, Gods, she fucking hated him.

It took every drop of willpower in her blood not to slap him.

"Malfoy," she said back. "It's Granger-McL—"

"Don't—" he stopped her. "It's bad enough you *married* the wanker. I do not want to hear his name in my house. Merlin knows it might summon his family, and I think my father might've *literally* made a ward to prevent that happening."

She bristled. "Why?"

Malfoy didn't waver. "Cormac Senior was even more of a prick than his insipid son. Frankly I'm shocked *you're* allowed in."

Hermione glared at him.

Some things never changed.

"*Charming,*" she said.

Malfoy swallowed hard, his jaw tightening as he gestured for her to follow him into the sunroom.

"Shall we?"

She fell into step beside him, the silence between them stretching long and awkward as they navigated the absurdly grand corridors of Malfoy Manor. The place was just as overindulgent as she remembered— every inch of it pristine, every detail designed to remind her exactly where she was.

Malfoy's eyes were fixed straight ahead. He cleared his throat.

"Surprised he didn't insist on coming with you, if I'm honest." His tone was flat, casual in a way that wasn't casual at all.

Hermione shot him a sideways glance. "Why?"

He shrugged stiffly. "Thought he might want to keep an eye on you." A beat. "Or me."

She bristled. "I don't need a *chaperone*, Malfoy."

His lips twitched—but unpleasantly. A tense, terse tightening of his mouth. "I never suggested you did."

"Then what *are* you suggesting? That I'll need a bodyguard?"

"I am not suggesting anything. I was merely *inquiring* as to whether he knows you're here."

Hermione's shoulders stiffened as she glared at him.

"He knows."

Malfoy shot a judgemental expression over his shoulder.

Hermione did not react.

She had been in a difficult position early in her career—her name had zero sway with the Wizengamot. Even less once she broke up with Ron and didn't have Percy Weasley's vote to fall back on. All the war heroics got her *nothing* if it didn't give her the ability to even enter the debate room. If she wanted to put forward bills to approve expansions to the Hospital, she needed a pureblood name attached to her own.

Cormac had offered her a lifeline.

He had contacts in the Ministry that she would never have had access to with just her own name. Even if they didn't like *him*, at the very least, she had one vote in the Wizengamot.

One vote was all she needed to table her agenda items. She could take care of the rest.

His family weren't thrilled with the idea of half-blood children, but they also weren't idiots. She had a good reputation, and she had drive. She was going to do big things, and the McLaggens knew that whoever gave her the opportunity would end up with the Minister for Magic in their immediate family. The benefit of having their name associated with a war heroine, and the photos of Cormac mingling with Harry didn't hurt, either.

It was a strategic match.

And she had grown to... well, *love* him, in a tolerating sort of way. She might not have been *in* love with him, but they got on alright, and he was mostly kind to her. He was *very* easy on the eyes, too, and despite her insistence that things like that didn't matter, it definitely didn't hurt.

All-in-all, it was a situation she was grateful to have found herself in.

The only thing Cormac and his family wanted in return from her was an heir. They didn't even care about the gender, which she'd convinced herself was surprisingly progressive of them. They just wanted an heir to parade around. Someone to eventually inherit. And so, she was holding up her end of the deal and trying to get pregnant like a good little wife.

Except it hadn't worked.

The potions had been disgusting, and had made her feel so unwell Cormac had gotten excited thinking it was morning sickness. She pushed through it, but still nothing. The charms they'd used—fertility, sticking, spells to release multiple eggs at once—not even a hint of a positive. No healer could tell them.

Nothing.

When Cormac had subtly suggested the idea of having another man get her pregnant, she'd been hesitant at first, but it made sense. She was one of the most photographed women in wizarding Britain. If she appeared in public, visibly *un-pregnant*, and then the following week was cooing after a small child, it would have immediately raised questions about whose baby it was. Raised questions about why a surrogate had been used.

Had the surrogate been a pureblood? Were the McLaggens blood purists?

That wasn't really fair to them. If her and Cormac's biologies weren't compatible, it made sense that *she* be the one to pursue... alternative options. No one would question if a seemingly happily married woman suddenly announced a pregnancy. No one would think it looked odd whatsoever. No one would *talk*.

The McLaggens valued very little above what was *talked* about.

Not even the heir being a true McLaggen.

But Malfoy didn't need to know any of this. She didn't need to explain her choice of husband to him, and she certainly didn't need to explain why she wanted to have children.

Malfoy offered her a seat, and she took it. He sat at a diagonal, his gaze fixed on her with an intensity that was almost confrontational. Elves appeared out of nowhere, pouring them both a glass of cool lemonade.

She didn't touch it.

"So," he studied her closely. "Have you been... well?"

"Drop the act, Malfoy. This is not a social call."

"Oh, and here I thought we were *friends*," he said, sarcastically. "Why don't you start with going through why you're here."

"You *know* why I'm here," she spat, but it shook her a little. Pansy had *sworn* she'd made everything *explicitly* clear when she'd broached the subject with Draco.

He rolled his eyes.

"Obviously I know why you're here. But surprising as it may be to you, *Granger*, I am feeling just as awkward about this as you are. Therefore, I would appreciate us being *extremely clear* with each other about *why* you are even entertaining the idea of—" He swallowed, hard. "—*this*."

She drew in a breath and swallowed firmly.

"Cormac and I are trying to conceive, but for whatever reason, it hasn't happened through..." She cleared her throat. "...*traditional* methods. Pansy seems to think that Cormac and I might benefit from your involvement."

Malfoy's expression darkened, and he leaned back, his movements sharp and deliberate as he rested his glass of lemonade on the arm of his chair.

"*Benefit from my involvement?*" he said. "You mean you want me to *help* you."

Hermione felt her lips tighten into a line. She bit her tongue as her jaw cocked.

"I wasn't aware you were capable of accepting help, Granger. You've always struck me as rather self-sufficient."

She shot him a warning glare, but he didn't let up. "I'm perfectly capable of recognising when I can't do something alone."

"Ahhh, you hear that? *You can't do it.* Meaning you are not self-sufficient. Meaning you *need help*," he said arrogantly. "Would it seriously kill you to say out loud?"

She snapped.

“Yes, well, unfortunately, medicine hasn’t advanced *so* far that I can asexually reproduce through parthenogenesis, so until then, I cannot *be* self-sufficient, and I unfortunately still require a man to come inside me.”

Malfoy paused. Something in his expression shifted. His fingers, which had been idly tracing the condensation on his glass, went still.

Hermione clenched her jaw and cursed herself as her cheeks went bright red. It was unbelievably crass of her. It was improper and inappropriate and *far* too familiar.

Malfoy always knew *just* how to draw it out of her.

He always did this to her. Every interaction they had ever had, from age eleven to age twenty-six. There was something about him that just put her on edge. Like every word was him flicking a match to a fuse.

She just couldn’t help but fucking detonate.

The silence that fell was long and pensive. Judgemental, she’d have called it.

His eyebrow twitched at her. And his lip curled into a smirk.

“Well, the name might’ve changed, but the witch certainly hasn’t.”

The familiarity took her by surprise. She reached for her lemonade to distract herself, taking a sip of it. Malfoy composed himself, leaning forward far more casually, elbows on his knees.

“I must apologise,” he said, though the words sounded begrudging. “It is impolite of me to pry.”

“Oh, by all means, pry away,” Hermione snapped. “I’m about to return the favor.”

Hermione straightened rigidly in the elegant armchair, her fingers laced tightly in her lap. For what felt like the hundredth time, her gaze swept over the ornate sunroom, filled with delicate white furniture and subtle touches of unbelievable wealth. Though it wasn’t ostentatious, or gaudy, it was, dare she say, tasteful. Understated. Accented with plants and flowers and sunlight. It was brighter in here than in any other rooms of the Manor she’d seen. Lighter.

It was only at that moment that she realised Malfoy had not brought her to the drawing room.

She’d learned from the McLaggens that the drawing room would’ve been expected for a meeting such as this. Cormac had walked her through it in *explicit* detail. Reminding her how to eat and drink and sit and converse and God forbid she had to use the loo, he’d been seconds away from owling Nanny McLaggen to ask how best she should ask for it. Rambling about the Manor, and where Malfoy would greet her and seat her and what his elves would serve. She wouldn’t admit out loud that she had been a little nervous about returning to this place, and the bad memories it held.

But Malfoy had not brought her to the drawing room, he'd brought her here. To a bright, relaxed room, where she could have her back to the wall, while his remained open and exposed.

It was an unspoken kindness that had taken her far too long to notice.

Her eyes cast back to him. Still as a statue. Stiff, even. Breathing slowly and steadily, as if it was paining him to be in her presence. She couldn't figure him out.

Malfoy sighed again, his shoulders stiff as he gave her a sharp nod to proceed.

Hermione tried to force herself to relax. As easily as he pissed her off... the sunroom was a kindness. One he probably hadn't expected her to even notice, but a kindness all the same. If he was going to let his guard down a little, she supposed it couldn't hurt her to do the same.

"What are you getting out of this?" she asked. "And why does Pansy think that you would even *consider* agreeing to it?"

He stared at her for a moment, his jaw tightening as if struggling to find the words. Finally, he looked away, his frustration palpable.

"Because she knows I'm desperate," he bit out.

"Wow," she said, sarcastically. "*Desperate*—"

He cut her off, his voice rising with irritation. "That is *not* a comment on your attractiveness, Granger, far from it. Believe me, I mean it quite literally."

His bluntness caught her off guard. She glared.

"But you *are* getting something out of it," she prodded. "Aren't you?"

He exhaled heavily. "So she *didn't* tell you."

Hermione bristled at the edge of mockery in his tone, but she didn't drop her gaze, pinning him to his chair like a particularly interesting bug she might examine. Malfoy's fingers wrung together in something she could only identify as stress.

He exhaled sharply through his nose, his frustration spilling over into his words.

"My bloodline," he began, his voice tight. "Has been subject to a curse. Someone, somewhere, in a line of ruthlessly ambitious ancestors decided that it was imperative that the Malfoy line never 'end'."

His expression was awkward, his jaw working as he seemed to bite back the more delicate words. "It's rather simple, actually. A magical failsafe to ensure the continuation of my line."

She studied him closely. "How does it manifest? The curse?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "An... urge. An overwhelming biological urge to reproduce."

Hermione frowned. “A lot of people feel the urge to—”

“*Not*—” Malfoy cut her off again, his voice rising with frustration before he visibly reined it in, his shoulders tightening. “—Not to the extent that I do. I would stake my life on that.”

She watched him carefully, noting how his hands flexed against his knees, his knuckles paling with tension.

“As far as I can tell,” he continued, his voice strained and low, “I’m the first one in a few hundred years that it’s actually manifested—”

“Why?”

He groaned with annoyance at the interruption, dark and low in the back of his throat.

“May I *finish*? ”

He looked at her expectantly.

Hermione huffed. But she nodded.

“Most Malfoys are married off by twenty-one at the absolute latest. It’s been getting progressively worse since I turned twenty-five. Worse again since the New Year.” He took a deep breath. “My twenty-sixth birthday was a month ago, and the issue has now become... significantly more pressing.”

He shifted in his seat again, clearly uncomfortable, and glanced at her almost apologetically.

“And it’s fucking humiliating enough without having to discuss the details with Hermione godsdamn fucking *Granger-McPrat*. ”

Hermione exhaled heavily.

There was nothing to be embarrassed about. She knew procreation was a delicate subject amongst purebloods, but there was no place for politeness when it came to curses. They manifested in different ways, but if there was something to be done... surely, they could be scientific about it?

“It’s not humiliating,” she reassured. “I know the urge to reproduce doesn’t happen to everyone but it’s perfectly natural to find it arousing. It’s basic biology to find the act of *breed*—”

“Granger, it makes me so fucking horny I can barely walk.”

Her mouth fell open, and her breath caught.

“*Oh.* ”

He seemed like he was forcing himself to hold her eye contact.

“Yes. *Oh.*”

He grimaced, dragging a hand through his hair with such force it looked as though he might tear it out.

She averted her gaze, blushing furiously. “I expect that’s rather annoying.”

He hissed as he inhaled. “It’s *agony*. And I can barely leave my fucking house.”

“Why not?”

“Because I would be *arrested*.”

Hermione studied him for a moment, her brow furrowing as she studied his form. He was agitated, that was for sure.

She’d always thought of Malfoy as composed. Smug? Yes. Arrogant and prattish and generally rude? Absolutely. But composed. Less so when he was younger, but even she couldn’t deny that the few times she’d seen him since the war ended, he’d seemed... controlled. Even in social situations she was sure he’d not have wanted to be in, he carried himself with the same refined confidence, as if nothing in the world could really rattle him anymore.

But this?

This didn’t look like composure.

Hermione, ever the academic, leaned forward, her curiosity overtaking any sense of propriety.

“When did it start?”

Malfoy exhaled sharply, rubbing at his temples. “Around twenty-two.”

She nodded, filing that away. “Do the symptoms come in waves? Or are they constant?”

“Constant.” His jaw tightened. “Worse when triggered.”

Hermione perked up at that, her mind immediately racing with possibilities.

“Triggered by what?”

Malfoy hesitated, which was strange. He had been answering her clinically enough, but now, his entire posture shifted. His shoulders tensed, throat working over a hard swallow. He was avoiding looking at her.

“Malfoy?” she prompted.

Nothing.

"Is it stress-related? Does it worsen at night? After eating? Exercise-induced? Perhaps it's physiological in nature. Hormonal?"

Malfoy made a strangled noise in his throat. "Granger."

"Because if it *is* hormonal, you might be able to manage it with potions."

"*Granger.*"

"Have you tried suppressants?"

His gaze snapped to hers, eyes piercing. "For fuck's sake, Granger, it's *you.*"

She froze.

Malfoy let his head fall back, closing his eyes as he took a deep breath from the ceiling.

"*You* are a woman of child-bearing age. *You* are looking to become pregnant. And *you* have told me that your husband has failed to make that happen. It is being triggered *right now* and it's being triggered by *you.*"

His eyes flicked quickly over her body, before stopping himself.

"And from the moment you stepped foot in my house, I have been so fucking hard I can't feel my toes."

Hermione stared at him.

She stared at him for what seemed like twenty years, so it must have been a good minute before her brain caught up, and tried to make her eyes dart down to his lap. She didn't do it, but the fact she'd even *thought* about it sent a furious blush to every inch of her body.

"I very much did not need to know *any* of that."

Her tone came out a lot more clipped than she intended. She could not have sounded more sarcastic if she had tried, but the sudden knowledge that he was sitting across from her with an erection made her nervous.

Malfoy groaned, burying his face in his hands, looking like he truly was in agony.

"I'm not here to win points for subtlety, Granger. I am desperate, and I am telling you the truth. The curse isn't interested in social niceties, it's about ensuring that my bloodline continues. It is *demanding* that I father a child."

Hermione absorbed his words with her blush, burying it down. "But it would be a half-blood? And it wouldn't even legally be a Malfoy."

He shook his head. "As far as I can tell, it doesn't matter. So long as the child carries half of *my* blood, that is enough. You wouldn't have to worry about anything else from my side, they

can't inherit any of the titles, nor the Malfoy name if they're illegitimate. So as long as you're legally married—”

“Illegitimate means that *you and I* aren't married, not that I'm married to *someone else* specifically.”

He rolled his eyes so hard they looked like they were about to fall out of his head.

“And *here comes Granger* with her own definitions, despite not knowing a single goddamn thing about pureblood magic.”

“I know *plenty* about pureblood magic, *thank you very much.*” She narrowed her own eyes at him, her lips pursing. “And I'll take being able to control my own body over an absurdly large house *any* day. And speaking of—” Hermione folded her arms, unconvinced. “Why not just get married and get some pureblood witch pregnant? It would be *so* much simpler than —”

“*No.*” Malfoy hissed, his voice sharp. His fists clenched against his knees, his knuckles white with tension. “Not an option.”

Hermione blinked, taken aback by the intensity in his voice. “Why not?”

“Merlin's fucking beard, Granger, because I *don't fucking want to*, that's why not!” He cut her off, raising his voice. “Why must you fucking question *everything!*? ”

Hermione stared at him for a moment, waiting for him to answer. When he didn't, she shrugged, and reached for her handbag so she could leave.

If he wasn't going to be honest about his reasons—

“Wait—wait,” he said. “Just...”

Malfoy exhaled sharply, dragging a hand through his hair. He looked like he was trying to wrestle back some semblance of composure, but the tension in his body remained coiled tight. His jaw worked, and when he finally spoke again, his voice was quieter but no less strained.

“Don't go. *Please.*”

Hermione stilled. She should've left. She should've. There had to be someone *other* than him who'd be willing to take part.

But there was something about the way he said it.

Reluctant, as if forcing the words out cost him something.

As if it wasn't costing her *everything*.

Her fingers curled around the strap of her handbag, digging her fingernails into the leather as she tried to quell the anger that was building inside her.

This deal cost him *nothing*. Yet he was making out as if she owed him all the answers and he owed her nothing but... but fucking *disdain*. Judgement and rudeness and awfulness and disdain. It was incredibly unfair. And it was embarrassing. And she just— she just—

She turned on him.

“For all I know, you could’ve set this whole thing up as some disgusting prank to humiliate me. Based on the awful things you used to do to me in school, it wouldn’t be very far out of your wheelhouse.”

“And for all *I* know,” Malfoy started. “You’re doing this to gather information as some fucking strategy to blackmail me for my Wizengamot vote. You’re not the only one with something to lose, here.”

She heaved with breath and anger.

“I have a career to think about, and a reputation to protect, and despite both of those things, I have been completely honest with you about why I’m here. If I’m supposed to trust you, then I need you to be *completely* honest with me in return. Because right now, I’m about three fucking seconds from walking away. So if you want me to stay, then answer the goddamn question.”

Malfoy’s nostrils flared, and for a moment, she thought he might snap at her again. But instead, he pressed his lips into a hard line, and fixed his gaze somewhere just over her shoulder.

“The Malfoy name has brought nothing but harm for generations. It deserves to die. And as long as I don’t marry, it will. With me. I wish it was the bloodline, too. But there’s nothing I can do about that, short of *killing myself*. If this curse forces me to have a child, then fine. But that child will grow up with a *different* name. My name ends with me.”

Hermione said nothing.

A heavy silence stretched between them. Malfoy was rigid, his jaw tight as if daring her to argue, to push back against a decision that was clearly set in stone. But for once, Hermione didn’t. She simply observed him. Really *looked* at him. And she finally saw the weight he was carrying. There were bags under his eyes. Dark circles. A pallour that she hadn’t noticed, he’d always been pale, but this seemed...

Exhausted.

The burden was far heavier than just a curse. He was carrying a history. A reputation; one that she herself had assumed still applied to him. Despite the fact he’d done nothing but be rather kind about this whole situation, thus far.

Rude, and clearly very pissed off by her general presence...

But actions spoke a lot louder than words.

“Go on,” he said, quietly. “Laugh at me.”

Hermione took a steep breath.

She didn't.

Instead, she just sat back down.

She was still cross. Because wasn't it so *Malfoy* to wait until the last goddamned moment to reveal *noble intentions*? It was like he was fucking allergic to them.

She pursed her lips.

"Annoyingly, I now see why Pansy thought I might be a good fit for this plan," she spat.

He looked up slightly, but did not smile. "Pansy has an irritating habit of being right when you least want her to be."

Hermione hummed an acknowledgement, but her eyes met his. Those icy, steel-grey eyes had softened slightly with time, though they still held a sharpness. An alertness, as if he were always thinking far more deeply than he let on. They raked over her quickly, but not coldly, and she felt her cheeks warm under his steady gaze.

Malfoy closed his eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath.

"Of every witch in the wizarding world, there are very few that I would trust not to undermine me on this. There is a lot to be gained for the witch who convinces me to marry her." He swallowed. "I was hesitant when Pansy suggested this, just like you were. But you are *already* married. And you are also one of the only people in the world who might like to see the end of the Malfoy name as badly as I do."

Hermione couldn't help it. She smiled, letting a soft laugh escape through her nose.

He seemed grateful for it.

"I am asking far more of you than you are of me. And I am *terrified* at the thought of being in your debt." Malfoy took stock of her, speaking quietly. "But this is also not your burden. And I will understand if I am asking too much."

Hermione held his gaze, searching for any sign of insincerity, but found none.

Malfoy had always been impossible to read. Or, at least, it seemed that way to her. Maybe she just didn't know him well enough to be able to see the lines that she was meant to read between. But this was something different. Something stripped of his usual posturing. The weight of what he was asking hung between them. It was heavy, and unspoken.

He *was* asking too much.

But so was she.

"Well the thing is..." she started, quietly. "Cormac had two stipulations. The first, which you meet quite tidily, was that whoever we asked would need to be very discrete."

Malfoy cocked an eyebrow at her. “That surprises me. He seems the type to get off on being publicly cucked.”

She shot him a tense glare. He conceded, waving her on.

“And number two...” she said.

Malfoy wasn’t looking at her. He was simply listening.

She sighed loudly.

“Two, it really needs be a blonde. And yes, it’s so that no-one knows he’s been *cucked*, as you so delicately put it. But also so that no-one asks any questions, including the child themselves. Cormac is *insistent* on that. So despite my *disbelief* in saying it...”

She took a deep, deep breath.

“...I think you might actually be perfect.”

She stared at her hands for a moment, allowing the words to settle in the air, but when she looked up, she found Malfoy staring.

He looked like he’d been electrified. Eyes wide. Stiff through the shoulders.

“*What?*” he whispered.

His voice was sharp as a knife. Sharp as teeth. Biting. Hermione wrung her hands a little as she watched a dark blush crawl up his neck.

“I think we are rather uniquely placed to help each other,” she said quietly.

“You’re... *agreeing*? His gaze began to heat.

Hermione stared at him. Was she not speaking English?

“...*Yes*? ”

Malfoy’s hand seemed to fling itself beside him, gripping the arm of his chair with rapidly whitening fingertips.

He swallowed, hard; his Adam’s apple wrenching down his throat as his lips parted.

“You do understand that this means that... you and I would have to...”

“I understand the mechanics of how a witch becomes pregnant, yes.”

Hermione blushed, trying to ignore the look that had plastered itself across his face at the thought of fucking her. He looked like—*God, this was so embarrassing*—he looked like he didn’t entirely hate the idea, and that made her feel unbelievably exposed. She stared at her hands instead.

Was she imagining things, or was he breathing a lot heavier?

She cleared her throat.

“So we shall need to discuss timing. I know approximately when my ovulation window will be open next—”

“Now.”

He practically fucking growled it.

Hermione’s gaze snapped up again, ready to confirm what he’d said, but what she saw made her whole body go warm.

Malfoy was staring at her.

With eyes so dilated they were almost black. With lips apart, panting breaths escaping over them. Colour high on his cheeks. Jaw stiff as if it was about to snap. A single bead of sweat was forming at the side of his neck, and she found her gaze lingering on it.

In all twenty-six years of her life, she had never been looked at like this.

“Now?” she squeaked.

“Now,” he whispered again. “I will get on my knees and beg if I have to,” he whispered.

And out of nowhere, her whole body went warm.

“*Malfoy*,” she scolded, blushing furiously. “We need— there are things— *considerations*— things to *sign*—”

“I’ll give you anything you want,” he said.

He leaned forward, placing a hand on the table between them.

“You want a trust fund? I can make it discreet. Charitable donations— influence, votes— just point me. I will do *anything*, Granger. *Anything*.”

Hermione’s breath caught as she studied him— really studied him. His pupils so blown she could barely see the gray in them anymore. The gravelled edge to his voice, the way his body seemed too tight for him. The way his hands trembled where they gripped the arms of his chair.

The way his legs were parting against his will.

Her eyes darted down, instinctively following the movement, and trailed up the inside of his impeccably tailored trousers. Up, along his inseam, until she reached strained fabric, leaving very little to the imagination. Leaving her eyes lingering on the rather significant—

Oh.

It appeared that there might have been *other* manifestations of the curse. *Other* ways it might've presented itself. Ways that might have... *amplified* a witch's desire to consider him as an option. Or perhaps that was just... the size that he was. She gulped. She'd only ever been with Cormac. She knew from reading relevant texts that he was appropriately within the average range in terms of size.

Malfoy seemed to exist a little above it. And as soon as he saw her staring at it—

It twitched.

“Fuck, Granger, don’t just look at it,” he groaned. “*Please.*”

This wasn’t just want. This wasn’t just urgency. Or even lust. This was something else. Her mind caught up with her instincts, logic slicing through the haze.

“Malfoy,” she said carefully, her voice steadier than she felt. “Can you consent to this?”

“Yes,” he spat back, faster than lightning, his eyes going wide. “Yes. I consent. I fucking consent.”

She eyed him carefully.

“You *hate* me.”

Malfoy let out a sharp breath, shaking his head. “I don’t,” he said, his voice rough but insistent. “Granger, I don’t.”

She studied him, her own pulse hammering in her throat. His pupils were still too wide, his breathing too uneven, his body thrumming with something that felt just shy of feverish. His answer had come too quickly.

Too desperately.

“Not good enough,” she said quietly.

“What do you want from me?” His jaw tightened. “You want me to say I used to?” His voice was hoarse, but there was no bite to it. Just unravelled, frayed honesty.

“Fine, I did. I hated you, once. But that was a long fucking time ago, and it was for reasons you couldn’t control.” He took a sharp breath. “I promise you, Granger, that if, after we do this, it turns out that I do actually hate you, you can be assured it’s entirely because of who you are as a person.”

Hermione frowned as she thought.

This was a bigger issue than he probably thought it was. What if the curse was *forcing* him to want her? Obviously he was desperate, but how much control did he really have over it?

Regardless, she wasn’t going to fuck him right then and there.

“I think I should go,” she said.

“No!” he said.

He *begged*.

“Please,” he sobbed. “Please don’t go.”

“Malfoy, I can’t even *speak* to you when you’re like this. Perhaps you’ll have a clearer head if you—” she blushed, her eyes darting downward. “*Take care of this* first.”

“How?”

Hermione tensed. “What do you mean, *how*? ”

“How, Granger? How am I supposed to—”

How to put it delicately.

She took a deep breath, and smiled tersely at him.

“Owl me after your next *wank*, Malfoy.”

She picked up her bag, and stood.

“Wait, wait, *wait*, Granger, please— *Please!*”

“I’m not sitting here while you try and convince me to fuck you, Malfoy.”

“Okay, wait—” he took a deep breath. He slammed his eyes shut, gripping the chair until his knuckles went white. “Please don’t leave,” he whispered. “Give me a minute. Let me explain.”

She pursed her lips, waiting for him to say literally anything else, but the longer she stood there, the more obvious it became how *difficult* this was for him.

He was sweating through his shirt. Trembling in his seat, like he was being slowly and delicately tortured. He looked like he was in *agony*. She almost stepped forward. Almost placed a hand on his arm to reassure him, but she was certain it would only make him feel worse.

So she just sat back down.

His breathing slowed, and he began whispering to himself. *Pleading* with himself to calm down. It took almost ten minutes for him to open his eyes.

And as he did, she held his gaze.

“It hurts, doesn’t it? ” she said quietly.

He swallowed, hard, reaching for his lemonade and downing the whole glass. It refilled magically, and he drank that too.

“It does,” he whispered. “I’m sorry. I lost control of it. But perhaps you can see how difficult it is for me to go out in public now.”

She nodded.

He was looking at her awkwardly, unsure of what to say. She’d apparently done the wrong thing by trying to leave. At least without confirming that their agreement would be in place *later*. The curse had made him panic.

So Hermione decided to placate it.

She placed her handbag back onto the chair beside her, reached for her own lemonade, and settled more surely into her chair. Making it clear to him, and making it clear to whatever part of his body was losing control that she wasn’t going to leave.

At least, *yet*.

Gratitude flicked across his face.

“I can’t wank,” he said, quietly. “That was how I kept it under control for years, but it hasn’t worked since the start of the year. And since my birthday, I can barely even *touch it*. It doesn’t matter how long I do it for, I get so close and then I just can’t...” He stopped short of being vulgar.

Hermione stared at him.

Months he’d said.

She *hated* the sudden rush of empathy that flowed through her.

She had first-hand experience of not being able to come. She was, in the words of every man she’d gone past kissing with, *difficult*. Viktor’s too-rough hands, or Ron’s attempt at going down on her—the closest she’d gotten had been with Cormac, after he’d learned that female orgasms could assist with conception. *Closest*. She still hadn’t gotten there though. Only ever by herself.

It was almost a blessing that Cormac didn’t seem to care that much.

But if she hadn’t been able to quickly finish herself off... God, she’d be about to burst out of her skin with frustration.

“Forgive me, this is crass, but surely you could... *hire* someone?” Hermione asked, giving up on pretense. “And if I’m totally honest, I doubt you’d even have to do *that*. You’re attractive, you’re rich, the contraceptive potion is a thing...”

He gulped. “Can’t. Tried. The curse knows.”

Oh, Hermione's interest was thoroughly piqued again.

"Knows *how*?" she asked. "Does the curse actually *know*, or is it somehow *your* knowledge of them being unable to get pregnant?"

Malfoy stared at her, seeming equal parts horrifically stressed and relieved that she was staying.

"As in," Hermione continued. "If a girl was to *pretend* that she was letting you impregnate her, but really was taking the potion..."

Malfoy shook his head. "It's based on *intent*. Pansy tried, bless her. Sent me a girl who claimed up and down that she wanted to, but she was lying. It didn't work. I don't understand the magic. But I can't come unless it's inside a woman who genuinely *wants* me to get her—"

He trailed off, motioning with his hand to finish his sentence.

"--- Pregnant?"

She spoke without thinking. His hands flew to the chair's arms again.

Hermione's eyes widened. "And am I right that every time either of us say the word—"

"*Don't*—" His fingertips sank into the leather. "Yes. Every time *that word* comes out of either of our mouths, it gets harder to fight."

Hermione's body fizzed with curiosity. "What does?"

Malfoy squeezed the ends of the armrests, groaning loudly. "Don't, Granger, I'm already being so fucking *vulgar*."

Then his eyes locked onto her lips. Dragging down her throat, over her collarbones, exposed by the sundress. He looked at her with the type of lust that she could feel on her skin. It was like a tongue; caressing and savouring her in a way she had not been savoured before.

"*What* gets harder to fight?" she asked, without thinking.

His eyes lifted back up to meet hers.

"The urge to drag you underneath me, *right now*, and fuck you into the floor."

Hermione's whole body erupted. Shivers ran up her spine. Then heat replaced it. Against her will. She should have been appalled. She should've recoiled, chastised him, shut this conversation down before it spun even further out of control.

She shouldn't have been turned on by the fact he wanted to fuck her this badly.

Shit. Was she *into this*?

She'd gotten a hint that she might've liked it when Cormac had first suggested trying for a baby and she'd been more turned on than she'd ever been with him. But this *urge*—

She swallowed it as a benefit. It would be easier if she *did* want him to do that. And she hated admitting it, but she rather *did*.

"I don't think we should—" she spoke quickly, over the top of his gasp of pain. "—*right now.*"

Malfoy's jaw tightened again.

"You're right," he said. "Did Cormac give you a contract as well?"

"Yes," she said.

"I think we should wait to sign them," he hissed. He was *fighting* to get the words out. "Give you some time to think about it."

It was almost kind of him.

"Give *you* some time to think about it, too," she said quietly.

His eyes locked fiercely onto hers.

"Granger, I'm not going to *stop* thinking about it until I've fucked you so full of cum you can *taste it.*"

His own mouth fell open, and he clapped his hand over it.

"Fucking—*fuck*—" he hissed into it. "I apologise. I'm sorry. I know my honour means nothing to you, but I swear on every shred I have, I'm *trying*—"

Hermione's breath hitched.

Her body betrayed her before her mind could catch up. Heat licked up her spine, her stomach twisted. Her skin prickled as if he'd actually touched her, and she found that she really fucking wanted him to. She clenched her thighs together instinctively, horrified at herself.

He was right.

She really, *really* needed to think about this.

"Malfoy," she said, quietly, "You're right. I think—"

He swallowed, hard. Nervously.

"I do need to think about it," she said, quietly. "*However*, I think— would it make things more manageable for you if I gave you a specific time I would let you know by?"

He took a deep breath, and nodded. "Please. But if you tell me you're going to be a week and then turn me down—"

"I don't foresee myself turning you down, Malfoy. I just want to make sure that Cormac is *really* okay with this, now that it's a real possibility."

Malfoy twitched, sinking his teeth into his lower lip.

But he said nothing else.

She collected her things, thanking his elves for the lemonade, and he guided her back to the Floo. He clutched every doorway as he walked through it, trying to steady himself. And by the time they made it back to the Floo parlour, he was practically panting.

"Sorry." He was drenched in sweat but was making no move to wipe it from his face. "I think it knows you're leaving."

Hermione hesitated, watching him struggle. He was trying so hard to keep himself in check, but every step, every movement, was clearly an effort. She could see it in the tightness of his jaw, the way his fingers twitched like they were itching to grab something—someone.

She knew she should just leave. She had already pushed things too far, lingered too long. But something about the way he stood there, tense and barely holding on, made her pause.

"...Are you going to be alright?" she asked, voice softer than she intended.

Malfoy straightened, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Don't worry," he said, firmly. "Unfortunately for the world, I'll live."

Chapter End Notes

[Check out these incredible options for cover art by starlinart](#)

I cannot express in words how grateful I am to my beautiful, talented, and wonderful alphabeta (omega?••), thornedhuntress. Not only is she an incredible writer and editor, she's also just a fucking incredible friend. I don't think I would've written a single word on this if it wasn't for her constant reassurance that my ideas aren't stupid. But she was there, so instead, you get an *almost* entirely pre-written (10 chapters ready in the chamber), multi-chapter breeding fic for one of my favourite fests of the year. Without her, this fic would be 1/10th what it is.

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Chapter 2: “For what I’m— I’m going to say things— I can’t stop it—”

Chapter Summary

Hermione considers her options and earns one of the tags.

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione stepped out of the Floo at Walton Park to a pacing husband. She was buried in questions before she'd even dusted the soot from her dress.

“Well? What did he say? Did he agree?” Cormac demanded, excitedly. “Did he try anything — did you let him?” He practically gasped. “I hope you *let him*.”

Hermione exhaled sharply, holding up a hand to stop the rapid-fire interrogation. “I just got home, Cormac. Give me a second.”

He huffed, crossing his arms, but he did step back, watching her closely.

She swallowed, suddenly aware of the warmth lingering under her skin, the ghost of something burning and electric still humming in her veins from her final exchange with Malfoy. At the way his hands gripped the door frame. The strength in them. In his body. In *that thought*.

Fucked you so full of cum you can—

Hermione forced herself to swallow with great difficulty.

She wasn't supposed to be enjoying the idea of this. This should've been a chore. A task to complete. But his desperation for her...

She'd be lying if she said she didn't find it a tiny bit flattering, regardless of whether it was real or not. Everybody liked feeling desirable.

She was only human.

A shiver curled down her spine, and she forced herself to focus. “He agreed,” she said. “He —” She hesitated. How was she supposed to explain the *rest* of it?

Cormac, though, seemed not to care for the details. He threw his hands in the air, grinning a mile and a half wide as he began punching the space in front of him in victory.

“Yes, yes, yes!” he exclaimed. “So you got him to sign?”

Hermione turned away, busying herself with shaking out her dress, trying to ignore the way her hands trembled. “No...”

Cormac immediately froze.

“He didn’t sign?”

“He asked me to think about it,” she said, quietly. “I told him I’d let him know my final decision in a few days. I said that I needed to talk to you first.”

“Me?!” Cormac paled. “Why *me*?” his hands flew to his hair tugging at gorgeous blonde curls that she’d hoped their child would have one day. The ancient McLaggens had heard that the ancient Malfoys cursed their line to only give birth to blondes and had immediately followed suit. “That makes it sound like I’m standing in the *way*!”

God, was he always this whiny?

“I know you want this,” Hermione said, rubbing her temples. “And *he* knows you want this.”

“Does he?!” Cormac said in a panic. “Does he understand that? Because when I say I want you to do anything to make sure he agrees to this, I mean *anything*, Hermione. Whatever you have to do.” His gaze fell deathly serious. “*Whatever it takes* to convince him to sign that goddamn contract, you *do it*.”

“I don’t think I’m going to have to convince him. He’s on board. That’s not the issue.”

Cormac let out a frustrated breath, pacing again. “Then what *is* the issue? If Malfoy’s agreed, I don’t see what else there is to think about.”

Hermione swallowed. Neither did she. If she hadn’t wanted this, she wouldn’t have gone over in the first place, and yet, something sat on her chest, heavy and unsettled. She couldn’t stop thinking about the way Malfoy had looked at her. The desperation in his voice.

It just seemed... unlike him.

She squared her shoulders. “It’s a big decision, Cormac. We should take some time—”

He huffed. “I think you’re overcomplicating it.”

That made her snap her gaze to him. “Overcomplicating?” she repeated, incredulous. “I have to carry the child of someone who used to *despise* me. Surely you understand why I might need a second to process that?!”

Cormac’s mouth opened, then slammed shut.

Wisely.

Hermione exhaled, shaking her head. “Look, I just need a few days. I’m sure I’ll end up going through with it, but I want to be absolutely *certain* that it’s not just the excitement of having an option finally lining up.”

Cormac dragged a hand down his face, still visibly tense, but he sighed in resignation. “Fine. But, Hermione, if you’re going to say no, do it quickly. The longer you wait, the harder it’s going to be for me to come to terms with.”

She nodded stiffly, but she didn’t say what she was really thinking.

However hard it was for them...

The wait was going to be a *hell* of a lot harder on Malfoy.

She spent the remainder of the weekend thinking about it.

By Monday, Cormac was impatient. His eyes rose hopefully to hers every time she entered a room. She smiled awkwardly at him, muttering a ‘not yet’. He grumbled and turned back to his newspaper.

By Tuesday, he was annoyed. Grinding his teeth. Huffing. Pointedly watching her as he inspected the polish of his Quidditch gear.

Wednesday he was irritated. She’d been a few minutes late from work, and he’d blown up at her as if she’d disappeared without warning.

“You could’ve had the decency to Floo,” he snapped, tossing his Quidditch gloves onto the table with a thud. It was all he did, these days. Quidditch. Day in, day out. Playing with his Ministry contacts and other pureblood friends who were content to not have jobs.

She paused, caught off guard by his tone. “St Mungo’s needed funding for a new research program. We put out a call and an anonymous donor sent the money in under an hour. I had to sign the paperwork so that they could get started on—” she shook her head, furrowing her brow as she checked her watch. “Cormac, I’m *four minutes* late.”

“I don’t care *how late* you are, Hermione.” He pinched the bridge of his nose, exhaling harshly. “You’re *never* late. This whole week you’ve been distracted.”

“Distracted?” she asked, trying to remain calm.

She wasn’t an idiot. She knew exactly what he was implying.

“*Distracted*. Always in your own head, you’re *putting things off*...” His eyes narrowed.

She pursed her lips tight.

“I told you, I’m still thinking.”

“Oh my God, Hermione, you must’ve done all the thinking in the entire world, by this point.”

“This isn’t a small decision, Cormac.”

“Correct, it’s not,” he snapped. “Which is exactly why I don’t understand why you’re *dragging your feet.*”

She stiffened, and stormed upstairs.

But he was right.

God, she’d even told *Malfoy* she wouldn’t be this long.

All she had to do was give them an answer. *Yes.* It was one word. One basic, tiny little word. Sign her name on a document and...And let Malfoy fuck her. It was simple. Clinical. But she just couldn’t bring herself to write the goddamn word down. She’d tried to approach it logically. He needed to reproduce, she and her husband needed a child. Their arrangement would be beneficial for both sides.

Everyone would get what they wanted.

But she was unsettled. Not by the offer itself, not even by what it would mean for her future, but by him. By the way his hands trembled as he gripped the doorframes, by the sweat beading at his hairline, by the raw, almost pained way he had spoken. By the way he’d looked at her.

She knew magic. Knew its strengths and its dangers. And more than anything, she knew what curses could do to a person.

This wasn’t Malfoy.

Malfoy *hated* her. Whenever she was stressed, she ran her tongue over the teeth she’d only had filed down because he’d cursed her. Any time she looked at herself in the mirror, and didn’t like what she saw, she could almost swear it was *his* voice tearing strips off her self-confidence. The weight of his hatred. The way he used to look at her like she was less. Like she was *nothing*.

And now that he was cursed, he looked at her like she was the embodiment of magic itself.

But how would he act *afterwards*? Once it worked, and she was pregnant. Or once she had his child? Once the curse was broken, would he wake up and realise with horror that he’d fucked a *Mudblood*?

She could handle his hatred if it was directed at her. She was an adult. But she would not allow someone to think of her child that way. To look at her child and think that they were *less*. Like they were *nothing*, simply by the fact that they had come from *her*.

Her eyes squeezed shut. It didn't matter if Malfoy was their only option, it didn't matter who her child's father was. She would not let *anyone* treat them like they didn't deserve to be magical, and with him, the risk was still too high.

She couldn't do it. She *wouldn't* do it.

And so, on Thursday, she took the day off. She would tell Malfoy she wasn't interested, and then she would spend the day outside, reading in the sunshine, forgetting about the idea for a day.

She would only be delaying a little bit longer.

But, as the time loomed, she suddenly decided she'd read *first*. That was wise. Get some sunshine, relax, and work up to it.

It was five o'clock by the time she made it back inside.

She had to stop putting it off. He deserved an answer.

Hermione moved into her study, where she sat immediately down at the desk. Steeling her nerve. She lifted her quill to parchment.

And, as if summoned by her thoughts, an owl tapped at her window.

She sighed, reaching up to let it in, but when she saw the sharp, elegant handwriting on the envelope, her stomach clenched. She took the letter from the plain barn owl, gave it a stroke and a treat, and sent it on its way.

He hadn't sent his eagle owl.

Discreet.

As promised.

She unfolded the letter, and cast her eyes over it. It wasn't long.

Granger,

I am not writing to hurry your decision. In fact, I am writing to make it on your behalf, and if you'll forgive me, I'm going to be rather candid.

This is a fucking terrible idea.

There is too much bad blood (please forgive the expression) between us already, and I do not wish to make your existence any less comfortable than I already have.

*You want a child, but your hesitation shows that you clearly do not want it to be mine. That should count for more than anything that either myself or your *idiot* husband wants.*

I think you should pursue other options.

Best of luck with your endeavours.

Kind Regards,

D. Malfoy

Hermione's throat tightened. She re-read the letter, the sinking feeling in her stomach confusing her even further. He was on exactly the same page as her. This *was* a terrible idea.

So why was she suddenly disappointed?

She took a deep breath, trying to force herself to calm. This was alright. It was completely fine. He had every right to back out of the agreement, same as her. In fact, she was a bit relieved. It meant that *she* didn't have to be the one to back out.

They would just have to find someone else.

Hermione chewed the inside of her cheek. God, Cormac was going to have a *conniption* when he got home from Quidditch. She sighed, got to her feet, and turned back toward her desk—

Tap. Tap. Tap

She glanced at the window.

Another owl. No— *his* owl.

Malfoy's eagle owl. Tufted ears and a somehow debonair expression. She'd know it anywhere, he always had one as his favourite, and this time, he'd sent it.

This message must've been very urgent.

Granger,

Please disregard my last message, I am an idiot.

I very much want to get you pregnant.

Please let me.

Kind Regards,

D. Malfoy

Hermione froze.

She re-read the message multiple times, her brow furrowing with confusion, until she realised that the curse was likely just forcing him to beg her.

How unbelievably odd.

Regardless, it didn't change her own decision. If anything, it reaffirmed it. Even when he was capable of telling her how he felt, his body was forcing him to agree to something he didn't want.

She sat down again, and lifted her quill to reply, but before she could, there was a scratching against glass.

Another owl.

Granger,

Apologies. Too candid.

Confirmed, bad idea. Probably a bad idea to write to you at all.

Disregard.

D. Malfoy.

Hermione frowned.

Another tap-tap-tap at the window.

Granger,

What are you wearing?

Sexual Regards,

D. Malfoy.

Her jaw dropped.

Tap-tap-tap.

Another owl.

Granger,

I am so sorry.

Fucking kill me.

D. Malfoy.

Hermione frowned at the letter, but before she could properly question its contents, a flicker of movement drew her attention out the window.

Four more owls were perched on the guttering.

Her mouth fell open, and she stared at the parchment in her hand once more. His normally elegant script had been desperately scrawled, like the owls themselves had written it.

Fucking kill me, he'd said.

Hermione wondered how many of these owls were begging her to do exactly that.

She didn't have time for this. She'd procrastinated too hard. It was already past five o'clock, and she was meeting some of the major donors for St Mungos in the morning. She didn't have *time* to go and talk Malfoy down from some biological ledge.

God *damn* her sense of ethics.

She took a deep breath. She tossed the parchment onto the desk.

And she marched downstairs to the Floo.

There was something seriously fucking wrong with this man. But it didn't stop her from being deeply, *deeply* concerned for his wellbeing. And as a qualified healer she wouldn't have been able to sleep at night if she hadn't done *something*.

Hermione stepped out of the other side, and into Malfoy Manor. The parlour was a mess. Powder was all over the floor, as if someone had been fighting to stop themselves from going somewhere. A chair was overturned and broken.

"Malfoy?" she called. "Where are you?"

One of his elves appeared with a crack.

"Oh! Oh! Miss can help!" the elf bowed, guiding her toward the hallway. "Master Draco is unwell, and Miss can help!"

The elf led her down the hall, tiny feet scurrying against hardwood. The further they went, the worse the damage became—a door hanging from its hinges, a shattered glass cabinet in dim lighting.

"What do you mean by *unwell*?" Hermione asked. "What's happened?"

"Too strong. Too strong today," she replied. "Master is fighting, but magic is fighting *back*, Miss! He is hurting himself trying to stop it!"

Hermione's stomach turned as they rounded the corner.

She wasn't in a pretty sundress today. Her hair wasn't in a pretty little updo, and she didn't have a lick of makeup on. It was mid-July, and she was dressed accordingly, in the denim shorts and light cotton t-shirt she'd been wearing when she went to read in the garden.

So, given her casual attire, she had been expecting to be the less presentable of the two of them.

She was wrong.

Malfoy was on the floor of what looked to be his study, braced against the wall like he'd collapsed there, panting hard. His shirt was wrinkled, half-unbuttoned, damp with sweat. His hands were fists in his hair, pulling, as if trying to hurt himself.

Or, more likely, trying not to.

Her breath caught. He was a wreck.

"Malfoy," she said, carefully, stepping forward.

His head snapped up, and when his eyes met hers, her stomach dropped. His pupils were huge, black swallowing nearly all the grey, his expression somewhere between relief and absolute fucking despair.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," he rasped, voice ruined. His head thunked back against the wall, his chest heaving. "I told you *explicitly* not to come."

She blushed. "I must've left before that message arrived."

He didn't say anything else. She took a step closer.

He flinched.

"Granger," he said, quietly, his fists clenching at his sides. "*Please go.*"

"You need help," she said, firmly.

"*Get out of here!*" he spat.

Hermione ignored him. Because of course she did.

Instead, she crouched down, studying him, her stomach twisting at the state of him. His breathing was shallow, his skin flushed, sweat dampening the hair at his temples. She had never seen Malfoy look like this before. Even in his weakest moments, he'd always made an attempt to hide it. Behind expensive clothes and a sharp bite, he'd protected himself.

But he couldn't hide the state he was in.

She pulled out her wand. "I'm going to cast a few diagnostics."

His head lolled against the wall. "Knock yourself out," he hissed through gritted teeth. "Maybe you'll find out I'm actually dying so I can do everyone a fucking favour."

She flicked her wrist, and golden lines shimmered into the air above him. The readings were awful—nervous system fried, temperature too high, adrenaline spiking so hard it was a wonder he was still conscious. His magic was unstable, erratic. Crackling through him like a live wire.

"Oh my God," she breathed. "Malfoy, this isn't normal."

"No shit," he rasped.

She chewed her lip, eyes flicking back to the readings. "Have you seen a Healer?"

Malfoy barked a humorless laugh. "Oh, yes. It went *flawlessly*. Tell me, Granger. You ever been told by seven different experts that the best solution to your problem is to '*literally get fucked*'?"

Her face flamed. "I— Malfoy—"

"It doesn't stop," he cut her off, voice hoarse. His fingers twitched like he wanted to grab something. Her, maybe. He clenched them into fists instead. "It never stops. And I am so fucking tired, Granger. You have no idea—"

He let out a sharp breath as he cut himself off. His eyes rose to her own, which she was sure were resigned and guilty.

"And you're..." his breath shuddered from his throat. "You've come here to say no."

Hermione hesitated for a moment. But she nodded.

He stared at her for a moment, the pain visible in his eyes, before closing them slowly.

Nodding.

"Good."

She didn't have much of a response for him. "Why good?" she asked.

"Because you won't be tied to *me* for the rest of your life. That's wise." He inhaled sharply. "Exactly the kind of smart decision I would've expected from you."

A compliment.

She tried to ignore it, but it softened her frown regardless. "That's not—I wouldn't be tied to you. Like you said, the child wouldn't even be a Malfoy. Ideally, they wouldn't ever even know."

He swallowed, hard. And he looked up at her. Sincerity in his eyes as he struggled to get the words out.

"But *you* would know. You would look at that child, and you would see me." His voice shook as he forced the words out. "You would resent that child for things that *I* did to you. Because they have my lips. Or my eyes. And it won't be fair."

Her lips parted to respond, but he reached for her arm, gripping it firmly.

"I know what it's like to be a child who is hated, Granger."

And her heart broke.

It was true. His parents had been notoriously unkind to him in his teenage years. They'd brought him up to be a particular way, to believe particular things. To achieve particular, horrific heights. He'd fallen short at every possible opportunity. Pansy always said Malfoy had changed for the better after they died.

Hermione was beginning to see that.

"Come on," she said, as gently as she could. "Let's get you off the floor."

She reached for his arm, fingers wrapping around solid muscle, and tugged. He tried to help her. Got to his feet to lift himself up.

Only for him to stumble, hard, against her.

Heat. A solid chest. He just—he smelled like—

Like *him*.

The scent of something expensive. Soft. Subtle. But very masculine. She couldn't put her finger on what it was, but even drenched in sweat...

Malfoy smelled absolutely *divine*.

Her thighs clenched.

His hands shot out to steady himself, one gripping the desk beside them.

The other clamping onto her waist.

She froze instinctively. Looked up at him, eyes wide and panicked.

"Fuck," he muttered, breath shuddering out of him. "Granger, don't look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"With the big, innocent eyes. I can barely restrain myself as it is."

Hermione ignored him, and made sure not to blush. With a sharp flick of her wand, she summoned the chair closer and shoved him into it.

"Well, then, sit there and think about something boring."

He let out a low, rough exhale, his head tipping back, exposing the long line of his throat. His Adam's apple.

She shouldn't have noticed it.

Hermione instead turned her attention to the room. It was in shambles. Papers scattered, furniture shifted out of place, a vase shattered in the corner. It looked like someone had been

fighting.

She supposed he had.

She flicked her wand, sending a pile of books back onto the shelf.

“Don’t,” he groaned. “The elves will—”

She shot him a sideways glare.

He paused. He stared at her in confusion. And then his lips curled into a half-smile, and he *laughed*. “Merlin, you really haven’t changed at all, have you?”

Hermione paused for a second.

He said it so *fondly*.

She focused on repairing the vase, though it was difficult, she wasn’t sure what it was supposed to look like. She glanced at him.

“I would’ve thought that you of all people would consider that a bad thing.”

“I don’t think it’s a bad thing,” he said, quietly. “Not at all.”

Her fingers slowed on her wand.

Malfoy didn’t elaborate, didn’t backtrack or offer some snide remark to balance it out. He just... said it. Like he meant it.

She risked a glance at him. “I don’t believe you.”

He exhaled heavily, letting his head fall back as he stretched in the chair.

“That’s fine,” he said, finally. “I’ve never done a single thing in my life that would make me deserving of your trust.”

She stopped completely, and turned to him.

“What are you doing?” she asked, sharply. “Why are you talking to me like... like...”

He looked up at her in genuine surprise.

“What. Like a person?”

She shook her head. He seemed to catch on, clicking his tongue like ‘*ahhh*’.

“Like I’m not going to come in my pants if you look at me?”

She nodded, tightly.

He took another deep breath. “You told me you weren’t interested.”

“I’m not.”

“Then that’s that. And the curse is letting me breathe in your presence.”

“That’s awfully respectful of it.” She blushed. “And you, I suppose.”

Malfoy huffed a quiet laugh, rolling his shoulders like he was testing his own restraint.

“First time for everything.”

She tried to avoid the small smile at his joke. But she changed her mind, and let him have it. Holding each other’s gaze for only a moment.

This was... odd. The entire time she had been here, he had been on edge, barely able to control himself, every muscle tensed, every breath labored. And now, just because she had said no— He was fine?

“If it’s that easy to take no for an answer, why is it so hard for you to go out in public?”

He exhaled through his nose. “Even at my least lucid, I still know who I’m talking to. When Hermione Granger says no, she fucking means *no*.”

She frowned.

“So if I was another woman, you’d be trying to talk me into it?”

The question hurt him. She saw it on his face.

But he nodded.

“Yes,” he said, quietly. “Quite *insistently*. And that’s not...”

Fair, possibly. Not *okay*. Regardless of what the end of his sentence was, he didn’t have to finish it. She understood.

And she deeply appreciated it.

Hermione wasn’t sure what to make of him. She appreciated his self-control, at the very least. Rather gentlemanly of him to immediately take her no for an answer. She wouldn’t have expected that from him. It was becoming rather clear to her that, despite her doubts about his motivations... Malfoy seemed, in fact, not an entirely awful man anymore.

She turned back to the vase, concentrating as the last few cracks forged themselves together.

“So that’s it, then?” she asked, voice lighter than she felt. “You believe the ‘no’, and you’re just... fine?”

Malfoy sighed, rubbing his temple. “No. But it’s more bearable.”

She glanced at him. “Because I rejected you.”

He shot her a glare, and this time, she didn't hold her grin back.

"I imagine Cormac's going to be *very* unhappy with you once you tell him," he chuckled.

She scoffed. "Awfully bold of you to assume I haven't already?"

Malfoy shot her a look of complete disbelief. "I haven't had an owl yet, telling me you're out of your mind and hysterical, and would I please do my best to convince you otherwise?"

Her mouth fell open. "He did *not* owl you."

"He did. Multiple times. Assuring me your hesitance was just you being '*hormonal*'."

She pursed her lips, fuming to herself. But Malfoy looked like he was trying to hold back a laugh. "He *really* wanted me to fuck you."

That was it. She was furious with her husband.

She turned in fury to Malfoy's desk, tidying papers, if only to give her hands something to do. She didn't look closely at them, just pushed them into piles as she plotted how many stinging insects she was going to slip into Cormac's Quidditch boots.

How *dare* he? Speaking directly to Malfoy—God she *hated* when Cormac got like this. Whenever he saw an *in* with anyone of any sort of status, he'd just—he—

Hermione rolled her eyes, huffing loudly. "Please tell me you have some idea why he is so *obsessed* with you."

Malfoy laughed loudly, rubbing his previously-sweaty hands down his thighs.

"I'm Sacred Twenty-Eight, Granger. One of the *big* ones. Most other pureblood families assume that we are magical down to the marrow in our bones. That there is something inherently *special* about us. A particularly enterprising social climber would do well to get on my good side. He would do even *better* if he were to realise that, without any heirs, I will eventually be needing to name *someone* in my will. Most purebloods in my position would likely be trying their very best to ensure that money stayed within their bloodline."

She rolled her eyes again. "So the only thing special about the Sacred Twenty-Eight is how much goddamn money you have."

He feigned shock. "Granger, such uncharacteristic *disdain* from you."

She scoffed dismissively, and she turned her eyes back to his desk. Picking up a small photo frame that had fallen over.

And then she made the mistake of looking at it.

It was Malfoy. Well, more specifically, it was two Malfoys. Draco and his mother. He must've been no older than one and a half; his mother no older than Hermione was now, both of them *gorgeous*.

He'd been a stunningly beautiful child.

She shouldn't have been surprised, really. He was rather unfairly handsome now and didn't he bloody well know it— likely one of the reasons she found him so irritating. But this, as a small child— God, he was truly *angelic*. His hair was even whiter and softer than it looked now; a fine, downy fluff that curled slightly around his ears, like it had been lovingly tucked there and hadn't decided yet whether it might like to stay in place. His cheeks were round and flushed. Grin broad and spattered with only four front teeth, making him look a little more rabbit than boy. Eyes large and sparkling with laughter, as Narcissa, beautiful as ever, bounced him adoringly on her hip.

The joy between them was palpable. And the smile on Narcissa's face was unlike the tight, practiced one Hermione had known as her standard. This one was real. This one was *light*. Real and soft and unrestrained. Pure happiness, watching her child laugh. Watching a tiny, bright-eyed boy look at her like she was the best thing in the world. Before things went horribly wrong, and they turned him dark with false beliefs. Just a family. A mother and son. *Happy*.

Hermione swallowed down the soft hint of an ache in the depths of her throat.

She had always wanted children. She'd questioned it briefly, during the war. Wondered if it was right. Wondered if there would even be a world to bring children into. She just so loved the idea of having a family. Of exciting adventures taking the long way to the shops, and seeing the love of learning spark in her baby's eyes. She'd always wanted that. To be someone's *most trusted*. To take on that responsibility, and to show them so much love that they could not help but feel surrounded by it.

God, she wanted that so badly.

“Cute, wasn’t I?” Malfoy interrupted her thoughts.

She sighed, placing the photo upright in what she assumed was its rightful place.

“Mmhmm. Gorgeous,” she agreed. “How could you *not* want to get pregnant, when you know they’re going to come out looking like *that*? ”

It happened so subtly at first that she almost didn’t notice.

A sharp inhale. A twitch of his fingers against the chair. The way his thighs tensed, just slightly.

And then—

Then the silence changed. Shifted. Thickened. She glanced up, and her stomach flipped violently.

His jaw was locked, his throat tight, his hands curled into fists on the armrests. The slow, agonised way he exhaled through his nose. Sharp and uneven. Like he was suddenly fighting something five times his size.

Hermione froze.

Oh.

Oh, no.

She hadn't meant it like that.

Had she?

His eyes flicked to hers, dark, heavy-lidded, and she could see it overwhelming him. Turning his blood to acid, and his veins to knives. *Pain*.

Shit.

Malfoy licked his lips, dragging in a careful, controlled breath. "Granger."

She swallowed.

His voice was even, but just barely.

"I'm sorry," she gasped, clapping her hands over her mouth. "I take it back."

"You—" His fingers flexed on the armrest, almost casually except for the fact that he was holding himself together with sheer force of will. "Granger, what the *fuck*!?"

Hermione let out a slow breath, forcing herself to play it off.

"I—" She cleared her throat. "I was talking about the photograph."

"I know," he hissed.

Through gritted teeth. Through perfect lips.

Muscles twitched in his jaw.

Hermione shifted, panicked, mortified. "I—fuck—Malfoy, I'm sorry. I just thought—"

And then his body snapped forward, curling in on itself, like he had lost control of his own muscles. His fingers flexed violently, gripping the chair like he wanted to rip it apart, his chest damp with sweat, his thighs parting once more against his will as if he was about to start bucking into the air.

His breath hitched, sharp and wrecked, as he let out a low, strangled groan.

This was her fault. This was all her fault.

He'd been holding back alright. He'd been able to have a conversation with her—a *respectful* conversation, even. He'd accepted her decision. He'd *admired* her decision.

And as a thank you—

She'd given him *pain*.

It *was* pain. She could see it in his body, in his face. Excruciating, agonising pain. Something inside her twisted. It wasn't fair. He was trying *so hard*, and—

And—

She moved forward.

In an instant, she'd lifted him by the shoulders. Pushing him deeper into his chair. His head lolled against the high back, brows furrowed in agony, tears pricking at the corner of his eyes.

Hermione swallowed hard. She didn't know what else to do.

She just climbed into his lap, and straddled him.

She didn't wait for his reaction. Just unbuttoned the rest of his shirt. Pushed his undershirt out of the way and reached between their bodies for his belt. Malfoy's body went rigid, but she didn't stop, letting the metal clink open as dragonhide leather slid between her fingers.

She heard his breath catch, but she didn't stop, nor did she look up at him. She simply focused on the zipper of his trousers, working it down and pushing the sides apart.

And then she was at his underwear.

Black. Expensive. A muggle brand she recognised, but she was sure she'd never owned anything half as soft. She couldn't slow down. She couldn't hesitate or she was sure she would lose her nerve.

An incredibly taut physique was peeking at her from the sliver of skin between his undershirt and the waistband of his boxers. A few hard lines of muscle, but none harder than the one that was tenting them. She ran her palm along it. Her fingers. Teasing over the head of it, and over where she knew the sensitive slit would be. His entire body twitched; head falling back with a loud gasp of agonising pleasure.

She gathered every nerve in her entire body.

And she slid her hand into the waistband.

She closed her eyes as she took him in her hand, trying not to sink her teeth into her lip at the wall-shaking moan that left him in response. But before she could move, she felt a hard grip on her forearm.

"*The fuck are you doing?*" he gasped.

Hermione didn't respond right away. She simply gave him a brief, exploratory squeeze; trying to be gentle—he seemed so sensitive—and in return, his entire body spasmed with need.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "It was my fault."

"This isn't going to work," he sobbed.

"Let me try," she said, shakily in return. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

She moved her hand again, and he *gasped*.

"It's not—I won't be able to—"

"*Try*," she whispered.

"*I have* tried. Over, and over, and over." He gritted his teeth. "Every minute of every day since the second you left."

And with that, her eyes rose to his.

She was sure she looked terrified, but not nearly as much as him. She held his gaze as she pumped him slowly.

"*Please*, let me try," she whispered.

It was her fault. She didn't know how else to make it up to him.

He was only in this position because of her. Because of her *stupidity*—because she'd waited too long to give him an answer. How many days had it been since he'd slept? Since he'd eaten?

She pushed her thumb up the underside of his tip, drawing an agonising moan from somewhere beyond his throat. He resigned himself.

"*Wet*," he gasped. "*Make it—make it wet*."

Hermione brought her hand to her mouth, letting her saliva pool in her palm until it was glistening. When she gave it back to him, his head pushed forcefully against the chairback.

He bared his throat to her, his Adam's apple exposed. He was practically drowning in need, low growls escaping his throat as he tried to speak through them.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "Granger, I'm sorry—"

She pumped him again, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

"For what I'm—I'm going to say things—I can't stop it—"

"Say it," she begged. "Say all of it. Whatever makes it better."

His eyes met hers again. She nodded furiously. He let his head fall back once more.

And he let loose.

"Let me fuck you," he whispered back. Hissed back. Moaned back. "I know you want it. You want me to put a baby in you. Let me do it for you."

Hermione's legs were spread across his lap, but she felt them twitch as they tried to grab hold of him. He felt it too.

And he slid his hands up her thighs.

She stiffened. She hadn't expected this. It didn't hurt, nor make her uncomfortable... He just wasn't supposed to touch her. Though she wasn't sure she would've been able to deter him even if she'd tried.

He was gripping her thighs as if he'd die if he let her go.

Warmth flashed low between her legs, and Hermione's mouth fell open. She let out a staggered breath, but it did nothing to hide the blush from her cheeks.

"Granger, you little fucking—" he moaned. "I bet that pussy's tight as anything. Isn't it? So fucking tight. So wet. I bet I could sink right in."

He took hold of both her thighs, spreading them wider over his lap. Taking handfuls of soft flesh in his fingers as he sank his teeth into his lower lip. She thought her denim shorts might keep his hands at bay, but he wasn't being deterred by a physical boundary.

"Let me take these off." His fingertips pushed underneath the cuffs of her shorts. He was inches away from her underwear. "I can take you right here. Sink you down onto me."

She pursed her lips hard, trying to focus.

"Just you wait until I get my hands on you," he hissed. "Gonna hold you down on my cock and fuck you 'til you're dripping with me."

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to ignore the infernal blaze shooting down her spine.

Her thighs were aching, and not just because they were spread.

She wanted to move. She wanted to shift forward and rock against him. Grind against him.

"Oh, fuck, you *like it*." He groaned, a whine behind it that tore through him in agony. "You love hearing me like this. You're fucking *wet* over it. Aren't you?" He stared at her, eyes wide. "*Aren't you?*"

She didn't answer him verbally, but her hand started moving faster on its own.

"You want this as badly as I do. Want me to fill you up," he gasped. "Let me do it, Granger. You only need one."

She whimpered. "One what?"

"*One good fuck.* That's all you need. I'll get you pregnant. I'll fuck a baby into you *right fucking now*. Just get on top of me. Let me fuck you. Let me come inside."

Hermione couldn't help it.

She rocked forward.

It caught him between their bodies. Just for a moment. But the bolt of electricity that shot between her legs made her whole body squeeze tight. She looked down at his cock, properly taking stock of it, moaning quietly to herself as she admired him. It was so fucking pretty, just like the rest of him. Looked so good as he slid through her hands.

He would fill her *perfectly*. She sank her teeth into her lip. She'd never been this turned on in her life and she was barely making a secret of it. Her hands squeezed around him as she began jerking him with both hands. Whimpering pathetically as she began rocking against his lap.

"I come so fucking much, Granger, there's so fucking much. I could fill you with it. I'll give you all of it. Every fucking drop. Just don't stop. Just don't stop what you're doing. Feels so fucking good, almost like—"

She rocked against him again. Thrust her hips forward. Closed her eyes as she pictured it. His cock sinking deep inside her. Filling her. Stretching her so well as he sank himself in to the hilt. God, she had no doubt at all he'd get her pr—

Malfoy gasped.

He swelled in her hands.

He fell silent.

Hermione opened her eyes and looked down.

And she watched as she made him come.

Watching was all she could do. Pulse after pulse after pulse, streaking across his body. Over his hands, over her hands. Over his shirt and her thighs and her shorts. His lips were parted. His jaw clenched tight, head thrashing against the high-backed chair as his fingertips sank into her thighs.

But he didn't make a sound.

Every muscle in his body tensed as it took control of him. It wasn't a sensual climax, it was a violent one, and she'd never seen a man writhe like this. She kept going. Kept her pace, but eased off the pressure, as she watched him move through his high. Watched him peak and shudder and twitch as his face contorted with ecstasy.

With *relief*.

Her hands were sticky, her thighs damp, her clothes ruined, streaked with the aftermath of her snap decision. And, as she slowed to a stop, she suddenly came to terms with the reality of what she'd just done.

Malfoy was still trembling beneath her, his chest heaving, his grip loose but lingering on her legs, his head tilted back against the chair as he tried to pull in steady breaths.

The silence stretched, and with every moment, she felt more and more exposed.

This was not, and had never been part of the deal. She was not here for *apology handjobs*, nor for whatever kind of *therapeutic massage* she was sure she was going to try and convince herself this was when she realised later what she'd initiated.

Gods, she still had her hands on his cock.

She let go of him immediately, hands snapping back to her own lap, but the damage was already done.

She was coated in it.

She had nowhere to put her hands. Nowhere to hide from what she'd done. Her skin flushed hot, panic rising fast in her throat.

Malfoy groaned, wiping his hand on his shirt before dragging it, mostly clean, through his hair.

His voice was wrecked, hoarse from overuse.

"*Fuck,*" he whispered. Shuddered. "*I came.*"

Hermione winced. Her thighs were still spread over him, her clothes ruined, her heart pounding.

She needed to get up.

Now.

She shifted, trying to discreetly remove herself from his lap, but the movement made him tense beneath her again, fingers tightening briefly on her skin.

"Um..." she swallowed hard, trying to figure out how to tell him to fucking let go in the most delicate way possible. "Yes, you did."

His eyes opened.

He had drenched her. Not quite head to toe but certainly from stomach to thighs, and she so desperately wanted to drink him in. She was still stupidly aroused, herself, and was finding it difficult to even look him in the eye. She needed to get home before she did something truly stupid.

Hermione cleared her throat, face burning.

"...I should—"

His fingers dug into her thighs again.

"*Granger.*"

His voice was firm. Dark. Hard. *Growling*. It sent goosebumps over her body, and her attention whipped back to him.

He leaned in closer.

“I *came*.”

He hissed it at her. His eyes locked onto hers.

He came. He could only come if—

And suddenly, realisation hit her all at once. No. *No*. That wasn’t— her *intention*— she’d decided she didn’t want to. She was *sure* she didn’t want—

Her stomach knotted and froze.

Wasn’t she?

His respectfulness of her decision, the easy conversation, the thoughts that actually, really, Pansy might’ve been right and maybe Malfoy wasn’t *so* bad these days... the *photograph*. That couldn’t have... she would’ve *known* if she’d....

If she’d changed her mind.

His hands splayed over her legs. And then, without so much as a question, they rose higher. Onto her hips, over them. Onto her arse. He squeezed it. Hard.

And dragged her deep into his lap.

She could feel him against her thigh. Sticky, and still hard. The thought made her whole body shiver. *How was he still hard?* But before she got a chance to ask, Malfoy was standing from the chair.

She squealed as he lifted her, struggling against him, but he was far too strong, and far too determined.

He simply tucked her into his own body, and started walking.

“*Malfoy*,” she squeaked. “Put me *down*.”

“*I came*,” he hissed into her ear. “You made me *come*.”

“Exactly. You’ve already come. So just put me down, so I can—”

Malfoy’s teeth gnashed beside her ear.

“Oh, Granger, if you think I’m done with you for today, you are very fucking wrong.”

Art from this chapter:

Hermione trying her best to look appalled from Pixie.m05 😍

Chapter 3: “He slammed the contract onto her belly. But he didn’t take a quill.”

Chapter Summary

Hermione and Draco sign the contract. And, exactly as I'm sure we all predicted, things do not go to plan 😊

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione had clearly lost her mind.

It was the only explanation for it. For how she'd found herself, arms draped over strong shoulders, being carried urgently down a hallway. She could feel every one of his breaths. The ripple of every muscle in his body, the movement of his hands as they splayed purposefully across her arse. He had big hands. She couldn't help but notice as his fingertips dug into the underside of her thighs.

It made her whole body shiver.

Malfoy clearly didn't miss the way her legs squeezed involuntarily around his hips. She knew that, because she felt him tense mid-step, as if considering the benefits of simply throwing her up against the wall instead.

But she knew where he was taking her. She knew what he was going to do to her when they got there. And she was shaking with anticipation.

He kicked the bedroom door open with his foot. The bed was larger than was practical. The biggest she'd ever seen. Wide and long. He tossed her onto it like she weighed nothing, and before she could squeak her discontent, he was on top of her.

Hermione should've protested as he slid her t-shirt up to her waist. Should've said something when his hands slipped beneath it, teasing over the front of her bra. Should've reminded him her top didn't need to be off for him to get her pregnant, only her shorts and knickers did. She should've said no as he began grinding his hard length against the centre seam of her shorts.

But she didn't.

She glanced down at him again, at the sight of their bodies, moving together as he stripped her. They were both already a mess, but it hadn't tempered his need. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so... *rabid*. He looked good. He felt... good.

And she decided she rather wanted him to keep going.

Her t-shirt disappeared over her head, and his breath caught as he took sight of her bra, but only long enough for his mouth to drop to the curve of her breast. Teasing his lips over them. Over her collarbones.

Distracting her as his fingers worked open the button of her shorts.

“Take your shirt off too,” she begged.

“No,” Malfoy cut in quickly, a little too quickly, wrenching her zipper lower.

Hermione blinked at him. “...Why?”

His jaw clenched. “Because.”

She stared. Because. That was not an answer.

Then she saw it. The flushed skin at his throat. The rise and fall of his chest. The way his fingers flexed against the sheets, like he was fighting with himself not to rip them apart.

Because taking his shirt off would take time, and he wanted her *now*.

She watched his throat move as he swallowed, his breathing suddenly sharper, heavier, more ragged. His posture went from stiff and reluctant to tense, thrumming with energy, like a predator snapping to attention. His eyes—*fuck*, his eyes. They’d blown completely black. Narrowed and intense and staring.

Hermione’s stomach twisted.

Her clothes were gone, but there was still drops of his come streaked across her thighs. Seeing it on her skin seemed to have turned him into a *thing*. A beast, possessed by biological imperative, looking at her like she was prey. His hand twitched again on the sheets, physically restraining himself from ripping her apart.

Her fingers curled into the duvet. “Malfoy.”

His nostrils flared. “*What?*”

Her face twisted in exasperation. “Take your shirt off.”

“No.”

“*Take it off,*” she demanded. “I don’t want to be the only one exposed.”

She watched as he fought it. *Tried* to fight it. His entire body tensed, his jaw locked tight, his fingers curling into the sheets, knuckles white.

But he was losing.

His hips shifted, his thighs parting as he rose to his knees.

Then he groaned sharply, aggressively yanking his shirt from his shoulders; his undershirt over his head like he was suffocating in it. He tossed it across the room.

Hermione's breath caught.

She'd forgotten. Scars painted his chest like a jigsaw. But beneath it there was only muscle. He was enormous, built like no man she'd ever seen in person. Whether the curse had manifested in a flood of testosterone, or perhaps he'd taken to working out to curb the impulses, she had no idea. She could see every breath pumping through his chest. Flexing muscle and pumping veins.

Oh. *Fuck*.

"Better?" he rasped.

She nodded, her legs unconsciously spreading wider at the visual. She reached for the waistband of her shorts. Malfoy went dead silent.

She looked up, immediately regretting it. His eyes were locked onto her fingers, pupils blown, panting like he was on the verge of losing his entire fucking mind.

He swallowed hard. "*Take them off*."

Hermione froze, fingers hovering over the fabric.

She squinted at him. "*I am* taking them off."

Malfoy let out a sharp, shaky breath, his hands clenched into fists against the duvet, but she had clearly taken too long. She'd managed to shuffle them halfway down her bum before his hands closed around her legs.

He dragged her across the bed, pulling her underneath him. Ripped the shorts down her legs, then did the same with her underwear. Tossed them across the room.

Hermione's hands flew to her body to cover herself. But before she could—

His lips were on her neck.

He was on top of her. Her body dragged underneath his, the way he'd promised. Her jaw dropped open in tandem with his, as his tongue worked over her skin. His bare cock pressed between her legs, almost notching into her with every shift and movement of his body. He dragged goosebumps out of her skin. Out of every deep, dark part of her that she could name.

She felt like she was on fire.

"I'm going to make you come," he growled into her throat. "I don't care how."

His hand dropped between them. Two fingers stroked over her clitoris. She squirmed against the sensitivity.

Hermione tried to slam her legs shut, but Malfoy's hand slapped against her inner thigh as he took hold of it. His gaze turned ferocious.

"Your husband sent me your schedule. I am already well aware of the fact that you are ovulating today. In fact, I haven't stopped thinking about it. So you try and close those legs again, and I will force them open and hold them there until I'm done with you. Do you understand me?"

Her breath caught.

She winced with embarrassment as her arousal began to *drip* from her.

She didn't know what was happening to her. Why this was— why she was so—

Hermione just nodded.

Malfoy leaned in close, and he hissed into the air between them.

"I am going to fuck you until you're dripping with me. Then I'm going to fuck you again. And again. And again." He moved between her legs. "I don't care how fucking long it takes. I will fuck you all day, every day, until you are carrying my child. Do you understand *that*?"

He rocked himself against her twice. His trousers and underwear hung from his hips, but his cock was free. He took himself in hand, angling his tip to her clit, teasing it gently.

Her body arched off the bed. The pressure was *flawless*.

Hermione was already squirming underneath it. She was sure that if he stayed there, if she could just rock herself against him a minute, she would— *he would make her*—

Cormac had *never* made her—

Shit.

"*Corma*— I mean— *Contract!*" she squeaked. "I need— you have to get it—"

She tried to move out from under him for her wand, but Malfoy pinned her down. For a second, he stared furiously down at her, and in that single second, she wondered—

She wondered whether he was just going to take her anyway.

It shouldn't have sent a rush through her the way it did. Every hair on her body was at attention. But, instead Malfoy released her wrist with a frustrated snarl. She snatched her wand, summoned the contract from the next room, and a few seconds later, there it was. On the bed, beside them. She picked up the scroll, tugging one of the pre-inked quills from the middle.

"I need you to sign it," she said, trying to speak clearly as he parted her legs. As he tugged one around the hard muscles of his waist.

He had to sign it first. He had to sign the contract before they did anything. The handjob was out of pity. No. *Mercy*. But this was different. This was—he had to sign.

“Your cunt is fucking gorgeous,” he whispered. “Fucking *soaked*.”

“Malfoy—“

“Going to look so pretty when I’m dripping out of it.”

She squeaked. She took a deep breath, ready to scold him.

“Malfoy, I need—*oh, fuck!*” Her voice stopped mid-sentence as he angled his cock to her clit again, stroking her with it before dragging it down to her entrance.

“Stop talking,” he growled, lifting her other leg to wrap around his middle.

“Malfoy,” she said. She rose to her elbows, trying to sit up. “If you don’t sign, then I do *not* consent—”

His hand found the centre of her chest, pushing her back down onto the bed.

He slammed the contract onto her belly. But he didn’t take a quill.

He snatched her wand from her hand, slicing the tip across his right palm, and, without hesitation, pushed his palm down onto the first page of the contract. Blood soaked through the paper. She could feel its warmth against her belly, and in no more than a heartbeat, gold tendrils erupted from the page. They bound him. Snaked up his wrist and pierced into his skin before fading back into the smear.

He tugged her hand from the sheets. Lifted it, his eyes meeting hers.

She nodded.

The slice was quick, but shockingly painful. She gasped, but she placed her palm to the contract to do the same. Gold tendrils, like his. Binding them to it. The warmth of his hand on top of hers. Malfoy tossed the contract onto the floor. Took her hand. Healed it.

Then he dragged her across the bed by the thighs.

And, without so much as a word, he pushed himself into her.

He didn’t hesitate, nor did he linger. Inch after inch, he just pushed inside her. Just *made her* take it. Forced her to adjust to his size with a shaking moan and shakier legs. She arched off the bed as he hilted deep within her; the unbelievable fullness making her body squeeze and stretch around him.

She’d never been filled like this before. The sudden pressure almost sent her freefalling toward the edge. But before she could desperately tell him not to move, he drew back out. She felt the loss instantly, but his hands curled onto her hips, lifting them off the bed and pulling her back onto his cock.

“Oh, *fuck*.” He drew himself out again, moaning. “You’re so fucking *wet*.”

Hermione could do nothing but whimper. Because *wet* was exactly what she was.

This, all this *talking*—it was doing something horrific to her psyche that she didn’t understand. His rambling, foul mouth, his desperate growling into her skin; she was wet to the thighs, and down them. Wet to the sheets. She’d never been—never, in her life, had she been so—

“You perfect little—*fuck*, you’re just like I imagined. I *knew* you’d feel like this. So perfect. So wet for me. So *warm*, just *waiting* for me to—”

He groaned, his head falling back as if he couldn’t hold it. He dropped his lips to her neck, her throat, her jaw; his lips catching over the skin as he gasped. She didn’t say anything back, her mouth hanging limply open as she tried to focus on continuing to breathe. She couldn’t speak.

She could barely even *hear*.

“You’re so good,” he hissed into the side of her face. “*Fuck*, you’re so good, Granger. I’m going to fuck you all day. You’re so perfect. You want it so badly.”

This was going too fast. It was happening so quickly. The rush, building under her skin.

Fuck. Fuck.

She was building too fast.

His hands roamed her body. *Going to fill you up*. Hard, sharp thrusts that sent bolts of electricity shooting through her nervous system. *Will you take it all for me?* He begged. *Will you let me see?* He pleaded into the side of her face. Telling her what he was going to do to her.

“*So good*,” he whispered. “So fucking *good*. I’ve never—*fuck*—” His breath hitched. “*Fuck, I’m gonna be so quick*. Tell me you want it.”

It was breaking her.

She wrapped her legs around his waist, digging her heels into his hips. Into his lower back. Dragging him closer. Deeper.

Malfoy moaned.

He lay himself over the top of her, spreading her thighs wider with his body. He hit her deep. Deep, against her inner walls, so good it was almost painful. She threw her arm around his shoulders.

“*Yes*,” she gasped. “*More*.”

“*Oh, fuck, you do want it*,” he whimpered. “You really want it, don’t you Granger?”

She'd never spoken like this in bed before. She'd never thought she'd want to. But with Malfoy, she couldn't help it. With every question, every comment and groan, her urge built. To respond. To moan and tell him how he was making her feel. How much she wanted it.

She needed him to know. She needed to say it out loud.

She gave in.

"Yes," she squeaked, lifting her hips to meet his thrusts. She could barely concentrate on anything but the pleasure. "I want it."

"Say it."

"*I want it,*" she wailed. She could barely get it out.

He growled. "What do you want? Tell me."

His grip tightened on her hips. A moan escaped her.

"Fuck me. *Fuck me.* I want you to come inside me. Get me—"

He began thrusting sharply into her.

"—*Pregnant*—" she gasped, words tumbling out of her as her entire body began to squeeze around him. "Fuck, Malfoy, give it to me. Come inside me. I want you to *fill me*. I want to be *dripping* with you. I want you to fuck a baby into m—"

He slammed himself into her, cursing into her skin. Her head fell silently back against the bed, her jaw hanging loosely as he began fucking her so hard she couldn't speak. Hard, desperate thrusts. Gnashing teeth at her neck, and hands all over her body. She was lightheaded at the idea of him. By the physicality of him. Her body responding and reaching for his.

And then, pressure. Pressure, and lightning and sparks, deep inside her. Deep, deep inside. It was too fast. It was building too quickly.

It felt like—

It felt like she was—

She gasped sharply. She was going to—

Light exploded behind her eyes.

And she came.

It was like an explosion. Those shards, those fractals of electricity that he forced through her body, shattering and bursting and detonating like arcs of pure energy. Her back arched. Her head fell back. Her moans fell into silence as the electricity sparked in her vision. The pleasure was too much, but not enough. Too close, but she was distant. She existed as stars,

as energy itself, cresting over the edge of the universe to the sound of silent ecstasy. Her thighs squeezing, legs shaking, fingertips sinking into his biceps.

She didn't know sex could feel like this.

Nothing existed but his body. But him. But the sound of his moan as her ankles locked behind his hips to hold him inside. Two bodies in orbit, tumbling through time or space or whatever version of heaven it was that made this feel so fucking good. She could hear herself begging for it. Pleading for it, as she tumbled back down to the earth she wasn't even sure she was from anymore. *Please please please and inside—inside*—as she held him exactly where she wanted him. Held him inside. Begged for him inside.

Hermione forced her eyes open, only to find his own gaze on hers. His mouth open, eyes glazed, breath wrenched in his throat. His hand slammed into the headboard.

He couldn't even warn her.

Malfoy's grip tightened on her hip. His eyes widened. Jaw swung open. And he—

"Oh, fuck, fuck, coming—I'm com—"

She felt the tremor rip through him, his body taut against hers as he slammed his hips hard against hers. As he came deep, *deep* inside her. Every inch of him unravelling in her hands as he bucked furiously into her body. She couldn't feel the pulses, but she could feel the warmth, already leaking out of her, nowhere else to go. But still, he fucked her. Fucked it back into her, deeper and deeper, over and over, his body wrenching and jerking as he reached for more.

Hermione could only hold on to him. Her fingertips raking over his shoulderblades, her legs crossed at the ankles as she squeezed him as tight as she possibly could.

It seemed forever until he began to come down. Thrusting slower and slower into the painted mess he'd made of her, face contorting like it still wasn't enough. She began moving her hips. Just a little. It was almost an instinct to do it. Finishing the movement just enough. Just enough to coax more out of him, and it worked. He rocketed back to his peak with a choked moan, making his body shiver and shake as he gave her every last drop of him.

Then, he stilled.

He took a breath, and his grip on her hips relaxed. She watched him come-to, every muscle in his body rippling as his control seemed to slowly come back to him.

But the way his lips parted; the quiet, satisfied, breathless voice—

"Fuck," he whispered. His brow furrowed gently, slowing himself to take a deep breath. Eyes opening and slowly closing again, heavily blinking himself back into sentience. His eyes were sharp, as normal. Shocking grey that should have made her nervous...

Had his gaze not been so soft.

He swallowed, once more, his hand lifting from her hip to her face. He cupped her cheek in his palm. He looked her in the eyes, his lips moving as if he were trying to whisper, but no sound was leaving him.

But shakily— weakly— he mouthed it.

“*Thank you.*”

He pulled out of her, but he didn’t inspect what he’d done. He didn’t kiss her cheek, or force her legs back around him. He didn’t immediately begin fucking her again, like he’d said he was going to. He didn’t even fully open his eyes.

He collapsed onto the bed beside her, heavy and uncontrolled. She waited a moment, staring at him in confusion.

“*Malfoy?*” she asked. She pushed his shoulder.

But it was useless.

He was out cold.

Hermione felt a wave of self consciousness.

It was over, but she was unsure of what to do with herself. The last thing she wanted was to move. The bed was possibly the nicest one she’d ever lain on. Her legs were shaking like jelly, and her skin was prickling with goosebumps as her body temperature began dropping.

She glanced sideways at him. *God* he looked warm. She normally would’ve quite liked a cuddle after sex, but she realised rather quickly that *that* would *not* be part of her arrangement with Malfoy.

Her *arrangement*. With *Malfoy*.

She had just fucked Draco Malfoy.

The thought made her feel odd in her stomach. Ten years ago she’d have felt nauseous at the very notion of letting him near her. She’d have screamed bloody murder if he’d tried to be close to her in this way. She’d have hexed him, punched him, then probably murdered him for laying a hand on her.

But she’d just had actual, honest to god sex with him.

Let him come inside her. *Voluntarily*.

In fact, she’d rather well begged for it.

She swallowed hard, letting her fingers drop between her legs. She was dripping. Completely *dripping* with him; he hadn’t been exaggerating. She found herself wondering how much there would’ve been if she hadn’t made him come ten minutes beforehand, and the thought painted a blush on her cheeks.

A flood of shame rushed through her body. Remembering what she'd said to him in the heat of the moment—

If this *was* a sick practical joke, she'd just fallen face-first into the trap.

Hermione pulled herself off the bed and hurried to pull her clothes back on. Her t-shirt. Her underwear. Her shorts. She could feel bruises forming on her neck and hips. She had to stop three times to *Scourgify* the cum dripping down her legs.

What he'd done to her was truly obscene.

She picked up the contract, tucking it carefully under her arm, and she made her way toward the door.

But she hesitated.

Hermione turned, looking back at the bed where Malfoy was passed out. Deep, steady breaths like he was catching up on years' worth of missing sleep.

It dawned on her rather quickly that that's precisely what he was doing.

She tried to walk out. She tried to leave him there, exactly as he was. But it went against her nature.

He'd waited years for the kind of relief that she'd just given him.

He was exhausted.

Hermione took pity on him, using her wand to lift the mess of covers, and tossed them haphazardly over the top of him. Then she made her way downstairs.

Without another word, she flung a handful of powder into the Floo, called for Walton Park, and stepped through the fireplace.

But when she stepped out of it, Cormac was waiting for her.

He was in his Quidditch gear. Hadn't even bothered to change. Just paced, back and forth, waiting for her to arrive home.

He pounced on her.

"Hermione!" he said, grabbing her by the arms. "I saw the letters. I *told you* that this was going to happen. He fucking *gave up* on waiting for you, like I *told you* that he would! For the love of all that is magic, I *hope* that you went to convince him. Did you put on the perfume I bought you? The..." he slowed, suddenly noticing her dishevelled appearance. "...the... one..."

His eyes went wide at the state of her.

"What happened to *you*?" he asked.

Hermione's gaze rose exhaustedly to his. She was supposed to be mad at him over something, but she couldn't remember what. Instead, she just stood there, staring blankly at him. She must've looked a sight; her neck covered in bruises, her hair a mess of wrenched curls. Cheeks flushed, clothes askew and still splattered with marks of drying evidence. She'd only *scourgified* her skin. She'd forgotten to do her clothes.

"You look..." Cormac hesitated, his eyes lingering on what she knew he'd recognise as come drying on the front of her shorts. "Merlin, Hermione, you're a *mess*."

Hermione took a deep, exhausted breath.

"You wanted Draco Malfoy to fuck your wife, Cormac." She motioned to the state of herself. "This is what your wife looks like after Draco Malfoy fucks her."

She tugged the contract from her pocket, glancing down at the paperwork, signed in blood. She slammed it into his chest, but even that didn't jolt him from his stupor.

She sighed tiredly.

"Now if you'll excuse me, I'm in quite urgent need of a *bath*."

Hermione went to work the following day. She felt like an idiot as she did so, too, walking into the Ministry's Department of Health and Magical Hospitals pretending like she hadn't just spent her day off with her legs wrapped around a man who wasn't her husband. Wrapped. And squeezing.

Rather deliciously squeezing, if she was honest.

She felt a blush rise to her cheeks as she stepped from the lift, trying to push the sudden warmth back down into her stomach. Damned backend of ovulation.

She should've stayed overnight.

If she wasn't pregnant she'd have to go back to Malfoy's multiple times the following month. Multiple sessions, just like the one they'd had. Where he held her wrists to the bed, and sank his teeth into her skin. Pulled her hair and held her legs open and fucked her rough and hard.

Hermione bit her lip. Then she cursed herself under her breath.

She was supposed to go over there and get pregnant. She wasn't supposed to be— God— *enjoying herself*. The very notion that she *was* enjoying it should've horrified her.

She was horrified that it *didn't* horrify her.

Until she remembered what she'd said to him. She'd begged. She'd *begged* for it. Begged for him to—

Fill me. I want to be dripping with you.

She cringed to herself as she heard the words falling from her own mouth in her mind. Rounded the corner to her Department. She was supposed to be embarrassed of this. If people *found out*—

God, if she never faced Malfoy again after that, it would be too soon. With any luck, she was already pregnant, and she would never, ever have to.

“Good Morning, Mrs. Granger-McLaggen,” Judah was already on his feet, statured and poised. He fell into step alongside her, flawlessly matching her pace, as usual.

“Good morning, Judah.” She nodded courteously at him. His nod in return was more hurried than usual.

His arms held flawlessly notated documents, as per usual. “Some last-minute RSVPs for the donor meeting this morning, so I’ve adjusted the catering accordingly. I’ve prepared additional thank-you notes for Lady Arison and Mr James, but one of the anonymous donors has also responded affirmatively—”

“One of the anonymous donors?” her eyebrows rose. “A small one?”

Judah hesitated.

Hermione stiffened. “Oh. One of the major ones?”

“Possibly, ma’am.”

He was cut short by a memo appearing in front of her face. She scanned it quickly—*shit*.

“Minister for Magic wants to meet quickly. I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

Judah nodded, and proceeded toward the boardroom.

Hermione sighed after him, frowning to herself. He seemed uncharacteristically flustered this morning. Her normally stoic secretary didn’t panic over nothing. She knew the Arisons’ donation history, and the Jameses notoriously expected to be worshipped in thanks for their thousand-galleon a year donation. Most of their donors couldn’t *wait* to get their names on a plaque or a bench at St Mungo’s, and it was her job, as Head of the DHMH, to know every single one of them. Within a few moments of meeting them, she would recognise and recall every donation they’d made over the past two years.

There were a few who chose to remain anonymous. Most were small, one-off gifts of a hundred galleons, here or there. Mostly altruistic from older couples who’d had a wonderful experience with the hospital and had some money to spare. Paying for a shipment of potions, or a few days of a healer’s time. Sometimes they covered lunches for the staff for a week.

Sometimes the donations were bigger than that.

There were two donors she didn’t know. Two donors whose identities were known only to the head of St Mungo’s, and the Minister for Magic. And the notion that the unflappable Judah

was now good-and-thoroughly *flapped* by whoever it was, as well as herself being summoned to the Minister's office...

She had a reasonably good inkling that one of them might be the 'anonymous donor' in attendance today.

Whoever they were, their donations were well into the six-figures. An entire mental health wing had been built at St Mungo's for those with PTSD from the war. Another for children with rare diseases. Just the week prior, they had immediately funded Healer Abbott's proposed expansion to the Infectious Disease wing. The Ministry hoped for it to be finished by the start of Dragon Pox season next summer—

She shook some focus into herself, and knocked on Kingsley's door. It immediately flung open, the large man striding down the hallway and nodding at her to keep up.

"Can't stop, but thank you for coming. I only need you a moment or so."

"Of course," she smiled.

"I'm sure you've already figured out why I called you here anyway."

"The '*anonymous donor*' coming today is one of the big two?"

Kingsley chuckled. "You're far too quick for your own good, Hermione."

He sighed as he pressed the button for the lift.

"I wanted to speak to you because I know that you can become... *passionate*... about sourcing funds for health initiatives. And that, rightfully, you have previously *declined* to accept money from certain... origins... but I want to remind you, before you meet them, how *crucial* it is that this donor remains... *active*."

She furrowed her brow, and then broke into a coy smile as she understood.

"So it's a Death Eater trying to buy atonement."

"I never said that."

"But it is, and you think I'm going to have to restrain myself from hexing them."

A sly grin curled at Kingsley's cheek. "I would never think such a thing."

Hermione only smiled wider.

"Ahhh. So I *will* struggle to restrain myself, and *you* think they'll *deserve it*."

Kingsley's loud, booming laugh filled the corridor. The lift arrived, and he pointed a warning finger at her.

"Play nice."

Hermione smiled. “*Of course*, Minister.”

He stepped into the lift, still chuckling to himself as he turned around to face her.

“I can’t believe I have to miss this.”

He waved her off. The doors closed.

Hermione took a deep breath as she turned back down the corridor.

Dolohov. That’s who it would be. There were only a handful of Death Eaters who hadn’t been rounded up into prison, and he was one of them. Likely trying to favour his way back into the country. She imagined the winters in Russia were quite a bit more miserable than those in London.

Alternatively , it could’ve been the Lestranges; or what was left of them. Perhaps Rodolphus or Rabastan, trying to buy their way off of society’s blacklist. Yes, the Lestranges would also make sense. Though she was sure that Kingsley would have known that Hermione wouldn’t have found the Lestranges *quite* so funny.

She turned the final corner to the boardroom, pushing the door open and entering with a soft smile, one carefully curated over the years to be just the right blend of appreciative yet authoritative.

The room was full of donors. Mostly older couples, leaving money in their will. Lady Arison, Mr James, as Judah had mentioned. But as she cast smiles around the room, a flash of white caught her attention.

She turned her gaze to the near side of the room, closest to the door she’d walked through. He was sitting almost behind it; as if trying to shrink into the back wall. Trying to draw as little attention to himself as he could. Not that it was in any way possible to blend in when you looked like *him*.

A flawless, sharp undercut of vanilla-blonde hair and silver eyes stared back at her.

Hermione froze in place.

Ice trailed down her spine. Into her stomach, and up her throat. Drawing a gasp from her lungs as her jaw locked into the open position. She turned to face him, almost taking a step forward as she felt a look of horror scraping over her face that Draco Malfoy had shown up to her donor meeting.

As she spoke. Out loud.

“*What the fuck are you doing here?*”

Malfoy sat up tall, stretching back into his chair. Crossed his ankle over one knee. His deep sage suit fit him like it had woven to his figure. Like it had been stitched specifically for him, that very morning. The colour suited him *perfectly*, as if shimmers of individual threads had

been sewn into it to match his eyes. Open-collared white shirt. Wearing a completely unreadable expression as his eyes stayed firmly locked to hers.

Jesus Christ, he looked good.

He looked so good that, for a moment, she almost forgot to be absolutely floored that it was *him*.

The donor. The anonymous donor who'd given hundreds of thousands of galleons to scientific research. To building new wings in the hospital. New departments. Better equipment and supplies.

It was *Malfoy*.

He was in her department. They were surrounded by other donors. People who she needed to respect and like her. People who she absolutely could not, under any circumstances, allow to find out that they had even *spoken* in the last eight years.

He was in her department, and she probably still had a fair amount of his come deep, deep inside her.

"I'm sorry?" he replied.

Hermione became keenly aware of the eyes of the entire room, staring at the two of them with an immense amount of interest. And became keenly aware of what she, the *Head of the Department*, had just said to him, a *major donor*.

She had one single opportunity to correct this. And one single opportunity to warn him that if he made a *single fucking comment*.

And she plastered a smile on her face.

"Mister Malfoy," she said, sweetly, crossing the room and extending her hand. "Please, excuse me. I was just not expecting..."

He stood, extending his hand to meet hers in a firm handshake.

But it was anything but polite.

"Not at all," he cooed. Coolly and far too arrogantly. "I gave your secretary an incredibly impolite amount of notice that I'd be..." His eyes flicked to their hands. "...coming."

Hermione's stomach twisted, but she knew better than to react.

He knew *exactly* what he'd said.

She moved to release them from the handshake, but Malfoy's fingers brushed her wrist. Pressing into it, gently, and her body awoke in a rush of electricity. He'd had his hands on her wrists not half a day before, holding her down on the bed as he had to physically stop himself from pushing inside her.

She smiled politely.

“Well, you’re very welcome. And, of course, your donations are greatly appreciated.”

His lips curled into a disgusting smile. She realised what she’d implied.

“*Anytime.*”

Oh, she was going to kill him.

The donor meeting went fine. Went absolutely, completely fine.

Malfoy didn’t say another goddamn word.

He sat in the meeting, looking *mouth-wateringly* good, and *watched*. Watched, as she drew the meeting to a close, and personally thanked each of the donors. Watched, as the room slowly emptied. As if he was waiting for her. But just when she thought she might get to rip him a new one for ambushing her at work, he left.

She went after him.

He was only in the corridor, but as Hermione rushed out, she damn near collided with Lady Arison, bumbling along with her cane. She couldn’t get by.

It was awfully unbecoming. It was idiotic and unprofessional. But Hermione—

“*Malfoy,*” she called.

He turned, an unbelievably smug expression on his face. He stepped to the side, an open palm to allow Lady Arison to pass.

“After you, Vera.”

She *giggled*.

Hermione held her eye roll as she motioned toward her office.

“I wondered if I might have a moment of your time. To discuss... some *urgent* business.”

Malfoy stared at her. Smirked. Nodded once. But didn’t stop smirking.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut as she forced herself not to hex him.

When she got him into her office, she was so furious she almost forgot to silence the door. She did. At the last minute. She wasn’t an idiot.

She turned on him. “Just what the *fuck* do you think you’re doing?”

Malfoy chuckled, dropping his head and laughing at the floor.

“Alright, so. How likely would you be to believe me, if I told you that I actually *completely forgot* this was your Department?”

Hermione glared at him.

“I wouldn’t believe you. *At all*. You *ambushed me*. After you *swore*—” she inhaled sharply. “After you *signed* in *blood* that you would make every effort to maintain the secrecy of our arrangement—”

“Granger, I swear. I completely forgot.”

Hermione’s jaw gritted to stone.

“You expect me to believe that our first... *session*... was *yesterday*. And the *very next day* happens to be the *first donor meeting* you’ve *ever attended*?!” She pushed him in the chest, up against the door. “You came here to *humiliate* me! To rub it in my face! Just remind me what you’ve got over me!”

“Are you done?” he asked.

“No, I am *not* done!” she spat, taking another step toward him. “Because I have some *thoughts* about you making *insinuations* about the nature of our relationship. You are *not* to *stroke my wrists*, you are *not* to *linger* on *suggestive words*—”

He sighed. “How much more money do I need to give you to stop talking?”

“I don’t *want* your money!”

He rolled his eyes. “You *don’t* want my money.”

She was being very stupid, but she was too angry to care. “*No.*”

“I think you *do*, actually.”

“*No. I don’t.*”

“I’ve donated hundreds of thousands of galleons to St Mungo’s in the past five years. And you *don’t want my money?*”

Hermione froze.

In her fury, she had forgotten herself. Both of the two anonymous donors had donated a fortune. Malfoy was one of them. But she had somehow, amongst her shock and embarrassment at seeing him the day after she’d left his house drenched in his semen, entered her office and suddenly forgotten the point of dragging him in there. If he was one of the major donors, it meant *Malfoy* was the one that had donated a fortune to St Mungo’s.

And Kingsley had explicitly told her to play nice.

She glared at him, poking him in the chest.

"I will not be the catalyst for you trying to *buy* yourself a *conscience*. Pansy said you'd changed. She said you were different. And you've been nice to me, until now. Now, you're just—you're *exactly the fucking same*. Throwing money at things to try and fix them." She could feel her chest heaving with anger. "And if you think that offering to donate more money is going to *calm me down* when you just tried to *humiliate* me—"

And then, somehow, they'd switched places. His reflexes were fast as lightning as he pushed her up against the door. Placed his hand over her mouth and stared pointedly at her.

"Granger, take a fucking *breath*, will you?"

She did. Through her nose. Trying to ignore the feeling of his hand over her mouth. Should she bite him? She should probably bite him.

He leaned in close.

"I did *not* come here to try and humiliate you. I *genuinely* forgot that you were the head of this department, and I swear to you, if it makes you uncomfortable, I will never attend another meeting again." He swallowed, hard. "But the fact is, there's a non-zero chance I might've gotten you pregnant yesterday. And, therefore, the curse is..." He took a deep breath. "Temporarily *assuaged*. So, thanks to you, I *could* attend this meeting. Because I am temporarily capable of being *coherent* in public spaces."

Malfoy's eyes trailed down her face.

"Well. At least *for now*."

Her pulse began racing under his hand.

She tugged his hand down. "What does *that* mean?"

Malfoy leaned in even closer. And then he—he—

Oh.

She shivered as one of his hands dropped to her waist, curling around it and moving to pull her closer. He brushed his lips across her cheekbone. Up to her ear, where he pressed a gentle kiss beneath it.

"I mean, it couldn't hurt to be *sure*..."

Hermione's mouth fell open, and she almost slapped him clean across the face. Though, she realised it would look a little odd if Draco Malfoy's first ever donor meeting ended with a handprint on his cheek.

She swallowed. Hard.

"Get out of my office, Malfoy."

“You *don’t* want me to bend you over your desk?” his tongue darted out, flicking over her jaw. “Give you a lovely start to the day?” She stood firm as he closed his lips around his tongue. “You can show me how *grateful* you are for my...”

His voice trailed off, but his hand trailed lower. Lower. Over her trousers.

Cupping her between her legs.

“*... donation.*”

She squeaked. He pressed the heel of his palm against her clit.

“Let me bend you over. Have you walk around the office, *dripping* with me.”

Hermione wasn’t sure if she wanted to punch his face or ride it.

“Malfoy,” she hissed through gritted teeth. “This had better be the curse talking. Because if you are trying to proposition me while I am at *work*—”

“It isn’t,” he purred. “Though I could be lying.”

“You’d better fucking pretend that you are.”

“Mmmmm,” he purred. “Will say, you do look very fucking breedable right now.”

She inhaled sharply. Grabbed his wrists. Flipped them once more, and pushed *him* against the door. He looked at her in surprise, before grinning wildly at her.

“Oooh, I *love* where *this* is going.”

“*Get. Out,*” she hissed. “I am *not* fucking you in my office. I have already fucked you once this month. That is *enough. Get out.*”

He tensed his wrists under her hands. There was no way she was actually holding him to the door. She was holding him still because he was allowing her to.

She swallowed, hard, dropping her gaze lower; noticing, or rather, realising that it was impossible to *not* notice, that he was rock-fucking-hard.

“Actually, no. Take care of *that* first,” she nodded at it. “And *then* get out.”

He scraped his teeth over his lower lip, grabbing her by the hips and pulling her against him. Against the hard bulge in his trousers. “Any suggestions on how to take care of it? Because I’ve got a *wonderful* idea—”

He ground his hips against hers. Hermione wrenched her wand from her pocket.

And she hexed him.

It wasn’t anything *bad*. Just a simple deterioration hex, to slowly drain his ability to stay conscious.

Oops.

He immediately went a bit woozy.

“Fugging— shid—” he dropped to his knees.

Hermione practically dragged him to her personal fireplace.

She didn’t want to use it. His name would be on the Floo history forever. But it would be better than the rest of her department seeing him, the newly-revealed major donor; hard as a rock and dopey from being *hexed* by the *head of the department*.

“Malfoy Manor,” she called out, tossing a handful of powder into the flames.

She reversed the hex. Pushed him into the fire. Wished, only momentarily, that it was a real one.

Then, as soon as he was gone, she took her first breath.

Kingsley would get over it eventually.

Chapter End Notes

Hi friends!!! Authors have now been revealed for Daddyfest so I can now reveal myself slowly, thigh-first. Hi!!! The chapter count on this is not 100% exact. I've got ten chapters in the cannon ready to post (this is #3) and am just finishing off the last ones, but if those somehow meld into 12 or expand into 14 I'll update accordingly. In the meantime, hope you enjoyed their first--- uh--- session :)

Chapter 4: “Granger, for fuck’s sake, stop caressing me”

Chapter Summary

Just because Malfoy's not a complete arse doesn't mean she hates him any less, that is for absolutely, positively certain.

Chapter Notes

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

Work was intense the entire following week. She kept her head down, mostly. Attended meetings, spoke with Healers about funding they needed, observed surgeries and gave a talk on the proper documentation of pain potions. It was nice.

Hermione loved to escape to the hospital. It was like a glimpse into the world of what could have been. She'd loved studying medicine. Loved learning. Loved practising, and her residency. But she'd realised very early on that she wasn't cut out for front-line healing.

She got too attached.

Every time she patched up a curse, it was one Harry had suffered. Or Ron. Or someone else in the battle of Hogwarts. Every time there was someone who couldn't be saved, or a treatment that didn't work, she would kill herself trying to find a way. It was too hard on her. And on her marriage. She was a good Healer. But she was even better at using her stellar reputation and her ability to pester people until she got what she wanted, to convince *others* to give Healers large amounts of money.

So that's what she did.

Cormac and his family had been a huge help in teaching her how it all *really* worked. She knew, as well as anyone, how important one's name could be in society's opinion. Even if it was only hyphenated. If she could source funding, and have a few... *well-placed* conversations behind the scenes... the Wizengamot approved almost every proposal she put forward. The expansion to the Infectious Disease wing had Healer Abbott almost crying with excitement. A few more Healers had come forward with ideas, and Hermione knew that she could work on them.

Though, this time, she made a point of *not* going directly to the anonymous major donor who'd donated last week. AKA Malfoy.

That weekend, Pansy and Ginny had she, Harry and Ron over for lunch, but from the look Hermione shot Pansy as she walked in, the witch knew better than to ask a *single* goddamn question about *what she'd suggested*. Pansy smirked over her wine glass but said nothing.

Hermione should have felt relieved.

She didn't.

Because even as she laughed at Ron's terrible jokes, even as she helped Ginny clear the plates, even as she chatted with Harry about work—

She was still thinking about...

Well. *Him*.

Knowing he could walk into her office at any time. She was sure his name would be on the front of the Prophet whenever they got wind of it. And when it got out that he was a major donor, not one single person would question him waltzing into the Head of the Department's office completely unannounced and completely uninvited.

Would he do it, next time he was horny? Walk into her office and hold her against the wall as he propositioned her? *How long would it be before she gave in?*

Ministry Code of Conduct be damned. If Hermione came within *leaping* distance of another orgasm like the one he'd given her, she could *not* guarantee that she wouldn't be immediately up against the door, both of her legs around his waist while he fucked her so hard the hinges fell off.

This *was* the point of the entire arrangement, after all.

It was incredibly embarrassing that the thought had her squeezing her thighs together with her friends right next to her. It also made her a little bit nervous that Malfoy could invade her thoughts like this. But she convinced herself immediately that it wasn't an issue, and her nerves were for another reason entirely.

It had more to do with the dreaded two-week-wait, she was sure of it. The two week stretch between ovulation and conception, and the start of a missed period that might indicate pregnancy. The wait was *agony*, fighting every single day to convince herself that if she tested, it would be too early to tell, and it would only come up negative. Every morning of the following week, she woke up hyper-aware of her body. Of every twinge and ache, every shift, every cramp. Any and every sign that something might be different.

She tried not to obsess over it, but every single morning she came downstairs to Cormac hurriedly hiding the calendar of her cycle.

She regretted ever telling him how to calculate it.

Monday, she'd heard him ask Pippey, their extremely well-paid house elf to give her green tea instead of coffee. She rolled her eyes. Coffee was well and truly allowed during pregnancy, even if she *was*.

Tuesday and Wednesday, he cocked an eyebrow at the smoked salmon, muttering about it '*not being fully cooked*'.

Thursday, he asked Pippey to hard-boil her eggs instead of soft, the way Hermione liked them. “Only a few more days until we know,” he’d grinned. “Might as well not take any chances.” She huffed.

Friday, he sent her three messages at work, asking if she wanted him to pick up tests on his way back from Quidditch.

Saturday afternoon, Hermione was ready to strangle him.

Her period was due the following day. Cormac had been at her heels *all goddamned day*, asking veiled questions like ‘*how was she feeling*’ and ‘*could he get her anything*’ and other things that would’ve seemed sweet to anyone else.

But she knew *exactly* what he was doing.

She fixed herself a cup of tea. Frowned at the kitchen, looking for some tiny imperfection that would inevitably make her day worse. She was self-sabotaging like that, she supposed, but she was in a mood to be angry.

However, as her eyes fell on the biscuit tin, she realised there might be something that could make it better.

She pulled it toward her, opened it, and smiled as she realised Pippey had filled it with chocolate hobnobs, the *angel*. Hermione reached for one, knowing it was about to solve literally *all* of her problems—

When a pair of arms hugged around her waist.

“Oooh, having a sweet craving already are we?” Cormac purred.

Hermione froze.

He kissed her neck. “Maybe time to take a test?”

Maricide is illegal. Maricide is illegal. You need him for his seat on the Wizengamot.

She simply whipped around, and glared at him.

“Can I have *five fucking minutes* without you checking to see if I’m pregnant?!”

Cormac flinched, surprised by her swearing—but only for a moment. He released her.

Then he sighed, exasperated, lifting his hand to his temples instead.

“Don’t do that,” he drawled with annoyance.

“Don’t do *what?*” she snipped back.

“Don’t get all pissy.”

“Pissy!?” her mouth fell open. “Maybe I’m a bit *pissy* because you haven’t given me *five minutes to breathe* this week!”

“I’m just being affectionate.”

“Oh?” She steeled. “You weren’t being affectionate when it was *outside* the possible window of getting a result on a test?”

Cormac sighed again. His jaw set, his expression shifting, something tight and irritated flashing behind his eyes. “Is this a symptom? Of being pregnant?”

“Is *what* a—”

“*This.*” He waved in her direction.

She steeled. “What’s ‘*this*’?”

“You *know.*”

“No, I don’t *know*, Cormac. Won’t you *please* enlighten me?”

“Oh, come on,” he sighed. “You’re being a bit of a *bitch.*”

Hermione’s jaw swung completely open.

“Oh, I didn’t *mean* it like that,” he rolled his eyes.

She threw her tea in the sink, the porcelain shattering against fireclay. Another thing she’d have to deal with later, fuck her life. Fuck her absolute fucking life.

Cormac came after her.

“Hermione, *come on.* You’re getting upset over nothing. I am *not* a bad husband,” he said, following her up the stairs. “I spent like ten minutes convincing Jamie Bulstrode to support you in the vote last week. Is that something a bad husband would do? Just take the test, there’s no need to have a tantrum about it.”

She stormed upstairs to the loo, slamming the door shut behind her as Cormac groaned loudly outside of it. She locked the door, storming to the toilet and tugging her shorts down. He wasn’t fucking coming in. She’d silence the door if she had to.

She didn’t want to hear another goddamn word out of—

Out... of...

A flash of red caught her attention.

She looked down.

Oh, hell.

Hermione closed her eyes. And she covered her face with her hands. She took a deep breath in. Then a deep breath out. Another in. And another out.

It hadn't worked. She wasn't pregnant.

She sighed, flicking her wand to cast the necessary spells to get her through it. Cleaning, containment, regulation of body temperature, mild pain management. An order she'd practiced countless times. An order that, each month, reminded her just how much she adored being a witch.

And, in the recent few years, how thoroughly un-pregnant she was.

The crushing disappointment was only compounded by the fact she was now going to have to walk out and tell Cormac, and she already knew what he was going to say. He'd say something nasty about her having PMS, and, in the cruellest unfairness of the world, he'd actually be partially right.

Not that that gave him the right to *say anything* about it.

God, men really just did not get it.

She washed her hands, and with a deep breath, opened the door to an annoyed looking husband. He was leaning against the opposite wall. Arms folded. Huffing, as was his nature.

"Well, that tantrum lasted *half* as long as usual."

She glared at him. "I'm not pregnant."

His face fell, but not with empathy, or anything even adjacent to it. Cormac tilted his head back against the wall with frustration, exhaling loudly through his nose.

"*Of course you're not.*"

He muttered the words. But she heard them.

Hermione's stomach twisted. Her grip tightened on the doorknob. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Cormac let out a short laugh, shaking his head. "Oh, come on, don't make *this* my fault as well."

A cold chill settled in her chest. She stared at him.

"I didn't even *mention* the word fault."

He stared at her for a moment. Then he rolled his eyes so severely she wondered whether they might fall out of his head.

"Will you *stop* twisting my words? You're making me sound like an arse. All I'm saying is that—" he opened his arms, shrugging widely. "Maybe it's *not* me who's the *problem*, don't

you think?"

She let go of the doorknob, instead slipping her hand into her pocket, her fingers curling around her wand. She wasn't stupid enough to do anything.

She just wanted to reassure herself that she had the option.

He noticed her hand. Where it was. He rolled his eyes.

"Whatever. I suppose it'll have to be *next* month."

Not a question, nor a kind word, he just said it as if it was a point of fact. Then he turned on his heel. Walked downstairs and grabbed his Quidditch gloves on the way out the front door. Hermione glared after him. Waited for the slam of the broom shed that always rattled the East Wall.

She could not be in this house a minute longer.

And that was how she found herself on her fifth glass of wine, curled up on the top floor of a pub in fucking *Bath*.

Of all the places in the world she could've gone, Bath was a stupid choice. Too many magical people lived in Bath, with its pretentious little streets and Roman architecture that always *just so happened* to come up in conversation. They always conveniently forgot the extensive coating of seagull shit that dripped down the sides of every one of the buildings. It wasn't even that far from the Scottish lowlands. It was barely a six-and-a-half hour drive. Timbuktu would've been too close to the Scottish lowlands in that moment, because it was too goddamn close to Cormac. She *hated* Bath and everyone who lived there.

But she'd needed a bar. A pub. Somewhere to relax, and get absolutely sloshed. Sloshed, relaxed and warm.

Like in a lovely, cosy, hot—

"*Bath*," she'd yelled into the Floo.

It had dropped her in an antiques store just across from a random Muggle pub, so she'd fumed and stormed her way in. She'd figured out from the nine cardboard coasters she'd angrily ripped to shreds that it was called '*The Raven*'. It had taken a Steak & Blue pie, an ale, and four and a half glasses of wine for the bartender to tell her that there was a goddamn *library* on the top floor, but even so, Bath was still the worst place in the entire universe. She'd spilled the rest of her glass on the way up, but swiped a bottle from the cellar as she passed the door with a tactful *Accio* and a well-placed *Notice-me-not*.

So she was sitting in a completely empty pub library, full of books on cars and not a single decent thing to read except an old, dog-eared copy of *The Da Vinci Code*. She was in the worst city in the whole of the UK, hating—no—*despising* everything, certain that it had *absolutely nothing* to do with being on her period and everything to do with her husband being an *arsehole*.

She was also certain that *all of this* was his fault.

Fucking Cormac.

She rested her head against the shelves, letting it loll as she glanced out the nearby window into the night. It was raining. That was nice at least. The lovely big plop rain that made everything smell of petrichor and made the streets feel cleaner. The raindrops looked pretty on the windows. She poured herself another glass of wine. Threw it down her throat. Then another. When she was halfway through her sixth, she had a thought that she should probably slow down, but she was tired. She was so fucking tired.

And honestly?

She was also just so fucking disappointed.

She thought this would work. She'd calculated her dates perfectly, it *should* have worked, even though she'd gone over to Malfoy's and not intended it to start with. Maybe Cormac had been right.

Maybe she *was* the problem.

Maybe the diagnostics she'd had done were all wrong. *Highly likely to be able to carry children* could've been completely wrong. Maybe she was just one of those women who *couldn't*. Despite wanting it more than anything, maybe it just wasn't destined for her. Everything she'd ever read told her that it took time, but they'd been trying for well over a *year*. She'd fucked a completely different man to try and make it happen, for God's sake.

The chances of it being *her* were seeming more and more likely by the minute.

Hermione closed her eyes, and downed the rest of her glass of wine. Then she let herself breathe deeply out. There was a bit more than a glass left in the bottle.

She downed the whole thing.

And she promptly fell asleep.

*

It must've been only about half an hour, but she woke up twirling.

Spinning spin spin spinnnnniinnnngggg. Maybe falling off her seat? But she didn't hit the floor. She must've learned to fly. What an *amazing* development! She stuck her arms out either side of her body, ready to begin soaring.

She smacked someone in the face.

The face of whoever it was that was holding her.

Oh. She wasn't flying. That was a shame.

She tried to open her eyes, but they weighed a million tons, staying closed as she rolled her head around and around and around to try and convince them to open.

Her head hit something firm.

An... arm?

No.

A *shoulder*.

She gasped. *A shoulder*. Her head was so very heavy, and now here was a lovely, comfy shoulder to put her head on so she didn't have to carry it around. She nuzzled right up into it. It was possibly the loveliest shoulder she'd ever touched.

“*Shoulllderrrrrr*;” she purred.

A voice sighed heavily.

“I am so sorry about this, John. Don't worry, I know her,” the same voice said, exasperatedly. “You can check her driver's license. It'll be in her bag. Hermione Jean Granger-McLaggen.”

Oh!

That was her! They knew her name! Whoever was carrying her was a friend. How lovely. A friend to drink with. Just what she needed.

“No, no, not like— no, she's married. I'll owl—” he corrected himself. “I'll call her husband on the way home. She's been under a lot of stress lately. I truly do apologise. If anything's broken or missing I'll pay for it next time I'm in.”

There was the sound of someone being clapped on the back, and then she was moving. Being carried. Down, down, down a lot of stairs and out the door. He jolted her a little, though whoever it was was trying quite hard to be gentle.

He was holding her unbelievably far away from his body, though, which she didn't like. It was like he didn't want to be carrying her.

Hermione snuggled into the nice warm shoulder again. Draped her arms around his neck, and curled in tight. Reached up and found... hair? It was so *soffffftttttt*. She teased it through her fingers. Lovely, soft hair. Maybe the softest she'd ever felt.

She began twisting it lazily around her fingers as she stroked through it.

His voice dropped low and growly.

“Granger, for fuck's sake, stop *caressing* me. Do you have any idea what carrying a semi-conscious woman down the street does to a man's reputation? You're making me look like a pervert.”

Granger.

She forced her eyes open.

Oh.

It was....

Well, it was *him*. Malfoy. And Malfoy was carrying her, somehow. Goodness, he was very strong. And he looked...

He looked *goooooooood*.

His hair was back, the way he used to wear it in school, but less.... cemented. Instead, he'd combed it neatly back, showing off his flawless clean shave and the striking cut of his jaw. He was wearing cologne; that gorgeous, *gorgeous* cologne. Cedarwood. Old leather books. White flowers. Just how he'd smelled when he fucked her.

He smelled *divine*.

And there *she* was, drunk and dishevelled and in a complete state, being carried by the nicest-smelling man from here to... um...

Where was she again?

She hummed in confusion, and he looked down at her. She realised she had not yet said hello to him, so she swiftly did that.

“Oh! It’s... it’s you. Hello.”

She was the stupidest person alive.

“Hello, Granger,” he said back, firmly. “You are very drunk.”

“I had, like, *one*.”

“One what? *Vineyard*? ”

She frowned. “...I can’t remember.”

He rolled his eyes at her, but said nothing.

“Were you on a date?” she caught a whiff of his cologne again.

He huffed a laugh. “Funny.”

She frowned with annoyance at him. “What’s *funny*? ”

“What exactly would be the point of me going on a date, Granger? ” he asked.

“Ummm,” Hermione counted her fingers on his shoulder. Months. She counted them. “Christmas?”

Malfoy glanced sideways at her, his brow furrowing in sheer confusion, as if he had no idea what she was talking about. Wait. What *was* she talking about? Was she stupid?

“What?” he said.

“Christmas?” she said. The very notion of Christmas itself. Dating. It made complete and utter perfect sense. It was very obvious what she meant, he was definitely the stupid one. “When you— months— someone— at Christmas?”

He stared for another moment, before realisation spread across his face.

“Ahhh, dating so that you have someone to *spend Christmas with*?”

Yes, that. God, he was so slow.

“Obviously,” she drawled.

He chuckled. “That’s what Theo’s for.”

She narrowed her eyes again. “Who’s Theo?”

“Theodore Nott. My best friend.”

Hermione frowned. “I don’t remember you having a best friend.”

Malfoy sighed, adjusting his grip on her. “Yes, well, not everything in my life revolves around making yours miserable.”

Hermione huffed. “Could’ve fooled me.”

He frowned, taking another step into the quiet street, but he didn’t respond any further than a furtive smile in her direction.

“Well,” she continued, squirming slightly in his arms, “what if you want something romantic?”

Malfoy snorted. “Oh, yes, that’s exactly what I need. A first date to sit across from me while I beg to fuck them exclusively for reproductive purposes. *That* should go over well.”

Hermione paused. And then she burst into a fit of giggles, dropping her forehead against his shoulder again.

Malfoy groaned loudly. “Glad my suffering amuses you, Granger.”

She snorted into his shirt. “Imagine your dating profile.”

He raised a naturally perfect brow at her. “What?”

“A dating profile. Like... an advertisement. Telling people you’re single.”

He furrowed his brow. “An advertisement? Saying *what*? ”

“I don’t know,” she said, grinning up at him, her head tilting lazily against his shoulder.

“*Rich, gorgeous, six-foot-two, 26 year old man seeks long term arrangement. Biologically enthusiastic, matrimonially unavailable. Non-negotiable terms include—*” She booped him on the nose. ‘---*No contraceptives.*’ I think you’ll be quite popular with the ladies, actually.”

Malfoy stared at her, completely deadpan. Hermione collapsed into another fit of giggles.

“Merlin,” he muttered, shaking his head. “Why did I volunteer to take you home?”

She opened her mouth, ready to spill myriad reasons at him, but he was walking up toward the Antiques store.

Toward the Floo.

Towards *home*.

“No!” she tightened her grip around his neck. “No. Not home. I don’t want to go home.”

Malfoy paused— well, no, not really.

He actually stopped walking completely.

His arms loosened around her, and then, she was being lowered to her feet. *Wobbly-ly. Wobbily. Wobblily.*

Ooh, now she was dizzy.

“Why not home?” he asked, looking into her eyes.

He had very pretty eyes.

She rolled her own, momentarily losing her balance. “Don’t worry.”

“I am worried. *Why not home, Granger?*” His hands moved to her arms, holding her steady as he forced her attention onto him. “Is... are you not safe there?” he asked, his voice darkening. “Are you going to be punished for coming home like this? Because if that fuck has ever—”

She snorted. Shaking her head.

God, she was getting very, very dizzy.

He took a deep breath. “Then what?”

She let her head flop forward, groaning with annoyance. It made no difference, really, that he knew. Wasn’t like he and Cormac were friends.

"I'm just.... not pregnant. And he's—" She waved her hand in the direction of the Floo. "He's being a dick about it."

"You're not—" Malfoy's body seemed to stiffen. Through his shoulders, into his throat. It seemed to catch him for a moment; to take hold of him, chest-first. He nodded, firmly, more than once. "Right. Right."

She suddenly felt very guilty that she hadn't made it a priority to tell *him*. In the heat of her annoyance with him showing up at her work, and her annoyance with Cormac, she hadn't even thought to. The thought was, even in her current state, sobering. Of all people, she should've told him. It was unbelievably selfish of her.

Maybe she *was* being a bit of a bitch.

"I'm sorry," she said, quietly.

"Don't apologise," he whispered. "Probably my fault, somehow. *I'm*—" He collected himself, and cleared his throat. "No offence, but I *was* thinking it was *rather* irresponsible to be binge drinking if there was a chance—"

"There's no chance." She shook her head. "I got my period today."

She realised what she'd just said. Then she slammed her hands into her face, covering her mouth and eyes and every other shameful part of her that had just blurted that out.

"Oh my God," she hissed at herself. "That was so much information, I'm so sorry."

Malfoy looked at her as if she was actually stupid.

"You don't need to *apologise*." He huffed a laugh out of his nose. "The '*not pregnant*' did kind of *imply* that."

A laugh caught in the corner of his mouth.

No. Even though he was being nice about it, she was still going to hate herself forever.

"Shut up. But, yes. Or, no, I suppose. I'm not fucking going home. You can just— um... Harry's. Or— maybe... um.. The Burrow? Wait, no, that would be weird. And Pansy and Ginny are away, or else I'd just— um... do you know if there's a hotel—?"

Malfoy shook his head. Took a deep breath. He glanced at the closed Antiques store. Whispered an *Alohomora* and let the door swing open, and looked back at her once more. He stared at her for a moment. Longer than a moment. Frowned, a little bit. As if he was trying to stop himself.

He lost.

"Fuck," he hissed at himself. "You can just— fuck it. I'll owl him."

He walked her over to the Floo. She had no idea what he was talking about.

“Maybe it *is* me. Maybe I’m— not enough eggs...” she mused, as she stumbled over a rug that looked seven hundred years old. Eggs. That made sense. Something about the price of them. Economics, really. It was probably just a maths problem. “...I wonder if they sell them at Tesco.”

Malfoy gave her a look of pure incredulity. “*What?*”

She waved to ignore her, but she waved her hand *toward* him, this time. She was waving her hands a lot. It felt weird, so she did it again. Bigger. Waved both her arms, and promptly fell backwards, taking a rack of vintage clothing with her. It clattered to the floor with an astronomically loud crash. She turned to the rack and shushed it.

Malfoy snatched her up into his arms, swearing under his breath.

“Of course you’re a fucking messy drunk, Granger, for fuck’s sake, *stand still!*”

He kept one hand on her arm, while the other dug into the Floo powder and pressed it into her hand. He dragged her close.

“*Malfoy Manor,*” he said.

And, just like she’d pushed him into the fire in her office, he pushed her into the fire in an Antiques shop. It seemed almost important, the fact that they’d pushed each other into the fire, but there wasn’t really much metaphorical value in it other than the fact they’d both done the same thing at some point. Seemed like a silly thing to even notice, really.

She tumbled through, onto another probably seven hundred year old rug, but this one was a lot less dusty. In fact, it was soft. *Oh.* It was soft. In fact, it was unbelievably and *inconceivably* soft. Her fingers splayed over the wool, snuggling her face into the softness and closing her eyes.

So warm. So soft.

So... sleepy...

A roar sounded behind her, but she didn’t move. Even as legs tripped over hers, she decided immediately that she wasn’t going to move, this spot was too comfy. Soft rug. Soft, soft, rug.

The world tilted again. Warm. Moving. He’d picked her up again. She grunted discontentedly.

Malfoy sighed loudly, the sound vibrating through his chest.

“You are an absolute menace, Granger,” he muttered. “You do realise that, don’t you?”

She tried to turn her head, but everything was too heavy, and his cologne was too nice, and— oh— his heartbeat was right there beneath her cheek, steady and rhythmic and terribly soothing.

“M’not a menace,” she mumbled, half-asleep.

"I'd wager that rug's the most expensive thing you've ever drooled on. So... points aren't exactly in your favour."

Hermione huffed, burying her face deeper into his chest. "Shut up."

He didn't argue. He just kept walking. He adjusted his grip on her, firm but careful, like he was more focused on not holding her too closely than not dropping her.

It was familiar. A bit. Not really. But she realised she knew what his hands felt like, and that knowledge was unsettling. Too much history. Too many instincts that told her to keep her guard up.

And yet, she didn't feel like he was going to drop her.

Before she knew, she was being lowered. Soft sheets. Plush and cool and lovely. She sighed happily, curling in on her side and dragging the pillow under her head. She was just dozing off when he shook her awake and scolded her loudly to take her shoes off.

He absolutely could've been nice and done it *for* her, but she realised she was being a very bad house guest and instead kicked them haphazardly elsewhere in the room.

When he muttered something about her needing to take her shorts off, she batted him away, tugging her wand from her pocket and clumsily transfiguring her shirt into... something. She didn't know what. But she tugged her shorts off. Along with her bra, hiding underneath the billowy fabric of her now-oversized t-shirt-dress-thing and tossing the lingerie lazily across the bed in his direction.

He chuckled. But there wasn't much laughter in it.

Sleep was already tugging at her. Dragging her down into the abyss of quiet recovery. She looked up at him, sleepy eyed, and gave him a thumbs up.

He didn't smile at it.

Instead, his lips remained taut. Perfect, pretty lips tugged taut with stress. They looked thin like this. Looked how she remembered him in school. It was that expression that she thought of as she drifted off.

But as she teetered on the edge of consciousness, she heard something.

"I'm sorry, Granger," he said, quietly. "I'm so sorry."

She heard it. In her mind, it came from thin lips. And he was apologising for a lot of things.

That much, she was sure of.

Hermione awoke the following morning, as if she was in heaven.

The sunlight. It filtered through the window like breath settling on glass. Like a butterfly on a petal. Soft, and gentle and beautiful. Dappled and speckled and flecked by the leaves of a nearby tree, just sparsely enough for the ray to warm the room.

She might've thought it was the most beautiful beam of sunlight she'd ever seen.

If she didn't have such a *raging* fucking hangover.

She rolled onto her back with a groan, throwing her arms out either side of her, fighting the wave of nausea that flooded her. She was already planning on getting up when she realised just how *enormous* the bed was. She froze as she remembered that the bed was not her own.

She dragged herself to her elbow, surveying the room she was in—

It was...

Oh, God, she was at the Manor.

And it was the same room. The one they'd had *sex in*.

Her mouth hung open as she tried to take it in. The Manor had to have dozens of guest bedrooms, but he'd brought her to *his bed*? After she'd pawed at him, and complained about her husband and... Been possibly the most embarrassing person alive.

No.

She slammed a pillow over her face. She couldn't think about that right now. She needed water.

Possibly to *drown herself*.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, pausing as her bare feet met the cool wooden floor. Her wand was on the floor, still in the pocket of her shorts. That was good. Her clothes were...wrinkled but intact. Also good. She pushed herself up, moving toward the door on the far side of the room, hoping—

She nudged the door open. Thank God. An ensuite. She slipped inside, shutting the door quietly behind her.

The bathroom was massive, all sleek marble and sparkling silver fixtures. Everything was pristine. Neatly folded towels stacked in perfect symmetry, and magically warmed. And yet, there was nothing personal in the room. No toothbrush, no comb, no cologne. Just like the bedroom. It was like no one even lived here.

She ran the tap cold, cupping her hands beneath it and downing a few shaky sips.

God, even the tap water tasted expensive.

Her eyes flicked to the mirror, and she winced at the messy reflection staring back at her. Her curls were wild, a tangled disaster from sleep, and the remnants of yesterday's alcohol

dragging shadows under her eyes.

At least Malfoy had the decency to let her wake up alone.

She stripped out of her remaining clothes quickly, barely hesitating before stepping into the shower. She turned away, sighing, before reaching for the taps. Complexly enchanted—because was there *anything* he didn't have the best of?—spinning to her exact preference of *scalding* before she could even ask politely.

Goddamn Malfoys.

But the second the water hit her, at precisely the right temperature, she sighed contentedly.

God bless the Malfoys.

Hermione tidied herself as best she could, rinsing the taste and the smell of pub from her mouth and skin. Trying not to linger too long. She had no idea of the time. The light filtering through the windows told her it was still early, but she couldn't be sure.

She just knew that she had *well and truly* overstayed the hospitality of her host.

She wrapped herself in a fluffy towel, almost moaning at how thick and warm it was on her skin. Everyone who'd ever lived in this house was magical. Drying spells were faster and probably more effective, so this towel had no purpose other than existing for pure, unadulterated luxury. She draped it around herself while she tried to do something about her hair.

She cleaned her clothes, transfiguring them back to their original shape, and pulled them on. Casting her necessary charms on them as well.

And then, sheepishly, she left the bedroom.

*

Malfoy was just starting breakfast when she arrived in the sunroom.

It was the same one they'd had their first meeting in.

The food on the table smelled *incredible*. A tiered silver tray with an array of buttery croissants and warm scones, alongside a small dish of clotted cream and jam. A porcelain pot of coffee let off curls of steam, accompanied by a matching set of delicate cups and saucers. A plate of scrambled eggs, impossibly soft and flecked with fresh herbs, sat beside a stack of golden toast, neatly arranged with small glass jars of honey and marmalade. There was bacon. *Sausages*.

It wasn't as if she wasn't used to the odd luxury. The McLaggens were, by muggle standards, wealthier than a lot of distant royals.

But the Malfoys were wealthier than *God*.

To say she felt a little out of place amongst the extravagance was an understatement. She walked in with her eyes on the floor.

“Morning,” she managed to squeak out.

He didn’t say anything. She glanced up at him, desperately pleading for him to say something back.

But all she was met with was a smirk.

“Granger,” he said, calmly. “Join me.”

“Thank you, but I really should be getting h—”

“*Granger*,” he scolded, his lip twitching into his cheek. “After I opened my home to you?”

His lips were pursed together. Tight. Twisted.

Trying *desperately* not to laugh.

Hermione sighed. She swallowed hard.

And she sat down at the table.

She lifted her gaze to his, and sighed.

“Alright, let me have it.”

He released the laugh he was so politely trying to hold, chuckling into his coffee and shaking his head at her.

“You’re a complete mess of a human, I hope you know that.”

She sighed. “I am *not*. I was just having a *very* bad day.”

“So it appears,” he chuckled.

It was teasing. *He* was teasing her. As usual.

But it didn’t feel nasty.

He seemed just as perplexed—amused, even—by the situation they’d found themselves in. In a situation, where, having *slept together*, he, Draco Malfoy, would not only allow her, Hermione Granger-McLaggen, to spend the night at his house, but would in fact carry her there, and owl her husband to let him know that precisely that had occurred. It did all seem rather unlikely.

And she supposed it *was* rather funny.

Hermione huffed a laugh, drawing Malfoy’s attention and gaze.

"Will you eat something, please?" he said, almost warmly. She almost declined out of spite, but seemingly out of nowhere, the mug in front of her filled with coffee.

Delicious, scalding hot coffee that smelled like it had been ground that morning. She took a sip of it... and almost moaned. It was, without exception, the best coffee she'd had since that one cafe in Melbourne.

"*Oh, God, that's good.*"

He didn't say anything else. He just took a sip of his own, turning back to the Sunday paper.

Hermione gave up on resisting.

In a minute or two her plate was the best-looking thing in the room. Sausages, bacon, scrambled eggs, toast, and a croissant, whispering enticingly up at her as the world's most delicious hangover cure, from the most delicate bone china she'd ever touched.

But when she went to start eating, she suddenly paused.

"You don't have to do this, you know," she said quietly.

His gaze rose to hers. "Do what?"

"You don't have to—" she cut herself off, trying to think of the best way to word it. "—be nice to me."

He furrowed his brow. "*Am I* being nice to you?"

She scoffed. "You were unbelievably kind to me last night in my *menace* state. You didn't have to let me stay here, but you did. And now you're *feeding me*." She took a deep breath, shaking her head at the insanity of it all. "Being *nice* to me is not part of the contract. You shouldn't feel obliged."

Malfoy had taken a bite of toast halfway through, and now he was chewing. Slowly. An eyebrow rising even more slowly as if she had four heads. He swallowed. Slowly. Took a sip of coffee. Slowly.

Then he took a slow, measured breath.

"Well, if that was your way of saying *thank you*, you should probably know that there's a *much* faster way. In *fact*—" He leaned in as if it was a secret. "---It only involves two words. Now, brace yourself, because the two words might shock you—"

She couldn't help but smile as she rolled her eyes.

"Thank you, Malfoy."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Granger, you don't need to thank me."

She glared.

He gave her his best shit-eating grin, then pumped his eyebrows obnoxiously. She rolled her eyes. But... teasingly.

"Whatever. I appreciate it."

"And I would appreciate you *eating*. Because if you don't, my elves will follow me around for the rest of the day begging me to ask you why the food was not to your liking, and I know how much you hate disappointing them."

She grinned. She cut a large bite of sausage, and politely (but pointedly) placed it in her mouth.

He nodded approvingly, making her smile.

"Besides," he added. "The Manor has nineteen bedrooms. It's not like you taking *one* is that great of a sacrifice."

She stopped chewing. Just for a moment, as the wording settled. She swallowed her mouthful.

"So where did..." she cleared her throat as quietly as she could. "Where did you sleep?"

Malfoy didn't miss a beat. "In my bedroom? Where I usually sleep?"

Hermione's stomach suddenly twisted, and she wasn't sure why.

The room—*that* room. The one she'd slept in. The one he'd *fucked her* in.

It wasn't his bedroom.

She took another quiet bite of her food.

Of course it wasn't, that would've been silly. He wouldn't have fucked her in *his bedroom*. Why would he have taken her there? Why would he want to spend the night with her in his bed?

She swallowed, hard.

Why would he want to wake up and be reminded of what he'd done with her?

It was a *good* thing that he hadn't taken her to his room. He'd probably woken up the morning after they'd slept together and been horrifically regretful of what they'd done. Why would he want to remember being biologically forced to sleep with—

With *her*.

And here she was, at his breakfast table, having further imposed on him? A sudden rush of embarrassment flooded her from nose to toes.

God, she was such an idiot.

She dropped her gaze to her plate. She apparently was not subtle enough about it.

Malfoy took a deep, exasperated breath, letting his head fall back on his shoulders as he stared at the ceiling, as if begging for patience.

“What’s wrong *now*?”

It immediately rubbed her a million ways, all of them wrong.

“Well, I’m *so sorry* that the thought of me touching your bedsheets is so *horrible* to you!”

He flinched.

She wasn’t expecting it. She expected an outburst, or a glare, or a shouting match.

But he just flinched. It was subtle, barely a flicker, but she caught it. The slight shift in his shoulders, the almost imperceptible tightening of his jaw. As if she’d struck a nerve he hadn’t been expecting to be so raw.

“That is *not* why,” he said.

But his tone was different. His voice was steady but it was quieter than before.

Hermione’s chest tightened. She’d hurt his feelings. She was in his home as a guest. A guest he did not need to host, and one he certainly did not need to have been so nice to. For the last twelve hours he’d been, all in all, an absolute fucking gentleman in every regard.

“Then why didn’t we go to your bedroom?” she asked quietly.

“Because I didn’t think you’d *want that*.” His fingers curled around the newspaper, before giving up and placing it down on the table beside him. “Given our *history* it didn’t seem like the gentlemanly thing to do. I took you *there* because I thought you might prefer more *neutral ground*.”

Oh.

Hermione caught some of the elves glancing at her, so she quietly turned her gaze to her food and kept eating. But with her stomach twisting with guilt, she’d never felt so much like she was having to force it down. Hermione turned her gaze back down to her food, focusing on cleaning her plate. The food truly was delicious, she wouldn’t have the elves thinking otherwise. Or Malfoy thinking otherwise.

“I suppose so,” she said, quietly.

And, with that, they fell into a quiet silence. Hermione shifted in her seat, awkwardly, as she broke off another piece of her croissant.

“Malfoy, I’m sorry,” she said, after a few minutes. “I shouldn’t have assumed the worst.”

“And yet,” he teased.

She frowned pointedly at him. “You can’t exactly *blame me* for that. Every single part of me is still expecting all of this to be some big joke at my expense.”

Malfoy took a long draw of his coffee, staring into it as he swirled it.

“Well, I apologise, Granger, but I *do* plan on making *some* jokes at your expense, particularly over your choice in husband. Maybe also your choice in literature.” He took another sip, his eyes flicking up over the rim of the mug. “*The Da Vinci Code?* Seriously?”

Hermione’s mouth fell open.

Malfoy’s incredible poker face remained in place, every place except one.

The corner of his mouth.

It twitched with an annoyingly smarmy tug to the left, and her eyes narrowed in his direction.

“Fine.” She glared at him. “Then I’ll restrict *my* jokes to be about the fact you’re only *capable* of holding a conversation with me because I’m on my period.”

Goodbye, poker face.

Malfoy dropped his fork, perfectly in time with his jaw.

Hermione stabbed the rest of her sausage, angling it to her mouth.

She pumped her brows at him as she bit the end off.

“Mmmm,” she said, loudly. “*Delicious.*”

Chapter End Notes

hi i love you guys so much thank you for being so overwhelmingly kind about this silly little thing, that's all ❤️❤️❤️

also just to clarify, I have been to Bath and it was absolutely beautiful and I adored it. Unfortunately its proximity to Wiltshire put it in the firing line. Sorry, Bath. I love you!!

Chapter 5: “We have got to do something about this breeding kink of yours.”

Chapter Summary

It's time for round two :)

Cormac was, as expected, extremely annoyed that she hadn't returned to Walton Park that evening. He was rather a *douchebag* about it, if she was honest, muttering under his breath about *hysterics* and *sulking* and *womanly troubles*. However, in a stunning display of tact, Malfoy hadn't actually completely told on her. He hadn't told Cormac specifically *where* she was staying. Just that she was safe, and would be sleeping it off, implying that he had also made sure that she had not been *seen* in the state she was in by anyone with a camera.

Which, to Cormac, was really all that mattered.

Even so, she felt like an idiot.

Cormac didn't speak to her for a day or so. Minimally, for almost the entire length of her period. He was angry. Disappointed that it hadn't happened, that once again, she wasn't pregnant.

If she'd been looking for it, she might've thought he visually stiffened as she walked into the room. Might've thought he seemed to let out annoyed huffs under his breath. *If* she'd been looking for it. Which she was. Because she was a human, and walking on eggshells in one's own house felt mighty unfair.

However, she didn't have to look very hard to figure out when he was pleased with her again.

It was approximately one-eighth of a second after she quietly informed him that her period had finished. Then, he was himself again, a big grin spread over his face. Smiling and chatting with her and asking about her day. Talking about ‘new chances’ and ‘this time, for sure’, and ‘not long now, and you can give it another go’.

Honestly, a part of her couldn't figure it out. For a man so obsessed with appearances, Cormac seemed almost *too* keen to have another man sleeping with his wife. He hadn't set any ground rules, he hadn't asked her to make any promises, he was just... encouraging her. She couldn't help but remember Malfoy's theory that Cormac thought, somehow, that Malfoy might be inclined to leave his entire fortune to his only blood relative. She had to shake her head at the stupidity. Her husband's positivity was almost sickening.

He was in such an horrifically good mood that he even bought her a book.

The Prospective Mother.

It wasn't until the weekend that she actually sat down to read it. She'd read many pregnancy books over the years, they were almost comical in their superstitions. This one was from 1912, so by magical standards, it was practically *modern*. It was full of old wives' tales of how to increase one's chances of conception. Eating oysters. Or pineapple. Or honey with cinnamon. A hearty breakfast every day. A regular dosage of *cough syrup*.

Then, the physical aspects.

It is observed that, following the marital act, the seminal fluid retained within the female passage for a period of at least ten minutes may serve to enhance the likelihood of conception. Elevating the legs above the horizontal will allow gravity to do some of the work, and may aid in—

Hermione placed the book in her lap, staring at the opposite wall, trying her very, *very* hardest not to picture it. Just *imagine!* Laying with her legs in the air like a basted turkey, trying not to *drip*. She couldn't wrap her head around how incredibly *unappealing* it would look. Gravity or not, it sounded, frankly, absolutely fucking obscene.

She couldn't picture being so comfortable with someone that she could—

A gentle knock at the window startled her, furrowed brows parting. A barn owl perched steadily on her windowsill, tilting its head at her.

She recognised immediately who it belonged to, because it had been to her house not one month before. At first glance, it was a normal owl. Plain, and unremarkable. But as she leaned over to take the message from its beak, it leaned forward, into her touch. As if bowing. As if properly *delivering* her message, instead of simply arriving at its destination in exchange for food. No other family on earth would bother having their owls trained so well.

The Malfoys truly had more money than sense.

Hermione gave the owl a soft stroke along the beautifully fluffed feathers at its chest, and it gave a purring rumble in response. She smiled. It seemed to like her.

A small treat, another stroke, and it shook itself in the afternoon sun. She watched it fly away as she opened the message, almost rolling her eyes. *Of course*, within minutes of her opening a book on pregnancy, Malfoy would somehow *know* to mail her. To make it from Wiltshire in time, he had to be truly psychic.

But as she read the message, her stomach turned.

It was an invitation.

To her, and her alone.

Granger,

If this calendar is correct, we're due to meet sometime next weekend.

I was wondering whether you'd consider staying the whole weekend here.

Strictly for the sake of efficiency, of course.

Regards,

D. Malfoy

P.S. If you want me to outline the things I plan on doing to you, do let me know.

Her first reaction was to set the message on fire. To send him a howler in return, to scold him —loudly. She would not be his *sex toy* for the weekend.

Well, it was her second reaction, really.

Her first reaction was to blush terribly and try to ignore the rush of heat that shot up the inside of her thighs. *Then* she considered setting it on fire.

But then, she thought about it.

And she realised it wasn't a terrible idea.

It made sense, physiologically, for them to make... *multiple attempts*. Her calendar could only be so accurate. There were extreme variations in cycle for when, precisely, a woman ovulated, and the general medical recommendation was that... *attempts*... be made multiple times over a few days in order to maximise the chances that the... *proceeds*... of said attempts would be in the right place when the time came. Given that it hadn't worked so far with a single, or sometimes... she cleared her throat... a *handful* of attempts...

She couldn't exactly get pregnant if they were in separate houses. It made sense for her to stay there. Cormac would be away with his friends, watching some Quidditch match in Croatia, so it wasn't like she had other plans.

It didn't mean her reply was any less daunting.

Are you sure?

That was what she'd written. That was *all* she'd written. The underlying implication of acceptance was dependent on a positive response, while giving him an out. Nanny McLaggen would be furious. Anything other than her polite acceptance of an invitation so graciously extended was simply *improper*... but it just seemed wrong to not make absolutely sure that she wouldn't be an *imposition* by—

By being available for him to fuck for forty-eight consecutive hours.

His response took a few days, but it was decisive.

It's only logical.

D.M.

With each message, his responses got shorter. More brief. But she knew immediately it wasn't from annoyance. The loop on his *g* was tight, the ink too consistent through the tail. Not swept elegantly in script, but instead, traced with a firm hand.

Perhaps to stop it from shaking.

When Hermione looked closer, the signs were there, in black and ecru. The hard point of the *D* and the *M*. The dots so fierce it looked as if he'd had to stop himself stabbing through the page.

He was struggling again.

It was, by this point, one week until her ovulation date. Malfoy was beginning to lose control of the need, *knowing* that the peak of her cycle was approaching. And it was that very same peak that had her warm at the base of her neck. Her hair felt hot against it.

She could already picture him lifting it from her shoulders, wrenching it into a ponytail as he pushed her face into the mattress. Or lifting her by it. Or bending her over, his fist in it as he made her back bend completely in half, and—

She jolted at the thought.

God, she was *incorrigible*.

It made her even more nervous. This was obviously still rather new to her, but was it so wrong that she was enjoying herself? Just a little? Dealing with him *outside* of the bedroom was still infuriating, but *inside*...

Inside the bedroom was going rather well, all things considered. Obviously there hadn't been any success on the actual *mission* thus far, but at the very least, she could admit that she wasn't hating the experience. It seemed highly possible that the curse was directly impacting his refractory period. Making it shorter. Making it *easier* for him to keep going.

Again... and again... and again...

If Malfoy had her available at his fingertips for an *entire weekend*—

Her hand seemed to scribble out a response before she could even stop it.

Alright.

Hermione received his acknowledgement of her response that evening. She opened the letter and immediately blushed as she read the truly *vivid* descriptions of what he planned on doing to her when she arrived the following Friday. Line after line of graphic—no—*pornographic* descriptions of every conceivable act. She slammed the letter closed, taking a deep breath, trying to force herself not to fixate on the contents.

Instead, she turned her attention to the window, waiting for the apology owl that would inevitably come straight after a message such as that one.

It arrived ten minutes later, and was almost half a page; desperately asking for her forgiveness.

Hermione swallowed hard, and wrote back, reassuring him that she was not offended.

Then she slid her hand into her underwear and didn't stop until her legs were shaking.

She was lucid on Monday evening.

Tuesday afternoon she'd started to become a little fixated.

By Wednesday, she could almost *feel* her levels beginning to rise. Not because she had some intrinsic or innate connection with her pituitary gland that told her that her luteinizing hormones were spiking, that would be ridiculous. But every time she thought about her impending weekend, her... her *downstairs* would suddenly clench around nothing.

Thursday, she was going a little bit rabid. She tried to jump *Cormac*, for God's sake. He came home from drinks with the boys smelling like firewhiskey, and took his shirt off, and apparently, that was enough. She wrapped her arms around him as he was changing, whispering in his ear that she was still *very* awake.

He collapsed face-first onto the bed and went to sleep.

She lay there for almost an hour trying not to touch herself.

Friday morning, Hermione went to work as usual. She messed up the buttons on her blouse twice; shaky hands making everything far more difficult than it had to be.

She was being absolutely, positively ridiculous.

She'd *never* been so much a slave to her biology before. Like a bitch in heat, warm under her collar as she pictured what Malfoy was going to do to her in a few short hours. She may loathe the man, here, in reality, but this weekend? When it was nothing more than just him and her... no offices to barge into...

God she could barely wait..

She could only imagine what he was doing right now.

Even at her worst, the anticipation was only mild torture for her. The knowledge of what she'd be walking into— it was bearable. It was controllable. What *wasn't* controllable was her constant awareness of the state he'd be in.

She hadn't heard from him in days. She knew he'd be struggling. Sweating. Shirtless. Almost unable to stand as he tried, in agony, to pull himself together. His hair a mess. Trousers hanging open. Waiting for her to arrive.

Maybe he was touching himself.

Maybe his cock was in his hand. Moaning her name as he tried to work himself over the edge to the thought of her, but he wouldn't be able to. Not without her there to take it from him. The thought sent a shiver through her.

It wouldn't be long before she was there. Under him. Doing exactly that. Taking it from him. Taking all of it. Deep inside her. Squirming and begging for it—

She glanced at the clock on the wall. A quarter to five.

Fuck it. Close enough.

Hermione bade a good weekend to Judah, who hid his surprise at her sneaking out early unsurprisingly well. Unflappable, as always. And rather good-looking, if she squinted a little. She almost slapped some sense into herself. Even *Judah* looked good— Oh, God, she truly needed to get out of there.

She immediately Flooed home. Drew a bath. Scrubbed herself. Detangled her hair. Wrapped herself in a towel and made her way to the walk-in wardrobe. Tamed her eyebrows. Curled her lashes. Looked between her two perfumes. Cormac had bought her one, the other, she'd bought herself. She looked between them a few times, sprayed the one she'd bought herself, and then immediately felt stupid and made a mental note to wash it off before leaving. She dressed without thinking. She only realised as she glanced at herself in the mirror that she'd put on another button-up sundress. It was appropriate for the middle of August. Feminine. Pretty.

But it was also unbelievably *easy access*.

Hermione watched a blush pass over her cheeks, staring at her reflection. She was making far, far too much of an effort. She groaned, covering her face with her hands, cursing herself furiously for dressing specifically to be *fucked*.

But she was so goddamn horny she didn't bother changing.

It was nearly half-six by that point. She shook with nerves as she approached the Floo, calling out her destination.

She stepped through.

And, then, she was there.

The parlour at the Manor was dark and empty. The crackling smell of the flames dissipated into the blackness. Soft rug cushioning her arrival.

Before she could even call his name, his hands were on her.

One around her waist, one wrenched up the back of her neck. His fingers splayed across the base of her skull. He sank his lips into her throat as if he was about to take a rabid bite out of her skin.

“You came,” he hissed, teeth gnashing against her jaw. His lips dragged along it. Over her cheek. Behind her ear.

Devouring her.

Oh, God, yes, she almost moaned. But instead, Hermione’s body just melted into his arms.

“You asked me to,” she whispered back, trying to stop her voice from shaking with nerves. With—

Fuck. With excitement.

Her body already knew what he was going to do to her, and her biology was bouncing off the walls with anticipation. Ovulation had her mind racing like an animal’s, and her stupid mammalian brain couldn’t stop picturing it. The image of him holding her legs apart. The moment of him entering her. The push. The squeeze. The slip. The tightness of his cock sinking into her, inch by inch. The visual of him taking control of her hips. Pinning them to the bed while his own stuttered and he—

Malfoy paused. His lips parted against her skin, he inhaled deeply.

“...Are you wearing perfume?”

Her stomach twisted with embarrassment, shame making her flush as she thought about lying to him. She was so desperate to get here that she’d completely forgotten to wash it off. God, she was such an *idiot*. This wasn’t a fucking date, or a social call, or a party. This was—this was *work*. This was a *contract*.

“Sorry. Yes. It’s stupid.”

He dragged his lips over the perfumed skin, a deep sigh on his breath. Then he followed it with his thumb. He dragged the soft pad over her pulse point, his lips touching to the shell of her ear.

“It’s not stupid. It’s—” he whispered. He swallowed. Hard. Took a shuddering breath. “*It’s pretty.*”

Heat flooded her cheeks, rushing down her body in a shiver under his hands. She knew he would feel it, there wasn't even much point hiding it. She just let him groan as he felt her heartbeat quicken. Let him take a step closer and press his body to hers.

Let him walk her backwards to the receiving lounge, then let him push her down and pin her to it.

He was on top of her, tearing at her clothes but trying to be gentle about it.

"You like that, do you?" he whispered. "You like when I call you pretty?"

God, she was already done for.

She nodded as he kissed her collarbones, letting herself submit to him. His lips were so perfectly soft; yet unbelievably forceful as they moved urgently down into her cleavage. He couldn't keep up with his own fingers, fumbling as he tugged at the buttons of her sundress in his desperation to get them open. His breath was already frantic against her skin. Hot and staggered as one hand pushed the hem higher up her thigh. He didn't hesitate for even a second. Just hooked his fingers into her underwear and tugged them down her legs. He glanced down, between them. His eyes rolled back in his head.

"Fuck, I forgot *how* pretty you are."

Malfoy reached for the fastener of his trousers, flipping it open and tugging the zipper down.

Hermione's body flooded with adrenaline. And with her own fucking arousal.

He was going to do it right there. He was going to fuck her. There. *Immediately*. Right there in the goddamn parlour. No warmup, no questions, he would push himself inside. Fuck her. Consume her.

He was just going to *take*—

Yes. Yes.

Hermione inhaled sharply, trying to stay sentient.

"Malfoy," she said, expectantly. "You don't think we should go somewhere a little more... private?"

It was absolutely not a question. But his hand disappeared into his underwear regardless.

"Here's good," he growled.

Hermione's heartrate spiked. "And if someone decides to pay you a visit?" She thought she sounded very stern, but Malfoy did not seem to care.

"No one's going to pay me a visit," he said. He tugged himself free, pushing against her entrance. She gasped, trying to stop herself from spreading her legs and just *letting him*.

“Malfoy,” she hissed. “You are *not* fucking me in the *middle of your goddamn Floo parlour*; you *prat!*!”

He growled his disapproval into her neck.

He scooped her into his arms. Pulled her close. She thought he might stand up with her, carrying her upstairs, but he didn’t. Instead, he rolled off the lounge while holding her. The motion sent them spinning through the air. She tried to squeal.

But the sound disappeared into a muffled *oof* as she landed on a familiar surface.

He’d apparated them to the bed.

Malfoy’s arms remained around her. His body was still heavy over hers, pressing her down into the mattress. He looked down at her. He paused for a moment, as if taking stock of what was beneath him.

Then he shoved his hands under her dress, and with a flick of his wrist, vanished every scrap of clothing on her body.

“*Malfoy!*” she squeaked, covering her naked body with her hands. “*Warn me first!*”

He took each of her wrists in his palms, and forced them onto the bed beside her head.

“*No,*” he growled. “*No covering.*”

Hermione’s mouth opened in protest, but none materialised. He’d wrapped his lips around her nipple, and sucked, *hard*.

Her loud complaint at being naked turned into an extremely grateful moan that she *was*.

He wasn’t supposed to make her feel like this. His mouth wasn’t supposed to feel this good on her body. She wrestled her arms free, tugging his open shirt over his head. Pushing his trousers from his hips as his mouth moved back up to her neck.

She wasn’t supposed to want him this badly.

He barely had to touch her for her to be ready. In fact, it seemed like the less he touched her, the more she wanted it. Hermione wondered, as he kicked off the rest of his clothing, if the curse was affecting her too, somehow. If it was messing with her hormones. She’d known she didn’t *hate* the idea when she’d been trying with Cormac, but with Malfoy, it was like the urge was tenfold. A hundredfold. A *thousand*. It was entirely possible that she was really, *really* into the idea of getting pregnant.

It was also possible that they just had *really* good chemistry.

Malfoy didn’t ask permission, and he wasn’t gentle as he notched his tip against her entrance. He just spread her legs apart. Lifted them, around his waist. Held her wrists to the bed.

Pushed into her. And he let out a groan so loud she felt it in her own chest.

She couldn't help but whimper, squeezing around him as her eyes rolled back in her head. She felt every inch of him as he slid deeper; as he stretched her out. Forced her to make room for him.

Her legs were twitching already.

"Yes," he gasped, drawing himself out before sinking back into the hilt. "Oh, *Gods*, yes." A sound rasped in the back of his throat. "It's been *too fucking long*."

He sobbed it.

He didn't stop.

"I missed being inside you so fucking much," he rasped, hard, his voice tumbling into a moan as if she was magic. As if she was made of silk. Velvet. As if she felt, somehow, as good to him as he did to her.

Her breath caught as she squeezed her legs around him.

"I missed it too," she whispered back. "Wanted—" she inhaled sharply. "—this."

He groaned again. Almost—almost *growled*, dropping his weight on top of her. His teeth gnashed in her ear, breath rumbling against her skin.

"Been thinking about you for a *month*. You know that?" he hissed as he thrust into her again. "I've spent every waking minute thinking about being inside you again. Thinking about what I was going to do to you when I got my hands on you."

Hermione could do nothing but squeak as a moan forced its way from her throat. He met it with a growl. Another thrust.

"It's going to take, this time, and if it doesn't, I'm going to fuck you until it does." Malfoy dragged his lips up her throat. To her jaw. His teeth bearing gently down over her skin. It drove her fucking insane when he did that, when she felt his teeth on her skin. It was brutal. Like he would truly devour her if he had the opportunity, and she wanted—he groaned into her throat—

She wanted him to.

Hermione sank her fingers into his hair, holding his teeth firmer against her skin.

He closed them, biting down. She gasped. It would bruise. It would *mark her*, but she didn't stop him. Instead, she let out a soft whimper of delicious pain.

"*Tell me exactly how much you want this*," he rasped. "I want you begging for it."

This was still new to her, this—this *talking*. She knew she liked it. God only knew she *loved* it; hearing him growl darkly into the side of her face. His teeth gnashing as he dripped filth into her skin. And almost, more than anything, she loved how deeply it affected *him*.

whenever she did it *back*. And knowing that she could break him—shatter his resolve, and force him to lose control of himself—

It made her feel impossibly desirable. And it made her feel inhumanly powerful.

Her lips found his ear in a heartbeat.

“I want this,” she whispered. “I want you to fuck me.” She tasted his skin on her breath. “I want you inside me, Malfoy. Fucking me. Just like this.”

Malfoy’s hips stuttered against hers, his breath shuddering as he whimpered across her skin. Losing himself. Already. And, with every thrust of his hips, she built faster right alongside him.

She wondered if it would always be like this. This frantic, all-consuming need to just...to just *fuck*. Not make love or tease it out or make it last, she wanted it. She wanted to *fuck* him. Needed it. Now. *Immediately*. And Malfoy was more than willing; no—he was *desperate* to give it to her. She had no idea how long they’d been going. Five minutes? Maybe five and a half? But she was already stretching through her core. Over her thighs, through her body. Her peak, her crest, the one she’d been waiting for all week, was building so fast she could barely hold on to it.

She arched into him. Met his thrusts from beneath.

Malfoy’s mouth fell open. His hand flew to her hip, forcing her to repeat the motion. Again. And again, their bodies meeting in hard jerks as his eyes rolled back.

“Like that—*fuck*, you’re so good under me,” he gasped. “Fucking hell, Granger—!” his moan sobbed out of him once more. “*Oh, you’re going to make me come way too fast.*”

Yes. Yes. He was just as close as she was. She was satisfying him. She was going to make him come. Her brain practically *purred* with pleasure. She moaned, meeting his thrusts again.

“You like that,” he gasped. “You want it?” He let out a growl of excitement as she nodded. “Yeah? You like knowing that you’re going to make me come?”

Yes. Oh, God, yes, she did.

“*Please,*” she whimpered. Begged. “Inside me. Come inside me. Put a baby in me. *Please.*”

“You first. I need—I need you to come first. Fuck, Granger, leave a man his dignity—” he hissed. His eyes met hers. Desperate. Watching. “I need to feel it. Need to feel you. Need you to—*come for me, and I’ll come for you. Come for me, and I’ll put a baby in you.*”

She was fighting a losing battle, trying to hold back. Trying to stop herself, to draw it out. He was just as close as she was; she knew there was no point. He was going to make her come whether she wanted to or not.

And she did want to. She wanted to squeeze her legs around his hips, locking her ankles behind them as she forced him to stay inside. As she dug into him. Claimed him. Took him

inside her and writhed underneath him, *begging*.

She wanted that more than *anything*.

“*I’m close*,” she whimpered back. “*Yes. Yes. Close—so cl—*”

His jaw gritted. She watched his Adam’s apple as he swallowed hard. His eyes locked on to her face. He was watching her. He was *making her come. Forcing her to—*

Fuck.

The tightness overwhelmed her, and her fingers sank into his shoulders.

“*Come—coming—!*” she gasped.

His lips parted. And he hissed—

“*Good girl.*”

Hermione’s body fired off in a million directions, exploding outwardly as her orgasm sent her writhing back against the bed. It exploded like fire, toppling her over the edge and into the silent abyss of euphoria. Fingernails raking over his spine. His hips. Feeling the muscles flex as he slammed himself into her, over and over and over. She threw her head back as he moaned into her neck, lips working furiously over her skin as his bucks began to stutter. He cursed furiously into her throat.

“*Fuck, fuck—fuck!*” he gasped. His fingertips sank into her hips, slamming her into his own as he sank in deep. As deep as he could go. All the way in, his full length taken deep inside her. Hermione writhed and preened under the gasping writhe of his body, almost feeling the warmth as her mind exploded with the visuals of him filling her again. Filling her, over and over, all the way to dripping, the way she’d so desperately needed. The way she’d *waited for*.

A moan fell from her lips. From nothing more than sheer fucking bliss as he came inside her.

It felt so good to hold on to him like this; to sink her fingertips into his skin. To feel his muscles ripple in time with his thrusts. His body felt like liquid gold against hers. Heavy and warm on top of hers. Pressing hers down into the mattress as a breath filled his lungs. She felt the rush of air pass her cheek. Felt his grip loosen on her hips.

And their eyes met.

They stared at each other for a moment, and in that moment, something seemed to sink in.

Lock into place.

In the plethora of romance novels she’d devoured over the years, it might’ve been the moment that the two protagonists realised their feelings. Realised, perhaps against all odds, that there might be something *more* between them.

But fortunately for Hermione, that was absolutely *not* what had happened. Because, in fact, that sudden moment of realisation between her and Malfoy?

It was the rather speedy reappearance of her *sense of shame*.

Malfoy's hands were still well on their way to her arse. Her own hands were basically at his mid-back, ankles crossed over his hips from where she'd been physically begging him to go deeper.

Last time, he'd just completely passed out afterwards. Just... pulled out, and... *flop*. Face down, on the bed, without so much as a *lovely doing business with you*.

Hermione wondered for a moment whether she'd preferred it that way.

Because now, their faces were only inches apart.

Staring.

And very much conscious of what they had just done.

His gaze trailed over her face for half a minute. Breathing heavily. Panting, even. Hermione could already feel her cheeks stealing the warmth that the rest of her body desperately craved.

But he didn't pull back. Malfoy didn't frown at her, or cringe, or wince with disgust. He didn't immediately let go of her.

In fact, his head dropped to her shoulder.

He groaned, loudly, into the pillow beside her head.

“Fuck, Granger,” he panted, before lifting his head again. “We have *got* to do something about this breeding kink of yours.”

Chapter 6: “You read dirty books before coming to see me, Granger?”

Chapter Summary

And it's still only Friday night 😊

Chapter Notes

Reminder to always check the fic tags. Some of the CWs apply in this chapter. I'm updating them as I come across stuff that might be relevant. If I've missed something LMK via DM (socials in endnote)

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

“We have got to do something about this breeding kink of yours.”

Hermione had to make sure she'd heard him correctly. Upon realising that she had, her mouth fell completely open, staring as accusingly as she possibly could.

How absolutely *dare*—

“My breeding kink!?” she spat, flabbergasted. *“Coming from the man who just said, out loud, ‘Come for me, and I’ll put a baby in you’? ”*

Malfoy's jaw dropped to match hers, scoffing indignantly.

“I have a blood curse, Granger. I have been very, very clear about that since the first time you walked into my house talking about getting pregnant. What comes out of my mouth is not my fault. I literally cannot help it.”

Hermione's mouth fell even further open, absolutely, positively appalled at his sheer *audacity*. The absolute—the fucking *nerve*—

However, before she could speak, Malfoy smirked, silencing her as she tried to reply.

“But you can help it,” he grinned maliciously. *“So you have a breeding kink.”*

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him, but he didn't drop her gaze. He waited for a moment, basking in her silence, then narrowed his own eyes accusingly. So she stared accusingly back.

And she decided that he deserved to be taught a lesson.

She let her gaze loosen a little. Soften, even. It was narrowed, still, but without the pointedness that came with accusation. Glancing up at him, seductively... from under dark, hooded eyes.

Malfoy's expression sparked with interest (and only a little suspicion) as her hand slid up his back, curling lightly around the back of his neck. She glided her nails up the short hairs. Held his gaze on hers.

"So you mean to tell me that if you *weren't* cursed..." She lowered her voice, a smooth, seductive cadence as best she could manage. "I'd never find you holding a witch's legs apart while you fucked her?"

His movements slowed.

She stroked the base of his skull, nails scratching into his hair. He shivered. But he didn't look away.

Hermione's fingers slid, slowly, down the back of his neck. Around to his throat, her thumb stroking the line of his jaw.

His breath shuddered.

She didn't stop.

"You wouldn't fuck her *sooo well* that she *begged to* feel you fill her? Begged you, over and over to come deep, deep inside. As deep as you could. As *much* as she could possibly take of you." She let out a small, seductive hum. "And then when you eventually *did* come, *deep* inside her, you *unimpaled* yourself from her, you knew without a single doubt that she'd go the rest of her day, *dripping* with you?"

Malfoy's gaze seemed to lose its focus. His skin prickled into goosebumps as he lingered on every word.

Hermione lifted her chin, whispering even quieter to make him come closer. "You wouldn't find that arousing, *at all*. Is that right?"

She dragged her teeth across her lower lip.

Malfoy's gaze had dropped, watching as she bit at the plump skin. His own lips parted, just a little, and she could've sworn that it felt like he was leaning into her. Completely dazed.

"Hmm?" she prompted. She squeezed her walls around his cock, and it jolted him back to attention.

Then he blew air over his lips, exhaling heavily.

"*Fuuuuck youuuu,*" he growled as he ran his hand through his hair. He leaned in close, glaring at her. "You *know* what talking like that does to me. That's *cheating*."

Hermione felt the tug of a smug grin in her cheek, hiding a small laugh as Malfoy stared accusingly down at her. “See? There is *nothing* wrong with liking it.”

“Mmmm,” he growled. “But you *more* than just like it. When I tell you I’m going to fill you up, you basically come on command.”

“I do *not!*”

“You *do!*” He teased. “You *love* it. Having your legs held open, having me pin you to the bed. Just like you *love* when I tell you how badly I love *doing the pinning*. Surely you can admit *that* much?”

Hermione scoffed, teasingly, as his eyebrows rose disbelievingly. Of course they were *bickering* while his *cum* was beginning to drip out of her. She rolled her eyes.

“Some girls *happen* to enjoy being made to feel like a man can’t resist them. Don’t act like that’s abnormal.”

She shrugged, sliding her hand down his back to tell him to pull out.

He did.

And, without thinking, she elevated her legs.

Malfoy’s mouth had swung open to retort, but instead, he just stared at her. Brow furrowed in confusion.

“What are you doing?”

Hermione realised that she’d somehow voluntarily assumed the basted-turkey position she’d so hated the idea of. She’d stuck her legs straight up, like the book said. Tilting her hips upward to... hold it... inside. To ‘*let gravity do some of the work*’.

She blushed. Furiously.

“Shut up. It was in a book.”

“A *book*?” He cocked an eyebrow. “You read dirty books before coming to see me, Granger?” He feigned a deep pout. “And here I thought it was *all me*.”

She scoffed, her mouth falling open. “It’s not a *dirty book!*” A blush painted her cheeks. “It’s a *pregnancy* book, Malfoy. It made a few recommendations. Apparently this helps get things where they need to go.”

“‘*Things*’?”

She blushed harder. “That *cum* you love talking about so much.”

He joined her in a furious blush. “Ah.”

“Mmm.”

“That sounds like drivel,” he said.

“It probably is. But it means that it mostly stays inside me rather than dripping out. So it can’t really *hurt* to—”

He frowned.

Malfoy’s somehow perfect eyebrows furrowed into an expression of something she couldn’t immediately place. Not annoyance, or impatience— perhaps a *little* impatience, but that wasn’t *all* of it. As she saw what it *was*, however— as she figured it out—

Hermione’s stomach twisted as she realised she recognised it.

Curiosity.

Her eyes widened as he moved closer. His lip cut slowly into his cheek as he smirked at her.

“*Show me.*”

Hermione’s eyes darted to his, but he didn’t react to her panic. He simply studied her. In silent concentration. Letting him come inside her was one thing, but allowing him to be *directly eye-level* with her most intimate area as it— as it *dripped*— was entirely another thing altogether.

“Absolutely fucking *not*,” she hissed.

Malfoy just lifted himself to his elbow, and began moving lower.

Hermione slammed her legs back down, scrambling for the covers to tug them over herself, but Malfoy kicked them away. He caught her around the ankles. She squealed.

“Malfoy, *no!*”

“*Come on*, just let me see!”

“You are *not* going to—”

“Granger, hold *still*—” He grabbed her legs, holding them together and pushing her knees to her chest. She was powerless to stop him, bending at the middle and trying to cover her face as—

As he *saw*.

Malfoy went deathly silent, and she uncovered her face, peering around her own legs. She couldn’t quite see him, but she already knew what *he* was seeing. She could feel it, trickling slowly down the crease between her buttocks and her thigh. Staying in the position hadn’t worked, at least not entirely.

And it—

It was the fact that it *hadn't* worked that seemed to have Malfoy completely transfixed.

Her thighs were already squeezed together, but he seemed to squeeze them tighter as he held them against her chest. She was on full display for him, and he was staring. Eyes locked and focused, directly on her... on her... *cunt*.

He'd made a complete mess of it. She was dripping with him. She could *feel* that she was dripping with him.

And his eyes started going dark.

Hermione watched his lips part, but no sound came out of them. At least, not to begin with. It took him a moment. Or a minute. Or two. Staring, lips parted, not even a breath passing his lips.

It was only then that the sounds began. A deep groan on his exhale. It was the start of it. The curse. She could almost watch it trigger through his bloodstream. The stiffening of his shoulders and the tightening of his neck. It had been no more than a few minutes, but it was triggering again.

She began calling his name. Softly. Quietly, to try and keep his attention, but he didn't respond. She squirmed uncomfortably as his grip tightened. As he stared at what he'd done to her. She could almost hear his thoughts in her own mind. Wondering how deep inside her the soaking trail went.

He licked his lips as he slid a finger between her own, trailing through his own spend and pushing it back inside her.

She went completely stiff, her mouth falling open as she squirmed in his hands.

“What are you doing?” she whispered.

“If she was full enough... wouldn't need her legs up.” Another swipe of his fingers, through the sticky trail over her skin. Guiding it back inside her. “She'd have to cross them. Stop herself from leaking.”

He wasn't speaking to her. Not directly. He was talking to himself, out loud. His fingers left her, but she felt him shift atop the bed. She peered around her own thighs again, trying to see what he was doing. She managed to catch a glimpse of him. He was on his knees. One hand around her ankles, but the other—

The other was wrapped around his cock.

Hermione's sharp intake of breath didn't snap him out of his daze. He hadn't noticed her looking. Or, if he had, he didn't...

Care.

She swallowed the saliva that had pooled in her throat as she watched him envelop himself in his own palm.

Hermione had never watched a man do this before. She knew *how* it was done, of course. She understood the anatomy of the male pleasure zones. The tip, in particular. The sharp line of the underside. Down to his balls— sensitive, but pleasurable. And just behind them. She knew, as she watched him, that his hand on his cock would feel good for him.

But it was another thing entirely to watch him touch himself.

It felt... primal. Instinctual, even, for her to be watching as he worked a large hand over his equally as impressive size. To watch long, firm fingers, slick from inside her, stroke the sides of himself. Tease over his tip. Make slow, repeated lines along his frenulum.

It made him look vulnerable, somehow, yet inconceivably strong; lean body taut, sharp jaw clenched. Hips rocking into his own grip. It danced on the edge of feeling forbidden for her to see him like this, to be watching the way he moved when he was alone. With pressure so specific to his taste. Harder at the top half of his length, but lightly over his tip. Teasing, almost feather-lightly across his skin; gentle fingertaps along his underside. His thumb pushing up over the head, and around. Around. And around. Caressing himself in his palm.

His breath caught with some movements. Eyelids fluttered. Gentle, almost silent moans leaving parted lips. His hips jerked incrementally forward, thighs flexing as he bucked upward. He was sensitive. He suddenly gave himself a harder squeeze as his grip tightened on her ankles.

She looked away, for a moment, blushing with embarrassment. But then, she looked again.

He wasn't looking at her face. She wasn't sure he'd even noticed that she was watching. His eyes were locked. Focused. Centered between her legs, his mouth hanging open with panting breath as he... as he touched himself.

Watching his cum leak out of her.

She should not have found it so arousing, but Hermione felt herself clench regardless. Around nothing. Knowing that it was *her* that was turning him on. It was *her*, and the very nature that she held a part of him inside her, that had him hard again.

He wanted what she could give.

He wanted to give her as much as she could *take*.

It made her clench involuntarily again. More of him trickled out of her, and this time, he snarled with frustration. With *anger*. He caught the drop with his fingers, his hand leaving his own cock in order to push it back into her once again.

"*Hold it,*" he hissed.

She tried. She flexed her walls, but all it did was push more out.

It drew a growl from somewhere deep past his chest. She let out a completely helpless sound of apology, but it only seemed to make him more brainless.

He pumped his cock in his fist. *Hard*. Sank his teeth into his lower lip.

“Malfoy,” she squeaked. She lay there, exposed like some sort of misbehaving fuck toy, as he began to whisper and groan to himself about *not enough*.

Hermione couldn’t help what she did next.

It was instinct. Biology, she was sure of it. The idea of him giving her *so much* that she couldn’t even hold it all inside her was activating a part of her brain that made her want to somehow prove that she could. That she could hold every drop of what he gave her, if he just gave her another chance. Women had the shorter refractory after all, and he just looked so *good*—

She took a nervous breath through her nose. Took one more look at him.

And she slipped her hand between her legs.

She was subtle. One finger, then two, slipping between her folds and touching gently to her clit. Her own thighs squeezing her wrist. Smoothly, softly. She went slowly, at first; teasing out her excitement at what his response might be.

And his response was better than she even could’ve dreamed.

Malfoy’s eyes flicked an inch or so higher, onto her fingers as she touched herself under the incinerating heat of his gaze. His anger faded into soft surprise as he drew his attention from between her legs to right between her eyes. His mouth fell open. He gave his cock another hard squeeze.

And that was how they stayed. For a minute. Two. Five. Eyes flicking across bodies and over mouths. Down throats, across shoulders. Lower, for a moment, then back to the eyes.

Hermione had never done this with anyone else. Never allowed someone to see her like this, to join this intimate moment, but she wanted *him* to. She wanted him to see what he did to her. To watch. She wanted to melt beneath his gaze. There was something about Malfoy that made her want to turn liquid over his attention, over his reaction, over his enjoyment. She *loved* seeing him like this. She loved what she *did* to him. Every circle of her fingers made her wetter, but she refused to break first. She refused to be the one to look away, and she refused to be the one to demand more.

Which was fine. Because Malfoy was more than willing to take what he wanted.

He dragged her down the bed by the ankles. Angled her where he wanted her, her knees still at her chest, but he didn’t enter her, no. Instead, he dipped the head of his cock into the trail of release that had trickled out of her. Coated himself with it. And he touched it, ever so gently, to her clit.

She shivered underneath him as he began thrusting gently over her.

“Malfoy?” she whispered.

“Again,” he growled. His hand left his cock, and instead, he parted her ankles, bringing his lips to the inside of one. “*You need more.*”

Hermione tore her eyes away from his mouth at her ankle, painting her skin with his lips. She turned her eyes to him, wide and nervous, the way she always was when he got like this. Her breath shuddered.

She nodded.

He breathed heavily into empty air.

“*Say it,*” he begged.

She immediately complied. “I need more.”

“More what?”

Hermione swallowed hard. She licked her lips. “I need you to fill me again.”

Malfoy rose to his knees. Pressed himself to her entrance.

“Then be a good girl, and spread your legs.”

He towered over her, predatory and hard-gazed. He was so intimidating when the curse took hold of him. Like he couldn’t help what he was doing.

She did as she was told.

He pushed back inside her with a groan, fingertips digging into her hips as he settled inside her. As if it settled *him*.

His eyes closed. Lips parted. For a moment he almost looked peaceful. Until he drew his hips back, and gave her a thrust that almost made her climb up the bed. He pulled back, giving her another one. Then another. He sank his fingers into the flesh of her hips, holding her where he wanted. He was rough with her. Rougher than he’d been before. Eyes wild, cheeks flushed. Jaw clenched with determination.

She could do nothing but open her legs and let him fuck her.

He did. She lay there, almost unable to move as he began slamming himself into her, harder than ever. Her jaw slack, making no sounds except the ones he drew from her involuntarily.

“That’s it,” he grunted, “don’t you fucking dare fight me.”

In response, Hermione let out an almost involuntary moan.

“That’s *right,*” Malfoy gave a growling laugh. “*You love* when I can’t resist you. Isn’t that what you said? Little fucking tease. Touching yourself when you *know* I can do it better.

When you know this cunt is *mine*.”

Hermione couldn’t even speak. She just stared at him. Mouth open. Shuddering under the embodiment of his lust.

“I wondered if you’d be my good girl. If you’d open wide for me. Or if I was going to have to hold you down.”

She wanted that power. That forcefulness. She wanted— she was already completely incoherent, but she wanted— She wanted *that*. She wanted to give in to it completely. To give in to the biology and have him *take* her. Have him pin her to the bed and— and just—

Oh, God.

And just fucking *breed her*.

Hold her down, and fuck her until she was full of him. Fuck her *hard*, and fuck her until she was full. Over and over, like he’d promised the first time. She was supposed to hate him, supposed to find him rude and arrogant and despicable, but in that moment, all she wanted was for him to fuck her so deeply she went limp in his arms.

Her lips parted, and she whispered it at first; so quiet he couldn’t have heard. She had to be louder. She had to be surer. She wanted to scream it, but she couldn’t. A whimper was all she could gather, so that was how she told him.

She whimpered it.

“*Hold me down.*”

Malfoy didn’t miss a beat.

In an instant, her hands were above her head. His body leaned over hers, angling her up toward him and slamming himself into her depths. Hermione *moaned*, she couldn’t help it, looking up at him through what she knew were hooded eyes.

“*Gods fucking—*” His mouth fell open. “You want— you actually want me to—”

“Make me take it,” she gasped. “Make me take it all. Every fucking drop. *Make me take it.*”

She didn’t have to ask again.

Malfoy pinned her to the bed by the wrists.

“You want me to *make* you?” he moaned roughly, grip tightening around her wrists. “Want me to pin you down and use your cunt until you’re leaking? Want me to fucking *use* you?”

She moaned, squirming against his hold. Spreading wider.

“Yes,” she whispered. “*Use me.*”

A sudden rush of braveness filled her, and she looked up at him. And with eyes as innocent as she could manage, she whispered.

“It’s yours.”

If she’d known in advance what those words would do to him, she might not have said them. Or, she might’ve said them sooner, she had no way of knowing for sure. But something happened to Malfoy.

It was as if those words—two short, inconsequential words—snapped something in him. Something deep inside, something that she couldn’t reach for and heal. She’d broken it. The seal, the edges, whatever it was, she’d shattered it. And, as she handed herself to him on nothing less than a silver platter—

He completely lost control of it.

“Mine?” he snarled, teeth gnashing against her throat. “Say it. Louder. Whose fucking cunt is it? Who does it belong to?”

“You,” she moaned. “You, Malfoy, it’s yours.”

“That’s right,” he growled. “It’s *mine*, you fucking hear me? No one else. No one but me.”

“No one but you,” she agreed.

“You’re mine. And you’re going to take all of it,” he hissed. “Perfect little slut. So fucking *breedable*. No one’s ever taken me like this. Never felt this fucking good.”

She inhaled sharply. She whimpered. His grip tightened on her wrists.

Her thighs were aching from the stretch, but she only pushed them wider. Squeezing his waist again.

“So fucking pretty. So perfect. Such a good girl, but I’m so much stronger than you,” he hissed. “You couldn’t get out from under me if you *tried*. I’m going to hold you down and come inside you. And there’s going to be nothing your body can do about it. I’m going to get you pregnant. Don’t you fucking dare fight it.”

Hermione’s body clenched hard, bucking underneath him as she felt the pressure of her inevitable climax building inside her. She was absolutely powerless to fight if, even if she’d wanted to. “I wouldn’t. I would never. I don’t want to fight it, I *want* it.”

She writhed as he moved faster, begging for more.

“I’m going to fuck you every chance I get.” He hissed it. “Until I get you pregnant. Until you’re carrying my child. I’m not going to stop until you’re leaking for *days*.”

He was rabid. He was *feral*. He’d completely lost control of every shred of himself.

And she had never been more wet.

Hermione squeaked, locking her ankles behind his hips again. He released her wrists as he thrust sharply into her. Her back arched. She threw her arms around his shoulders.

Begging.

“This cunt is going to ruin me,” he growled. “You’re going to ruin me. You know that, don’t you? I can’t get enough of you. And you fucking *love it.*”

“I do,” Hermione took handfuls of his hair. Forcing him to look at her.

Malfoy’s eyes rose to hers. Only inches apart, it was...

It was suddenly really intense.

Silver flashes, so close to hers. Their lips both open. Parted. Hot, panting breath exchanging between them as she clung to his shoulders.

Clung to his neck. Clung to *him.*

The words formed in her belly. In her throat. She wanted to scream for him. Scream his name. Tell him how he was making her feel. It was in the back of her mouth. On her tongue. It fell out of her.

“*Fuck me, fuck me, I’m yours.*”

His breath caught in his throat. He stared down at her, eyes flashing with something wild, something urgent, something—

And in no more than a single moment of time, she knew what it was. Because everything changed.

Because Malfoy kissed her.

She knew kissing. She knew the soft build of it, the practiced tilt of heads, the rhythm of breathing and the gentle movement of lip on lip. She knew how desire could flicker and die, how it could ignite and burn. She knew when to linger and when to leave. But this? This wasn’t a kiss.

This was a fucking *explosion.*

The universe. Space. Time itself ceased to exist as his lips found hers, panting and desperate as she whimpered into his mouth. His hand gripped the back of her head, hers found his face, holding him desperately against her lips as his thrusts began to stutter.

She’d never been kissed like this before.

It was a firework; a collapse of something she couldn’t name, or mark down, or rationalise, but it was more than biology. This was ordained. This was physical and magical; that she knew. A supernova, a quantum leap, a manifestation of light as her body tumbled headlong into the climax of euphoria that she’d only ever felt with him. But this wasn’t just some

orgasm that he'd dragged her into; no, this was different, somehow. Different, to feel them connected like this, in two places at once; mouths and bodies. Curved and melded in an effortless balancing of the universe. Melting together with hands and grip and tongues.

She knew he could feel her coming. The squeeze was almost too much for her, and he moaned into her mouth as she whimpered into his, but it didn't slow her down. She just came. For him, with him, around him, part of him, as he tumbled over the edge after her, filled her deeply, just as he promised.

But he didn't stop kissing her.

They seemed to come down as one. Each thrust quietening, but she met them with her own body. Rolling together like waves of light. Skin on skin as they slowed, and slowed, almost to a stop, but not quite. Their bodies were entwined, the way that, by now, was almost beginning to feel natural.

And he still hadn't stopped kissing her.

His lips lingered on hers, and as her clarity began to form, she realised that this was new.

They didn't do this. They didn't *kiss*. Malfoy had never kissed her before this, it wasn't really part of the *agreement*. She'd always been so desperate to *fuck him* that she hadn't noticed.

But she'd noticed now.

And she really, *really* didn't want him to stop.

It felt so good to have his body over hers. His chest to hers, to have him inside her as their lips parted in tandem. As they panted over each other; breathing over cheeks and chins and noses. He still hadn't stopped kissing her. He was going to, though. She could already feel him hesitating. He was shifting. Moving, on top of her. Or off her. Grounding himself, or maybe trying to regain the balance that had clearly begun to shift.

Unsure.

His lips left hers, though he didn't move away, he lingered. A single breath between them.

Waiting. Wondering. Asking.

Malfoy had crossed some sort of line that neither of them had ever even acknowledged the existence of. They both knew it. Even without specifying; without clarification, they both knew it.

He wasn't supposed to have kissed her.

It served no purpose. No goal or aim that aligned with their ultimate one. She didn't need to kiss him to fall pregnant, and it was so— *intimate*. It was so personal. It was so—

It was—

It felt so—

Without thinking, Hermione curled her fingers around his neck, and pulled him back in.

Their hands lost all sensibility. All control. Grabbing and grasping and wrenching at every part of each other that they could reach. Breathing, furiously, through noses and across cheeks as their lips crashed together, over and over and over. She was closed in on a reason for it; on a reason for her to be kissing him like she couldn't breathe.

And that reason ended up being nothing short of *because she couldn't stop*.

His voice shuddered against her cheek, hers strained through her chest as she whined against him.

She just couldn't seem to let go.

It was only a minute before he parted her lips with his tongue, the feel of it drawing a pathetic moan from somewhere deep in her gut. She should've been embarrassed by it; by being so overcome; so weakened by something as simple as a kiss—

But no one had ever kissed her like Malfoy was kissing her.

It couldn't have been long, but it felt like they lay like that for hours, in an ebb and flow of volume, holding back, then fevered. Slowly, then exploding, both of them deepening the kiss without either knowing who was responsible for what. She only knew he was holding her, his arms wrapped around her body as her own curled tighter around his neck. Kissing her like she was made of glass, after fucking her like she was made of steel.

He was so much gentler than she expected.

When she did eventually open her eyes and pull back from him, she found his own heavy-lidded and drunk on it. He breathed over her lips, not speaking, so she tried to fill the silence on her own. She placed her palm to his cheek, stroking absentmindedly to try and settle a feeling so intense. But intense was the wrong word.

There wasn't really a word for it. In her entire vocabulary, not a single one felt like enough. Intense barely scraped the surface. Overwhelming—no. It wasn't too much of anything. It was...vivid. Consuming. The most exquisite, profound feeling of wholeness that she'd ever felt.

But she couldn't put it into words. So she just—

“*Fuck*,” she whispered.

He panted over the top of her, swallowing hard.

“Yeah.”

There was hesitation in his voice. And a momentary panic on his face. She looked up at him, quietly. A little nervously. Caught his attention.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, as if she didn’t already know.

For a brief, sharp moment, she was certain he regretted it. Caught up in the sex, the passion of it, maybe? Perhaps he hadn’t meant to kiss her, especially not like *that*—but what they’d done wasn’t sexual, not really, it was just... something else.

But instead of wiping his mouth, or spitting, or showing even the slightest shred of remorse, he met her gaze. He studied her face for a moment. Or five. Or thirty. He lifted a hand to her chin, stroking his fingers over her neck, and his thumb over her lips. Staring. At every single feature of her face, as if he was memorising her.

It was impossibly personal.

She blushed, and tried to drop his gaze, but he didn’t let her. He held her, but he didn’t kiss her. He just stared for a while. Then, when he became aware of his fixated gaze, he dropped it, licking his lips and clenching his jaw.

“Nothing. You just keep...” He stopped himself, taking a deep breath. “...you keep surprising me.”

She wanted to ask how, but she didn’t have a chance. Because, in turn, he decided to surprise her.

He pulled out of her—that wasn’t the surprise, obviously. She knew it had to happen eventually.

But he didn’t leave.

He didn’t flop face-down onto the mattress and go to sleep, like the first time. He didn’t hit on her then immediately try to fuck her again, like the second time. He didn’t ignore her. Didn’t make fun of her. Instead, he tugged the mess of covers out from underneath them, and threw blankets over the top of her.

But then, he slid in next to her. And he pulled her into his body.

He was warm. So entirely and wholly warm, from his hands to his feet to his body, and she couldn’t help but practically purr as he guided her head onto his chest. Gingerly, she let him guide her arm over himself, curling her in closer as he pressed his lips to her forehead.

A... cuddle.

Hermione’s breath caught. She hadn’t expected that he’d be the type, or that he’d ever *want*

Well, she’d apparently been wrong. Because he was holding her, comfortably. Confidently. It wasn’t an accident. He was holding her intentionally.

There was a warmth in her, somewhere. A mild buzz, deep inside her, that felt... nice. She could feel it through every inch of her body. Through her fingers, as they stroked almost absent-mindedly over one of the long scars that traversed his chest. Her legs as she let one

shift a little closer to his. He met her halfway, touching his skin to hers as his grip smoothed over her arm.

Through the small, soft smile that tugged at her cheek.

“Don’t run off,” he whispered into her hair.

She nodded on his chest, but he squeezed her shoulder gently.

“Promise me,” he asked

She lay her head over the slowing beat of his heart. She took a deep breath. Closed her eyes.

“I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

guys i'm dying your comments are *killing me* 😂🤣😊😘😭😭😭😭😭

Chapter 7: “There is no way you’re not fucking pregnant.”

Chapter Summary

The weekend goes exactly as expected, and there are some... interesting realisations

Chapter Notes

Some of the tags are earned in this chapter, take care of yourselves first.

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

Hermione awoke to rasping breath. A hard length behind her. Whispering.

“*Wake up,*” he gasped. “*Please. Please, Granger, please wake up.*”

Malfoy had pulled her body against his, but he was trying not to. She could feel it from the flex of his arms. The tension in them; he was trying to give them space. It was as if his body wouldn’t *let* him move away. She moved, only slightly, and realised she was wet. She was *unbelievably* wet.

And there was a hand between her legs.

His hand. His large, strong hand. They were still naked, and his arm was draped around her, pulling her against his body. His wrist flexing over her pelvis.

His fingers teasing over her clit.

Her legs fell open wide as she moaned, the pressure *flawless* as he seemed to try and fight himself to drag his hand away.

“I didn’t know I was doing it,” he gasped. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean t—”

He’d been touching her in his sleep. In *her* sleep.

And she was so turned on by it that she could barely think straight.

Hermione had no idea what it was. Of course, she liked to be touched. Everybody liked being touched. Being desired and worked toward the edge. Someone else taking pleasure in her own. But the fact he’d desired her—that he’d touched her—that he’d yearned to feel her pleasure crest around his fingers—without even *knowing he was?*

The moan that fell from her lips drew from somewhere even his long fingers couldn't reach.

She was practically in a daze at the heat flushing through her system. Maybe she was tired. Maybe she was overwhelmed by it.

Maybe she just desperately needed his cock inside her, *right this fucking second*.

She lifted her head, looking over her shoulder at him. He'd been spooning her. She met his eye in the low light.

"Are you alright?" she panted.

He nodded, but—

"I need—" he choked on his response. "Please, *please*, I need—"

She knew what he needed. *Fuck*, she needed it too. She wondered if he'd actually shared a bed with a woman since his curse started manifesting.

He was shaking. He needed *her*.

Hermione rolled to face him, and captured his lips with her own. He was shaking too hard to deepen it, the stress building too rapidly in his body. She didn't think about it, just tugged him closer. Pulled him on top of her.

He lay her body over hers, her lips on his; bare skin together as his hands curled onto her hips. Her hand slid between them to guide him in. She was already well and truly wet enough.

And, as he sank into her, Malfoy's breath shuddered over her lips.

"*I'm sorry*," he panted. "I really didn't know."

She looked hesitantly up at him, knowing she was blushing. He seemed so overwhelmed; not just by his sudden, urgent need, but by *her*. He seemed almost *horrified* that he'd touched her without thinking to, and she was taken aback by the surprising rush of tenderness that that thought brought on, but there were more important things to worry about.

"Malfoy, it's—" she whispered back, trying to reassure him. "I think—I think I'm actually kind of into it." She shifted beneath him, feeling her cheeks warm as she looked up at him. She was *so wet*, and she knew at least some part of it was *him*... but her desperation for him to start moving made her breath catch. "I think I might actually be *really* into it."

Malfoy stared at her for a moment. Then another. Then another. His eyes searching hers for any shred of uncertainty, but she knew he would find none.

He let out a desperate sob of relief.

"How are—" He whispered. "How are you so fucking—?" He sank his lips into her neck. Down her jaw. "I can't believe you're even—you'd have every right to—*Gods* there is

something so fucking wrong with me.”

“There isn’t.” Hermione stroked her fingers through his hair. “Just fuck me, Malfoy. Whatever you need, I want it too.” She smirked. “God knows, I’m so fucking ready for it.”

He choked as he pushed himself deeper inside her.

“*You’re so good to me,*” he whispered, as he moved slowly on top of her. “I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve for you to be this good to me.”

She caught his breath with her own, and he kissed her again. Again, and again, and again, he kissed her, their lips barely parting as they grasped at pieces of each other as their bodies melted back into one, single entity.

She’d never felt like this before. He was only the second man she’d ever been with, and never, not once, had it felt like this with the first. It felt illegal. Forbidden, somehow, knowing that she *should* have been sharing a bed with a man who wasn’t her husband. Knowing that she shouldn’t *like* how he felt inside her; shouldn’t melt into his lips, the way she did. She definitely shouldn’t have poured her entire soul into the way she begged for more across his cheek. Promising him parts of her that she knew she couldn’t give.

He loved it so much, though, when she told him her body was his. That he owned it. Possessed it. That she was his, in that way. She liked how he lost his mind when she said it. But, more than that—a part of her liked pretending it was true. Not because it was him—she was sure she’d have rathered it was near anyone else—but because it made her feel, for the first time in possibly forever—

Like someone truly couldn’t fucking resist her.

And she came. Whimpering and whispering and begging him as he held her body to his. Then, he made her come again. She drowned in the taste of him in the middle of the night. It was unlike anything she’d felt before, this... whatever this was between them. Physical, but it was more than that. It didn’t feel like raw sex. It was...

No, it was something else.

Maybe it was the fact that they *knew* they were trying to make a baby. The intimacy of that act. Of knowing that if they were successful, they would create a person who was a blend of the two of them. That was an intimate thing to consider. That they, through their bodies, carried two halves of a life. That they could *create it*. Bring it to life through an act of.... well. Not *love*, per se, but it was *more* than just sex. It was too intense to be *just sex*.

She swallowed hard. It wasn’t *feelings*, or anything, though.

That would be fucking absurd.

She just really enjoyed being intimate with him. Physical with him. Feeling him inside her, on top of her, around her. Feeling his lips on hers. Feeling every time his cheek lifted in a

smile, pressed quietly to hers. And she supposed, in terms of company, he'd proven himself...

Rather enjoyable, actually.

Malfoy kissed her as he came, hips stuttering and breath rasping. Kissed her more softly as he pulled out of her, and she propped her legs up beneath the covers, hugging her knees. He chuckled, curling in next to her. Passed her a drink of water, and when she was done, he began drawing slow, unintentional circles on her abdomen. Over where her womb was.

It was all disgustingly affectionate of him.

They lay in silence for a while as she pondered; with her head on the pillow beside his. Wondered which time might be the one to 'take'. It was unlikely they'd ever know, especially if they kept going at it the way they were. She was almost a little sore from it. Three times in seven hours. They still had forty-plus hours to go.

Perhaps a little break wouldn't be a bad thing.

"Malfoy?"

Her voice was quiet, but his head was right next to hers. She didn't need to be loud. His face was beside hers on the pillow.

"Mmm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

She tilted her chin up to look at him, and he lifted his own higher to assess her for a moment before flopping his head back down on its side.

"What?"

"What does it feel like?" she asked, quietly.

He shifted, his eyes meeting hers. "What does what feel like?"

She swallowed nervously. "The curse," she whispered.

"Ah," his eyebrows rose, slightly, then furrowed. "When it triggers? Or when I..."

"Both, I suppose? Either?" She looked up at him softly.

He frowned. "Is this another one of your ex-healer medical curiosity things?"

She furrowed her brow.

"I... perhaps just... well, say that I *was* curious. Or maybe... *interested*."

"*Interested*?" Malfoy's eyes flicked cautiously to hers. "That makes it sound like you *care* about me."

Her stomach twisted in a knot. *Of course* she didn't care. What an utterly ridiculous notion. She wasn't really sure why she was even asking. It mattered to her, she supposed. She was also just curious, like she said. That was why. That had to be why.

It was professional curiosity, nothing more. It wasn't because she cared about him, or anything. Well, she did, of course, but only so far as a healer should care about their patient.

"I... *Medically*. I care about— um—" A flood of embarrassment filled her, and she backtracked urgently, but...

There was a focus in his eyes that made her pause.

Was there much point in pretending that she still despised him? He hadn't given her a reason, so far, not to trust him, at least. In fact, at every single stage, at every point, he'd given her reasons to. He'd been gentle... mostly kind, except for when he was intentionally riling her up, but that wasn't really his fault, he couldn't change who he was as a person, after all.

But it was somewhat of a lie.

Hermione didn't really want any harm to come to Malfoy, medically or not. She felt sympathy for what he was going through... She did often find herself wondering about his wellbeing when they were apart. Did that mean she cared about him?

She pondered it for a moment.

And she then decided that, yes, actually, she did.

She took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves, and she just looked at him.

"Hell. *Of course I care*, Malfoy. You're a person, just like anyone else. I don't like watching you be in pain."

He looked at her as if that surprised him, somehow. What did this make them?

Friends?

Hermione's gut wrenched at the thought. At the realisation that he, too, might be just... Completely at a loss over what was happening to them.

They were not friends. She and Malfoy could not be friendly, they could only be at each other's throats. Though she supposed that 'rasping desperately into it while they fucked like rabbits' technically still counted as that.

She tried to force herself not to blush.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," she said, quietly. "I just... want to know what it feels like for you."

He eyed her carefully, but it seemed the longer he looked, the more his gaze softened. He chewed the inside of his cheek, and for a moment, she wondered if he was even going to

answer her. She wouldn't have blamed him if he didn't. It was probably a far more personal question than was appropriate.

But Malfoy closed his eyes.

He thought for a moment, clearly thinking through his words as he tried to pinpoint how to explain it, and she waited for him. She didn't feel the need to rush him. It wasn't like she was planning on going anywhere, so she just watched. Quietly. Studying his face, as he thought. He looked so calm, as he thought it over, the question lingering in the line between his brows.

She couldn't help but notice how very wonderful he looked when he was thinking.

But he *was* thinking. Mulling it over for what seemed like an age until finally, he lifted eyes to hers.

"Have you ever held your head underwater for as long as you could?"

He was hesitant.

Hermione stared at him.

She had, a few times. In moments of immense stress. She'd found beautiful, peaceful silence in slipping fully under the water in her bath, staring up at the ceiling as the water stilled around her.

She nodded silently. He dropped his own head once in acknowledgement.

"So picture that. But then, imagine that it's not in your control. Imagine that you're being *held* underwater. By the throat." He settled in beside her. He stroked his hand flat over her stomach, letting his fingers glide over her skin, almost absentmindedly. "It's like you're drowning. For days at a time. Trying to hang on to the edge of your very last breath."

He swallowed.

"It's a really specific feeling. Where your chest is aching, and your throat's burning. Everything in you is fighting the urge to inhale, because you know if you do, you'll drown."

Hermione watched his Adam's apple flex against his throat as it moved again. It made him nervous to talk about, she could tell that much. She wondered if he'd told anyone this before. Doctors? Pansy? His family, when they were alive? She supposed they never would've had much of a chance.

Maybe people had asked if he was alright. She was sure they'd *all* asked him if he was alright.

But she wondered if anyone had ever asked him what it *felt like*.

"And then?" she whispered.

Malfoy's fingers made tighter circles, as if looking for something to occupy them.

"I don't know if I have the words to tell you how much of a difference you make."

Hermione blushed, but he stroked her even more gently.

"The second you arrive, the second I get my *hands on you*... when I *come*..." he took a deep breath, his neck stretching back into the nighttime that blanketed them. "When I come, it's like taking a lungful of air."

His body seemed to shift and settle, as if that breath was flowing through him in real time.

"The buildup really does feel like drowning. But that breath that I take, that lungful of air..." He shook his head slowly. "Fuck, it's so good it almost hurts."

"Does it?" she asked quietly. "Hurt, I mean."

"The release?" He shook his head again. "It's not painful, or pleasurable—"

Hermione's jaw dropped. "It's not *pleasurable*!?"

Malfoy chuckled. "No, it is. Believe me, *it is*." He glanced sideways at her. "It's just... it's more than that. It's more, *on top* of that. Coming feels..." he sighed. "It's just as good as it always is, but on top of that, I get this unbelievable *relief*." He closed his eyes again. "It feels like I'm dying, and then suddenly, I'm not. I can breathe. And I can think about something other than taking my next breath."

He looked over at her again, his expression falling serious as he lifted a hand to her lips. He brushed his thumb over them. Slowly. If she was honest, almost affectionately. She could almost feel the texture of his fingerprints moving over the plush skin.

"The moment I'm inside you, it's like pushing toward the surface," he said quietly. "Like finally righting yourself, and seeing a glimpse of the sun through the water. And when I come inside you, it's..." he took another deep breath, his eyes partway rolling back. His fingers brushed her cheek. "Nothing feels like you feel when I come inside you."

Hermione blushed furiously. She could feel cheeks going embarrassingly warm as he guided a curl behind her ear.

"That makes you blush? Hearing how much I love it?" he chuckled, stroking his fingertips down the back of her neck. "You like hearing how much I love fucking you?"

"Shut up," she glared at him.

"No," he growled. Rolling her back onto the bed. He lay himself over the top of her. "Because I *do*. In fact, you feel so good I might just have to take you again. *Right now*." He dropped his lips to her neck, dragging them slowly up her throat.

She moaned involuntarily, and he chuckled into her skin.

"You're incorrigible," she hissed.

“At least you’re awake this time. Also, *you asked*.”

She couldn’t help but give him a small smile.

“I didn’t *ask* you to hit on me.”

Malfoy smirked. “You’re going to be carrying my child soon. I’ll hit on you as much as I damn please.”

She blushed again.

And he did not, in fact, stop hitting on her.

Not once, the entire weekend.

Saturday morning, she woke up to lips around her nipple, and hands around her wrists. He made her come twice by nine. He had breakfast sent up, and they ate in bed, then fucked again.

He kissed her a lot. It was during sex, mostly. As soon as he was inside her, his lips were on hers. His tongue was curling over hers. Her hand was on the back of his neck, and his hand was on her jaw, holding her gently still while he kissed her like he couldn’t stop. Saturday afternoon, evening, night. They went three times in a row on Sunday morning, before she collapsed from exhaustion in his arms.

And the whole time, his lips were on hers.

With every session, the kissing got longer. The sex more natural. *Easier*. His body started to feel familiar. Started to feel like something she *knew*. She knew which spots on his neck would drive him insane. He knew just the right amount of pressure she wanted on her clit. She knew exactly how hard to nip his lip—to drag her teeth across it—to make him lose his goddamn mind and pin her to the bed. They did nothing but fuck. And kiss.

And... talk.

They talked quite a lot, actually, propped up on one elbow; half-breathless conversations bookended by one of them pouncing on the other. He asked her about work, and she asked about Theo. They talked about books, he spent a lot of his time reading.

He had excellent taste.

She found she rather liked talking to him.

Malfoy was wildly intelligent, though she’d always known that. But he was rather funny, too. She definitely hadn’t known *that*. He had that lovely bite to his humour that she knew, in another circumstance, she mightn’t have quite been able to tell if he was joking. But she caught it now, each time, in the flick of his eyebrow. The tiniest twitch of the corner of his mouth.

He had a truly wicked sense of humour.

And of course he was unfairly witty. Far too quick for his own good; and charming, even, when it suited him. He was an arrogant prat, and he knew full well how good-looking he'd turned out, but even so, she couldn't remember the last time she'd so enjoyed just... *talking* to someone.

By Sunday afternoon, though, the time limit had begun to loom. She would have to go home soon. Back to Cormac, who, depending on the results of the Quidditch match, would likely be in a foul mood. She'd go back to work, back to silence. Back to seeing Malfoy possibly once a month; barely speaking to him unless it was about *this*.

And, if she was being completely honest, she was...

Going to miss it.

He'd just pushed inside her again. Slid himself into her as she threw her arms around his neck. Once again, he angled into her *flawlessly*, sending a shockwave up her spine and a moan coursing out of her throat.

He kissed her. Over and over, his lips on hers as he began moving inside her.

But he paused.

His movements slowed for a moment, swallowing hard as he touched his nose to hers.

"Would it be weird for me to say that I kind of don't want you to leave?" he whispered into her lips.

Hermione tried her best to hide what that did to her, but she couldn't. They were annoyingly on the same page. She smiled, just a little, her breath catching as he rocked into her once more. Then she raked her fingernails through his hair, the way he loved. He moaned contentedly, rising to her hand and pushing against it.

It was strangely intimate.

"I don't really want to leave either," she said, quietly.

Malfoy lowered himself over the top of her, and breathed heavily over her cheek.

"You don't?" he asked.

She swallowed her nerves.

She shook her head.

He pushed his full length into her, gasping as he spoke. "A part of me is still convinced that you don't want to be here."

It made her pause.

"I do," she whispered, questioningly. "I do want to be here."

He kissed her again. She held their lips together. But something about his words made her feel—

He was still nervous about this, just like she was. Showing up, seeing each other, and knowing what they were walking into—of course it made her nervous. But knowing that she wasn't the only one, made her feel... strangely stronger.

Whenever she showed nerves, or uncertainty, or even gave the slightest hint of being worried that he didn't want this, he made her feel like he did. He reassured her, over and over, that he absolutely wanted her. That he wanted *this*.

So Hermione placed her hand flat against his chest from underneath.

He pulled back, slowing to a stop as he looked down at her with concern. She'd never stopped him before. She swallowed, hard. Looked up at him, nervously, gathering up all her courage as she asked.

“Let me go on top.”

Malfoy's lips parted as if that surprised him, somehow. He looked down at her, his eyes widening. He didn't say anything.

But he nodded.

He pulled out of her, slowly, and she guided him slowly onto his back. Slid her leg over his hips as he took her waist to steady her. She leaned forward, just a little, bringing their chests together briefly as she let a soft kiss linger on his lips.

She *did* want to be here.

And there was a part of her, a very small part of her, that wasn't one hundred percent sure it was just to get pregnant any more.

She kind of... *liked* being with him.

The realisation made her breath catch as her hand wrapped gently around him, guiding him home, and she sank down onto him with a loud sigh. Malfoy's breath caught as his fingers tightened on her hips.

As she began to ride him.

It was slow going, at first. She'd only done this a few times before, but if Malfoy noticed, then he definitely didn't mind. His eyes had rolled back in his head already, eyelids fluttering closed as he slammed back into the pillow beneath his head. He forced them partway open, sinking his teeth into his lip as he cursed.

“Oh, *fuck*,” he gasped. “*That is one hell of a view.*”

She shuddered over the top of him.

Hermione couldn't help but feel a little exposed. Her whole body was on display to him; right there, for him to stare at as she began rocking herself on and off him. Taking him deeper, then lifting herself off, fucking herself on his cock while her hands splayed across his chest.

But he looked so beautiful from up here.

Blonde hair splayed against dark sheets, Adam's apple raking down the front of his throat as he rasped with each motion of their bodies. His abs, his arms, his shoulders; he looked like an *angel*, his face contorting in deeper ecstasy with every rock of her hips.

She whimpered as she began to move faster, trying to draw out the micro-reactions that her body demanded from him. A little quicker, and his brow furrowed. Harder, and lips parted further. Taking him a little deeper, and his grip tightened on her hips.

Hermione did all of them. One by one. Over and over. A little faster. A little harder. A little deeper, drawing a groan from somewhere deep and dark in his throat.

Because she wanted to be here.

She wanted him to feel good, and she wanted him to know that. She wanted him to know that she wanted him. That she wanted to be here, *with* him.

That she liked being with him.

His hand left her hip for a moment, trying to grasp every curve of her body at once. Her waist. Higher. Cupping her breast, and brushing his thumb over her nipple. His touch was desperate, and his gaze was adoring. It was *worshipping*. Heavy-lidded and admiring as he took in the visual of her riding him. She'd never felt so desired as she did with him. So perfect and wanted, so sensual and *craved*.

It made her feel *beautiful*.

Hermione arched her back, pushing her breast into his palm. Spread her legs a little wider.

Faster. Harder. Deeper.

Malfoy gasped, his hand dropping to her hip once more as a moan fell from his throat.

"*Fuck, Granger. I'm—*" He held on tighter. "*Shit—I think—slow down.*"

She did no such thing.

Instead, she moaned, her hands splaying further over his chest, meeting his hips halfway. Slammed herself down, knowing her thighs would weigh across his hips. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Slow down?" she whispered. "You want me to *slow down?*"

He nodded furiously.

Hermione sank her teeth into her lip, the way she had when she'd teased him over his breeding kink. She sank her fingertips into his chest, fucking him harder. A little faster.

"No, Malfoy, I'm not going to slow down," she whispered. "I'm going to fuck you until you fill me again."

Malfoy's head practically exploded.

He let out a choking moan, his eyes widening and throat constricting at the depth of the breath he took.

"*Gods—fuck—no—*" he gasped, loudly. "Are you *trying* to make me come?"

Hermione smirked again. Then she nodded.

"That's *exactly* what I'm trying to do."

His head fell back, teeth sinking into his own lower lips as his voice began shaking.

"S-slow down, witch. I have to get you off fir—"

Oh, God, she hadn't expected to like this as much as she did. He felt so good inside her, but that wasn't what was sending her skyrocketing. She squeezed her walls tightly around him, as tight as they could go, lifting herself off once more.

She was *breaking him* like this. His composure, his body, his *mind*—

"Come in me. That's what'll get me there," she whispered. "Fill me up, then fuck me again."

His eyes rolled back in his head. She slammed herself down onto him.

Faster. Harder. Deeper.

Malfoy fell silent.

All she could see was the flex of his jaw; the clench. Hands slid down to her arse. His fingertips dug into the soft flesh, holding her as she fucked him. Guiding her to keep going. Asking her to keep going.

Honestly, she wasn't sure she could stop.

He looked too good. Fuck. This was doing things to her she hadn't expected. Building her in a different way, taking control of him like this. Using him. Taking *him*.

His brow furrowed furiously. Forcefully. Painfully.

"Granger, *fuck—*" he gasped. "You're— shit, *shit—fuck, I'm getting—*" he rasped.

She moved faster. Her eyes locked onto his.

Malfoy's throat flexed. Voice caught. Brow furrowed in panic.

“Stop, or m’gonna come.”

And Hermione did not fucking stop. She kept going. Exactly as she was, as Malfoy’s body contorted with pleasure underneath her.

In her whole life, she’d never seen something so erotic; so pure and beautiful as Malfoy looked as he tumbled headfirst into the pleasure of what he was feeling. As he writhed and bucked and moaned in the type of ecstasy he usually gave *her*. His fingertips sank into her hips, heels dug into the mattress; hips bucked against hers as he came deep inside her.

It felt different, this time, feeling him come inside her from underneath. Rolling her hips over his, drawing his orgasm out for as long as it could possibly go. She’d done that for him. *She* did it for him, and for no other reason than she wanted to. Because she wanted to make him feel good.

To make him believe that she wanted to be here.

Her body was raging; pulsing with need. She’d been so focused, so locked in to watching him that she hadn’t realised how close she was. He shivered as he came down; hands shaking as he took his first rasping breath, but as he did, his face contorted with sheer fury. He glared at her.

“You—” he started, a sneer forming on his face.

He sat up, stilling her on his lap. His fingers sank into her thighs.

“*Oh, you’re fucking in for it now,*” he growled.

And, in one movement, he had her on her back.

Hermione squealed as he moved them as one, managing to stay inside her, but he didn’t stay still. No. He was—

He was still hard. She didn’t know *how* he was still hard, but it didn’t matter. Because as he lay his body over hers, she ached for every single inch of him. He wasn’t gentle with her, wrenching her legs apart and throwing them around his waist as he lifted her off the bed. Hermione’s fists wrenched in the covers as he began furiously fucking into the mess he’d made of her body.

“I came *so hard*,” he gasped. “Made me come so hard, fucking witch—”

He slammed himself into her, hard. The evidence trickled out of her and made her whole body arch underneath him.

God, she could *feel it*.

“You feel that?” he demanded. “You feel what you did to me? Feel it inside you?”

She could. She could feel it. God, she *revelled* in it, in knowing that *she’d done that to him*. That she’d fucked him so well he couldn’t hold back, couldn’t stop himself from going over

the edge. That he'd loved seeing her on top of him *so much* that he couldn't control it.

Hermione whined, her hands scrambling for purchase across his shoulders.

She nodded furiously.

"Yeah? You like dripping with it?" he whispered. "Then *tell me whose it is.*"

She could barely get the words out, stuttering and shaking as she tried to hold on to control of her body. He knew whose it was. He knew who had filled her. *Obviously.*

But he also knew what this did to her.

Making her beg for it. Making her *work for it*. Making her scream and writhe and plead with him for more, as if it was something he'd only give if she was a very, very good girl. He knew she loved when he *took her*. When he *made her* beg.

Fuck. He barely had to try.

"It's yours," she squeaked, her legs squeezing around his waist. "It's all yours. Every drop."

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. He knew exactly how to—

She was rocketing toward the edge, and he knew it. The intensity in his eyes, the laser-focus. He knew. He *knew*.

"That's fucking right. And how much is there?"

She could barely hold it. She threw her arms around his neck, holding him close as he lay over her.

"There's *so much.*" She held onto him, desperately. "There's so much inside me. I'm so full of you—there's so fucking much—"

Hermione was losing herself.

She'd never been wound this tight, not even with her own hands, but every rise of her hips plucked at the string. Tightened it. Wrenched it. Struck her at the perfect depth. The pressure on her clit. He had her on the edge, and he knew it, playing her body like a fucking violin.

Perfect, just perfect—

"So full of me."

His moans, his body, his breath, his voice—

"That's it, Granger, you're gonna—*let me have it*—"

Oh, God, she was so close. She whimpered, her lips parting open—

"*There* it is. That's my *good girl.*"

Fuck.

She exploded around him, her legs squeezing his waist as he groaned his approval into her ear. Coming hard, with her fingernails down the back of his neck. She might've been whimpering his name, she wasn't sure. She was just a mess of incoherent sounds as he fucked her through the climax she hadn't even been trying to chase.

It made no sense that he could make her feel like this. That he could work her body this well, *play* it so well, holding her and kissing her and making her feel so—

So—

So *worthy* of it.

Hermione came down in his arms, and as she did, she felt the soft, firm pressure of his forehead pressed against hers. Sweat streamed down both of their necks. Her body was aching. Legs shaking from the strength of it. From the exhaustion.

But she didn't want to feel any other way.

She lifted her chin, brushing her lips against his.

“Oh my *God*,” she whispered.

He touched his nose against hers.

“*Mmmhmm*,” he growled.

They panted into each other for a minute, before his lips met hers again.

“You are—” he kissed her softly. “—fucking—” Another kiss. “—*something else*.”

She let out a contented sigh, resting her hands gently on the back of his neck.

“What was that?” she whispered. “Fourteen?”

“Yep,” he panted back. She almost felt his grin.

He took her lower lip between his teeth, gently dragging across them as he kissed her again.

Then he growled. Right into her lips.

“*There is no way you’re not fucking pregnant*.”

She let the laugh escape from her, reaching up to capture his lips, but after she did, he didn't let her go. Instead, he cupped his hand around the back of her neck, holding her in the kiss. She lingered for a moment, curling her arms around him. It made both of them smile too hard. They couldn't hold it.

“Tired, are you?” she asked, breaking their kiss with a laugh.

“The second you leave I’m sleeping for a week.”

“*Rude*, rub it in,” she scoffed. “I have to go to *work* tomorrow!”

“Mmmmm, and I’m going to think about you dripping with me the *whole day*,” he groaned, rolling his hips inside her again. He paused for a moment, fingers catching a curl. His gaze seemed to soften as he tucked it behind her ear. “*Fuck*. Maybe I was serious. Take the day off. Stay one more night.”

Hermione blushed under his gaze. “And suddenly, he’s no longer tired?”

Malfoy laughed, but he didn’t say anything else. He just kissed her again. And again. And again. He kept kissing her as he pulled out of her. Kissed her for a minute afterward.

But it slowed.

He kissed her for a little shorter each time. Each press of his lips was a little more hesitant. When they broke apart for the final time, she knew.

They were done. The weekend was over.

She had to go.

Hermione wondered, for a moment, if he’d been serious. *Stay one more night*. There was no real point, based on her dates she would’ve well and truly ovulated by now. It would’ve been a mistake, and it would’ve been walking a very dangerous line. Letting this turn into anything more than it was—anything more than what they’d explicitly agreed on—would be a mistake. Regardless of how good it felt. Besides, if he’d actually wanted her to stay, he would’ve stopped her.

But he didn’t.

Didn’t stop her as Hermione pulled herself out of bed, walking quietly, nakedly, and a little ashamedly toward the shower, knowing his eyes were on her. Didn’t stop her as she closed the en suite door, blocking the heat of his gaze from her form. Didn’t stop her as she stepped under the perfect temperature water.

She heard him get out of the bed, too.

For a moment, his footsteps sounded like they were approaching. Sounded like he was walking toward the ensuite door. She paused beneath the spray, glancing over her shoulder toward the door as if she expected him to walk through it and join her. To step in under the spray with her. Naked. To wrap his arms around her, kissing her gently as the water washed over them.

It wasn’t as if she’d thought about it, though. Or that she was hoping he would. Of course not. It would’ve been *absurd* for him to walk through the door and join her as if there was something... *nice*... or... *intimate*... between them. Something other than... well, *sex*.

Which meant there was absolutely no reason for her to be disappointed when he didn’t do it.

She turned back to the water. Finished her shower. Dressed. Dried her hair.

And she stepped back out into the bedroom.

Malfoy walked her to the Floo in silence, both of their clothes in place. Not touching or looking at each other. Just... walking in silence. When they arrived, they stood, face to face. Looked at each other.

And he didn't kiss her goodbye.

It struck her as odd. But then Hermione found herself wondering *why* it struck her as odd. They weren't together, this had been very explicitly designed to be *just sex*. Well, except for the recent addition of kissing. But that was arguably part of sex, they went hand in hand. Or... mouth on mouth, more specifically. So that was why he hadn't kissed her goodbye. Because they were not currently having sex. It made sense. Besides, she wasn't expecting him to. Not really.

Was she?

No. Surely not.

But...

No. It would've been ridiculous.

She found herself lingering for a moment regardless.

The silence fell heavily between them. Sank into the air, and drew their gaze to each other. Malfoy stilled. Eyed her, a little bit. As if he was wondering. *What was he wondering?* Could it be... possibly, a little bit... wondering if he *should* kiss her? *Was he?* Or was he just standing there? *He wasn't saying anything.*

She could've done it. She could easily have initiated a kiss. She could've, if she'd wanted to. *Which she absolutely didn't.* That would be absurd. She was married, and she and Malfoy were— well they weren't necessarily enemies, but at least according to every scrap of self-preservation in her body, she knew was supposed to hate him.

Why on earth would she want to kiss him goodbye?

So she just kind of... stood there. Standing, silently, in front of the Floo.

He didn't make a move.

Ridiculous to expect that he would, really.

She cleared her throat.

"Well, um... bye, Malfoy."

She turned—

But he grabbed her wrist.

Hermione paused for a moment, looking back at Malfoy as his fingers curled around it. His lips were parted, as if he was mid-sentence.

His eyes, suddenly, were trained on her. Silver-grey, yet warmer than anything. A slight tinge of the faintest pink dusting across his nose, his cheeks. A gaping mouth as if he was... nervous. Nervous to say whatever it was he was going to say, whatever he was thinking, out loud.

His fingers flexed on her wrist as if he were trying to... stop himself from something. From doing something. Pulling. Tugging. *From dragging her back into his arms.* And, with that single thought, something happened in her stomach.

A flicker. A flutter.

Butterflies.

Butterflies.

Like wings, unfurling and coming to life in her stomach. Nerves. Excitement.

Over— because of—

Because of *Malfoy*.

She had to hide her gasp behind a breath.

She could not have *butterflies* over *Malfoy*. They were biologically and animalistically *fucking* for reproductive purposes *only*. It didn't matter how lovely of a time she'd had over the weekend. How much she'd enjoyed laying in bed with him, talking about books and nothing. It didn't matter how badly she may or may not have wanted him to pull her into his body, or to kiss her so hard she couldn't breathe. There was no lepidoptery involved in this. There were no *feelings* involved in this.

There *could not* be any feelings involved in this.

Hermione looked up at him, knowing that panic was twisting over her face. More. More. Her stomach twisting deeper, harder into sheer terror the longer she waited.

And still, he said nothing. Did nothing.

Malfoy exhaled heavily. Swallowed, firmly. Pressed his lips into a line and nodded, once.

He released her.

"Bye, Granger."

She nodded back at him.

Then she stepped through the fireplace, and went home.

Chapter End Notes

Removing endnote calling out assholes because they don't deserve the attention nor the free advertising. Instead choosing to be grateful to the overwhelming majority of readers and writers in this fandom who get it. People like you make this a place where writers feel like they can pour their hearts, souls, and psyches into fics. So thank you for being wonderful. And thank you for being kind.

Also thank you for being so goddamn feral in the comments it is cracking me up every time I get a notification. Some of them actually almost made me pee myself laughing so literally have at it 

Chapter 8: “I’d be the only man in the room who could afford you.”

Chapter Summary

Hermione attends a gala with her husband and esteemed guests, and nothing at all goes wrong whatsoever.

Chapter Notes

Side note, I'm going off the conversion rate of 1 Galleon = ~£5 just in case you're trying to figure out figures. I've seen some estimates of £25 and £50 and come on now. Forbes put the Malfoys as billionaires and he's being silly generous but let's not go crazy.

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

It was almost two full weeks later. Thursday evening.

Hermione still hadn't stopped thinking about it.

About... him.

The feel of Malfoy's lips on hers lingered like a spirit, unresolved and unsure of what to do next. What lingered more was the obvious and very clear *absence* of his lips that she now felt like she'd left a piece of her there, standing on the seven-hundred year old rug, waiting to be kissed.

Like some sort of pathetic *idiot*.

She should've just fucking kissed him. Then, at least, she could've convinced herself it was because he was just a very, very good kisser and it was an enjoyable act. Rather than... whatever *this* was. This fixation. This *obsession* over it. It was ridiculous for her to be so enthralled by the idea of kissing someone who, up until about two months ago, she'd been absolutely convinced that she hated.

And yet, there he was. Every time she closed her eyes. Making her stomach kick with extremely inconvenient butterflies. She had to stop thinking about it. About him. Letting the meretricious little bugs impact her emotions was a surefire way to make whatever good thing she and Malfoy had going on *extremely fucking awkward*.

Their relationship existed inside the bedroom.

That was all.

Hermione could hear Cormac stomping around in the next room, searching in vain for his cufflinks. *Accio* wasn't working, and despite her insistence that he must've left them at his family's flat in Islington, he had decided that they were absolutely, unequivocally *here*.

She ignored him, and just focused on her makeup.

She'd done a good job, she thought. She'd been to so many galas and balls as Head of Department that she could do her makeup in her sleep. Her hair was somewhat pinned, but not too much; she still wanted to look like herself, after all. She was giving a speech, as usual. The Chief Healer had sent his own speech over weeks ago, and she'd written hers in support of his initiatives. It was well-planned, and well-coordinated, besides, she was no stranger to public speaking, these days. She was very confident. And while she *knew* that her looks had very little to do with that confidence...

Wearing a dress like the one she'd be wearing that evening certainly didn't *hurt*.

She was rather excited to wear it, actually. She didn't make a habit of buying new dresses, but a woman at Nanny McLaggen's book club had snarkily mentioned a recent article about Hermione's 'frugality' in rewearng dresses to events, and, well— Hermione had been '*strongly encouraged*' (read: firmly instructed) to do a bit of shopping. Pansy had gone a little insane helping her pick them out, but Hermione was excited about this one.

Elegant black. Sleek and one-shouldered, with the sleeve going all the way down to her wrist. It had two practical and tasteful slits at the legs to allow easy flow and movement. It was comfortable. It was stylish, it was mostly warm, and most importantly, it fit her like it was made for her. God bless Pansy and her network of seamstress elves.

She slipped it on, adjusted herself, and stepped back out into the bedroom.

She wasn't *expecting* a compliment from Cormac, but as she adjusted her dress in front of him, its absence was immediately noticed. His shirt hung open at the chest and wrists. He took one look at her, gave a frustrated sigh, and continued rummaging through drawers.

Hermione sighed. "I really think the gold ones are at the London flat. Can you just wear the other ones? The ones I got you for Christmas a few years ago. They're *lovely*. They'll look so nice with—"

"*No*," he hissed. "I'm seeing *people* tonight. These were a gift from the Quidditch club. The guys from Gringott's and the Ministry specifically. I *have* to wear the gold ones. I *know* they're here."

Hermione said nothing. Pressed her lips into a tight line, and stepped into the hallway, out of earshot from Cormac.

She sighed. Closed her eyes. She hated doing this.

"Pippey?" she said quietly.

The house elf appeared in front of her, wide-eyed and *shocked* at who had called her.

“Yes—yes, Miss Hermione? Miss Hermione does not often call Pippey. How can I help?”

Hermione squatted down, trying to stay eye-level with the elf. She’d annoyed Cormac enough to have him reduce the staff sizing, but he *refused* to get rid of Pippey. The elf was damn near as old as the country manor itself.

“Pippey, I need you to do something for me, please, if you’re not too busy.”

“Never too busy, Ma’am! Never for Miss Hermione!”

Hermione sighed. “Thank you. I need you to go to the London flat, and look for Cormac’s cufflinks. They’re little gold broomsticks.” Hermione glanced over her shoulder, lowering her voice. “If they *are* there, you bring them back here, and place them somewhere that he’ll find them. But you mustn’t tell him what you did, or that I asked you to do it. Alright?”

Pippey frowned. “Miss Hermione wants Pippey to *lie* to Master Cormac?”

“No, no, not *lie*.” Hermione took a deep breath. “He’s getting very stressed that they’re not here. *I told* him that they were in Islington. He’s insisting that they’re not, and we are going to a very important event tonight. If he has to admit that I was right, he’ll be in a very bad mood for it, and won’t have a very good time. So I need *you and I* to *pretend* that he was right, and that they were here all along. It will make him very, *very* happy. Can you do that for me?”

Pippey grinned widely. And, with a snap of her fingers, disappeared.

Hermione stood, smoothing her gown, and turned back toward the door. She opened it, quietly, plastering a wide smile on her face.

“Alright, if you say they’re here, then they have to be here somewhere. Where have you already looked?”

“Just here, Ma’am.”

Hermione was shown to her seat, immediately beside Cormac, as was to be expected. The usher pulled out her chair for her, and she sat, as gracefully as she could. She’d always thought that the notion of trying to sit on a chair that was simultaneously being pushed underneath a table was an inherently clumsy exercise, but somehow, she managed to not make a complete fool of herself, sitting down heavily as the usher impaled the backs of her legs with the seat.

She supposed she had Nanny McLaggen to thank for that. She’d forced Cormac to do it one hundred and twenty-seven times in a row in the weeks leading up to their wedding.

Pearl-white name cards hovered in front of them, floating appropriately at four inches above their plates. Hermione never paid much attention to them, but for some reason, tonight, they caught her eye. She took Cormac’s gently between her fingers, inspecting it.

Mr. Cormac McLaggen

Then she plucked hers.

Mrs. Cormac McLaggen

Well. Wasn't that just *wonderful*.

Hermione frowned at it, and the young man behind her cleared his throat expectantly. She chanced a glance sideways at Cormac. He'd seen what she was nonverbally complaining about, and his expression was pleading.

"*Please don't make a scene.*"

"I am a *speaker* at this event, Cormac. The least they could do is use my *actual name*—"

"That *is* your *actual name*. In polite society, you are first and foremost *my wife*." He reached for his empty wine goblet, tipping it expectantly toward the nearest elf, who tripped over herself to fill his cup. Cormac took a long sip from it, holding her gaze. "Things would be a lot easier for both of us if you acted like it, sometimes."

Hermione held her sigh. It wasn't worth it. She already had to sit next to him the entire evening. The night would be even less tolerable if they were quarrelling. A man sat down on the other side of Cormac, and in an instant, she lost his attention. Cormac acknowledged him while standing, vigorously shaking his hand with a gaudy, gold-broomstick-cufflink-lined greeting (yes, they *had* been in Islington). Then, he sat, and they began talking about Quidditch.

He did not introduce the man to his wife.

Polite society indeed.

Hermione didn't hold her sigh back this time. Instead, she glanced at the empty seat on *her* side, wondering which high-society fop she would be expected to adulate for the evening. One by one, the guests were shown to their seats. And, one by one, the seats around her began to fill.

All except the one beside her.

She could have checked the place name. That would've put her out of her misery. But it seemed like a faux pas. Like something that, if Cormac saw her do, he'd scold her for. So instead, she greeted the Nicholsons on the opposite side of the table. A small smile, a nod;

they were too far away to engage in conversation. The centrepieces on the table were clearly designed to keep them talking side-by-side, instead of across the food.

Damn purebloods and their etiquette rules. The Nicholsons were lovely people. And she couldn't even have any *wine*, not if there was a chance she was pregnant. She lifted her water goblet, taking a sip and placing it back down.

That was approximately the time that the chair beside her was pulled slowly away from the table.

She tried not to be obvious as she turned to look, planning only a glance. But as she turned, she found herself incapable of looking anywhere else.

Because it was an all-too-familiar face.

Angled, pale, and with the first hints of a smirk tugging at his cheek. A smirk she'd seen far too close. Lips she'd felt on hers.

And he looked... he just... he...

She sort of stopped breathing for a moment.

There wasn't a man alive for whom a dinner suit had ever been more uniquely designed to fit. Black fabric clung to every line of his physique like it had been stitched out of nothing but pure reverence. It cut into his waist with a precision that bordered on obscene. Clean lines and refinement. A true excess of wealth and exquisite taste that *only* Draco Malfoy could do justice to.

But it wasn't his clothing that made her stomach flutter unnecessarily.

She knew what he looked like beneath those clothes. What he looked like when he was coming apart. How his lips felt against the apex of her throat, and the exact cadence of his moan as he groaned into it. Knew how that silken vanilla blonde felt as it slipped through her fingers. She knew the feel of his full length inside her, every last inch. The feel of his hips slamming against hers, she knew exactly how deep he could hit her. She knew the dimensions of his waist between her thighs. How he moaned as she wrapped them around him. Squeezing him as he wrung pleasure from her, thrust after thrust.

She knew how it felt to be held by him. Held properly. Caringly. His body behind hers as she slept. Holding her tightly, with a warm breath exhaled through her hair. She knew the sound of that breath as they slept. The gentle flickers of his fingertips against her bare skin.

She knew how it felt to have his lips press softly to hers.

What she did *not* know was how to sit next to him at a dinner like they were little more than strangers. Not when the butterflies in her stomach had worked themselves into such a sudden kinetic frenzy that her cheeks seemed to fill with blood from the residual heat alone. His gaze was entirely set. Focused. Pinpointed, completely, on her. Smirking, as usual, but this time, there was a softness in it that she'd never noticed before. It was casual. Easy.

Familiar.

She began smiling back at him.

But Hermione caught herself.

She couldn't believe she hadn't realised in advance that he'd be there. They'd slept together this month. He'd be coherent, and he was clearly interested in making sure that St Mungos had the money it needed. Of *course* he'd be there. Though she'd be having a rather strong word with whomever had been responsible for the seating chart.

She supposed they weren't to know how unbelievably fucking *awkward* she would feel sitting beside him, given how they'd left things. Given how badly she'd wanted to him to just snatch her up and—

Nope. No. Work event. *Work. Event.*

Malfoy's eyes flickered downward with interest, taking her in, his wicked smile widening.

"Well. Good evening, Grang—"

Hermione got to her feet. And it was only at that point that Malfoy noticed who was sitting on her other side.

His eyes flicked to her husband. Recognition crossed his face.

The smile disappeared from it.

His eyes narrowed rather discontentedly. He stuck his tongue into his cheek, sucking on it.

"—Granger-McLaggen."

He spat the word between them as if it tasted disgusting in his mouth.

Hermione frowned at him, but he didn't show a shred of remorse.

"*Behave,*" she whispered, quietly.

Malfoy's jaw dropped slightly, giving her a look of pure, angelic innocence. Scoffing, silently.

She narrowed her eyes accusingly back, making sure that there was an implication of daggers encased within.

He cracked.

Malfoy gave her the very smallest, most unbelievably subtle smirk she'd ever seen him offer.

She sighed, conceding.

Hermione took his hand and shook it firmly.

“How *lovely* to see you again, Mister Malfoy,” she announced, pointedly.

Cormac’s head whipped around faster than lightning, chair scraping as he leapt to his feet.

“*Malfoy!* Merlin, how *are* you?! It’s been *ages!*” his voice boomed embarrassingly loudly over the top of her head. “I can’t *believe* we’re not placed to chat! Hermione, maybe we could—”

Cormac was as subtle as a kick between the eyes. He wanted to swap seats so he could spend the evening kissing Malfoy’s arse.

Hermione thought she caught her eye roll in time, but judging by the speedy flick of Malfoy’s grin, she wasn’t fast enough.

Malfoy stuck out his hand.

“Cormac,” he said, barely hiding his sneer. “We’ll have to catch up *some other time.*”

A tactful *fuck off* if ever there was one, but the dismissal’s implied tone was completely lost on her husband. Cormac shook his hand with the kind of enthusiasm that made him look like a wacky inflatable flailing arms balloon at a used car dealership. It was a rather specific image, and one that no one in the room except her would be familiar with, but, unfortunately for everyone involved it was also an incredibly apt one.

Her husband took his seat once more, but as she went to take her own, the seat of her chair pressed firmly and steadily against the back of her knees. She took the sign, sitting down, and the chair somehow magically and neatly placed her in exactly the right place at the table.

Oh. So *that* was how it was supposed to be done.

She glanced sideways, making eye contact with Malfoy as he took his hands off the back of her chair. She could’ve sworn he smiled at her as he took his own, beside her.

But before he settled, he moved in close.

His breath skimmed across her neck as he entered a space he shouldn’t have occupied in public. For a moment, she was back in his bed, his arm draped protectively over the top of her. His lips in the crook of her neck. His body pressed to hers. His deep, dark growl of satisfaction as he bucked into her.

She swallowed tightly as his hand found the join of her chair. She thought for a moment that it might be to steady himself. But his thumb brushed over her hip.

“*Just between us,*” he whispered. “*You look absolutely fucking breathtaking.*”

Hermione exhaled heavily, furiously trying to hide the blush that began creeping up her chest and into her cheeks.

“Thank you,” she said, trying to sound dismissive.

His leg pressed to hers under the table. He skimmed his fingers down the skin just above her elbow.

She stilled.

“I’m serious,” he replied. “You’re like something out of a magazine.”

The blush was building, but still, she pushed it down. She cast a slight glare at him as a last-ditch effort to try and calm herself down.

“What *kind* of magazine?” she teased.

Malfoy chuckled, his lip curling into a smirk.

“Well that’s not fair. Now you’ve got me thinking about the dirty ones.”

“You saying I look like a whore, Malfoy?”

He eyed her predatorily, his tongue darting out to wet his lips as he leaned in again.

“If you were,” he whispered, lowering his voice into something akin to a growl. “I’d be the only man in the room who could afford you.”

He skimmed his fingers along the side of her thigh. Up to her hip. She shivered under his touch.

“I’m serious, Granger,” he whispered. “That dress is fucking *incredible*. Making me want to sneak you out of here so I can see how it looks hiked up around your waist.”

She lost her battle against her blush.

“Well, I think I’d likely be *missed* when they called my name for a speech?”

Malfoy smiled broadly, taking a breath to say something... but it caught. He frowned as his gaze caught to the right of her, toward the centre of the table.

He narrowed his eyes.

He reached across her, snatching her name card out of the air and inspecting it. He frowned again. With a flick of the card in his fingers, the ink wiped clean. And, with a brush of his thumb, a new name appeared.

Hermione Granger-McLaggen

Department Head - Health and Magical Hospitals

Hermione stared at it, smiling as he released the card into the air in front of her and it floated back to its rightful place. She turned to thank him, but didn't get a single word out as he winked. He brushed his fingers against the inside of her wrist again. Over the palm of her hand. He hesitated there for a moment, before releasing her and inconspicuously reaching for his wine glass. It was lucky he did, too. Because if he'd lingered over her hand any longer, she wasn't entirely sure she wouldn't have let him hold it. Just once.

And the fact that that thought even came *close* to crossing her mind made her...

God, she really wished she could have some fucking wine.

"Innovation breeds excellence, Granger."

He couldn't have been any more smug about the way he said it.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him. Polite applause filled the room, one of the hospital administrators many positions before her in the speaking queue finding her seat after a speech that had perhaps been slightly longer-winded than necessary. Perfectly-dressed waiters continued serving mains at the other end of the long tables.

She married her eyes at Malfoy. "Don't quote my own department's strategic goals at me, I *wrote* those."

Malfoy grinned mischievously, cutting into his roasted pomegranate quail with a truly horrific amount of grace. "Admit it, it's a brilliant idea."

"Microdosing *Amortentia*?" Hermione said, glancing sideways at him, half a smile twitching at her lips. "Is this your idea of flirting, or have you finally lost your mind?"

Malfoy's eyes caught hers over the rim of his glass. "It can't be both?"

She rolled her eyes, but she knew he caught the way her smile twitched despite it. "You do realise using a love potion for a purpose other than the strictly controlled *intended* one is an ethical, logistical, and bureaucratic *nightmare*?"

"Technically, it's a *desire stimulant*, not a love potion," he said smoothly, watching her as he sipped. "The Ministry just *calls* it a love potion because they're horrified by the thought that someone, somewhere, might accidentally enjoy themselves."

Hermione arched a brow. "I'd wager they're more scared someone might fall in love with their Healer and try to shag them on the exam table."

Malfoy took another bite of quail. He made eating it look easy. Though, she knew first-hand what food at the Manor was like, she shouldn't have been surprised. He finished his mouthful, his gaze pointed and focused as he made her wait for his response. As he swallowed, he looked up at her, smirking.

"Well, I suppose that depends on the Healer, doesn't it?"

Her mouth fell open, and he glared at him. “Malfoy!” she scolded.

“What?” he said innocently. “They’re already at clinical trials in Japan. Early stages in Finland. It can help reassociate positive memories in patients with severe PTSD.”

Hermione cut into her own food to hide her blush, copying the way he had done it, trying desperately not to make a fool of herself. She leaned in closer to him, eyes narrowing, voice low. “So you’re suggesting we hand out diluted *Amortentia* as if they were *pepper-ups* for a cold. It’s a Class-A potion. Do you have any idea how many medical codes that violates?”

“At least seven,” he said, smirking. “But imagine if it *worked*. Trauma patients, long-term curse sufferers,” he eyed her pointedly. “Even mild doses could stimulate positive emotional feedback. Could be groundbreaking work in rewiring the brain to incorporate pleasure into the process of healing.”

She cocked an eyebrow. “You want patients to get aroused in therapy?”

He glanced sideways at her, then leaned in closer, speaking low and quiet. “Tell me that wouldn’t convince more people to do it.”

She gave a soft laugh, hiding it behind her napkin, but it was a little bit too strong for her to hide.

Malfoy’s eyes seemed to soften. Seemed to… glaze, a little bit. A small smile tugged at his cheek, and he sighed in her direction.

“What?” she asked, quietly.

“I just love your laugh,” he responded.

They both went silent.

Cormac had clearly heard her laugh, and he’d leaned a little closer as if trying to involve himself in the joke. Hermione simply dropped her gaze, focusing on her meal until her husband lost interest. It wouldn’t do to be… *fraternising*… right in front of him.

But as soon as Cormac turned away, she found herself glancing at Malfoy.

And their eyes had to meet for only a millisecond for the butterflies to erupt.

The blush that filled her cheeks wasn’t gentle or demure, it was violent in its warmth, in the pinkness she was sure filled her cheeks. She dropped her gaze instantly, avoiding his as she tried to brush it off.

“Stop it,” she scolded, no louder than a whisper.

Malfoy chuckled quietly so as not to attract Cormac’s attention. “I was actually about to apologise for my candour, but after seeing what it does to you? I think I might spend the rest of the evening complimenting you, instead.”

Hermione pursed her lips. “You’re a pest.”

“Possibly,” he allowed. “But I also smell like vintage books, cedarwood, and white florals if the *Amortentia*’s to be believed. So you’ll just have to deal with it.”

He didn’t have to tell her what he smelled like. She knew that very, very well. Whether it was carrying her home, or pressing his body to hers, she was well-versed in the scent of Malfoy’s cologne.

“Oh?” Her stomach twisted with butterflies. Just because he did indeed smell like that didn’t mean she was about to let him get away with his arrogance. “So when you smell Amortentia, you smell *yourself*?” The corners of Hermione’s mouth twitched into a smirk. “Very on-brand for you, Malfoy.”

His mouth parted slightly—just a flicker of surprise. Then he rolled her eyes with a smile that didn’t quite reach full denial. He leaned in close, dragging his teeth over his lip.

“Careful, witch, I could bend you over this table right now and you’d probably let me.”

Hermione shot him an amused look, ensuring not to blush. “Unlikely.”

“Blowjob underneath it, then.”

That got her. The back of her chair jostled as someone leaned on it to speak to Cormac, but she was too busy to mind. She was far too preoccupied with going bright pink, instead. Her foot darted out on its own accord and kicked Malfoy square in the ankle. He grinned at her.

“I’ve donated six hundred thousand galleons to St Mungos in the last five years. That should get me *something*.”

Hermione froze. No, that wasn’t right. She mentally tallied in her head. There were *two* anonymous donors. One had donated about four hundred thousand, the other a little over two. There were *two*. He couldn’t—neither of them had donated *six*—

“They’re both you?” she asked. “*Both* of the anonymous major donors are you?”

Malfoy stared at her for a moment, realised what he’d said, sighed, then shrugged.

Her mind went blank. “Why would you pretend to be two people?”

“If there’s *one* anonymous donor, everyone goes ballistic trying to find out who it is. If there are *two*, it seems normal, and people seem to respect your privacy a little more.”

She wasn’t listening. “*Why* have you donated six hundred thousand galleons to St Mungos?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

Hermione’s mouth opened to retort, some scathing, insulting remark about him and his family. About the amount of harm they’d done, the *unlikelihood* of a *Malfoy* ever thinking of anyone but themselves. The pure, almost *laughable* idea that someone with his surname

might ever willingly hand out money for a good cause without screeching from the rooftops that they'd done so. But at the last moment, she stopped herself.

He could see it.

She knew by his expression. He knew *exactly* what she'd been about to say to him. He was very good at hiding it behind that firm smirk, but she'd spent too much time around him recently to see anything other than hurt.

She *knew* him.

And if she said it, it would hurt him. Plain and simple. He was bracing for it. Bracing for her to say something awful about him. To remind him of who he was. What he'd done. To willingly forget all of the work he'd done, the *good things* he'd already done.

So she didn't say it.

Instead, she cast a soft smile in his direction.

"That's very kind of you," she said, quietly.

Malfoy looked surprised, but he didn't say anything. They both turned back to their food for a moment, taking almost simultaneous bites of their dinner. Perhaps because neither had anything to say.

No, that wasn't right, because she had *a million* things to say. And she decided very swiftly that she was going to say them.

"But why don't you want people knowing it's you?" she asked.

He glanced sideways at her. "Would you want to be healed in the *Malfoy wing*?"

She frowned, and pursed her lips. "It wouldn't bother me. If my treatment was high quality, and everything was being healed—"

"And what if my father had murdered yours?"

She fell silent.

She hadn't thought about it that way.

It still shocked her, sometimes. It had been years since the war, and to her, the wounds had mostly healed. Some scars still hurt. Some losses. A stab of pain in her chest when she remembered all they'd sacrificed.

But she didn't harbour any guilt over it.

She couldn't imagine what that felt like. To carry the burden of guilt for crimes that weren't yours, because that's how you were raised. One name, one family, one history.

It didn't seem fair to the man he was today.

He was the very definition of changed. Pansy, frustratingly, had been right again. He was different now. Hermione could see it.

She wondered if Malfoy could.

"You're not your father, you know."

She didn't know the words were coming, and that was why she couldn't stop them. They fell out of her like the air did, but he hadn't dragged them from her. No. She'd given them quite freely.

He took a long drag of his wine. Gave a hard swallow as he stared into the rapidly emptying cup.

"There is nothing I want more in the world than for that to be true."

Hermione had to fight the urge to reach for him. To lift her hand and stroke her fingers through his hair. Up, over his forehead. To have him close his eyes and arch into her hand as she pressed kisses beside his lips. The way he did when he was kissing her back. He was gentle like that. He liked being gentle with her. He'd manhandle her when the situation required, of course, but there was a gentleness to him that she theorised he didn't allow many people to see.

He'd surprised her, actually, with just how gentle he was. In action and in words, he was... considerate. He could bite when he needed to, but the more time she spent with him, the less she saw it. It was only when he was backed into a corner. When he was threatened.

When he was scared.

She made a point of placing her water cup down closer to his. Letting their arms brush gently against each other as she spoke.

"I don't see many similarities," she said.

He looked at her again. "No?"

She smirked. "Well. Other than the overwhelming superiority complex, and the truly devastating handsomeness."

Malfoy seemed to scrunch his whole face at once.

"You thought my father was *handsome*?"

"*I love* that the superiority complex rang *no* alarm bells whatsoever."

He gave her an expectant look. Hermione gave him an incredulous expression back.

"I'm a woman with *eyes*, aren't I?" She bit her lip. "Every girl in Hogwarts looked forward to when *your father heard about things*."

Malfoy's mouth dropped open. "They did *not*."

"Oh, believe me, Malfoy, they *did*. Your dad was an arsehole, but he was also *very* hot. Even Pomfrey used to fix her hair when she heard he was coming." She bit her lip. "No one is immune to the *Malfoy charm*."

He huffed a laugh through his nose, grinning widely. "Careful, witch."

"Of what? Hmmm?" She pursed her lips teasingly at him. "Going to *charm* me under the table?"

Malfoy turned his body toward hers. There was still a laugh in the corners of his mouth, but his eyes were a little more serious. Then, they were a lot more serious.

"Are you being honest?" he asked. "You don't see it?"

"Malfoy—"

She opened her mouth to give another snarky response, but as she did—

She looked at him.

There was something in his eyes. A focus— no. A hesitancy. Something honest, and fragile, and... nervous. It only took a single beat of her own heart to know how serious she needed to be. This mattered to him. More than anything else in the world, perhaps; this mattered. He wanted to know what she thought. Of him. He actually, genuinely wanted to know.

Her opinion of him... mattered. To him.

Hermione turned her gaze to his. Pursed her lips. Met his eyes intentionally with her own.

"Draco—" she said, quietly.

He stiffened, his gaze flicking to hers at the sound of his given name.

She hadn't meant to call him that, not really, but it felt wrong to call him by a last name that he so clearly hated the sound of. So instead, she reached out, brushing her pinkie finger against the back of his hand.

And quietly, she met his eye.

"Your father would be horrified by the man you've become."

It wasn't something that she'd usually expect to be a compliment, but as the words lingered between them, she could almost *see* how deeply significant they were to him. Because Draco stared at her for a moment. Then a longer moment. He took a deep breath.

“Do you really mean that?”

Hermione smiled. She nodded. She leaned in to speak quietly.

“Refusing to marry? Giving away what must be a good part of your family’s fortune *anonymously* to good causes?” She lowered her voice, glancing around. “You’re enthusiastically trying to impregnate a *Muggleborn*.”

Draco snorted.

He clapped his hand over his mouth, and Hermione burst out laughing.

“And then, of course, there’s *that* never-before-heard sound, which I’m sure he’d be *horrified* to know had represented him in public—”

He breathed his laugh across his dinner, dropping his gaze to his plate, but as it rose once again, they simply looked at each other in silence.

This time, it lasted a little bit longer.

There was a sudden demureness in him that she’d never seen before. A humility that broke free, every now and again. It meant something to him, those words. It clearly affected him that she’d made the effort to say it.

He was so *grateful*.

And God, it was truly unfair that a man could look so reverent in candlelight.

She was the one to break the silence, picking up her glass again and sipping from it.

“So,” she said, grinning at him. “How much more are you planning on donating before you consider your debt to society repaid?”

A small smile moved to his lips. A grateful one. He gave her that look again. The softer one. It was new. She liked it though.

“How much more do you need?” He took a sip of wine, smirking over the top of his glass.

“Well, with enough funding, we can turn St Mungo’s into an international teaching hospital. Set up satellite locations in developing nations. The magical government of Malawi sent through a request years ago for a field hospital and we’ve never had enough. How’s *that* for repaying a debt to society?”

Draco chuckled. “Certainly would go a long way.”

Hermione grinned. She did love a good hypothetical. “Mmmm. Maybe *too* far. I don’t think you can afford that level of goodwill.”

“Why? How much would that amount of goodwill set me back?”

“God, who *knows*,” she teased. Then, she glared, mischievously. “I’d probably send you a bill for a million galleons regardless of what it cost.”

“Done,” he chuckled. “In fact, I’ll give you two. Just because you look so pretty tonight.”

Her mouth fell open, and she laughed. “You do *not* have two million galleons.”

“Well, not *on my person*. But if that’s what you need, you’ll have it.”

She exhaled a heavy laugh. “Stop that.”

He grinned. “Stop what?”

“I’m not an idiot, Draco. You are *not* going to donate two million galleons to the hospital.”

“Why not?”

Her mouth dropped open. “Because you don’t *have* two million galleons.”

“Oh, don’t I?” he side-eyed her. “You could set up a hospital in the Cook Islands as well. I hear it’s *beautiful* this time of year. Though you’ll have to go soon, the wet season starts in November.”

Hermione paled. He was being coy.

He was always coy, but he was being particularly fucking coy.

“Draco, you *don’t*,” she said, very uncertainly.

His eyebrows rose, an amused smile on his face, but as he eyed her, it turned to one of devilish enjoyment. Of pure *sinfulness* in its entertainment. He took another sip of his wine, the red liquid almost staining his lips as he whispered back.

“Whatever you say, *Hermione*.”

Her brain imploded.

It was her name. That was all. Just the sound of her first name. She’d heard it a million times.

But never, ever from him.

It fell from his lips like sweet liqueur. Honeyed and thick and dripping from his tongue. Quiet, as he wrapped around it. Low and smooth and purring as it curled around her like warm, strong arms. He said her name as if it belonged to him. As if it was his. As if *she* was his.

No one had ever said her name like *that* before.

Hermione’s jaw went slack, staring at him as her breath caught in her throat. She immediately wanted him to wrap his hand around it. Squeeze it free. And, from the heated black in his gaze, he knew *exactly* what it had done to her.

“Fuck,” she whispered.

She became once again conscious of the company that they were in. Shaking her head to try and bring herself back to some semblance of lucidity.

She cleared her throat. “Two million, then.”

Malfoy leaned in close again.

“*Make good on that blowjob and I’ll make it three.*”

Hermione’s mouth dropped open again, her gaze turning furious. But, before she could scold him, her husband’s completely rehearsed laugh sounded behind her. He was chortling sycophantically at some joke or another, sending even more annoyance shooting up her spine.

She turned her body more toward Malfoy.

“*Stop it,*” she hissed.

He smirked. “Make me.”

“This is a *work event* for me.”

“And what?” his lip only curled further. “Am I making it hard for you to act *professionally, Hermione?*”

She almost fucking *whimpered*.

Oh, God, she had to do something. She had to distract him. If he started talking *like that* to her, she wasn’t sure she’d be able to resist. He sounded so good, and he looked so good, he *smelled so good*, and he— just— she had to—

She had to at least make him suffer as badly as she was.

She smacked her water cup into his lap.

Malfoy gasped, but managed to keep himself composed enough to not draw attention.

“Oh, *goodness,*” she gasped in horror. “How unbelievably *clumsy* of me!”

She ripped her napkin from her lap, and placed it into his. Began mopping it up from his trousers with pointed, hard dabs of her hand.

He froze. His voice dropped, and he growled at her. “*Oh you little fucking—*”

“Gosh, you’re *soaked,*” she whispered. “Please, let me get that for you.”

She held his gaze. And she began making slow, hard circles over his lap.

His jaw clenched, swallowing hard as she looked innocently up at him. She practically felt his cock jump.

“You could just *scourgify* it,” he warned.

“I could,” she whispered back. She lowered her voice to nothing but a purr. “But then it wouldn’t be revenge. Would it?”

A vein in his neck seemed to pop as he swallowed. Dry enough, she moved back to her own chair... but not before lingering near him for a moment.

“Not very nice, having someone tease you in public, is it, Draco?”

He exhaled heavily through his nose. “All I did was say your name.”

“In the most *dangerously* seductive way possible.”

She barely realised what she was saying until it had already spilled out of her. God, she was stupid.

“You find me dangerously seductive, do you?” He practically growled his satisfaction at her slip-up. Then, slowly, and quietly, he parted his legs beneath the table. Tugged his trousers downward. Drew her attention to the growing bulge at the front of them.

She was getting him hard at dinner.

“And just how far is my *seductiveness* going to get me?” he whispered. “Hmm?”

Hermione pursed her lips, dropping her napkin back onto her own lap. But, as she did, she had an idea.

She felt along the front of her dress, tracing a seam until she found one of the slits that she loved so much about this dress. Without warning, and without a word, she let it fall open, exposing a good part of her thigh to the space between the two of them.

“Two can play at that game.”

She dragged her fingers over the exposed skin peeking out of her dress.

It tickled, a little. It didn’t feel the same as when he did it, but it was enough to make her breath heat. Malfoy didn’t notice right away, taking a sip of his wine. But, slowly, his eyes drew downwards.

Hermione watched them go wide. Watched his lips part and his breath catch. She let him watch. Just for a moment. Just enough to give him the payback he so desperately deserved.

Then she refocused her attention on her meal, being as polite as she possibly could.

“*Witch...*” he warned. “You know how I feel about you touching yourself in front of me.”

But then— *then*—

Malfoy slipped his hand onto her thigh.

It was subtle. Discrete, as only someone like him could be discrete. It wasn't blatant, nor tasteless. It was entirely likely that no one would notice, even if they were standing immediately behind. Even if they were sitting immediately on her other side.

But *she* noticed. *She* knew. And, as his fingertips stretched in long lines across her skin, she knew she wasn't going to be able to hide her reaction to it. She shifted away from his touch, but her skin warmed, then shivered with goosebumps as his fingers sank into her thigh. Gently, but very firmly.

Possessively.

"*Malfoy*," she scolded.

"Oh we're back to last names, are we?" he growled. "Does that mean I'm in *trouble*?"

Hermione tried once again to move away, but he only sank his fingers in harder. Holding her still.

"You want me to *really* get myself in trouble?" he purred.

She covered his hand with her napkin. It was supposed to protect her. To cover her from being seen. But all it did was embolden the man beside her to slip his hand further up her thigh. Higher. Higher. Higher.

Until he stretched out his pinkie finger and stroked it over the front of her underwear.

She shivered, squeezing her legs together around his hand. Malfoy pretended not to be watching her, instead taking long sips of his wine as he glanced casually around the room. But he moved ever-so-slightly closer to her.

"*One wrong move*," he whispered. "*And I'll make you come in front of a room full of people who're supposed to respect you.*"

She tensed, entirely certain he wasn't bluffing, as if her husband wasn't inches away. "That would be awfully *impolite*."

"Would it?" he purred. "Darn, I'd have to *Malfoy charm* my way out of it."

"And in the meantime, leave *my honour* in shreds." She gave him her very best doe-eyed look. "I thought you were raised better than that."

His lips parted in surprise, and he tsked.

"Ahh, you know just how to wound me." He smirked teasingly at her. "Fine. Then what if I just make you blush again instead?"

"Oh?" Hermione smiled coyly. "And how are you planning on doing that, then?"

He pulled back from her thigh.

And instead, he took her hand.

In an instant, he'd captured it, linking their fingers together under the anonymity of the table. Entwined. Encapsulated. Her hand slipped perfectly and easily into his as he gave her a soft, gentle squeeze.

As he didn't immediately let go.

Her eyes darted up to his, trying to ascertain whether he was joking. If he was teasing her.

But Draco was staring at her, his expression serious, eyes gentle as his grip as he flexed his fingers over hers. As he brushed his thumb over the back of hers, letting their wrists fall into a comfortable rest against her lap. A soft tinge of orchid pink, right at the top of his cheekbones gave him away.

He wasn't planning on letting go any time soon.

How long had been wanting to—

Hermione's butterflies went *crazy*. They jumped up and down, backflipping and vibrating in her stomach like she was made of pure champagne. She gasped. She knew, without feeling, that her cheeks had gone bright pink. Bright *red*, as her lips parted with her blush.

She heard the embarrassed sigh of nervous laughter that fell from her lips.

And—

So did Cormac.

His Quidditch companion had gotten bored of him and turned elsewhere to converse, which meant that Cormac had picked *that exact moment* to stop ignoring her for the evening. He turned, looked at her.

Then glanced down.

His eyes, understandably, fell straight to Malfoy's wrist. Exposed, as it was, while the rest of his hand was obscured. Below the napkin.

Inside her dress.

Cormac couldn't see they were holding hands beneath it. But, as their hands quickly parted, she realised it would have looked mightily suspicious for an entirely different reason altogether.

And, as his brow furrowed in confusion, Hermione's entire body stiffened in panic.

They'd gone way, *way* too far. The entire point of the arrangement was to not be seen, or found out, and here Malfoy was, with his hand up her dress. This was *so fucking risky*. She closed her eyes, and braced for the moment Cormac exploded.

But it didn't come.

Instead, she felt him leaning across her.

He moved slowly, his arm curling around the back of her chair as he leaned in to speak in her ear.

But he *didn't* speak in her ear.

Instead, he leaned across her, wincing awkwardly at the man on her other side.

"I— Malfoy, look, I get it. I do. She's an attractive girl. Maybe a little too ambitious and headstrong for most people's taste, but she's got *great* legs, am I right?" He chuckled, and forced a rather smug smile onto his face. "Obviously you've got your... *situation*... and I respect that— respect *you*—"

The word hung in the air like a white flag. Oh, God.

Was he *asking Malfoy politely to not touch his wife?*

Cormac cleared his throat. "But if you could possibly....uh... ease up a bit. Just... not here. Not so *publicly*. People *notice* things, you know? They *talk*. And I just... being married to her is enough of a handful as it is without the extra *drama* that..." he dropped his gaze to her lap.

He smiled, pointedly.

"So... uh... if you wouldn't mind?"

And it dawned, rather suddenly, on Hermione, that Cormac didn't care whatsoever.

He didn't say *stop*. He didn't get angry. He did not care *at all* that what she and Draco were doing was unbelievably disrespectful to their marriage.

He only cared that they were in public. That there was a risk for him to be embarrassed. And though she didn't *really* care what Cormac thought. Not *really*...

She couldn't deny, it hurt her feelings. Just a little bit.

Yes, their marriage was political, but it hurt her to be reminded, in front of Draco, that Cormac saw her as very little more than just a *reflection of himself*. She tried to hide the hurt from her face. Tried to force an expression of nonchalance in its place. Cormac didn't care, and Hermione knew damn well that she shouldn't either.

But, as she turned slightly to look at Draco—

Oh.

He *did* care.

There was a sudden intensity in his eyes as he stared, in disbelief, at her husband. To anyone else in the room, Draco might've looked stoic. Focused, even. But she knew him a little better than that, now.

She knew what to look for.

The outer corner of his brow twitched. His lips had parted, but closed, just as slightly. A swallow, a flare of the nostrils. A slow blink. A tick of the muscle just beside his jaw.

Draco's expressions were minute. Were subdued. Controlled and composed at all times, unless you'd seen his expressions, all from the closest possible view. Twitches and pulls, tightness, or a slow blink, he had one of the most expressive faces she'd ever known. It was so clear, as long as one cared enough about what he thought in order to look for it.

And she did. She cared enough, so she could read him.

And he was *fuming*.

He pressed his lips together, forcing a fake, almost mocking smile onto his face as he leaned across to her husband.

"Do I *mind*?" Draco chuckled. "Oh, Cormac, I don't mind *one bit*."

He sank his fingers into her thigh.

"In fact, I don't think *your wife* minds, either."

Cormac's jaw ticked. Brows twitched together. Hermione frowned at him. It wasn't like she was *asking* Draco to try and feel her up in public. Regardless of her feelings about the situation. Regardless of the fact that up until Cormac got involved, she had, in fact, been really into it.

She wouldn't have *actually* let him feel her up in public. She was pretty sure.

She swallowed as Cormac continued.

"I'm just asking you to think about what people would say if they *saw*. Don't you think it would be... *preferable*... to keep this *arrangement* a little more *private, Malfoy?*"

"She's not pregnant yet," Draco whispered back. "And until she is, she's mine to do whatever I like with." His eyes lifted, glaring pointedly at her husband. "Isn't that what you wrote in your letter when you were begging me to *fuck her, McLaggen?*"

Hermione's stomach twisted with rage, along with her head as she whipped it to her husband.

"You said... *what?*"

Cormac didn't respond. His eyes just narrowed. Jaw set. He withdrew his arm from around her, but she knew her husband, and he was *not* going to retreat. His hand slipped under the

table. And, after a bit of frustratedly fumbling with her dress, he found the slit on the other side of it.

In no more than a moment, Cormac's hand was on her other thigh, squeezing hard as he wrenched her closer to his side.

Hermione turned to him.

"*What are you doing!?*" she hissed.

"In case you've *forgotten*, you're actually married to *me*, so I can touch you whenever I want," he hissed back. "*Don't make a scene.*"

Draco guided her back toward him, his breath seething through his nose. Firmly. A tease on his breath as his fingertips slid higher up her thigh.

"Ignore him, baby. Go on. *Make a scene for me.*"

Hermione squeaked at the pet name, which he had notably *never* used until this moment, but Cormac was very clearly not aware of that fact. He glared out of the corner of his eye, pushing his own hand higher. Squeezing her thigh.

Malfoy responded in kind.

Hermione tensed in her chair, her legs parting beneath the table as they each pawed at one thigh. Slowly spreading her legs wider. The world's slowest race to see who could get all the way under her dress.

She grabbed the backs of both of their hands, trying to remove them, but neither relented.

Her husband leaned across her and sneered. "Malfoy, if you go any higher, we're going to have a problem."

"*Cormac!*" she hissed.

"Why's that?" Draco spat back. "You think she wants *you* so badly she'd let you feel her up in public?"

"*Malfoy!*"

"Wants *me* more than she wants *you*. I'm her *husband*." Cormac's face was going red. "Your job is to get her pregnant. *Nothing else.*"

With their quiet whispers, the guests around them either weren't paying attention, or were polite enough to look away from an argument they couldn't hear. But Hermione knew that neither were going to back down. She couldn't intervene.

But that meant she also couldn't stop Malfoy from responding.

She glanced sideways at him, pleading with her eyes to just *leave it*, but he was already leaning in. She knew what it meant. A smirk was already forming at the corner of his mouth. He was angling his face down, to keep his voice low, and quiet. But he wasn't planning on backing down.

"Only two men have ever been inside her, Cormac." Malfoy growled, speaking across her. "And going by the look on her face the first time *I* fucked her... I can surmise that only *one* of us has made her come. Isn't that right, baby?"

Hermione barely managed not to gasp.

Oh, God, he looked so fucking good when he was jealous.

Cormac's jaw locked like stone. She knew he wouldn't be that stupid. Despite the fragility of his ego, he was far too afraid of the consequences for causing a scene in public. But she had never seen him look so *furious*.

Hermione kicked Malfoy in the leg, but he didn't react. Just smiled saccharinely as he waited for her husband's response.

Cormac swallowed, narrowing his eyes as he tore them away from where Malfoy was touching her.

"And whose bed is it that she comes home to, hmm? Who's she bearing children *for*?" Cormac spat. "I walk into every fucking room with her on my arm. And if you say her full name when you fuck her, you have to say *mine* too."

Her head whipped back around, glaring daggers at her husband. She fumed.

This wasn't about *her*. This was about *Cormac's fucking pride*. The *arse*. Hermione moved to protest—

But Malfoy was too quick. And too angry.

He leaned in, teeth gnashing like a rabid dog. His gaze sharpened as his eyes narrowed. He lowered his voice.

"Well you see, the thing is, *when I* fuck her, I hold her down and make her tell me *exactly* who her cunt belongs to. I make her *scream* it. She's a very good girl for me. She does *exactly* as she's told."

Malfoy's eyes almost narrowed to slits as he challenged. His lip curled into a sneer.

"And I'm sorry to inform you, Cormac, it's not *your* name she's screaming."

Hermione's jaw dropped, her body simmering with absolute *rage* as she fought to close her legs despite the strong grips they'd been wrenched apart by. Draco's fingers brushed against her underwear again, making her squirm and squeeze her thighs. Cormac noticed. His face was completely red with annoyance and embarrassment.

Malfoy winked at Cormac. Then he turned to her.

“And as fun as this is, baby, I’m not sure if you’ve been listening, but they’re about to call you for your speech.”

Polite applause rippled the room once more as Chief Healer Mountbatten took his seat. It was her turn.

Shit.

Her name rang out around the ballroom, and every eye in the room turned to the three of them. Hermione rose from her chair in a daze, forcing a smile as she bumbled her way through the welcoming applause. The only thing she could focus on was how it had felt to have two large hands slipping from her thighs simultaneously.

She made her way to the lectern, practically shaking in her heels. She summoned her notes. Cleared her throat.

“*Sonorus*,” she whispered, pointing her wand at her throat.

She plastered a smile on her face.

“Thank you, Chief Healer Mountbatten. It’s an honour to be speaking tonight to so many of our most esteemed guests.”

Esteemed.

In particular, the two men having a cock measuring contest over her, just *waiting* for her to return.

Thank *God* she’d written her speech in advance.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter has two of my absolute favourite lines in it can you tell which ones 😂😂



Chapter 9: “Finish that sentence and I’m going to do something neither of us can take back.”

Chapter Summary

Hermione has some thoughts on Draco's behaviour

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione ended her speech inviting everyone to mingle. To enjoy drinks and live music and to chat in the parlours surrounding the ballroom while dessert was served in canape form. She glanced across the room as the guests dispersed.

Watched two chairs push back from the table at the same time

Eyes on her. Then on each other. Glare. Then, back to her.

Her stomach dropped.

And she bolted.

It wasn’t so much a *run* as it was a tactful, strategic, and extremely swift exit from the ballroom, darting stage-left to try and hide herself amongst the largest group of people she could find. *Literally*. There were half-giants in attendance. The largest group of people provided rather adequate cover.

She slipped into the small room, quietly inspecting the bookshelves behind the enormous group of men, trying very hard to remember all the times she had blended into the background and not been noticed by anyone, ever.

Cormac entered the opposite side of the room.

His eyes were narrowed. Searching. He didn’t see her right away, but he wasn’t taking a once-over as a final answer. He stepped in, and she subtly watched him make his way, counter-clockwise, around the group of half-giants. Looking for her.

And she very much did *not* want to be found.

Hermione waited until he was out of sight, slipping slowly out of the room and back into the long corridor.

She made it only about five steps before she was grabbed around the waist and dragged into an office.

She knew who it was without looking. The door slammed silently shut behind them, but he didn't let go of her. In fact, he pulled her closer. Draco was behind her. Arms wrapped possessively around her waist. He pulled her against his body, pushing her hair out of the way and hissing into her ear.

"Don't you fucking *dare* try and avoid me now," he growled, his hold tightening.

"Malfoy, stop it," she whispered.

"No. You're going to stand there and fucking explain to me—"

"*Malfoy*—" She struggled in his hold.

"*Granger*—just—," he hissed.

She freed herself briefly, but he caught her wrists, crowding her up against the heavy mahogany desk until she was practically seated on it.

Then he pinned her palms to the surface at her hips.

"—Just fucking *stop!*"

He *demanded* it, holding her wrists unbelievably firmly, and panting, right in her face. Silver eyes wide, a strand of blonde hanging over his eye as his jaw cut him into sharp angles. He was *ropeable*.

She met his gaze, knowing her own rage was about to spill over.

"*What do you want?*" she hissed.

"I want to know why the *fuck* you're *with him!*?" His voice carried through the room, spitting furiously into the space between them. "And if it's for a reason that is even *remotely* voluntary, then what is fucking *wrong* with you? Hmm? You *love* him and every one of his *delightful qualities*? Is that it?"

Hermione furrowed her brow. "I—"

"Please, for *Merlin's* sake, tell me you're not in *love* with that fucking prick."

His breath was heaving as he leaned over the top of her; his grip on her wrists so tight she could barely pull her shoulders in. Their chests were almost touching. Lips only inches apart.

Hermione wasn't sure she'd ever seen him so angry.

She frowned at him.

"I'm not *in love* with him, no."

Malfoy's breath caught almost instantaneously. His lower lip shook for a moment, and he closed his mouth, inhaling sharply through his nose in frustration.

“Then *please enlighten me* as to *why you fucking married him?!*”

Hermione’s gaze rose to his, irritation coursing through her.

“Frankly I don’t think that’s any of your business. Especially given the *shit* you just pulled—”

“The shit *I* pulled!?” his jaw dropped. “He was practically—”

“He’s my fucking *husband*, Draco, his behaviour is *not your concern!*”

Draco leaned over the top of her. “If *that* is how he speaks to you in *public*, I can only *begin* to imagine how he speaks to you in *private*, and that *is* my fucking concern, because I *will not* stand for—”

“No, that’s right, you *can’t* stand for it, because it makes it awfully hard to lift a leg and *piss all over your territory*, doesn’t it, Malfoy?!?”

“*Hermione!*”

He silenced her with the sound of her name, and for a moment, they just stared at each other.

Furiously. Silently.

Achingly.

It wasn’t like it mattered, not to *him* at least. It *shouldn’t* have mattered to him.

Why on earth would Malfoy care *why* she was married to her husband, as long as she *was*?

Well.

As his breath heaved ferociously over her lips; as his eyes flashed with fury only a foot from her own—

It seemed, very much, like he cared.

“I can’t propose legislation without a Wizengamot seat,” Hermione said, firmly. “Cormac’s family are well aware that I’m going to end up Minister for Magic one day. They want their name attached to the history books.”

Malfoy’s eyes flashed with rage.

“That’s *it?*” he spat. “You had *dozens* of other men to choose from—”

“Like *who?*” she spat back. “There are a limited number of pureblood families left in the UK that have a Wizengamot seat, and even fewer still who *haven’t* married their sons off by the ripe old age of *nineteen*. Cormac’s family only *got one* because they managed to prove that they were very distantly related to the Crouches. Two of the other seats are empty because

their families were so insistent on *fucking each other* until they all died out, and the seats that are *left* are occupied by men that I had absolutely no chance of marrying in the first place!"

Hermione gladly listed them.

"Ron and I were *never* going to work, Neville's married. Jamie Bulstrode's married. Ernie Macmillan's gay, though I suppose at this point I'd have been just as likely to get pregnant with *him*. I've never had a single conversation with any of the Slytherin boys and I wasn't falling over myself to believe that a *single one of them* would be interested in *sullying their line* anyway, what with the decade and a half of looking at me like I'm *dirt*. So please *enlighten* me, Malfoy, as to the options I had left?!"

Her own breath was panting now. She looked up at him in a rage, his lips pursed into a tight line of impatience.

But she was impatient, too.

"Cormac offered me a *lifeline*. He is the *only* one who made this possible for me. And I *know* he's an arse. He's awful, and he's an arrogant prick, but the overwhelming majority of the time, he is perfectly content to leave me alone to pursue my career. All he's asking for is an heir. Someone to pass on his name to. I know that's not what *you* want, but it's what *he* wants. And it is a *reasonable ask*."

She swallowed hard, sitting up straighter.

"And if I ever want to be a mother, he is the *only* chance I have of doing that without also losing *everything* I've spent my entire career working towards."

Her jaw clenched as she stared directly into his eyes.

"So how *dare* you stand there and question my choices without a single regard for the *consequences* I'll face if *you fuck this up for me!*"

Draco stilled.

It was as if she had slapped him. Or punched him again, like she had so many years ago. But this time, there was no stinging palm. No knuckles aching or drops of purest blood dripping down his face.

It was just...

Just... *shock*.

She pushed against his grip, trying to shove him away, but still, he didn't let go of her wrists.

"Stop," he whispered.

"Malfoy, let go of me."

"*Stop,*" he hissed, closing his eyes as if trying to wrap his head around it.

“Malfoy, I swear to god I will screa—”

“For fuck’s sake, Hermione, just sit *still* for a moment so I can fucking apologise.”

She stilled. Her stomach flipped. *Apologise?*

Hermione swallowed hard.

He seemed horrified. Eyes squeezing shut, breath catching, chin dropping as he came to terms with it in his own mind. She’d never seen him like this before. This dismayed. This... *reverent*. As annoyed as she was at him, she had to admit, she was almost curious about what an apology from Draco Malfoy would sound like.

“Let go of me, then.” She tried to frown at him.

He took a breath through his nose. “Only if you promise not to run off. I’m serious. We need to talk.”

She nodded. He released her wrists slowly, allowing her to fold her arms. She raised her brow at him.

“Well?”

“Hermione,” he took a deep breath. Straightening himself to look her in the eyes. “I would like to apologise for how I acted just now. At dinner.”

She glared at him. Silently.

He sighed. “I acted like a spoiled child.”

“You always act like a spoiled child. You’re going to have to be a *hell* of a lot more specific.”

“I’m *getting there!*” He frowned, taking a sharp breath. “What I did was extremely inappropriate. I embarrassed you. I degraded you. I revealed *very* intimate details about things that should’ve stayed between us—”

He closed his eyes, his face contorting as if it was hurting him to say.

“And what’s possibly worse than anything, is that I made the night about your husband and I, when it was supposed to celebrate the work that *you* and your colleagues have done. That was very selfish. And that was very unfair.”

He took another deep, low breath.

“Also I should probably apologise for the pet name, too. It... felt...” he swallowed, hard. “It felt good, in the moment. But that, too, was inappropriate,” he rushed.

Hermione’s arms suddenly felt very awkwardly placed.

She stared at him, an entirely novel emotion bubbling inside her. Shock. Surprise—the pleasant kind, though. Delight. Confusion.

Was this how men were supposed to apologise?

Cormac had never apologised to her like this. *No one* had ever apologised to her like this. Malfoy was right. He *had* embarrassed her. He *had* acted like a spoiled child, and he'd been a lecherous cad, and he *had* made the night about him.

But she hadn't expected him to want to *apologise* for it.

She couldn't really comprehend it. She just continued staring at him until a question bubbled into her chest. She squared her shoulders. She furrowed her brow. Frowned.

“*Why?*”

It was curt, but so what? He'd annoyed her.

“*Why— why am I sorry?*”

She frowned harder. “Yes.”

“Because, believe it or not, I don’t actually *like* making you unhappy.” Draco’s frown forged a line between his brows as he looked her directly in the eye. “But more than that, it’s... because you deserve an apology.”

Her stomach kicked with those goddamn butterflies again. She frowned as hard as she possibly could.

“So then why on earth did you do it?”

He looked down at the floor, but only for a moment. The next, his eyes were on the pooling fabric at the base of her gown. Then, up. Up. Over her hips. Gazing longingly at her waist, which he was not touching. Up the length of her arm. Her breasts. Her collarbones. Shoulders. Neck. Jaw. Her lips.

He lingered there for a while before he met her eye.

“Do you want the answer that makes things easy, or do you want the truth?”

Hermione frowned. “Which one do you *think* I want to hear?”

“The easy one.”

“Then tell me the easy one.”

Draco sighed. “Because I’m a selfish, volatile arsehole who rarely thinks of anyone but himself.”

She glared. “And the truth?”

“Because I forgot, for a minute, that you *weren’t* actually mine.”

She stopped breathing.

The sudden hurricane of butterfly’s wings made every breath in her body catch from within. Trap. Against the inside of her lungs, as the words began to circle her. Wrap her. Curl around her body like heated, steaming breath before sinking into every pore of her skin.

He—

He... *What?*

“Draco...” she said, quietly, his name catching on her voice. She could already feel her cheeks turning pink. But she didn’t scold him for it.

“Sorry,” he said, quietly. “That was... one more in a long line of inappropriate things to say.”

They stood in silence for a moment, and she tried not to stare at him as her heart began racing.

Instead, she forced out a soft laugh.

“Well, it’s probably a good thing I’m *not* yours. Of all the things you want in the world, I’m almost certain you wouldn’t want *that*.¹”

“You...” His gaze whipped up to hers. “What?”

Shock slapped across his face, his mouth opening, slightly.

“You think I wouldn’t *want*—?”

They stared at each other for a moment that was far, far too long.

Hermione’s stomach twisted into a knot. She tried to control her heartbeat.

“Do you?” she asked, quietly.

“I...” Panic formed in his eyes. He took a deep breath. “I don’t...”

Draco dragged a hand over his face, his eyes meeting hers.

“I don’t *know*.²”

Her fingers pressed hard against the edge of the desk, desperate for something to hold onto. Her breath stilled in her throat, chest barely rising, a little bit too terrified to move, in case she accidentally stumbled across the truth in the horrifically long silence.

And, on top of that, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to uncover her own.

A tremor of fear flickered through from under her lashes as she finally looked up at him. She was wide-eyed. Waiting. Caught between the sudden terror of admitting anything she’d

thought over the past few weeks out loud—

Alongside a fragile, rising hope.

That moment. That shared moment when their lips had met, and it had felt like everything changed. Maybe it wasn't just her. Maybe, she hadn't been alone in feeling it. In looking at him differently. It was just a kiss, or twelve. Or a hundred.

A handful of kisses in the middle of something that was supposed to mean nothing.

But something *had* changed.

Had he felt it too?

Their eyes met in the middle, with nothing but the sound of breath between them. He didn't blink as he swallowed. As he held her gaze, looking every single bit as terrified as she felt.

She'd never seen him so shaky. Unsure.

"I think... I—I just—" he hesitated.

The words came quickly. Stiltedly. Staggered into half-sentences as each of them tried to string them together. He took another deep breath. Heavily. Nervously. Her heart was beating too fast.

Hermione was the one who spoke.

"*Malfoy, what the fuck?*"

The words fell out of her mouth before she could stop them; tumbling into the minimal space with nothing short of clumsiness. She hadn't even meant to say them, they'd just appeared, out of nowhere. Completely unexpected and completely irrational.

And then, she couldn't stop.

"You're not—we're supposed to *hate* each other, and—you—*what?!*"

"*I don't fucking know!*" he snapped back. "I don't know what happened. I just—"

"You just *what?*"

"I just... I—I *kissed you*—and then it just—I realised—I—" He floundered for a response. "*I don't fucking know!*"

Hermione's heart began to race.

He didn't mean this. He couldn't mean any of it. He was *him* and she was *her* and it didn't make *sense* for them to mean it.

But still, neither blinked. Neither breathed.

“This—” she started, trying her very best to look him in the eyes. “This is nothing. It was probably just the timing. Everything was so... charged. We were both tired. Both very on edge—”

Draco’s head fell back, neck stretched to the ceiling as he pursed his lips at it. Then, he took a step forward, shaking his head.

“*You have no idea what you do to me, do you?*”

His eyes were so serious again. Those microscopic movements of muscle and tendon twisting him ever-so-subtly into nothing short of agony.

She blushed, breaking their gaze.

“The curse—”

“The curse has *nothing* to do with it.”

Hermione stiffened, curling her arms tighter around herself.

He didn’t stop. “From the second you stepped foot in my fucking parlour, I have been unable to think about anything *but* you.”

Her head whipped up to his, furiously. “Well, *obviously*, Draco. Whenever I see you, you’re in such a *state* that—”

He slammed his palm onto the desk beside them. “*Fuck* the state I’m in, Hermione!”

The crack of his palm against wood echoed sharply between them. Hermione didn’t flinch. She just stared at the centre of his chest as he turned and walked a few steps away.

“*Every fucking second*,” he said. “The ones where I’m completely lucid and the ones where I’m passed out and dreaming, I am thinking about you. You’re like a fucking bug in my brain, burrowing in and *forcing* me to think about you. About the tiniest, most insignificant things.”

“Like *what*? ” she spat.

“Like *what*? ” he demanded back. “You want to know *like what*? ”

“What *things*? ” She moved from the desk, and took a step closer to him. “What *tiny things* have got you *oh-so-fucking-occupied*—”

“*Your eyes!*” He barked, stepping one single foot in her direction. “You have the most *beautiful fucking eyes*—”

Hermione’s jaw dropped, said eyes immediately darting up to find *his*. Breathtaking portraits of silver and ice grey. He—he thought *she* had beautiful eyes?!

Of all the fucking *nerve*—

“And what about *your eyes*?!?” she hissed back. “They’re *stunning!* I keep fucking *staring at them.* It is *infuriating.*”

Draco panted for a moment, taking a deep breath and hissing through his teeth.

“Your hair smells fucking incredible,” he growled.

Her jaw clenched. “Yours is so soft it’s like goddamn *silk.*”

“You are quite literally the best fuck I’ve ever had.”

“You make me come harder than I can even do to myself.”

He took another step forward.

“You make me feel like I’m not completely fucking worthless as a human being.”

She gasped. *How dare he?*

“Well, *you make me feel fucking beautiful,*” she hissed through her teeth.

He took one more step, right into her personal space. Right up in her face. Furiously. Angrily. He gritted his teeth.

But then—

His resolve faltered. Draco’s lips parted, his breath shuddering and panting as he stared, hopelessly at her.

“Every time you leave, it terrifies me that I’m never going to see you again.” He pressed his lips into a tight line. He swallowed, hard. “And you are the only witch I’ve ever met that has left me *so terrified* of her walking out of my life that I’m incapable of kissing her goodbye.”

Hermione stopped breathing.

That moment.

That moment, as she’d left. The butterflies. *The fucking butterflies.*

He’d—

He’d felt it too.

“You were going to kiss me,” she whispered, her breath catching before she could even finish her sentence. “When I was leaving. You—you *were* going to kiss me. I *knew it!* I was *sure* you were going to—”

Draco said nothing. He simply breathed furiously through his nose, as if fire was to follow.

“You were thinking about it?”

She froze.

His voice was quiet, but not at all hesitant. He'd figured her out in an instant. Whispering his disbelief into the space between them. Hermione tried to take a breath, but all of a sudden, she couldn't.

"I—

She couldn't finish her sentence. It was as if she'd completely forgotten *how*. Floundering. Scoffing. Searching for words. *Any fucking words* other than falling over herself to not *admit*

Draco's jaw dropped. Then, he groaned, running his hands through his hair.

"Gods fucking *damnit*, *Granger*, don't tell me *you*—"

"How on earth is that fair!? Why are *you* the *only one* who's allowed to have caught feel—"

"*Finish that sentence and I'm going to do something neither of us can take back.*"

Hermione's lips parted in a silent gasp, her eyes flicking rapidly over his face. A tremor ran through her chest; small, tight, and unstoppable as her heart kicked hard against her ribs.

He took one, last, step forward. He breathed quietly into the now non-existent distance between them. His chest almost to hers, their faces inches apart.

He was standing so close.

It was dark. She was a little cold.

He was standing *so fucking close to her*.

Maybe it was her. Maybe she was the one that was standing too close. It certainly felt that way, the more she breathed. Every breath seemed to draw him closer, the silence fuelling the magnetism. She was drawing closer, but so was he. Moving. Slowly.

It was only as she lifted her eyes to look at him that she realised they were both leaning into it.

The first thing she noticed was his eyes. Not quite hooded, but not wide. He was studying her. Softly. Assessingly. His cheeks, a little pink, maybe? She couldn't quite tell in the low light.

But his lips.

Those, she could see.

His lips were parted, but only for a breath. For two. Then, for his tongue, to wet them slightly. She couldn't take her eyes off them. Couldn't stop staring. Letting her tongue dart out to soften her own lips.

“*Hermione*,” he whispered. “*I...*”

Her gaze rose to his once more.

He swallowed hard.

She couldn’t be sure, but it looked like he was thinking about it. About *it*.

About the thing she already knew he was going to do unless she stepped away.

She knew he was going to. She could see it written in the parting of his lips. It would happen. In a second, or five or thirty, it would happen, and whether or not it did was entirely up to her. She just had to step away to stop it. One single step backwards, and he wouldn’t do it. That was all.

One step.

One.

But she didn’t move.

Hermione didn’t know *why* she didn’t move, but she didn’t. She stayed, silently, wordlessly, in place. Staring at him as his fingers touched hers. Brushed over her wrist, up the exposed length of her arm. Across her collarbone.

Under her chin. He guided her.

Up. Back.

Held her. Stilled her.

And then, with a touch as soft as a butterfly’s wings—

He kissed her.

It was chaste and innocent. She was shaking and nervous, but she didn’t push him away. She *thought* she did. Her hand rose on its own to his chest, and she was certain it was to push him away. But all her hand did was slide, higher and higher, until it rested on the back of his neck and pulled him against her.

His hands on her waist felt like melting into hot water. Felt like molding into a shape that only existed to lay flush with his. His other hand, too. Splaying across her jaw, then back into her hair, holding her to him like she mattered to him. He touched her everywhere, smoothing her out across her ribcage. Down her spine. Curling around her as he pulled her into his arms.

She had never felt so good in someone’s arms as she did in Malfoy’s—

She swallowed.

In Draco’s.

And there it was. His name again. But this time it wasn't on her tongue. Not on her lips, but in her mind. In her entire body. His first name. A name that until *this*—this arrangement—this—whatever the hell this was—she'd barely dared to say aloud. And his name tasted like *gold*. Like vintage books and cedarwood and white florals, but without a hint of bitterness. Without pretense or hesitation, it tasted like him.

And it tasted more beautiful than anything she'd tasted before.

This was different. He was different. He wasn't what she expected, or what she knew. She had no idea what she was doing. Or what he wanted. Or what this meant.

She only knew that if she stopped kissing him, she was absolutely certain she would die.

Hermione whimpered into his lips at the butterflies that broke free inside her, swimming through her bloodstream and into every furthest corner of her body. The lightness, the euphoria, the sudden flutter made her arch into his hands. He exhaled heavily, across her cheek, through his nose, a moan behind it as he parted her lips with his own. Her tongue found his first, though, and it fractured him. His grip tightened on her waist as she caught his tongue with her own.

It escalated. Not physically. He didn't tear at her clothes, nor she at his. But it escalated. In intensity. In desperation. In the overwhelming feeling purring through her blood that this was exactly where she wanted to be. That she deserved this, and that she wanted it; to be kissed like she was air and he was a man who was drowning. Her hands raking through his hair, his sinking into the flesh of her waist, her lower back, pulling her against him like he couldn't bear to be even a single atom's-width apart from her.

Like he wanted her for *more* than just—

Voices sounded outside the door. She recognised them. The Chief Healer chatted animatedly with someone as they ambled past, only metres away.

Hermione broke the kiss with a gasp.

She stepped back, slapping her hand over her mouth to keep herself quiet as she glanced up at Draco. He looked so perfect. So utterly and adorably dazed and confused as she stared at him, wide-eyed and horrified.

“What the fuck are you doing?” she hissed.

Draco froze. And, just like he had at breakfast all those weeks ago; he flinched.

It made her feel *awful*, but it didn't make her feel any less panicked. She knew he could see it on her face; the absolute, unbridled *horror* at what had just happened.

“What's wrong?” he whispered, his voice shaking.

“What's wrong?” she spluttered, fighting to find the words that might express the sudden dread surging in her. “I'm married, *Draco!* We're not in bed, we're not—*shit*—you just *kissed me*. *That's* what's wrong! It's *all* wrong!”

Draco seemed to freeze for a moment, his gaze falling to her lips as his name fell from them again. Like he still couldn't believe that she would say it.

But he was shaken. He pursed his lips as he looked at her.

"Fine. You don't want me to kiss you. That's fine."

She'd hurt his feelings. Fuck, *no*, that wasn't what she—

She wanted him to kiss her more than she wanted to stay standing. More than she wanted to breathe. More than anything she'd wanted in a long, long time, she wanted *that* more than *all of it*.

Fuck.

"Draco—" she whispered. "That's not what I—"

He stiffened, slightly, then took a step closer, and once again, she didn't step back. He didn't kiss her, he simply slid his hands to her upper arms.

Then he leaned in, and he whispered.

"I don't know what the fuck else to do."

His voice was shaking.

She exhaled her panic, but it didn't resolve it.

"Hermione."

His voice was tense. Trying to soothe her, but failing to even soothe himself. She was at a work event, sneaking off to a quiet room to kiss a man who wasn't her husband. What if Cormac found out? What if her *colleagues* found out? The donors, *Kingsley*—well, at least she wouldn't get in trouble for *hexing* Draco if she was *shagging* him—

She covered her face with her hands, but Draco's own closed around her wrists.

He pulled them from her face.

"Is the thought of having feelings for me *so fucking horrifying* to you?"

It immediately rubbed her the wrong way. How *dare* he assume—How *dare* he!? She knew she was just lashing out, but he thought *he* had no idea what to do?

God, she was completely *drowning*.

"Fuck off," she whispered, furiously. "That has *nothing* to do with why."

His jaw clenched. "Please talk to me."

“What if...” Hermione pressed her lips together. Took a deep breath, mustering her courage. “What if the curse is just tricking you into thinking that you have feelings for me?”

He looked down at her. “What?”

“There’s every possibility that the curse is acting on you. I’m not saying it *is*, but I’m just saying... it’s possible. And if it is, then all of this—”

“It’s not.”

“How do you know?”

“Because it’s not.”

She practically heard his teeth begin to grind.

“Even in the midst of my least lucid, I am fully conscious of *everything* I say to you,” he hissed. “It is an impulse. An urge that only spewing filthy words at you or convincing you to fuck me will satisfy. But you’ve seen it yourself. *I can control* it when I have to.”

Hermione’s stomach twisted with nerves. “Oh, yes, *of course*,” she said, sarcasm pooling in her voice as she swallowed hard. “That’s the very first thought I’ve had every single time I’ve seen you; watching you hold on to walls, struggling to stay upright. Or, the other times, when I’ve found you on the fucking *floor* with your shirt open and trousers half down. That’s the *first* thing I’ve thought, every time. *He is in control of this.*”

She was whispering it so forcefully it felt like she was screaming, but he didn’t flinch.

He met her gaze. “Is it excruciatingly painful to stop? *Yes*. But could I have stopped it if it was something that would’ve hurt you?” he hissed back. His eyes were deadly serious.

“*Absolutely*, I could’ve. Begging is just the *much* less painful option.”

Hermione tried to find it reassuring, but she couldn’t. “This doesn’t do anything to disprove my point.”

Draco looked down, his lips pressed together. She could practically *feel* his frustration.

“The curse doesn’t just activate without me knowing about it,” he said, the desperation evident in his tone. He brushed her hair off her face, letting his thumb linger against her temple. “I *know* when it’s triggering, and when it’s influencing me to do things. And I *swear* to you—”

He took a deep breath, as if purposefully calming himself as he met her gaze. The soft pad of his thumb stroked her skin softly. He lowered his voice, and he whispered.

“The feelings I have for you are entirely my own.”

The butterflies in Hermione’s stomach exploded like fireworks, jumping and fluttering and flapping about her insides, as they took control of her. She could barely breathe, could only

shiver, fighting the overwhelming urge to kiss him until she couldn't remember her own name.

She gaped for a moment, taking in mouthfuls of air as she scrambled for a *why*. A why. She needed a why. *Why* should she not just throw her arms around his neck and kiss him until she forgot how to breathe? *Why* should she not tell him that she felt it too? That almost every moment she was apart from him, she'd been thinking about him. That she'd been collapsing under the weight of wanting his lips on hers. She needed a reason. *Any* reason.

The voices reappeared in the hall, and her head whipped towards it. She hadn't locked the door—she hoped to God Draco had, because if she locked it *now*, they'd hear. If they entered, they'd find her.

Like this.

With *him*.

"We'll be seen," she blurted. "You—you probably have lipstick—"

"We're magical, Hermione, there are spells for that," he swallowed hard. "And yes, I will let you be in charge of lipstick removal. You can make sure you get every last smudge."

His eyes suddenly brightened, and he leaned in, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth.

"Though, I apologise in advance if Cormac notices the cedarwood."

Hermione's mouth fell open.

"I can't—we can't be—" she placed her hand against her cheek. "Not now. This is—for fuck's sake, Draco, this couldn't have waited?"

"When your husband's out there looking for you, feeling *ragefully* cucked and thoroughly pissed off, meaning that there's a good chance he'll demand you stop seeing me completely?" Draco scoffed heavily. "Just because you don't *love him* doesn't mean he couldn't make your life *hell* if he wanted to. And I could *not* risk him taking you away from me without at least making sure that you *knew*."

He reached for her, replacing her hand with his own. His fingers splayed softly against her skin, his thumb brushing across her lips as he whispered.

"You don't have to do anything about it. I'm not... I would never ask..." he said, quietly. "I just couldn't let someone drag you out of my life without you at least *knowing* that you've made a mark on it."

Hermione's breath caught once more. Draco stepped into her space, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her into them. God, he felt so good. The size and the firmness and his cologne and his arms, wrapping her up in a cocoon of pure *him* that she wanted to crawl in and live forever.

"So, no. This couldn't have waited."

Hermione let her forehead drop against his chest. Trying not to melt into his body like she was a part of him.

This was not supposed to happen. She wasn't— *he* wasn't— It made no sense for her to feel this way, but even in her most logical reasoning, she couldn't deny it. She knew she stared at him.

Every time she looked at him, she thought of that first day in the sunroom, with her back to the wall and his own to the danger. Carrying her through Bath.

The Draco she knew now was not the Draco she'd expected to know.

And she was past the point of being able to deny it.

The warmth in her body. The blushing. The goddamn *butterflies*. Hermione hadn't said a word of it out loud, but she didn't have to.

"*I don't hate it.* Just by the way," she whispered, curling herself into his arms. He exhaled heavily, running a hand over her hair as he held her against him.

"What?" he asked, lowly. "What don't you hate?"

She turned her lips toward his chest, breathing in the taste of his skin as she whispered it.

"*You called me baby.*" She shook as she said it. "And I fucking *liked it.*"

She couldn't say anything else.

He knew. And she knew. They both knew.

She just didn't know what it meant for *them*.

Fuck. Fuck.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

This fic now had a dedicated discussion channel on the Wizarding World WIPs discord!
<https://discord.gg/mQDPCWYnmJ>

Thank you all so much for your support and your encouragement on this fic!!! I'm getting to the point where I'm barely keeping up with comments though, and I'm still going to try my absolute darndest to keep up, but if I don't get back to you please know I have absolutely read every single one and I am squealing and kicking my feet alongside you.

Love you all!

Chapter 10: “I don’t want neutral territory. I want you in my bed.”

Chapter Summary

Some bad news.

Chapter Notes

There is a CW for Cormac’s actions in this chapter, some of which may be triggering for those who are sensitive to themes relating to DV. Please note Hermione is NOT harmed nor really all that intimidated by him, but he’s trying his best which could be uncomfortable for some readers. Details in the dropdown, I’ve also added two related tags and I apologise to those who might not have started this story if it had been there all along. Please take care of yourselves first.

► Domestic Violence CW/TW (Spoilers)

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

Hermione knew that the fallout from the evening was going to be bad. She knew, as soon as she stepped out of the tiny office to find that her husband had already gone home, that she was going home to World War III.

But even she couldn’t have predicted his rage.

The Floo’s smoke hadn’t even finished retracting back up the chimney before he was screaming in her face, his own an unattractive shade of puce, a vein bulging in his forehead.

“*What the fuck, Hermione?!*”

Cormac picked up a decorative urn, hurling it against the opposite wall. She watched it shatter, the ashes scattering across the floor.

Hermione frowned at the pieces of it. “That was *your* great-uncle, not mine.”

He ignored her.

“*What the fuck* was that whole scene at dinner?”

She took a deep breath, calming herself. “I could ask you the same thing?”

“*ME?!*” He screamed. “What the fuck have *I* done?”

She glared. “Oh, I don’t know, something about *owling Malfoy* and telling him he could do *whatever he wanted to me?*” She gritted her teeth.

“Well, if you’re going to act like a *fucking whore*, he may as treat you like one!”

Hermione’s body turned to stone.

“What did you just call me?”

“Tell me I’m wrong,” Cormac stepped closer. “Going over there pretending it’s just to get pregnant. Pretending you’re going over there for *us*. And all the while you’re getting railed and he’s making you *come!?*”

She stared at her husband. “I’m sorry, are you saying he’s *not allowed to?* Because I don’t recall that being *anywhere* in the contract.”

“I’m saying you’re enjoying this *way* too much.”

“Just because you’ve *never bothered* to make me come doesn’t mean *every* man has to do the bare fucking minimum, Cormac.”

Cormac stiffened. His back was like steel as he squared up before her.

“*Is he bigger than me?*”

“*Excuse—*” Hermione’s jaw dropped. “You cannot be *serious?*”

“It’s the only reason I can think of that you’d be so willing to spread your legs for a *Death Eater.*”

Hermione gasped. “Oh, that is *rich*, considering—”

He gritted his teeth. “Considering what? Because the fact you didn’t say *no* means it’s a *yes.*”

“Cormac, no one’s size has anything to do with *anything*. And not that it’s *any* of your business, but Malfoy has been an absolute gentleman about this entire thing, up until *tonight* where he only got angry when *you* started talking about me in front of him as if I wasn’t even *there!*”

“Oh, so, now you’re *defending him?*” He scoffed. “Gods, he must be fucking enormous.”

She shook her head at him, in complete disbelief, and turned her back on him. Stormed out of the room and up the stairs.

He followed her.

“He satisfy you, Hermione?” he spat. “He make you *scream his name?* Bet it echoes *beautifully* off the walls of the *Manor.*”

“Just fuck off, Cormac.”

“No, how about *you* fuck off,” he spat back. “This is *my* fucking house.”

“It’s my house, too.”

“Maybe it would be, *if we were actually married.*”

The words rang in Hermione’s ears as if he’d screamed them.

She froze, halfway up the stairs.

Her eyes whipped to his as she spun on her heel, and in no more than a millisecond, Cormac knew he had badly, *badly* fucked up. His eyes went wide, and he scoffed, immediately trying to laugh off what he’d said as some kind of sick fucking joke.

But no.

Hermione knew what she’d heard.

“*What did you just say?*” she hissed, reaching into her pocket.

Cormac swallowed. “Nothing. You misheard.”

In a heartbeat, her wand was whipped from her side, and pointed directly at his throat.

“*Misheard?*” she hissed. “Just like I might have *misheard* the counter curse to the one that *cuts your cock from your body?*”

And, with that, his demeanour changed.

Cormac was not a kind, empathetic man. He pretended to be, when it suited him, and over the years, he had gotten shockingly good at feigning it. But there were times—sporadic times—where the facade fell entirely.

Times like this one.

His expression tightened into a sneer.

“So, funny story, I never actually filed the paperwork for our marriage,” he glared at her. “At the time, my family decided it would be prudent to do some additional research into your past. To hold off, looking for evidence of magical heritage before we signed away our future to... someone like *you*. ”

Hermione’s entire body went stiff. Cold.

Her wand hand shook as she pointed it at his throat.

“*A Mudblood,* ” she prompted.

“I don’t *use* that word, Hermione.” His eyebrow cocked. “But it’s lucky, regardless, that they did. Because look what a *disloyal fucking bitch* you turned out to be.”

She didn’t let the anger show in her face, but she couldn’t help but tighten her grip on her wand.

“So you’re telling me, that after all this time, you and I aren’t legally married?”

Cormac’s lip curled in a sneer.

“*Nope.*”

Hermione’s blood pressure spiked; part with fear and part with rage, and she couldn’t stop herself. She matched his expression, hatred painted on her face.

She leaned in, bringing her face level with his; and she hissed it.

“*Thank. God.*”

Hermione shoved her wand back into her dress, storming into her dressing room and slamming the door behind her. Her pyjamas were snatched instantly into her hand, she wrenched the zip of her dress down.

This was too much to think about. Her hands were shaking. Not married. *Not married*. The last five years had been—she couldn’t even string two thoughts together. She’d barely pulled on her t-shirt when the door rattled behind her.

“Open the door,” he hissed through it.

“*Fuck you,*” she hissed back.

An *Alohomora* blasted it open. He stormed in, holding the door open so she couldn’t slam it shut. His eyes fell to the pyjamas she’d pulled over herself, and his face spread into something halfway between amusement and sheer *surprise*.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he said, a smirk pasting over his face. “Are you getting ready for bed? You’re *staying here?*” Cormac scoffed, disbelievingly. “Not going to *run off* to your boyfriend’s giant fucking cock?”

“And let you change all the wards so that I can’t get back in and retrieve my things?
Unlikely.”

Cormac stopped talking. He narrowed his eyes at her. But it wasn’t in suspicion.

It was because he was *laughing*.

The sound of it sent a chill up her spine; maniacal, mocking laughter sending a flush of ice through every inch of her body, but she hid it, fixing her t-shirt as she eyed him carefully.

“You think I’m going to change the wards?” he shook his head, laughing in absolute disbelief as he placed his hands on his hips. “You seriously don’t get it, do you?”

She turned to face him, her brain racing a million miles a minute, but she was so fucking blinded by her fury that she couldn’t think straight.

He took a step closer. Hermione backed away instinctively, but it didn’t deter him. He simply stepped one further inside her dressing room.

“I fucking *own* you, witch,” he glared at her.

A spark of panic flinted in her blood, and she swallowed hard.

“We’re not married,” she said, shakily. “So actually, you don’t own *shit*.”

“And just what are you planning on telling everyone? That we *broke up*?” Cormac said. The corners of his mouth twitched into a cruel smirk. “*Career-obsessed witch suffers humiliating divorce?*”

She glared at him. “It wouldn’t *be* a divorce. I’d just tell everyone you lied to me—”

“That’s not a very fun story. Who cares about what I do?” he chuckled. “But do you know what *is* a fun story?”

Hermione’s brow furrowed as Cormac took another step forward.

“‘*Hermione Granger fakes pureblood marriage for political gain,*’” he said. “‘*Society taken in by manipulative Muggleborn.*’”

She swallowed, hard. “No one would ever believe that.”

“You don’t think? Lots of the old guard pureblood wizards would *love* a future that doesn’t involve you taking away their status. So how about the subtitle? ‘*Golden Girl sneaks around with Death Eater scum while holding the respected McLaggen family hostage over the promise of an heir.*’”

Hermione hid the moment of panic on Draco’s behalf that shot through her chest. *Jesus, fuck*, that was the last thing he needed. She forced herself to scoff.

“No one respects you, Cormac. You’re a *joke* in the Ministry.”

One last, large step forward, caging her against the wall. “And yet, we’re still taken more seriously than *you*.”

Her stomach wrenched, looking up at him, the sudden reality making her heart pound, panicked, in her chest.

He wasn’t wrong.

The Ministry, despite its shiny red apple wax surface of progressiveness in allowing Muggleborns to hold positions of power, was still rotten to its very core. The only Muggleborns who could hold such positions were married into pureblood or high-status halfblood families, though that truth would never be spoken aloud. It all came down to the Wizengamot seats. So long as she were connected to one, it only *partially* mattered what her blood status was. And God only knew, she couldn't fucking access one by herself.

Without Cormac, she would be nothing. She knew that.

And *he* knew that.

If she wanted to have any chance of continuing the work she'd been doing with St Mungos, she had very little choice in what to do next. She hated this. She hated it so much. But she sank her teeth into her lower lip, and took a deep breath.

"You want something from me," she said.

It wasn't a question.

Cormac's lip curled into a smirk. Hermione pursed her lips as she felt his breath scald as it neared her.

"*I want my fucking heir.*"

Hermione's mouth fell open. "You.... even though—"

"*Even though.* You're still *you*, after all. And I must say, even despite not being *married* to you, I have very much enjoyed the perks of being 'married' to someone so socially *beloved*. So if you want to hang on to your lovely little job, and your reputation, and all those *adorable* projects you do at the hospital, I expect you to fall pregnant by the end of the year. You have four months left."

"*Or what?*"

"*Or;*" he sneered. "I will make that special trip over to the Daily Prophet, and let them know exactly what you and Malfoy have been up to."

She frowned at him, shaking her head. "It would be your word against mine, Cormac."

"Oh, would it?" he said, frowning. "Hmmm. You're right."

He tapped his wand against his own lips. Then he clicked his tongue, his eyes lightening as if he'd sarcastically just thought of something.

"Gods, if *only* there was evidence of him telling you how badly he wanted you. Asking you what you were wearing. Inviting you over for entire weekends at a time, all neatly spelled out and documented in dozens and dozens of letters, with both of your names on them, that you *carelessly* left lying around."

He grinned at her. "Not to mention the *rather explicit* contract between the two of you, agreeing to engage in sexual intercourse on a regular basis until such a time as you fall pregnant, signed *in blood* by both of you."

Hermione's blood went cold in her veins. She couldn't hide her reaction to it. The letters. The fucking *contract*. She—he couldn't—

"Cormac, you *told* me to go over there. *You wrote the contract!*"

Cormac grinned. "And yet, my name isn't on it."

And suddenly, her blood wasn't cold any more. No. The heat of fury rushed through her.

"You set me up," she hissed. "This entire fucking marriage has been... what... *leverage?*"

He chuckled quietly, placing his hand against the wall beside her head and leaning in.

"You know as well as I do that my family's Wizengamot seat was handed to us because of an obscure blood connection," he sneered. "What exactly do you think will happen to the Malfoy fortune when Malfoy dies? His seat? *The Manor*? Because *I* can tell you. And the pencil-pusher wizards working at Gringott's who can sign over uninherited assets to the first blood relatives who come forward will *also* be able to tell you."

His lip curled into a smirk.

"Why do you think I spend so much time playing Quidditch with them? Loose lips sink ships, Hermione, or, perhaps, the careful planner gets the Manor. And his fortune. And his seat. Two seats on the Wizengamot for *one family*? Awful lot of *power*, isn't it?"

Hermione's stomach twisted in disgust, but Cormac kept going.

"You know, my family expected that you might try to *rebel* at some point. Some ridiculous idea about putting children off '*for the sake of your career*' or whatever. Nanny did always tell me you were too headstrong for any good to come of you. She warned me you'd be more trouble than you were worth."

He pouted condescendingly at her.

"But I just *had to have you*," he chuckled, waving a finger at her. "I knew I deserved the *best*. And what better trophy could I deserve than the fucking *Gryffindor princess*?" He let out another sickeningly condescending chuckle. Then he shrugged. "I never did know what was good for me."

He smirked, eyes sparkling at her again.

"So, yes, I suppose you could call it leverage. But I just prefer to say that I *created failsafes*."

Her jaw hung wide as her blood simmered in every crevice of her body.

“And, what?” she whispered. “If I don’t give you a child, you’re going to tell everyone that I lied about being married, and that I had an affair?”

He smiled coldly. “Hermione, that’s *blackmail*. I’d never do that.”

She could do nothing but stare at him.

He exhaled heavily, dropping his head for a moment, as if he couldn’t believe he had to explain it to her.

“I don’t want to be at war with you, Hermione. We’ve been doing perfectly well up until now. You’ve been a lovely little piece of arm candy, for the most part, and, if you continue to be a good girl, you’ll end up making the McLaggens one of the richest and most powerful families in Wizarding Britain. So, I think it’s reasonable for us to agree that, if you follow through on your end of the deal, I’ll file the paperwork with the records office. I’ve got a few favours due for collection from Petersen anyway. I’m sure he won’t mind his pen slipping on the dates. We both get what we want, and no one will be any the wiser.”

Hermione stared at him. She took a deep breath.

And she thought for a moment.

It didn’t take her long. Just a moment. Literally one single moment of thinking before she realised.

Hermione lifted her eyes, and furrowed her brow at him.

“How do you know Draco won’t just show everyone the letters that *you sent him*?”

Cormac froze. “What?”

She shot him an expectant look. “The letters? You owled him, giving him my ovulation calendar. Telling him he could do *whatever he liked* to me until he got me pregnant. *Begging* him to agree and assuring him that *my hesitation* was purely *hormonal*? ” She raised an eyebrow. “Did you *completely forget* about that? Or did you just think that he would hate me *so much* that he would help you try and destroy me?”

He went pale.

“I... uh...”

“Shocking as it may be to you, Cormac, Draco does *not* hate me. In fact, I’m absolutely certain that he’ll be *glad* to share as many letters revealing you *enthusiastically begging him to fuck your wife* as I want.”

Cormac’s mouth fell open, his eyes flashing with panic.

“Well, hang on a minute—”

“Did you not even *consider* that?” she stared at him, before placing a hand on her hip. “God, I’m almost *disappointed* in you.”

He stared at her, his mouth still hanging open as he tried at a snail’s pace to catch up with her.

“If you’re going to try and blackmail me, Cormac, don’t *sign damning contradictory evidence* with your *own goddamn name*.”

He scoffed loudly, placing his hands on his hips as he tried to think of something. Spluttering. *Scrambling* over his words.

“Well, I’m *still* not submitting the paperwork until you give me a child.”

Hermione just shook her head at him. “Honestly? Cormac? At this point, I don’t fucking care *what* you do. You can start by jumping off the east roof without a broomstick for all I care.”

He scoffed again, then pursed his lips as he tried to think of something, but she just rolled her eyes. She pushed past him. Slammed the door behind her.

It was almost as loud as the string of frustrated curses Cormac let out from the other side of it.

Hermione curled into a ball.

The guest room was cooler than she expected. Summer was about to finish. The weather was starting to turn for the year, and the nights were beginning to get colder. She cast a warming charm over the bedcovers, but even when heated, they didn’t feel warm enough.

A warm blanket couldn’t fix the kind of cold she felt.

She wasn’t in love with Cormac. She’d never been under any illusion that she was. But a part of her had thought—

A part of her had thought they were *friends*, at the very least.

You couldn’t stay married to someone for five years without at least somewhat getting along. And they had, until recently. They’d peacefully co-existed. They’d laughed about things, he was polite to her friends, however self-serving that may have been, and they didn’t entirely not tolerate him. For the most part, he’d been good to her. Occasionally a sycophantic, self-obsessed prat, but it wasn’t as though she didn’t know to expect *that* when she married him.

She’d never expected that he’d do something to hurt her like this, though.

It was going to mean something, she knew it would. She would have to wrap her head around it, but she couldn’t focus on it through the *hurt*. It made her entire body feel sore, from her

legs to her chest to her abdomen. She hugged her arms around her stomach. It felt good. It soothed an ache that she'd only just realised was tight in her gut. Throbbing, stretching, aching pain.

It was a familiar pain. She knew it well, after years of similar pain every month. The ache, the swell, the full-body discomfort. If she were to compare it to something, it almost felt like

No.

No, no, no, no, no.

Hermione inhaled sharply.

She touched her hand to her wand, whispering *Lumos* as she sat bolt-upright in bed.

She only had to slip her hand into her pyjama bottoms to know why her body felt awful. Blood. Across her fingertips. She closed her eyes, counting the days... she was a little early. Meaning her dates had been off.

Meaning it hadn't worked. She'd failed.

Again.

Hermione dragged her knees to her chest, resting her forehead on them as she let her breath leave her, but it was ragged.

She wasn't going to cry over this.

People struggled to fall pregnant all the time. The way it was whispered to teenagers, as if it was easy and would happen right away if one was even the tiniest bit careless, was wrong. Sometimes it was hard. Sometimes it took time. Sometimes it took *years*. It made complete, total, and utter sense that she wasn't pregnant again. She was an adult, and she wasn't going to cry over something that made perfect, logical sense.

This. Happened. Sometimes.

She forced herself to take deep breaths. In, out. In, out. Deep breaths as she removed herself from the bed and made her way down the hall to the bathroom. In, out, in, out. Deep breaths. She wasn't going to—

She could feel them prickling the back of her eyes, but she forced another deep breath.

No. No. She would *not*— *No!*

She cleaned herself up. Had a shower. Cast the charms, again. Her voice shook with every whispered one. Breath shuddering.

No crying.

No.

She took a step out of the bathroom.

She looked left, down the hall toward the bedrooms. She tried to force herself to walk down it. Back toward the large, empty bed that gave her a coldness which blankets wouldn't warm.

She started walking. But it wasn't down the hall.

Hermione's feet were taking her downstairs. Quietly, and without a thought. Without anything but the pull in her body that was urging her in that direction. Her hand trembled as she took a handful of Floo powder. Her voice shook harder as she announced where she was going.

Then she tumbled through the Floo—

And stepped onto a seven-hundred year old rug.

It was soft, and clean. Familiar. Warm. The pattern was so beautiful, she almost wanted to drop to her knees and run her fingers through its fibres. She stared down at it, then squeezed her eyes shut as tightly as she could. Trying to stop herself from giving in to the heat prickling behind her eyes. But here, where she knew he was close?

It made no difference.

Burning hot tears forced themselves free; down her cheeks, too fast for her to even try to wipe away. There, on the seven-hundred-year-old rug, she stood in the dark; her arms wrapped tightly around herself as she sobbed into the nighttime.

She was only standing there a minute. One, single minute, before she heard him striding, quickly, down the long corridor.

He only had to place a hand on her waist for her to melt into his body.

Draco pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her tighter than she ever could've herself. She curled into his chest, sobbing into his nightshirt as he cupped the back of her head.

"What happened?" he asked, quietly. *"Did he hurt you?"*

She shook her head. He breathed a sigh of relief, but he didn't let go. In fact, his grip only tightened.

"Hermione, I need you to tell me what happened. Because if he laid a single fucking finger on you—"

She shook her head again. And Draco exhaled heavily.

"Will you tell me what he did?"

No. No. She didn't want to. Not now. She knew she'd barely be able to even get the words out. She didn't want to talk. She didn't want to think about Cormac.

She just wanted to be with *him*.

"M'not pregnant," she sobbed. "*I'm so sorry.*"

Draco stiffened momentarily. He tried not to, but she felt it; the disappointment flooding his body as he tried to steady his breath. She didn't know whether it was the curse, or him that was truly disappointed, but she could *feel it*— that same, horrifying, awful disappointment with her. With her as a woman.

She was failing. She was failing *him*.

But, as she spiralled, she felt a small, grounding kiss press to her temple.

"It's not your fault, baby," he whispered. Another kiss to her temple. One to her hair. "And I don't want you thinking that it is."

His lips were *so warm*. So— so reassuring.

"It is." She despised the coldness of his shirt, wet at the collar from where she'd cried into it. "It *has* to be me—"

He held her tighter. Held her to him.

"Hermione, these things take time. Even *I* know that, and you're a qualified healer. So *I know* that you know that too."

Time. It had taken *so much* time. *Years*, at this point. She sniffled.

"But Cormac and I have been trying for—"

"*I'm not Cormac,*" he said, his hand stroking the back of her neck. "And *we've* only been trying for two months. Alright?"

She sniffled again. He was right. She nodded.

He smoothed his hand over her hair. Down the back of her neck. Across her shoulders as he guided her into his chest.

"Is our arrangement still on?"

"Yes," she squeaked out. "I think— yes. I think so."

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"I don't care how long this takes, Hermione." He tilted her chin up to look at him, wiping a tear from under her eye with the pad of his thumb. "In fact, the longer it takes... the longer I get to keep you, so..."

He gave her a small smile. She forced herself to give him one back.

“Stay with me tonight?” he whispered.

She nodded one more time. He nodded back.

Then he leaned in and kissed her.

It was soft. Gentle. Reassuring. Quick, but not at all rushed. Just to break her circuit. To calm her down enough to be able to listen.

“Come with me,” he said.

Then he took her hand, and led her down the hall.

It wasn’t long before they arrived at the door to her normal room. It was familiar. She’d been in there multiple times now. Hermione reached for the doorknob.

But he shook his head.

“Not staying in there tonight.” Draco guided her gently back. “You said you’d stay with *me*.”

Her stomach’s butterflies began to rouse. She sniffled again.

“What happened to neutral territory?”

“I don’t want neutral territory. I want you in my bed.” He squeezed her hand tighter. “And from now on, when you’re here, that’s where we’ll be.”

It made her pause for a moment.

The thought should’ve terrified her. Should’ve made her draw into herself and feel trapped. Suffocated. But it didn’t. Now, it just felt like a relief.

God, she hadn’t realised how badly she wanted to be somewhere that was *his*.

Draco led her down a long corridor. A long, darkening corridor that seemed to widen with every step. At the end, she saw it, an enormous set of dark double doors; black walnut or plum mahogany. Heavy and foreboding. But as he approached, they swung open as if they were made of something lighter than air. The room itself was dark as well. Low light and intimidating features. From the outside, it almost frightened her. But as she stepped through the doorway, she was hit with—

With *him*.

The room. It smelled like him. Like old books and cedarwood and white florals that made her think of summer. Photographs along the side table. A child-sized broom was mounted on the wall. A bottle of cologne on the end of the dresser. His. The one he wore, every single day.

She almost let out a sob at the *relief*. At the sudden, overwhelming sense of comfort and safety and protection that took hold of her, purely by being in this room.

In *his* room. With *him*.

“Come on,” he said, pulling her toward the bed.

And if she’d thought entering his room was comforting, then slipping into Draco’s bed felt...

She didn’t have a word for it.

It didn’t feel wrong, or right necessarily. Didn’t feel odd, nor did it feel natural, but it did feel like something was changing. As she slid in beside him, he pulled her into his arms. Guided her head to lay on his chest, surrounded by sheets that smelled like him. In an instant, it seemed like everything was... lighter. Or at least, like it wasn’t so goddamn fucking heavy.

She let her hand rest on the centre of his chest. He covered it with his own.

The butterflies in her stomach went so haywire she could barely control them. Flowing through her like liquid happiness as he tightened his hold on her body.

Was this what being held was supposed to feel like?

She exhaled heavily across his chest, closing her eyes as her cheek warmed against his skin. She could hear his heartbeat; a slow, steady thrum that made her own slow to match it. She wanted to fall asleep on it.

But the thought of lying with him had her mind practically vibrating in place.

Hermione tilted her head to look up at him, but Draco’s eyes were closed. His head was laid gently back against the pillow, taking long, deep breaths.

“Fuck, this feels good,” he whispered.

She let out a soft laugh. “What does?”

“You. In my arms. In my *bed*.” He curled his arm around her. “Thank you, by the way,” he whispered.

She furrowed her brow. “What for?”

“For coming here.”

Hermione stiffened, but he didn’t let her. He just pulled her a little closer, angling his head down nearer to hers. She let her fingers stroke over his chest.

“I didn’t even think about it,” she whispered. “I just...”

Hermione didn’t say anything else. She knew she didn’t have to.

She’d needed to be held.

And there was only one person she wanted to be held by.

“Good. Because John would’ve been *very* pissed off if you’d passed out in his pub again.”

Hermione cringed. Draco let out a soft laugh as he kissed the top of her head.

“Rude,” she whispered.

“Accurate.”

“But also *rude*.”

He turned onto his side, pulling her close and snickering into the side of her head. But the movement stretched her out a little.

She winced at the mild ache of pain.

He noticed, furrowing his brow in concern, before realisation sparked in his eyes. His touch fell a little more gently.

“Is there anything I can do?” he asked, looking down at her.

Normally, she would’ve just said no. She hated to be a bother, or an inconvenience. But she could tell he was serious.

She took his hand. His large, heavy hand, and she placed it over her abdomen.

“There,” she said, quietly. “That’s nice.”

Its weight was comforting. The pressure, and the gentle touch. It was even a little warm.

Then, it was a *lot* warm.

He was heating it. Wandlessly. Resting over her, soothing her in a way she could only let out a soft moan beneath. Hermione glanced sideways at him, and found him eyeing her expectantly, waiting for her reaction.

She narrowed her eyes. “Show off,” she smiled.

“Just trying to impress you.”

She glared up at him.

“Well, it’s working,” she whispered. “You’re very clever, and also devilishly handsome, and I’m *very* impressed by your general competence at most everything. Is that what you wanted?”

He grinned with his eyes closed. “Absolutely *verbatim*.”

She couldn’t help but smile at him. “It feels wonderful, Draco, thank you.”

He pressed his lips gently to her cheekbone. And then, softly, skimmed across her lips.

She couldn't remember the last time she'd been taken care of like this. The last time someone had cared, this much, about her comfort. He was being so lovely. So gentle and patient with her that she couldn't help it. She deepened the kiss. Raised her hand to cup the back of his neck.

Asking wordlessly.

More.

Draco hesitated, but as her fingernails caressed the base of his skull, he sighed into her lips.

He pulled her in under his body. Slipped his hands under her shirt, and over her breasts. Again, he was gentle. Not squeezing too hard. Stroked his thumb over the soft skin and held her. Massaged, gently.

Soothed her. And there was nothing she wanted more in the world than his comfort.

He parted her lips with his tongue, curling over hers, and she melted into it. Into the feel of his lips, of his warm, warm hands. Of his body slotting closer into hers.

She angled her body toward his, and noticed rather quickly.

He was...

She smiled into the kiss.

He was *hard*.

Draco sighed heavily across her lips, a laugh behind the breath.

"Sorry," he chuckled, shyly. "Can't help it."

"Maybe it's confused by where in the month we are."

A dark breath left his lips. "Or maybe I just want you all the goddamn time."

He dragged her back into the kiss.

It was a little more forceful than normal, and she moaned into his lips. His cock twitched against her leg at the sound, and she couldn't help but smile again.

God, she loved that she did this to him.

The idea of his body coming to life against his will at nothing more than her sheer *proximity* sent a rush of her own arousal rapidly southward.

"Well..." she said quietly. "You *did* put *one* idea in my head at dinner..."

He grinned into her cheek.

“Absolutely fucking not,” he growled.

She gave him a pleading, and very intentionally innocent expression.

His eyes rolled back in his head.

“Don’t do that,” he groaned. “Don’t look at me like you’re going to start begging to have my cock in your mouth. That is *so* not fair.”

She jutted out her bottom lip, and he shook his head as he ran his thumb across it.

“No,” he said. “Maybe someday, but not now.”

A soft silence fell between them, his thumb trailing the outline of her lips as he followed it with his gaze. His tongue gently wet his own lips.

He leaned in, pressing them to her neck.

She let out a soft, involuntary sigh as her body reacted as it always did, with a rush of pleasure under his touch. He dragged his kiss to her jaw. Over the line of it. To her ear.

His voice was low and heavy as he whispered.

“I wouldn’t say no to being inside you, though.”

Hermione stiffened.

A flush of embarrassment filled her cheeks, and she knew he could feel her trying to turn her head away from him. His hand slipped to her cheek. He didn’t let her turn away.

“I... I can’t...” she whispered. “I’m on my... remember?”

Draco paused for a moment, his lips hovering beside her jaw.

Silence fell between them. A long, extended silence that she could taste in the air. His breath warmed her skin as he exhaled into her pulse point.

“And?”

He pressed his lips to her neck again. Hermione’s body seemed to come to life all at once. She was aroused, she didn’t have to check to know that much. The ache inside her didn’t care what time of the month of it was. It wanted him anyway. She wanted him.

And he very clearly wanted her back.

“I might not... you know. Because of the curse, but...” His thumb brushed across her cheek, kissing over her cheekbone. “Fuck, it’s already been too long. I just miss feeling you so close to—”

He paused himself, his eyes flicking to her lips.

“I miss *you*.”

Hermione did a terrible job of hiding the butterflies that erupted in her stomach.

His eyebrow twitched with interest. “Also, I’ve heard it can actually somewhat *help* with the pain. So... if you want to, I am definitely on board.”

She couldn’t help but hesitate.

She wanted to. *God*, she couldn’t think of anything she wanted more than to be close to him right now. She wasn’t sure what having him inside her would feel like, but something deep in her psyche told her it would feel *wonderful*. That it would soothe her aching muscles in a way that nothing else possibly could.

But still, she hesitated.

Something that, deep inside her, she felt like she wasn’t supposed to want. Like she wasn’t supposed to want his comfort while she was in pain, but she did. She wanted him more than ever. Wanted him to make it feel better. Wanted to *let* him make it better.

She *needed* him to make it better.

It wasn’t even the blood that scared her so much. This just felt... this felt different. For all intents and purposes, this was *not part of the deal*. Sex... like *this*... wasn’t part of the contract. If she wanted this, if she asked for this— she would be letting Draco see something that she’d never shown anyone else. The most private thing she could think of. The most *intimate* thing she could think of. But he *wanted* that with her. He wanted—

He missed her.

And the idea of showing him exactly how much she’d missed *him* turned her on more than anything he’d ever done to her before.

So she nodded.

And she didn’t have to do a thing.

Draco slid his thigh between hers. Lifted her hips, guiding her to rock against him while he pressed his lips to her neck. Slow, gentle ripples of his tongue. His lips. His teeth. It was all she needed to begin squirming. He knew exactly how to turn her on. Without laying a goddamn finger on her, he had her disintegrating in his arms.

He also knew that too much, too soon would spook her. He just *knew* that.

His shirt went first. She ran her hands across his skin, a lovely distraction as he guided her pyjama bottoms down. He was so gentle with her as he slipped them from her body.

Her underwear were next. She tensed as he slid them down, annoyed with herself for feeling embarrassed, but instead of letting her linger on how exposed she felt, he just kissed her.

Over and over. Her lips, her neck, her breasts— gentle, exalting inhales of her skin as he pulled her body closer to his.

He wasn't trying to tease her; that she knew, but even so, she was on the edge of her lucidity. His lips met hers again, and the flood of emotion made her throat close.

She couldn't help but run her fingers through his hair.

"*Draco*," she whispered. "*Please*."

He let his forehead meet hers as he reached down for his own pyjamas. He pushed them from his hips. Kissed her as he positioned himself over the top of her and guided them completely off.

They were nude. Both of them were nude. But she'd never felt so naked.

He slid his hand up her inner thigh, and instead of parting for him, her legs twitched closed. He didn't hold her down, or force them apart. This time, he just stilled. His eyes were soft as grey velvet as he caught her gaze, holding it for a moment. He kissed the corner of her mouth.

"I'm not afraid of it," he said, quietly, his palm warm on her thigh. "I just want to make you feel good."

He stroked his thumb over her skin.

"I need you to trust me, though. Can you do that for me?"

Her breath sobbed out of her. How did he do that? How did he always know *exactly what to say to her?*

Her legs parted hesitantly around him, and he moved in between them, but Hermione was shaking. Shivering, until the warmth of his body began to engulf hers. Until the scent of his cologne was all she could smell. Until his hair dangled from his forehead, brushing over her own. He kissed her, slowly. Softly, as he swept his tip over her. Their reactions were mirrored. Gasps, both. She didn't expect to be so sensitive. His eyes rolled back.

But breathing heavily, she nodded.

"I trust you."

He pushed into her. Gently. More gently than he ever had, but still she winced.

It wasn't painful. Just... tense. *Tight*.

"Am I hurting you?" he asked.

"No," she whispered back. "It's just... sore."

Hermione watched the flicker of concern in his eyes, but she wouldn't let him feel like it was his fault. She was always sore at this time. She wanted this anyway. She ran her thumb over his lips, and he melted into her palm.

"Please," she whispered.

He kissed her again. Pushed a little further in. It *was* sore. Achy. Stiff. His lips danced over her cheekbone; tiny pecks and whispers, and she stretched up to meet it. He lingered for a moment. Let her adjust to him.

"As slow as you want," he whispered, brushing her hair from her face. "I'm all yours."

Hermione opened her eyes. Slowly, but purposefully, looking up at him with all the unsurety in the world.

He was serious.

She let her hands slip onto his hips, where she guided him deeper. Pulled him into her, slower than ever. She couldn't take all of him to start, so she guided him back out. Took a breath. Pressed her lips to his, and guided him back in.

He was so gentle, as he began slowly rocking in and out of her.

It was tight, to start with. Tight and achy, but it didn't hurt. It was...

It was *good*.

The pressure made her tense, but the longer she held him inside her, the more it eased. Like a knot in her shoulder, it melted under his touch. Her body smoothed and softened. Soothing her from the inside out. She let out a soft moan, letting herself relax. She knew he wasn't going to take advantage of her, not when she was like this.

She... Hermione swallowed, hard. She did.

She actually trusted him.

Her eyes rose to his, nodding softly as she began moving her hips underneath him. Taking more of him. Easing more of him into her.

As she finally took him all, Draco's eyes rolled back.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

He exhaled heavily. Nodded. He panted as he looked down at her.

"*Tight*," he chuckled.

She blushed, laughing softly as she dropped her gaze again. "Sorry."

He caught her chin, tilting her to look at him.

“Don’t apologise,” he whispered.

Hermione melted into him.

She’d never felt anything like this. The entire rest of the world seemed to fade into nothing in comparison to how it felt to be here with him. So safe and secure and so whole with him inside her. Being in his arms felt like she belonged there. Feeling his lips on her skin felt like it had been specifically designed. Like the entire universe had collapsed into a single entity and was lingering; floating, in the space between their bodies.

“Is it okay?” he whispered.

Hermione nodded, and he kissed her softly.

“Tell me if it isn’t. We can stop whenever you want,” he whispered. “As badly as I want to, I don’t think I’m going to come. I can’t get you pregnant.”

She furrowed her brow.

God, she wished he could.

Beautiful, gorgeous little babies. Blonde hair and silver eyes. Intelligent and kind and caring and wonderful. She wanted him to get her pregnant more than anything.

Not for anyone else, but for *them*. For *her*.

She wanted it. That was all they needed. She dragged her teeth along her lower lip. Smirked.

Hermione lifted her hand to his face. Her palm against his skin. He slowed.

“You can,” she smiled.

He furrowed his brow, and she nodded.

“It’s possible. Very unlikely, but you can get me pregnant at *any* time during a cycle. There are studies—”

“*What?*”

“I’m a qualified Healer, Draco. Do you not trust *me*? ”

Draco stared at her for a moment.

But then he kissed her. Hard and fast and more passionately than their current pace allowed.

“Do you want it?” he gasped. “Do you want me to get you pregnant?”

She looked up at him, trying somehow to convey it with her expression, but it wasn’t enough. She lifted her lips to his.

“What are you going to do?” she whispered, a sly smile at the corner of her mouth. “Make me beg?”

His breath caught.

He grinned at her.

They found their rhythm quickly, but the rhythm itself was slow. Gentle, and careful and slow, to the harmonisation of their breaths. He felt impossibly hard, but he’d never touched her more softly. Like she was important. Like it was important that he didn’t hurt her. She’d never trusted anyone so fully as she trusted him not to do that.

Draco would never hurt her.

Hermione smiled into the side of his face as she let her legs fall a little wider, rocking up to meet his thrusts, and he let out a choked sound into her ear. He wanted this. He *loved this*. It sent a quake through her entire body.

Maybe it was the relief from pain, maybe it was the intimate nature of what they were doing. It could have been the knowledge that this was *new*—this was *different*—maybe it was his gentleness, or the taste of his lips on hers. But she was building. Rising, faster and faster. In comparison, the slowness of his motion was torture. Beautiful torture, that made her arch and moan into his hands. She wanted him to go faster, but at the same time, she knew she didn’t. She wanted him just like this, his body moving slowly over hers, whispering praises into her skin.

“You’re so perfect.” He kissed her neck. Gnashed his teeth through moans at her jaw. “Gods, I’m so fucking lucky.”

Her hands trailed up over his biceps, holding onto him as her breathing began to fall heavier. She raked her fingers up the back of his neck, into his hair, her hands splaying through it as she held his lips to hers.

“*Draco*—” she whispered. She begged.

“I’m here, baby. You gonna come for me?”

She nodded.

“*That’s my girl. That’s my girl. Come on—*”

She could only whimper her approval as he took her gently over the edge.

Hermione came as if she was made of the very earth. Building and growing and folding over from the inside out, and bursting across a million planes and directions as her climax tightened in her body. It was *intense*, the way she claimed him inside her; with her fingertips pressed to his skin, holding him in every way that she could as she clung to him. She could barely hold on to it, barely keep track of the release of ecstasy as he gasped air for the both of them. But he didn’t let go, in fact, the opposite, a hand cradling her ribcage to reassure her that he had her. That she was safe.

That he wasn't letting go. So that she *could*.

She could only hear his gasps as she tightened around him, feel his hands, taste his skin and his sweat; could hear nothing except the perfect cadence of his groan as her walls released him from what must've been a suffocating squeeze.

"*Fuck,*" he whispered. "Oh, baby, *fuck. So fucking good.*"

She pressed her forehead to his, desperately gasping for air as a world-ending pleasure spread through her body.

It was a comedown unlike any other; soothing every single muscle in her body as they all seemed to relax at once. She'd never felt something like it before, the utter *perfection* and *wholeness* and *release* of an agony she hadn't even realised she had.

She was soft. She was remade.

But Draco was shaking.

Hermione opened her eyes, looking up at him, and found his brows knitted. Eyes shut. Face turned upward and tight toward the headboard.

"Draco?" she whispered. "What's wrong?"

His lips pursed tightly.

"*Close.*"

The word sent a thrill through every inch of her body, as it always did to know that he was right there with her. To know that she felt even one-half as good to him as he did to her. That she brought him that same pleasure; that same release—she loved it. She *wanted it*. She inhaled sharply, and instantly, began moving beneath him.

He grabbed her hip to still her, shaking his head. "*Don't wanna hurt you.*"

"It doesn't hurt," she whispered, raking her nails through his hair. "Draco, listen to me. It doesn't hurt."

She pulled his lips to hers, moaning into him.

"*I've never felt so fucking perfect.*"

His breath shuddered over her lips. He kissed her.

And he kept going.

It didn't take long. Half a minute or so until his hips pushed flush against hers, coming deeply, yet somehow still so *gently* inside her. It drew a moan from her nonetheless; a satisfied, blissful sound that made his grip tighten on her body. His breath caught and shuddered in her ear, the sound of his choked groan sending shivers down her spine. The

involuntary buck of his hips against hers. Another few seconds, and he was letting the weight of his body sink over the top of her own.

Only one more second until he kissed her.

Their breaths panted as they curled into one, but this time there was no hesitation. He kissed her fervently. Enthusiastically. Frantically, knowing she would kiss him back, and she did. She kissed him. Over and over, softer and softer until he came down completely; exchanging breath and kisses and soft, satisfied moans. Kissed him the way she wished she had, that night she'd left so many weeks ago.

She wasn't lying.

She'd never felt more perfect.

It was like she could feel all of herself at once. His hands on her body, his chest against her own. The gentle weight between her legs as his hips softly pinned hers to a bed that smelled like him. She felt perfect. She felt beautiful.

She felt like... she was exactly where she wanted to be.

It was impossibly intimate, feeling like this. Like the natural, perfect blending of two bodies that knew each other better than any other. The butterflies in her stomach seemed to move in tandem; rolling in a wave of serendipitous satisfaction; calmed and placated and...

Acknowledged. *Finally*.

Draco buried his face in her neck, exhaling heavily.

"That was—" he whispered.

He swallowed hard.

Their eyes met. Held. Lingered for what seemed like a lifetime.

"Have you done that before?" she asked, quietly.

He met her gaze, and slowly, shook his head. "No."

For some stupid, idiotic reason, it made her smile.

"First time for both of us, then."

It was lovely. It was... frankly, rather beautiful, she thought. Maybe it was silly, but there was a purr of satisfied possessiveness at knowing that she was his *first* at something. Even so, it felt... special, somehow. But, as they smiled somewhat dazed at each other, the humour of it seemed to sink in all at once. In the afterglow, it suddenly didn't feel... quite *as* sexy as it had. Knowing that when he pulled out, she was going to be a *mess*. But, even so, she didn't really mind as much as she had before. His gaze fell to her lips. Studied her face; her cheeks, her nose as his gaze rose to her eyes. He looked at her for a moment. Pointedly. Honestly.

“Were you lying to me?” he asked, a smile in his voice. “About being able to get you pregnant?”

“No.” Hermione shook her head. “It is possible. *Technically.*”

He cocked an eyebrow.

She smiled. “It’s more likely to happen if you have irregular periods and it’s toward the *end* of menstruation... but...” she sank her teeth into her lip. “It is theoretically *possible.*”

He shook his head, a soft laugh escaping him. “So you *tricked me* into coming?”

“I absolutely did *not!*” she smiled coyly. “By your own admission, the curse relies on me *wanting* you to get me pregnant. Remember? And I *do.* Literally at all times.”

A beat passed, the barest furrow appearing between his brows as Draco exhaled heavily, dropping his face, burying it against her neck.

“Do you really?” The question was muffled against her skin.

Hermione furrowed her brow at him.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

She felt him breathing heavily as he teased over the question in his mind. She could almost feel it as it moved over his face, brow furrowing against the crease of her neck, jaw tightening as he chewed on it. It was clearly bothering him.

She stroked her fingers through his hair.

The gesture drew his head to rise. Drew his eyes back to hers, soft and a little resigned.

“It really doesn’t... horrify you?”

“The thought of you being my baby’s father?”

Draco watched the words leave her mouth, and nodded. “I keep thinking it’s not true. That you couldn’t possibly want it to be me.”

Hermione’s heart broke for him. She let her fingers trail his cheek. Over his jaw, his nose, his lips—*God, his lips—*

“Draco,” she whispered, knowing that her words weren’t going to be enough. “I want it to be you.”

She was right. He wasn’t satisfied. She caught his gaze again.

“At this point, I don’t think I’ll ever want anyone else.”

They stared at each other for a minute. For a few minutes, before, eventually, he kissed her once more.

Softly. Slowly. Purposefully.

And, for those few minutes, she allowed herself to forget about anything else that had happened.

To forget about Cormac, and the contract, and everything else that had gone so horribly and irrevocably wrong that evening. She could justify a few minutes. Taking them for herself to pretend for a little while; and to bask in how *this* felt. To be in Draco's arms and be under his lips and feel his body on hers. To convince herself, or at least pretend, that everything was going to be okay, and that she'd come up with a plan, and it would all be alright. Because it would be. It *would be*. She'd think of something, eventually.

And, as Draco's fingers threaded into her hair, she couldn't help but swallow hard.

She'd think of something.

Chapter End Notes

Don't worry, she's going to tell him, I just had to split the chapter otherwise it would've been like 12.5k words long.

Threats of violence should be directed to Cormac and not me

Chapter 11: “I trust you,” he whispered. “I trust you.”

Chapter Summary

Hermione tells Draco about Cormac's plan. He does not react the way she expected.

Chapter Notes

Remember when you guys thought them not being married was a good thing here's why it's not (wanted to let you live in bliss for a minute)

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

Hermione made her way to the ensuite as quickly as she could. Draco graciously gave her a few minutes to clean herself up before he joined her, and she realised, with significant embarrassment, that he had probably been speaking to his elves. Likely to change the sheets.

But by the time he'd closed the bathroom door behind him, she was too half-drowned in scalding hot relaxation to be embarrassed about it.

She couldn't help but peek at his incredible form as he slipped out of his robe, turning away from her to hang it behind the door. He had a lovely bum. She'd never really had a look at it before. Strong thighs. She turned to face the water, pretending she had not been ogling him as he approached.

But as he slipped into the shower behind her, he didn't curl his arms around her. Instead, he took hold of her hips, moving her forward. She glanced over her shoulder at him, only to find him admiring *her* bum.

Draco blew air over his lips, shaking his head.

“Have I been good?” he asked, his gaze not moving.

“What?”

“Have I been *good*?” he cocked an eyebrow, but didn't look away.

She sank her teeth into her lower lip. “*Very* good. But... why?”

“Then how come I've never seen you like this before?”

"I was just thinking the same thing about you, actually." Hermione grinned. "And you *have*. I walked to the shower naked last time I was here."

"Oh, don't worry, *I remember*," he chuckled. "But I meant like *this*." He ran his hand down her hip, resting on her bum. "All soapy and *wet*."

She barked a laugh, raising her hands to the hot water to guide some over her.

"Maybe you're just very, very lucky?" she teased over her shoulder.

"Yes, *I am*," he growled into her ear. "But it only has a *little bit* to do with the most perfect arse I've ever seen."

He finally stepped forward, curling his arms around her and bringing his lips to her ear.

"Though it does make me want to visit you at work so I can make good on my promise to bend you over your desk."

Hermione burst into a grin. Before she could scold him, he'd pinned her up against the cold tile. And before she could kiss him—

He was already rather enthusiastically kissing *her*.

Draco kissed her ravenously, pushing his naked body to hers, and she couldn't help but curl her arms around his neck. She dragged his lower lip between her teeth, and he grunted in pain as she nipped it.

"Gentle," he scolded.

"You don't deserve *gentle*."

"I was only joking," he whispered, his smirk tugging his cheek against his will as he tried pulling her back into the kiss.

"No, you weren't," she grinned.

He captured her lips with his again, kissing her hard as his hand curled around the back of her head.

It felt, in that moment, like the most natural thing in the world; grinning furiously into each other's lips as she kissed him hard enough to punish him. Like this was *them*. This was their relationship. This was just how they were. Biting and laughing, exposed and naked and bare. This was something that, if this was real, they could do. They could take showers together. They could touch and kiss and explore; skin to skin. Giggling like idiots and feeling totally, irrevocably, completely at home.

And, as if he realised it at the same time—

It slowed.

It slowed down, their movements softening as he began exploring her body with his hands. It wasn't sexual, though. Just... gently exploring. His fingers over her wrists. Her arms. Her collarbones.

Her face.

Draco watched the water run off her lips. She saw him watching. *Felt* him watching, as his eyes trailed the droplets. His eyes were so serious. He pressed his forehead to hers as he touched her waist. Her stomach. Running his hand slowly up her spine as he held her body against his own.

The hot water flowed around both of them, rivers of liquid down her back and over her hips. He soaped his hands, washing himself, and her, and she did the same.

And now, she smelled like his soap.

Fucking cedarwood.

His mouth found hers again, and her hands found his hair, raking through the wet strands that the water had darkened. His fingers trailed over her ribs with reverence, brushing the curve of her breast without grabbing. Without asking or expecting—just learning. Mapping her.

She'd never felt anything like it.

There was a part of her that wished he could've been her first *everything*. If he had been, maybe she wouldn't have had so many hangups about herself. She wouldn't have been so ashamed of her body, and the things it did, naturally. She would have known how to demand respect from a partner. How to ask for what she wanted. Draco never made her feel like it was anything less than she deserved.

And yet, when they were done, and dried, and dressed, and she was lying in his bed directly across from him—

It somehow felt completely inevitable.

“What?” He furrowed his brow. “You’re staring.”

She stroked her fingers over his cheekbone, trailing the line that once, she'd found pointed and harsh. Now, it just felt strong under her fingertips.

“Nothing,” she replied.

His hand left the sheets and captured hers within it, bringing her fingers to his lips, where he kissed them.

“Tell me.”

She sighed, watching as his lips trailed over her fingerprints.

“I just didn’t expect this,” she whispered.

Draco met her gaze. “Expect what?”

She shook her head, adjusting herself on the pillow. “To like you.”

“Rude.”

Hermione scoffed. “How is that *rude*? You were *awful* to me for a good ten years!”

“You were no saint *back*?” He narrowed his eyes teasingly. “I don’t recall ever punching *you* in the face!?”

She let out a loud laugh, and Draco tugged her closer to him. He pressed his lips to her cheekbone.

“I’m sorry, by the way. It feels ridiculous to even say. The way I treated you isn’t something that I can ask you to forgive... but even if you never do, I’ll be sorry for it all the same.”

Hermione smiled at him, softly.

“Thank you. I suppose there isn’t much sense in apologising,” she whispered. “Because forgive me if I *dangerously* misinterpreted that kiss, the sex, and the conversation we had this evening, but I’m starting to pick up on hints that you might not feel that way any more.”

“Oh, obvious, was it?”

Hermione grinned. Yes. It was obvious. And there truly wasn’t much point to it. There were no words that he could realistically say that would’ve erased it, but... a part of her wouldn’t have wanted him to. It had hurt, of course it had—but would she have changed anything if it meant that she might not have ended up here? She sighed.

“Still,” she whispered. “I can’t say I expected that I’d...”

She didn’t know if she should say it aloud. Regardless of everything, she didn’t know what the butterflies that he gave her actually meant. For her. For *them*. It was a conversation she wanted to have, but not now.

Not when it felt so good to be wrapped up in his arms.

“Being completely honest, I suspected I would.”

She was already right up against his body, but he kept managing to pull her closer to him. She didn’t make one bit of effort to hide her disbelief. “You expected that you’d like me?”

“Would’ve been a *feat* not to.”

“What do you mean by that?”

He shrugged.

“No,” she said, glaring at him. “Tell me what you mean. What do you mean it would’ve been a feat *not to like me*?”

“It would have been a feat. That’s all.”

She scoffed. “*You* don’t even know what you mean.”

He sighed. “What do you want? A monologue?”

Hermione grinned. “Oh? You have a monologue prepared?”

“Apparently. Because I know *exactly* what I mean by it.”

She settled, laying her hands under her head as she looked up at him expectantly.

Draco sighed, brushing his thumb across her lips. “Remember the first time we talked about this? About all of this, everything that’s happened between us. You told me I hated you.”

She nodded. He smiled.

“And I told *you* that once this was all over, if I hated you, it would be entirely because of who you are as a person. Do you remember that?”

“Yes,” Hermione narrowed her eyes at him, suspiciously. “But this isn’t over yet.”

“I know, thank the Gods.” He ran his fingertips over the bridge of her nose. “But I figured out pretty quickly that I don’t hate you.” He looked down at her. “In fact, I don’t think I’ve ever hated anyone less.”

Hermione’s mouth fell open, her lips parting as she tried to get a word in, but he pressed his thumb to her lips, silencing her.

“No, no, you wanted the monologue. Lie there and take it.”

She met his eyes as best she could.

“You’re brilliant. You’re beautiful. You’re clearly very good in bed—”

She laughed, he silenced her again with a kiss. But, as they parted, he paused.

The silence lingered for a moment as he swallowed hard, taking a deep breath before he spoke again.

“There is something about you that makes no sense to me,” he said, quietly. “Anyone who *encounters* you knows how incredible you are. You’re like this enigma of... I hesitate to say *perfection*, but if there was anyone who deserved the term *golden*—” he exhaled heavily.

“You’re *untouchable* to *everyone*. You set a standard of goodness that is impossible to meet.”

Hermione blushed a little, hiding a laugh as Draco narrowed his eyes accusingly at her.

“You spend every day trying to make things just that *tiniest bit better* on behalf of people who can’t, or don’t know how. Just because *you can*. And because after everything you’ve been through, and after being given *every fucking reason* to be bitter and angry at the world, that enormous fucking brain of yours has somehow managed to make you the kindest, most empathetic person I’ve ever known.”

Hermione blushed harder, but he didn’t let her look away.

“And then, you get in a room with *me*, you don’t hold back a single shred of it.”

She smiled slightly. He smiled back.

“The second you’re with me, you become fucking stubborn as anything, and you drive me up the fucking wall. Every time you tell me off, or you *rudely* correct me, or you cut a hole in my argument just to throw it back in my face, I know that it’s supposed to make me seethe with rage—” He rolled his eyes, exhaling heavily. “But for some fucking reason, it makes me feel...”

He hesitated. But then, he resigned himself.

“It’s silly,” he exhaled heavily, shaking his head. “But it makes me feel like there’s a part of you that only exists when it’s with me. That I get a part of you all to myself. It’s mine. *Just mine*. And I can’t help but think that’s the sexiest, most wonderful fucking thing I’ve ever seen.”

His thumb left her lips, brushing over them as he leaned in to replace it with his own lips. He kissed her, slowly. Softly.

“You give me a part of you that no one else is allowed to have. It’s a *gift*,” he said, his voice no louder than a whisper. “So tell me how the fuck I’m supposed to hate you, Hermione?”

She couldn’t help but whine at the overwhelming gratitude.

“Draco—”

He groaned, capturing her by the back of her head and dragging her lips back to his.

“*Fuck*, I love when you call me that.”

He rolled her onto her back, legs entangling as their bodies entwined. She threw her arms around his neck again, holding herself up to kiss him against gravity. He was right. About all of it. About this strange, unlikely thing that had happened to them. It made no sense, not really—that it would take *so little push* for her to drop every single hesitation she had about him, but wasn’t that what made it so special in the first place? The fact that this was so very unlikely?

That’s what made it so special to *her*, at least.

“Why do you love it?” she asked.

“Because it feels like you’re talking to *me* instead of... well...” he gestured to the room.
“*Me.*”

The butterflies kicked up again, tightening her hold around his shoulders. “Well, I didn’t think that hearing you call me *Hermione* would ruin me the way it does.”

He pulled back a half-inch, cocking an eyebrow.

“Oh, I *ruin* you?” he purred.

“Oh, get over yourself,” she grinned. “I like it. That’s all.”

“Well, as long as we’re doing *this*.” He tightened his grip on her waist. “I promise I’ll call you *Hermione*.”

“And I promise I’ll call you *Draco*. At least until you get me pregnant and we have to go back to pretending we don’t—”

She stopped herself before she said it.

Pretending they didn’t— pretending they *weren’t*—

It was something that, until that moment, hadn’t crossed her mind, the fact that they had an end date. That one day, they would have to go back to being... what? Friends? *Strangers*? It was as if the room suddenly seemed a little colder. A little larger.

It hurt *Draco* just as much as it hurt her to think about. His face fell a little, and he furrowed his brow at her.

“What happens when I do?” he asked. “It’ll happen eventually, so... what happens when I get you pregnant?”

She closed her eyes, leaning into his touch. “Well, I should expect that when I get pregnant, what will happen is that I will eventually have a baby.”

He chuckled, and she opened her eyes again just in time to watch him roll his own.

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Then what *did* you mean?” she asked.

She already knew. She just didn’t want to be the one to say it.

Draco’s gaze lingered on her. He brushed her curls from her face, contemplating his words.

“What happens to *us*?”

Her breath caught in her throat.

She didn’t want to think about it. It wasn’t something that, until tonight, she’d even really thought about. At least, not out loud.

When she got pregnant... what then?

There had been moments—the kiss at the gala, the incinerating graze of his hand in hers, and the way it felt for her name to be on his lips—that the thoughts had fluttered to the surface. But she'd pushed them down; pushed them back into their ridiculous little box, vowing to never open it, knowing that if she did, she'd have to consider them. She'd have to acknowledge them. The thoughts.

About what it would feel like, in some other universe, to be his.

To be *properly* his.

Her lips parted as she moved in close to him. Curling herself into his arms, as if shielding herself from the very question he was asking. She didn't want to have this conversation. They both knew what the answer was.

"This isn't... There *isn't* an—" she rested her forehead on his bare chest, breathing him in.
"Draco, this was never meant to be anything *more* than..."

She let herself trail off, closing her eyes to inhale the scent of cedarwood that lingered on his skin. Her hand over his chest, fingers splaying over the steady rhythm of his heart.

He pressed his lips to her forehead, speaking quietly.

"But it is."

Hermione met his gaze, and his fingers caught her jaw, begging her to stay there.

"Isn't it?" he asked.

It wasn't a question. It was a demand.

Acknowledge it.

"*Draco,*" she pleaded.

"This is more than that now, Hermione," he said. "Admit it."

She exhaled heavily. She couldn't help it. Her palm on his cheek, fingernails stroking through his hair.

"*Of course it is.*"

His forehead dropped to hers, pressing against hers with relief. "I knew it," he whispered. "I knew it wasn't just me."

"*Of course* it isn't just you." She shook her head, bringing their lips together. Kissed him, gently. "This is so much more than that. Of course it is. How could I possibly think otherwise?"

“I know. I know you don’t think that, but I just... the thought of losing you just makes me—”

“Draco, I know, but that doesn’t mean we can—”

“Why not?”

The conversation was happening too fast. Of *course* it wasn’t just him that thought that they were *more* than what they’d intended to be. The multitude—the *amplitude* of how much *more* they were than what they were supposed to be was almost too big to comprehend. But still, there was this lingering *knowledge*—

She sighed. “Because your curse isn’t going to just *go away*.”

He swallowed, hard. “Why does that matter?”

Hermione stared at him, her gut knotting. She’d never taken him for an optimist, nor thought him naive. But when he saw what he wanted, she knew it was impossible for him to see any scenario where he didn’t get it.

And that was a problem.

Because this scenario—the one they’d found themselves in—

Hermione took a deep breath.

“Would you want me to go home to him every night?”

Draco stiffened. The strength in his gaze seemed to falter. He shook his head.

“So you’d want me to leave him. Completely. *Publicly*.”

He exhaled heavily. The question lingered between them for a long time. Draco’s lips pursed, as if trying to fight it.

But he nodded.

Hermione took a deep breath, trying to ignore the butterflies that sprung to life at the idea. Trying to keep herself rational.

“If I left Cormac to be with you instead—” she said, trying to ignore the spark of excitement in his eyes. “If I did that, *right now*, you would still want to get me pregnant. Correct?”

He growled contentedly, burying his face in her neck.

“*Correct*.”

“But...” She swallowed hard. “You can’t *marry me*.”

He hesitated a moment, but growled into her neck.

“Well... fortunately that’s not a physical requirement.”

She tried to laugh at the joke.

But she couldn't.

"Draco, I'm supposed to be Minister for Magic one day."

He took a deep breath. She knew he knew where this was going.

"I'm not planning on stopping you," he whispered.

She stroked her fingers through his hair.

"If I left to be with you, and you got me pregnant, I would be nothing but a knocked up, unmarried, bad example. And bad examples don't have the job that I have."

Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"I don't just need support, Draco. I need my name on a seat. It's a *requirement*. Without my name being specifically attached to a Wizengamot seat, I would be throwing away every single thing that I've worked for. Throwing away my entire *future*." She lowered her voice, speaking softly. "It's bad enough my entire marriage has actually been a farce but—"

His grip tightened on her waist as he pulled back, as Hermione's gut wrenched, the words having slipped free before she could think of better ones.

"What do you mean a farce?" His brow was furrowed.

Shit. She'd planned to be a little more diplomatic about telling him.

Hermione knew that it would've made sense to tell him straight away, when she'd first stumbled into his arms, but in the scheme of things, in the light of not being pregnant, it hadn't seemed like the most important part at the time; not when she'd needed *so badly* to feel his arms around her. And besides, she didn't want Draco thinking that she'd... well, *left Cormac*, not when she hadn't really had much time to think about how that would impact things between her and Draco yet. Not when she hadn't had time to think about how it would affect her job—and especially not when she hadn't come up with an *alternative* to what on earth she was going to *do*—

She swallowed, hard, trying to come up with something quickly; to give her some time to think before she'd said anything that might make him worry.

She cleared her throat.

"It's nothing. It's a stupid technical hiccup. I'll figure something out, please don't worry about it. I'll—"

"Hermione—"

She began shifting uncomfortably beneath him, wriggling a bit to try and get free. To get some distance, only for him to surge over her, pinning her to the bed.

“What do you mean a farce?” he asked.

“Can we please just drop it?” she replied.

“No, we can’t fucking drop—is he holding this over your—” Draco took a sharp breath.
“Shit, is he *divorcing* you?”

Hermione stared up at him.

God, she hoped she wasn’t going to regret telling him.

And slowly, she shook her head.

“He can’t divorce me,” she said, quietly. “Because we were never technically married in the first place.”

Draco went completely pale.

“What?”

Hermione took a deep breath, trying not to tear up again.

“The whole thing was a power play. He’s *such an arse*. He never lodged the paperwork with the Department of Records. We’re still together, as far as the public is concerned, until I can figure something else out. But I suppose until then I’m...” embarrassment started to build in her chest. Her jaw shook as she got the words out. “...I’m not actually technically married.”

Draco’s body went completely stiff.

“You’re *not married* to him?”

There was a sudden intensity in his voice that, in the moment, she mistook for anger.

She could’ve expected anger. Of course he’d be angry. Draco was mightily protective of her, and of course, he would be ready to dig Cormac’s shallow grave with his bare hands. For God’s sake, she wouldn’t have been surprised if he’d marched to the Floo, thrown himself into the flames, and torn Cormac limb from limb.

It was in his face—the anger she expected. It was *there*, but, as she listened more closely to his sharp breathing, she realised anger wasn’t what she could hear.

It was...

It was something else.

Hermione furrowed her brow. “I—*no*. And he tried to blackmail me over it. Well, more... *us*, I suppose. He said he’s not going to lodge the paperwork until I give him a child. He’s somehow got it in his mind that he’ll get his hands on all of your assets if the baby’s yours, and he’s holding it over my head to keep me in line.”

“Fuck. Fuck. No— no, no, no—”

“Draco, I’m sorry.” Hermione swallowed, hard. “I didn’t want to worry you, or make you feel like you had to do anything about it. But if you wouldn’t mind awfully just lending me some of those letters he sent you where he was begging you to fuck me, I’m absolutely *certain* it’d scare him into—”

But Draco groaned.

The noise was deep and gutteral. Grating, grunting as he tried to take a breath. He’d barely even caught it before claiming her lips with his own.

He kissed her *hard*.

It was completely out of nowhere, and she moaned into his lips in surprise as his arm curled underneath her, lifting her body to his as if claiming it as some sort of possession. His tongue passing over hers, his teeth dragging over her bottom lip. Pouring his soul into her as he took her over.

It was *lovely*...

But it was also not really the reaction she expected.

She broke the kiss.

“Draco?” she whispered, questioningly.

He pulled back, the corner of his mouth twitching into a smirk.

“This is fine. No, this is *good*,” he growled. “It makes things very straightforward, actually.”

She frowned. “What do you mean?”

He smiled, pressing his lips to her cheek as his fingers entwined with hers.

“You’re just going to marry *me*, instead.”

Hermione froze. Her heart skipping three beats, stumbling, then turning to ice under her skin. She looked up at him.

“*Excuse me?*”

“Marry me,” he whispered. “Fuck your job, you can move in here. You can spend your days reading. Doing philanthropy. I can take you anywhere you want in the entire world. You want to go and fund field hospitals in Malawi? *We can fund as many fucking hospitals as you want.*” He buried his face in her neck. “And we could have *so much sex*. Gods, imagine how easy it would be for me to get you pregnant if I could fuck you four times a day? I will give you *so many fucking babies*. As many as you want. And they’d be *ours*. You’d be *mine*. *Hermione fucking Malfoy.*”

He growled again. Into her lips. Then her neck, dragging his teeth along her throat as if trying to find a place to sink in.

“Draco, what are you—” Hermione guided him off her. Furrowed her brow at him. “Stop it!”

“No,” he replied.

But his expression was twisted in absolute agony.

And Hermione’s blood went ice cold in her veins.

She knew that face. That agony. That *pain* that was flicking across his features, and contorting them wretchedly. She’d seen it many times. Many, many times before.

And she gasped, as she realised, in horror, what she had just done to him.

She knew. She already knew, the sudden realisation curling over her as her eyes went wide. Hermione was a witch. A, for all intents and purposes, *unmarried* witch, who had recently admitted that she had very, *very* strong feelings for him. Who was unashamedly willing—*desperate*, in fact—to bear his children. Her eyes flicked up to Draco’s, and immediately, she knew that once again, she had said the very *wrongest* thing that she could have possibly said.

Because this meant that, for all intents and purposes, *they* could get theoretically get married.

And that meant, for all intents and purposes, that if he could convince her to do *exactly that*—

She could give him a legitimate heir.

And that was the single, *only thing* that he’d *trusted her* not to do.

He’d begged her for that. He’d pleaded—he’d entrusted that information to her as *sacred*; as something that was so deeply ingrained in him that he could barely separate it from his own consciousness.

By telling him, she hadn’t just triggered his curse. She’d escalated it fucking *tenfold*. The curse was like a parasite in his brain. She could see it taking over his body, inch by crawling inch as he forced his hands to stay on the bed. His eyes darkening, his brow furrowing. Shoulders turning rigid as if he was transforming, right there, on top of her.

“Draco,” she whispered in a panic, “you don’t want to get married. To anyone. *Ever*. That is really, *really* important to you.”

He lay his body over hers, raking his fingers through her hair.

“You know what else is really important to me?” he whispered.

She stared at him.

“*You*, Hermione. *You’re* fucking important to me.”

The butterflies in her stomach sprung to life, making her whole body warm.

Pushing them down was *agony*.

No. No. No.

Maybe he meant it. Maybe she *was* important to him; her heart seemed to stutter at the thought. And he was important to her. He was important to her, too. In a perfect world, where nothing had ever gone wrong; where she'd chosen a different career, she imagined she might've *liked* having the kind of life that meant Draco could brush his hand over her lower back in public. Holding his hand. Kissing him in front of her friends. She might like waking up to him every morning, and feeling his body against hers as his breath whispered beauty and promises across her cheek.

But even if that reality had existed—even if it was true—

It didn't change anything. Not really. Because as deeply as she felt—this couldn't happen. This wasn't real—it wasn't really him that was talking like this. She frowned.

This wasn't him.

"You don't want this," she said quietly, coaxing him back. "Draco, focus. Listen to me. You *don't want this*. Regardless of how important I am to you, you don't want to get married to *anyone*. You chose me because you *trusted* that I wouldn't do that to you. So don't say things like that." She tightened her lips into a line. "*It's not fair.*"

He squeezed his eyes shut, fighting the words that were trying to escape him. Trying to convince her, and himself, that he did. His brows knitted deeply. His jaw wrenched as it seemed to force words to pass his lips.

"I can't help it. I—*fuck*, Hermione," he said, his voice shaking. "Whatever I say to you—" He caught her face in his hands, kissing her deeply, before wrenching himself away. "It's going to get worse. I can already feel—*fuck*—*Gods*—Please. Please—"

She knew.

She already knew.

He didn't want this.

Draco—the real one, not the cursed one—*her Draco* did not want this.

It was the one thing he'd asked of her. The one requirement, the one stipulation—that she was already married, so that as bad as it got, he *could not* be tempted.

How could she not have realised that the curse would react like this?

He'd made a vow to himself. A promise that he would never, ever marry. That his name would die with him. That was more important to him than anything, regardless of what his stupid curse was telling him now.

And if he couldn't say no to it—if he couldn't stop himself—

Hermione's breath caught.

"I'll say no, Draco," she whispered. "I promise, whatever happens, I'll say no."

He nodded, furiously. Kissed her again. Moaned into her lips.

"I trust you," he whispered. "I trust you."

"Thank you." Hermione kissed him. She reached over to the bedside table. "Then trust that this is for your own good."

She whispered that same deterioration hex that she'd cast on him in her office, and the effect moved quickly through his body, slowly fading him into unconsciousness.

"You're going to leave," he whispered. "You're going to leave me again."

"I won't. I promise."

"You will."

"Draco, you told me once that my word matters to you. Do you remember that?"

He nodded. Stared at her. Pursed his lips. Nodded again.

"I gave you my word that I wouldn't take advantage of this, and I give you my word now. I'm doing this so that you can sleep, so that the curse will let you rest. I'm not leaving you. I will be here when you wake up. *I swear it.*"

Through the hex, he forced a wonky smile onto his face.

"Dankkyou—" he slurred. "Purfct. Yourso.... Purfct—"

He passed out onto the bed.

Hermione curled up next to him, stroking his hair as he began snoring loudly.

If this escalation of the curse was anything like when their arrangement had started, he was going to stop at nothing to make sure that she said yes. To give her anything, everything she could possibly want, until she had no choice but to agree to marry him.

There was no way he'd be able to control himself.

This was the curse's entire *purpose*. She had to figure out a way to stop this. Something other than helping him find someone else. Finding some other witch who would get to hold him like this. Feeling him beside her in bed. Some other witch for him to kiss; some other witch's baby to have his eyes. She ghosted her fingers over his, she had to press her lips together as hard as she could.

There had to be a way to help him. Because the alternative was giving him up completely.

And she wasn't sure that was something that she could do.

Hermione didn't sleep well.

The entire night, she had to stop herself from tossing and turning. Lying there, on her back, trying to figure out how she was going to stop his curse from torturing him. From ruining *them*. Anything better than the obvious, which was just convincing Cormac to submit the paperwork under threat of everyone finding out he'd been practically begging another man to fuck his wife. That was the simplest solution. If they were married, the plan would go back to how it was originally.

But it was also the one that made her stomach curl the most.

Because it was one thing to already *be* married to him; it was entirely another to sign her name on a document to marry him *again* when she knew how far he was willing to go to betray her. And... with *Draco* in the mix, now— She wouldn't let herself think about it. She wouldn't let herself even consider it. There had to be some other way. *Absolutely not.*

But the *what the fuck to do instead* kept her awake.

So, no. She didn't sleep well.

In the morning, she woke to the feeling of the mattress moving beneath her. The sudden loss of warmth at her side. And the sound of feet on the hardwood floor.

She lifted her head, sleepily, and felt lips pressing to her temple.

“Go back to sleep,” he whispered. “I have to duck off for something urgent.”

“Hmmm... what?” She cleared her throat.

“Urgent business in France. I’ll be back later, but you might be at work.”

Hermione frowned. The gala had been on a Thursday evening—

Shit. Work. She went to sit up, but Draco chuckled, guiding her back down.

“It’s still early, baby. Very early. You have plenty of time.” He pressed another kiss to her forehead. “I’ve set the curtains to open at six. Promise.”

She took a deep breath, smiling as she relaxed back into the soft bed.

“That’s my girl,” he whispered. “You look so beautiful in our bed.”

Our. She knew it was the stupid fucking curse talking, but she grinned anyway, burying her face into the pillow beneath her. Sinking back into the enormous bed that smelled like him. Like *them*. She let sleep overtake her.

When Hermione awoke again, it was to a room lit with silver. It wasn't as bright in this one as it was in the room he'd chosen for her. That room woke to bright, golden sunlight. Warmth and coziness. She wondered whether that was why he'd chosen it for her. But, even so, she liked this one better. Silver light, instead of gold. There was so much more warmth in the darkness, when it smelled like him. She could sleep soundly every night in a room that reminded her exactly where she was.

She got up from the bed and gathered her things, showering once more to hang on to just that little bit of cedarwood, to get her through the day.

As she left his room, she made a point of looking around for the letters both she and Cormac had sent him. There they were, neatly stacked on his desk, as if he was saving each one to look back on later. Hermione took a handful of incriminating ones. She'd told Draco she'd need them—she was *sure* he wouldn't mind.

Then, she stepped into the Floo, away to the place she'd called home.

And she hoped, to *God*, that she hadn't just ruined everything.

Chapter End Notes

I know it's in the end note but i just want to take another minute to lay down my life and all of my love for the amazing ThorneHuntress. She manages not only to write her own fics, do binding, and run 1-2 enormous fests every year, but she also made the terrible mistake of deciding to be my friend. So therefore she gets to deal with me flopping onto her metaphorical couch and whining continuously about the plot of this story, over and over and fucking over again, until i'm somewhat happy with it. We've read over chapters 11-14 so many fucking times that I swear to god neither of us know what actually happens. So even when I hit post I'm never sure it's right. But she gets me as close as humanly possible. Thank you isn't enough.

Additional huge thank yous to my incredible cheer readers / emotional support readers b_lovedhunter and sultrynuns who have been incredible pre-readers and whose gasps and swoons in the right places have made me feel like it's not stupid.

It'll all make sense in the end, I promise.

Chapter 12: “Just send the goddamn flowers before I come down there and set you on f—”

Chapter Summary

Whelp, time for the fallout from telling Draco she's not married.

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione tried very hard not to think about Draco.

She put her head down, focused on the bills that she needed to work on. She had a motion due for debate in the Wizengamot, so at least for the time being it was the single most important thing in the world to her.

Cormac had been cold as ice when she arrived home that morning; trying very much to pretend like he wasn't hovering around her as she'd begun getting ready for work.

“Glad you finally realised where your bread’s buttered,” he’d said, under his breath, but it was far too shaky to be even the slightest bit intimidating. He was *dying* to know whether she had the letters, she could tell from the side-eyes and panicked glances. But it was so obvious that she almost had to laugh. She didn’t, though. In fact, the look she gave him every time he got in her way made it clear that she was not in a talking sort of mood.

She just smiled reassuringly to herself.

Then she cast a bubble head charm around herself to block him out, just in case he was too fucking thick to pick up on the cue.

When Hermione arrived at work that Friday, she stacked the letters that she’d borrowed from Draco neatly on her desk. There were five. A small, neat pile of ecru parchment neatly folded into card-size. She’d picked the most incriminating ones she could find, making a mental note to tell Draco when she next saw him that she had gone ahead and borrowed them for safekeeping.

But then she didn’t see him. Or hear from him.

For *days*.

Draco was probably trying to distance himself, and as much as it hurt, that was probably a good thing. If he couldn’t be in the same room as her without trying to convince her to marry him...

She sighed.

She owled him over the weekend to check if he was alright, but didn't receive a response. On Monday, she'd even owled Pansy. She said Theo had run into him, and that he was fine, just... busy.

Preoccupied with something.

Hermione had thanked her politely and then gone to the loo to sit very still and stare at the wall for seven full minutes. Nervously breathing in and out and trying to convince herself that he wasn't angry with her for... well...

For not being married.

It wasn't her fault, she knew that, but she also knew that in the light of day, that this was exactly what Draco had been afraid of when he'd agreed to take part. '*There is a lot to be gained for the witch who convinces me to marry her.*' That was what he'd said. And even though it wasn't *her* convincing him... It was her that was responsible for the idea being in his head.

And that was enough to make it feel, very much, like her fault.

It wasn't though. It was Cormac's.

Fucking Cormac.

What a shame she hadn't made a career in the DMLE instead. It would've been lovely to have the connections to make the things she felt like doing to him look like an accident.

When she had gathered enough mental fortitude to return to her office, she'd managed to convince herself to be something near rational. Painfully so.

But a knock on her door broke her concentration.

"Come in," she sighed, rubbing her temple.

A man in an oddly shaped hat poked his head in the door.

"Ms.... Granger?"

She furrowed her brow. "Technically, it's Granger-McLaggen, but—"

He pushed the door open a little wider. And Hermione's heart stopped. It was a courier.

And he was holding a floral arrangement.

Hydrangeas. Snapdragons. Roses upon roses upon roses. Tulips. Daisies. Peonies. An explosion of textures and shades. It was *stunningly* beautiful, of course.

But it was also *enormous*.

It was so wide it filled the doorframe, a few stunning dahlias on the side being knocked about as the courier tried to squeeze it through the opening.

“I have—” he grunted as he manoeuvred himself through the door, digging in his pocket for a card “—a delivery for Ms. Hermione Granger. But...?”

She frowned.

These couldn’t be from Cormac. Firstly because he was well aware of her last name, and secondly, because hell would freeze over before he would ever think of buying her flowers, even to try and smooth things over with her. She stood from her desk, making her way across the room to take the card from the courier.

“I’m sure it’s just a mistake on the card,” she said, nonchalantly. “I’m the only Hermione working at the Ministry. And Granger was my maiden name.”

He handed her the card, shrugging. She flipped it open.

Hermione,

Please take these flowers as notice of my intentions.

I am now courting you.

Sorry.

No, wait, tell her I’m not sorry, not one bit.

Wait. No. Tell her I am sorry, otherwise she’ll hate me.

Is your quill writing all of this down?

Just send the godsdamn flowers before I set you on f—

Regards,

D. L. Malfoy

Hermione squeaked, her eyes going wide.

“They’re for you, then?” the courier asked.

“I—” she inhaled sharply, crumpling the card into a ball in her hand and staring at the enormous bouquet. “—they’re *intended* for me, but—”

The courier breathed a sigh of relief, and turned over his shoulder.

“We’re in the right place, gentlemen. Come through.”

Hermione’s stomach dropped through the floor.

“Wait—what? What do you mean *gentlem*—”

The courier stepped through the door, conjuring a pedestal for the arrangement on the far side of the room. Hermione pushed past him, sticking her head into the corridor.

And she felt herself go deathly pale.

She stepped backwards into her office, somewhat incapable of breathing as another arrangement came through the door. Almost the same size as the first one. Then there was another.

Then another.

Man after man came through the door of her office, holding enormous arrangements of flowers that barely fit through the doors. Two, then three. Four. Five. Six.

She lost count at eleven, but the line was down the hall.

“What—” she gasped. “You *can’t!* You *cannot* leave all of these here!”

The main courier shrugged. “Sorry, Miss. Explicit instructions to—one moment—” he unfurled a sheet from his other pocket, furrowing his brow at it. “The instructions were to *drown* your office in flowers, or else he would—” The courier’s eyebrows shot up. “—well *that’s* a bit graphic.”

Hermione could do nothing but stand in the centre of the room and watch as the couriers did exactly as Draco had instructed.

There were pedestal displays. Reds. Yellows. Whites. Flowers hanging over the edge of her desk, and down the sides. Pink and purple draping in a curtain of flower buds, magically waterfalling down from the ceiling. And God, even the *ceiling*. Blues and indigos dripping amongst green. Pastels and brights and texture. The couriers’ wands worked with immaculate precision, affixing tulips and dahlias and orchids to her ceiling, until there wasn’t a single surface bereft of florals.

As the men completed their tasks, the head courier opened a bag at his side. Pulled out a large glass jar. Snipped the wick, lit it with his wand.

Handed it to her.

She glanced at the label.

Cedarwood.

Took the candle from her hands—God knew she had no idea what to do with it—and placed it gently on her desk.

Then, he handed her the clipboard.

She managed to sign for the delivery with her mouth open, and her stomach in her throat. The men all left, but the flowers remained. It was only as the door closed behind them that she came to terms with the overwhelming fragrance of what had to be close to a thousand individual blooms.

And a candle. That smelled like him.

The fragrance was unlike anything she'd ever smelled before. It was almost like being in his bedroom, but... at work. All around her. And not in a lovely, subtle way.

In an enormous, overwhelming, extremely conspicuous display of *purpose*.

What. The. *Fuck*.

She glanced down at the card again. Her entire body shook as she read it once more.

No. No.

Draco could not be *courting* her. She barely even knew what that meant. Cormac had mentioned it a few times, in passing, when they'd agreed to marry. He'd bought her a scarf—no, wait, or was it gloves? And earrings that she'd had to go and get her ears pierced to even be able to wear, because of course he'd commented, when she hadn't. There were other things, too. She had no idea which things were important and which things he'd done were just him being a bit of a prat. But in all their 'courting'—

Cormac had never done *this*.

With a flick of her wand, Hermione locked her door, and sat down at her desk. She folded her hands in front of her, staring, horrified, at the room around her. She began trying desperately to concentrate on her work, though the fragrance in her office was so strong she could barely think straight. But, before she could begin, a flicker of movement caught her eye.

There were—

Hermione's eyes widened as she looked closer at one of the arrangements.

At first glance, it looked like an orchid. A *row* of orchids, draped across the display. But, as she peered closer, the petals began to... unfurl. Little by little, they splayed open, and shut, before, one-by-one, taking flight.

Butterflies.

They weren't real of course, just magically enchanted petals from pretty flowers, but the visual made her stomach churn all the same.

Hermione watched with unbridled annoyance as one butterfly drifted toward her; a slow, spiralling path; its wings opening and closing lazily as if it had nowhere in particular to be. It skimmed the edge of her desk before settling in above her left hand, flexing its wings with unhurried grace.

It was incredibly pretty magic. *God, he was impressive.*

Which was why she was immediately extremely bloody annoyed with him.

This was so unbelievably *unnecessary*. Curse be damned, surely there was some iota of a brain still in that unfairly beautiful head of his that recognised how inappropriate it would be to send *this many fucking flowers*. Did he expect it wouldn't garner attention? Expect that it wouldn't make her feel awkward and uncomfortable and very exposed?

It was as if he thought it was completely normal that her office had just been drowned in a kaleidoscope of obnoxiously fragrant flowers and *god damn fucking magical petal butterflies*.

She took a sip of water. Cast a bubblehead charm around herself. Shooed the butterfly back into flight and instead, stared at the stack of requests for funding that lay in her in-tray.

But that only made it worse.

He could not be courting her. This was— this was the exact *opposite* of what he should've been doing.

So, instead, Hermione got to her feet. She shoved the card from Draco into her handbag, and made her way up to the Ministry owlery. She needed the walk. She selected the most aggressive, scrappy-looking owl she could, and scrawled a letter on a scrap of parchment.

Draco,

Stop it. This is a waste of perfectly good flowers.

You are not courting me.

Regards,

H Granger-McLaggen

She hesitated.

She'd signed it with both names as instinct, cursing to herself as she realised. She scribbled out the second name in a flurry of anger. Then realised it would look like she was trying to draw attention to the fact she was, in fact, technically not currently married to Cormac. Which, in the context of his curse, seemed like a bad idea. So she took her whole last name off as well.

Hermione stared at it, the single, solitary *H* as her signoff. It looked stupid. But not nearly as stupid as she felt.

So, in an act of pure sensibility and not at all out of cowardice and having absolutely no goddamn idea what to do—

She didn't send the note.

She needed more information first. And that involved calling a friend to organise lunch for later in the week.

Monday came and went. Tuesday, Hermione could still smell the flowers as she walked down the hall.

Everyone could.

They'd all assumed they were from Cormac, and she was perfectly happy to let them continue assuming as much. Her birthday was in a few weeks, which she made a point of noting, and they were under some kind of stasis charm. They might even *last* until her birthday. God only knew she wouldn't be getting any other gifts. At least not from Cormac.

But later that morning, when she walked into her florists shop of an office—

There was a box on her desk.

She could see from the doorway that it was beautifully presented. A white box, a crisp ribbon, and a seal that she didn't recognise. She waved a few butterflies out of her face, and furrowed her brow.

“*Judah?*” she called, suspiciously.

He popped his head around the door.

“Yes, Mrs Granger-McL—”

“What is this?”

“It appears to be a gift, ma'am.” He cleared his throat.

“From... Cormac?”

He hesitated.

“Couldn't possibly say, Ma'am.”

Hermione nodded to excuse him. She rounded her desk, though, approaching it with caution.

The lettering moved as she neared it.

Gold cursive letters wrote and rewrote a phrase in French, elegantly, in a handwritten script that felt older than even the building she was standing in. It sent a shiver up her spine, which was odd.

She didn't even know what was in it.

Hermione sighed, realising that *this* was likely the pathetic attempt at a peace offering from Cormac, and reached for the ribbon to yank it open. But the ribbon would not be yanked. Smooth as silk, and twice as elegantly, the ribbon began to unfurl of its own volition. Curling over itself, under itself, in a dance of beautiful symmetry, until it lay flat across her desk.

Then, the lettering changed once more.

Gold script. A golden bird. A golden heart appeared atop the box, and then, it re-formed. Into letters. Into her name.

Hermione

She reached hesitantly for the lid, and this time, it didn't jump away from her. No. Instead, it glided from its place; soft and smooth as butter. She placed the lid beside the box. Dug through the packaging. And inside, was a—

She frowned.

It was just a... *blouse*?

Well, that was a little unfair. It was a very *nice* blouse, but it was a blouse all the same. She lifted it from the box, furrowing her brows at it as the stupid little petal butterflies of her office seemed to begin looping about in excitement. Stupid bloody moths probably thought they could eat it. The fabric weighed practically *nothing*, but it didn't seem flimsy, somehow. Just... delicate. Intricate and expensive and so soft it was like dipping her hand into water. Beautiful, pearlescent white that would look lovely with her skin tone, and clearly very expensive, but it was just a blouse all the same. She didn't really *need* any new blouses. If anything, it looked like it might've been a little big for her.

It was truly very lovely. But it was a very *odd* apology gift.

Regardless, she didn't have time to try it on. She placed it more or less gently back in the box, shoving it into her illegally extended handbag. She'd already queued up someone to ask about it.

And she was late for lunch.

At half-past-twelve, Hermione stepped into the shockingly overpriced tea room that Pansy occasionally enjoyed being seen at.

They hugged, falling into that sort of easy chit-chat between friends. Pansy and Ginny's recent trip to Brazil had gone swimmingly. Ginny's team had won their match convincingly.

Pansy had a fabulous tan. No, Hermione hadn't scheduled herself a vacation yet. No, Harry and Greg had not yet publicly admitted they were sleeping together. That sort of thing.

They ordered afternoon tea, a request to which the waiter apologised and replied that afternoon tea was not due to be served until three o'clock.

Pansy stared at him until he backed away.

Their afternoon tea, to Hermione's surprise, arrived ten minutes later, and Pansy helpfully instructed Hermione to try an egg truffle finger sandwich. They were delicious.

Then Pansy asked about Cormac.

Hermione frowned, finishing her very fancy tiny sandwich, and told her that they were currently in an argument. Pansy's eyebrow rose too fast.

"Oh?"

"Yes. And it's a rather big one. He sent me something, actually. I wanted to get your opinion on it," she said, with a shake of her head. "I think he's trying to get out of the doghouse."

"It better have been *very* expensive." Pansy smirked.

"You don't even know what he did."

"I don't care. It should be expensive on principle alone."

Hermione smiled at her. Then sighed.

"*It looked* expensive. I just can't make sense of it." She reached into her bag, wrapping her fingers around the side of the box. "And it's lovely, of course, even though it's silly. The clothes I have are perfectly fine, so I'm honestly inclined to just throw it away. I'm not in the mood for him to be—"

As she pulled the box from her bag, however, she was cut off mid sentence by a gasp from Pansy.

Hermione froze.

Pansy's eyes went as wide as the plates on the table before them. She reached out her hands for the box, clenching her fingers in her desperation to get her hands on it.

"*Give that to me. Right this fucking second.*"

Hermione practically tossed it at her, and Pansy squeaked with surprise as she ran her hands over the lettering. Her mouth was open. Lips parted. Horror and shock and awe painted over her face. "You lucky *slag*," she muttered.

Hermione was feeling unbelievably nervous. "Is... um..."

Pansy didn't tear her eyes away from the box before her. "You have no idea what this is, do you?"

Hermione paused, eyeing the box carefully. Then shook her head.

"Mind bringing me up to speed?"

Pansy seemed to snap back to reality, but shook her head in disbelief at what was in her hands.

"Hermione, this is a *hell* of an apology."

She opened the box with a gentleness that Hermione had never seen before; a delicate touch that made it look almost—if she looked very *very* closely—like Pansy's hands were shaking. She slipped the cuff between her fingers, admiring the stitching for a moment, then shook her head in disbelief. Placed the blouse back into the box, but didn't close it, moving everything else aside so it could sit between them on the table. She cleared her throat.

And she sighed with the most *annoyance* Hermione had ever heard.

"Some bitches have all the fucking luck."

Hermione almost scoffed, but Pansy kept on, her voice rising as she ranted.

"In my entire *life*, and despite being president of the social clubs for the most fabulously fashionable women in Wizarding Britain, this is the first time *I* have even *held* one, despite repeated enquiries to get on the purchase list, for which the waitlist is *seven hundred years long*. Of course, somehow, it's *you* that gets your unmanicured hands all over one despite having *no comprehension* of its significance to fashion—"

Hermione swallowed, hard, gaze darting nervously about as Pansy's voice began to draw the attention of the other patrons. "What is it?"

Pansy took another deep breath, but this one was fuming.

"*Pans.*" The plea in her voice was awfully pathetic, but Hermione was desperate. God, what had Cormac done?

Pansy shook her head again. Another deep breath, as if she were praying for patience. She lifted the sleeve, brandishing it at Hermione.

"This blouse is *fairy-sewn*. French fairies. They live high up along the Channel coast. A regular blouse might have a thread count per square inch of 200 threads. Six hundred for a very fine silk. This one? *Eight hundred thousand*. And I'm sure with that giant brain of yours you understand that two hundred and eight hundred thousand are very, *very* different numbers."

Hermione's eyes went wide. She glanced down at the fabric, so delicate in its box, and for the first time, she noticed the *shimmer* it seemed to exude. It was like magic itself was woven

into the fabric, shining and reflecting the very air around them. Like a fine dust, the very reflection of sunlight.

“How is that possible?” she asked.

Pansy nodded. “I told you, it’s fairy made. Tiny hands. Fairy silk, mostly from spiders. Also, it’s magic. It’s *unbelievably* magical. Won’t rip, tear, or stain, and adjusts itself to fit to your body shape. And it costs more than the average wizard would make in a half a decade.”

“*What?*” Hermione asked, knowing she was pale as a ghost.

“I don’t understand,” she said. “I... I’m almost *certain* this isn’t something Cormac can afford.”

Pansy stared at her for a moment, and then back down at the blouse. Furrowed her brow, which Hermione already knew to be a big deal because of the threat of wrinkles.

But Pansy shook her head.

“No, you’re right,” she mused. “The McLaggens could never afford something like this. They wouldn’t have the influence to even get on the *list*. It takes decades of favours, and being introduced, to even be granted permission to see through the fairy’s *disguises*—”

Hermione’s stomach twisted. Because Cormac could never have done this.

Cormac wouldn’t have the influence. He wouldn’t have the money. He wouldn’t have some personal connection to French fairies that could have resulted from centuries of familial relations—

He had not recently run off, early in the morning, saying that he had *urgent business in France*.

And then proceeded to be unbelievably busy and not be contactable for a few days.

Oh, God. Oh, *shit*.

“Pansy,” Hermione said, quietly. “I...”

Pansy tore her eyes briefly from the hem, glancing up at Hermione. Then did a double take.

Her eyes went wide.

“Oh my—*Hermione*—” her lip curled into a smirk. “Is this from Draco?”

Hermione didn’t say anything. She stared at the blouse for a good ten seconds before she managed to even squeak a response.

“*Possibly?*”

Pansy squealed, clapping her hands as she erupted with glee. “Oh my god, *Congratulations!* I just *knew* it would work. And that is so sweet of him to buy you a *gift* just to *celebrate*—”

“I— what?” Hermione said. “Pansy, I’m not pregnant.”

Pansy froze. “What do you mean you’re not pregnant?”

“This is—”

Hermione swallowed hard.

She knew she shouldn’t be revealing anything; particularly about her and Draco, but, to be perfectly fair, Pansy was one of the only other people who *knew* about Draco’s curse. If *anyone* was going to have insight on what to do, it was the woman in front of her.

“It’s a big misunderstanding,” she said, lowering her voice as she tried not to roll her eyes at her predicament. “Draco’s curse has got him thinking that he can *court* me—”

Pansy went as rigid as stone. “What!?”

It made Hermione freeze in response. “What?” she asked.

“He’s *courting* you?”

Hermione flushed bright pink. She could feel it rising in her cheeks. “Apparently.”

“You’re *married*.”

“Actually, I’m not. That’s what Cormac and I are fighting about. He never lodged the fucking paperwork. Can you *believe* it?”

Pansy stared at her. “You’re not married to Cormac?”

Hermione shook her head.

“And Draco has found out?”

Hermione winced, and nodded.

“...and despite the fact that he is one hundred percent adamant about *never* getting married... because you’re willing to give him a child, he’s now... courting you?”

The pink in Hermione’s cheeks darkened into a hot, pulsing crimson. She pursed her lips, glancing up at Pansy.

“Yes?” she squeaked.

Pansy continued to stare.

And then, she *snorted* with laughter.

Hermione's shoulders fell in exasperation as Pansy began laughing so hard she couldn't breathe.

"It's not *funny*!" she pleaded. "Pansy! *Stop*!"

"I go away for a *month*—and he's—*what*—" Pansy wheezed, covering her mouth periodically with her hands as she broke into hysterics. "What is your cunt made of, fucking *gold*?"

Hermione felt very much like banging her head on the table between them.

"Shut up. Shut up. Shut up."

"Alright, *alright*," Pansy took a tiny breath. She lay her hand over the top of Hermione's. But her eyes were sparkling. "So..." she said, tightly, her lips twisting as she tried not to laugh. "*How were the flowers?*"

Hermione's eyes went wide.

"*How did you—?!*"

Pansy roared too loudly to answer. She was *shaking* with laughter, and with every single second that passed, Hermione's cheeks only went redder and redder.

Hermione groaned, covering her face in her hands.

So what if the likelihood of this exact and very unlikely sequence of events happening was infinitesimally small? She supposed, to an outsider, the thought of her and Draco doing anything but holding knives to each others' throats could seem rather comical, but Pansy was supposed to be her *goddamn friend!* She was supposed to be *helping*, not looking like she was about to wet herself, wheezing across the table at the very *notion* that Draco might want to—

God!

Hermione was mostly certain that she had, in fact, already *been* courted before, whatever that even bloody well meant, but even at his worst, Cormac had never behaved as ostentatiously as this, as *conspicuously* as this, flaunting his wealth and—

And—

And just confusing the fucking *hell* out of her.

"Pansy," Hermione hissed. "Stop being coy and *help me*. I don't know what to do."

"Coy?" Pansy said, extremely bloody coyly. "Me?"

God, these *fucking Slytherins*.

Hermione groaned, unable to do anything except cover her face with her hands.

“Pansy,” she whined.

Pansy began to compose herself. She took a deep, deep breath, wiping under her eyes before motioning to the waiter.

“Two more coffees, please. Strong ones.”

She glanced at Hermione.

“Alright,” she said, still taking deep breaths. “Flowers are the first stage of courting. Tell me about them.”

Hermione sighed, telling Pansy everything she could possibly remember about the arrangements as Pansy’s lips parted wider and wider, until finally, she sighed.

“Well. As much as it’s possibly the funniest thing that’s ever happened, it does sound *beautiful*. How’s the fragrance?”

“Overwhelming,” Hermione frowned.

Pansy sighed loudly again, as if swooning. “Gods, he’s spent a *fortune*. And the *butterflies*—Circe damn him, that is an exquisite touch. It sounds like he’s done an incredible job. So, at the very least, Narcissa would’ve been thrilled with him, Gods rest her soul. But *fuck me*, Hermione. What did you *do* to the poor boy? It sounds like he’s absolutely *besotted*.”

Hermione stared at her, completely confused. “How can you tell that from flowers?”

Pansy sighed heavily. “Granger, *surely* you’re familiar with flower language as a concept?”

Hermione frowned. “Is that… like… a rose means love?”

Pansy rolled her eyes so severely she almost moaned. “In a *disgusting* oversimplification, yes. Flowers mean things. Peonies, for example, mean ‘*happy life*’, which is what, I expect, he’s trying to convince you that you’d have with him. And if they’re in the bud, like you said, it means he’s willing to invest the time. He’ll wait for you. Not that he *wants* to.” She lifted her coffee cup to her lips, exhaling over the top of it. “Calla lilies beside clematis—*beauty inside and out*. Gardenias for *secret love*. The bulbous ones you described are probably hyacinths— they mean *sport*.” She chuckled. “He’s willing to fight for you.”

Hermione gulped nervously, and Pansy smirked.

“So I don’t think I need to tell you, he’s rather serious about the idea.”

Hermione tried to stop herself from groaning.

“Should I have sent them back? I tried to write to Draco—”

Pansy’s eyes went wide. “Saying what?”

“Telling him to stop it.”

Pansy's mouth fell open in horror. "Absolutely do *not* do that."

"Why not?"

"It is considered unconscionably *rude* to not even *consider* a suitor when he shows interest. He will take *great* offence to it, but regardless of that I don't think I need to tell you that Draco does *not* take being told no well."

"But his *curse*—" Hermione frowned deeply. "I don't mind being rude if it stops him from trying to *marry me*."

Pansy furrowed her brow. "Oh, *alright*, then. Dump them onto his front lawn after he's made such a lovely gesture. Set the arrangements on fire and send him the ashes. Squish every last butterfly, curse the flowers to bite him and deliver them with a *thousand owls* to shit on his house—"

Hermione blushed. "Alright. *Alright!* I *won't*!"

She frowned. She still didn't see the point, but Pansy seemed very insistent. Hermione sank backwards into her chair and rested her head in her hands. "Will you at least tell me what's supposed to happen after the flowers, then?"

Pansy frowned. "It's already happened."

"What?" Hermione's stomach twisted.

"The second stage is a piece of clothing, which, obviously, he has already sent you. And *extremely quickly* by courting standards. He must want an autumn wedding."

Hermione's eyes darted to the box between them. Right. Cormac had given her some awful, itchy gloves. So that must've been the second stage. *God* she felt so stupid for not asking at the time.

"So the blouse was *definitely* from Draco?" she asked.

Pansy nodded, looking longingly down at the gift.

"Merlin, Hermione. I think every straight witch in the Wizarding world has wondered, at some point, what it would be like to be the lucky girl being courted by *Draco Malfoy*. I was almost *horrified* when I realised I was gay and that it wouldn't be me. I mean, the displays that Lucius put on for Narcissa are the stuff of *legend* in society. If this is the second stage, I'm almost nervous about what he's going to give you next."

A sinking pit formed in her stomach. "What's the next stage?"

A sly, curling grin spread across Pansy's lips. She took a sip of her coffee, narrowing her eyes over the top of it, letting out a small laugh.

"*Jewellery*."

Hermione cringed. “*Oh, God.*”

“Well, more specifically, the wording is ‘*a token of the greatest significance*’ but that pretty much *always* means jewellery. He’ll start doing things in between now and then to grab your attention, but the next big move? Jewellery, for sure.”

Hermione didn’t wear much jewellery at the best of times. A pair of basic gold earrings, or a delicate chain around her neck. Her wedding ring, of course, but even that, she’d demanded something minimal. After the monstrosity of a piece that was Cormac’s Great-Aunt Mirabel’s ruby engagement ring, she’d put her foot down about the one she’d wear every day. The earrings Cormac had given her were alright, and she did still occasionally wear them... but...

Hermione chewed her lip nervously. “What kind of jewellery would be normal?”

“*Normal?*” Pansy smiled. “*Normal* would be earrings or a necklace, or something. Muggle brands have been very *en vogue* recently with some of the lower classes. And look, I’m partial to the Garrard couture line as well, but *Lucius* had four five-carat diamonds turned into a brooch for Narcissa, so I’m sure Draco will have something just as sparkly up his sleeve. And note, that this *isn’t* the engagement ring, that comes later.”

Hermione stiffened as Pansy began tapping her finger against her lips.

“What do you mean *five-carat*—” She frowned. “Isn’t that *huge*? ”

“Of course it’s huge! But yours won’t be anything that massive. Draco *hated* that brooch; thought it was unbelievably *gaudy*. ”

She took a long sip of her coffee, somehow not even remotely messing up her lipstick, but took a single look at Hermione’s panicked face and grinned.

“But don’t worry, dear, it won’t come for a few days. Etiquette is to space out the stages based on how fast you want the engagement to be, and knowing Draco, whatever it is is going to be so fucking expensive it’ll take him *at least* that to pass all the securities at Gringotts where their *really big* stuff and all their money was stored.”

“Where...” Hermione paled. “It’s in a *vault*? ”

But Pansy wasn’t listening.

“I just can’t for the life of me think which piece it will be.” She’d sat up straighter again, and was tapping her finger on her cup, slowly, pondering out loud. “Diamonds, I think, though. He knows you won’t wear an emerald, too Slytherin. Too many memories. And a sapphire...” Pansy eyed her. “With your complexion? No. No, it’ll have to be diamonds.”

Hermione’s stomach twisted.

“Those all sound... very expensive.”

“Well *obviously*, ” she rolled her eyes. “Something like citrine or topaz would be considered downright offensive. *Unless* it was the girls’ birthstone or had some sort of significance to the

family. When's your birthday again? It's soon, isn't it?"

"It's in a few weeks."

"Oh... that's right..." Pansy pursed her lips. "Hmm. September... That *is* a sapphire birthstone..." She shook her head. "No. No, it's still diamonds. You'll be getting diamonds."

Hermione sighed. "Well, if he tries to give me any diamonds, I'll just return them to him, and —"

Pansy went absolutely pale.

"*Return them to him!*? Hermione, what did I *just say* about declining his *courting gifts*!?"

Hermione frowned. "Pansy, I—"

Pansy groaned with frustration, flipping her hair off her shoulder as if trying to cleanse herself of the embarrassment of explaining it.

"If you're going to reject him, you *must* do it when he's ready to propose."

Hermione's eyebrows knotted together at the centre of her forehead as she gave Pansy the most incredulous look she could conjure.

"That is *absurd*!" she remarked, incredulously. "Why can't I just turn him down *now*?! I'll send him this blouse back and he can bloody well give it to you for your *birthday*!"

"More coffee. On the house," a waiter nervously interrupted. Pansy's eyes whipped up to his, glaring furiously at him until he placed the coffees between them and backed hurriedly away. Pansy didn't bat an eye, as if getting free things (and drinking four cups of coffee back to back) was normal. Hermione supposed it likely was, for her. Pansy took a long sip of scalding hot espresso, and turned back to her.

"You can't *turn it down* because Draco does not *like* being told no."

"And that's my problem, *why*?" Hermione spat back.

Pansy's eyes rolled once more, placing a hand flat on the table as if to steady herself.

"Gods, he is so lucky that this has happened with *you*, and not some opportunistic *tart*—" She stared her straight in the eyes. "It is *your problem* because *you're the one with the blouse*, Hermione. He's chosen *you*, and your golden little cunt, to apparently lose his godsdamn *mind* over. Meaning that all things courting, up to and including gently *coaxing* him to stop instead of punching him in the face and brutally rejecting him, are *your Circe-given problem*."

She looked down at her espresso as she sipped it. But then, her eyes left her coffee cup, and Hermione shifted uncomfortably as her gaze dragged down her form.

"Also, you should put it on. Like, *immediately*."

“*What?!*” Hermione gasped, her eyes wide.

“You need to wear the blouse. Publicly. So he can see that the gift is acknowledged and proportionate, and appreciated. Otherwise he’ll just keep giving you things until you accept them.”

“Absolutely *not!*”

“Did you not just hear me say how upset he’ll be if you don’t?”

“Did you not just hear *me* say that I’m absolutely not going to do it?”

“Why on earth *wouldn’t you?*” Pansy cocked an eyebrow. “It’s only going to do good things for your reputation.”

“I could not disagree more.” Hermione said, frustratedly. “Wearing something that was gifted to me by a *man who isn’t my husband?*”

“Husband? More like a petulant roommate. Honestly, who needs to go and conceive a bloody *child* when you’ve got *Cormac*.?” Pansy rolled her eyes severely. “Besides, no one has to know that it’s not from him. If anyone asks, just say it was an expensive gift from a donor.”

Hermione’s mouth fell open. She glanced around to make sure no one was looking at them and leaned in, lowering her voice. “I’m the head of a Ministry department, Pansy. I’m not allowed to accept expensive gifts from donors.”

“Then say you’ve been saving up and bought it yourself, for fuck’s sake! It’s not like anyone’s going to care *who* it’s from. Just that you’re wearing a very fucking nice top.”

Hermione sighed. She checked her watch. She’d been out for over an hour, and she had a meeting in ten minutes. The Ministry was an eight-minute walk away.

“*Shit,*” Hermione said, slipping some galleons onto the table. “Pansy, I have to go. I have a meeting.”

“You have a meeting?” she asked, her fingertips clicking on the side of her coffee cup. “Right this very minute? We haven’t finished!”

“Yes, sorry, I lost track of time.” Hermione said, gathering all of her things and placing them gently back into her handbag. “I’m sorry. I just have to go *now.*”

Pansy stared at her. Momentarily. Contemplatively. Her fingernails still clicking against her coffee.

“So you’re leaving me here? And just... walking back to work?”

“Yes. I am, and the photographers are always hanging out around this time to snap pictures of salacious lunch meetings, so more likely than not they’ll try to get an interview, so I absolutely need to run. I truly am sorry. I just need to—”

Pansy threw her drink at her.

Uncomfortably warm coffee exploded over the front of Hermione's shirt, soaking her completely from collarbone to waist. Her hands flew up in front of her, her mouth falling open, a squeal erupting from her lips as she instantly began dripping onto the floor.

Hermione stood in frozen silence as she thawed from the outside in, the rage bubbling in her stomach as her eyes rose to the woman opposite her.

"*Pansy!*" she hissed, sinking back into her chair to try and hide it. "What is *wrong with you!?*"

Pansy clicked her fingers at Hermione's bag. At the engraved gift box.

Hermione pointed at her.

"*No!*" she said, sternly. "No. I can just *scourgify* it."

"That's going to take at least five minutes," Pansy tutted, glancing at an imaginary watch that would not have matched her outfit. "And it's dark coffee... it'll probably stain..."

Hermione stared at her again. She would've stared for a full minute, had she had the time. But she didn't. So, she took four seconds of blatant, angry, furious glaring.

Then she let out the most indignant, furious groan, picked up the box, and stomped toward the ladies room.

Pansy followed her, giggling to herself as Hermione locked the door behind her.

"I will *never* forgive you for this," she said, wrenching it from its box and unbuttoning her drenched blouse. She threw it onto the chair, glaring through the solid door in Pansy's direction. "You maleficent, profligatory, officious—"

"I don't know what *any* of those words mean."

"—*cow!*"

Pansy scoffed, and rolled her eyes. "Well, at least that one I *know.*"

Hermione wrenched the blouse from the box, the silk floating over her fingers like—well, silk. But it didn't just feel like silk. It felt—

She pulled it on, over her arms and up over her shoulders.

She almost gasped.

It felt like freshly shaved legs in satin sheets. Like slipping into body-temperature water. Like sinking into the softest pillows. With each button she did up, the blouse seemed to shrink. Sinking into her form, over her curves. It was loose enough to feel comfortable, but she knew without looking that this fit her like *nothing else*.

She was going to throw something.

Hermione scowled. "I am so furious with you, Parkinson," she said, through the door.

"It's *Weasley*, now. The wedding was three years ago. *Remember?* Some of us want to exist outside of our family's *stellar* reputations."

"Well, how about starting with not *forcing clothing* on people against their *will!*?"

She could *hear* the chuckle in Pansy's voice.

"Don't complain, Hermione. Why do you think Draco always looks so incredible? You think he looks that good just because he's tall and strapping?" Pansy laughed. "It's nothing but *good tailoring*, darling. This is a statement. This is him telling you that you've got him on your side now." She exhaled a laugh. "I wouldn't be surprised if he's snuck a '*Property of DLM*' into the seams somehow."

Hermione hated that she glanced quickly down at the cuffs.

She stepped from the lavatory, and as she hit the last button, Pansy's jaw dropped.

"Damn, Granger, you've had a *body* under there."

Hermione shook her head, giving Pansy an absolutely filthy look, and shoved the box in her bag.

She rolled her eyes again, pulling her things together, and turned to look at Pansy.

"Well? How does it look?"

Pansy cast an eye over her, pursing her lips. Then frowning.

"You look fucking incredible and I don't think I'll ever forgive you for it." Her mouth turned up at the corner. "He's going to be *oh* so pleased when he finds out."

Hermione checked her watch. She was going to be so late. She slung her handbag over her shoulder.

"You truly are a cow, just so you know."

Pansy smirked at her.

"*Moo.*"

Hermione kept her head down and her stride purposeful as she exited the tea house, praying silently that she wouldn't run into any photographers. It was slightly too warm for her coat, but she tugged it on anyway. It mostly hid the blouse from sight, at least.

She hoped, to *God*, that she wouldn't run into anyone, or, more accurately, anyone who might recognize *bloody fairy-made fabric*. She crossed her fingers and breathed, and hid in plain sight as she made her way back to the Ministry.

And, she'd been lucky so far.

It was an eight-minute walk, and she was five minutes in. More than halfway there, and not a single photographer in sight. She breathed a sigh of relief. No photos.

So obviously, as was the nature of Murphy's Law; the moment she turned the corner into the street nearest the Ministry—

Flash.

It dazzled her momentarily, leaving her off balance. The photographer who took her picture was standing *far* too close. Hermione lifted a hand to rub her eyes.

And, in the daze of it, let her coat fall open.

"My," the photographer's eyes went wide. "That is a *lovely* blouse you're wearing! Where on earth did you get it?"

Another photographer stepped forward, snapping a picture of her.

"Awfully nice for a Ministry salary?" She heard them mutter.

"Well, she *is* married to a—" another replied.

"The McLaggens are *barely*—"

"Mrs. Granger-McLaggen!" one shouted. "Was the blouse a gift? Who's it from?"

"No one!" she squeaked back in a panic. "It's— it's from no one."

Hermione forced her coat closed, and hurried into the Ministry. *Furious*. She was going to *kill* Pansy. But more than anything—

She was going to kill Draco.

Chapter End Notes

There's a point to this, I promise.

Chapter 13: "Pocket change."

Chapter Summary

Draco's back. The courting gets worse. Hermione makes multiple mistakes.

Chapter Notes

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

Magical Health gets a Makeover?

Health Department Head Serves Style While Wards Celebrate Staffing Increases

There it was, the headline front and center on the Daily Prophet. And, accompanying it, a picture of her coat falling open while she was talking to the photographer. Hermione picked up the paper, staring at it, before proceeding to roll her eyes dramatically.

The *front page*? For a *shirt*? *Seriously*?

She skimmed the article and noted, with great annoyance and comparatively little surprise, the few instances of her most recent policy changes and the comparatively *many* instances of shaming her *previous* outfit choices, tossing about words such as '*unflattering*' and '*frumpy*' and '*dressing like a sentient filing cabinet*'.

However, to her immense surprise... the article wasn't *entirely* disparaging.

In addition to the rather rude comments that perhaps her '*newly-sparked interest*' in fashion meant that she was '*finally taking her job seriously*', there were... other comments. Implying that, with this new found rebranding, that becoming a donor for the hospital might actually be becoming somewhat *en vogue*. And, what was even worse, was that it ended with a direct encouragement for readers to contact her department about it.

She fucking hated slow news days.

Hermione tugged on the itchy cuff of her cotton-blend blouse and sighed. It was *fine*. There was absolutely nothing bloody wrong with her clothes. She enjoyed a new dress for a special event as much as the next girl, but there was absolutely no goddamn need for her to go out and spend an exorbitant amount of money on clothing. If the damn reporters wanted to ask her about it, she'd happily tell them as much. Then probably set their shoelaces on fire under the table.

She reluctantly paid for the newspaper she'd basically already read half of.

As she looked back at the photograph, she noticed, with a spark of nervousness, that the corner of the gift box was sticking out of her bag, just there, on the edge of the frame. She could only hope no one had a keen enough eye to identify it, she certainly didn't have the time or energy to explain how she'd come into possession of such a vaunted piece of clothing.

God damn it.

She decided to skip waiting for a coffee that morning.

Finally taking it seriously, she thought, as she stormed down Whitehall toward the Ministry. Honestly, what in the name of Rowena Ravenclaw's left tit did a *blouse* have to do with *magical fucking hospitals*? Yes, she'd looked 'presentable' for once. That *must've* been how she'd managed to restructure the curse trauma unit and reduce triage times by thirty-seven percent. How she'd managed to obtain funding for four new wings in six years, as well as shore up bequests for the next two *decades*. It clearly had *nothing* to do with her years of experience and three policy white papers, did it?

No, no, it was the *fucking blouse* she'd worn yesterday.

She was so *fed up* with the way that this entire system worked. Where her last name and the correct clothing was the *only* way to get one's foot in the door, her only chance of making any significant change. It wasn't like she could even try to whip up votes with a well-placed campaign; not when a *ridiculous* number of the seats didn't even have some pompous pureblooded heir to even *sit* in them. She was completely reliant on her *arse* of a goddamn not-even-husband to turn the handle for her. She was practically *scowling* by the time she turned into her department.

"Judah, can you remind me please to send a *scathing* letter to the editor of—"

But Judah wasn't at his desk.

She stopped in front of it, staring at the empty seat, furrowing her brow.

Judah was *always* at his desk. He had a superhuman ability to *always* be at his desk when she needed him to be. He had a superhuman ability to know exactly what she needed from him, at literally all times, ever. He was the closest thing to actually being legitimately superhuman she thought she'd ever encountered.

So why wasn't he at his desk?

Hermione shook her head, turning down the corridor toward her own office... Until she noticed, from the other end, that her door was open.

And there was a heated debate coming from within it.

"Judah?" she called.

There were sudden, hushed voices, and Judah stepped out of her office, slamming the door shut behind him.

“Mrs Granger-McLaggen,” he said, nervously. “Good morning.”

And he stood stiffly and silently in the corridor.

“Who’s in my office?” she furrowed her brow suspiciously at him.

“Oh, uh....” Judah’s cheeks flushed above his beard. “No one.”

Hermione’s stomach sank.

“Judah, if you’re lying to me I’m going to be very disappoin—”

Judah blushed furiously, pink tinging beneath his glasses. “I apologise. I sincerely apologise. I did lie, but... perhaps it would be better to let me handle this. You already have so much on your plate—”

He was white as a sheet.

Hermione guided Judah out of the way, stepping into her office.

Which had *exploded* in a sea of clothing.

The walls had been illegally extended, somehow. Pushed further out, to twice the size, as hundreds of pieces of clothing on rolling racks swung with chaos. There were people *everywhere*— well-dressed, stylish people with minuscule waistlines and shiny hair— fussing over mannequins as they argued loudly over the shreds of available space. Skirts. Dresses. Blouses. Accessories. A man squeaked as he tried to hold up a towering pillar of shoeboxes. Another fell over under the unbalancing of what had to be twenty handbags on each arm.

Her mouth fell open.

“What on *earth*? ”

Her voice seemed to strike them all silent. Every eye in the room turned to her. Jaws dropped, eyes widened.

And they all seemed to *pounce*.

All at once, the salespeople *converged* on her, surrounding her in a mishmash of nonsensical talk about *new season* and *en vogue* and *tailored*.

Hermione didn’t say a word.

Judah was already beating them back with a designer handbag.

“*Get back!*” he called, wielding it as a weapon as he swung it wildly, before apparently remembering he had a wand and pulling it from his pocket. He pointed it at the ground, panting, a splash of blue paint spilling across the ground. “Or the clothes are next!”

They backed away, seemingly remembering themselves.

Hermione watched as they bowed their heads one by one, before eagerly straightening and trying to catch her eye.

Judah cleared his throat.

"It appears..." he said, quietly. "It appears that you may have received some additional gifts. They're from—" He met her eye pointedly. "Well, I expect you have already made a reasonable deduction as to who they're from."

And then, he handed her a card.

It was scrawled, almost ripping the paper with the sharp edge of a quill. Handwriting she recognised. A signed card. A signed card full of damning evidence which Judah had clearly read.

And now, Judah knew.

Hermione was sure there was every chance Judah had *suspected*, over the years, that her marriage to Cormac wasn't the frolic through wedded bliss that it might've seemed. Judah was far too observant to not notice something like the fact that she rarely spoke about her home life. Or that five birthdays had gone by without so much as a bouquet from her 'husband', let alone a dozen and a half of them complete with magical butterflies. And, perhaps, the glances at Malfoy... her willingness to drag him into her office after donor meetings and *yell* at him might've shown somewhat more *familiarity* than she generally showed her other donors... The flowers. The blouse. It all led to one rather glaring conclusion.

But to have confirmation that Judah *knew*— Hermione's stomach twisted in sudden fear. She knew he reported to her but that didn't mean she didn't respect him. Adore him, really. And now, what would he think of her? What would he *say*? It wasn't like he'd say anything to anyone, or report her, but even so, having one of her direct reports *know* that she was—

That she was *involved* with a *donor*—

But instead of being judgemental, Judah held her gaze steadily. Stoically. Supportive, as he always was. He glanced up at the others in the room, turning his back to them, and lowering his voice.

"Is Mr Malfoy making you uncomfortable? Because I can have a word..."

Hermione let out a shaky breath.

Oh, Judah. The sweetheart.

He really did always know *exactly* what she needed him to say.

"No, Judah. It's alright, thank you."

But she paused. Then she pursed her lips, and met Judah's eye, giving him a small, grateful smile.

“I mean it. Thank you,” she said, quietly. “I— um—”

He shook his head.

“It is none of my business, until you need it to be.”

Hermione nodded as her stomach twisted into a knot the size of her illegally expanded office, trying not to sink to her knees and bury her face in the ground.

God. Fucking. Damnit.

She glanced around the room, taking closer stock of what was actually there. A rack of undoubtedly designer clothing. A towering stack of boxes upon boxes of shoes. Bags and accessories and clothes and fucking underwear and those were just the things she recognised. Hermione suddenly pictured him, striding in somewhere that she was sure she’d’ve been turned away at the door. All business and competence as he sent people running in every direction to try and be the first to give him literally anything he wanted.

God, he'd look so good ordering people around.

She tried to clear her head of the image.

“Is...” she turned to Judah. “He can’t possibly have bought all of this for... me?”

Judah cleared his throat.

“I believe you’ll find your answer on the card, ma’am.”

Hermione turned her gaze to the paper in her hand. Flipped it open. Read the words.

And her jaw just about dropped to the floor.

Hermione,

Gods, you look fucking hot when you wear things that I paid for.

Even if you pretend that I didn't.

Eternally yours,

D.L. Malfoy

Hermione managed to swallow her panic, but she couldn’t quite choke down her rage.

What. The. Fuck.

He—

Had he gone completely fucking *insane*?!

She stared down at the note, fury (and admittedly, some panic) bubbling in her system. Then, Hermione looked sideways at Judah.

“The staff are awaiting your approval, and then they’ll have it all sent to the Manor, along with instructions to fetch the rest of your belongings from Walton Park and move them over as well.”

Hermione went deathly pale.

“No— he’s instructed them to— *what*—” she panicked, trying not to vomit. “Oh my God, you *cannot* move my things out of Walton Park House. I need— the media— they’d—”

Judah nodded. “I could probably convince them to just let me send it all there directly instead, then, ma’am. They’re *confused* Muggles. If I tell them it’s for storage purposes, they’ll probably agree.”

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief.

“Yes. That will do. Thank you. And then will you make my office its correct size again, please? I would absolutely do it myself—”

Hermione turned on her heel, her teeth clenched tight in her jaw. She smiled tersely. “*But I have a fucking owl to send.*”

She flipped the card over and slammed it onto the desk as she scribbled her response.

Then, she stormed up to the owlery.

Pansy be damned.

He needed to be told no.

Draco,

You are not courting me.

Stop sending me stupid things I don’t need, and do some fucking good with your money that does not involve buying extravagant gifts for someone who neither wants nor needs them.

Irritated regards,

Hermione.

That should do it. Well. It had *better* ‘do it’. If it didn’t, she was certain that the next round of clothing would leave her wearing nothing but the Imperial State Crown and the skin of an

animal that was supposed to no longer exist.

And if that happened—

Well. She supposed she could always hex him again.

Cormac was visibly uncomfortable when she arrived home. The clothing newly hanging in the wardrobe seemed to have sparked something in him. Panic, or fear, or a sudden, overwhelming realisation that he had monumentally fucked up, she wasn't sure, and to be honest she didn't particularly care.

She caught him staring glancing nervously at the silk as if he hadn't the slightest idea what to make of it, which made sense to Hermione, as his spine was probably made of something even more fragile.

The complete and utter stupidity of the gift was almost worth it, just for that thought.

But while seeing Cormac suffer was immensely gratifying... there was something else entirely hanging over her head.

And that was that Draco hadn't replied.

It was good, really, that he didn't reply to her; because she was extremely annoyed with him and any response he gave her was only going to make her angrier. She already had to suffer through dinner with a *muffliato* cast around her head to block Cormac out, she didn't want to have to deal with Draco trying to convince her that a whole new wardrobe of clothes was somehow a good and practical thing for him to have bought her, even if they *did* do positive things for her professional reputation in the media.

And the fact he'd made her admit that against her will made her extra, doubly annoyed at him.

Hermione entered the Ministry the following day, rather pointedly *not* wearing *any* of the clothes that Draco had bought her.

Well, except for the lovely little pair of heels from... whatever the one with the red soles was.

They were horribly impractical, and a perfect example of how women were expected to suffer in the name of sophistication. Goodness, they were pretty, though. They made the most wonderful, elegant clicking sound across the Ministry's main hall, and she almost allowed herself to become horribly arrogant as she enjoyed them. Until her name rang out across the tiles.

It was a deep, booming sound; jovial yet calm despite the speed with which it reached her.

Kingsley.

“Hermione!” he called again. “A moment?”

She turned. He was in a rush, as he always was, but clapped her gently on the shoulder as he passed amongst a flurry of other Level One officials.

Hermione’s eyebrows furrowed. “Is everything alright?”

“Alright?” he asked in return, laughing loudly. “Is everything *alright*?”

There was a sparkle in Kingsley’s eye that Hermione did not like the look of.

“I should say that things were *more* than alright,” he said, cryptically. He leaned in, lowering his voice. “Especially at home, it seems.”

Hermione couldn’t hide the quizzical expression on her face, but Kingsley seemingly ignored it.

And without another word, he passed her the scroll.

She recognised it immediately. She knew these scrolls better than the back of her hand.

Hermione wrenched it open, glancing down at the text. A bunch of legal jargon, a whole heap of instructions, et cetera, and then, the important part.

One hundred thousand galleons

Her eyes went wide. “Wow,” she said, smiling. “That’s very generous. A new major donor?”

She glanced up at Kingsley, but instead of responding, he just looked at her.

It made her pause, furrowing her brow at him before turning her gaze slowly back to the form. She read over the legalities, the amount—

But then, she got to the name.

And her blood ran cold.

Because there, on the name line, was a name she had not in a million years expected to see.

On behalf of the McLaggen family trust

Her jaw dropped.

"*Cormac?!*" she said, far too incredulously to be anything other than wildly unprofessional. "Why on *earth*—"

"Seemed very keen to get the money into your department," Kingsley chuckled. "I take it he didn't share this plan with you?"

"Absolutely *not!*" Hermione said. "He's *never* shown any interest in—"

She stopped herself before she gave too much away.

Hermione clicked her tongue, a flood of annoyance somewhere around the base of her throat.

He'd *never* shown any interest in her work. Never. Not fucking *once*.

Until, of course, she stopped speaking to him. Until he noticed that she was garnering rather a lot of positive press. And until he realised that this was very likely the only way he'd get her attention.

"What's the occasion, do you think?" Kingsley smiled. If he could see how much it had pissed her off, he had enough tact to pretend he didn't. "Anniversary? Perhaps a birthday?"

There was absolutely no way in hell Cormac had remembered her birthday, let alone gone to the effort of getting her something for it. This was a ploy. It was some sort of tactic. He knew that this would get her attention, because it was her literal job for this to get her attention.

This was Cormac's version of a *hail-Mary*.

"My birthday. Absolutely. It's in a few weeks." Hermione cleared her throat. "That is one hundred per cent why he's done this."

She forced a tight smile at Kingsley, who smiled warmly down at her.

"You know, things like this look *good* for you, Hermione. *Very good.*"

"Thank you, Kingsley," she said quietly. "I'll... I'll pass on my gratitude."

He nodded.

But then, he glanced around.

The Minister took a step closer, leaning in to speak quietly.

"There's... *another issue* I'd like to speak to you about. A matter that's a little more... *delicate.*" He lowered his voice. "Though, perhaps it might be best if we discuss that in your office."

Hermione's stomach twisted, though she wasn't sure why. "Of course, Minister. Any time you're free," she blurted.

“Wonderful!” he clapped his hands. “Let me drop a few things in my office, and I’ll be right down. Say, five minutes?”

Her head nodded without her say-so, a professional smile plastering itself across her face.

Kingsley smiled approvingly, but then, without so much as another word—

His gaze fell to her shoes.

It lingered for a moment, but before she could confirm the emotion behind his expression, he turned on his heel, back to the swarm of Ministry men surrounding him. In a moment, he’d been swallowed by his entourage, the men moving en masse, on to their next Very Important Ministerial Task, leaving Hermione standing in the middle of the atrium.

He’d noticed her shoes.

Yes, the high heels were lovely; a lot nicer than the low court shoes or loafers she usually wore. But that didn’t *mean* anything. He couldn’t possibly have known they were a gift from Draco.

Could he?

No. That would be ridiculous. There was no way he could suspect something like that from nothing but *shoes*. She’d been so *careful*. The only way he could’ve known if something was going on was if he knew about the blouse, and Kingsley didn’t strike her as the type to be up to date on fairy-sewn fashion. Though... he *was* a pureblood.

Surely, she was just panicking.

Though, perhaps security had been notified about the intruders in her office. Maybe the Floo network staff, or maybe— God, *Cormac* wouldn’t have said anything, would he? No, God, not to *Kingsley*. Cormac was stupid but he wasn’t *that* stupid. She was overthinking this. There was absolutely, positively no way that Kingsley could know about Draco, and no way that he ever *would* know about Draco.

Hermione made her way downstairs with her back straight, taking deep breaths to calm herself. There was no point in fretting about Draco. There was nothing to fret about. He would read her letter, he would stop sending her gifts, and she would figure something out.

Her husband, on the other hand—

“Judah, can you draft the most generic possible thank you note—”

He looked up from his desk, springing to his feet.

“Mrs. Granger-McLaggen, good morning.” His clipboard was at the ready as he fell into step alongside her, as usual. “My apologies for interrupting, ma’am, I know I had your first appointment noted down for nine-thirty, however, one of the major donors has requested an urgent meeting. I would have provided more warning, but Mister Malfoy was *quite* insistent, and I thought you might like—”

Hermione stopped walking.

“Malfoy is here?” she said, knowing she’d just gone white as a sheet.

“Yes, ma’am. He came in through the Floo and refused to leave your office. I have tried multiple times to remove him, but—”

Judah hesitated.

Hermione frowned.

“What is it?”

“He’s... uh...” Judah took a deep breath. “Not wearing trousers, ma’am.”

Hermione’s body turned to ice as her eyes trailed down the corridor toward her office door. Surely he hadn’t—

She strode as silently as she could, turning the door handle without a sound. She opened the door a crack and peered in, but as soon as she did, her stomach dropped. Because pacing, rather urgently, back and forth—

Was Draco.

He was frantic. Fists in his hair, brow furrowed and furious and panicked. His shirt buttons were almost entirely open, a tie draped around his neck as if he’d started getting dressed and simply forgotten halfway through. Step after step after step, backwards and forwards across the length of her office, muttering intelligible things to himself.

Pointedly, trouserless.

Hermione’s eyes went wide.

She quietly pulled the door shut and slammed her back up against the wall, shaking her head furiously.

“*Fuck!*” she hissed at Judah.

“He said it was urgent, ma’am. I silenced the door, but he was yelling something about...” he lowered his voice, peering at the door. “Something about an owl, yesterday.”

Hermione’s stomach sank into the floor.

Oh God.

Oh, *God*, she’d told him to stop courting her. She’d told him to stop, just as Pansy had told her explicitly *not* to do.

And now he was pacing her office with no trousers on.

Fuck.

“No, no, no, no, no,” she said under her breath. “The *Minister for Magic* is on his way down, and Dra—”

She caught herself.

“Mister Malfoy is not himself, right now. If Kingsley *finds him* like this—”

Oh, God, oh, God.

Oh, God.

Hermione had, at most, *minutes* to get rid of Draco before the *Minister for fucking Magic* discovered him. Before he came to suspect that there might be a *reason* that a good-looking, eligible, rich, young bachelor might be found, without any trousers on, in the lush, flower-covered office belonging to the young, female department head whose office was tasked with *soliciting donations by any means necessary*—

Judah glanced toward the door. Then back at her.

“I’ll stall the Minister.”

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief, and nodded at him. God, she owed that man a raise, and she’d give him one, right after she ripped him a new one for seating her between Draco and her husband at the gala.

“Thank you,” she said, quietly. “I just... give me... *three* minutes.”

And then, with a deep breath, she stepped through the door, pushing it shut behind her.

In a moment, he had her up against it, his arms curling around her waist and up her back. Holding her to him. Squeezing her. Burying his lips into the side of her head.

“You’d better have a *fucking good excuse* for showing up here without—” she started.

“*Baby*,” he whispered, relieved. “Thank the fucking *Gods*—”

Hermione choked up, the sudden rush of affection at the sound of his voice filling her all the way to the throat.

Oh, Lord, she wasn’t made of *stone*.

She couldn’t stop herself. She melted into his arms. It hadn’t even been that long. Just over a week, a week and a bit, maybe? With the feel of his body on hers, she found that she couldn’t quite remember.

Besides, she had three whole minutes, surely she could just take *one* of them for herself?

So she let him kiss her all over, just for a moment. Let his lips move through her hair, trail down her cheek. To the corner of her mouth. She relished it. Savoured it. The feeling of lips

she now knew so well; brushing across hers and drawing a soft moan from her as her fingers found his hair.

And as *his* fingers found—

Found the rapidly tightening peak of her nipple through her shirt.

It only took him a moment to isolate it. Stroking it gently as his lips moved against hers, sending electricity roaring through her body like she was a live wire. She had to let her body weight fall against the door.

God, how did he *do* that?

She'd never come alive under little more than a touch than she did with him. It was like her body craved him—*ached* for him— for the closeness and the feel of his skin on hers. Before she even realised what was happening, he was dipping his fingers into the waistband of her trousers, his thumb brushing the button, just *waiting* for her invitation. For even the slightest *hint* of consent.

Oh, how she would love his hands on her right now. How she would *die* to feel him sink his fingers into her. To have her skin against his, her body wrapped around him, sinking himself in while she kissed him instead of breathing. His lack of trousers made it quite obvious how *he* was feeling about the proximity, hard and firm against her as his hips shifted against her thigh. It felt so good; so *safe*; to be in his arms again that she almost didn't push him away.

But then she very rapidly came to her senses, and quickly did exactly that.

“What the *fuck* are you doing here?” she hissed, her hands on his chest as she tried to thrust him away from her. “And where on *earth* are your trousers?!”

Draco took her wrists in his hands and pinned them against the door. She could help but arch her back against it as her body flooded with warmth.

He growled into her neck with a frustrated rumble, as if it were the most irritating question she'd ever asked. “You don't like how I'm courting you,” he whispered.

It wasn't a question.

Hermione shivered. “What?”

“Your owl,” he said, directly into her throat. “I could practically *feel* you seething. It would've been so fucking hot if you hadn't then gone on to accuse me of not *courting you properly*—”

“Draco, that is *not* what I said!” She flushed with annoyance. “I said you weren't courting me *at all!* As in, *this is ridiculous*, and you need to get the idea out of your head *immediately!*”

“Why?” His hand slid down to her arse. “Is a two million galleon donation not enough for you, now?”

Hermione froze.

“Is— *what?*” she squeaked, her hand slapping up across her mouth. “You *haven’t*—”

“Oh, Kingsley didn’t tell you yet? Interesting. I’m sure he’ll mention it soon enough.”

She stared at him in disbelief.

“Draco, you *didn’t*.”

“I’m a man of my word, Hermione.” He smirked, leaning in and capturing her lips again, before whispering across the top of them. “When I say I’m going to do something, it gets done.”

Hermione couldn’t move.

Two. Million. Galleons.

He’d done it. He’d actually *done it*. Draco had donated—he’d given—

He’d actually done it. Two million galleons.

He was insane.

He had to have gone actually and properly insane. She’d never heard of an individual having that much money on hand to just *give away*. Not even *Harry* could just drop two million galleons as a— What the fuck was she meant to call this? A power play? A mental break?

Fuck, maybe she was hallucinating, that would explain everything.

Judah’s voice sounded from far away down the end of the hall. “*Please, Minister, let me fetch you a cup of tea before you—*”

“*Nonsense, Judah, I’ve other business to attend to. She knows I’m coming, I’ll see myself in.*”

And in a split second, it became very, very obvious *precisely* what Kingsley was coming to speak to her about.

It was this. It had to be this. A hundred thousand from Cormac, and then *two million galleons* from *Draco fucking Malfoy*? How had she done it, what tactics had she employed, could she replicate them, was this to be a steady income stream—and *why* had Draco fucking Malfoy donated two million galleons out of *nowhere*?

Her entire body descended into unbridled panic. An uncharacteristic donation, and he was about to find Draco like—

Like *this*.

Hermione whipped her head around.

“Draco, you need to leave. Now,” she hissed. “I understand that you’re in a bit of a state right now, so I won’t process your donation until you’ve come to your senses—”

But he did nothing of the sort. In fact, he just crowded her closer

“You’re not accepting my money?”

“*Of course not!*” she hissed. Hermione squeaked. “You’re barely even fucking *lucid* right now.”

He dragged his lips up the side of her neck.

“I can assure you, baby, I’m entirely conscious of what I’m doing,” he said, while untucking her shirt and slipping his hand beneath it. “Two *million*. As promised. Though, I’m still *very* open to you making it three.”

Oh, God, Oh, God.

“Draco, do you have any fucking idea how much goddamn *money that is?*”

Draco scoffed. “Pocket change.”

“Pocket ch— *POCKET CHANGE?!*” she practically contorted with rage. “You don’t even *have* any fucking pockets right now!”

Draco glanced down, as if he’d barely realised that very fact.

“Irrelevant. It’s a gift. You’ll accept the donation.”

There were footsteps in the corridor. Heavy, broad footsteps that did not belong to Judah.

She studied him for a moment, knowing panic was spreading across her face. How could he possibly think that he actually wanted to give her *two million galleons*?!

“You couldn’t even be trusted to put your fucking *trousers on* this morning,” she sputtered. “How am I supposed to trust that this is what you want? You’ve told me *explicitly* before that you’re lucid while the curse is acting, but how the hell am I supposed to *believe you* when all you’ve done the last week is act like an absolute *lunatic*—”

“You want me to show you I’m lucid? Want me to prove that I want this?” Draco’s eyes flashed dark. “Because I will show you exactly what I want, Hermione. You told me to spend my money on things that *mattered*, so I’ve done *exactly* what you asked of me, but now you want to act like you’re *furious*—”

“I am *furious*, and I will send many *more* *furious* owls if you don’t get the fuck out of my office right this fucking instant!”

Draco stood taller, looking horrifyingly put-together despite his lack of trousers or any shred of decency.

“Hermione...” he said, sternly.

The footsteps were getting louder.

Fuck, fuck, fuck—

Hermione’s heart was beating in a frenzy, and she whipped her gaze up to his, *furious*.

“Draco, that is *the Minister for Magic*. And he is coming in here with questions about why both you *and Cormac* have both suddenly and inexplicably made *very large donations* to the hospital. If he finds you in here like this, he is going to think I’ve done something *very unethical* to *obtain* said donations, in which case, I’m going to do *everything* in my power to make him believe otherwise. Do you hear me? *Everything in my goddamn power.*”

Draco glared.

“Cormac donated money as well?” He snarled.

“*Yes,*” she hissed.

“And you’ll accept *his* money, but not mine?”

Oh, God, she was three beats away from suffering a heart attack and dying of stress.

“*Yes, because he was fucking mentally competent while he did it!*” she spat back. “And if you don’t get out of my office *right this fucking second*, I will go to him and *personally and thoroughly* thank him for being so *generous.*”

It wasn’t true, she’d rather swallow a blast-ended skrewt than be polite to fucking Cormac, let alone *thank* him, but perhaps saying it would be enough to make Draco realize how absolutely *insane* this had all become.

However, as it turned out—

It was entirely the wrong thing to say.

Draco’s gaze darkened *instantly*, his jaw ticking as he forced her up against the inside of the door. She could see it in his eyes; the sudden possessiveness as the curse flashed through his bloodstream. His fingers tightened around her wrists. His face was no more than an inch from hers, teeth bared.

And from his throat, erupted a deep, dark growl.

It sent a ferocious shiver up her spine, making her want to turn herself the other direction and have him fuck her so hard the entire Ministry heard them.

The door handle rattled.

With their combined weight against it, it wouldn’t open, but Draco’s eyes flashed angrily to the brass. He pinned her once more against the door, her chin in his fingers as he stared into

her eyes.

“You will *not*,” he said, quietly. “You will not go anywhere fucking near that manipulative cunt *bastard*.”

“I will do *whatever it takes*, Draco. Because like it or not, I’m still—”

“*No!*” Draco sneered. “You are *not* married to him.”

“I’m not married to *you either*, so *get out!*”

She pushed him away, turning her back on him to try and make it sound like the door was just jammed. She heard him hesitate for a moment.

The doorknob rattled once more, and, to her relief, she heard him stride across the room. Over to the fireplace.

He pointed at her.

“I will prove it to you,” he hissed. “Just *don’t do anything fucking stupid.*”

He disappeared through the Floo at the exact moment that the doorknob began to twist.

Hermione wrenched it open, barely taking a breath before the greeting forcibly tumbled out of her mouth.

“*Thereweare, sorrythehandlessticksabit, Ministerpleasecomein!*”

Hermione subtly smoothed her clothes as she somehow managed to tuck her shirt back into her waistband. Hoping to *God* he hadn’t heard two voices.

The Minister for Magic rarely left the Executive Level unless it was to smooth an international crisis. Or, that one time, to put out a *literal fire* that had somehow started on Level 3. So the fact that he was seated in her office...

Was a little out of the ordinary, to say the least.

He paused as he took his seat, glancing around at the cacophony of flowers that adorned her office, but ever the tactful politician, he cleared his throat without questioning it. He settled in the chair, and gave Judah a polite nod before fixing his gaze on Hermione.

“Five minutes. Alone.”

Judah met Hermione’s gaze. “I’ll hold your memos.”

“Thank you, Judah.”

Kingsley exhaled heavily, leaning back in the chair across from her desk.

“So,” he said, quietly. “I suppose congratulations are in order?”

For a second, Hermione panicked. What for? Was she pregnant? No, she wasn't pregnant.

She had to take a deep breath.

Even if she was, how on earth would Kingsley have known that?

God, she was so on edge.

"Apologies, Minister. Do you mind if I ask what for?"

Kingsley's eyebrow cocked slightly. "The... *donation*?"

Oh. Right. The thing they'd discussed approximately five minutes prior.

Her flush turned to a deep crimson red as she tried to stop herself from kicking her own leg until it bruised.

"Oh, of course," she responded. "Uh, thank you. It'll go a long way."

Kingsley studied her with the kind of focus that one might peer curiously down at an interesting bug. Piercingly. *Expectantly*.

"I came down because I wanted to speak to you about another donation we received."

Hermione clasped her hands atop her desk, trying to play it as coolly as possible.

Kingsley handed her the scroll. But the way he passed it to her made it immediately obvious that this one was different. He handed it to her so slowly that it almost felt like the world had stopped.

She already knew what was inside it.

The form should've been identical to every other; a donation form, nothing more. It should've featured all the same jargon; all the same provisos and legalities and indications for when and where their money was to be used or spent, but this one—

It didn't have any of that.

It was almost completely blank, except for ten words, scrawled in rigid block print across the form.

To be allocated at the discretion of Ms. Hermione Granger.

The signature was magically sealed, hiding the person's identity, but she already knew who this was from. The *two million galleons* seemed to stare at her from the ecru, almost mocking her in its amplitude, but not nearly so much as the dedication. It wasn't just a gift to the Ministry, this was a gift to her, *specifically*.

God, could he have been *any more obvious*?

“I didn’t force him to do this,” she said, shakily. She swallowed, hard. “I didn’t—I swear, I didn’t—”

A small smile curled at the corner of Kingsley’s mouth. “You knew it was coming, though.”

“*Only recently!*” she spluttered. She took a deep breath. “Because I kind of... *dared* him to.”

Kingsley chuckled.

“You clearly didn’t *hex* him and that is all I asked...”

Well... while that wasn’t *exactly* true, Hermione admitted to nothing, clasping her hands in front of her.

“...And seating him next to you at the Gala was clearly a stroke of *genius* by that wonderful assistant of yours.”

Hermione turned a sharp glare toward the door to her office.

Judah.

Oh she was going to have words.

But Kingsley wasn’t done.

“Because while I’m sure your husband will continue to be supportive of the cause, whatever you’ve done to ensure Mr *Malfoy*’s ongoing support seems to have... been *very* lucrative.”

Hermione cleared her throat.

“Yes, well. Mr Malfoy was a silent advocate for the hospital long before I knew his identity. So perhaps it was just him being...”

She stopped herself, but then realised her error in doing so. It would be far more suspicious for her to hesitate in complementing him— like she had something to hide.

She swallowed hard.

“.... unbelievably generous.”

Kingsley eyed her carefully.

“Indeed.”

She suddenly felt like she’d been pinned under a microscope.

His gaze didn’t quite narrow, nor did it give anything away. But in his chair, he shifted, leaning onto one elbow as he studied her closely.

“Hermione,” he said, quietly. “I don’t think it needs to be said...” He lifted his chin, eyeing her knowingly. “But I hope you know what you’re doing.”

Hermione exhaled heavily, trying to hide the terrified panic that curled in her stomach.

“Oh, no, no, it’s not like...”

Like that.

Like she wasn’t sleeping with Malfoy. Like she wasn’t putting herself and her position at risk in doing so.

Like she hadn’t developed feelings for him.

But she couldn’t say that it wasn’t like that.

Because it was *exactly* like that.

She *was* sleeping with him. She *had* invited rumours. She’d taken risks for him. She’d snuck off from a *Ministry event* to throw her arms around his neck and thoroughly snog his face off and just be *held* by him for a moment. Let him kiss her fiercely against the door with her boss and her staff immediately outside, and then have the audacity to feel butterflies at the very idea that he’d been there. And she *did* have feelings for him. Big, *complicated* feelings that made the rest of her life seem almost trivial in comparison.

So she couldn’t lie and say it wasn’t like that.

Because it was *exactly* like that.

Kingsley didn’t call her out on it. She knew it wasn’t because he approved, *God* no. She knew damn well that the last thing he wanted was for her to throw her entire career away over something like this. But she also knew that he trusted her judgement.

Foolish as that may have been.

She wasn’t sure she trusted her *own* judgement.

Hermione straightened in her chair as Kingsley rose from his own, pointing at the form.

“Let me know what you decide to allocate the funds to.”

“I’ll run some numbers,” she said, quietly.

As she bade him a quiet farewell, her eyes dropped to her desk, knowing that her panicked expression was giving too much away.

This was—

Hermione slumped back in her chair, her mouth open and her entire body in a haze of disbelief.

She was caught.

Kingsley knew. Or, at least, he had sufficient reason to be suspicious. Cormac's donation had been unbelievably fortuitous. It made it look, at the very least, like she was still happily *married*, at least.

Her eyes drifted across her desk at the thought.

But, as she took stock of what was there—

She immediately noticed that something was missing.

As Judah made small talk with Kingsley in the hall, Hermione's stomach began to twist into a panic as she realised—

Draco's letters from Cormac.

They weren't on her desk.

She knew she hadn't thrown them out. The cleaning elves only came on alternating days and the weekends, so they can't have been tidied away. It couldn't have been Judah, he would die before moving something off her desk. They'd clearly disappeared before Kingsley arrived—Draco wouldn't have taken them back, surely? He had absolutely no reason to, and besides, he couldn't have. He'd had less than a *second* to walk by her desk while she was kicking him out, and she'd told him explicitly their last time together that she would *need* them to scare Cormac out of doing anything fucking stupid—

And—

As Kingsley's voice faded into the distance, she cleared her throat.

"Judah?" she called.

He popped his head in. Hermione cleared her throat.

"Has anyone else been in my office this morning?"

He checked the planner in his hand. "No one, except yourself, myself, Mr Malfoy, and Mr Shacklebolt, ma'am."

She was about to frown when he clicked his tongue.

"Oh, except— your husband stopped by very early this morning after he signed his donation paperwork. Said you'd left some additional confirmation documents on your desk for him." He nodded toward the blank space that the letters had occupied. "He seemed very relieved to have them."

A flicker of panic ran up Hermione's spine.

"Cormac was here?" she asked. "And he took...?"

Judah stood straighter, seeming to stiffen slightly.

“Yes, ma’am. Was he... not supposed to?”

Her entire body turned to ice.

Oh, God.

She was going to be sick.

Cormac had taken her letters. And she *needed* those. She needed those to protect herself. The letters she’d taken were all the very most incriminating ones. Without them she had no contradictory evidence. Without them she had absolutely no leverage. God, how could she have been so *stupid* to just leave them *lying on her desk*? He hadn’t even needed to outsmart her. A part of her had assumed that he didn’t have the *balls* to walk into the Ministry and *take them*; something which she now recognised to have been possibly the stupidest thing she could’ve assumed. She should’ve *never* underestimated the courage he could muster when it came to protecting his own neck.

The hundred thousand galleons was an fucking excuse to get his hands on them.

And because of that, now, she had nothing. Almost nothing.

She had a completely incoherent man sending her extravagant gifts, thinking he could marry her. She had a complete arse of a technically-not-her-husband who now held every single one of the cards, and she now had exactly zero fucking idea of what the hell to do about it.

Hermione turned her gaze to her assistant, trying to stop herself from shaking.

“No, Judah,” she whispered. “*He absolutely was not supposed to.*”

Hermione was so out of her depth. Backstabbing. Blackmail. Pureblood courting. More money than she’d ever even comprehended. The situation had spiralled completely out of control, and she had no idea what to do. She had no idea who to turn to that would even *begin* to understand--- Until, she realised that, in actuality...

There was *one* person who would understand.

It was going to involve some grovelling. Cutting her pride into tiny chunks so that she could swallow every last bite of it.

But this situation called for professional help.

And there was only one person she could get it from.

Just a heads up, Chapter 14 (next week) is written and ready to go, but 15 and 16 are still in development. I've been really unwell for the last month and a bit, so I haven't been doing as much writing as I had planned to. I know exactly what's going to happen in them but I'm just dying a bit at the moment and haven't had the mental space to wrap them up the way I want to. But fingers crossed this will be the last iteration of the back-to-back daycare colds. It had better be because I've got other shit to do 😭😭 I'm not planning on there being a delay but the more consecutive illnesses I have the more likely it seems that I might need to schedule a week break in between.

Love you all, thank you for being so wonderful. I'll keep you informed <3

Chapter 14: "Baby. Please."

Chapter Summary

Hermione figures a few things out. With help, obviously.

Chapter Notes

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

Pansy stared expectantly at her from the other side of the desk.

"I'm sorry I called you a cow, Pansy."

Hermione bristled. "You threw coffee on—"

"You were absolutely right that turning down his gifts would be a huge mistake, Pansy."
Pansy inspected her perpetually immaculate manicure.

"I—"

"I'll never try to correct you when I have absolutely no idea what I'm talking about again, Pansy."

"Alright!" Hermione groaned. "I get it. I'm sorry. When you said he didn't like being told no, I didn't think—"

*"Exactly. You didn't think. You simply stormed out, making me look like a friendless *idiot* eating *alone*—"*

Hermione shot her an exasperated look. The corner of Pansy's mouth turned, almost impossibly, further downward.

"Looove the outfit, by the way," she drawled, sarcastically. "I'm just *certain* that was the absolute *best* choice you could've made this morning."

Hermione glared at her, ignoring the way the polyester blend from M&S didn't feel one-hundredth as good as the Dior separates she'd *almost* worn instead. But just because Draco had *given* them to her didn't mean she had to indulge his stupid fantasies. *Especially* not after she'd realised it clearly did things for his perverted little mind when she wore things he paid for.

She watched, in annoyance, as Pansy's eyebrow twitched; expectant and arrogant and *knowing*. The woman wasn't even actually mad. She'd waltzed into the office with two extremely large, very strong coffees to 'celebrate', but if Hermione was honest, it wasn't

entirely clear if it was to celebrate the incredible donations, or the new wardrobe, or to celebrate the fact that she had, once again, been... Hermione sighed.

Frustratingly right.

"I'm sorry, alright? *You were right.* Draco clearly hasn't taken it well." Hermione pursed her lips. "But I need to know what he's going to do next, because the situation is now significantly more dire."

"Oh, whatever," Pansy scoffed. "Dire *how*? What's he bought you now, a crown and scepter?"

Hermione took a deep breath. There was no sense getting annoyed at Pansy's attitude. She didn't need an argument. She needed answers.

"Draco isn't even the cause of my biggest problem right now, Pans. It's dire because Cormac took the letters."

Pansy's brow furrowed.

"What letters?"

Hermione winced, trying to figure out the most tactful possible way to explain the letters without revealing the horrifying (to Pansy) details of what was inside them. She explained as best she could about the types of letters Draco had sent her, and the ones that Cormac had been sending *him*.

Pansy's gaze was solid and sharp.

"So he lies to you for five straight years, then he *steals* from you—" She sucked her cheek. "And now he gets to... what? What's his plan here? More fucking *blackmail*?"

Hermione swallowed, hard. "I expect he'll destroy the letters so that I have no more leverage." She balled her hand into a fist. "God, I can't believe I was so stupid. I shouldn't have reminded him they existed."

Pansy took a deep breath. "No, probably not. I mean, *I* would have immediately begun coordinating his violent, untimely death and made it look like an accident, but that's just me, and that doesn't matter now. What matters now is what you're going to *do* about it."

Hermione shook her head.

"I don't know what I *can* do. Without the letters, he actually does *own* me. And I need to do absolutely everything in my power to stop him from exposing me and destroying everything I've worked for, and it's all just so that I can't do it to him. I'm completely at his fucking mercy. I either do exactly what he wants—"

"And that's what, exactly?"

Hermione pursed her lips.

“The fact he’s done this means he’s realised that he has something to lose. That being married to me was *good* for him. So I expect that’s what he’ll want. Sign the paperwork, give him an heir—” Hermione swallowed hard. “Keep my fucking mouth shut, or he’ll end my career.”

Pansy seemed to turn further to stone.

She’d never seen her friend so angry, so... *furious*. Dark brown eyes practically incinerated the space between them, perfect jawline set to a knife-edge.

Pansy glowered. “Draco won’t let that happen.”

“Draco’s not exactly in the right frame of mind to be doing *anything* right now.”

“Oh shush. He—”

“He showed up in my office and had forgotten to put any fucking trousers on.”

“He—” Pansy’s jaw dropped and she paused for a moment, collecting herself. “Alright, I suppose that’s a fair point, he does normally remember to do that.”

Hermione took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. “Kingsley almost found him, Pans.”

Pansy’s expression suddenly greyed a little. “Ah.”

“Yes. *Ah.*” She wrung her hands. “So I need him to stop, and I need you to tell me how to *make him* stop. I have enough on my plate with Cormac trying to actively destroy my career right now. I don’t need Draco doing it by accident.”

Pansy took a deep breath, shaking her head slowly. “He’s not going to stop, Hermione.”

“He *has* to. *Surely* this qualifies as *enough* by now!”

Pansy scoffed. “Oh, *well*, with all your demonstrated expertise in pureblood courting culture, so long as *you* think this is enough...” She folded her arms. “He’s trying his best.”

“He’s put me in a *terrible* position.”

“He’s put you in an *excellent* position.”

Hermione bristled. “In what *universe* is my former enemy giving a *two million galleon donation* with my *name on it* putting me in an *excellent position*? He *knows* how many eyes I have on me. And even if I didn’t have the job that I have, in what universe would that *ever* be an appropriate gift for a woman you’re courting?”

Pansy stared at her.

“In *this* universe, Hermione. Where you’re being courted by *Draco fucking Malfoy*. I am at an absolute loss of how else to explain this to you. He is courting *you*. What exactly did you expect? A pony? A castle?” She frowned. “Something vain and garish and excessive—”

“Oh, you mean like an entire wardrobe full of designer fucking clothing? Yes, how thoroughly *genteel*.”

Pansy glared at her. “A well-tailored wardrobe that commands respect might be trivial to *you*, Hermione, but it is important to people who are going to be *voting* for you for Minister for Magic one day.”

She leaned forward, her lips pursed.

“I daresay Draco knows *precisely* what your career means to you and *precisely* what it will take for you to reach your full potential in the eyes of Pureblood society. Like it or not, he *understands* these people. He knows their ways, and he is offering a lifetime of knowledge up to you on a platter. That wasn’t just a donation. It’s *your* name on something. It lifts your profile higher than you *ever* could alone. He wouldn’t be doing this for anyone else, but he’s doing it for *you* because he knows that this—your *career*—is the single most important thing in the world to you right now. Money in the right hands will make things happen, Hermione. Can you seriously not see that?”

“I—”

Hermione stopped herself. She wanted to protest, to argue, to point out how *entirely* absurd it all was.

Instead, she took a deep breath, squeezing her eyes shut.

She knew it as well as Pansy did. That was exactly what Draco was doing, and it was, in fact... rather fucking effective. Thoughtful, too. He knew how important her work was to her, and it was something that, she was certain, if she *was* actually a single, pureblood witch, might’ve meant the absolute world to her.

In all her years battling and begging Cormac to garner support for her bills, to donate or show up, or show even the tiniest *shred* of interest in what she was doing; the only thing that had ever come of it was the occasional ten-minute conversation. And even then, it was with someone he could then try and talk into playing on his club Quidditch team. She would *never* have asked Draco to help her, not like this—*even* the donation was a *joke*—but, when she thought about it...

Draco had cared about the hospital long before she’d even known he was behind those mysterious donations. He read widely, he followed research, and even though his *regular* donations were more than enough, he’d *still* made a point of stepping up when he realised how much it would mean to *her*—

Fuck. Her teeth met her bottom lip as she tried to hold back the word. He was just as passionate about her work as she was. And what was worse was that he understood how it worked.

Even better than she did.

"Alright. Fine. I will reluctantly acknowledge that the gifts have been extremely thoughtful," Hermione said. "But, regardless, I really, *really* need it to stop."

Pansy pulled a compact from her tiny handbag, reapplying her signature bright red lipstick as if none of this even bothered her.

"Well then, why don't you go ahead and just *tell him to stop*, it worked *so well* last time."

Hermione closed her eyes, tenting her hands together over her mouth and nose as she closed her eyes.

"Pansy, please stop punishing me, this is *important*."

"Oh, I'm glad you can finally acknowledge that!"

But before she could spit out anything more venomous, Pansy stopped speaking, and instead, she pursed her lips.

Hermione watched her for a moment, and in her friend's eyes, she saw darkness clouding her expression.

If it were anyone else, Hermione might've thought it was a longing; perhaps for something that never was, but she knew without even thinking that it wasn't about the two of them. Pansy had made it clear that that wasn't how things were between her and Draco. They hadn't been in a long time.

No. This was something else.

"Pans," she said, quietly. "What is it?"

She closed her compact quietly, before placing it soundlessly back into her handbag.

"Do you understand what this curse is doing to him?" she asked quietly.

Hermione furrowed her brow. "Of course I do."

"Explain it to me, then."

Hermione hesitated, suddenly feeling rather as if she were sitting in front of a professor who'd just asked a particularly tricky exam question.

"He's... he's trying to convince me to marry him, even though that isn't what he actually wants." She shifted in her seat. "And he's giving me all of these things because he thinks that, eventually, he'll be able to give me something that means *so much* to me I just can't help but accept."

Pansy didn't acknowledge the words. At least, not out loud. But Hermione could see it, their impact curling through her friend, something near dread flickering across her face as her gaze fell, just slightly.

“It’s more than that, Hermione,” she said, quietly. “This—*all* of this—he—”

She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath through her nose.

For a moment, Hermione thought it might’ve caught a little.

“It’s supposed to be beautiful, the courting process,” Pansy said, quietly. “A milestone in a young man’s life. And a young woman’s, for that matter. When Draco was young, he was so *excited* for it. Anyone would tell you he simply adored the show of it. He used to boast about how much he was going to spend, how much he was going to spoil his future wife. But he’s not...”

She paused, taking a shallow breath.

“Despite what everyone might think of him, he’s just never really been that kind of boy. Money doesn’t really matter to him that much. He’s just been made *painfully* aware of where it can get you. Of *what it can do*.”

Hermione’s stomach began to twist. She didn’t immediately reply, warming her hands around her own coffee and rolling it through her palms. Pansy’s eyes lingered on the movement, as if unsure of where else to look.

“The Malfoys are not the kind of family who have the privilege of courting someone they love. Families like that, like *mine*—you’re told from a very young age that you’re not like everyone else. You’re taught—it’s drilled into you, really, that you’ll marry who you’re told to. You’ll court who you’re told to, and you’ll deal with the fact that you’re *never* going to know what real love feels like.”

Hermione watched her silently, watching the sadness pool in her friend’s expression, the discomfort with so much openness drawing walls higher. Pansy simply swallowed it. Pressed her lips together.

“Lucius and Narcissa...” Pansy continued. “Their parents both had their eyes on the match before they were old enough to talk. Then they fell for each other as teenagers and never had eyes for anyone else. They were the exception to the rule. They made some horrible choices in their lives. Truly *abominable* choices...” She pursed her lips. “But they loved each other. *Fiercely*. Probably *too* much.” She swallowed, lifting her gaze once more. “I think a part of Draco has always grieved that he would likely never have that for himself.”

Hermione watched as Pansy’s fingertips interlocked, squeezing tight as if trying to find comfort in the pain of her own grip.

“He realised long before his parents died that he didn’t want to carry on the name, not that he would ever tell them as much. He knew what he meant to his parents, regardless of everything. He was their legacy. And he thought, perhaps foolishly, once they were gone, that he might be able to have *something* like what they had. That he might meet someone who was *alright* with never getting married. But then that stupid fucking curse manifested—”

Pansy cut herself short. Her eyes darted down, and she swirled her coffee slowly.

"It is a cruel, cruel joke that a man who wants the freedom to love *so badly* is also the one who'll have to sacrifice everything he believes in in order to have it."

Hermione's heart seemed to shrink in on itself, hurt and crushed and aching all at the same time, a band tightening around her chest.

If Pansy noticed, she said nothing. She simply swallowed, and took a deep breath.

"I think it would be best if you didn't see him this month."

"What?" Hermione's heart sank into her stomach.

"With the curse. With everything that's going on... I just don't think it's wise to be putting yourself in that kind of proximity."

And at that, Hermione's stomach and heart twisted in unison.

It wasn't that sex was that important to her—of course not—but it had barely even been two weeks, and she *missed him*. The feel of his chest to hers, their fingers entwined, bodies joined; the sound and the feel of his breath across her cheek; across her neck as he whispered to her in a room that smelled like both of them. The taste of his lips on hers was still lingering, and she couldn't get it out of her head. *No*—it felt like too long already.

To go another four without him—and who was to say it would just be four? It wasn't as if the curse would simply *go away*. Who was to say that she'd *ever* come up with a solution that would be good enough to assuage it, and even if she did—who was to say that it would never come back?

Hermione suddenly wanted to cry.

This was supposed to just be about getting pregnant. It couldn't have been more straightforward. They fuck, he comes inside her, she gets pregnant, they never speak again.

But it was more than that now. God, it was *so much* more than that.

She knew he still wanted to sleep with her—to get her pregnant—and his curse seemed to readily back that up. But *should* they? While he was doing everything he possibly could to convince her to marry him? What if he changed his mind, but he knew that she wanted to keep going—would his curse prevent him from saying so? *Could* he stop?

Then again, if she *didn't* sleep with him...

Her mind drifted once more to the visual of him, their very first time together. Sweating and shaking and wrenching his hair. On the verge of tears from nothing but pain.

Pain she could fix. Pain she could *soothe*.

"I can't *do that* to him, Pans," Hermione said, quietly. "You haven't seen him when it's taken hold of him like that. I can't do that to him."

“Can’t do it to him?” Pansy frowned. “Or won’t, because you can’t stomach the thought of being apart from him for that long?”

Hermione winced at the accusation in her friend’s voice.

“He’ll be in *agony*. ”

In no more than a moment, Pansy’s gaze flickered from concern to anger.

Hermione understood, of course. The two of them had grown up together, and she was *fiercely* protective of Draco. But the severity in her eyes was unfamiliar.

“Alright, *fine*. *Fuck his brains out*. See if I care. But just answer me this—” Pansy said, her lips in a tight line. “When he realises that you’re actually falling in love with him, and he takes that as confirmation that you want this exactly as badly as that damned curse does...”

She lifted her gaze, pointedly pinning Hermione to her chair with it.

“... what then?”

Hermione’s breath caught.

It was the first time she’d heard it said out loud. That word. The question rose up through her skin. Straight from her stomach, but somehow, also from her chest. Her throat, her muscles, her cheeks. Teasing—just gently—at the back of her tongue.

Hermione immediately swallowed the entire thought back into the box it had peeked from, slamming it shut before she could really look at it.

“I’m not—” Hermione said, clearing her throat. “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m *not falling in love*—”

“Are you absolutely *certain*? ” Pansy interrupted. “Because while we both know that regardless of how he really feels, there is a part of Draco that *isn’t* cursed and doesn’t want to end up where this is leading. And *that* part is getting harder and harder for him to isolate.”

Pansy sat up straighter, leaning nearer.

“So let’s just say you *do* fuck him. Or you even allow yourself to be in the same room as him again. He kisses you. Looks into your eyes. Touches his lips to your cheek and begs you to marry him because he’s in *love* with you too... will you be *able* to turn him down?”

Her friend’s gaze was pointed. Knowing as it cast across her face, waiting for a reaction.

Draco was—

Pansy thought Draco—

She thought he was in love with her.

And in that moment, Hermione’s entire world flipped upside down.

What would it sound like; those words in his voice? Would it be between relieved smiles; desperately rasping it into each others' mouths as they stumbled down the hallway toward his bedroom? Would he hold her by the shoulders, shaking her as he tried to make her believe it? Or, would he whisper it, quietly, into her lips, their bodies entwined and his fingertips stroking through her hair?

What would his reaction be when she said it back?

Her stomach flipped. *If*.

If she said it back, not when.

Not—not *when*—It wasn’t—It couldn’t be—

She didn’t—

She—

Every hair on her body stood on end as the realisation dripped ice down her spine.

Oh.

She—

She took a deep breath, trying to scoop the liquid realisation back into the box it had overflowed from.

No. No, no, that—no. That wasn’t—

Absolutely fucking not.

She did not *love* him. It was the most absurd, unlikely, stupid idea she’d ever heard. It was statistically inconceivable. It was nonsense. She had some feelings for him—that she’d already come to terms with—but feelings were something that could fade. Love? Love was... permanent. And by the very nature of their agreement, they could not *be* permanent. She couldn’t be with him. They’d already discussed this. So there was absolutely no way that she had, somehow, over the course of no more than three months...

...fallen for *Draco Malfoy*.

Hermione knew her cheeks were already flushing bright pink, so she convinced herself very swiftly it was just warm in the room, despite it being early autumn. She cleared her throat in a panic.

“He’s not in love with me.”

Pansy stared. “That is not what I asked.”

Hermione straightened her back, trying to make herself look even one shred as confident as she should’ve been.

“I promised him I would say no. And no matter what, I intend on keeping that promise.”

“It has nothing to do with your promise—”

“I won’t let him sacrifice this for me, and I’m going to tell him that.”

And Pansy’s hands hit the table.

Hermione couldn’t help but freeze as dark brown eyes burned with an intensity across the desk. It was a look that Hermione hadn’t often seen. A sudden fierceness that reminded her very much of Narcissa at her most unyieldingly protective.

Pansy’s hands were shaking.

“You can fucking *tell him* whatever you *godsdamn want*, Hermione. But at the end of the day, the curse is based on *your intentions*. If there is even the slightest *doubt* in your mind—if even one single, tiny shred of you thinks that waking up next to him every morning sounds like *heaven*, actually—” She took a deep, shuddering breath. “He’ll do *literally anything you ask* of him right now, up to and including sacrificing the thing that’s most important to him, so that you don’t have to sacrifice what’s most important to *you*.”

Pansy gritted her teeth. Set her jaw in place.

“If you tell him you don’t want to marry him, are you going to be able to *mean it*? ”

Hermione stared, trying to come up with a response, but before she could—

There was a firm knock at the door.

It was Judah.

He paused at the door, opening his mouth, then closing it again.

“Mrs… Ms… ” he cleared his throat. “Ma’am. Some deliveries just arrived for you.”

His face was twisted in something partway between embarrassment and sadness. But that wasn’t what made Hermione’s heart sink.

In one of his hands was a small, delicately wrapped package.

And in the other was a letter.

Hermione was practically shaking as she took them.

She opened the letter first, expecting to see rough cursive, etched into parchment.

But instead she found harsh block letters.

Hermione,

It's time we stop this nonsense. I'm willing to compromise if you are.

Your Husband,

Cormac.

Hermione's stomach twisted.

But then she opened the package.

It had been hastily wrapped. *Very* hastily. As if wrapped by someone who needed it to be in her hands immediately. The paper crinkled and tore beneath her fingers. It was heavy. Heavier than she expected for a package so small. But as she reached the final layer, something tumbled out of it.

And it wasn't from Cormac.

Hermione had never seen the item before, but she knew it without needing to ask. Its reputation preceded it.

Pansy's breath caught as Hermione turned it over in her palm.

It was a brooch. Four enormous five-carat diamonds that sparkled with such clarity she could almost see straight through. A platinum silver backing. A central insignia.

M.

Hermione's heart sank into her stomach, but before she could even say anything, her gaze was drawn to the paper.

Baby,

Please.

D.

She had to cover her lips to catch her gasp.

Pansy's eyes widened as the piece fell from Hermione's hands, clattering onto the table between them.

"*What—?*" she whispered.

Hermione could barely speak.

She knew without asking what this was. Pansy had only described it in passing, but now that it was here, in her hands—Hermione knew. She couldn't begin to imagine it—the coats and robes and dresses that this brooch had adorned through its lifetime. The conversations it must've been privy to. The things it had seen. Hermione wondered whether Narcissa would be rolling in her grave to find out who it had just been gifted to. It was beautiful, of course. Lucius Malfoy never would've conceived something anything less than extraordinary. But, in Hermione's hand, it felt...

Far, far too heavy.

"I thought you said he *hated* this brooch," Hermione said, quietly. "You said he thought it was gaudy. That he'd never gift me something like this."

"I—" Pansy stared, pale-faced, at the piece of jewellery. "I thought... I didn't think that he *would*."

Hermione stared at it.

"Why would he give this to me if he hates it? If it reminds him of his parents?" she asked aloud. "It makes no sense. He knows I'm on his side about ending the Malfoy line. In fact, if there was ever a piece of jewellery that I'd want *less*, it would be—"

And, in no more than a single, fleeting moment in time, Hermione understood.

It started, right there, in the back of her mind, like the beat of a butterfly's wings. Growing, building as it formed. It wasn't an idea, no; it was no more than a thought. A single, minuscule shred of understanding that moved from soft displacement of air and swirled like a dark cloud.

The understanding. The knowledge.

Whether the pain was too much for him to bear, or whether he had truly just lost every semblance of lucidity he had left, he *knew*—knew, beyond any doubt—that this gift was not one that she wanted. Was not one that *either* of them wanted.

But what it was—

Was a message.

It was begging her. *Pleading* with her to do something, because he no longer could. To figure out some way that this didn't end horribly for both of them; where one of them got everything they thought they wanted, at the expense of the other losing everything they had.

But there was only one way that she could think of.

There was—

There was only one alternative.

The thought that had entered her head in that very moment was one that she'd had before. She'd ignored it, then— pushed it back down almost instantaneously. It had been a last resort when she'd first conceived it, and it still was. It was the single, worst case scenario that she could think of.

But there had to be another way. *Some* other way that didn't involve—

“Hermione?”

Pansy asked the question without demanding. It was a kindness, Hermione thought.

She wondered if Pansy had seen it all along.

Her friend leaned forward, placing a perfectly manicured hand on the desk, as if readying itself to slide and capture her own. Concern knitted across her face, but Hermione didn't respond to it.

Was there any other way?

And, as Hermione sprinted through every corner of her brain; every tiny crevasse in her consciousness, she realised.

No. There wasn't.

Her eyes lifted to Pansy's as resignation settled in her stomach. Wings of butterflies stuck in traps. Weighted. Subdued.

“It won't be enough,” Hermione said, quietly. “I don't know if it'll ever be enough.”

Pansy frowned. “What won't?”

Hermione dropped her gaze to the brooch, skimming over it with her thumb.

“It's never going to be enough for me to just turn him down,” she said, quietly. “He wants to marry me, and I need to make it so that he *can't*. The way it was when—”

She teased her fingers over a knot in the wood.

The way it was in the beginning.

Her lower lip began to tremble as she closed her eyes.

“I think I have to marry Cormac again.”

The words left her so quietly she wasn't sure she'd said them at all, but even if she could barely hear them, she absolutely felt them. Heavy. Bitter. Angry and hurt and awful.

Pansy's breath shuddered.

“Hermione, don't be ridiculous,” she whispered. “You'll be miserable for the rest of your life.”

She wasn't wrong.

Every alarm in Hermione's body was sounding. Every shred of sense falling away to panic as she wrapped her head around what she would have to do. She didn't want to. The thought made her want to die. She swallowed hard, trying to stop herself from shaking. The silence lingered for an eternity. Hermione didn't really have much else to say.

She took a deep breath. Sniffled.

And she sat up straight.

"*Judah?*" she called, as forcefully as she could muster through the humiliating wetness pooling in the corners of her eyes.

She heard him push back from his desk, walking briskly down the hall.

"Yes, ma'a—"

He froze as he saw her, but, tactful as ever, he didn't say anything.

"Can you please send an owl to Cormac and ask him to come as soon as he can?"

Judah's brow furrowed, but he hid it almost instantly.

"Of course, ma'am." He paused a moment, then added, quietly—"Can I get you anything? Glass of water, perhaps?"

Hermione was almost sent over the edge, losing control of her bottom lip for just a moment at his kindness. The sweetheart. He knew her too well.

"I'll need—" she shook again, but caught herself, clearing her throat. "I'll need a blank copy of form 16-A as well, please, from the Department of Records. The bright pink one."

"16-A? That's a *marri*—"

"I know what it is, Judah. So one of those," she said back, curtly. "And yes, a glass of water, please."

And with that, Judah's expression hardened.

His grip seemed to tighten on the doorknob, but he nodded regardless. Calmly, stoically, he closed the door behind him.

Pansy got to her feet, knowing she didn't need to be present for this part. She moved quietly. Solemnly. Dropping her head as she spoke.

"Are you sure about this?" Pansy asked.

Hermione's hand closed around the brooch, squeezing it firmly.

She looked up at her friend. She straightened in her seat.

And she whispered it.

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Wait for it, wait for it, wait for it, it's coming, trust me on this. TRUST ME.

Also can I just say, this is genuinely the loveliest group of commenters I've ever seen on a wip. You have all been so kind about me being unwell. I literally adore you all. Every single one.

Chapter 15: “You think I’d regret marrying you?”

Chapter Summary

Hermione keeps her promise.

Chapter Notes

It’s a Cormac chapter, so another warning my darlings. Tread gently.

► Cormac's actions include

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

“I feel like I should’ve dressed up more!” Cormac chuckled.

He *chuckled*.

Hermione swallowed hard. Stared at him.

He was making *jokes*.

She tried to huff a laugh through her nose in his direction, but couldn’t even hold on to that.

“Oh, come on, Hermione, don’t look so *morbid*.” He rolled his eyes, laughing again. “This is a *good thing*. You’re making a very smart choice right now. We can put all that unpleasantness behind us, and start fresh. Start over. This is the absolute best case scenario. Everyone is getting *exactly* what they want!”

He nodded at her, smiling widely.

“This will be good for *both* of us.”

Hermione just closed her eyes. “As long as you agree that the arrangement we had previously still stands.”

Cormac sighed heavily.

“*Don’t worry*,” he complained, sarcastically. “I’m not going to stop you from getting railed on a monthly basis. We’ve still got a baby to make, after all. Who knows. We might even want *more* than one. Then you’ll get to have him *more* than once, aren’t you lucky?”

A deep, steady breath wasn’t enough to calm the agitation in her stomach.

“You know it’s funny, really, that it came down to the letters, I *really* thought Malfoy was going to tear me in half for a minute there.” He chuckled again. “Well. I suppose he can just keep doing that to *you* instead.”

Hermione winced at the disgusting joke. But before she could turn away, she felt a finger under her chin, guiding her up to look at him. She opened her eyes.

He smiled widely at her.

“How about a smile for your husband?”

She could do nothing but stare at him in disbelief.

“Awww, *Hermione*.” He pouted. “I’m starting to think you might not actually *want* to be married to me. Maybe we shouldn’t do this. Not if you can’t even give me a *little smile*.”

He knew what he was doing. He was taking such pleasure in this. In watching her fall apart at the seams. Watching her be miserable. Cormac knew as well as she did that this was the very last way that she’d wanted this to go. He knew very well that she didn’t want to be married to him. Not after his fucking *lies*.

But she needed him.

He was the only way she could see Draco again.

She never felt dirtier than when she forced her lips to tighten in his direction.

“*There* she is. That’s a pretty girl.”

He released her. Hermione dropped her gaze to the floor, but he didn’t seem to notice, instead picking up the quill and twirling it in his fingers.

“It’s a shame about this whole situation, really. That we have to use Malfoy.” Cormac sighed. “You and I would’ve had *such* good looking children.”

The bile that flooded her throat was almost too much for her to swallow, but she managed. “Well, I suppose it wasn’t meant to be. Our biologies just don’t seem to be particularly compatible.”

“Mmmm, well, that and the blood curse.”

Hermione turned to him, her stomach knotting as it sank.

“*The what?*” she asked.

Cormac cocked an eyebrow at her. “You *know*,” he started, as if it was entirely obvious. “That whole thing about the McLaggen line only being able to *improve*. *That* blood curse.”

Hermione’s blood turned to ice in her veins. “I didn’t know about a blood curse.”

“Oh, I’m sure I must’ve mentioned it,” he said, nonchalantly. “All the important pureblood families have curses of some sort. I’m almost *certain* I told you about it.” Cormac concentrated on signing his name, finishing with an unnecessarily large flourish against the bright pink paper.

“It’s interesting, actually. Nanny was looking into it. We thought that ‘*improve*’ might allow for a looser interpretation, you know, given your achievements. But it turns out all it’s really interested in is making sure the magical line isn’t diluted—”

“*Diluted?*” She whispered.

And suddenly, she felt rather faint.

The corner of Cormac’s mouth curled into a cruel smirk.

“I wouldn’t use that word. But...”

And he *shrugged*. As if it had been obvious. As if she weren’t so *godsdamned stupid* for not seeing it sooner.

“You knew,” she said, the question attached hanging in the air, brittle. “You *knew*? ”

“About the curse?”

“That you could never have gotten me pregnant. *You knew that*. You knew how badly I wanted a family. And you *married me anyway*? ”

Cormac stood taller, turning to face her completely, his hands coming to rest on his hips.

“Well, it all worked out, though, didn’t it? You get access to a Wizengamot seat, you get to go and fuck Malfoy until it works—” he grinned. “*And* you get a great-looking husband to bring along to events with you! ”

Hermione’s stomach wrenched, the dread brought about by simply being here morphing into something more, something so much *worse*.

“Cormac, you *lied* to me,” she whispered.

“I didn’t *lie*!” His jaw dropped, scoffing. “Perhaps I didn’t spell it out line by line for you, but I’m sure I at least *hinted* at it at some point.”

Hermione’s stomach was in such a knot that she wasn’t sure she wasn’t going to pass out.

Oh, God, she was going to be sick.

“You told me it was my fault,” she whispered. “You said it. Multiple times. You said that it was *my fault* I wasn’t getting pregnant. And I *believed* you.” She couldn’t breathe. “This whole time, I’ve thought it was *me*, and I’ve been—I’ve lost sleep over it—I’ve *cried* over this—”

Cormac furrowed his brow. “Well, I didn’t know *for sure* it wouldn’t work, so I don’t know what you want me to say to that.”

“How about *I’m sorry, you fuck?*”

His expression was almost incredulous. He either didn’t understand, or simply, didn’t care. He just turned to face her fully, and sighed.

“Look, we can stand here and argue about who’s wrong and who probably wasn’t listening *all afternoon* if you want, but I’m only interested in doing that if it’s going to get me somewhere.”

He held out the quill to her.

“Now, are you going to sign the paperwork, or not?”

Hermione stared at the quill for what felt like an age. It may as well have been an axe; a longsword, as she faced the guillotine.

Because this suddenly felt like a death sentence.

But marrying Cormac wasn’t an option that she had to consider, it was the *only way*. She told herself that, over and over and over. Repeating it in her head as she squeezed her eyes shut. Draco would never be able to rest until he *couldn’t* marry her. Her job, her future family. The man she loved.

This was the only way that she could have a piece of all three.

Hermione might have been able to sacrifice her job. Maybe Minister for Magic wasn’t all it cracked up to be. She might have been able to accept living life without children. In time, she could’ve come to terms with it.

But the last one—*that last one*—

Draco.

She tried to picture a life where she’d see him in passing. Where their eyes would meet across a crowded room, and they would pass over each other as if they’d never been anything more than enemies-turned-strangers. Where she saw his name in the society pages—with a wife, perhaps—welcoming a child. Smiling, broadly. Grey eyes sparkling; down at a baby who thought he was the whole world. A woman by his side who didn’t care about the promise he’d made to himself. Who didn’t care about what he wanted.

No. No.

Him, she couldn’t sacrifice.

So she took the quill.

Her hand was shaking as she stepped forward. She angled the quill to the parchment.

And, as she did—

A small, petal butterfly landed on the back of her hand.

Hermione's heart shattered as the tiny thing rested, opening and closing its wings in languid comfort. As if begging her. *Pleading* with her. As if trying, at the very last minute, to get her to reconsider.

But she *had* to do this. She didn't have a choice. Not when the alternative was.... Even though it was the very last thing in the world that she wanted, she would do it, if it meant keeping Draco from sacrificing everything that mattered to him.

And still, her hand wouldn't move.

She tried wriggling her wrist; thinking it might gently guide the butterfly away, but it clung to her. Stuck, softly, against the back of her hand.

So delicate but so *strong*.

It walked along the length of the fingers, onto the desk beside her, as if encouraging her to walk away. Strutting, really, as if it knew very well the message it was sending.

In her heart, there was the tiniest, almost undecipherable flicker of warmth. Her lips parted. She took a breath. The corner of her mouth twitched up a smile.

She lifted the quill away from the parchment. and—

Cormac's hand smashed down onto the table.

“*No!*” Hermione screamed, horror curling through her system at the clench of her heart.

Cormac lifted his hand, but beneath it, there was no butterfly. There was no smeared lifeforce, or evidence of his cruelty.

There was nothing more than a petal.

One limp, broken petal, and a single dusting of gold that shimmered, then disappeared; the lingering trace of a magical signature.

He looked at her like she was an idiot.

“What?” he asked, casually. “It wasn't *real*. ” Cormac shook his hand of the magic regardless, wiping it on his sleeve. “Damn thing was probably going to bite holes in all your new clothes anyway.”

Hermione's breath shuddered.

Technically, he was right. It wasn't *real*. It wasn't alive. It was only a petal. That's all it had ever been. A flower petal and a bit of magic. A pretty bit of magic to make her feel special. It wasn't real. It had never been real. It had only ever been some silly little trick.

But that didn't mean watching it disappear felt any less like a knife through her stomach.

She glanced down at the paperwork, knowing—*knowing* what she was doing. *Who* she was signing up to be tied to for the rest of her life.

She knew.

She lifted the quill again, pressing into the parchment.

And, with all of the hesitation in the universe—

She shakily signed her name.

“Merlin, could you take any longer?” Cormac said, pulling the bright pink form aside and blowing on the ink. “Judah, be a good man, and run this down to Petersen, will you?”

Hermione glanced up, trying to hide the fact she'd just shattered into a million pieces, but Judah wasn't looking at her. He was staring.

At Cormac.

Judah's blank expression was as close to a glare as Hermione had ever seen. It was about as close to punching Cormac in the face that a man like Judah could get.

It was sweet of him to be so furious on her behalf.

She smiled at him, knowing she looked unbelievably pathetic as she did so, but she wanted him to know she appreciated it all the same.

Judah forced a short nod, and took the papers gently.

“Of course, Mr McLaggen.”

Then, he turned to her. Hesitated for a moment, and cleared his throat.

“*Mrs. Granger-McLaggen.*”

He nodded once more. Then turned on his heel and left the room.

Cormac rested his hands on his hips, taking a deep breath.

“Merlin.” He blew air over his lips in a whistle. “That's a weight off to have that sorted.”

He pulled her into a one-armed hug.

She felt immediately dirty, and recoiled just enough to guide him away.

“Cormac, if you don't mind, I have a lot of work to do.”

He seemed relieved.

"Perfect. I was going to catch a few of the Quidditch guys. I daresay they'll all be keen to nick off early for a pint. See you at home, my lovely wife."

Then, he smacked her arse.

The clap of his palm against the seat of her trousers left a resounding *thwack*. She jolted, closing her eyes once more as Cormac strode confidently out the door.

Hermione felt like she was going to be sick.

She stood there, alone; surrounded by nothing but silence.

She'd done it. She'd signed it.

And now she was going to cry.

She didn't realise she was going for the Floo until she was standing right in front of it.

Hermione raised her hand an inch. The Floo powder shifted and slipped in her palm as she stared into the fireplace. She knew he wasn't expecting her. That she shouldn't go, not now, after she'd...

But she threw the powder in anyway.

In no more than a moment, she was stepping out of the Floo at Malfoy Manor.

And he was staring at her.

"Hermione—" he gasped.

She was in his arms in seconds.

He felt so good with his body against hers. Firm and tall and capturing her in his arms as she threw her own around his neck. She couldn't help but close her eyes, breathing in the scent of his cologne as she melted into him. It had been so long since she'd felt him—

She realised it'd actually only been hours.

God, why did it feel like a lifetime?

She buried her face into his collarbones, inhaling him. Breathing in mouthfuls; *chestfuls* of cedarwood, of white florals and vintage books and the perfect, inescapable taste of him. Feeling her heart somehow quicken and calm, all at the same time. Molding to the shape of his body, slotting into him like the other half of a whole. He held her tightly, his palms across her lower back, melting into her skin through her clothing, his breath hot against the side of her head. The living, breathing manifestation of a deep lungful of air after feeling like she'd never breathe again.

Nothing felt like it felt to be held by him.

It was like falling into place. Like laying down to rest. Feeling the weight flow from her body as she liquefied into his touch.

“I knew you’d come around,” he whispered. “I just knew it.”

She winced into the silence of his chest.

In no more than a moment, she remembered why she was there. She hadn’t come here to fall into his arms. To melt into him, or breathe him in. She’d come here to—

She’d come here to tell him something she knew he wouldn’t want to hear.

“Draco, that’s—” She squeezed her eyes shut, taking a sharp breath. “That’s not why I’m here.”

“Of course it is,” he whispered, pressing his lips to her hair. “Why else would you be here?”

She knew she had to tell him. She couldn’t delay it. The longer she waited—the longer she let herself put it off—the worse it would be.

But God, he looked so *hopeful*.

His gaze was so adoring. So—so *transfixed* on her. As if she was the most beautiful, wonderful thing that he’d ever seen. Smiling, just a little bit; holding her in his arms.

She furrowed her brow, pressing herself harder into his chest. Aching. Agonising.

“I figured out how to make it stop,” she whispered.

“Make what stop?”

She leaned back, looking up at him.

He had absolutely no idea what she’d done. Did she even have the heart to tell him?

“The curse,” she whispered. “The part of it that’s got you convinced that you can—”

He interrupted her.

“Just say yes, Hermione,” he whispered. “Tell me I can ask you.”

God, she was going to break him in half.

“Draco, I’m not going to marry you.”

“What?” His brow furrowed. “Don’t be ridiculous. Of course you are.”

“No,” she said, quietly. “I’m not.”

He stared down at her as if trying to wrap his head around it, moved in closer—as if that would make it easier for her to understand, somehow.

As if this was a matter of her just not understanding.

God she wished it were that simple.

“You are. And I’m going to make you so happy,” he said, quietly. “I will dedicate every day of the rest of my life to making sure you never have to worry about anything, ever again.”

“I don’t doubt that for one second that you would do that, Draco.”

“Then why would you say you won’t?”

Hermione swallowed hard.

“Because I’m already married.”

Draco stiffened. “No, you’re not.”

“As of ten minutes ago, I am.”

His breath shuddered against her cheek. His entire body seemed to flinch at once. It was harsh, like a shock through his bloodstream. Like he’d been punched in the stomach.

The muscles in his jaw twitched against the side of her face.

“Don’t say that. It’s not fucking true.”

She took a deep breath, squeezing her eyes shut.

“I signed the paperwork with Cormac,” she said, quietly. “He’s signed it too. We’re married. It’s done.”

Draco seemed to turn to stone against her, seemingly unsure of what to say, but the silence was *agony*. He took a step back. Eyes wide. Panicked.

“Why would you do that?”

There was so much accusation in his voice. Hermione swallowed hard.

“Because this is the only way that I could stop you from doing something you’d regret.”

He stared at her. Horrified.

“Regre—” He took another step backwards. “You think I’d *regret marrying you?*”

Hermione’s breath began falling shaky.

“Yes, I do.”

Draco lifted his palm, laying it flat against his mouth. His brow was furrowed.

He looked so—

Her stomach twisted and knotted.

He looked so *hurt*.

Hermione tried calming herself; calming the sick that was rising in her throat. The panic. She *had* to do this. She *knew* she had to do this. Cures and curses and everything else aside—

This was the *only* thing that was important.

He furrowed his brow in pain.

“It’s a lie,” he said, his head falling back as he tried to catch breaths through his teeth. “You have to be lying. You didn’t do this. You *can’t* have fucking married him *again*.”

“What choice did I have?” She let out a shaky breath. “Draco, this curse is not going to just let you go. It’s only going to get worse.”

Hermione reached for him, for his hand, but it was clenched in a fist at his side.

She swallowed hard. “I can’t *be* with you if every time I see you, all you do is try to convince me to marry you,” she said. “And I can’t *not be* with you.”

Her gaze rose to his. She’d never seen him look at her with such anger. Such confusion. Such

Such *betrayal*.

She already knew that this, too, was part of the curse. That his reaction—or at least, part of it—was being influenced by an urge to try and convince her to change her mind. By any means necessary, just like the first time in the parlour, when he’d said anything and everything to get her to stay. But even that didn’t help how she felt. In fact, it made her feel so much worse.

It made her feel unbelievably cold.

She shivered.

“You made a vow to never get married, Draco. You *promised* yourself. You swore to yourself that the Malfoy name would end with you, and you were willing to stake your life on it. You went almost a *decade* keeping that promise to yourself, turning down every eligible witch who threw herself at you—”

His jaw gritted. “None of that is important.”

“It is important to *you*. And that means it is important to *me*.”

Draco’s hands fell to his hips, blowing air over his lips. She could see him unsettled. Aching. Stressed. As if he could barely draw a full breath.

She swallowed. “If I told you yes, then for the rest of my life, there would always be a question. In the back of my mind, there would’ve always been a question. Niggling. Just...”

sitting there. Completely unsure.”

“*Unsure?*” He was exasperated. “How can you be unsure about how I feel about you?”

“I don’t doubt how you feel about me, Draco, but that’s completely different to you wanting to *marry me*. How could I know that you really *want this*? ”

“Because I’m *telling* you I want this.”

Hermione’s hand pushed into her pocket, drawing the brooch from deep within it.

She held it up to him.

“And what about this? Hmm?” she asked, desperately. “You’re telling me that you want *this*? ”

It glittered in her palm. Sparkled, really; as if feigning innocence. As if pretending, sentiently, that it didn’t represent what it did. The ill-gotten artefacts. The blood money. The generations of Malfoys fattened on the suffering of those who dared exist beneath them. A physical representation of the legacy of cruelty and atrocity and ruthlessness. She felt her jaw tighten.

“You gifted me the very thing you swore you were trying to destroy.”

His eyes darted up to hers, confusion painting his face. Brow furrowed. Jaw set. Having absolutely no idea what she was on about.

But he looked down at the brooch, and she watched it dawn on him.

She watched the realisation break like sunrise; like beautiful morning light filtering in slivers of silver over the bed. She watched it light his eyes, and then, in no more than an instant—darken.

Darken. With understanding.

That, just as she’d suspected—

He barely even realised he’d done it.

“I—” he said, softly. Questioningly.

As if he really had—for the last few days—

Had absolutely no fucking idea what he was doing.

“You have less control over this than you think you do, Draco. At some point, over the past few weeks, you lost control of it,” she whispered. “I have no idea when it even happened. Do *you*? ”

It could’ve been any time. Before the flowers, before the blouse—maybe when she’d sent him that owl? Maybe Pansy had known that it would escalate like this. Or maybe—*maybe*—

it was only since Hermione had told him she'd accept Cormac's money over his.

She wasn't sure when Draco had lost control, but the fact was, that he had. That he couldn't control it any more.

And it didn't even seem to be bothering him.

"None of that matters," he whispered. "You can't have married him. You can't *do* this to us."

"I did this *for* us," she pleaded.

But he didn't agree. He shook his head, breathing heavily.

"How can you say this is *for us* when you've just *guaranteed* that we can't be together?!"

Panic rose in Hermione's throat. He wasn't getting it. He wasn't *accepting* it.

"But we *can* be. At least for a little while," she said, the words feeling hollow in her chest. "It could take *months* for me to fall pregnant. *Years*. I have Cormac's assurance that he won't interfere in the meantime."

She tried to force a smile at him.

"We're just back to the original plan," she said. "But now we know how we feel about each other, so, at least, we can *enjoy* it while it—"

She tried to muster a courage that she did not possess.

"I know it's not ideal, but— like you said when I came to the Manor that night— for as long as it takes, we get to keep each other—"

"*Temporarily!*"

He shouted at her.

Draco's voice echoed off the walls. He'd never raised it at her before, and it stunned her into silence. She could almost see him fighting it.

"I would get to keep you *temporarily*."

His voice shook as he stared at her.

"This means I get you for a week. A few weeks. A few months."

He took a step forward, his palm cupping her cheek.

"Curse or not, we've already established I can't keep my hands off you, Hermione. You'll fall pregnant eventually. And when you do—"

He swallowed hard.

“—I’ll lose you.”

His thumb brushed gently over her cheek, his breathing falling heavily.

“Maybe one day you’ll decide to have more children and I’ll get you for a month or two more. But regardless of the when, and the how—” He pressed his lips together. “You being married to him means that I only get you *temporarily*. ”

She could hear the shaking in his voice. It was getting worse—as if he was losing control of that, too. She looked up at him—

God, she wished she hadn’t.

His eyes caught the light, but didn’t quite shine. Dulled grey, as if she’d truly broken something in him. His jaw tightened. He leaned in.

“It won’t be me waking up next to you in the mornings,” he said. “It won’t be me sitting across from you at breakfast. I won’t be the one walking into events with you on my arm. And that’s not *enough* of you for me.”

His breath was heavy as it scorched over her lips, the space between them so minuscule but feeling like it was an entire universe away. His forehead pressed lightly to hers.

“I don’t want you temporarily, Hermione. I want you for good. For *ever*. For all fucking time. I want you to be mine. *Only* mine.”

She tried to find the truth in his eyes, but she couldn’t even latch onto it before she lost the light again.

He smiled softly. “*My wife*. ”

Hermione swallowed the lump in her throat.

It tasted suspiciously of butterflies.

She couldn’t want this. She could *not want this*. She had no guarantee he meant a goddamn word of it, and even if he *did*, he didn’t *want* to mean it.

But that didn’t mean that it didn’t make her heart want to soar regardless.

“You know I can’t be,” she whispered back. Her throat burned. Her eyes burned. “How could I look at myself, Draco? How could I look at *you*? ” she asked. “You made me swear to you. You made me *promise* that I wouldn’t take advantage of you. I looked you in the eyes and I *swores* I’d turn you down. I *promised you* that I wouldn’t let you do this. This is the *one thing* that you asked me to do. To tell you that I *don’t want this*. That I don’t want *you*. You *trusted* me to not want any of it.”

She pressed her lips together, trying to stop herself from shaking.

“But I failed you.”

She blinked back hot tears as her voice began to catch.

“I can’t tell you I don’t want to marry you, Draco. Because it’s a lie.”

She placed her palm on the side of his face.

“And I can’t tell you that I don’t love you because I don’t fucking believe it.”

It took him a moment— just a moment— but she watched the words spread over his face. And in that moment, she got to see him. Him— the real him— eyes widening as his breath caught on the words. That moment, he knew. And the next, he’d pulled her so tightly into his arms that she could barely breathe again. Hermione squeezed herself into him as the tears began escaping from her eyes. Draco’s breath shuddered heavily as it left him, his fingertips sinking into her waist.

“Then let me ask you,” he whispered. “Please. Baby, just let me ask.”

Hermione stared up at him.

She wanted to. She wanted *him* to. God, she wanted it more than anything. To throw everything away, and pretend she could trust it. To pretend he really wanted this.

But he didn’t.

She knew that better than she knew her own name.

So she shook her head.

“If I let you, you would be throwing away the most important thing in the world to you, just so that I don’t have to make the same sacrifice,” she whispered. “This is the only way I can keep my promise to you. And I love you too much to break it.”

He stared at her. Brow furrowed in pain. Pain that she had given him. But, at the same time—

Pain that she knew meant it was working.

“You would have my ring on your finger,” he hissed. “And a promise. I will swear it.”

Hermione shook her head once more.

“How could I wake up every morning beside you and know for sure? How could I look at you across the breakfast table and be *certain*? ” she asked. “How could I kiss you, Draco, knowing that there was a *chance* that you didn’t actually want to be kissing me back? ”

He flinched. As if that truly did hurt him.

“There will never be a chance of that,” he whispered. “Not ever. Hermione, *I lo—*”

“*Don’t*, ” she whispered. “Draco, *please* don’t. Not when you’re like this.” She took a sharp breath. “I can’t hear it for the first time when you’re like this.”

He pursed his lips together. Squeezed his eyes shut. Forced a nod as he let his forehead press gently to hers. His voice shook.

“You can’t fucking marry him.”

She could feel the heat in his voice. The anger—confusion—she could *taste* the fucking curse on his breath. On his lips. In every inch of his skin. It was there. It was right there, just below the surface.

She held him by the back of his neck, the tears finally falling.

“Draco, it’s done.”

“You’ll be—”

“I know,” she whispered. *“I already know it’s going to be awful. Being married to him, knowing what he’s done. What he’s like,”* she whispered. *“I’m going to be completely miserable.”*

He frowned deeply at her, searching her face for an answer she didn’t give, so he asked it, quietly. *“Then why would you do it?”*

Hermione’s fingers raked through his hair.

God, he was so beautiful.

*“Because doing this means I get to keep you, Draco. In some capacity, I get to have a *little bit* of you. It won’t be forever, and it won’t be much.”*

Her voice was no louder than his breath, heavy and tangled as she tried to memorise the feel of him.

“But I’ll live ten more lifetimes in misery if it means I get to have a tiny piece of you in this one.”

Draco’s breath caught once more, a soft one escaping him as his eyes met hers.

“Baby,” he whispered.

But that was all he could say.

The sound that left his throat was unlike any she’d ever heard. It was agony. Pain. The crushing weight of his breath leaving him, all at once, and from all of him. She caught her tears as she glanced up in panic, trying to soothe him as his body stiffened against hers.

But it was no use.

He was breaking apart. She could feel it in his chest as he breathed against her. Crumbling, weakening; piece by piece as he collapsed around her. His arms were so tight, his grip so

firm, but there was no comfort in it now. There was no strength in it; only a dark, desperate need to not let her go.

But she had to go.

“I—” she said, quietly. “I think I should—”

His eyes darted to hers, as if sensing her resolution

“Don’t go,” he pleaded. His hand slid lower, slipping into hers and squeezing it hard. “*Please don’t go. We have to think of something. There has to be a way—*”

“Draco,” she whispered. “I have to.”

“I’ll take your name.”

He winced in pain, trying to force the words out, as if they’d do something. As if they’d do *anything*.

She took a deep breath. “Draco, that’s not how it works—”

“Our children wouldn’t be legitimate,” he interjected. “They wouldn’t have my surname.”

Hermione’s gaze drew up to his, meeting him in the middle with a soft breath. The part of him that wasn’t cursed knew very well that that wasn’t how it worked. But the part of him that *was* cursed...

He still didn’t believe her.

Draco knew as well as she did that no matter what name they or their children had, if they were married, any children would still be legitimate heirs. Legitimately and legally *his*. And, in the eyes of the Ministry—in the eyes of society... The money, the property; everything he’d tried to get rid of—it would be theirs. If there were heirs, there was power. There was legacy.

And that meant there was no hope of him destroying it.

It *had* to end with him.

“Illegitimate means that you and I aren’t married, Draco, it’s got nothing to do with surnames.”

“No,” he shook his head, as if trying to will it true. “No, that’s not right.”

It *was* right. Draco knew that, and was pretending not to.

She smiled weakly at him.

“And here comes Malfoy with his own definitions, despite not knowing a single goddamn thing about pureblood inheritance law.”

Draco's eyes darted up, recognising the very thing he'd said to her so many months ago, his breath seeming to stumble over the words.

He lifted his hand to her face, brushing the back of his fingers across her cheek.

"I know plenty about inheritance law, thank you very much," he whispered back. "And I'll take waking up every morning next to the witch I—"

He stopped himself, wincing as he tried to control it. As if finally, he was beginning to understand. Beginning to accept.

Hermione squeezed his hand back, letting the fingers of her other stroke the back of his neck. She knew it was unconvincing, but she forced a smile onto her face regardless.

"As soon as you and your ridiculous curse accept this, we can go back to the way we were. You don't want to get married, and I don't want to lose you. There's nothing that either of us can do to change it. So we just need to accept it, and find a compromise. Alright?"

He stared at her.

She swallowed hard.

"*I need* you to accept it, Draco. It doesn't matter how badly I want it. I will never, *ever* marry you. That is my promise. That is *my vow to you*. I love you too much to ever let you do that for me," she whispered. "You told me once that when Hermione Granger means no, you *know* that she means no. And this is me, standing here, saying no to you. *No*. That's what I need you to believe. *No*."

Draco closed his eyes.

She watched him force the knowledge into himself. Into his brain, his body; his brow creased deeply as he took breath after deep breath.

It was familiar, really—she'd seen him do it before. Through agonising pain, writhing in a tall-backed chair. Sweating, panting, thrashing under the duress of the curse. It was less violent this time, but it didn't mean it hurt less. She could see it on his face, written in sweat and furrowed skin.

But then, he opened his eyes.

And he breathed deeply.

"You love me that much?" he whispered.

Hermione smiled up at him. She brushed her thumb along his cheek.

"*Ridiculous, isn't it?*" she whispered. "But I suppose you're just going to have to trust me."

He didn't say anything back.

His jaw just set harder.

Hermione leaned up, pressing a soft kiss to his lips. She lingered; far too long for what it should've been; but she couldn't help herself.

She wanted him to kiss her back.

But Draco didn't deepen it. He didn't curl his arms around her. The kiss existed. It happened — *He just allowed it to happen*. It set her eyes to well with tears again. She could handle anger. She could handle disappointment.

But curse or not, she couldn't handle the thought she might've just broken his heart.

She turned back toward the Floo, taking a step toward it without another word. She took a handful of powder. Took a deep breath.

But he grabbed her wrist.

Hermione paused for a moment, looking back at Draco as his fingers curled familiarly around it. His lips were parted, as if he was mid-sentence.

“Hermione,” he said, quietly.

His eyes, suddenly, were trained on her. That same beautiful silver-grey, flickering under the firelight, yet somehow warmer than anything else in the room. The faintest pink dusted across his nose, his cheeks. His mouth gaped as if he was—

As if he suddenly had all the answers.

“Yes?” she asked.

His fingers flexed on her wrist as if he were trying to figure something out. Wrestling with it. Thinking.

And in her stomach, there was a flicker. A flutter.

Butterflies.

Butterflies.

After all of this, her name on his lips still never failed to give her butterflies.

“You *promised* you’d say no.”

She took a sharp breath.

She nodded.

He stepped forward, cupping her cheek in his palm. He looked her in the eyes, his lips moving as if he were trying to whisper, but no sound was leaving him.

But shakily— weakly— he mouthed it.

“*Thank you.*”

Chapter End Notes

Heyyyyyy guyyyssssssss remember how I said it was gonna be resolved in the same chapter? I didn't lie exactly... Perhaps I might've made that promise before realising how long the chapter was gonna be... Okay wait, wait WAIT PUT THE PITCHFORKS DOWN (dives in a bush) There is plenty of time for this to be resolved don't you worry, and it'll happen quite quickly from here. I hope it's going to be worth it. Also the last two chapters are gonna be hella long. It might turn into 18 chapters (god remember when it was 12 i cannot shut up). Triple amounts of love for my one and only thornedhuntress, light of my life, Mira to my Zoey, I love you more than words and thank you for the sick, sick angst things that you make me do.

Update 01/10 - 🔔🔔🔔

My darlings my angels, I am so sorry but I won't be posting a chapter this week. Despite my best efforts, I've got like 11,500 words down but it's just not.... *right* if that makes sense? The chapters aren't sparking the level of joy that the others have, and while I could easily post a mini chapter of like 4.5k, pacing wise it would be doing the story a disservice. I want to finish this fic off with the oomph it deserves, so I'm going to hold it back a week. Next chapter posting 8 October at the regular time.

I'm really sorry to disappoint and I love you all so much and I'm so sorry ❤️❤️❤️❤️
❤️

Chapter 16: “Is it enough for you to—”

Chapter Summary

Hermione sacrificed something.

Draco's turn.

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione went home that evening. Cormac was on time for dinner, as if he knew precisely how little she wished to see him. He spent the entirety of the meal talking *at* her about everything that had happened over beers with the lads from that damned Quidditch club he so adored.

She wasn't really listening.

Friday morning, she dressed carefully for work. But even the beautiful Chanel set couldn't lighten her mood. It felt wrong to be dressing up for anyone but him. Knowing that she'd chosen to have it all—nearly all—instead of—

It would've been insane. Short-sighted and stupid and insane to throw everything she'd worked for down the drain for...

She took a breath.

For a man she couldn't be with.

By the time she reached her office, her forced smile had become second nature. Someone stopped her in the atrium, asking about the procedure to sign up as a donor, and her answer had been so automatic she'd barely realised she was speaking.

She looked put together. Competent. No one at the Ministry would know she'd barely slept; that her chest felt too tight and heavy to take in air. They wouldn't know that every time she closed her eyes, she wasn't sure they wouldn't be watering when she opened them again.

Hermione passed Judah's desk without a word. Approached her office. Her palm fell flat against the door, and she stopped.

Hermione Granger-McLaggen

Department Head — Health and Magical Hospitals

It was right there, on the door. It had been for years.

God, she'd never hated the sight of it so much.

But all she could do about it was let the door swing closed behind her.

The view from behind her desk was a morbid one.

A room full of flowers, still pristine. Each one a bright, painful reminder.

A cedarwood candle that never seemed to go out.

By mid-morning, she'd buried herself in paperwork. By midday, the pile of parchment on her desk had doubled. Half of it wasn't even donation forms, they were notices from the Wizengamot. Upcoming consideration of her proposals, sealed and stamped in purple. She didn't even bother turning them over.

She couldn't bear to see Cormac's name written beside hers any more.

She closed her eyes, ceasing the scratching of her quill just for a moment. Hoping the silence would quiet the screaming in her brain that was begging her to think of something else.

And, as she sat in the quiet—

There was the tiniest, almost imperceptible flutter of movement.

She opened her eyes, and, once again, they were drawn to a small, magically-sentient petal in front of her. Moving. Strutting. Wagging across the desk as it approached her fingertips.

Pretty little thing.

It must've been the very last one.

Hermione smiled as it walked delicately onto her fingers. It was smaller than the others had been, but it was no less pretty.

It made her heart ache.

How could something that wasn't real have felt so achingly genuine? How could she possibly convince herself that he hadn't meant to do any of it when it felt *so much* like he did? Even if the curse had taken complete control from the moment she'd told him she wasn't married, there was *so much* of him in this. His fingerprints were on every flower, every butterfly. *Of*

course she would be overwhelmed. She still had no idea at what point he'd lost control of it, but there, in that moment—

It almost didn't seem to matter.

All he'd *ever* been to her, from the moment she'd stepped out of his fireplace—

Was wonderful.

The butterfly's wings fluttered lightly against her fingertip, and it turned, as if looking at her.

What had she done?

She had no guarantee this would even work. No guarantee it would stop his curse. She had no way of *knowing*, for *sure*, and if it *didn't* work, she'd just—

What had she done?

Hermione let the butterfly float away, and wrapped her arms around herself.

If this didn't work, she was certain she would break. She would shatter into a million pieces if she lost him for good. She could hardly even picture it, having remarried Cormac for *nothing*. But there was no other way. There was nothing else that she could've possibly done. Other than somehow *falling out of love with him*, she was completely powerless to stop this.

She squeezed herself harder.

But—

As she did—

Her attention was drawn to the Floo.

Hermione got to her feet, staring at the mass of flames as they exploded into her office. They rescinded, with a cloud of smoke. A figure stepped out of it.

Their eyes met.

Her breath caught.

It was Draco.

And this time, he was wearing trousers.

For a heartbeat, neither of them moved. Hermione stared at him, trying to reconcile the man she'd left the day before with the one standing in front of her. The Draco she'd left yesterday had been shaky. He'd been in agony. He'd been out of control.

It wasn't the same Draco that was standing on the opposite side of the room.

This one stood tall. Shoulders set. Clothes impeccable. Breathing heavily, but not panting.

He was—

Or, at least, he looked—

He crossed the room, scooping her up into his arms and pulling her in, against his body. Squeezing her. Burying his face in her hair and inhaling deeply.

Hermione was shaking.

She didn't know how to be sure.

How long had she spent trying to convince him? How much longer would it take? How many times was she going to have to turn him down before he—

Draco tilted her chin up, forcing her to look at him; grey eyes narrowing as he held her still.

As—

As his mouth curled into a nervous, shaky smile.

Then his eyes darted around the room. His eyebrow arched at the mass of flowers.

“Well. I never did claim to be subtle.”

Hermione's eyes whipped up to his.

He'd said it so—

So *casually*.

She searched his face like a woman possessed; studying every inch of him for confirmation. The line beside his mouth. Those beside his eyes, and between his brows. The warmth in the grey, the—the tiny flicker at the corner of his lips.

She *willed* it to be true. She *needed* it to be true.

“Draco?” she whispered, shakily.

He swallowed, hard.

He nodded.

The breath that had caught in her throat left her in a whimper as she threw her arms around his neck. She buried her face into his chest as his arms curled around her, holding her tighter than she'd ever been held before.

“I'm sorry,” she whispered. “I'm so sorry. I didn't know how to—or *when* to make you stop, and then it just kept getting worse—”

“I know. I know, love.”

Hermione squeezed him tighter. His lips were buried so deep in her hair she could barely hear him.

“But what part of *don’t do anything stupid* did you not understand, witch?”

Hermione swallowed, hard.

“It wasn’t stupid,” she replied. “It was the only thing I could do.”

“Hermione,” he demanded. He pressed his thumb against her lips. “What’s that religious thing that a bunch of you Muggleborns hate?” He frowned, then clicked his tongue. “*Satan*. To try and protect me, you went and married *fucking Satan*?”

She let her head fall against his chest with a thud, but he just squeezed her tighter.

Then, he sighed loudly.

“It *was* stupid. But I’ll admit, I can’t argue with the results.”

Hermione looked up at him, swallowing hard and sinking her teeth into her lip.

“Do you mean that it worked?” she whispered.

He exhaled a laugh down at her. “Go on. Run your tests.”

She took a step back, hardly daring to hope as she lifted her wand, casting diagnostic spells. Heart rate, excellent. Blood pressure. Brain activity. Everything was normal. Better than normal. Which was good. Excellent, even.

But it didn’t prove anything.

She looked up at him, nervously.

“How are you feeling?” she questioned.

“Fine. Though, don’t think I missed that you’re wearing that little Chanel set I paid for. So a little horny, if I’m honest.”

“Ahh,” she cocked an eyebrow at him. “Perfectly yourself, then.”

The corner of his mouth twitched into a smirk. “The fun part of the curse seems to have stuck around.”

Hermione huffed half of a laugh through her nose. “Are you experiencing any overwhelming urges to purchase expensive items and gift them to me?”

“No more than any other man who’s seen you naked.”

She smiled shakily. “Oh, he’s got *jokes*.”

Draco’s lips quirked upwards in turn.

Hermione took a deep breath, steadying herself as best she could. She wasn't sure what she'd do if this backfired. If the question that was on the tip of her tongue did anything other than *nothing*. She was almost certain a part of her would die.

She met his gaze.

"Do you want to marry me?" she asked.

He went quiet.

A flash of panic twisted her stomach as he thought about it. As his gaze softened. His tongue darted out to wet his lips, and he swallowed, gently.

He reached out for her, brushing his palm over her cheek.

And he shook his head slowly.

"No," he whispered. "I don't ever want to get married."

His thumb brushed across her lips.

"But *Gods*, you make me wish I did."

She blushed, and tried to turn her face away, but he didn't let her. He held her chin steady, forcing her to look at him.

She let him.

"I'm serious," he whispered. "Hermione, I didn't think I'd ever get a chance to feel like this. I didn't think it could even be possible. And then when I did, I didn't think there was a single chance you could feel the same—"

"*I do.*"

Draco swallowed hard. He nodded. "I know. And curse and everything aside—"

He exhaled heavily.

"You're everything to me. I need you to know that."

She couldn't help it. She raised her fingers to his hair, stroking through the silk and smiling up at him.

"The gifts were a decent hint."

Draco sighed with embarrassment, a tinge of pink settling over his cheekbones.

"I'd like to say I couldn't stop myself, but honestly, at the start, I absolutely could've and just didn't want to."

Hermione smiled at him again, but even still, she couldn't laugh.

Because in her mind, a dark cloud lingered.

It had worked, clearly. He'd accepted it. Draco could accept, without question or hesitancy, that she would never, ever marry him.

And now she had to reconcile the finality of that.

They were not together, and they could never be. Her eyes began to water once more.

He noticed.

She expected him to comfort her. To pull her into his arms, and whisper to her that it would all be okay. It would be alright, and the time that they *did* get to spend together would be *so worth it*. That he would *make it* worth it. That they could spend days, weekends—maybe even the odd week, when Cormac gallivanted off with his Quidditch club—wrapped in each other's arms and pretending that it was permanent.

But he didn't.

Draco didn't comfort her. He didn't even pull her in for a hug. Instead, he swallowed hard.

And he took a deep breath.

"I have one last gift for you."

Hermione tried to stay positive, narrowing her eyes at him in a weak tease. "My wardrobe is full."

Draco rolled his eyes at her. "It's not—" he started, exhaling heavily. He shook his head. "—it's not that."

"What is it, then?"

He went quiet again.

"It's nothing like *this*," he said, gesturing at the lingering flowers. "It's nothing that most people would even want. But I..."

From inside his breast pocket he pulled a document. A few sheets of parchment, stapled, and neatly folded in half.

He handed it to her, nervously.

"...I feel like *you* might want it."

She opened it, casting her eyes over it—

It was a contract.

Her eyes skimmed the words, trying to make sense of the summary, but it was in such legalese she was struggling to wrap her head around it through her bleary eyes. Something

about living relatives. Primogeniture. Sufficient provable heritage. She frowned at it.

“What is this?” she asked.

Draco swallowed, hard.

“You should have got a letter about it this morning, but I thought I might...”

Hermione’s eyes glanced over to her desk. She *had* received a lot of letters this morning.

She turned back to him.

Draco leaned forward, taking her hand in his. Hermione stared at him, confused, but Draco just nodded her toward the folded paperwork.

“Try page four.”

She flipped to it.

*We, the undersigned, being duly authorised legal representatives of the Department of Magical Records, hereby certify that the hereditary Wizengamot seat historically allocated to the family of **MALFOY** is, by voluntary renunciation of hereditary claim, transferred in its entirety from the possession of its current title-holder.*

By their signed deed of surrender in accordance with the Entitlements Act (Transfer of Titles) of 1432, the holder of the seat of **MALFOY** formally and permanently renounces any right of succession, inheritance, or revocation, and has bound this seat against transmission to any heir or descendent.

*Therefore, we, the undersigned, certify that the seat of **MALFOY** is eligible for reassignment.*

*As of today’s date of **8 SEPTEMBER 2005**, full proprietary and representative rights for the Wizengamot seat of **MALFOY** are hereby transferred and granted as named beneficiary in the formal transfer of Magical Title (Registration 58008-143) to:*

MS. HERMIONE JEAN GRANGER.

*Payment of transfer fees for the seat of **MALFOY** has been received in full.*

Hermione’s blood turned to ice in her veins as she read it. Over and over and over, until they turned to nothing more than a jumble of letters on the page in front of her.

Her hands were shaking, barely holding onto the paper as her eyes lifted, in a panic, to Draco’s.

“It’s—” she said, no louder than a whisper. “What is this?”

He cleared his throat. “Well, it says right there.”

“This—you—”

She looked up at him.

“You *bought me* a *Wizengamot seat*?”

Draco took a shaky breath, suddenly looking distinctly uncertain.

“Well, no, you can’t *buy* a Wizengamot seat. They have to be inherited. Or transferred.” He swallowed hard as he tried to get the words out. “So, technically, I just... gave you mine.”

Hermione could hear nothing but the sound of her own scratchy inhale as she read the words four more times.

“*What?*”

“I got the idea from Cormac, actually. Getting his grubby little hands on the Crouch seat. I realised... someone in that department was clearly happy to sign off on it, if given the right... *push*.”

He cleared his throat.

“It did cost a bit. I had to make some very awkward visits to pencil-pushers around the Ministry last night. Invested in a few businesses. Bought a *shit-ton* of new brooms for that semi-professional Quidditch club they’re all a part of, plus the upgrades to their stadium. Administrative costs, transfer fees...” he smiled nervously at her. “Took a solid *chunk* out of the vault, if I’m honest.”

Hermione couldn’t breathe.

“But—” she said, “but I—Draco, I’m a Muggleborn, I can’t—they—they won’t *allow* me to
—”

“They already *did* allow. Money in the right hands will make things happen. It’s something that every single pureblood is brought up knowing.” He forced a small smile into the corner of his mouth. “Personally, I think they’re all a bit scared of you becoming Minister and remembering who tried to *get in your way*.”

She stared at the words on the parchment in her hands, terrified they would disappear the second she looked away.

“And... we...” Draco cleared his throat. “Well, I never doubted you would run it all, one day. This should help you get there a little easier.”

She looked up, and his eyes searched hers with an almost unbearable fragility, like a man standing on the edge of a cliff. He looked as if he might pass out, right there in the parlour, stiff as stone. His shoulders were taut. Jaw set.

"Is this a courting gift?" she whispered. "Is this—if I accept this, am I condemning us—is this—" Her eyes were watering. *"Draco is this a fucking trap?"*

She shouldn't believe it. Couldn't. With this, she could put forward her *own* legislation. She could *vote*. She could *trade* for votes. She was immediately eligible to become Minister for Magic on her *own fucking merit*, and he'd just—

He'd—

Draco's hand rose back to her cheek, brushing his thumb across her skin.

"You told me to do something good with my money, Hermione."

He swallowed, hard.

"This was the greatest good I could think of."

And suddenly, Hermione stopped breathing.

Draco inhaled slowly.

"I love you, Hermione. I don't know how else to say it. I love you more than any of this. But even with how desperately I love you, I'd be lying if I said this were a selfless gift. Because for all intents and purposes you've got power on your own, now."

Then he began rambling.

"You don't need... you *wouldn't* need someone else's seat... what I mean is that you don't have to get... to become Minister—" He cleared his throat, his voice shaking. "You wouldn't have to... marry... *anyone*... to make it happen. Meaning that... if... if you *wanted* to..."

His eyes met hers.

"If you'd *consider it*—" he whispered.

A noise escaped her; a sharp, aching little sound she barely recognised as her own. Her knees gave the tiniest wobble, and she reached blindly for something to steady herself. The parchment crinkled in her other hand as she clutched it tighter, terrified it might vanish if she let go. Her heart was hammering in her chest, and her thoughts were too loud, and they were coming too fast, and *what* and *how* and—

And then she burst into tears, launched herself at Draco and kissed him so hard she couldn't breathe.

It threw him off balance, sending them both careening into the wall, but she didn't stop kissing him long enough to care about the logistics of something so momentarily unimportant as falling. She just kissed him. Hard and rough and with both arms flung around his neck, leaving every single bit of the balancing up to him.

They landed with a thud, and she practically climbed him, her hands lacing behind his head as she captured his lips with hers. As she sank her tongue into his mouth, violently—desperately—drawing a shudderingly delicious groan from deep in his throat.

“I take it you—” he said, moaning contentedly as she tried her very best to stop him from speaking. “—like the gift.”

“*Shut up,*” she whispered, unable to stop herself from sobbing the words into his mouth. “*Shut up, shut up, you wonderful fucking man—*”

He tangled his fingers in her hair, meeting her kiss halfway with every shred of energy that she gave him, and it *killed her*. The relief. The comfort. The knowledge that they had a *way out*. That they had a way forward that didn’t involve her giving up everything else that mattered to her.

She had him pushed against the wall, but he was the one who surrounded her; hands and lips all over her as she wet both of their faces with her ridiculous tears.

“Is this enough?” he whispered. “Is it enough for you to—”

Hermione pulled back. She looked up at Draco, her breath shuddering across his lips.

She knew what he was asking.

Was it enough for her to leave Cormac? *Was it enough* to mean that she wasn’t throwing her career down the toilet? If she and Draco went public with their relationship; if they had *children*, while *unmarried*—it still wasn’t perfect. It wouldn’t be easy. She’d be judged—and *harshly*—

But she had her own seat now. She had *her own seat*.

It didn’t *matter* what the public thought of her now. *She had a say*. She had a voice, and she had a vote, and she *mattered* regardless of *who* she was married to.

She was the first of her line.

That meant far more than anyone’s shitty opinion.

It would be a scandal for a few months, of course. She was sure people would have thoughts about her leaving her husband for a former Death Eater, but Hermione smiled to herself as she looked up at him.

“My reputation will take a hit,” she said, shakily.

He nodded. “It will.”

“It’ll take a long time to recover.”

Draco swallowed, nervously.

Hermione stroked her fingers through his hair.

"Probably long enough for the kids to start primary."

Draco eyes locked on hers.

"Is that—" he whispered. "Do you mean—"

"Do I want to say *fuck it all* and be with you anyway?"

They stared at each other for what felt like an age, breaths heaving in tandem, arms locked around each other.

She swallowed. She took a breath.

"Yes, Draco, I do."

Her answer was a gasp against his lips as she caught his face in both hands and dragged him into her. He met her halfway, and then, there *was* no halfway; just them. Their lips, their shaking hands. Their bodies melting into each other and his arms around her waist and hers around his neck as she clung to him like he was the only solid thing in the world. It was heat and it was breathing and it was love and she was drowning in it, but she'd never so badly needed her air to taste *only* of him.

Draco sighed contentedly into her mouth. A sound she hadn't heard in—*God*, it felt like years. Like breathing. Like air. Like he was the one who'd been drowning. They stayed like that, even as their lips finally parted, breathing each other in through long, staggered breaths.

"Tell me you love me again," he whispered.

She smiled. God, she'd scream it at him if he wanted her to.

"I love you, Draco."

His jaw trembled. His eyes squeezed shut. He sank his teeth into his lip.

"Fuck," he whispered. "And tell me you like the gift."

Hermione let out a soft laugh of confused disbelief.

"What?" she questioned. "*Of course* I like it."

"Good," he said, quietly. He leaned back slightly, looking into her eyes. "Because unfortunately it also comes with a condition."

She furrowed her brow.

"What?"

"Well, not a condition," he said. "More of a request."

And, from his trouser pocket, he pulled a small box. He flipped it open, revealing a... honestly rather fucking *gorgeous*—

Diamond ring.

It was stunning. Understated and subtle. Classy. Minimalist. Exactly what she would've picked for herself.

Exactly her fucking taste.

Hermione's brow furrowed sharply, pain etching through her bloodstream.

“No, no, no, Draco, you *promised*—”

“It’s not an engagement ring.”

“It’s a diamond ring on a gold band, Draco, and it came in a very nice box. What the fuck *else* could it be?”

He glanced down at it, then back up at her.

“I’m not asking you to marry me, so it’s not one.”

Hermione pursed her lips at him. “Then what is it?”

He took a deep breath.

“A ring is just a symbol,” he said. “A promise. An *agreement*, if you will.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him.

Draco smiled, almost nervously, down at the ring.

“I am not interested in sharing you with him. And we both know you can’t be married to *me*,” he whispered.

He flicked the box away, taking the ring between his fingers and looking down at it again.

“But nobody else bloody well knows that. And I daresay the second the public finds out that you’re single, every eligible wizard from here to bloody Malawi is going to be falling over themselves for a chance with you.”

Draco took her face between his fingers, holding her still.

“So if you think I’m going to let you walk around without *at least* having *some sort* of ring on showing that you’re *taken*, you’re fucking kidding yourself. And it just so happens that due to the convenient triggering of a particular curse by a particular witch at a particular time, I had *this* ring made especially for you.”

The smile that broke over her face was unmatched by anything. Not flowers or fairy cloth—not even the kaleidoscope of ostentatious lepidoptera in her stomach.

"So you want to pretend that I'm your *property*?" she teased.

There was a growl of disapproval from his throat.

"I don't *own you*," he said, squeezing her chin tightly. "But I'm making damn sure everyone knows you're *mine*."

His eyes narrowed sharply over her, as if daring her to disagree with him.

Warmth unfurled inside her at a dizzying speed, making her lightheaded as she smiled so wide her cheeks hurt. It was almost unfair, the way a single sentence could strip her entire world down to its bones and leave her this...

This *light*.

Because she *was* his. In her entirety. In every sense of the word.

She was his.

Finally, she was his.

"Alright?" he demanded.

Hermione tried to maintain some form of composure, but she failed miserably. She had to sink her teeth into her cheek to stop herself from beaming as she snatched the ring off him and admired it.

She supposed it couldn't *hurt*, being publicly committed. In fact, it was downright thoughtful of him. People were far more likely to accept her having children out of wedlock with her supposed *fiancé*. Any questions about solid plans or setting dates could be deflected in the name of '*far too much to do*'. It was a brilliant idea from Draco, actually. Yet another in a long line. And that would be the *only* reason that she was doing it, of course.

It would have absolutely *nothing* to do with the butterflies in her stomach at the thought of him publicly claiming her. At knowing, every time she glanced down at her hand, that she was his. Knowing when her day was awful, and people spoke over the top of her; when they treated her like she didn't matter—

He thought she did. He had made *sure* that she mattered.

And *fuck* she was so proud to be his.

So Hermione smiled at him.

And she slipped the ring onto her finger.

Draco smiled, and she couldn't miss the flash of satisfaction in his gaze as he watched the ring magically size. He pulled her into him, his arms draping around her waist.

"Thank you for not being *difficult* about it."

“*Difficult?*” she whispered, feigned disbelief lacing her tone. “I am never *difficult*. ”

“Mmmm. Maybe we should ask Cormac what he thinks?”

Her gaze narrowed on him.

“I’m beginning to wonder whether this is all some sick, twisted revenge fantasy of yours.”

Draco chuckled.

“Hermione,” he scolded softly. “If I wanted to take revenge on Cormac, I have *myriad* other ways I can do so. But you *specifically* asked me to leave him alone.”

His eyebrow cocked.

“Unless... you’ve changed your mind...?” He smirked at her. “Because I would *love* to tear him to shreds for you.”

“You will not be tearing him to shreds, Draco. As much as he deserves it.”

She stared expectantly at him.

Draco sighed. “Just *promise me* that you’ll let me be there when you tell him?”

She raked her fingers through his hair, smiling so widely, she felt her face might break. She pressed her lips softly to his, and then, halfway to a laugh, she whispered back.

“Are you going to punch him in the face?”

He grunted disapprovingly at her. “Absolutely not. Using fists? How *common*. How... *Muggleborn*.”

Hermione sighed, rolling her eyes at him.

Draco grinned. “But I will *try* to keep my voice down this time.”

She couldn’t help but laugh, scolding him with her gaze as his arms wrapped tighter around her waist.

He leaned in, and whispered.

“*Let’s go get you divorced.* ”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to the overwhelming majority of you who saw my A/N a fortnight ago were so kind about my week off posting. I know that other fandoms and writers can cop some

seriously entitled comments and I was unbelievably nervous about it. But I only had a few mild ones. Further proving that you are just the loveliest group of readers that ever did exist .

I mentioned in the WWW discord (link in Chapter 9 a/n if you want to join!) that this chapter was meant to be 13k+. It's actually nearly 16k. And I decided I was going to split it into three chapters. But instead of extending posting by three weeks and dragging it out, I'm posting all three today. Why? I don't know. Maybe I'm just that fucking grateful that you guys didn't give me a hard time when I really needed it.

There will still be another chapter that comes after 18 (maybe two) but this is the fun part. And we all need a bit of fun in our lives.

Love you all. So fricking much.

Chapter 17: “So as soon as you have ideas about how to get rid of the money...”

Chapter Summary

Divorce time?

Chapter Notes

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

Hermione flung the door open, rushing down the hallway with Draco right behind her. Their destination wasn't far, but as her speed increased, it suddenly felt like the longest hallway that'd ever been built. The Ministry was busy today, the pre-lunch rush starting to pick up, but she didn't let go of Draco's hand as she dragged him after her.

She had one destination in mind.

Judah's desk.

She saw him from a mile away, head down and working, as usual. But, as if he could sense her approaching, his quill came to a stop.

The man lifted his gaze slowly, clearing his throat as he stood from his chair.

“Ma'am?” he greeted her. “Something I can assist with?”

Hermione's stomach flipped.

This was it. The first person they would tell. The first she would ask for no judgement from. She was leaving her husband to be with her... God, what even *was* he? Her lover? Her sperm donor? Her... side-piece?

She took a deep breath.

The man she was in love with.

Of everyone in the world, she knew Judah would understand. She knew he wouldn't judge her.

She *hoped* he wouldn't

With another breath, she straightened herself, settling her posture as she looked him in the eyes.

"I need you to drop what you're doing," she started. "Because I need your help with something else."

His gaze was locked on hers.

"Anything, ma'am."

She cleared her throat.

"I've decided that I'm not going to legally marry Cormac. So my name will *not* be Granger-McLaggen. It will simply be Hermione *Granger*, and that is how it's going to stay. So I'll need you to organise the transfer of... literally *everything* to that name, and that name alone."

Judah's gaze remained fixed on hers, but he didn't react beyond that simple, easy countenance she'd so grown to rely on.

"Of course, ma'am."

"And—" She swallowed hard. "I need you to contact Petersen. Right now. Send a memo, a Patronus, I don't care what." She swallowed again. "But I need you to submit every request necessary to reverse what we did yesterday. Do you understand? I *don't want it filed*. And if it has already been filed, we need to file to cancel it. I just need to make absolutely certain that that paperwork—"

Judah looked up, serene as ever. "What paperwork would that be, ma'am?"

Hermione stared at him.

"The marriage license?" Her voice shook. "The one Cormac and I signed yesterday."

"Oh." Judah adjusted his quill. "*That* paperwork."

They stared at each other for a moment. She was confused, for a moment, unsure as to how he could've already forgotten.

Until Judah's eyes shifted guiltily to the corner of his desk.

Hermione's eyes followed his gaze across the dark wood.

There it was. Bright pink, legally signed.

And shredded into nearly a thousand pieces.

Hermione's eyes darted back to Judah as his arm stretched out to the side. He didn't break eye contact as he swept the paperwork into the waste paper basket.

"Apologies, ma'am. Mr. McLaggen must have been correct," he said, calmly. "*Darned butterflies* must've eaten holes in it."

Hermione's breath caught in her throat.

For a long moment, she couldn't speak. She couldn't even think. Relief surged through her so violently she almost sobbed, blinking down at the wastepaper basket, then back at Judah. Her lips parted but no words came. Her hand pressed flat against her chest, as if it would do a single goddamn thing to calm herself.

Her breath shuddered. And she whispered.

"How did you know?"

Judah's expression softened, meeting her gaze with kind eyes behind his glasses.

"I didn't, ma'am. Pure insubordination," he replied softly. "And I shall set aside time in your calendar to discuss an appropriate reprimand."

Hermione stared at him.

And then, she broke into a wide grin. She let out a genuine laugh as she shook her head at him.

"That will absolutely *not* be necessary, Judah." She nodded at him. "Thank you."

He nodded back.

"Of course," he said, nodding his head reverently at her. "Ms. Granger."

They smiled briefly at each other, but only for a moment.

Judah's gaze had drifted to Draco. His eyes narrowed *just* enough for it to be completely unmistakeable. It wasn't loud, nor was it particularly threatening. But what it *was*, was a warning.

And Judah was giving Draco one.

Then, he opened the top drawer of his desk.

"I also took the liberty of preparing some draft press releases for you to choose from, just in case. You can select one of these, or amend them to your liking."

Hermione couldn't help but feel a rush of warmth for the man. His ability to preempt what she would need—she shook her head in disbelief.

He handed them to her. She glanced down at the top one.

For Immediate Release: Hermione Granger Confirms End of McLaggen Relationship, Focuses on Public Service

Perfect. It was professional. Short. To the point.

She glanced at the second.

Press Advisory: Granger Terminates Union with McLaggen, Who Somehow Remains Shockingly Oblivious as to Why

Behind her, Draco snorted with laughter. Hermione's mouth twisted as she tried to stop herself from joining him.

"Thank you, Judah. I'll look them over now."

He nodded stoically at her as she slipped her hand into Draco's, dragging him back down the corridor toward her office. The moment the door shut behind them, she finally exhaled, the sound breaking halfway between a laugh and a sob as she fell back against it.

And, to her great delight—

Draco pushed her up against it and kissed her *hard*.

Hermione moaned as his hands slid up her waist, grounding her firmly against the hard wood behind her. It was a little louder than she meant for it to be, and Draco chuckled into her lips.

"You have one hell of an assistant," he murmured, his lips roving over her throat.

"I know, he's wonderful." She sighed, melting into his hold. "Please remind me to give him an enormous raise."

"Please remind me to buy him an enormous *yacht*."

Hermione grinned.

But she didn't want to think of Judah right now.

This was the closest she'd been to Draco in what felt like a million years. How long had it been since he'd pushed her up against the door last time? A month and half, surely. Maybe six. But there was no Minister for Magic storming down the hallway this time. No Chief Healer, no assistant...

Just the two of them. Alone.

And *together*.

So, as quietly as she could...

She locked the door.

"Don't laugh," Draco said, clearly not noticing what she'd done. "It'd be another chunk of the Malfoy fortune, gone. And you can't say he wouldn't deserve it."

She wasn't paying much attention.

Draco's thigh had slid, probably almost subconsciously, between her own. It felt, if she was honest, rather bloody fantastic, although it was falling just shy of *not enough*. Because her skirt—though *beautiful*—was thoroughly in the way.

Hermione licked her lips. "That fortune seems to be doing a hell of a lot of good, recently."

"Mmhmm," he smirked against her skin between the presses of his lips. "And I find myself in possession of both *it*, and an incredibly beautiful, unbelievably charitable witch, who, it has just become apparent, is willing to spend the rest of her life helping me give away every fucking knut of it."

Hermione laughed.

Draco's eyes flicked up to hers. He stroked his fingers through her hair, tucking it behind her ear as he smiled.

"So as soon as you have ideas about how to get rid of the money..." he said.

Hermione stilled.

It was a throwaway comment, she knew that.

But in her mind... An idea formed.

Maybe it was the elation of knowing that things were going to be alright. Maybe it was the gratitude—the fact that even without some stupid, ancient curse, he had managed to give her everything in the world that she could possibly want. Or maybe... *Maybe*—

She was getting a little too close to *that point* in the month, and her body had just come to terms with the fact that she had Draco *all to herself*.

Wordlessly, she led him to the small receiving sofa opposite the Floo in her office. He didn't even question it, simply sighing contentedly as he sank down into it. Sighing far *more* contentedly as she placed her knees on either side of his hips, and sank down into his lap.

Her skirt slid higher up her thighs. He noticed.

And his hands followed the fabric.

Hermione's teeth caught at her bottom lip.

She could already feel his teasing fingers skimming across the hem of the flawless two-piece set that he'd bought for her. And he was right. There was something rather *lovely* about knowing she was wearing something he'd paid for.

Her eyes flicked upward to Draco's.

She wondered when he'd figure out what she was thinking.

It wouldn't take much to get him going. A few well-placed words about a topic of mutual interest... the curse was still there, he'd admitted as much. But she knew, first... Well, first hand... that so long as her intentions were on point, that the rest wouldn't be an issue. And she was an academic. She liked the experiment anyway.

So Hermione stroked her fingers—experimentally—down the back of his neck.

He sighed.

She kissed him.

It was languid. Intentional. Her lips moving against his as she gently parted them with her tongue. He sighed against her.

Good. *Good*.

It didn't take much to escalate. It was slow, and she was subtle; rocking her hips *just that little bit* to make him start chasing it without thinking.

And she was right. It took no longer than a minute for his breathing to deepen a little. For his fingers to tighten—just slightly—on her hips. She broke their kiss to exhale heavily against his mouth. Let her lips linger, just a moment. Then, she dropped them to his neck. She trailed his pulse. Inhaled his cologne; grinding herself, slowly, over his lap.

His eyes were going dark.

She wondered if he had *any idea* how hard he was.

Maybe she didn't mind if *this* part of the curse stuck around for a little longer. The part that left him dazed and confused and with his mouth hanging open as she worked herself over the top of him.

It distracted him so thoroughly that he didn't notice when she teased his top button open. She brought her lips to the corner of his mouth for the second. The third button, and her lips were dragging gently down his neck. Another, brushing gently as she began to trail lower. His jaw. His throat. *Flick. Flick.* She licked her lips as she lowered herself to her knees. Pressed a kiss lightly against his abs. It was only as she flipped open the clasp of his belt that he realised where she was.

What she was going to do.

“*Baby*,” he panted. “What are you—”

Hermione glanced up at him.

“You want to get rid of some more money?” She held his gaze, trying to hold herself back from grinning. “I *distinctly* remember you telling me how I could turn a two million galleon donation into three.”

She trailed her fingers along the hard line that had formed at the front of his trousers. Teased them open while he watched. Dragged the zipper down, click by purring click.

His lips parted. He let out a heavy breath.

“*Fuck off*,” he whispered. “Don’t tease me—”

Hermione traced his outline over his underwear, watching as his eyes fluttered closed. Up, around his tip—*God*, he was so *ready*—and slipped her fingers into the waistband of his underwear.

“Who’s teasing?” she whispered.

She took hold of his length, the weight of him in her palm making her sink her teeth into her lips. She touched him. Just a little. Softly.

And, yes, alright. A little teasingly.

Her gaze lingered on that waistband. Slowly revealing his taut body and creamy skin as she dragged the fabric lower.

She licked her lips.

And she guided him free.

God, she’d missed him. It wasn’t a thought she’d expected to have, but he looked *so good*; his cock out and his shoulders set wide as he leaned back to get a better view. His thighs widened around her, giving her room to reveal him to his base. It was like something out of a fantasy she’d never realised she had; her on her knees for him as he looked down at her with a focus she wasn’t accustomed to.

But he even looked bigger from this angle.

“*Fuck—*” he whispered, his Adam’s apple gliding along the front of his throat as he swallowed desperately.

Hermione wondered how long it had been for him; since the last time he’d felt the welcome of a warm mouth around his cock. She guessed it might have been a while. It would’ve been difficult for him to enjoy, knowing there was no way he would ever finish.

Because, as she let her tongue softly touch against his length—

He *trembled*.

She kissed it. Caressed it, really. Teased her hand lightly over him as she brought him toward her. Touched her tongue to the underside of his tip.

Draco’s eyes rolled back, his entire body seeming to follow as she closed her lips around the head of his cock. A breathy moan escaped his throat. She’d expected words. Something frantic and tasteless and desperate that would send her reeling and taking his entire length

down her throat at once, but they didn't come. Instead, for now, there was relative silence. Nothing more than the sound of his breathing and that of her wet mouth. Until—

"Baby, please don't tease me."

Hermione didn't hesitate.

She let her thumb glide along his underside, drawing a twitch from his thighs that made electricity shoot through her entire body. She had no path in particular, her lips, her tongue; she savoured it with time that they didn't really have. They were in her office, in the middle of the day on a Friday. Even with the locked door, someone could walk in at any moment. Hermione smiled to herself.

He never *had* cared about being found out.

She took him deeper into her mouth, drawing a long, soft moan from somewhere deep in his chest.

"You know I'm not going to be able to come like—" he gasped as she flicked her tongue.
"Oh, fucking hell."

Hermione smirked, squeezing him gently.

"I think you can, actually."

Draco whimpered, staring down at her.

"It worked with my hand," she whispered. *"Don't you remember?"*

He did. She *knew* that he did. But his eyes lingered on hers in silence anyway.

"Because I certainly remember," she murmured, her voice a low husk.

She must've replayed it a hundred times in her mind by now. His legs spread, shirt open, her fumbling with his belt. The first time she felt him in her hand—oh, *God*—he'd been *so hard*. So tight and tense and ready to come before she even had her hand fully wrapped around him.

And then—the talking.

"You started telling me all the things you were going to do to me."

She could basically hear the words, rasping as she dragged them from deep in his throat. The words falling from him against his will, filthy and depraved from such beautiful lips.

She caught herself, swallowing hard as she tried to calm herself.

"You begged me to take my shorts off. To sink down onto you. Do you remember that?"

Hermione licked across his tip. His breath shuddered. He nodded.

She could still picture his hands on her thighs.

“I remember how it felt,” she whispered, dragging her tongue over him. “When you said you were going to hold me down. Hold me down on your cock and fuck me until I *dripped* with you.”

His eyes rolled back, and she took him halfway into her mouth again, sucking gently as she moaned her approval.

“*Hermione*—” he whimpered.

But it wasn’t a complaint. She watched Draco’s mouth open and his eyes flutter closed as his head fell back against the sofa. She knew the effect she had on him. Her, her body. These words. Her eyes flicking up to his. And she knew it wasn’t just the curse that caused it.

She wanted him. He knew that. And he wanted her.

Draco loved *her*.

His thighs were tense under her hands.

She squeezed them hard as she firmed her lips... and took him down to his base.

The sound that left Draco’s throat was something akin to demonic, fingers sinking into the sofa as his body tensed and tightened all at once. He had to let go to quieten himself—his hand clapped to his face, covering his mouth as his eyes rolled back into his head. Hermione barely knew what she was *doing*, but she knew *him*. She knew what he liked, how firmly he stroked himself. And *where*. She could still picture him; knees apart, legs spread, palming himself as he stared.

At *her*.

She could barely stop herself from squirming, knowing exactly how good he’d feel inside her, but she couldn’t bring herself to climb on top of him. Not yet. There was something so intoxicating about being here; on her knees for him. Showing him exactly how badly she wanted him back. And showing him, once and for all—

She wasn’t going *anywhere*.

It was almost unfair how *good* it felt, knowing she was his. Knowing he was hers. Knowing, as his hand slipped into her curls, that it was *him*. *His* fingers on the nape of her neck. *His* thumb against her cheek. *Him*. She wondered, for a moment, as his palm cupped the back of her head, guiding her up and down his length, if he realised that he was doing it, and she glanced up.

He knew.

Draco’s gaze was locked on her, his lips hanging softly open as he watched himself disappear into hers. Breath shuddering. Thighs twitching.

“Don’t fucking stop.” His eyes fluttered shut again. *“Gods, I wish you could see yourself right now.”*

She preened under his praise, trying to stop herself from smiling around his length.

“Can’t believe you’re mine,” he whispered. *“Can’t believe I get to—”*

He glanced down at her again, chest heaving, but breath choking in his throat.

“Baby, I want to fuck you so badly, but I—ahh fuck—” His brow furrowed sharply. *“—just once, I need to watch you swallow it.”*

Hermione’s body shivered with need. With satisfaction, as Draco’s grip tightened in her hair. As his lips parted further. As his gaze

God, he looked so good from where she knelt; his hair unsettled and messed from a hand raked through it. Silver-grey eyes; hooded and watching, or hidden behind a desperate roll and fluttering eyelids. And his lips. Those lips she knew better than her own. Lips that kissed and devoured and whispered. Lips that were parted and panting and wet from his tongue.

She moved faster without thinking. Sucked a little harder. Watched him. Every sharp angle, every soft meeting of their gaze, as the edge she pushed him toward grew nearer and nearer.

Draco’s face was contorted in a way she’d never seen before, not even as she rode him like her life depended on it. His brow was furrowed so deeply it was knitted, his mouth locked open by his rigid jaw. A strand of his hair fell over his face as he began to lose control of himself. Silver-grey eyes heavy and lidded, needing to close but fighting to watch his cock disappearing into her mouth. She gripped him a little tighter. Teased his tip with her tongue. Slid her thumb along the vein at his underside, the way she’d watched him do to himself. He shuddered, and from his parted lips, a jilted moan fell.

“Like that,” he whispered. *“Oh, Gods, baby, please—please just like that.”*

It dawned on her, rather suddenly, that there was a chance she was about to edge him within an inch of his life. To bring him to the precipice and not be able to take him over it. But she knew, somehow, without even needing to think it, that that wouldn’t happen. She and this curse... they seemed to understand each other now. She knew what it wanted from her, and it knew how badly she wanted to give it.

Hermione knew what she had to do.

She closed her eyes. She took him to the back of her throat again.

And she imagined him coming inside her.

Not in her mouth, *inside her*, the way she craved him. The way she always had, every time, needing him to fill her, to complete her. She wanted it. *So badly*, she wanted it—for it to be *him* that filled her. She loved it. She loved *him*, holding her hips in his large, strong hands, exactly where she needed as he slammed himself into her. She pictured it—the moment that dark growl of possession left his chest. The feel of his breath against her throat as he

whispered her name. The moment their eyes locked—the feel of his lips on hers. The sound—*Oh, God, the sound*—of his hand hitting the headboard as he began to fuck her harder. Of his whimpering breathing leaving parted lips. The choked moan that left him as he whispered—as he begged—as he *growled* at her that he was going to get her pr—

“Baby—” His grip tightened in her hair. “Baby, *fuck, I’m gonna—*”

She felt it move through his fists, taking handfuls of her hair. His forearms, flexing in her periphery. Then, his thighs, tight and strung. It travelled through his body; his abs clenching as his body wrenched beneath her.

The words were trying to form on his lips, he couldn’t force them out, but she heard them nonetheless..

Coming. She thought. *He was coming.*

Her body was on fire as she watched his eyes roll back, then flutter closed as his lips parted in ecstasy. His entire body contracted; thighs fighting to close around her. His fingertips sank into her scalp, holding onto her as she pushed him into the peak of his pleasure.

The sudden swell of him between her lips made her own eyes flutter closed.

And he came, pulsing over and over across her tongue as she took him just that little bit deeper. As she gripped his thighs a little harder. Arched her back. Let a soft moan fall from her throat and resonate over his length. It seemed to snap him in half, his fingertips sinking into the back of her head with such desperation it was as if he’d forgotten that anything else existed.

Hermione whimpered with every pulse, sucking him deep as she begged for him to give her all of it. She wanted every inch of him. She wanted every drop of him.

Physical and metaphorical.

Every last fucking drop.

It was so *warm* over her tongue, a sensation that, until now, she’d never realised made her *achingly* wet. She so desperately needed to breathe, but she couldn’t bring herself to pull back, completely intoxicated by the taste of him. By the feel of him. By *knowing* that she had succeeded in breaking him.

Hermione watched as he came down from his high. Felt his grip loosen in her hair. His thumb began stroking, almost absent-mindedly, at the side of her cheek, sweeping up to her ear as his breathing began to slow.

She waited until he calmed, holding him in her mouth and just... watching. Watching his chest rise on every breath. Watching his jaw unset itself. Watched the softness return to his expression, with that perfect, blissful *peace* that she’d come to know as uniquely his.

The curse was almost poetic, in that way. So violent in its expression, in its desperation, its hardness, but then, in the afterglow, leaving him so perfectly... *soft*. Lips, hair, expression—

he was so beautiful that she wanted to cry. It was odd, surely, to feel so sentimental over something like this, but Draco was *hers*. She'd kept her promise and he'd found a way to fix it and they were... this would be...

She would never have to say goodbye to him again.

Hermione pulled off him slowly. Gently. She glanced up to make sure he was watching, and, because she loved him very much and he was *very* good to her—she swallowed. Draco was shaking, but even so, he groaned with satisfaction.

Then he looked at her as if she was the single most beautiful thing he'd ever seen in his life.

“That—” he whispered. “I—”

He couldn't finish the sentence, and Hermione said nothing in response. Instead, she pressed a soft kiss to his tip and guided him back into his clothing.

Goodness knew he had a history of not being able to put his trousers on without help.

But the gesture seemed to mean something to Draco. The care, or perhaps the act of casual intimacy; because his mouth fell open, as if he was *melting*, and immediately dragged her from the floor and into his lap.

He held her tightly, squeezing her against his body as he buried his lips against the side of her head.

“*One minute,*” he whispered. “*Just give me one minute.*”

Hermione grinned. She leaned in, speaking quietly.

“Draco, I know better than anyone how quickly you recover. But if you're going to try for round two, *one minute* seems a bit—”

He dragged her underneath him, caging her in as he lay his body over hers.

“One minute, and I'm taking you somewhere we're going to get photographed, so that every last person in the Wizarding World knows you're mine.”

And, in her entire life, she had never been more certain that she was exactly where she needed to be.

Chapter End Notes

•• (Keep going, there's a point to this)

Chapter 18: "With everything I fucking have, Hermione."

Chapter Summary

They're free. Finally. Except for the fun part of the curse they're mutually in agreement about that part being okay.

Chapter Notes

This one I kind of sprung on thorny last minute so it's a bit rough, any lingering mistakes are my own <3

► Cormac Chapter. Proceed with Caution.

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

Hermione held his hand nervously as they entered the lift. Mercifully empty.

But the atrium was not.

They stepped out of the lift with their hands entwined, and her heart was pounding, and not just from nerves. People were going to *see*. They were going to see, and they would *know*. She and Draco were—

They were together. And instead of that terrifying her, it made her...

God, if she was being completely honest, it *did* terrify her. But it wasn't the heavy, rocky dread that she was used to, no. It was that leaping, soaring, freefall kind of terror, where you know you're doing something *absolutely insane*.

But God *damn* it if you already know you're going to just *do it anyway*.

She was *his* now. She was his, and he was hers, and they were *them*, and it would probably be a little rough while people adjusted to that. But they *would* adjust. Eventually, with time.

Hermione glanced up at Draco, and found him staring at their entwined hands.

His gaze flicked to hers.

"You ready?"

She smiled. "What's the worst that can happen?"

It was a foolish question, she should have known better.

Because, as they made their way across the atrium... She found out *exactly* what 'the worst' was.

They were halfway across the floor when a too-familiar voice rang out.

"*There* she is!"

Cormac broke into a wide grin, striding toward her as if he'd known she was about to appear. That in and of itself was cause for concern.

But he was also clutching an enormous bouquet of roses.

Hermione felt her cheeks going red, but not with pleasant surprise.

She just stared at him.

Cormac didn't seem to notice, or if he did, he didn't care, approaching her with an enormous, performative smile as he preened under the dozens of eyes that had turned to watch.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, nervously, squeezing Draco's hand tighter.

Cormac straightened up, glancing around at the confused expressions of passers-by. A handful slowed to watch. He cleared his throat, and he smiled again.

"Surprising you!" he exclaimed. "Is it so out of the ordinary for a husband to surprise his *wife* on her *birthday*?"

Hermione stared at him.

"Today's the ninth," she said, nonplussed.

"Correct." Cormac smiled expectantly at her.

She blinked. "My birthday's the *nineteenth*."

His face fell.

A few snickers sounded from those who were pretending not to be watching, but Hermione didn't feel badly about it. It wasn't *her* that had waited in the Ministry atrium with a giant bunch of roses for someone she knew despised her. And for a moment, Cormac only seemed marginally rattled by it.

Until a muffled snort sounded from behind her.

Cormac's cheeks flushed red as he glanced at Draco.

"Well forgive *me* for being thoughtful," he complained, under his breath. "Roses mean *love*. It's a *gesture*. Most people would be grateful—"

“Most people manage to remember their spouse’s birthday.”

Hermione hadn’t meant it to come out so clipped.

No, that was a lie. It was precisely how she’d meant it.

The crowd of Ministry onlookers had begun to whisper, little murmurs rippling outward. Cormac’s jaw twitched as he caught the sound, and his grip tightened on the flowers until a thorn pricked through the wrapping. He winced, scowling down at them, face twisted, and suddenly he was stepping forward, anger overtaking the fake smile.

Hermione didn’t bother hiding her own.

“You think this is funny?” he hissed. “Standing there making a *fool* out of me in front of everyone—”

He took a step forward, into her personal space.

And a hand clapped onto his shoulder.

“I think that’s quite close enough, *Mr. McLaggen*. ”

The gathering onlookers stared, whispering furiously behind their hands as Judah forced him to take a few steps back.

“Let go, you *boor*.” Cormac sputtered, clutching the flowers like a weapon as Hermione watched embarrassment flood over his face. “I am speaking to my—”

Judah cleared his throat.

Cormac’s brow furrowed.

And, with as close to a smirk as Hermione had ever seen him muster, Judah rather smugly shook his head.

Cormac stared for a moment, clearly confused as to what Judah was implying, but Judah only stared mockingly back. Cormac turned toward her as if expecting an explanation, but Hermione’s expression didn’t change.

She almost pitied the man. *Almost*.

Cormac frowned, looking between her and Judah with an expression of growing fluster.

“What’s going on?” he asked. “I *am* speaking to my wife.”

Judah straightened his tie, smiling politely at Cormac.

“About that, sir. There was a very unfortunate accident. I’m afraid the paperwork seems to have somehow been shredded. So, no, as it turns out, you’re not. Speaking with your *wife*, that is. My fault *entirely*.” He blinked slowly. “And *Ms. Granger* thanks you kindly for the

generous gift, but regretfully informs you that her office already has all the flowers it could possibly need. So I'll just... take care of those for you."

With a click of his fingers, the roses in Cormac's hands disappeared in a puff of smoke. Hermione had to stop herself from smirking as the man let out a muffled shriek of surprise. Cormac blustered at the man but Judah—saint that he was—merely stepped back, far enough to give her space, but not *nearly* far enough to give Cormac any breathing room.

In protest, Cormac's gaze turned back to her, and his eyes fell to her hand.

Entwined—rather publicly—with Draco's.

Cormac's brow furrowed; just a tiny bit. There was a flicker. A moment of anger.

And then a pause, as he realised the situation he'd put himself in.

His stiffened, glancing nervously around the now rather significant group of curious rubberneckers. She could practically *see* the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end as his expression began to darken.

Hermione knew the look all too well. She'd seen it so *frequently* over the past five years. Whenever she spoke out of turn. In any situation where she did anything other than brush off her achievements in favour of his. If she held her tea any other way than the correct one.

The pinched jaw. The twitch at the corner of his mouth. Cormac *basked* in attention when it was positive. When he could control it.

But this? *Here*? He'd made a scene, and it wasn't at all a welcome one.

He glanced nervously at the rapidly gathering crowd. And then, his eyes met hers.

"*Hermione*," he hissed. "*What the fuck do you think you're doing?*"

She said nothing, just stood still as Draco's grip tightened on hers.

Cormac lowered his voice.

"*Get. Your fucking hand. Out of his.*" He took a step forward. "*People are looking.*"

And still, Hermione said nothing.

A low murmur began to ripple through the crowd, and, with every voice that joined, Cormac's cheeks began to flush redder. People were noticing. People were *seeing*.

People were wondering what the fuck was going on.

Cormac's eyes were flicking wildly around the crowd, the panic beginning to show on his face. Hermione squeezed Draco's hand harder.

Cormac cleared his throat.

And he let out a fake, chortling laugh.

“Such a *prankster*,” he announced, straightening himself taller. “Hermione, come on now. I’ve been looking forward to seeing my *wife*—”

Hermione let go of Draco’s hand. She took a half-step forward, meeting Cormac’s gaze.

“I’m not your wife any more, Cormac” she said, quietly. “You made *certain* of that.”

A hushed whisper spread throughout the crowd. Cormac’s jaw tightened.

Then, he forced a laugh.

“Now don’t be silly, you’ve had quite the joke,” he sing-songed, smiling nervously at her before his expression darkened. “So be a good girl and get your fucking arse over here.”

“No, Cormac. You don’t get to dictate what I do any more.”

She took another step.

“Now, turn around and leave before I let Draco tear you to shreds the way he’s been dying to since the first time you disrespected me in front of him.”

Cormac’s smirk faltered. The color drained from his face, then rushed back twice as red.

“You—” He seethed. “No. This isn’t how it’s supposed to—”

He forced another laugh.

“We have a *reputation* to uphold. We have an *image*. I pledged to donate galleons we don’t even *have* to get in the same room as you. We— Hermione, we—” He swallowed hard, his voice a low, angry hiss. “*We had a fucking deal.*”

“*Had*, Cormac. We *had* a deal. I’d play pretty little wife as long as you were helping me with my career and managed to not be a complete and utter *arse*. But you *used* me. You *lied* to me. You pledged those galleons so that you could *steal* from me. And you—”

Hermione had plenty more to say, but she was interrupted by the feel of a hand on her shoulder. It wasn’t Draco’s. She turned, and found herself looking up at the smiling face of Kingsley Shacklebolt.

“*Minister*,” she said, forcing a smile, darting a wary glance at Cormac.

Kingsley smiled down at her in turn, Cormac’s smirk faltering.

“*M—Minister*,” Cormac greeted him.

Kingsley turned toward him. “Ah, Mr. McLaggen! First the generous donation, and now— did I just see flowers? I could’ve sworn—” He glanced around, looking for them, but shook

his head, and turned back to Hermione. “Quite the celebration, I thought your birthday wasn’t until the nineteenth!”

Hermione eyed Cormac. He had the nerve to look *annoyed*, that her boss knew her birthday better than her own goddamned “husband”. She narrowed her eyes.

“You’re right. It’s not. Your timing is excellent, actually, Minister—

Cormac’s gaze suddenly flashed with trepidation. She turned toward him, meeting his panicked stare head-on.

“I’m afraid the McLaggen family’s donation won’t be going through after all. It seems the funds... weren’t quite so available as the family made out.”

Cormac’s mouth fell open. “That’s—that’s not—” He let out a short, strangled laugh, too high-pitched to be convincing. “Of course they’re available! I—Hermione—*she’s joking*, Minister, she does that—”

Kingsley’s brows lifted slightly, a polite mask firmly in place, the careful expression of a man who knew better than to add additional fodder to the gossip brewing before him. Hermione straightened herself out, years of suppressed humiliation pooling in her chest.

“Don’t be silly, Cormac, we both know this isn’t funny,” she said, calmly. “And I wouldn’t joke about something as serious as *fraud*. Financial or... marital.”

“Fraud, you say?” Kingsley drawled, crossing his arms across his chest.

The colour drained from Cormac’s face, then returned all at once in an angry, splotchy flush. His throat bobbed. “Minister, you can’t—we are—everything is completely and totally—” His gaze darted wildly around, at the watching faces, the expressions of shock.

Someone lifted a camera.

He paled rather drastically, eyes wide like a deer on the motorway.

Then, without any warning, Cormac yanked her forward by the shoulders.

And he *kissed her*.

Hermione squeaked with surprise, but the sound didn’t reach the air, instead tumbling into a sloppy, lapping tongue and a mouth wet with saliva. Her hands shot up instinctively, but before she could push Cormac away, he tugged her arms around himself like he was trying to make it look, for the camera, like *she* was the one that was trying to eat *his* face.

His tongue swirled around the inside of her mouth with such *moisture* that she felt like she might honestly drown, and she prepared herself to slap him. Right across the cheek, and hard enough to leave a mark that he wouldn’t soon forget. She was *raring* for it. The second he let her go, she was going to slap him clean across the face, and then rip him a new one.

But then—

He slowed to almost a shuddering halt.

Hermione watched his eyes flicker open, as he suddenly pulled back. Just an inch or so, but it was enough to see his brows furrow in confusion. Cormac's eyes searched hers for a moment. Then glanced down at her lips. Then, seemingly rolled his own together, as if—

Hermione paled.

As if tasting—

Hermione gasped as she realised what Cormac might have just tasted. Or, more precisely—

Who.

She and Draco had only left her office a few moments before, and she supposed there was every chance that the taste of *what she'd done to him* had...*lingered*...on her tongue.

Cormac's eyes suddenly left hers.

And flicked to the man standing behind her.

Hermione clapped her hand to her mouth, trying to stifle a startled, panicked burst of laughter as Cormac's twisted in disgust. She glanced over at Draco, expecting to find him being held back; maybe by Judah, maybe by the crowd—Cormac had *kissed* her, after all.

But Draco wasn't being held back.

Instead, he stood there, perfectly still; arms folded across his chest, expression stoic. But all too soon, the corners of his mouth twitched. Slowly, deliberately, the smirk spread; curling *just so*, savoring every agonising second Cormac had just endured.

His eyes narrowed, a sharp glint of satisfaction flickering in the silver-grey.

He leaned in. And he whispered.

"How's it taste, McLaggen?"

Cormac took a step forward, as if ready to swing, but Draco was ready for it. He grabbed Cormac's arm, pulling him in, and smirking down at him.

"Ah, ah, ah," Draco mocked. *"Let's not make a scene."*

"Fuck you, Malfoy."

Draco clicked his tongue. "You kiss your Nanny with that mouth, too?"

"Mister McLaggen!" Kingsley reprimanded.

Without a shred of hesitation, Draco turned to him. "If you'll allow me, Minister. I have this under control."

Kingsley eyed him carefully. His gaze softened momentarily, and for one split-second, she could've sworn there something almost... *approving* in it.

He lowered his voice.

And he turned to Hermione.

"I will remind you that Mr. Malfoy does not work for the Ministry, and therefore cannot be reprimanded for hexing anyone."

Hermione breathed out a laugh. "Understood."

Kingsley's gaze snapped up to Judah. "Judah, if you'd be so kind as to alert security?"

Judah nodded. Both men walked off.

"*Secur—*" Cormac seethed. Every vein was standing out on his forehead. He turned back to Draco, a bead of sweat beginning to form at his temple. "Malfoy, I am going to fucking *destroy you*."

Draco grinned. "That's cute."

"I have *the letters*."

"You have *some* of the letters. *I* have all of them."

"Except for—"

"No exceptions. I made copies of every one you ever sent me as soon as I found out you'd *blackmailed* Hermione into staying married to you." He glanced sideways at her, apologetically. "Sorry, my love. I'm a bit less trusting than you are."

Hermione inhaled sharply. She managed a rather forgiving nod. Draco smiled.

"All it'll take is one nod from her, and the story breaks across the front page of the Prophet. She's the wronged party. Her reputation will recover." Draco's eyes narrowed, his voice no louder than a murmur, just as he'd promised. "*Yours won't*."

Cormac's face reddened, his hands clenching and unclenching by his sides. His mouth opened, but no words came out, only sharp, panicked breaths.

"You can't," he finally spat. "You wouldn't—" His voice cracked. He looked around the crowd, searching for support that wasn't there. His eyes darted to Hermione, then to Draco, then back again. "I have a lot of friends in the Ministry, Malfoy. Maybe that means nothing to you, but it certainly does to *her*. And I will make her regret this."

Draco stared at him for a moment, shaking his head as if genuinely shocked by his stupidity.

"Do you mean the pureblood socialites that spend their days pretending to contribute to society? The ones your Nanny likes so much? Because I think you'll find that Mrs. Pansy

Weasley is *very* unhappy indeed about the way you've treated her very close friend, and will be making it *quite* clear where the McLaggens, particularly your *Nanny*, now stand in the social pecking order."

Cormac paled. Draco didn't stop.

"Or, do you mean the spineless little freaks in that recreational Quidditch club you so *adore*?" His gaze flicked over Cormac judgementally. "I did find it funny just how *many* of the team were willing to sell me their ownership share. Petersen practically *wet himself*."

Hermione's gaze flicked sideways. *Oh, he hadn't?*

Cormac's breath caught. "They did not."

"Money in the right hands will make things happen, Cormac, and a 500% markup does wonders. Not that you'd know. You couldn't afford the original buy-in, could you?"

Cormac was practically shaking with rage, his fuse lit and sparking. Hermione could see it drawing to an end. Drawing towards an inevitable conclusion.

And still, Draco fanned the flame.

"In case I'm not being *perfectly clear with you*, Cormac, what that means is that I now *own* your stupid little club. So if you want to start threatening the future mother of my children—"

"You'll never scrub the mud off her, Malfoy, or *her* children. No matter how much gold you throw at her."

A gasp proceeded around the crowd. Draco smirked.

"And with that truly *delightful* contribution, you're off the team." His gaze narrowed, looking Cormac up and down one last time.

"And we'll be needing those gold cufflinks back."

He winked.

Cormac detonated.

His fist flew immediately, but Draco somehow managed to dodge it, coolly refusing to send one back as Cormac lost his balance with the force of his swing. Two Ministry security officers pushed through the gathering crowd, flanking Cormac on either side. He was still shouting—half threats, half nonsense—but the sound was drowned beneath the rising murmur of onlookers.

"Let go of me!" Cormac barked.

"Escort him out," Hermione ordered, her tone brooking no argument.

Cormac made what Hermione could only describe as an *unimaginable* scene, screaming profanities at her, at Draco, at *everyone* as he was dragged kicking and screaming from the Ministry atrium.

The ripple of gossip that spread through the crowd was practically *visible*, as eyes tracked after the screaming man, whispers surging in a dull roar as speculative gazes shifted back to the couple left standing there.

Draco cleared his throat beside her.

"So, I think that well and truly qualifies as lifting a leg and pissing on my territory," Draco whispered. "How much trouble am I in with you?"

Hermione sighed, fighting the smile that twitched at her lips. "A fair bit. There were a lot more threats in there than polite society would deem acceptable."

Draco chuckled. "I'd say I'm sorry, but... Well. I wouldn't want to lie to you."

"Threatening his Nanny's social standing? Incredibly impolite behaviour." She eyed him carefully. "Taking away his Quidditch club was entirely *nasty* of you."

She tried her very hardest to seem disapproving.

She failed.

Draco smirked. "Serves him right for making a scene."

Their eyes met in the middle, lingering for a moment. He took a single step closer.

"Now, are you going to let me kiss you in front of all these nice people? Or does the public have to wonder what the *fuck* is going on?"

Hermione stared up at him, her heart swelling alongside the blush that filled her cheeks.

And she pulled him into a kiss.

The noise of the atrium faded to nothing more than a quiet hum as her lips found his once more. As she let herself mould into his body, melt into him, to shape into the curve of his hands as they curled around her waist and into her hair. It was almost unnatural, how *natural* it felt with him; their bodies slotting together like two halves of some unknown, greater whole. Something about balance, or symmetry, or a perfect equilibrium; like their atoms had formed the same dust at the start of the universe, and, by their very elemental design, had somehow found each other again.

He tilted her slightly—because of course he did, he'd always been a bloody showman—sighing into her lips as she let him take the lead. She trusted him. Of course she did. How could she not? When kissing him felt like *this*; when *being his* felt like *this*? Made her think of atoms and balance, and the existence of millions of universes; in which they found each other, over and over, *every single time*.

She loved him. *So deeply*, she loved him.

It truly should've been impossible.

As they broke apart, she realised the crowd had thinned; typically-British very-good-manners dictating that public displays of affection should encourage an immediate aversion of the gaze.

But there was no hiding the affection that she held in her own gaze.

She looked up at Draco with a blush forming on her cheeks, smiling dopily at him in a way that was entirely unbecoming in *her place of employment*.

“Thank you for that,” he whispered, but there was an edge of teasing in it.

Hermione questioned him with a look.

He smiled. “Now every man in Wizarding Britain is going to hate my guts.”

“Is that...” she furrowed her brow. “Not normal? For you?”

Draco glared at her.

Hermione grinned. “Well, I suppose we’ll have to expedite the press release telling everyone about how *generous* you are, oh benevolent benefactor.”

She didn’t care if everyone in the *world* hated him. *She* didn’t. She was going to spend the rest of her life by his side. It wasn’t going to be easy, trying to repair both of their reputations at once, but she knew they could do it. They would do it because they *had* to. Because that’s what she’d decided. Hermione had never taken no for an answer before, and she wasn’t planning on starting now.

If the world wanted the Golden Girl as their Minister, then they would just have to get used to it.

Because she wasn’t going anywhere without him.

But even so, it wouldn’t be easy.

They departed together, hand in hand, leaving the crowd behind as they slipped from view. And, as the long corridor toward the stairs surrounded them in quiet, she turned to him once more.

“By the way,” she asked, quietly. “*Future mother of your children?*”

Draco assessed her knowingly.

“Don’t tell me you don’t like it,” he teased. “Because that’s precisely what you are.”

She blushed, smiling widely.

“No, I *do* like it. Of course I do,” she whispered.

Draco turned to her, his gaze focusing as he assessed her tone of voice. She knew he could hear it. The hesitation.

How could she possibly put this?

“Do you think we should… *wait*? Just a little bit?”

Draco’s brow furrowed in confusion, but before he could say anything, she placed her palm gently against his cheek.

“I still want to do it. More than *anything*. So don’t go getting any ideas that I’ve changed my mind.” She smiled. “There isn’t a thing in this world that could make me change my mind. God, Draco, I am *so in love with you*. I want it *more than ever*.”

He kissed her softly. “Then why wait?”

She spoke quietly.

“I just think maybe we shouldn’t *rush it*. Let things settle a bit first. Let people get used to the idea of *us* before dropping a bombshell like *that*.”

He exhaled heavily.

“You know that I’ll be happy with whatever timeline we end up with, as long as we end up there eventually.” He smiled, but a little nervously. “But as magical as that blowjob was, baby, I think you know as well as I do that all it does is take the edge off. If you’re telling me I can’t fuck you for *months*—”

“That’s—” she sank her teeth into her lip. “That’s not what I’m saying.”

“I—” Draco’s expression twisted into mild concern. “Hermione, if I’m being completely honest, I—” he swallowed, hard.

His expression darkened.

He stepped into her, backing her—just a little—up against the corridor wall.

“If I’m deep inside you, and you’re squeezing me, and--- he inhaled sharply. “...and we’re *right there, on the edge* and you ask me to pull out, I’m not—” He closed his eyes, pressing his lips together. “I’m not *entirely* sure I’ll be able to.”

A flash of heat the temperature of the sun licked down the back of her neck.

Oh, she knew that *very well*, and she wouldn’t have *wanted* him to. It was all she could do to not lock her legs around him and hold him deep inside her on a *bad* day. He already knew that she liked when he held her down, bending her in half to slam himself *even deeper* while he spat the most disgusting filth into her ear—

She blushed. *God*, she loved this damn curse, sometimes.

“I would never ask you to do that,” she responded.

Draco sighed as if it was the most impossible conundrum he’d ever faced.

“Well, as far as I’m aware, there isn’t a single spell, potion, or salve that can *physically prevent* me from filling your pretty little cunt once you’ve let me in. So unless the Muggles have invented something...”

Hermione straightened, realisation forming. She blushed.

Then she cleared her throat.

And she offered him her hand.

They made their way up to the street, down Whitehall to the Tesco Express on the corner, Draco eying her with confusion all the while. She hadn’t told him *what* she was buying, only that she was buying... *something*.

She nipped inside. The array of choices was, as usual, rather overwhelming, but in no more than a moment, she was through the self-checkout, slipping the box into her bag and making her way back out to the street.

“What did you buy?” he asked, narrowing his eyes as he tugged her out of the main thoroughfare. “You’re being... even more odd than usual.”

Hermione sank her teeth into her lip, blushing furiously.

“Something that will help you to not get me pregnant.”

He searched her face with suspicion, body caging hers against the brick. “If you don’t want me to get you pregnant, I’m not going to be able to come regardless.”

She could feel him starting to stir as he pressed his body to hers. His proximity was doing rather disastrous things to her self-control. She let her fingers rake gently through his hair.

“That’s just the problem, darling. I *do* want you to get me pregnant. In fact, it takes up *far* too much space in my brain, these days,” she whispered. “I just also recognise that it would be *even better timing* if it took us a few more months.”

She shrugged.

The corner of Draco’s mouth twitched upward. “So what you’re telling me,” he started, taking her chin in his fingers. “Is that you want to spend the next few months trying to see if you can outsmart a thousand-year-old curse?”

Hermione smiled up at him.

“Well to be fair to your ancestors, condoms weren’t nearly as readily available then as they are now.”

Draco let out a long, dark breath, glancing briefly around to make sure no one was actively watching. Then he leaned in. And dropped his lips to her neck.

Hermione melted under the touch. She hadn’t come in weeks, and she was *aching* for him. He was being so gentle, but so *demanding*, a tiny nip of teeth between soft kisses to soothe them. She wanted his mouth on her. His hands. His *weight*. She wanted him to pick her up and bend her in half and pin her to the bed with her knees pressed to chest while he fucked her so full of—

The pathetic little whimper that left her throat only made him moan against her throat.

“If it means I get to be inside you *right now*, I’ll do anything you ask.”

“Good.” She lifted her lips to whisper in his ear. “Because if you felt so inclined as to take me back to the Manor right now, lay me on that stupidly expensive rug, and *fuck me into the floor*; I would be ever-so-grateful for it.”

Draco’s breath shuddered over her ear.

He didn’t wait to take her back to a Floo.

It took no longer than a hand gripping her forearm for it to happen. In an instant, she was back at the Manor. Her legs went out from under her as he tugged her downward.

Then, they were tumbling onto the floor.

Directly on top of a seven-hundred year old rug.

They landed in the parlour in a mess of lips and tangled limbs, shedding pieces of clothing and not bothering to watch where they were flung. Draco was on top of her in an instant, like it was pure necessity, pure need; his waistcoat, then his shirt, open to reveal bare muscle. He wrenched her blouse open without stopping, sending buttons clattering across the floor.

“You ripped my blouse!” she gasped, but he didn’t stop.

“I paid for it. I’ll rip as many as I want,” Draco growled approvingly into her lips, shifting his hips over hers to push her skirt up to her waist. He yanked her bra down, spilling her over the cups and latching around her nipple as her back arched against his mouth. She could barely *breathe* through the pleasure, her entire body on fire as she whimpered and moaned under his desperate hands. It had been so long.

It had been *too* long.

His trousers were next, flicked open, shoved down his hips, dragging her underneath him. It was just like the first time, peeling layers and flinging clothes in a desperate attempt to get to her, and she’d never felt so alive. So wanted, so desired, so *needed*.

Fuck foreplay.

She needed him inside her.

Now.

She knew it more than she knew the sound of her own name; that the feel of him pushing into her would soothe it. This desperation, clawing inside her, wanting him—*needing* him—

“Draco,” she whispered. “*Please.* I can’t wait any—”

She dragged her bag toward her, practically crushing the box she’d bought as she ripped it open. As she tore the packet, reaching between their bodies and gliding it onto him. He shuddered at her touch.

“That’s it?” he whispered. “All we have to do?”

Hermione curled her legs around his hips, dragging him closer.

“That’s it.”

Draco pushed her legs even higher. Aligned himself to her entrance. His eyes flicked up to hers, as if—God, he was wonderful—as if he was asking for *permission*.

He didn’t even have to ask.

Hermione sank her fingernails into his shoulders. Dug her heels into him. She lifted herself to meet him, his tip notching against her entrance, and with the tiniest shift of his hips, he pushed inside. The sudden stretch made her draw a desperate gasp. He matched it, his own lips parting wide as he paused for a moment.

“Oh, *fuck,*” he whispered. “*You’re so fucking ready—*”

Hermione squirmed beneath him.

“I need—” Draco groaned in her ear. “Fuck, baby, I’m sorry, I can’t—I—I have to—”

And then he drove himself into her in one long thrust.

Hermione arched off the floor, or at least, she *tried*, her body bending as he filled her so completely that she had to let out a wail. Draco slammed himself inside her, as deep as he could go, drawing himself out then slamming back in.

He let out a moan so loud she felt it vibrate in her chest.

She’d forgotten how big he was. How perfectly he filled her; how it felt to stretch around him. Taking him felt like a *dream*. He always felt good, but this—he—*fuck*, he’d never felt so

It hadn't even been that *long*, only a few weeks—but she was so pent up, *so worked up* that the sensation made her feel like she was *exploding*.

She sank her fingers into his shoulder.

Her whole body burned with need, legs already shaking as she flung her arms around Draco's shoulders.

"*Hermione*—" he sobbed, "*—you're so fucking wet.*"

She was.

He hadn't touched her. Hadn't dragged that magnificent, beautiful mouth down her body. Had barely needed to kiss her, and she was soaked completely through. That was what he did to her. Fuck the curse, fuck her *kink*, fuck anything and everything that wasn't the exact combination of perfect *somethings* that made him *him*. His eyes, his lips, his hair, his smell; the shape of his hands and the cut of his waist and the strength in his thighs as they slammed against the underside of her own. She loved it. Every single inch of him. She loved him.

But here, now, it was his weight on top of her—feeling him there—feeling him inside her—it made her want to scream.

"*I know,*" she whispered, knowing it was all because of him. "*I know.*"

She kicked her legs higher, begging for him deeper—

Draco caught her thigh. Then the other one. Bending her in half as he began fucking her into the floor.

Hermione moaned so loudly that her own echo whispered back to her.

"I will never get enough of you," he whispered. "There will never be a day when I won't want you like this. I need—" He dragged his lips along her neck, the way that he knew she loved. "I need you to know that."

She whimpered.

His fingertips sank into her hip as he began rocking her against his own. She keened under the gentle nip of his teeth on her throat.

"*I will want you every morning,*" he murmured. "*And every single night.* Every second of every hour of every day, I will want you. I will be thinking about it. About *feeling you like this.* Taking you." He groaned. "*Claiming you.*"

Fuck, she was already so close.

"*Please,*" she gasped into his ear. "Oh, fuck, *Draco*, you feel so—"

"*That's what you want, isn't it?*" he teased. "*Tell me it's what you want.*"

It was. *It was*. In the moment, it felt like it was *all* she'd been thinking about. Did anything else matter? Because right there, with her legs already shaking with need, it certainly didn't feel like it.

"You're the only thing I want. You're everything," she whimpered. "I will want you every fucking day. I will want you inside me, claiming me—*filling me*—"

Draco groaned. She raked her fingers through his hair.

"—I want all of you, Draco. All the time. Always."

He dropped his head to her shoulder, breath rasping furiously.

"You're mine now, baby. You're *mine*," he whispered. "You're mine today, and tomorrow, and every single goddamn day until I get you pregnant. And then—" He took a deep breath. "—thank the *Gods*— every single fucking day after that, too."

Hermione squeezed her thighs tighter around his waist. Draco moaned, his breath shuddering.

"*I love you*," he whispered. "*With everything I fucking have*, Hermione. *I love you*."

"*I love you*," she whispered back, the words making every muscle in her body tense. Because she did. She *did* love him. More than breathing, more than air, more than the sound of her own heartbeat. She loved him. He loved her. She could feel it in every inch of his skin. In every part of him, and every place their bodies connected, *he loved her*. And this was—she could have him like this—

Forever.

She was tightening around him, she could feel it, the precipice building

"Baby, I'm getting—" he rasped. "Fuck. Fuck. I—can't—" He gave her a few hard, deep thrusts. "*I'm so fucking close*," he whispered. "*What are you doing to me?*"

Hermione wanted him to rip the condom off. To pin her down and fill her, the way he deserved. The way *she* deserved. She would have *him*. She would tell him she loved him. He would growl it back, filling her over and over and *over* again as she tried to stop herself from quitting her job entirely so that she could spend every single day with Draco between her thighs.

She would wake up beside him every morning, his hand caressing her belly, smiling as he gently slid inside her from behind. She would see him at breakfast, his silver eyes catching the early morning light that filtered golden through the sitting room. It would catch on her ring, making it shine, and his eyes would spark with possessiveness.

It shouldn't have been as attractive as it was to her, his possessiveness over her. He would go *feral* over the sight of her, rounded and swollen with his child, she just—she just *knew it*. It was possessive and possibly a little fucked up, but she knew he would. Her expensive skirts tightening around her mid-section, knowing it was *his seed* that had made her that way—

God, she couldn't wait.

The urge to tell him to stop was building so rapidly. To tell him to take it off. Rip it off. Pin her knees to her chest and slam into her from above as he held her down. He was so fucking *deep* like this, his pelvis slamming against her clit with every goddamn thrust. If he wasn't wearing it, he'd be *right there*, on the cusp of painting her like a beautiful artwork of life. She wanted to be dripping with him. She wanted to be *filled* with him. She wanted—

She wanted him to get her—

Her orgasm took hold as she pictured it, sending her arching underneath him as he moaned his approval into her ear. He was praising her, she could hear it, but she couldn't make sense of it, her body spasming and writhing as he fucked her into her climax. She couldn't think of anything but the pleasure. It overtook her, mind, body, and soul, spreading through her like an explosion as she felt his thrusts begin to stutter.

Draco fucked her like he belonged there, grinding himself into her and touching every last fucking inch. Her thighs shook as she squeezed them around him, heels digging in on instinct, as if she'd forgotten. As if she was begging him, still.

Come inside me. Come inside me. Inside. Fill me.

He let out a choking moan as he followed her over the edge, his body curling around hers as he came deep, deep inside her. His full length, down to his base as his breath shuddered into the minimal space between their lips.

Hermione could barely keep her eyes open.

She'd never felt bliss like it. His weight on top of her, his breath in her ear. A drop of his sweat had somehow been caught by her lips—she could fucking *taste him*. And he was delicious. Intoxicating and beautiful and she licked her tongue over where she'd found it.

Her lips found his.

She kissed him softly, but he was panting too hard to kiss back, his lips parted and hanging open between frantic swallows.

"God, that was fucking *incredible*," she panted. "I feel like—*God*, I thought it'd be dulled, somehow." Her thighs trembled through aftershocks of her orgasm, and she smirked. "It absolutely was *not*."

Draco swallowed again.

"I—" he furrowed his brow.

She stroked her fingers languidly through his hair. He was going to say something, but it couldn't be important, not compared to this. To the feel of his body on top of hers; the feel of his skin against her own. She sighed contentedly.

Draco frowned harder.

“What is it?” she whispered, her voice warm and soft.

“The... thing,” he replied.

She smiled. Rather genius, she thought. A *condom*. She couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of it sooner. “What about it?”

Draco’s brows knitted closer together, and she felt—*ohhhhh God*—she felt the sudden whole-body emptiness as he began to pull out of her. She hated the sensation of losing him from inside her. It was one of her least and most favourite parts. Losing the fullness, the heat, the thickness from her body. But watching his face as his release trickled back out of her? One of the most deliciously erotic things in the universe. Hermione’s thighs twitched and shook, fighting to close.

He held them apart.

Silver-grey eyes stayed firmly downwards as he slipped free from her, but as he did, they rather rapidly began to widen.

Hermione frowned at him. “What?” she asked.

He didn’t respond right away. Instead, he stared at the place where their bodies had been joined, just moments beforehand.

Furrowed his brow harder.

Then, after a few moments, his eyes widened. He glanced further downwards toward the condom still on him, then back up at her.

And, with a crack to his voice, he said—

“*It broke.*”

Chapter End Notes

Hope these three were worth the wait ❤️

Sorry guys just had a baby brb

Also, side note: Draco owning the Quidditch club is unbelievably fucking sexy to me and it was heavily inspired by me melting into the floor over my beloved beta's current WIP [The Four Fs](#) (Theo x Draco x Hermione poly fic). Hiiiiiiiiighly recommend 😂



End Notes

Socials at <https://linktr.ee/malfoyesque>

I will never stop thanking my wonderful alpha/beta/omega [thornedhuntress](#) for making this fic not as shit as it was. Thank you for listening to my incessant whining and poking and kicking cans and throwing myself on the bed in a tantrum when it doesn't do the words thing the way I want, and then fixing it so I didn't feel like (as much of) an idiot posting it. <3

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!