

In Silence & Submission

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/43648180) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/43648180>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationships:	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy , Pansy Parkinson/Harry Potter , Ginny Weasley/Blaise Zabini , Theodore Nott/Charlie Weasley
Characters:	Hermione Granger , Draco Malfoy , Pansy Parkinson , Harry Potter , Ginny Weasley , Blaise Zabini , Theodore Nott , Charlie Weasley , Ron Weasley , Astoria Greengrass
Additional Tags:	BDSM , Kink , Good Girl Hermione Granger , Dom Draco , Impact Play , Spanking , Cock Warming , Masturbation , Sex Toys , Oral Sex , Draco Malfoy & Harry Potter Friendship , Inappropriate Use of Malfoy Signet Ring , Power Dynamics , Suits as Foreplay , Grieving , Suicidal Thoughts , Magical self-harm , Trauma , Post-War Trauma , Post-Battle of Hogwarts , Ten Years Later , PTSD , Tattooed Draco Malfoy , Found Family , Forced Orgasm , Bondage , Slytherins Adopt Hermione , Good Slytherins , Gratuitous Smut , Fluff and Smut , Ron Bashing , Psychological Trauma , Praise Kink , Marking , Explicit Sexual Content , Hermione Granger & Theodore Nott Friendship , Fluff , friendship fluff , HEA , Dual POV , do not copy to another site , Complete
Language:	English
Collections:	Dramione , Lions Among Men , holy crap dramione is hot , Dramione WIP , Dramione fanfics that NEED to be read
Stats:	Published: 2022-12-16 Completed: 2023-06-23 Words: 69,672 Chapters: 29/29

In Silence & Submission

by [gillianeliza](#)

Summary

10 years after the war everything has changed. Enemies turned into friends and lovers. Fear turned into hope. Pain into joy. Everyone has moved on except for Hermione Granger. Nestled within her friend group, now made up of not just Harry and Ginny, but also Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Blaise Zabini and of course Draco Malfoy, she was content to allow the trauma of her past to haunt her. More than just content - it was what she felt she deserved - until one evening Draco Malfoy decided enough was enough.

This is a low stakes, split POV fic that deals heavily with life AFTER the Battle of Hogwarts. You will find the POV of either Hermione or Draco stated in bold italics, in the middle whenever it shifts. Please read all tags as this work deals with BDSM, kink, trauma recovery, & suicidal ideation.

Notes

NOTE: I am not currently allowing IS&S to be translated into other languages. Thank you so much for your support.

A huge thank you to my amazing alpha reader & dear friend [hellodarknessdarling](#) who gave me the prompt for this fic, intending for me to write an all-smut-no-plot BDSM fic for our close friend [thebiglittlelibrary](#) & somehow my brain turned it into this. & thank you to [thebrightcity](#) for beta reading!

[Elivrayn](#) created the gorgeous cover art for this fic. Thank you so, so much!!

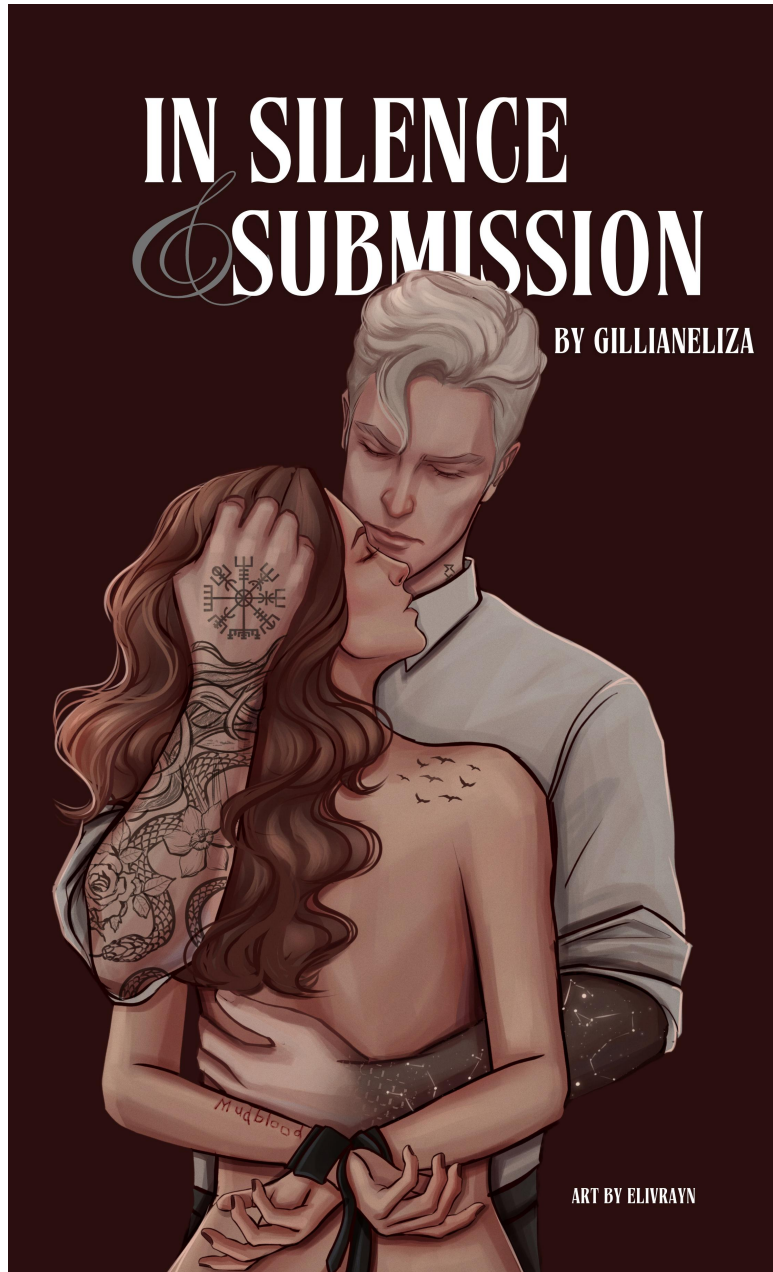
Follow me on TikTok ([@gillianeliza_](#)) & IG ([@gillianeliza](#)) for updates on this project. This fic is complete.

I do not allow translations of my work, only allow hand-crafted binds for personal use, & any transformative works such as audio fics must have written approval.

In Silence & Submission is now available to listen via audiofic by the amazing ETL Echo. You can [listen to it here](#).

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Chapter 1



Hermione

“Hermione Jean Granger, you have approximately one second to open this door or else I’m coming in,” Ginny bellowed through the door.

I sighed, running my hands through my hair as I stared at the array of clothing strewn across my bedroom.

Thursday night was pub night – it was *always* pub night on Thursdays, but it never ceased to make my stomach knot uncomfortably. The biggest reason being that it was a loud, public place, with too many people and too much stimulation.

Alright, perhaps that wasn't the *biggest* reason.

As my anxiety kicked in, my mental walls shivered as if waves were crashing against the other side. Faces flashed through my mind, the image of two outstretched hands never meeting, the fluttering of a sheet over a body. My fingers went ice cold, my heart pounded like a kettle drum so loud I could barely hear. Though I'd been proficient at occlumency for over a decade now, I could only ever seem to keep the worst of it at bay. Panic, worry, anxiety slithered through the cracks but that was fine, I would take those emotions to leave the rest where it was – safely behind the stone wall I'd built over ten years ago.

I liked the quiet, liked the peace of Ginny and my three-bedroom flat near the Ministry in London. Liked even the slightly less quiet bustle of Sunday dinners at Pansy and Harry's house, especially when Theo decided to join. No matter how many years it had been, after the quiet of the forest on the run followed by the loud, terrifying final battle, I couldn't seem to find my equilibrium. Now the battle lived on inside my mind, a riot of noise and memories clamoring for my attention until I could barely think.

Over the years I'd learned to live with the noise, but in moments when the panic seeped through it became almost unbearable.

There was a blast of light from the keyhole of my door before it burst open and Ginny toppled into the room.

"The door was unlocked, you know," I said from where I sat cross-legged on my bed.

Ginny righted herself, throwing her sheet of bright red hair over a shoulder and assessed the room critically.

"What are you spiraling about this time?" she asked in her no-nonsense attitude.

It was easy with Ginny, she was the first real girlfriend I'd had – Parvati and Lavender, Circe bless her soul, had not exactly warmed me to the idea of extending my social circle outside of Harry and Ron. But after the war Ginny came blazing into my life, demanding that we find a flat, move in together, and start our new lives.

Ginny never over-coddled the way her mother was prone to – *Godric* she didn't even know how to cook. We had survived on take out and instant noodles until Blaise came into the picture with his chef-like quality cooking and he had taught me enough to scrape together a decent breakfast and perhaps a soup or two.

"Maybe I shouldn't go," I mumbled, staring at the burgundy sweater in my hands.

Gin stared at me for a long moment, what she saw I wasn't quite sure, but whatever it was had her shifting through the piles of clothes until she pulled a black skirt from the mess.

"Wear this, you know he's a leg guy," she said.

“Who is a leg guy?” Blaise called from the living room.

“No one!” I cried, pushing my fingertips to my eyelids.

Heavy footfalls sounded down our narrow hallway and I groaned.

“Ohhhh,” Blaise said knowingly, and I didn’t need to look at them to know they were exchanging *a look*. “Yes, definitely the skirt, Granger.”

I fell back against the pillows of my bed, covering my face with my arms. Truly, it wasn’t just about the clothes. I was already overwhelmed, the newest batch of wolfsbane I’d been working on wasn’t responding in testing the way it should have. It made me miss Professor Snape, oddly enough, with his brilliance in potions and out of the box approach to brewing. I struggled to improvise with potion making, my mind was too adept at following the rules.

“I don’t think I can go,” I said, my voice muffled by my arms.

A pair of thin hands wrapped around my forearms, tugging until they fell away with a soft *thud* against the cream pillows surrounding me.

“Why not?” Ginny asked, grabbing the sweater still clutched in my hands. “Wear this with the skirt and a pair of black tights, if you pair it with your heeled boots, you’ll look great.”

Blaise made an appreciative noise from the doorway. If it was any other wizard – besides Theo, perhaps – I would have assumed he was agreeing for the sake of agreement, but Blaise had to be one of the best dressed wizards I knew.

Beside someone else, however.

“It’s not just about the clothes,” I said in a small voice.

Ginny dropped to the bed beside me, forcing me to bounce a little as she knocked her shoulder with mine.

“Hey, listen, come for a little bit and then if you get overwhelmed, we can leave, yeah?” Her voice was soft, it was a tone she very rarely used but when she did it made my chest hurt.

It was the kind of tone a mother might use with a child, the kind of voice one would use with a loved one who was hurting. The way one might speak to a bird with a broken wing who would never fly again.

Tiredness seeped through my bones, curling around my heart and settling somewhere near my stomach. There were so many reasons why I shouldn’t go, so many reasons why I should stay where I was. And that tiny voice in the back of my head, that sounded disturbingly like a whispering Bellatrix Lestrange, reminded me that it was not like I would be missed if I wasn’t there anyway.

“If you want to leave, just give me the signal, all right?” Ginny continued, tapping my shoulder until I looked at her.

She winked twice and proceeded to give me a finger gun. I rolled my eyes.

“Subtle, Gin,” I grumbled.

“Seriously, Hermione, one look from you and we’re out of there. We’ll come home, put on our most comfortable, rattiest sweats, and watch something on the telly. We never use that thing and you spent so long making it work in the flat.”

I sighed, it was true, I knew Gin would leave in a heartbeat if I asked her to. Knew she would kick Blaise out so we could order pizza and lay on the couch until she finally fell asleep. It hurt in some deep, strange way to know that she would do that for me, to know that if I left, I would just do nothing but bring down her evening. I could do this, I could push through for her.

“Fine, okay, sounds good,” I finally said.

Ginny smiled widely, throwing the skirt at me before she jumped to her feet.

“Blaise, grab the coats, Hermione, you have approximately two minutes to change before we leave, no matter the state you’re in,” Ginny said, suddenly taking on the air of a general before flying past Blaise and into her own bedroom.

“Bloody scary, that witch,” Blaise mumbled under his breath.

“I heard that!” Ginny called.

...

Draco

Sweet Salazar, I needed to find new friends or – at the very least – we needed to find a new drinking establishment. One would think now that we were all in our late-twenties the Wizarding World would find something else to focus on than the fact that a group of Death Eaters and Dumbledore’s Army could be found in the Leaky almost every Thursday night. But if the gossip column of The Prophet was any indication, it seemed on that account one would be wrong.

I wasn’t quite sure when everything had changed, if it was before or after Pansy and Potter got together. Perhaps it was when Theo first caught sight of the dragon-taming Charlie Weasley, or perhaps when Blaise found out that Potter and Red had split. But somewhere in the last six years my small band of snakes had become a mixture of snakes, lions, and dragons.

Was I happy? I honestly wasn’t sure. It had only been in the last few years that the nightmares had subsided until it was a rare event that I woke trembling with the echo of my screams rattling my four-poster bed. Only in the last year could I endure hearing the name *Voldemort* without a visible shiver running down my spine. But I had learned that in everything, including moving forward after your life was consumed by a madman with a face like a snake, control was key.

“Firewhiskey, mate?” Blaise asked, cutting into my thoughts.

He was standing beside the large booth we always took over Thursday nights, his arm wrapped tightly around his Gryffindor. I wish I could say it was strange to see the way his thumb stroked

Red's hip or the way she looked up at him like he hung the fucking moon. But honestly, they made sense together, the same way Pansy and Potter did. It helped that Red – or *Ginny* as everyone tried to convince me to call her – had about the same level of snark as Blaise, mixed with a no-bullshit attitude that had brought him to heel.

“Yeah, thanks,” I replied.

“Granger?” Blaise asked, his hand outstretched, palm up to the witch that was suddenly sliding into the booth beside me.

Fuck, this was going to be a long night.

“Firewhiskey would be great, thanks Blaise,” she answered, pushing a hand through her long curls so as they fell forward, they cascaded like a waterfall in front of her face before she pushed them back over her shoulders.

Blaise gave us both a nod before tugging his girlfriend off towards the bar. Beside me, Granger shifted, tugging down her skirt over her thick black stockings and pulling her bag onto her lap. There was something about seeing her outside of her Ministry robes that made my pulse pound in my ears and my mouth suddenly feel dry. I had tried not to notice her as she'd entered the pub in her burgundy turtleneck, tight across her chest and small waist where it was tucked into a black skirt that was far shorter than the ones I'd usually seen her wear, exposing the toned muscles of her legs...

Circe, I needed to get myself in hand.

“Quick, pull it out before Red comes back,” I whispered conspiratorially.

She looked up at me with wide, slightly confused eyes and for a moment the world screeched to a halt. The flecks of gold and honey in her brown eyes were startling, captivating, and though I'd watched her more than I cared to admit, it was a rare gift to be this close. At first, when our eyes met, it was as if the haunting presence of my aunt filled the space between us with her mad cackle echoing through the room. But after so many years that feeling had lessened until it was merely background noise.

Of course, we saw each other often – we were colleagues at the Ministry and the best friends to three sets of best friends who were all dating one another. She had been Potter's “best witch” while I had stood in as “best wizard” for Pansy. It was the last time I'd seen her eyes this close, as we'd begrudgingly opened the dance floor with Pansy and Harry six months ago at their bonding ceremony. The feeling of her small frame in my arms, the silk of her silver dress beneath my fingertips – it had been like trying to caress fiendfyre.

“What?” she asked, her brows pulling together in confusion.

I couldn't suppress a grin as I leant back in the booth, throwing my arm over the back of the bench.

“I know for a fact you're getting ready to smuggle out some ancient text to skim under the table when no one is looking. Come on now, Granger, we've gotten this far with the stereotype – there's no reason to stop now.”

She rolled her eyes and huffed, but I barely registered it over the rosy tint that stained her cheekbones as she pulled a small leather book from her magically enlarged – and *illegal* , I might add – bag. For a moment she balanced the text on my knee and I placed my hand over the soft leather cover to steady it while she slid her bag onto the floor beside her feet.

“I’ll have you know it’s for work, Malfoy,” she grumbled, leaning over to ensure the bag wouldn’t get in anyone’s way.

Now it was my turn to roll my eyes.

“It’s always work, Granger. Don’t you do anything *other* than work?”

She sat up, throwing her hair back over her shoulder.

“Other than Thursday pub nights and Sunday dinners at Pansy and Harry’s, you mean?” she asked, raising a honeyed brow.

I nodded, letting my thumb graze the ridged binding of the book.

“Yes, other than that,” I answered, not even holding back my grin.

She blew out a breath, moving to grab the book from me but I held it out of her reach.

“No, of course that’s all I do, just like you,” she griped, trying to lean across me to grab at the leather binding. My mind couldn’t help but retort: *That’s not all I do and I’d love to show you.* But then she pushed closer. “Now give it back! It’s fragile!”

I laughed, enjoying far too much the feeling of her chest against my side as she tried to reach with her short arms.

“It must not be that fragile if you have deemed it fit to be read under a table in a *pub* , Granger,” I drawled, moving the text over my head.

“I put an impervius charm on it! Quickly, give it back before Gin and Blaise come over,” she pleaded.

My mind suddenly ran rampant from the way she begged, my cock twitching to life in a way that was wholly inappropriate and I wanted to ask her what she would be willing to do to get the book back. I swallowed, trying not to breathe in her floral scent, or the way her soft curls brushed my neck as she reached. I wanted her, yes, but it was more than that – more than just physical attraction. It was... *gods* . Someone like me, who lived so long in the dark, was addicted to the light and her light... it was *everything*. Her passion, her fire, her smile, her mind. I wanted it all – had wanted it for so long. Even if I couldn’t have it.

Slowly I lowered the book and handed it to her.

“I’ll be sure to knock your knee if someone asks you a question,” I drawled as she snatched it back and placed it across her thighs.

“Which one is it today?” Theo’s voice called over the cacophony of voices.

I turned to watch as Theo's chocolate curls bounced with his walk as he slid through the crowd of people, nodding to some and winking at others before plopping into the booth next to me.

"*The Alchemy of Lycanthropy*," I answered before Granger could.

Theo's eyebrows raised.

"Are you researching for the alterations of the wolfsbane?" he asked, his eyes suddenly twinkling in excitement.

"I knew it was a bad idea to have you two swots working together," I grumbled, leaning back and throwing my other arm on the bench so the two could word vomit at each other.

Theo was one of the lead, specialized healers in St. Mungos – having worked his way from spell damage to creature induced injuries before the ban on werewolves seeking treatment at the hospital was overturned. *Lupin's Law*, they had called it, and it not only allowed werewolves to receive medical care, but also access to the wolfsbane potion each month and a safe place to transform, along with job opportunities.

It had been a fight Granger had won, but not quickly. She had withered at her desk in Regulations and Control of Magical Creatures for two years before she'd been able to present the bill in front of the Wizengamot, and another year and a half of posturing, publicity, and bribes – not that she knew anything about that last one – before it was finally passed.

After, she had been made the head of the new liaison office between St. Mungos and the Lycanthropic division of Magical Creatures. It was how she had first become friendly with Theo before accidentally introducing him to his future husband, Charlie Weasley.

As they continued to jabber over me, I spied the unruly black hair of my best friend's husband weaving his way through the pub, scarlet nails clutched around his bicep. Giving them both a nod, to which Potter returned too enthusiastically for my taste, and Pans merely rolled her eyes at the two swots leaning over my chest.

"Oi! Granger! No shop talk at the bar, you know the rules," Pansy half-snarled in a way she only did for people she loved.

Granger scoffed, leaning back. I breathed a sigh of relief, if she had leant any closer to Theo she would have practically been in my lap and then I wasn't sure if I could fully be responsible for my actions.

"*He* started it!" Granger cried, gesturing towards Theo.

Theo placed a hand over his blue cashmere sweater, falling back against the bench and leaning his head against my arm.

"Granger! You wound me with your disloyalty! I thought we were in this together!"

She shook her head, grabbing for one of the glasses of firewhiskey that was floating to us.

"It's every witch for herself out here, Theo," she answered.

Theo grabbed his own drink before nodding.

“Well, in that case, Granger has a book under the table,” he stated before knocking back half his tumbler.

Pansy gasped as if in true shock, her short black bob swaying as she scrambled with Granger until she was able to tug the book out of her hands.

“Sweet – mother – of – *Circe!*” Pansy grit through her teeth. “What did I say about books at the table?”

To this we all rolled our eyes. Pansy, despite her prickly exterior, was certainly the mother of the group. Knowing how she grew up, with a distant mother and an absent father, it was always a surprise to realize that she was the glue that had held us all together throughout Hogwarts. She had been the one to make sure I was eating during sixth year, who had told Blaise and Theo to keep an eye on me.

I knew that if she had needed to, she would have even taken the mark for me without a second’s hesitation.

Now her mothering tendencies spilled over into our lives this way. She ensured we had weekly pub nights, weekly dinners, she berated Potter for his inability to not be a git, Granger for her swotty book habits, Theo for his inability to stop himself from flirting with literally anything that breathed despite the fact that his husband found it hilarious, Blaise for his terrible taste in women (before Red, *obviously*), and up until a few years ago me for my drinking.

The rest of the group found their seats around the table. At first, I’d thought it was strange that Red had wormed her way into our weekly pub nights, but it was clear that whatever had happened between Potter and her when they were teenagers was in the past. She’d said on many occasions, usually under the influence of too much firewhiskey, that she thought perhaps her mother had wanted the relationship more than the two of them did.

So here we were, like every other Thursday night, gathered around a large table enjoying each other’s company like civilized adults.

McGonagall would be proud.

Theo was just launching into a story about Charlie’s most recent adventure in Romania – one of the rare times Theo had agreed to go with him to the reserve – when the door of the pub opened and a head of bright red hair walked in.

The table fell silent as the Weasel pushed his way towards us. I wondered if interrupting our weekly pub night was the ginger git’s favorite pastime, or if he was truly so thick he didn’t realize he was unwanted. He’d pulled this shit only three weeks ago and had left with bat bogeys so big I’d bought Red an extra-large firewhiskey in compliment.

Beside me, I felt Granger shift, her head ducking down. For a moment I thought she might slide beneath the table to hide before she came back up, clutching her black bag in her hands.

Fucking Salazar, no. Not this, not again.

It had been three bloody years since they had broken things off. Three bloody years since the Prophet leaked the photos of the git with some blonde in Norway while he was away on a Quidditch game. And it had now been three bloody years of Granger fleeing whenever he came into the room under the guise of him “spending time with his friends.” Never realizing that he never stayed long enough to get more than a few sentences in before Potter would pull him from the pub before Red – or I – could get a good hex in.

I, for one, was *not* his friend and I was not about to allow this anymore. Every time he came around a little more of the light dulled in her eyes.

Before she could rise from her chair, I placed my hand on her shoulder, squeezing once and leant closer to her. A small voice in the back of my head said I wasn't playing fair, but I'd observed Granger enough over the years to know what she needed. I'd thought about this so many times, pictured what might come of this moment, and I refused to wait any longer.

“Stop,” I commanded, my voice slipping low into a tone that dripped dominance and power.

She froze, her eyes wide and her hips a few centimeters off the seat. *Good*, this was all the confirmation I needed.

“Sit,” I ordered, giving just enough pressure onto her shoulder for her to follow my command.

Something flickered in her face and for the love of Morgana I couldn't stop the next words that flew from my mouth as her hips touched the wood and she released her bag.

“Good girl,” I rumbled low enough only she could hear.

Chapter 2

Hermione

What in Godric's name was happening?

It was as if every single muscle in my body had melted at his voice. That simple command of *Stop* had frozen every cell in my body. The circling, panicked thoughts at the sight of Ron screeched to a halt and it was as if I were in limbo. Until, that is, his voice had dropped lower, almost a growl around the edges of his words as he'd said *Sit*.

And I sat.

This wasn't the usual Malfoy I knew. I'd never heard him speak that way, and, save for the occasional awkward side hug, unavoidable dance at a wedding, or when he withheld my books from me, we never deliberately touched.

Of course, I'd heard things over the years. Pansy had spilled way too much about their relationship from Hogwarts and then about the rumor mill. If even half the stories were to be believed, Draco's predilections went beyond my understanding of sex. He was, for all accounts and purposes, a supposed *sex god* with a desire to dominate and the skills to do it. But never once in my life had I thought I would be on the receiving end of his attention... No matter how much I had longed for it.

So to feel his hand wrap around my shoulder and keep me there, it set my nerves on fire. His hand was so large his fingertips brushed my collarbone while his thumb rested across the line of my neck. I had to fight the urge to look at him – to be honest I had to fight the urge a lot.

Draco Malfoy as a boy had been lanky, all points and angles, it had gotten worse as the war had progressed until I'd thought the bags under his eyes were permanent and his cheekbones so sharp they could have cut glass. That didn't mean I hadn't noticed him – I had *always* noticed Malfoy since first year. He had been a puzzle to solve, an ancient rune in need of translating. It was the way he presented himself as one person, but in quiet moments when he thought no one was watching, had been another.

Quiet moments when I had watched him teach a frightened Hufflepuff second year how to control their broomstick. The times I saw him comfort Theo and Pansy during fifth year after all their parents had been sent to Azkaban. Or in sixth year when I had been cornered in the Transfiguration Wing by Cormac McLaggen and he had all but *avadaed* him for grabbing me when I'd told Cormac to leave me alone. Malfoy had disappeared before I could ever thank him.

Over the years, as I saw how he fought his kindness yet still it managed to seep through the cracks of his mask like water through stone. I watched him struggle with the burden that had been placed upon his shoulders much in the way Harry had, and slowly my fascination had turned into something else.

But Draco Malfoy as a man? That was something else entirely. He had filled out after the war and his brief stint in Azkaban. Though he and his father had switched sides during the war and Lucius had received a pardon for his help, people had still wanted a scapegoat. Malfoy, as one of the only living high profile Death Eaters, had the unfortunate luck of taking the brunt of the Wizarding World's anger. He'd been sentenced to seven years in Azkaban for his use of unforgivables, breaching the magical wards of Hogwarts to allow in Death Eaters, and the attempted murder of Albus Dumbledore.

Once the Ministry had realized he was more useful to them in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, they had offered him a plea deal and he'd taken it. After a year and a half in Azkaban, he'd thrown himself into his training in a bid to keep his freedom. It had built up his muscle and, without the threat of a dark wizard living in his house, he'd grown at least ten inches.

Now his shoulders were wide and through his black, soft jumper that I knew one could see the faint outline of the muscles and the round slope of his biceps. If I looked at him now, I would also be able to see the curling end of one of his many tattoos – a black and grey rendition of Devil's Snare – that ended across the top of his right hand, curling around a complicated protection rune. Perhaps even be able to catch a glimpse of the Azkaban prisoner tattoo that had been inked on the right side of his neck. But I didn't look at him, *couldn't* look at him.

Instead, I stared at the table, trying to understand why that simple phrase *Good Girl* had melted my insides and why it felt so right falling from his lips.

That *something else* I had felt for him in Hogwarts had become a full fledged infatuation somewhere along the way in the last ten years. It was the way he took responsibility for his crimes, for his past, and sought to make amends. How he carved himself out a brand new life through humility, patience, and perseverance. I wasn't sure when I had realized I was in love with Draco Malfoy, only that it had been much in the way of being caught in a storm. At first there were merely a few drops but before I knew it I was soaked to the bone.

I had thrown myself with abandon into different relationships to ignore it. He would never want me, regardless of how much he had changed, regardless of his apologies and the long, late night talks the group had engaged in coming to terms with the war. Or well... *they* had come to terms with the war.

Even still, I knew that he would always see me as a bucktoothed swotty Gryffindor, even if he didn't think my blood was made of mud any longer. And that wasn't even to acknowledge what had happened in his ancestral home – the scene of the crime I relived almost every night. But *Gods*, at this moment, something strange swirled within me. Part of me felt so relaxed I thought I might be able to face Ron and the other part was wide awake, begging for Malfoy to tell me what to do next.

Ron cleared his throat awkwardly as he stood at the table and I finally forced myself to look up at him. He too had grown since the final battle – we all had after our access to food had been restored and we were no longer on the run. Years of professional quidditch had left him stockier, a little wider, and without the height of Malfoy it put me in mind of a gargoye.

But it was his face that made the edges of my chest ache. Strange to know someone for almost your entire life, to think you *loved* that person, and yet they stand in front of you no better than a

stranger. I didn't know Ron, not anymore, didn't understand the man he'd become or the choices he'd made.

"Uh, hullo, everyone," Ron said.

I saw Ginny's eyes darken as she looked at her brother, her hand twitching towards her wand. Pansy appeared to see it too because she gave a subtle gesture to Blaise, who stilled Gin's hand before it could get there.

Everyone's attention was turned towards Ron except for Harry, who I was surprised to see was watching me, his eyes flicking to Malfoy's hand on my shoulder. Then, finally, he turned towards Ron.

"Ron, mate, we talked about this," he said evenly.

Ron shifted uncomfortably, his gaze jumping to me then back to Harry, obviously confused as to why I hadn't run yet.

Honestly, so was I.

I tilted my hips, trying once more to move. I should leave, I should give Ron time to spend with Harry and Gin – it's not as if anyone would miss me anyway. The anxiety burned through me like acid in my veins. It was raw, painful and yet also welcome, because deep down I knew I deserved the pain.

"No," Malfoy said under his breath in that same dark tone. Then, under the cover of Ron's weak explanation of how he'd assumed he would be welcome continued: "You will sit here like a good little witch and drink your firewhiskey, do you understand me?"

I swallowed, my cheeks burning from the tone of his voice. Again, there was that odd part of me that relaxed at his words, that wanted nothing more than to please him. All the noise in my head suddenly... stopped. The silence was like a warm, heavy blanket, soothing me, covering me, keeping me safe.

Wait – *what* ?

But somehow, I found myself nodding as if I were under the imperius curse, even though I'd been able to spot and throw it off since I was fifteen. His hand tightened slightly against my shoulder.

"Words, Granger," he breathed.

I took a shallow breath, my eyes dropping to the table unseeingly.

"Yes, I understand," I answered in a voice I didn't recognize.

His thumb swiped once against the nape of my neck and he shifted his shoulders under the guise of reaching for his drink with his free hand.

"Good," he said.

The word made me shiver even as I felt my knickers dampen. I should be asking myself what the hell was happening? How was it that he could convince me to stay with a simple command? Why was it that my body was responding? And why in the *world* was I suddenly aching beneath his simple praise and desperate to do anything to hear it again?

But instead my mind was quiet, as if the battle inside me had found a brief reprieve.

Ron was gone, I suddenly realized, and without missing a beat Theo launched back into his story as if there had been no interruption. As soon as the door of the pub swung shut, Malfoy's hand dropped from my shoulder and I was left feeling suddenly bereft.

...

I stared at the golden placard in front of me for longer than was necessarily appropriate, part of me wondering what I was doing there.

Draco Lucius Malfoy

Department Head, Quidditch Division

Magical Games and Sports

It wasn't that I had barely slept last night – that was a normal occurrence. It may have been ten years since we were on the run, but to my body it might as well have been yesterday. I survived on two or three hours of sleep every night and, usually around three or four in the morning, rolled out of bed to make breakfast for me and Gin – and Blaise when he was staying the night. Which, to be fair, was most nights, but I couldn't get Gin to admit that he had moved in with us, even though he had his own mug in our kitchen and chair in our living room.

So the fact that I couldn't sleep wasn't the reason I was here, staring at Malfoy's office door. It was the fact that I couldn't get his voice out of my head, couldn't stop longing for that brief moment when he'd told me to stop.

Pub nights were hard, I found myself constantly checking the door any time it opened, I was overwhelmed by the noise. As much as Malfoy and Pansy poked fun at me for my tendency to hide a book under the table, it was there more as a security blanket.

In books, I felt safe.

I couldn't say it was the same everywhere else.

But last night, when Malfoy's hand had covered my shoulder and he'd spoken? For the first time in perhaps sixteen years my whole body had relaxed and now I wanted to know why.

I took a deep breath, rolling my shoulders back and sliding a hand over the dark, charcoal grey robes I picked out specifically for this occasion. They were a set Pansy had convinced me to buy, though the dress beneath it was high necked and long sleeved, it nipped in at all the right

places to create an hourglass shape, the pleat in the back of the skirt just big enough to allow me to comfortably sit and walk without feeling restrained. When I felt my most unsure, they were the robes I chose to wear. They made me feel powerful, much more in control than I actually felt.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I knocked twice on the door.

“Come in,” Draco called from the other side.

When the door swung open, I was surprised to see the mess of papers strewn out across his desk. There was still nine months until the next Quidditch World Cup, but it seemed that didn’t stop the work from piling up.

He’d cast off his sapphire blue outer robes, I saw them draped over one of the two cushioned arm chairs he had for visitors, leaving him in merely a crisp button-down white shirt and a matching blue waistcoat. My mouth dried at the way he’d rolled back his cuffs, the sight of his forearms, a black and grey snake nestled against flowers, Devil’s Snare wrapping around his wrist, its tentacles slithering over the back of his hand around the protection rune, and on the other arm a depiction of the night sky, stars gleaming faintly against his skin.

“S-sorry,” I stuttered, realizing that he was obviously too busy for this conversation. “I can come back another time.”

I was already turning towards the door, trying to calm my beating heart when his voice cut through my embarrassment.

“Granger, wait.”

It wasn’t the same dark tone as the night before, merely his normal voice, but I stopped all the same.

“What can I do for you?” he asked, and I heard the distinct sound of his quill clicking into the holder on his desk.

I shook my head, my fingers inches from the handle of the door.

“I’m sorry, Malfoy, you’re busy. It’s not important, it can —”

A hand closed over my wrist, drawing it back from the handle. I stifled a gasp at the contact, at the way electricity zinged up my arm, the way my magic seemed to purr in response to his proximity in a way I’d never noticed before.

He was towering over me, his grey eyes alight with concern. Tugging on my wrist, he pulled me over to the chair that did not currently have his robe thrown over it and pushed me until I sat. I almost groaned at the way he leant against his desk, hiking his trousers up slightly and then interlaced his hands together in front of him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

It was as if, for one moment, he could see through my glamour charms. As if he could suddenly see the evidence of the sleepless nights on my face, as if he could hear the echoes of my

nightmares bouncing off the walls of the silencing charms I placed in my room.

“It’s nothing,” I lied. “I just... I wanted to talk about...” I took a deep breath, summoning all my Gryffindor courage. “I want to talk about last night.”

Malfoy stilled and I could have sworn the grey in his eyes darkened into silver as he took a slow, deep breath.

“About the book?” he asked, though I could tell he was playing with me.

I shook my head.

“No, not about the book.”

He leant forward, resting a hand on the edge of the desk, the silver signet ring on his index finger glimmering slightly in the light.

“You’ll have to help me then, Granger, I’m not quite sure what you mean,” he said, his voice dropping into a slightly huskier tone that almost gave his game away.

I swallowed loudly, my eyes shifting around the room. His office was large, with a picture window on the right wall charmed to show a view of autumnal rolling hills, the tops of orange and yellow trees just visible in the distance. On the off-white wall directly behind him he’d hung a few posters from the quidditch cups he’d worked on in the past and on his desk sat a few photograph frames, though I had no idea what pictures they held. I assumed they were photos of him, Pansy, Blaise, and Theo – perhaps some of his parents.

“Granger,” he said, calling my attention back. “What about last night?”

I cleared my throat, smoothing my hands over my skirt.

“Last night you... you told me to stop,” I said in a small voice. “And when you did, the rest of the world went soft... quiet.”

He blinked at me for a long moment before a gentle smile pulled up the corner of his lips. He appeared to deliberate with himself for a long moment before he reached with his free hand to brush a curl from my cheek, his fingertips trailing across my jaw for such a brief moment I wondered if it truly even happened.

“You liked that, didn’t you?” he asked, his voice almost reaching that same, dark tone he’d used last night.

I nodded.

“I want to know why,” I continued, trying to shake myself out of the same strange daze. “I want to know how you did it.”

Malfoy ran a hand through his hair, it was loose – longer on top than on the sides. Now that he no longer wore it slicked back it had a natural wave to it I hadn’t ever imagined he’d possessed.

Godric, *I* wanted to run my hands through his hair.

...

Draco

I couldn't say I was surprised to see her here. Granger had been the brightest witch of her age – still was – and her hunger for knowledge was unparalleled.

But I was still at a loss at how to explain to her what it was she felt last night. From what I understood, her previous experience with partners had been paltry – a long stint with the Weasel and a torrid on and off situation with that half-a-troll Krum.

“You like to be in control, don't you, Granger?” I asked. “In your professional life you have control of all things, yes? It's important that you have a handle on your work, on the work of your employees, that you control everything within your reach.”

She blinked at me with those big brown eyes, her fingers twisting in her lap against the silk of her dress robes. Those *gods damned* dress robes that always made me want to rip them off her. I knew Pansy had convinced her to buy them two years ago for that specific reason though she had hidden it under the guise of the werewolf legislation hearings – she'd known they would drive me mad. Then, after what felt like an eternity, Granger nodded.

“Why do you like to be in control?” I hedged.

I could almost hear her thinking, qualifying, writing up a list of reasons in that big brain of hers.

“It makes me feel... safe,” she answered finally.

But I could tell it wasn't quite the truth from the set of her mouth, the way her shoulders curled in on themselves. No, if I had to guess, she hadn't truly felt safe in a long, long time.

“Does it?” I asked with a raised brow.

She nodded.

“Do you want to know what I think?” I continued.

Something flickered across her face for a moment – what was it? Indignation? Fear? Frustration? But I didn't acknowledge it. Instead, I leant forward until we were eye to eye.

“I think that last night, when I took the choice away from you, was the first time you felt safe in a long, long time,” I said, letting my voice drop into that commanding, dominant tone. “I think you felt relieved to not have to wonder – *what do I do? Where do I go? What happens next?* Am I right?”

I heard her sharp intake of breath and had to stop myself from groaning at the sight of her pink tongue as it swiped across her lower lip. But she didn't answer, just nodded once.

“Words, Granger,” I commanded.

For a witch who could talk a mile a minute in most circumstances, I was surprised at how quiet she was being. I wondered what it was like inside her mind just now and though I knew I could find out, I refused. That was a violation and I would *never* do that to her.

She cleared her throat.

“I – uh, yes,” she said in a voice that sounded slightly strained. “I want you to teach me how.”

A soft chuckle escaped through my lips and I shook my head. Of course she wanted me to teach her how to do that – not realizing what she was actually asking me to do.

“You want me to teach you how to what, exactly?”

Her eyes flicked down to my mouth and up again.

“I want you to teach me how to make it all stop again,” she said.

I shook my head, leaning away from her before I did something stupid.

“I can’t teach you that.”

She stared at me for a moment, her eyes hardening.

“Why?” she asked, incredulous.

All her uncertainty, her softness from a moment ago vanished behind the wall she had built for herself over the years.

“Because it’s not a matter of *teaching* you to stop the noise in your head,” I said in an even tone. “What you are truly asking me to do is to dominate you, which is a much longer and more in-depth conversation.”

Her mouth popped open, eyes growing wide in shock.

“I... No – no, that’s not –”

I stood up, tugging once on my waistcoat.

“It’s not? You’re saying you didn’t like it when I took control last night?” Her mouth shut with an audible *click* of her teeth. “I would bet it was more than just a relief, Granger.” I placed my hands on either side of the armchair until we were almost nose to nose. “I would bet all the money in my vault that at the moment I praised you, when I called you my *good girl*, that you were dripping for me between your thighs.”

She shivered beneath my gaze and I could see that I was right. Even now, I saw from the corner of my eye her thighs shift as she pressed them together. My hands gripped the arms of the chair tighter. I thought I could see the moment where she made a decision, the way her brown eyes flickered, then darkened.

“Yes,” she breathed.

“Yes, what?”

I watched her tongue trace her bottom lip once more.

“I was dripping for you,” she answered, her voice barely above a whisper.

I had to close my eyes for a moment to try to savor the sound of her saying those words. My cock jumped in my trousers and I thanked Circe for the position I was in so she couldn’t see it. I was well on my way to being truly hard and all she’d done was admit to making a mess of her knickers.

Salazar, let me touch you, Granger. Let me show you what I can do.

“Then tell me what it is you want, pet,” I rumbled.

Her lids fluttered and I knew it was the term of endearment I’d let slip between my lips. It had been a while since my last sub, a while since I’d had a witch begging at my feet. Even then, I’d never dreamed it would be here with the witch I’d been fantasizing over since third year.

“I want you to make it all stop.”

It was a breathy sort of plea and I could hear the undercurrent of anxiety there. In that moment I saw what she was asking for – what she *needed* – and how deep it ran. It was more than her relationship with the Weasel, more than the embarrassment of a cheating ex.

“Then I suppose you have some research to do,” I said, forcing myself away.

I rounded my desk, grabbing my outer robe and sliding it back on to hide the evidence of my excitement at what she had just said. Granger was merely staring at me, blinking up with those wide doe eyes.

“Research?”

“Mhmm,” I hummed. “Your favorite thing.”

Steepling my fingers together over the desk I leveled her with my gaze.

“And what do you suggest I research?”

Well, here goes nothing.

“BDSM, Dominant/submissive relationships.”

The sharp intake of breath she took was almost inaudible, but I heard it. I saw the way her chest moved, the way her hands clenched into fists.

“What – what do you mean?”

I sighed, I should have known I couldn’t just ask her to research a topic and not expect her to ask questions.

“Granger,” I started, laying my hands flat on the desk. “I am a Dominant, it means I like to exercise my control over other *willing* participants. I admit what I did last night was perhaps a

step too far, but I could not just sit idly by and watch you cave to that git once again. Never did I expect, however, for you to be so... responsive.”

I leant back in my chair, elbow resting on the arm while I looked at her. I couldn't resist bringing my hand to my mouth, trying to guide her eyes there.

Do you want me as much as I want you?

“Hermione Granger, Golden Girl, Brightest Witch of Her Age, and you know what else?”

She gulped, shaking her head. It was unnerving, but *telling* , that she was so quiet.

“A *submissive* .”

Chapter 3

Hermione

We stared at each other for a long moment as the word hung between us.

No, I wanted to say. *No, you're wrong*.

But I couldn't find the words. I was a strong, independent witch. I had almost single handedly taken down the Wizengamot and some of their most barbaric laws, I had helped my best friend defeat one of the darkest wizards known to our kind, I oversaw an entire department of the Ministry for Circe's sake! How could I do all that and be a *submissive*?

Yet, unbidden, came the memory of last night. The feeling of security, of assuredness that I no longer had to make a decision. I didn't have to run back to my flat beating myself up over whether or not I should have stayed, or sit there an anxious wreck wondering if I should have gone. Malfoy had taken the decision from me and, in doing so, had given me the closest semblance of peace I had felt in *years*.

It had also allowed me to see that Harry was unhappy with Ron, to see that Ron truly was not wanted at pub night. I'd always run before I could see his reaction but to see the way Harry looked at him disapprovingly, the way Ginny almost hexed him the moment he stepped up to the table, made me wonder if all this time I'd been wrong about wanting to give them space to spend time with Ron – to not make them choose. Granted, it was a secondary reasoning for leaving. I couldn't stand to be in his presence, not after the things he'd made me feel, the words he'd said to me so much over our relationship.

"Do they know?" I asked suddenly.

Malfoy's pale eyebrows pulled together in confusion.

"Does everyone else know what... what you are?" I clarified.

A small smile tugged at one corner of his mouth and *gods* I could not stop staring at it. Couldn't stop watching the way his index finger, clad in that silver signet ring, kept brushing his bottom lip.

"As a general rule, I don't go around flaunting my kinks," he drawled. "But yes, they know. I dated Pansy for three years and Blaise is in the lifestyle as well, though he's a switch – something I'm sure Red *loves*."

My mind, which had been screaming, circling with questions like crows high in the sky screeched to a halt.

"Blaise is a *what*?" I gasped.

Malfoy smirked in a way that made my stomach swoop low and my mind rev back to life like a muggle engine. I'd never felt so off balanced before but at the same time it didn't make me anxious. I wasn't ready to go tearing to the door or try to convince him to obliviate me, *yet*.

"Listen, Granger," he said, leaning forward onto his elbows and tilting his head as if he was observing his prey. "This is what I want you to do."

I almost shivered at the way his voice dropped, the way the soft growl tremored over my skin. There was a desk between us but he might as well have been in between my thighs. One of his large hands spread out on the desk, his index finger stroking a line across a piece of parchment.

"Are you listening?" he asked, his eyes growing dark.

I nodded.

"Y-yes," I answered.

That predatory smile curled against his mouth once more and he pushed himself to his feet, adjusting his robes as he walked around until he loomed over me in the chair. His grey eyes were almost black now and I wondered, in that moment, if perhaps he felt the same overwhelming desire for me that I did him.

Two fingers tapped my cheek and I jumped, not realizing my gaze had drifted from his in an effort to center my thoughts.

"I want you to take some time to research. Talk to Blaise, talk to Red, fuck – talk to Pans." He took a deep breath, his fingers curling beneath my chin to tilt my head up a little higher. "And... if you like what you find, we can speak on Monday."

I swallowed.

"Not Sunday?"

We had a standing Sunday night dinner at Pansy and Harry's house every week and I'd assumed he would want to talk then. But he shook his head, biting down once on his lower lip.

"No, not Sunday," he all but whispered. "Better to be here, when we discuss. If we were at Pansy's..." His voice trailed off as his thumb brushed once against my lower lip. "It's best we're somewhere that things can't get too out of control."

An ache was blossoming deep within my core as his thumb swiped once more over my mouth. A small voice in the back of my mind piped up that perhaps that was exactly what I wanted. I wanted to see what Draco Malfoy looked like in and out of control, but first I needed to understand what I was dealing with.

"Will you do your research, Granger?" he asked.

I took in a shallow breath, his cologne thick in the air between us.

"Yes, I'll do my research."

His eyes gleamed as his thumb drew down my bottom lip just enough to expose my teeth, before his thumb fell away.

“Good girl.”

...

Draco

I was so fucked.

I couldn't get the image of Granger out of my mind, of her sitting so primly in my chair with her ankles crossed, hands clasped in her lap, and her head tilted up in the perfect expression of submission. Whether or not she realized it, she was *exactly* the type of witch who would thrive in such a lifestyle.

No matter how confident I was about that, I couldn't stop the nagging feeling that she would talk herself out of it. Perhaps she would do her research and get spooked. I'd heard enough from Blaise about how she didn't sleep, the silencing charms that sometimes failed under the weight of her screams, how she worked herself to the bone to stop herself from *feeling* .

Everyone had moved on from the war – hell even *Potter* had moved on, but not Hermione Granger. Yes, to the outside world she presented a put together, in control front. But the rest of the time? The rest of the time it was as if she was drowning in the middle of a crowded room and no one knew how to pull her to the surface.

But I could. I *would* .

The night after she'd come into my office, I'd drawn together my usual reading material on the topic, duplicating the pages I wanted her to read and sent them off in a scroll with my eagle owl. As I expected, she didn't reply, though Dominus did return looking smug, so I assumed she'd showered him with unnecessary treats and affection before he'd left.

By the time this morning rolled around I couldn't wait to get over to the house to see her. *Sweet Circe* , to know that we would be sitting around a dinner table and she would know what I was, know what I could offer her, was overwhelming in the best way. Because it was more than just sex – I could offer her comfort, confidence, *control* . I could take care of her in a way no one ever had before.

Gods, I wanted to.

However, a few hours before I was due to leave, my fireplace lit green and Blaise barrelled through, casting a quick cleaning charm on his white button down and black slacks.

“Why the *fuck* did Granger just ask me why I was a switch?” Blaise yelled, pointing back to the fireplace.

I chuckled, crossing my ankle over my thigh and turned a page of the Prophet.

“Well, why *are* you a switch, Blaise?” I asked with a raised brow.

He groaned, throwing himself across the black leather couch beside the fire and covering his eyes with one of his long arms.

“Something’s gotten into her,” Blaise mumbled. “The last few days she’s been holed up in her bedroom researching something. Gin and I assumed it was work but then all of a sudden, she’s in the kitchen this morning, sliding an omelet onto a plate for me and asking, ‘ *Blaise, how did you realize you’re a switch?* ’”

My chuckle turned louder. I could imagine it but the image wasn’t as complete as I would have liked.

“What was she wearing?” I asked before I could stop myself.

“What was she – *what?*” he snapped, jumping up to a seat and pointing a finger at me. “ *You .*”

I raised one hand in a gesture of surrender, folding the paper down with the other.

“Me?” I asked in an all-too-innocent voice, pointing to myself.

Blaise’s brown eyes widened for a moment before he burst into a cacophony of laughter.

“Merlin’s saggy *ballsack* , Draco,” he cried, slapping the leather cushion beside his hips. “You propositioned her!”

I rolled my eyes, placing the paper onto the small, marble table beside my chair.

“I merely instructed her –”

“Instructed or *commanded* ?” Blaise cut across.

“Is there a difference?” I asked evenly, interlacing my hands as I rested my elbows on the arms of the chair.

Blaise ran a hand up his face and over his closely cropped hair.

“Fuck me,” Blaise muttered.

“No thank you, though I do love how you beg.”

He threw me the finger before leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

“She *is* suited for subbing, isn’t she?” he asked after a moment, all levity forgotten.

I nodded, letting my eyes skim the living room. I took in the deep green damask wallpaper, the black wood mantle, the gilded photos that rested atop it – one of Blaise, Theo, and Pansy in our fifth year together on the grounds of school, one of Pans and Potter at their wedding, and one of all of us last year at Christmas.

The eight of us were piled onto Pansy’s velvet sofa, Pansy and Potter in the middle, Theo beside Pans with Charlie sitting on the arm while on the other side of Harry sat Hermione, Ginny

perched on the arm beside her with Blaise and I standing behind the sofa leaning forward. I watched as the photo Hermione swept her curls back from her shoulder, using the movement to sneak a look back at me. The moment she looked away I looked at her. In many ways it was a photo of longing, of missed connections, of wasted time.

I would not waste any more time.

“I think it would be good for her, Blaise,” I said seriously. “Thursday night, when that *git* showed up unannounced, I commanded her to stay.”

His eyes widened, mouth slightly open as I regaled him with the whole story, explaining what I’d done, how she’d reacted, and the conversation in my office. By the time I was finished he had his head in his hands and he was staring at the ground between his black leather loafers.

“Holy shit,” he drew the words out, letting his wonder infuse his tone. “This is it, Draco. I’ve always known she fancied you but *this*?”

I rolled my eyes. This was not the first time he’d brought this up, but suddenly I found myself truly listening. He’d mentioned that Red would make little throw away comments about Granger fancying me but now, after the way she’d reacted, I wondered if it was actually true.

For me, my fascination with Granger had started in third year the moment she punched me in the face for my awful, childish rant about Hagrid. It had been the first time anyone had truly stood up to me and put me in my place. For it to have been a muggleborn witch with buck teeth and wild hair? It made me notice her, *really* notice her.

I’d started to watch her when she thought no one was looking, noticing the kindness, the compassion she felt towards others. Kindness and compassion were foreign in my world, something that was best left to childhood and bedtime stories. Kindness made you weak, kindness made you a target. But Granger? Her kindness, her *goodness* made her strong. The way it was coupled with a fiery temper and thirst for knowledge had become addicting to witness as the time passed.

For years it had eaten at me, the feelings I harbored for her. So at odds with the blood purity rhetoric I’d been taught that I tried to lash out, blaming *her* for the way I felt, as if she had somehow bewitched me. It hadn’t been until that horrid night in the drawing room of my old family home that I had understood those feelings for what they truly were:

Love.

“You really think she fancies me?” I asked, gritting my teeth at the desperate way my voice sounded.

He let out a choked gasp of exasperation.

“Sweet *fucking* Salazar, Draco! Of course she fancies you! Can you imagine a bird who *didn’t* want you suddenly melting into a pile of magical goo just because you told them to *stop*? I mean...” He threw himself back against the couch, his head tipped up to the sky. “Thursday night she was locked in her room stressing over what to wear to impress *you*.” His hands flopped against the cushions once more. “And yet, here you sit with that *brilliant* brain of yours – second in our year behind *her* – and ask me if she fancies you?”

Sighing, I nodded. He was right, there were too many signs pointing to the truth of the matter. Before now it had been safer to ignore them, safer to tell myself they were wrong, that she didn't feel that way. That wasn't even to mention the repercussions if I had somehow been accused of forcing *the Golden Girl* into anything. For the first few years, while on parole from Azkaban, I would have done anything to maintain my freedom, to keep myself from going back to that gods-forsaken place, even if it meant pushing away my feelings for Granger. Then it became just a matter of trying to move forward, trying to accept that it would never be.

But not anymore, I wouldn't let her light, her *fire* get snuffed out.

"I really think it would help her," I said finally.

Blaise let out his own sigh, swinging his head on the back of the couch to stare at me.

"Gin told me once that she hasn't cried since the battle. Can you imagine that? Ten years, *ten bloody years* without mourning." He shook his head as if the idea was unfathomable. "I think you're right, mate, I think it could help. I know that when Gin's having a bad day – like when she was almost traded from the Harpies and everything was up in the air for a bit – having me top was... I don't know, a *relief* for her."

I made a small sound of agreement in the back of my throat.

"What does Red think about all this?" I asked.

Blaise shrugged.

"You know Gin. Doesn't have an ounce of shame in her. I left them to chat but I do know her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree when Granger started asking about submission and impact play."

Fuck. So she had gotten that far. I shifted in my seat, trying to stop myself from imagining all the wicked, sordid things that came to mind with those words. But a few slipped through. I saw Granger trussed up to a spanking bench, ass high in the air and a blazing crimson with my handprints. I blinked and she was on her knees, her arms locked behind her back, bound at her elbows to thrust her breasts forward, as I drew a flogger across each tender rosebud nipple.

I blinked, clearing my throat.

"Oh, mate," Blaise chuckled as he gave me a knowing look. "You are *so* fucked."

Chapter 4

Hermione

To say I was trembling with anticipation was an understatement.

I'd thrown myself into my research with great fervor and it had been a relief for it to be a topic other than my usual work necessities. At first, I was shocked. Of course, I'd *heard* about BDSM and kinks before – Ginny and Pansy had always been a little too open about their bedroom encounters – but I'd had no idea how deep these things ran. I'd always assumed it was limited to the bedroom, limited to light spanks or perhaps being held down.

But what Malfoy was referring to was something else altogether. I'd figured as much – Draco Malfoy never did anything halfway, we were similar like that. It *had* been a bit of a surprise to receive a tightly rolled scroll of parchments from him Friday night, delivered by a gorgeous tawny eagle owl.

When I'd finally unrolled the scroll after lavishing the owl with treats and a few head scratches, I'd practically dropped the parchments in surprise.

Dominant/submissive Relationships:

Sometimes referred to as Dom/sub or D/s, this relationship is one wherein an exchange of power takes place to fulfill sexual and/or emotional desires. The most important thing to remember with all types of power exchange relationships is that consent is key and a careful negotiation process is imperative to creating and maintaining a safe, healthy D/s relationship. Though there are many different styles of Dominant/submissive relationships, most often break down into the following categories:

24/7: This refers to a relationship that maintains the pre-arranged power exchange and control at all times, regardless of setting, day, or situation. The title Master/slave is commonly used for this type of dynamic and often involves a collaring ceremony, which commemorates the union of the Dom/sub.

Bedroom: These dynamics, unlike the 24/7 total power exchange, do not stray outside of the bedroom and typically only explore the power dynamic during sexual encounters. Outside of the bedroom, the Dominant and submissive behavior holds no power.

Switch: This refers to when two people switch power dynamics depending on the agreed upon scene or time. One might Dominate for the first part of a scene before switching to submission or vice versa...

My mind had gone fuzzy after that. I'd noticed words like *Brat/Brat Tamer*, *Ropes*, *Bondage*, *Rules*, there had even been a parchment titled *Boundary Checklist*, but I'd had to drop to the floor and put my head between my knees. Eventually I'd pulled myself together enough to continue reading and when I'd finally fallen asleep that night, it had been to an image of Malfoy standing over me, his body faintly glimmering in dim candlelight, curling the soft leather of a whip around his wide hand.

After this morning's interrogation with Blaise and Ginny, before Blaise ran off to Godric-knows-where, I had started feeling a little more settled. There was something in the description of a submissive that called to me, something seductive about the idea of agreed upon limits and boundaries and then giving up all control.

I hadn't realized how much I wanted that until it was placed in front of me – and that wasn't even accounting for how much I wanted Draco. There was no way I would say no to being involved with even just this small part of him, even if I wanted so much *more*.

For once I'd allowed Gin to dress me almost without a fight and I couldn't help but check myself one more time in the full-length mirror at the end of our hallway. The dark green – just a shade darker than Slytherin green – sweater dress clung flatteringly to my curves and was warm enough that I wouldn't need a coat even if we spent time in the garden without warming charms. I *had* talked her out of the sky-high *fuck me* heels she'd tried to convince me were perfect for the dress, instead opting for a slightly more reasonable pair of knee-high black boots.

"You look perfect," Ginny crooned, holding out the pot of floo powder. "*Godric*, this is going to be so fun."

She'd weaseled – no pun intended – out of me within two minutes once we were alone who it was that had encouraged me to research the lifestyle. It had taken approximately twelve minutes and forty-seven seconds for her to calm down enough to engage in a proper conversation again.

I took a deep breath and threw the powder into the hearth, watching as green flames burst into life. Stepping inside I hastily called out *Potter Residence, Wiltshire* before disappearing in a swirl of flame and smoke.

My head spun as I came to a halt in the large fireplace and I stumbled, unable for a moment to find my bearings. A large hand closed over my elbow and I leant into it gratefully, trying to take another moment to steady myself.

"All right there, Granger?" Draco drawled.

I gasped, my arm giving an involuntary jerk but he didn't let go. He was dressed in a sleek black button-down shirt and matching black slacks, a dark, forest green sweater – almost the same shade as the dress I had on – slung over his shoulders. The first few buttons of his shirt were undone and I could see just a peek of a black tattoo script on his chest. His hair was mussed, as if he'd only just come through the floo as well, but his grey eyes were molten silver in the warm glow from the chandelier.

I must have been gawking, because he pressed two fingers beneath my jaw and closed my mouth before his thumb brushed at my cheek.

“Soot,” he whispered, before wandlessly cleaning the remainder of the black dust from my clothes.

“Thanks,” I rasped, trying to swallow in my now very dry throat.

He gripped me a little tighter under the arm, drawing me completely out of the fireplace before Ginny came through. Her entrance snapped me out of my daze enough to realize that it wasn’t just Draco in the room. Blaise came forward to help Gin through, though she waved him off before pulling out her wand to clean off her black slacks and cream sweater.

The living room – or *traveling parlor* as Pansy called it – was tastefully decorated in creams and deep purples. The sparse furniture was opulent: two large, incredibly uncomfortable chairs and a white marble table. The chandelier that hung over us dripped with gold and crystals, and at certain times of the day flooded the room with rainbows.

When Pansy and Harry first bought the house, I had laughed, poking him in the ribs when he first had walked me through the newly furnished rooms. He’d whispered conspiratorially under his breath so Pansy wouldn’t hear:

From a broom cupboard to this, eh?

“Hermione, come help me with the last of the table setting, yeah?” Harry called, poking his head around the doorway that led through a small hallway into the dining room.

“Sure,” I replied, my cheeks heating as Malfoy’s thumb brushed once against the inside of my arm.

I looked back at Malfoy for a moment, wondering if he was going to let me go. His eyes were still dark, traveling from the tips of my leather boots up my legs, over my waist, and eventually back up to my eyes.

My cheeks flushed with heat, I’d never seen him look at me this way, so open, so... *possessive*. It was as if with each look, each second, all his walls were crumbling down. I’d known what he had been offering before, what I had unknowingly been asking, and I had wanted it. But now that I was standing in front of him, feeling the way he towered over me with his height, broad shoulders, tattoos, and smelling the deep, rich scent of his cologne?

I absolutely *needed* it.

...

Draco

Sweater dresses should be illegal. Tomorrow, I would make time to petition in front of the Wizengamot.

I should have known that when Blaise left an hour before me to “run some errands”, those errands would be coming here to inform Pansy that I was – how did he put it? Oh yes:

Officially corrupting the Golden Girl.

By the time I had arrived through the floo, Pansy had been there to tackle me to the ground, whipping my chest over and over with a tea towel.

“Ow – *fuck Parks!* You know I don’t – *OW!* – like being on this end of – *shite* – impact play!”

“Draco Lucius Malfoy are you –” *SMACK* “– telling –” *SMACK* “– me that you have propositioned HERMIONE –” *SMACK* “– to be your new *sex toy* ?”

By that point I had covered my arms over my head to protect my face and tried unsuccessfully to curl into a ball.

“I haven’t told you anything you crazy bint!” I cried. “POTTER! Come get your wife!”

Above us Blaise and Potter merely guffawed, obviously relieved that at this moment they were not on the receiving end of one of Pansy’s tantrums.

I had to admit that I should have been grateful this was the extent of the tantrum. I’d half expected Potter to join in, perhaps finishing what he’d started all those years ago in a dingy, abandoned washroom at Hogwarts. But instead, he had merely wiped his glasses on the front of his jumper and said:

“Hermione is the smartest person I know – she’ll choose what’s best for her. Plus, if it had to be with anyone, I’d rather it was with you.”

Sometimes this friendship with Potter haunted me.

We had barely scrambled to our feet again when the floo lit up and Granger stumbled through, her curls piled in a messy bun on the top of her head and that gods forsaken sweater dress clinging to every delicious curve of her body. There was only a small sliver of olive skin exposed on her legs where the top of her boots ended and the hem of her dress began, but it was enough to send me reeling.

I took a deep breath once she’d left the room to help Potter, running my hand through my hair a few times to put it back in place before a small chuckle cut through my reverie.

“The sexual tension in this room is so thick I think I might faint,” Red quipped, her eyes wide in false alarm as she clutched at Blaise’s bicep. “Quick, m’lord, hold me before I go down!”

She feigned a fainting spell, the back of her hand pressing to her forehead before she burst into a loud cackle. The floo lit green again and Theo burst through, his green eyes alight with excitement as he held up a parchment with Blaise’s neat scrawl.

“Draco Malfoy you *bastard!*” he cried, tackling me to the floor once more.

Merlin, it was going to be a long night.

Theo had to be physically restrained as Charlie came through the floo a moment later. I had to admit out of all the Weasley’s, Charlie might be the favorite, beside Red, of course though I would never tell her. He didn’t bat an eye at the sight of his husband straddling another man,

beating him around the face with a spare bit of parchment. He had merely sighed in a business-like sort of way, wrapped his thick, scarred arms around Theo's middle, and pulled him bodily into the air.

I wasted no time when we filed into the dining room to take the seat beside Granger at the long, oval table laden with roast, potatoes, peas, and Yorkshire pudding. As always, the table was impeccably set with Pansy's typical gleaming silver serving ware, chargers, and a long arrangement of autumnal flowers that spilled across the center of the table. I would say she'd outdone herself, but this was a typical Sunday meal for her. Christmas made this spread look paltry.

Granger was seated in her usual spot beside Red, her fingers toying with the cream napkin on the place setting beside her plate. When I sat, I was surprised to see she didn't look up, merely gazed unseeingly at the flowers in front of her.

Theo barreled into the room, wrapping his arms around her from behind and lavishing loud, sloppy kisses against her curls. I didn't miss how she'd frozen for a moment, her eyes widening in panic before her body relaxed into his as she realized who it was.

"Sweet Mother Morgana, Granger, who dressed you today? You look like a feast," Theo had crowed, circling her chair until he stood between her and Red.

Who dressed her today? Was it common knowledge that she struggled to decide what to wear for these gatherings? Did *everyone* know that she stressed over what to wear except for me?

From the way Charlie looked appreciatively at her before taking his seat and giving her a warm smile, I thought the answer was a resounding yes.

"Gin did, Theo, thanks," she answered in a quiet voice.

She was overwhelmed, I realized, perhaps overwhelmed by the gathering in general. How had I never noticed this before? She loved and was loved by these people – felt safe with them, I was sure – and if she felt overwhelmed *here* then what did that mean for the nights at the pub? For the large, extravagant Ministry galas where she was forced to parade around like a prized pony up for auction?

I shifted in my chair, drawing my arm across the back of my own and catching Theo's eye. He looked over at me and I subtly shook my head.

Times like these I was grateful for the decades long friendship I had with him. He knew from merely that moment that it was time for him to sit down. He gave Granger another bright smile, squeezed her shoulder, before ruffling Red's hair and darting over to the other side of the room to claim his seat beside his own red head.

I watched her more closely as dinner progressed, as conversation chattered around us and she appeared to shrink in on herself with each passing breath. She had never been one for large gatherings, even in school – I could remember the look on her face so clearly from that damned yule ball in fourth year. The panicked, wide-eyed way she'd glanced to and from the door every few moments as if planning her escape. So different from the bright, fiery look in her eye when she was indignant. The way her eyes narrowed as she lectured us on elf rights or werewolf legislation. The way she had looked right before she had punched me in the face in third year for making fun of Hagrid.

That wasn't even to mention what I had witnessed when I was seventeen years old, staring at her writhing on my drawing room floor. The same wide-eyed look of fear in her eyes as my aunt had mutilated her beautiful body.

It was the one redeeming moment in my entire life, the moment where I raised my wand against my own blood to save her. It had been the turning point in the war for the Malfoys, the moment I had found out my father had become a spy for the Order of the Phoenix, the moment where I realized that what I thought I knew and what truly *was*, were two very different things.

How had that moment changed her, I wondered? In our years of friendship, I'd never once asked. Even when I had apologized for my part in it, apologized on behalf of my family for what had been done, I'd never thought to ask if it still haunted her. If she had been changed irrevocably by the war the way I had.

Even now I couldn't sit with my back to a door, even now the thumping slide on the floor – whether it was from a box or the shifting of a rug – made my skin crawl. Countless other little things that I didn't know would ever be the same.

She was pushing her food around on her plate and I realized from the pattern she was making she had taken maybe only a few bites. I watched as her teeth bit into her bottom lip, her eyes flicking up every now and again to Pansy who was, as usual, holding court around her dinner table, currently in a heated argument with Charlie on the best way to cure dragon leather.

“Granger,” I said softly, letting my tone drop low.

She froze, her fork pressed into a small cut of her roast, eyes fixed on her plate.

I leant closer, pushing my knee slightly against hers under the table.

“*Eat*,” I commanded.

I knew I wasn't playing fair, knew we should have a discussion – perhaps *many* discussions before I even tested these waters again, but *Salazar* I wanted to help her. Wanted to peel back the layers of her heart until I could see her soul, until I could soothe those wounds. Until she could find the strength to put herself back together again.

Her lashes fluttered once against her cheek as she took a small breath.

“Yes, Sir,” she replied softly.

I almost choked.

Chapter 5

Hermione

It just slipped out.

Alright, perhaps it didn't *just* slip out. I had wanted to see how it felt – for research purposes of course – and in that moment that he'd commanded me to eat, when I'd been sitting there overwhelmed by our proximity, by the loud chatter in the room, by the desire to reach out and *touch* him... it had just felt right.

Gods, did it feel right.

Especially when my thoughts went silent, when my heartbeat smoothed, and all the tension dripped from my shoulders. I brought my fork to my mouth, chewing the piece of roast and swallowing with satisfaction.

Beside me, Malfoy repositioned himself slightly closer, his hand just for a moment closing around my thigh. *Circe*, his hand was so large it covered my entire leg.

“Good girl,” he rumbled through his chest, his hand squeezing once before falling away.

I chanced a glance at him, at the dark ring of silver around his blown pupils, at the way his mouth was slightly parted, his eyes darting from my mouth to my eyes and back again as I popped another bite of food into my mouth. We stared at each other as I unseeingly placed bite after bite of food into my mouth until I was full and the chatter around the table had stopped.

“Something you'd like to share with the class, Draco?” Pansy asked smugly.

Jumping slightly in my seat, I stared back down at my half-eaten plate before looking up at Pansy. Her green eyes were sparkling in the candlelight as she looked between the two of us and I was surprised to see how much joy was there. It was reflected in the expressions of everyone around the table, as if they were somehow relieved to have realized Malfoy and I had been existing in our own little bubble.

“Merely that your dinner was, once again, a triumph, Parks,” Draco drawled, dabbing his napkin around his mouth in a way that spoke of years of etiquette classes.

Pansy mirrored his actions, as did Blaise and Theo. The remainder of us *peasants* merely rolled our eyes.

“Suck up,” Harry murmured under his breath as Pansy rose from the table, the sign that dinner was officially over and dessert would follow after drinks.

As soon as Pansy's lithe frame exited the room, Draco threw his napkin at him and the table erupted into laughter and I along with them.

...

I clutched the roll of parchment in my hand a little tighter as I once again stared at the golden plaque on Malfoy's door.

It had been a successful day – the new wolfsbane potion we had been adjusting for the last few months finally showed real promise to stop the entire transformation at the full moon, rendering the magical person for all intents and purposes *cured* if they chose to take it every day for a week leading up to the full moon. I'd been adamant that we release the patent to a number of potioners so that those who were affected by lycanthropy could have the option of whether or not to transform.

So it was riding that high that I'd decided to march my way up to Magical Games and Sports to finally speak to Malfoy. I knew what I wanted – no *needed* – and after last night I hoped he wanted it too.

The idea was tempting but I tried not to think of the reality. Of what it would truly feel like to submit to him. The feeling of his hand on my thigh had been enough to set me aching until that night in bed I'd brought myself to a frantic release. The reality versus the fantasy slightly terrified me if I was being honest but the thought of not going through with this, of not seeing it through, was unimaginable. Even if it meant knowing that I felt more for him than he did me. But I had to keep my head on straight – this wouldn't be a relationship, he wouldn't want anything more than this. I couldn't allow myself to get too attached. There was no point trying to let myself hope otherwise.

I knocked three times on the door before it swung open to reveal a much tidier office than the last time I'd been there. The autumn sun was just setting in the magical window, casting a golden light into the room and gilding the silver strands of Malfoy's hair.

He was leaning back in his chair, the picture of power and dominance in his black three-piece suit, white shirt so crisp it was a wonder it didn't cut his ivory skin. With a smirk, he raised his hand, silver rings glittering on his thumb and index finger as he bade me to enter and wandlessly closed the door behind me.

"Granger," he said, pushing his large black leather chair back and rising to his feet.

With a simple twist of his fingers, he opened the button of his black robes, revealing the onyx waistcoat that had just been peeking out, a silver chain of a pocket watch draped artfully across his right side. He shrugged out of the robes, taking the time to hang them on the ornate silver hook on the wall opposite the window before striding over to me.

"Malfoy," I replied with a nod.

He leant against his desk, arms crossed in front of his chest and ankles hooked, putting me in mind more of a professor than the head of the Quidditch division of Magical Games and Sports. It was a surprising move to many after his probation had ended with the DMLE – I had assumed he would have purchased his own team to manage rather than stay at the Ministry.

Slowly his eyes slid over me, over the flowy cream blouse I wore, tucked into my black high waisted pencil skirt, down to the sheer black stockings I'd bravely donned this morning, using a spell to hold the thigh highs up before sliding into a pair of black pumps with so many

cushioning charms on them I could have walked a tightrope with ease. His teeth bit into his lower lip for a moment and I almost groaned at the sight before he released it.

“How can I help you today, Miss Granger?” he asked in a sly tone, tilting his head to the side to assess me.

I took a deep breath, then slowly extended the roll of parchment towards him.

“Here is my boundary checklist with each item ranked as you asked,” I replied in as business-like of a tone as I could muster through the way it felt suddenly as if I were flying on a broomstick in the middle of a windstorm.

Malfoy raised a pale eyebrow at me before he took the roll of parchment, tapping it once with his wand so that it unfurled in his hands. It had taken me almost the entire night to rank the checklist, which was separated into twelve categories, on a scale of zero to five:

Bondage and Suspension

Impact/Percussion

Sexual Activity

Sensation Play

Breath Play

Humiliation

Body Part Torture

Fetishes

Role Playing

Service and Restrictive Behavior

Voyeurism/Exhibitionism

Bodily Fluids and Functions

I had to admit, Malfoy was thorough. There was no subject left untouched, no topic too taboo, and I had answered each and every one as honestly as I could within my understanding of the subject matter.

As he read, his eyes darkened, the hand not holding the parchment gripped the side of his dark wood desk so tight his knuckles were white with the strain and his platinum monogrammed cufflinks glimmered faintly in the setting sun.

“You want this?” he asked, his voice deep and breathless.

When he looked up at me, I nodded, feeling like a fly trapped in a spiderweb. I couldn’t move, couldn’t speak, could merely affirm with a movement of my head.

“I need to hear you say it, Granger,” he continued, lowering the parchment slowly to his desk. “I need to hear the words.”

I swallowed, my throat clicking with its dryness.

“I want this,” I answered.

I want you , I added silently.

His grey eyes closed for a moment, as if savoring the words before they opened.

“I assume you have questions?”

I licked my lips, trying to steady myself. I had millions of questions that ranged from as vague as – why this kink to as personal as...

“Why me?” the question slipped from my lips as the cacophony of thoughts swirled in my brain.

He blinked, tongue pressing into his cheek.

“What do you mean, *why you?* ” he asked.

Taking a deep breath, I stepped forward, gripping the back of the chair I’d sat in last week while he’d touched my lips and asked me if I’d been dripping for him.

“I mean... you could have your pick of any witch, I’m sure they’re lining up to be with you and plenty would have experience with this.” I gestured vaguely towards the parchment in his hands. “You wouldn’t have to bother with teaching – training, I mean.” I swallowed, remembering what I’d read of Doms training their new subs. “I’m just –”

“Stop,” he said, raising a hand.

Slowly he pushed himself off the desk, taking his time to close the space between us until I had to crane my neck back to look up at him. The scent of his cologne was intoxicating, pine and clove and another herbal scent I couldn’t quite put my finger on.

“Hermione,” he started, my name on his tongue sending a zing of electricity through my abdomen. It sounded foreign falling from his lips after the last however many years of *Granger* . “You are one of the most powerful witches I know. Wickedly smart, devastatingly gorgeous, and honestly – bloody terrifying sometimes. Anyone who says otherwise is either imperiused or a liar.”

I gulped in a breath of air, my mind reeling. *He’s just telling you why he wants you as a sub, Hermione – nothing more* , I reminded myself. But there was the telltale tightening of my muscles, the ringing in my ears that told me if I wasn’t careful, soon I’d be crumpled to the floor with my head between my knees.

“ *Breathe* ,” he commanded, his hand closing around my elbow.

Taking a small breath, he nodded.

“Again.”

I took another, less panicked breath and a small smile curved across his mouth.

“Good,” he praised, and I thought my knees might go weak. “I want you, Hermione.” He leant down until his hot breath ghosted across my ear. “I want your mind, your body, your *submission* . I want you kneeling at my feet, I want you tied to my bed, begging me for mercy. I want your tears, your pleas, your screams. I want your pleasure.” I felt his other hand graze across my waist, fingers spread wide. “I want *you*. ”

Then, he kissed me.

Chapter 6

Draco

Gods, the feel of her lips on mine. It was chocolate and firewhiskey and Christmas and quidditch all mixed into one. Cupping her cheek in my hand, I pulled her up until she was on the tips of her toes. Her hands instinctively wrapped around my shoulders, exactly how I wanted.

After what I imagined was a brief moment of surprise, she kissed me back with a fervor I hadn't anticipated. Her mouth opened to me with the merest swipe of my tongue and I swallowed the tiny gasp that escaped from her chest. It was perfect, *she* was perfect. And I knew, no matter what, that this would be so much more than just scenes, so much *more* than just submission.

She was trembling beneath my hands and though I knew she had been close to panicking a moment ago, I thought perhaps it was something else now.

When I drew back, her pupils were dilated, her lips slightly parted as small gasps escaped. The look on her face wasn't hungry, it was *ravenous*, and from the rankings on her checklist I knew she wanted those things too. I wouldn't turn the question around on her – not yet. Wouldn't try to force her to explain why she wanted this from me other than to make the storm in her head quiet.

"Now, I have my own papers ready for you," I continued, summoning the scroll I'd set aside in hopes she would follow through today. "Would you like to read it now or in private?"

She swallowed loudly, glancing down at the parchment in my hands and up again.

"Private," she whispered, her voice wavering.

I nodded, floating the scroll back to my desk before summoning her own papers.

"Are you ready to begin?" I asked. "Do you consent to my will, understanding I am here to take care of you, to push you, and to keep you safe?"

It helped this dynamic that we already knew each other – *trusted* each other.

Licking her lips, her eyes flared.

"Yes, I consent," she answered, her voice husky.

Thank fucking Merlin. It was time for a little fun, time for her to get a glimpse of what I had to offer her. Gently, I pressed her parchment back into her hand.

"Then I want you to do something for me, pet," I said, my voice slipping low. Her lids fluttered and my chest warmed at the sight of her body reacting so beautifully to my words. "You are going to use those gorgeous legs to climb on my desk and read out your preferences. Do you understand?"

Her eyes widened but she nodded.

“Words,” I warned.

“Y-yes,” she answered.

Oh, she could do better than this. Remembering her ranking on impact play I leant down and gave her thigh a soft slap.

“Yes, Sir,” she corrected.

Fuck .

I stepped back, with a wave of my wand I cleared my desk of all the other papers, photographs, and various odds and ends until all that remained were my documents for her to look over. Granger took a step toward the desk, obviously trying to figure out the best way to get her small frame onto it, but before she could step onto the chair beside us, I stopped her.

“Take off your shoes,” I instructed.

Extending my elbow to her, she grabbed hold as she slipped the tall, black heels off her feet. Once she was standing in her stockings, I wrapped my hands around her waist, lifting her over the desk. Gracefully she drew her feet beneath her until she was kneeling on the wood, facing my chair.

I stepped back, taking in her profile, the way the sunset highlighted the graceful curve of her nose and set her hair aflame. Her chest was heaving beneath her blouse, thighs pressed tight together.

Casting a quick cushioning charm beneath her so that her legs wouldn’t hurt, I circled the desk and sat in my chair. She was short enough that I didn’t have to look up. The sight of her there, kneeling on my desk, set my cock to throbbing, but the picture wasn’t quite right yet.

“Wider,” I said, tapping a finger to her knee.

She shifted her weight, opening her thighs a little more so that her skirt slid towards her hips. I could see just a glimmer of the dark lace between her legs and... *sweet fucking Salazar* she was wearing thigh high stockings. I wanted to peel them off with my teeth.

“Perfect,” I whispered, leaning back in my chair and resting my elbows on the arms. “Now read.”

With surprisingly steady hands she drew the parchment up, licking her lips before her voice floated through the room.

“Boundary Checklist,” she started, taking another deep breath. “The following activities should be ranked from zero to five, with zero designated as a hard limit, one neutral or uninterested, two may try for partner, three willing to try, four like it, and five love it.”

Granger paused, her eyes flicking up to me as if for permission to continue. I nodded, gesturing to the parchment.

“Bondage and Suspension,” she continued, her voice growing a shade darker. “Blindfolds, three. Heavy bondage, four. Light bondage, four. Complete immobilization, two. Bondage under clothing in public, four. Leather restraints, five. Chains, five. Ropes, five. Intricate Japanese rope bondage, also known as Shibari, five.”

With each passing item, her voice became breathier. I watched her thighs tense, as if she was stopping herself from pressing her legs together. By the time she reached the *sexual activity* section, my cock was pushing so tight against the placket of my trousers it was almost painful.

“Fellatio/Cunnilingus, five. Swallowing semen, f-five. Hand jobs, five. Anal sex, three. Anal plugs, three. Vibrators, four. Masturbation...” Her voice trailed off for a moment as she swallowed loudly. *Interesting*. “Five. Fisting, zero. Forced masturbation, three.” Suddenly her cheeks flamed bright red and I silently noted her response before she continued. “Group sex, zero. Orgasm control, three.”

This was torture, but I needed to hear her read it – needed to catalogue her reactions to better understand her. I knew she had almost no experience with any of these topics, so her ranking of five was more an enthusiastic response to the idea of the activity. She’d given all fives to spanking, flogging, and whipping, with fours to belts, wooden paddles, and a three to face slapping. I’d been unsurprised that she’d given a two to full body strappings, it wasn’t my style anyway.

By the time she finished the list a few minutes later, I could smell her arousal between her thighs and I was gripping the arms of my leather chair to stop myself from touching her.

Finally I released the chair, pulling the parchment from her fingers, rolling it back up and tapping my wand once to it with a privacy charm. Granger’s cheeks were a beautiful rosy tint, her brown eyes almost a gold in the final vestiges of the setting sun.

“Very good,” I said, pushing myself to my feet.

I didn’t try to hide the fact that my cock was pressing painfully against my trousers. Her eyes dipped down to the bulge and up again.

“Are you wet, darling?” I asked, placing my hands on the desk on either side of her knees.

She bit her lip, nostrils flaring for a moment.

“Yes, Sir,” she answered in a meek voice that made the words sound even more sweet.

“How wet are you?” My voice dropped low and her eyes closed as if it was a caress.

Shifting slightly on her knees, her shoulders raised then lowered, obviously unsure of how to answer.

“Perhaps I should check,” I continued, patting the spot on the desk beside her. “Turn to the side, place your forearms here.”

Quickly she obeyed, the cushioning charm allowing her to easily scramble until her forearms were pressed into the shiny wood and her ass was raised high in the air.

“*Fuck*,” I cursed under my breath at the sight of her before I allowed one hand to slide up the smooth curve of her calf. The silky texture of her stockings was delectable beneath my hand as I followed the line of the seam up to the lacy edge on her thigh.

I paused there for a moment, fingertips skimming the hem of her skirt to allow her time to understand what I was about to do. She nodded once, her eyes catching mine as she gave her silent consent and I rucked her skirt over her hips.

Black. Fucking. Lace.

What a minx, this witch was. With a featherlight touch I rounded the curve of her ass, learning the texture of the lace against her skin before finally I drew two fingers across the seam of her knickers. She was *soaked*.

“What a good girl you are,” I praised. “Making a mess of your gorgeous knickers, just for me.”

She moaned a reply as I traced a circle around her fabric covered clit.

“Do you know what happens to good girls who obey their Doms, pet?” I asked, my other hand moving down her spine until my fingers slid into her hair, pulling the clip from her curls so they cascaded down onto the desk.

“No, Sir,” she answered breathily.

Hooking my fingers into the lace, I drew it to the side until I could see her gorgeous cunt glistening in the light. My cock throbbed, jumping at the sight of it, but I took a breath to steady myself.

“Good girls get to come.”

Chapter 7

Hermione

My whole body was on fire as I knelt on his desk, my forearms pushing into the soft wood. I could feel the cool air on my exposed skin and it made the ache between my thighs deepen until I wanted to beg him to touch me.

A small whimper must have escaped my lips because he shushed me softly, fingertips massaging my scalp before he grabbed my hair and pulled my face to the side so he could watch me.

“The door is locked and the room is silenced,” he said, a single finger tracing the seam of my entrance, gathering up the wetness there before circling my clit.

My hips shuddered, trying to follow his hand as he moved it away, giving a light smack to my backside. The sensation shot through me and my cheeks reddened as I felt a gush of need slide out onto my thighs.

“Greedy,” he chided. “Stay still for me, pet.”

I whimpered but nodded as his fingers returned, once again tracing the line of my core down to my clit and back up again. I wanted to circle my hips, wanted to press myself closer, but fought the urge. I would be good for him – I would make him proud.

He began to draw slow circles over my clit, waves of pleasure radiated from between my thighs and I moaned, pressing the side of my face into my forearms until his hand tightened in my hair and drew my head up.

“Eyes on me,” he commanded. “I want to watch your face whilst I fuck you with my fingers.”

Before I could do so much as take another breath, he pressed two blunt fingers inside of me, the hard ridge of his signet ring massaging the spot right behind my pelvic wall. I groaned at the feel of his thick fingers stretching me before his thumb pressed firmly on my clit.

“Oh, *gods*,” I whimpered. “Please Mal – *Sir*.”

His fingers curled downwards as he started to shallowly thrust them inside, his thumb pressing firmly onto my clit, his other ring creating a friction I’d never felt before but desperately needed.

“My sweet girl,” he crooned. “Making a mess of my four thousand galleon ebony desk with that golden cunt of hers. You’re *gilding* it for me, Hermione.”



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I'd never known I had a thing for dirty talk until that moment. *Circe* his voice, so deep and almost growling, rippled through me until it was another aspect of the pleasure from his fingers. I moaned, my eyes squeezing shut until he tugged on my hair in a silent reminder to open them again.

Faster, I wanted to say, but before I could open my mouth his hand picked up speed as if he had read my mind. The sound of his fingers moving inside of me was obscene, but mixed with the sound of his voice and the feeling of his thumb on my clit it sent me spiraling to greater heights.

"Can't wait to feel you squeezing around my..." But his deep moan cut off the rest of his sentence. "*Gods*, the sounds you make. Going to build you a perch on my wall and keep you there to look at every day."

I let out a breathy high-pitched wail as my body began to tremble through his ministrations. I was so close, *so* close. My mind wanted to spark to life, wanted to wonder why it was suddenly so easy. With any other partner it would take *forever* to get me close and even longer to come. *Gods*, so often I just gave up and finished myself off after they'd fallen asleep.

"You're mine now, Hermione. Do you understand me?"

My walls fluttered around his fingers at the words and I nodded.

"Say it," he growled.

Could I even speak right now? A small part of my mind tried to remember: *it's a scene, a scene, it's only for right now.*

"I – I'm yours, Draco," I cried with fervor all the same.

His rhythm stuttered for a moment before he picked up his pace, fingers massaging a spot I'd never been able to reach on my own – never *felt* before with anyone else – until tears pooled in the corners of my eyes.

“Come, *now*,” he commanded.

And as if I were merely a puppet on a string, I came with a scream, my body convulsing around his fingers as wave after wave of pleasure rippled through me until I was nothing but sensation. Nothing but the blissful feeling of ecstasy.

His fingers slowed inside, drawing me back down to earth until I realized I was laid almost flat against his desk with my behind still in the air. Gently, he moved my underwear back into place, pressing a soft kiss on my hip before stepping back until I could see him again and slipping the two dripping fingers into his mouth.

The moan he made as he tasted my orgasm on his skin made me clench around empty air, the ache almost immediately returning. I saw his cock twitch against his trousers, the impressive tent there a mere suggestion of his raging need. *Gods* I wanted to taste him, wanted to feel him push inside of me until I was screaming again.

But instead, he slipped his fingers from his mouth after sucking them clean and gently drew back down my skirt, smoothing it over my backside.

“So good, darling,” he crooned. “So perfect. My perfect, perfect girl.”

Warmth tingled within my chest as he continued to praise me, wrapping his hands around my middle and pulling me up. Slowly he sat back in his chair, taking me with him until I was nestled into his chest, my head resting in the crook of his neck as he stroked down my spine.

“How do you feel?” he asked, his head tilting down until I could feel the brush of his lips against my forehead.

I thought about it for a moment. My mind was quiet, calm, like a still lake at twilight – no ripples to be seen across the surface.

“Good,” I answered, my voice weak after my screaming.

His other hand curled around my knees, drawing me closer until I was completely engulfed by him.

“Anything you didn't like?”

Other than the fact that you didn't fuck me into next Wednesday?

I shrugged, shaking my head.

“I liked it all, Malfoy,” I replied honestly. “I want more.”

He chuckled, his thumb tracing the curve of my knee.

“I want you to start keeping a journal. Whenever we finish a scene, I want you to take the time to write down what you remember and how you felt. You don’t need to share it with me unless you want to, but it’s important that you have an opportunity to sort through your feelings after.”

My brows pulled together as I thought about it.

“I don’t know...” I said slowly. “I don’t think that’s necessary.”

Malfoy shifted, his hand sliding up to dive into the back of my hair, gently tugging me away until I could see his face.

“What you experienced tonight was merely the very tip of the iceberg,” he said. “It won’t always be reading documents and getting finger fucked, Hermione.”

My face flushed red and I opened my mouth to argue, but he silenced me with a finger on my lips.

“I’m asking you to trust me. I’m asking you to listen to me in this very specific circumstance and trust that I know what’s best. Can you do that?”

I grumbled, thinking of all the reasons why I didn’t want to journal about my feelings. I spent the majority of the time ignoring my feelings unless they came up to smack me in the face – like when I got overwhelmed or panicked. This was him asking me to invite them in, to pour them a cup of tea, and to ask how their day was going.

His finger stroked my cheekbone and though his next words were husky, they weren’t laced with his dominant tone. He was truly giving me a choice.

“Can you do that for me?”

After a few more incoherent mumbles I nodded, falling back onto his chest and my fingers curled around the collar of his shirt. He sighed, the hand on my face sliding down my back to curl around my waist.

“Sometimes you’ll be punished, sometimes I will make you cry.” I tried to jerk away but he held me close. “Yes, Hermione, sometimes I will make you cry, not on purpose but it will happen. Oftentimes a scene will create an emotional release, it’s normal – nothing to fear. Often you may feel drained after – emotionally or physically. It is my job to take care of you and I don’t want you to hesitate to tell me what you need, understand?”

I nodded.

“I understand.”

He pressed a kiss to my hair, the feeling sending butterflies soaring through my stomach which felt a little silly considering what we had just done.

“What are you doing tomorrow night?”

I stilled; my fingers wrapped around the pearlescent button beneath his chin that was opened to show just the palest sliver of his throat. He’d forgone a tie today, or perhaps taken it off before I

got here, and all I wanted to do was lick up the column of his throat and suck on his prisoner tattoo.

“I don’t have any plans...” my voice trailed off as the butterflies multiplied inside my abdomen.

Malfoy shifted, tilting his head down.

“Would you like to come to my place? We can begin our first night of training.”

Excitement bubbled inside of me at what that might mean – I’d never been to his house. It meant more to me than just beginning training, it felt like perhaps I would be allowed to truly get to know him, to take a peek into what made Malfoy... *Malfoy* .

“All right,” I replied a little too quickly and he chuckled.

“Floo in around seven if you’d like, I’ll make sure we’re connected by then. We can have dinner beforehand... Come dressed in whatever you wear to work tomorrow,” he instructed.

I sighed in relief, my shoulders sagging at his words about clothes. I had grown to love them, really, I had. Honestly, after eight years of friendship with fashionista and fashion designer Pansy Potter, née Parkinson, it was bound to rub off on me. But even still I didn’t quite have a head for clothes in circumstances other than the clear boundaries of my work, events, and the occasional wedding.

“All right,” I said, nodding against his chest. “Can I bring anything?”

Malfoy shook his head, brushing away a wayward curl from my face and tucking it behind my ear.

“Just yourself,” he murmured, before drawing my face back and kissing me once more.



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Chapter 8

Draco

At quarter to seven I stood in my traveling parlor trying to decide the best place to be when she entered through the floo. My first thought was to be at the mahogany card table my great grandfather had won in a game of wizard's chess back in the eighteen hundreds but no... That would be odd if she came in while I was dealing out a game of solitaire. Then perhaps I thought I'd sit in one of the two overly large wingback chairs that framed the fireplace reading a book she would definitely find impressive and yet... *no*.

I settled for leaning against the doorframe with a hand loosely in the pocket of my trousers. It wasn't silly to be this nervous, I told myself over and over again. It meant I cared, that I wanted this to go well.

Suppose all that mind healer work had paid off in the end.

When the clock hit exactly seven, the floo lit green and Hermione stumbled from the hearth, a swirl of curls and red-wine robes. I rushed forward to steady her, my hands gripping her elbows as she blinked a few times. She always had struggled with floo travel, as well as with portkeys and I supposed it was due to the fact that she had spent the first eleven years of her life without experiencing it. Potter was much the same, though from his time playing quidditch I assumed he had a bit of a stronger head for the spinning that only floo and portkey travel can provide.

Once she got her bearings she stepped back and my mouth dried.

Her hair was free, curling in loose waves around her face and down her shoulders to cover her chest. The outer robes she wore were a deep burgundy and velvet, warm against the November chill outside. But the dress she wore beneath was black, with a low square neckline and what looked like capped long sleeves. She'd chosen to wear sheer stockings again and I could only pray to Merlin that they were the same kind of lacy thigh highs she'd worn yesterday.

"Hermione," I said by way of greeting.

Now that we were doing this, I refused to call her by her last name. I wanted her to know that I saw *her*, not just the bucktoothed teenage know-it-all I'd grown up with. It was the first part in my plan to warm her up to the idea of *more*.

"Malfoy," she replied with a small smile, her hands twisting in front of her.

I stepped closer, letting my fingertips slide across the velvet lining of her robes.

"Perhaps, given the new step we are taking, you could call me Draco," I stated before reaching up to wrap one of her curls around my finger.

Her gulp was audible but she nodded.

“Draco, then,” she said with a smile. “Odd to say your name after eighteen years of *Malfoy* , isn’t it?”

I shrugged, releasing the curl and watching it bounce back into place.

“I don’t know, you had no problem saying it yesterday afternoon as you were coming around my fingers,” I purred.

A gorgeous blush stained her cheeks as she drew in a sharp breath, but she didn’t deny it. My hand dropped to the space where her neck met her shoulder, fingertips wrapping around her throat and I pulled her closer, slotting my mouth over hers. Truly, I was proud of myself for waiting this long. From the moment the floo lit green all I had wanted was to taste her again, to feel the soft, supple give of her lips against mine. She moaned, opening for me at once as her hands clutched my arms. I delved into her mouth, tangling my tongue with hers until my cock was jumping to life in my trousers.

I contented myself to kiss her for one more moment, knowing if I didn’t stop I’d end up making her come over one of the priceless pieces of furniture in the room. So I released her, keeping a steadying hand on her shoulder as her eyes fluttered open, lips swollen and glistening.

She smiled and I was pleased to see it reached her eyes as a blush spread across her cheeks. After a moment she took a deep breath and looked around the parlor, one of her brows raised.

“Why does this look so familiar to Pansy and Harry’s living room?” she asked, her change of subject an obvious sign of her discomfort with my original question.

Oh, pet, we will need to work on that.

Placing my hand on her low back, I began to guide her out of the parlor and down the narrow hallway towards the dining room.

“Because Pansy decorated it, of course. Do you really think she’d allow me to decorate my own house?”

Her laugh was almost a giggle, all her discomfort from a moment ago forgotten.

“You’re right, she also insisted on decorating Gin and my flat and we don’t even own the place.”

With a flick of my fingers the large door to the dining room opened, cascading the dim hallway with the gentle glow of candles. My housekeeper Ms. Barnes had really gone above and beyond before she’d retired for the day and, inwardly, I reminded myself to give her a raise.

The dining room wasn’t something I used often – it wasn’t like I had much reason to entertain. To be truthful, even with my past relationships whether they be girlfriends, subs, or both, we’d tended to go out or else gone straight downstairs. But this was different, because Hermione was different.

With Hermione I wanted so much *more* .

“Why don’t you own the flat?” I asked, surprised. “You and Red both make enough.”

Hermione shrugged as I drew out a seat for her at the small table I'd transfigured for the evening, assuming she wouldn't want to sit at a large banquet table and have to yell at each other over the large distance. She touched the black napkin beside the silver charger for a moment, her fingertips sliding across the silver stitching before she let her hand drop into her lap.

"I don't know... I suppose it's easier that way," she answered.

I took the chair beside her before summoning the bottle of sparkling water from a side table and filling our glasses.

"Easier?" I hedged, placing the bottle down between us.

She drew her bottom lip between her teeth and exhaled through her nose.

"Well, at first, I thought living with Gin was temporary... You know, with my dating Ron and her dating Harry. But then she and Harry broke up, realizing they'd never had much chemistry once the whole *forbidden lovers dating-your-brother's-best-friend* thing had worn off and Ron and I became long distance so he could go play quidditch internationally..." She sighed, toying with the stem of her glass.

I watched her for a long moment, observing the way her brows pulled together as she was deep in contemplation. I could almost *see* the thoughts cascading past her irises as she tried to put them in order.

"But?"

She shook her head, leaning back in her chair, her next sentences coming in a rush.

"But I think it's more than that. I think, after my par— after *everything*, it feels wrong to put down roots."

Hermione blinked a few times in surprise, as if the words that fell out of her mouth weren't what she intended to say. My heart twisted in my chest at the lost look in her eyes, at the way she glanced at me as if she'd done something wrong.

"I'm – I'm sorry," she said, pressing her fingertips to her eyelids.

Gently I grabbed her wrist, pulling her hand away from her face.

"Don't apologize," I replied softly. "I think it's completely understandable after everything that has happened, you would be reluctant to put down roots."

Her shoulders visibly sagged in relief and I stroked my thumb once against the thin skin of her wrist.

"If you ever want to talk about it," I began cautiously. "I'm here to listen."

Hermione smiled, covering my hand with hers.

"Thank you, Draco," she said. "I'll... I'll think about it."

...

Hermione

Malfoy's – *Draco's* – house looked exactly how I assumed it would.

It was all dark wood and silver accents, plush emerald and black furniture that gleamed in the hundreds of candles that lined the walls and chandeliers, charmed to never go out. It was the adult version of the Slytherin common room.

Part of my brain was still spinning from what I had admitted to him before dinner began. I'd never spoken it aloud before – not even to Ginny. There was just something about the open expression on his face, the way he'd asked as if he'd truly wanted to know. It made me wonder why we had never spent more time one-on-one. The last time had been almost six years ago when he'd tugged me away from the group at one of our first pub nights and apologized to me.

Well, except for the obvious answer that I'd been infatuated with him since I was a teenager and the prospect had terrified me up until now. Perhaps still did. Part of me still worried what would happen when this was all over, when the novelty of dominating the *Golden Girl* would wear off and he would move on. I knew he would chew me up and spit me out, knew this was nothing more than fantasy for him, but if I was honest with myself... I didn't care.

I would take whatever I could get of him.

Dinner passed enjoyably. I'd known from previous conversations that due to his family's history, the Ministry no longer allowed him to own house elves, but he did *employ* a few free elves that helped with cooking and serving the food, as well as a housekeeper to which he credited the beautiful arrangement of flowers and candles in the dining room.

By the time we finished, it was easy to forget that I'd come here for another reason other than dinner. When the final course disappeared and Draco dabbed at his mouth with his linen napkin before throwing it onto the table in front of him, he turned to me with a dark look.

"Now, before we begin, I'd like to discuss a few ground rules," he said firmly.

I nodded. This was good, rules were safe, so why did my heart feel the need to start beating a mile a minute?

"The first, and most important thing, is your safety. We will decide upon safe words that we both can use if we feel overwhelmed or if a scene goes too far. Have you thought of any?"

Shifting a little in my seat, I licked my lips.

"I think the usage of red, yellow, and green makes the most sense logically," I replied.

Draco hummed his agreement, running a hand through his hair before resting his elbow on the table.

"I agree, it's the most traditional even among wizarding partners. I'll be using that when you are able to speak to check in with you. Just for my own peace of mind: Green means good to continue, yellow means we need to slow down because things are too intense and we need to

adjust, and red means stop and aftercare must immediately commence. But if you are unable to speak, I'd like you to hold up three fingers for red or cast red sparks, two for yellow or cast yellow sparks, and a thumbs up for green or, of course, cast green sparks."

The idea that I wouldn't always be able to speak simultaneously terrified and excited me.

"I think I can remember that," I answered when he gave me an expectant look.

He smiled then, reaching out to brush his fingertips over the back of my hand.

"Don't worry, I'll also remind you as we go along," he said softly, almost affectionately. "There is something else: I don't share."

My eyes widened.

"I... I would *never* ." My throat felt thick for a moment at the implication.

After Ron three years ago, the insinuation that I would go behind Draco's back, even if we weren't in a relationship, stung.

Draco's hand tightened over mine.

"Hermione, I'm sorry. That's not what I was implying. I meant it more as reassurance for *you* . You are not just mine now – I am also yours."

I could hear the sincerity in his voice as his grey eyes pierced mine and I wanted to believe him – *gods* I knew the only way for this to work was for me to believe him. But I'd heard this before, in slightly different phrasing. Heard the reassurances, seen it on parchment, and then watched the photographs loop in the paper.

Draco leant forward, his thumb brushing against my chin.

"It's hard, I know," he said, his voice gruff with some unnamed emotion. "It's hard to trust after that. All I can do is show you through my actions and hope that time will help you to heal."

I nodded, biting the inside of my cheek to stop the torrent of emotions threatening to spill over. Words echoed in my mind, faces on parade, the terrible, crushing guilt I always felt threatening to consume me. Breathing deeply, I focused on a wall, building up the layers brick by brick until the dangerous emotions were separated and I was safe.

Draco watched me with narrowed eyes.

"You're an occlumens," he stated – it wasn't a question.

"I am," I replied a little defensively.

He sat back, assessing me for a moment.

"I want you to promise not to use occlumency during a scene. It's important for your safety and mine that you experience what is happening, that you *feel* . Good, bad, ugly."

The prospect of not using occlumency was terrifying. Occlumency had become second nature, it was how I survived.

“I’ll try,” I said, wanting to be truthful.

Draco reached out, his hand covering my left wrist and his thumb stroked softly against my skin.

“That’s all I ask, Hermione.” He clasped my hand, interlacing our fingers together. “Come, let’s go downstairs.”

My brows pulled together in confusion at his words. Downstairs? We were downstairs.

But he had a mischievous smile on his face as he pulled me to my feet and led me back through the long hallway. It was dim, only a few sconces lined the hall but it was enough to illuminate the varied landscape paintings that were hung every few feet or so. Eventually through the twisting labyrinthine hallways we stopped in front of two large double doors, ornately carved with ivy and serpents, which swung open at our approach to reveal a large library.

I gasped, my free hand covering my mouth as I took in the high, cathedral-like ceiling with its glass dome and ironwork. There were rows and rows of books, complete with rolling ladders that looked straight out of my dreams. To the left of the entrance was a large sitting area complete with fireplace, two wingback chairs, and a small couch all upholstered in black velvet fabric. I had to hand it to him, the wizard did like to stay in theme.

“It was originally the conservatory,” Draco murmured. “I had it renovated into a library but also...”

He tugged me towards the far wall away from the sitting area until we stood in front of another towering bookshelf. Thick black and brown leather tomes lined the shelves, the scent of parchment and dust heavy in the air. It was... *gods* it was beautiful.

Warmth seeped into my side as Draco leant closer, his lips brushing the shell of my ear.

“You’re wet already, aren’t you, pet?” he purred, his thumb stroking the line of my palm.

I swallowed loudly but nodded.

“Yes, Sir,” I replied, my eyes tracing the lines of priceless texts in front of me.

Is that what this was? Foreplay? If so, it was definitely working.

But then he reached out, placing two fingers on a red leather book on the fifth shelf from the floor, pulling it back so that it tipped on its spine. A great groaning echoed around us – it sounded almost like stones grinding against one another – and the next thing I knew the bookshelf swung in on itself, revealing a wide staircase leading down into darkness.

Draco waved his hand and at once torches sprung to life, illuminating the passage and at the bottom, a dark red door that looked faintly ominous in the flickering light. Dropping my hand, he instead pressed his palm against my lower back, guiding me down the steps, the only sound

the clicking of my heels against the stones and the shallow, ragged breaths scraping through my lungs.

We reached the bottom of the stairs and I expected the door to swing open at our approach, but instead he turned to me, his eyes dark.

“Place your hand on the door,” he instructed.

I did, my fingers spreading out, learning the silken texture of the wood. The door wasn’t painted, it had been charmed, and the magic hummed beneath my fingertips.

“*Portus dominus*,” Draco incanted. “Allow access to this witch, Hermione Jean Granger.”

Heat flared against my palm, not enough to hurt, but the warmth snaked up my wrist, over my arm, and settled into my chest. For a moment, all I wanted was to spend the rest of the night examining the gorgeous spell work and warding done to the door. I assumed from the sensation and the incantation it was spelled to recognize a magical signature and open only to those given permission.

“Are you able to bring others through the threshold who are not granted entrance?” I asked curiously.

Draco shook his head.

“No, they would not be able to get through,” he answered. “Speaking of, open it.”

“But...”

Draco barely suppressed a grin.

“Hermione, I promise I will answer any question you have about the wards of this door and the rest of my house, but *later*, yes?”

I grumbled slightly, but conceded that perhaps this was not the right time to question him about magical warding techniques. Instead, I clasped the round black handle of the door and with a twist it swung back and open to reveal...

Gods...

To reveal what I could only describe as a sex dungeon.

Chapter 9

Draco

I tried to look at the room with fresh eyes, as if I could see it through the lens of someone who had never been in here before.

Usually witches gasped or stepped back, I even had one moan audibly once. But Hermione? Hermione just *stared* .

The candles in the room lit as the door swung open, bathing the large space in a soft, golden glow. Though in its construction we had referred to it as *The Dungeon* , I had wanted it to feel anything but that. Now, I most often just referred to it as *the room* . The walls were laid with a dark, wine-colored damask wallpaper, though the black wainscoting that lined the bottom half of the walls kept it from overwhelming the eye. The wainscoting also hid conveniently placed hooks in the walls, as well as a hidden compartment if someone liked that sort of thing. From how Hermione had, understandably, rated kidnapping and interrogating role play, I knew we wouldn't be utilizing that hidey-hole.

I allowed her to process the room in her own time. There was a wide landing right as one entered, with a coat rack, bench, and table to place any items needed to be left behind. Two steps led down onto the dark mahogany floors, a wide bed, transfigured to hold up to six people was set against the far wall to the left. I'd imported the frame from Italy with its detailed carvings of bodies moving in a tangle of limbs and pleasure down the posters and along the headboard.

"Black silk sheets, really Draco?" Hermione asked, obviously grasping for some sort of humor.

From the set of her mouth, the flush in her cheeks, and the way her breasts strained against her dress, I could see that this excited her.

Her eyes traveled to the low partition that separated the bed area from the wide St. Andrew's cross set against the wall, a black spanking bench beside it. My favorite floggers, crops, and straps hung against the wall from the gold hooks I'd salvaged from an ancient sex club in wizarding Paris I'd visited about six months after I'd been released from my travel restrictions. I'd gone for research and had stumbled upon the site, the old keeper of the property – *Monsieur Fournier* – had been so pleased by my interest he'd invited me to take whatever I wanted.

It was where I'd gotten the beautiful silk lounger that sat in the middle of the back play area. The red silk brocade matched the walls perfectly and was spelled to never stain or chafe, could be transfigured to various heights, and was one of my favorite pieces in the room.

On the other side hung the various shackles and restraints I used, as well as a grid system over the ceiling to allow me to chain a witch by the wrists, but move her away from the wall if needed for better access to her entire body.

A small sitting area was immediately to our right where a roaring fire was set into the grate, a large dark armoire beside the gilded mantle stocked not only with various toys, lubes, blindfolds, and anything else we might need, but also blankets, pillows, and aftercare items.

We must have stood in the doorway for a full two minutes while she looked. I didn't want to rush her so I contented myself to watch her face, the subtle movement of her brows, the way the corners of her lips tugged down or up depending on what she was looking at. Finally, her shoulders lowered a few centimeters and she took a small step into the room.

"When we play here, I'll have you come into the room before me to give you time to settle yourself and prepare. You'll have two options for where you can place yourself, depending on your mood. Here." I pointed to the space beside us where a large square cushion was set into the floor right above where the two steps led down. "You will kneel, toes together and knees wide, hands on your thighs with your palms face up and your head bowed. This position will tell me that you are ready for play and whatever I have to offer you."

I left her on the landing, taking the few steps down into the room and pointing to the spot beside the hearth where another cushion was inlaid into the stone.

"Here is where you will kneel in the same position if you need more communication or reassurance with the night's events. It's normal to enter the space assuming you are ready, but after you disrobe your mind may change. This spot indicates to me that we need to have a conversation before we begin. Do you understand?"

She nodded, her eyes locked on the cushion beside us.

"Words, Hermione," I said firmly.

"Yes, I understand," she finally replied.

I placed my hand on her low back, trying to provide her a semblance of comfort. She wasn't the first brand new sub I'd trained. This lifestyle had come to me naturally – from my first encounters I'd preferred to be in charge, commanding, taking control. It was a way to ground myself in the unsteadiness of my world.

After Azkaban, once I had been allowed to travel, I'd spent weeks outside of Britain, mainly in France, trying to pretend I was anyone other than *reformed Death Eater Draco Malfoy*. It was how I'd found myself in *Le Mystère des Roses* – a magical sex club designed to fit any taste, to fulfill any desire, to be *whoever* you wanted – learning what it meant to dominate. Though I'd come to *Le Mystère* in the hopes of forgetting myself, instead I had found who I truly was.

Learning to be a Dom had been more than just learning how to control, how to possess, how to exude power. I had learned the power of kindness, of compassion, of forgiveness. I had learned how to make those things I had seen as weakness my strength.

Just as Hermione had.

"Would you like to see more?" I asked.

Hermione took a deep breath and then nodded.

“Yes, I think so,” she answered quickly before I could ask her to speak again.

Slowly I took her around the room, explaining each section and the uses of the equipment. With each item explained I watched her eyes dilate, the blush spreading across her cheeks until the small bit of her cleavage I could see was reddened with it. My cock throbbed, *gods*, I couldn’t wait for what the night had in store. If she would allow it, that is.

When I had finished the abbreviated tour, I brought her back to the landing.

“Now, have you seen enough for one night or would you like to play?” I asked, trying my hardest to keep my voice from dropping low.

She licked her lips, eyes bright as she looked me over.

“I want to play,” she said immediately.

There was no hesitation in her tone, no indication that she felt anything other than arousal and I smiled, stroking the line of her jaw with the back of my hand.

“Good,” I said, curling my fingers around her velvet robes. “Then let’s get you a little more comfortable, shall we?”

Hermione smiled, her eyes flashing with excitement as she allowed me to pull the robes from her shoulders and hang them on the nearby rack. Her dress was exquisite, reminding me of the pin up girls I’d seen in muggle posters in antique shops. But before I could unzip the back, she waved her hand, wandlessly unzipping the dress in anticipation.

“Oh, pet, you opened my present without my asking,” I tutted, drawing a knuckle down the line of her spine.

She shivered as I pushed her hair over her right shoulder, fingertips skimming over the ink there.

I’d seen her tattoo before – Red had a matching one – but never up close. It was a beautifully detailed flock of eight miniscule sparrows flying up her shoulder blade. Two tiny sparrows broke away from the rest, dotted near her collarbone, as if they were flying down to her heart.

A bird for each soul they had lost, I knew, she’d said as much when she and Red had come back from the tattoo parlor for pub night eight months ago.

“I’m sorry, Sir,” she said, her shoulders beginning to shake from nerves.

I slid my hands over her back and down her arms, pulling the dress with me until it fell to the floor at her feet. Her wand was holstered around her thigh with two straps, the leather biting into her skin in a way that made my cock pulse. My groan was audible as I took in the matching lace bra and underwear set she had on, complete with those damned thigh highs. *Black. Fucking. Lace. Again.*

“Step out.” I grabbed her elbow, assisting her as she stepped out of the dress and with a flick of my fingers sent it floating over to the rack with her robes.

Circling her slowly, I let my eyes rove over her body. Full tits, narrow waist, generous hips and thighs, it was better than I could have imagined – better than I *had* imagined. Scars peppered her olive skin, shimmering faintly in the light, though none were as obvious as the dark purple scar that slashed across her chest and down her abdomen, nor the angry red words carved across her left forearm.

My eyes squeezed shut for a moment, trying to stave off the torrent of images that flashed through my mind. Hermione writhing on the floor, her eyes locked on mine as she screamed, her body bowing off the ground. The scent of blood tinging the air until it became too much, my mind focused on a singular phrase:

Mine to protect. Mine. Mine. Mine.

When I opened my eyes she appeared to fold in on herself, as if she were embarrassed. *Salazar*, the movement pricked my temper – not at her, but at those before me that would have given this insecurity fuel. I grabbed her wrists, drawing them apart before she could fully close herself off.

“No,” I said, allowing my tone to drop low. “Each and every one of your scars is a victory, Hermione – do you hear me? It is a testament to your power, your strength, and your will to live. *You made it out alive.*”

Her honey brown eyes glistened for a moment in the light before shutters closed behind her irises. I stepped closer, cupping her chin between my index and thumb.

“No, darling, none of that in here. You know the rule.”

It would be going to the top of the list of rules I’d send to her flat tomorrow if she wanted to continue after tonight.

Though her brows furrowed, I watched as the wall behind her eyes tumbled, giving me a glimpse of the pain – the *guilt* that lived there. I didn’t need to use legilimency to see it, I could practically hear her screaming. Could hear the mad cackle of my aunt, Hermione’s pitiful sobs as she refused to break.

“Do you want to continue?” I asked, sliding my hand over her jaw to let my fingers rest behind her ear, my thumb stroking her cheek.

Her eyes flickered over mine, dropping to my mouth and back up again.

“Yes, I want to continue,” she answered after a moment, though her voice felt weak.

I leant in close, brushing my lips across the curve of her temple before whispering low in her ear.

“Then pick your spot and get ready for me, pet.”

Chapter 10

Hermione

I took a moment to think of how I felt.

Was I overwhelmed? Did I need more reassurance? No... I didn't think so. I was done with words, done with conversation – I wanted *him*. So I stepped around Draco, finding the cushion beside the steps and lowered onto it, trying to remember what he had said.

Toes together, knees wide, hands on your thighs palms up.

It took me a moment to find the right position, I vaguely remembered a drawing from one of the books I'd found on the subject during my research and hoped it was close enough. The click of dragonhide leather shoes on the floor sent a thrill of anticipation through me and I bit the inside of my cheek.

Fingertips touched my chin, drawing my face up. His thumb brushed once against my lower lip as he stared down at me.

Gods, he was beautiful. His white-blond hair fell over one eye, giving him a look of being debauched though his charcoal grey suit was immaculate with its crisp black button-down, waistcoat, jacket, and perfectly pressed trousers. His rings were warm on my skin and it sent a thrill shooting through my core as I remembered the feeling of those rings *inside* of me.

“Perfect,” he said, and a shiver rippled down my spine as he bent and brushed his lips against mine.

I thought, perhaps, I could spend the rest of my life kissing Draco Malfoy. There was something about it that I couldn't quite quantify – as if with each kiss he was trying to impart to me some vital secret, some precious piece of himself. But the rational part of my mind spoke up saying that it was merely wishful thinking.

All too soon he stepped away, down to the back end of the room and stood in front of the large piece of red satin furniture in the middle. Its curved shape reminded me in a way of a muggle lounge chair.

“Come here, pet,” he commanded.

Slowly I pushed to my feet, but he tutted, shaking his head.

“No, no, in here you don't walk, darling. In here you *crawl*. ”

I blinked at him for a moment, my mind trying to fight the dreamy relaxation that was already threatening to take hold. But then Draco snapped his fingers, pointing to the space at his feet.

“Crawl to me.”

Another shiver tiptoed down my spine and I found myself falling forward onto my hands, navigating the two shallow stairs easily and crawling on my hands and knees over to him. I'd thought it would feel humiliating. That I'd become indignant. I was a powerful, independent witch, I had helped to defeat the darkest wizard of our time – why in the world would I want to *crawl* as if I were less than? Why would I want to degrade myself in that way?

But as I watched Draco's eyes heat, watched the way his lips parted and his trousers stirred, I felt anything *but* degraded.

I felt powerful.

When I crawled to the space he'd indicated, I sat back on my heels, hands on my thighs palms up, hoping it was what he'd wanted.

"Good," he praised, his fingertips stroking back my hair. "Such a quick study."

My chest warmed under his compliment, arousal coiling in my belly as, with his free hand, he touched the red lounge beside him.

"Lay here and spread your legs wide," he directed.

Immediately I obeyed, surprised at how comfortable the position was with the way the back curved upwards. When I had settled myself, yet with my thighs tightly pressed together, Draco pulled his wand from the inside of his waistcoat, and waved it – vanishing my bra and knickers, leaving me only in the silk thigh high stockings. Before I could protest however, I saw them appear beside my dress and robes on the rack at the other end of the room. He didn't touch my wand where it was holstered on my thigh, seemed to sense that I wouldn't be comfortable parting with it and for that I was grateful.

"Now, I am going to sit right there." He gestured to the overly large wingback chair in the sitting area, perfectly positioned to view the lounge where I lay. "And watch you bring yourself to the point of orgasm."

My mouth popped open and despite the warm gooey feeling seeping through my limbs, my mind revved to life.

"*What?* Why?"

His pale eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Because this is your first scene and we have not properly negotiated beforehand, I will answer your question," he said, his tone dark and ominous. "However, after tonight, if you question me during a scene – unless it is for safety purposes or to save word – you will be punished. Do you understand?"

I swallowed loudly. I had asked for this, had agreed to his terms, had known coming into it I wouldn't be able to railroad him with my questions or endless need for knowledge.

"I..." I grimaced before finally acquiescing. "I understand."

He nodded, sliding a hand through his hair.

“Now, I want you to touch yourself because I want to learn how you please yourself. In the process you are teaching *me* to please *you*. As much as I know you love to research, that was information I just couldn’t find in a book. And believe me, I tried. I read the *Unauthorized Biography of the Golden Girl* front to back and never once did it mention how you liked to make yourself come.”

His lips twisted in an effort to keep the smile off his face, but I wasn’t fooled. The humor rippled through me, pulling a giggle from my throat before I could stop it and the levity burned away the rest of my anxiety.

I had to trust Draco, starting now.

“Yes, Sir,” I replied to let him know I was ready.

Draco’s eyes flashed, as if every time I said *Sir* he couldn’t quite believe it. But the brief moment of humor slipped from his face as he trailed his fingertips across my collarbones and down the line between my breasts. His eyes lingered there, hungrily taking in each rise and fall of my chest until it slid lower to where my knees pressed together.

“Now, let me be clear: I want you to bring yourself to the point of orgasm but you are not allowed to come,” he said, voice low. “If you don’t come, I’ll let you suck my cock any way you’d like.” He knelt before me, hands sliding over my knees to part my thighs and I let him. “If you *do* come, you will be punished. Do you understand?”

His gaze dipped down between my thighs, resting on my core. I watched his nostrils flare, heat filling his irises until they were molten silver in the candle light.

“Yes, Sir, I understand.”

Tapping the inside of my knee once, he nodded.

“Good girl.”

Draco rose, moving away from me with unconscious grace toward the large wingback chair on the opposite side of the room. My heart thrummed in my ears, the ache between my thighs growing deeper as I watched him shrug out of his suit jacket, vanishing it to the coat rack by the door. His waistcoat went next until he was only dressed in his shirt, tie, trousers, and shoes. With deliberate, precise movements he removed his cufflinks, placing them in his pocket before rolling up the sleeves of his shirt, exposing the rigid muscles of his tattooed forearms.

I could feel myself growing wetter by the second.

Finally, he turned to face me fully, his eyes never leaving mine as he slowly lowered himself into the chair – sprawled across it almost as if he were a king. He rested one elbow on the arm, chin resting on his thumb while his fingertip drew across his lips.

“Begin, pet.”

I took a steadying breath before I slid my hands over my knees, up my thighs and over my stomach.

I can do this. I told myself. I can do this.

My fingertips trailed over my breasts, leaving goosebumps in their wake until I circled my nipples, plucking at them until they hardened into peaks. Draco shifted, extending one leg straight while bending the other, as if trying to accommodate for something. Slowly I drew one hand down between my thighs, parting myself for him.

The line of his jaw hardened as if he were restraining himself and the sight made me bolder. I dipped two fingers down to my entrance, gathering my heavy arousal and gliding it back up to my clit, circling once. My body was on fire, needy and desperate for attention. I let out a breathy whimper and Draco's finger stilled on his mouth. He looked suddenly as if he were hewn from stone.

I circled my clit again, hips tilting with the electric shocks of pleasure that skittered across my abdomen and down my legs. Allowed one foot to fall from the lounger onto the floor, giving him a better view of what I was doing. My teeth found my lower lip as I circled another time, twice, three times, until my hips were bucking off the satin cushion and my head had tilted back against the pillow.

Draco moved, undoing the first three buttons of his shirt before shifting forward until his elbows rested on his knees, hands clasped together in front of him. His lips parted, tongue sliding across his teeth and I moaned.

I needed more; I needed *him* . But I knew what he wanted, understood my orders, so I moved my fingers lower, slipping two inside of me and curling them. The heel of my hand pressed against my clit, giving me the friction I needed.

The sounds I was making should be embarrassing, but at this moment, I felt only desire. Felt only the power of holding his attention, his desire, his lust. The feeling spiraled higher, coiling like a tight string ready to snap.

No, no, I wasn't supposed to come .

But before I could stop myself, I broke apart, my body seizing as I rode wave after wave of pleasure. The sounds of my orgasm echoing throughout the room. I squeezed my eyes shut, panting as I slowed my fingers inside myself, my hips lowering back to the silk.

"Oh pet," Draco drawled and my eyes shot open. He was leant back again in the chair, knees spread wide and one hand dangling off the armrest in the picture of indifference, but he couldn't disguise the press of his cock against his trousers. "You've disobeyed me."

Chapter 11

Draco

I was hoping this would happen.

The sight of her falling apart with two of her slim fingers crammed into her cunt was glorious. I'd had to squeeze my hands together, nails biting into my skin, to keep from stroking myself. One touch and I would have exploded.

I'd composed myself enough by the time she came down from her orgasm, trying for an air of nonchalance as she looked at me, her brown eyes bright and cheeks flushed.

"Come here," I commanded, pointing to the space between my feet.

She blinked but obeyed, pushing herself to her feet unsteadily. For a moment I thought she would forget my earlier order but after only a brief hesitation she lowered to her hands and knees. I swallowed, watching the slink of her hips as she crawled to me, unable to stop from staring at the way her full tits hung between her arms, swaying with the movement.

Stopping at the spot I indicated, she sat back onto her heels, taking up the perfect position.

"What did you do?" I asked, coloring my dominant tone with disappointment.

Her eyes shimmered in the light and I could see that she was disappointed in herself too.

"I made myself come," she answered in a small voice.

I leant forward.

"And were you allowed to come, pet?"

Her cheeks flushed and for a moment all I could see were her long lashes against her cheek as she stared at the floor. A perfect show of contrition. *Gods*, she was glorious.

"No, Sir," she replied meekly.

I pressed two fingers beneath her chin, tilting her head back up to me.

"And what happens when good girls disobey, darling?" There was no edge in my voice, no anger, merely confidence.

Her teeth bit into her lower lip and I heard the small breath she took to steady herself.

"They get punished, Sir."

My thumb stroked the line of her jaw before I let her go.

“Yes, pet. They get punished.” I summoned a nearby ottoman and charmed it to the proper height beside my right thigh. “Stand up.”

On shaking legs, she rose as I pulled at the knot of my tie. From where I sat, her nipples were at the perfect height to be licked, sucked, abused – but this was not the moment. I grabbed her arm, pulling her to lay across my lap, her hips pressing into my thigh while her forearms rested on the ottoman.

“I’m going to spank you eight times, and after each one you’ll count and say *thank you, Sir*. Do you understand?”

Her tiny body trembled against me. I smoothed a hand up her spine before grasping her wrists, tugging my tie from around my neck and tying her wrists together so her face was resting on the ottoman instead. I tested the bond, sliding my pinkie finger between her skin and the fabric to ensure it wasn’t too tight before gripping her hair pulling her face to the side so I could better see her face.

It was her first test and one I’d designed for her to fail – I’d known she wouldn’t have been able to stop herself once she got started. These things were always better to get out of the way early and later I would explain the difference between a punishment like this and a true punishment.

“Yes, Sir,” she replied, her voice breathy.

But even for all her nerves, I saw moisture glistening between her thighs. Watched the way she pressed her thighs together as I tightened my grip on her hair and massaged one supple ass cheek with my other hand.

“Why are you being punished, pet?”

She shifted slightly as I pulled my hand away, the anticipation making her tremble further.

“B-because I disobeyed you, Sir,” she said.

“Are you sorry, pet?” I asked, watching her eyes close for a moment before opening again.

“Yes, Sir. I’m so sorry. I –”

My hand came down on the fleshy part of her ass cheek, the ringing *slap* echoing throughout the room. Just as I expected, in the first moment that the pain shot through her, she tensed, but then her whole body relaxed – melting into me as I smoothed my hand over the sting.

“Count, darling,” I reminded her.

She took a slow breath, her voice more even than before.

“One, thank you, Sir.”

I switched to the other cheek, keeping my pressure mild enough not to frighten but hard enough to sting. She wouldn’t be too marked by this but it was a good teaser of what was to come.

“Two, thank you, Sir,” she said, her voice husky as I massaged the burn away.

With each spank I watched her thighs tense, noticed the slide of her arousal until it was dripping down her thighs. Her hips canted, trying to find any friction against my trousers. At four, I paused, brushing her hair out of her face affectionately while my other hand rubbed against her pink cheeks.

“Color?” I checked in.

I removed my hand entirely from her behind, not wanting to influence her answer.

“Green, Sir,” she replied immediately.

“That’s my girl.”

With a featherlight touch I skimmed the dripping space between her thighs, her whimper stirring my cock – already throbbing and hard until I almost thrust against her hips. *Fuck*, if I wasn’t careful, I’d be coming in my trousers before this was even over.

I chose the next spank to land at the junction of her thighs. Her moan was low, almost a growl as the sensation rippled through her body. With a jerk, her wrists moved as if she wanted to push herself up, or perhaps back into my hands and I let out a low chuckle.

“Pet...”

“*Five, thank you Sir,*” she moaned.

I alternated the last three slaps. Left, Right, and the final landing once again between her thighs. My hand came away slick and I leant forward, moving my fingertips in front of her face.

“Look at you, darling. *Dripping* from your punishment,” I crooned, the thumb of my hand in her hair brushing against her temple.

“Thank you, Sir,” she said, her lashes fluttering and cheeks pink.

Both sets of cheeks.

“You took that so well, darling,” I praised, moving my wet hand back to her thighs and drawing my fingertips up the wet skin.

She moaned, almost incoherent in her arousal. Each touch against her skin made her hips jump, circling as she tried to seek me out. I knew she could feel me rock hard against her stomach, knew she could feel the way my hips tilted to try to find the same pressure she so desperately needed.

“Are you ready for your reward?” I said, my voice just as husky as hers had been.

Frantically she nodded, trying to look over her shoulder at me. She was small enough that it was no problem to lift her by the shoulders and place her on her knees in front of me. *Salazar*, the sight of her, hands tied behind her back, breasts thrust forward, eyes bright and shining with just the barest hint of tear tracks on her cheeks. I’d been thinking of this image only the other day and the fantasy was no comparison.

Slowly I opened the placket of my trousers button by button, reaching in to grasp my aching cock and draw it out. Hermione's eyes widened at the sight of me, her teeth biting into her lower lip. I gave it a stroke, a groan slipping through my lips as my cock finally got the attention it needed.

Her thighs pressed together and I knew she was close just from the spanking, but my girl could take more – I knew it. So I slid my other hand around her neck, up into the base of her skull and dragged her face forward. In this position, with her hands bound, she was at my mercy.

Just the way I liked it.

“Kiss it, darling,” I instructed.

Lips pursed, she kissed the tip, drawing back enough to see the silvery precum sticking to her lips and draping to my cock. Her tongue slipped out, licking at her mouth before I brought her back down, those brilliant lips wrapping around the head of my cock.

“Suck.”

She did, her cheeks going hollow. Her tongue flattened, licking glands as I pushed more of her into my mouth before tearing her off.

“If it gets to be too much, conjure red sparks at your fingertips,” I said. “Let me see it.”

I looked behind her shoulder, watching red sparks dance across her digits.

“Perfect,” I complimented, before pushing her back down on my cock.

Her moan vibrated through my cock, my core, my very *being*. I bit my tongue, trying to stop myself from coming and she seemed to sense it, sucking harder as I used her hair to steady her. Instead, I fucked up into her mouth, using my shoulders against the chair to thrust my hips off the cushion and into her. My eyes moved from her face, her eyes watering as I continually hit the back of her throat, to her hands behind her – ready at a moment's notice to release her – when I noticed one of her hands move into the green signal.

“*Such* a good girl,” I moaned. “Letting me fuck your mouth like this. Sucking my cock down like the little slut you are.”

Her eyes widened as she looked up at me. Her pupils were so dilated they were almost pitch black, wetness clinging to her lashes.

“*My* little slut,” I growled.

Another moan vibrated my cock, her thighs pushing together, and I knew she'd be dripping against the floor. I thrust faster, her eyes never leaving mine.

“I'm going to come in your mouth,” I warned, remembering her rating on her boundary list. “And you're going to drink it all down.”

She nodded as best she could around my cock as I felt my release build. My abs tensed, balls contracted, and a thin sheen of sweat dewed on my brows.

“Thirsty, pet?” I groaned.

Her answering moan was loud, almost feral as I canted once, twice, three times, and came with a great cry into her mouth. Her throat worked wildly as she drank down my release, saliva dripping from her mouth and to the floor between our feet.

After a moment I pulled her off me, smiling at the way she leant forward to lick the small bit of fluid left behind before I tucked myself back into my trousers. She was beautiful with her flushed cheeks and swollen lips, like a dream I’d long since forgotten, long since let go of.

“That was magnificent, darling,” I said in a soft voice, running my thumb beneath her wet chin and over her damp cheeks. “I am so, so proud of you.”

Her whole body was pliant as I brushed my lips to her forehead, her cheeks, then snapped my fingers so the knot on the tie released and fell to the floor. My hands moved down over her shoulders, massaging her arms and drawing them forward to rub her wrists as I continued to whisper praise to her. From the dilated look in her eyes and dazed, dreamy expression on her face I knew if she wasn’t in subspace, she was absolutely close.

After another moment I pulled her into my arms, standing in one fluid motion. She nuzzled against my chest, fingertips sliding through the opening in my shirt to touch my skin. I walked us quickly over to the bed, carefully depositing her onto one of the pillows and brushed her long curls from her face.

She stared up at me for a moment, one of her hands catching my wrist and pressing a kiss to the palm. My heart stuttered at the gesture. It was beautiful, how open she was in this moment, as if all her walls had fallen to the ground.

I knew she would struggle with the drop once it came, so I slipped off my shoes, climbed onto the bed and knelt between her thighs. My hands ran over her shoulders, her arms, her breasts, learning each and every curve, divot, and scar on her skin. I let my mouth follow the same path as my hands, kissing, nipping, and sucking her collarbones, the roundness of her breasts, down her stomach to her hips.

Her thighs fell open wider as I worked down her body, hands sliding through my hair as I licked at the arousal spread across her legs. Savoring the sweet and musky taste of her.

“Now, darling,” I rumbled, my breath ghosting across her clit. “It’s time for me to take care of you.”

Chapter 12

Hermione

My body felt like it was floating in a warm bath, all worry, all pain forgotten.

It wasn't like the imperius curse, nothing sinister or strange. Merely complete surrender to the wizard between my thighs. Total trust built by years of friendship and now firmly established boundaries that allowed my mind to quiet and my body to blossom.

Almost reverently his head dipped low as he drew the flat of his tongue up my center. A moan burst from my lips at the contact. I'd become so wet while he'd used my mouth, I had thought a few times I might come merely from the pressure of my thighs together, but now? I wouldn't have been surprised if I came immediately on his tongue.

My hips canted up to meet his mouth as his lips closed over my clit, sucking it gently into his mouth. It was such a contrast to the brutal, swift face fucking he'd given me only minutes ago. This was sweetness, it was the painful, terrifying intimacy I'd always feared. Yet here, with him, I felt only bliss.

"So good for me," he murmured against my clit. "Want to make you feel good too."

One of his long fingers traced my entrance as he licked circles against my clit and my moans became louder.

"*Sir, please*," I begged, fingers threading through his hair.

I tried to ground down on his finger. I needed it inside of me, needed any part of him he would give me. Before I could beg again, he pressed two fingers into me, crooking them up to brush against my g-spot as he sucked my clit more firmly into his mouth.

Stars exploded across my eyes, my orgasm ripping through me like a tidal wave. My back bowed, fingertips scrambling against his scalp as I screamed incoherently. But he didn't let up, not like the first time on his desk. The pressure on my clit lightened, but his fingers continued to massage, crooking over and over until my thighs were shaking and sweat blossomed across my chest.

"One more for me, darling," he murmured to me. "Give me one more."

I shook my head – never once in my life had I come twice in a row. To be honest, even this orgasm was surprising given I'd come only thirty minutes or so ago. But I felt his smile against me as he languidly licked my clit, pushing his fingers deeper until the ridge of his signet ring massaged my walls and I groaned.

"You can do it, Hermione. One more, *for me*."

As if my body was waiting for the words, another wave of pleasure crested and I cried out, his name falling from my lips like a prayer or a plea. A plea for mercy, for retribution, for this to stop, for it to never end.

He brought me down slowly, mouth leaving my body as his fingers slowed.

“That’s it, that’s my girl. That’s my good girl,” he praised. “So good, so perfect.”

My whole body tingled as he kissed up my stomach, his hand pressing firmly between my legs as if he knew the two orgasms that ripped through me left me aching and sensitive. The pressure was nice, grounding, allowing me to find my breath as he rested his elbow beside my face, fingertips brushing my forehead, and his lips closed over mine.

Just as the other times he’d kissed me it felt like so much more than just a kiss. Kissing Ron had become perfunctory all too quickly, much more like kissing a friend than kissing a lover. Victor had been rough, as if he was merely going through the motions of intimacy so we could get to the sex. But kissing Draco was magic. It was light and fire and ice and darkness all rolled into one.

I hoped it was the same for him. A tiny, cackling part of my brain that had been quiet for the entire night suddenly stretched as if from a long nap. All the languid bliss from a moment ago began to fall off me like petals in the wind. What was left felt heavy, raw, and vulnerable.

Arms wrapped around my middle, hauling me up until I was resting between Draco’s thighs, his back against the headboard. I felt the pressure of his mouth against my hair, my forehead, his hands stroking my shoulders and arms.

“It’s called the drop,” he said softly. “It’s normal.”

How strange that he could seem to sense what I was feeling. But the drop was strange, as if sadness and hopelessness had turned into a physical sensation. I tried to push it away, tried to build my stone wall around it, but the mortar wasn’t tight and the feelings snaked through.

Draco conjured a glass of water, pressing it into my hand.

“Drink.”

I did as he asked, trying to ignore the way my hand trembled as I brought the glass to my lips. The water was cool and refreshing – I had no idea how thirsty I was until it hit my lips and I drank it all down greedily.

“Good,” he praised, vanishing the glass when I was done.

Discomfort settled over me as we sat there, his hands rubbing my wrists and arms, careful to avoid the scar on my forearm. When would he ask me to leave? Surely we couldn’t be too far off from that moment.

“I…” I cleared my throat. “I should go.”

He stilled behind me.

“No, you shouldn’t,” he answered, his arms wrapping around my chest and waist, pulling me closer. “I know we both have work in the morning but it’s important you stay for a while longer. Once your aftercare is over, if you’d like to leave you can.”

Aftercare. I remembered mentions of it during my research but it had sounded unnecessary.

“It’s okay, Draco. I don’t need –”

“I’m going to be honest here, Hermione, I don’t care what you think,” he said. Though he had cut across me, his tone wasn’t sharp. It was as if he were reasoning with a toddler. “I am your Dom – unless you’ve changed your mind – and that means it is my job to ensure you are cared for. *Regardless* of if you feel you deserve it.”

Now it was my turn to freeze. He hadn’t said *need*, he had said *deserved*.

Because it was true... At the root of the matter was that I didn’t feel that I deserved to be cared for in this way. A memory floated into my mind, Ron’s face, scrunched with annoyance only a few weeks after the war. I’d asked him to hold me, to comfort me, but he’d rolled his eyes and pulled on his trousers.

You don’t need that, Mione.

I’d understood well enough what he was actually saying. I didn’t deserve it. Not after the lives I’d taken at the battle. Not after I’d survived when Fred had died, when Tonks and Remus had died, when Lavender had died, when Dobby had died.

Those words hadn’t stung as much as what he had said years later, when I had finally confronted him about the photos in the paper and the endless stream of women. He hadn’t cried, hadn’t yelled, merely stared coldly as I’d asked him why. Why he resented me for surviving, why he placed that burden on my shoulders.

Because if I could have chosen anyone to survive, it wouldn’t have been you.

I’d stared at him in shock as he had reminded me of that day. Of the impossible choice I had made between my life and others - it was the *same* choice he had made, the same one countless others had made, but for some reason he had felt that I could have saved them all. That I had a choice of who lived and died and had chosen wrong.

That I should have died to save Fred, regardless of the fact that I was nowhere near him when it happened. Ron was just that confident in my abilities, in my skill of getting us out of trouble, and now I was the reason we’d lost so much.

Put it away. Build a wall.

Control your emotions, a kind voice said, another memory. *You are the only one who can help Harry survive this.*

“Will you let me take care of you?” Draco asked, pulling me back to the present.

...

“How were things with Malfoy last night?” Ginny asked as she stole a crisp off Harry’s plate.

We were seated in the Ministry canteen for our usual Tuesday lunch date if Gin wasn’t away on a game. Harry grumbled before sliding his plate closer to her, knowing it was better to give in than try to fight.

“Um... it was fine,” I replied, pushing my salad around with my fork as if nestled between the leaves might be a way to divert the particular subject at hand.

“Either all the rumors about Malfoy are shite or you’re preferring we discuss something else,” Harry observed.

I wrinkled my nose at him.

“The rumors are... true,” I said with a sigh.

Harry’s green eyes widened while Ginny’s narrowed. She placed her elbows on the table, staring me down.

“Tell. Us. Everything.”

I half expected Harry to put a stop to it. Surely he wasn’t interested in what had happened last night with Malfoy, but instead he leant forward as well, removing his glasses to rub them on his robes as if clean glasses would help him hear better.

“You really want to hear this Harry?” I asked him incredulously.

Harry nodded.

“Either I hear the Prophet version from you or the *Playwizard* version from Pansy once she gets the details out of Malfoy.” He pointed a finger at me. “I choose you.”

My eyes scanned the crowded cafeteria. The din was so loud there was no chance of anyone overhearing us – I also knew Draco had a lunch planned with Pansy, Theo, and Blaise so it wasn’t like he’d stumble into the conversation.

Finally, I relented, regaling them with the bare minimum information about the night. From the dinner, to the rules, to the basics of what had been done – leaving out details like how brutally delicious the face fucking had been and the way I’d come so hard I’d seen stars.

Both of them stared at me wide eyed.

“ *What ?* ” I snapped, feeling self-conscious.

“I knew Malfoy was into that sort of stuff, Hermione, but... *damn* ,” Ginny said, picking up a napkin, and transfiguring it into a fan for herself before turning it on Harry.

Honestly, after the two of them had broken things off I’d been afraid I’d have to choose between my friends, but nothing had been further from the truth. They’d slipped easily into their friendship, no hint of jealousy between them, until they were as close as Harry and I were. Closer than he was now with Ron.

“And here I thought Pansy and I were freaky,” Harry mumbled, almost as if he was disappointed.

"Oh, darling," Ginny said in an approximation of the posh tones of our Slytherin friends while she patted his arm. "You were never much of a Dom."

Harry bit the inside of his cheek, nodding.

"Wait, so all of you have been doing this kind of stuff for *years* and I was just... what? Out here wallowing in plain vanilla sex?" I gasped.

They both blinked at me for a moment.

"Well..." Ginny started.

"Yeah," Harry finished for her.

I shook my head, pressing my fingertips to my eyelids.

"Did he do aftercare?" Gin asked after a moment.

I nodded, sliding my hands off my plate to grab my coffee cup and take a long sip. After I had agreed to let him take care of me, he had cuddled me for a while longer, brushing his fingers through my curls whispering a detangling charm before laying me on my stomach to rub a pain relief potion onto my behind.

He had told me all about the magical warding done on the room and his entire manor, slowly pulling me out of the drop and my dark mood until I felt like myself again. Asking him question after question.

Hours later I had sat at my desk, nestled into the corner of my bedroom, staring at the journal I'd bought. It had been easy enough to catalog the events of the night in the same way I did when we were experimenting with the wolfsbane potion or assessing the Ministry funded homes we had established for packs to reside in until they got on their feet. Event A followed by situation B which led to experience C.

But then I had gotten stuck, unsure of how to explain what I had felt. Emotions were dangerous. Emotions shattered glass and cracked plaster. Emotions shredded my throat and made me forget my own name. Emotions were the enemy.

After the brief discussion of aftercare, I was grateful when Harry changed the subject to Gin's new schedule. The Quidditch season had just started and she was slated to be gone every other weekend for the next few months. I sighed, thinking about how empty the flat would be without her there.

"Don't worry, Hermione. I'm sure Malfoy will keep your plenty busy," Gin said brightly with a wink, not missing the way I'd sighed as she had told us her schedule.

I bit my lip, shrugging.

“I don’t know, Gin. It’s not like we’re dating or anything. He might have even gotten it out of his system – maybe after last night he realized he didn’t actually want me.” My voice started picking up speed as the thought took root. “Perhaps I was actually shit at it, perhaps I made a fool of myself. Perhaps he doesn’t –”

A scarred hand covered mine.

“Blimey take a breath, Hermione,” Harry said, squeezing once. “That’s absolute and total rubbish and you know it.”

I blinked at him. Did I know it?

No, I certainly did not.

“Listen, it doesn’t make sense for *Draco Malfoy*, heir apparent of the Malfoy legacy, Witch Weekly’s most eligible bachelor for the last *three years in a row*, and sex god to want me. Hermione Granger, bookworm, activist, and –”

“Total hottie?” Ginny asked.

“Terrifyingly powerful?” Harry added.

“Brightest Witch of her Age?” Ginny continued.

“Savior of magical creatures?” Harry’s grin started spreading across his face.

“Voted greatest tits in Gryffindor, class of 1998?” Gin completed.

Harry slapped her arm while I gaped at them.

“Hey! She wasn’t supposed to know about that!” Harry snapped. “I made Dean and Seamus take down the posters.”

I shook my head.

“There’s no way. Didn’t you ever see Parvati’s?” I groaned.

Harry grinned, nodding once.

“Well, yeah, just once during the Yule Ball before –”

“HARRY!” we both cried, the tables around us looking over curiously.

Gin’s hand covered my wrist, pulling my attention to her.

“That’s all to say that you have a lot to offer, Hermione. I wouldn’t be surprised if now that Malfoy’s gotten a taste, he’ll be crawling back for more.”

I rolled my eyes, thinking of the way my thighs had ached this morning from my own crawling.

“Well, that would be an unexpected change,” I quipped.

Chapter 13

Draco

“Tell me again, but slower,” Blaise said, leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed.

“Fuck, mate, would you rather I get a pensive?” I asked, rubbing my fingers between my brows.

His eyes snapped open as he lowered the front two legs of his chair onto the ground.

“Would you mind?” he asked hopefully.

I let out a disgusted noise that was covered by Pansy’s cackle and Theo’s loud chuckle.

“Yes, in fact, I would mind. This is none of your business,” I grumbled, pushing away my half-eaten plate.

“Come on, Draco,” Theo said, leaning forward to squeeze my shoulder. “We’re just happy for you. Can you blame us for wanting to bask a little in your joy?”

I raised a brow at him.

“Theo, no less than two minutes ago did you ask me how many times I made her come. How is that you *basking in my joy*?”

Theo’s expression was innocent, as if he saw no problem with the invasive question.

“And?” he asked hopefully.

Pansy took a delicate bite of her soup before lowering the spoon back into the bowl.

“Darling, I know for a fact that Granger is spilling the Bertie Botts to Harry and Gin right now. I owed Red this morning saying not to stop the inquisition until Hermione had been squeezed for every last drop of information.”

“It’s terrifying how close you are with your husband’s ex-girlfriend,” I deadpanned.

Pansy rolled her eyes, flipping back a strand of her hair.

“What’s terrifying is how *quiet* you are about this, Draco. Usually, we can’t get you to stop talking.”

Blaise shook his head.

“I still can’t look at Astoria the same after that one night you two had,” he mumbled.

Theo’s fork stole a bit of salad from my plate.

“I can’t look at her the same after what that bitch did,” Theo muttered darkly.

“*Enough*,” I snapped. I didn’t want to talk about Astoria right now. “This time is different. It’s... it’s private.”

All three of them stared at me as if I’d just announced I’d be running for Minister of Magic. Then, Theo began a slow clap until Blaise and Pansy joined in. Giving them all the finger, I pushed my way to my feet, buttoning my suit coat.

“Okay, fuck you all, I’ll see you tomorrow and not a moment before,” I cautioned, leaning over to peck Pansy’s cheek and leaving the café before the three could do any more damage.

It’s different, it’s private. I repeated to myself as I stepped out onto the street, casting a quick warming charm before I made my way back to the Ministry using one of the visitor entrances beside an old brick wall.

As I strode through the atrium, I couldn’t help but notice the riot of brown curls, piled into a neat bun at the top of her head. Immediately my body stirred and I had to take a deep breath through my nose. Hermione was dressed in dark green trousers, a black long-sleeved turtleneck tucked into the high waist. Even from here I could hear the click of her heels on the marble floors. Each *click* made my cock jump and my stomach tighten.

Picking up my pace, I timed it perfectly so that I slipped into the lift behind her. Before anyone else could join us, I closed the grate and hit the number for my floor. Her nose was buried in a file she had obviously brought with her to lunch, quill already clutched between her teeth as if she’d been making notes before she’d even left the table.

“Hello,” I said softly, leaning against the wall opposite her.

Hermione jumped, her quill falling to the floor as her mouth popped open. With a snap of my fingers the quill zoomed into my hand and I held it out for her. She stared at me for a moment and I could see her brain whirl back to life before she took the quill from me. A small shiver jostled her shoulders as our fingertips touched.

“Hi,” she breathed.

I slid a hand through my hair, trying for nonchalance. What I really wanted to do was hit the stop button, vanish her trousers, and fuck her so hard her screams echoed all the way down to the Department of Mysteries. But I couldn’t - I had made that decision last night. As desperately as I wanted us to have sex, I wanted it to be as *Draco and Hermione*, not Dom and sub. I wanted her to want me for *me*, not just because of the way I dominated her.

“How are you feeling?” I asked, watching the way her eyes flicked over my suit and back up again.

Did she like what she saw? How many times had she panicked between last night and now? From the way her eyes flickered, then went blank, I was willing to bet it was at least twice.

She shrugged, gripping the file closer to her chest as if she could use it as a shield.

“I’m fine,” she answered, her eyes dipping down to my tie pin.

I stepped a little closer.

"I'm not," I said, my voice taking on a bit of huskiness.

Her gaze shot back to mine, eyes wide and shields down. *Good.*

"Because all I want to do right now is rip these clothes off of you to see how pink your ass cheeks are." I stepped even closer, pleased when she didn't back away. "Because I agreed to a budget adjustment for the cup without realizing it because I couldn't stop thinking of the way your tears tasted on your cheeks after you'd been choking on my cock." I reached, slowly pulling the tie out of her hair that was keeping up her bun. "So I'll ask you again, *pet*, how are you?"

She was panting, that telltale flush beginning to creep across her high cheekbones as she looked up at me with those beautiful doe eyes.

"I'm scared," she blurted out, lashes fluttering as if she could somehow pull the words back.

Oh, no, no, no. This would not do and I refused to let her move through the rest of her day afraid. She was *mine* - mine to protect, mine to take care of. I hit the *stop* button on the lift quickly before turning back to her.

"Why are you scared?"

She bit the inside of her cheek, rocking back and forth from one foot to the other, her gaze resolutely on the floor. I resisted the urge to tilt her chin up. If this is what she needed to talk to me then so be it.

"Hermione..."

"Did you en..." She swallowed. "I'm fine."

I raised my brows, assuming she'd been about to ask me if I enjoyed last night. Slow enough as to allow her to step back if she wanted, I smoothed back a stray curl from her face, tucking it behind her ear.

"Did you not just hear what I said? I enjoyed it so much I can't stop thinking about it. *Salazar*, Hermione, I've already made myself come twice today and it's barely 1PM."

Cupping her face in my hands I stepped forward, leveling my gaze with hers.

"I enjoyed it so much I want you to come to mine tonight so we can do it all again," I admitted, thumbs brushing her cheeks. "Will you?"

The relief was so palpable on her face I smiled.

"Of course," she said quickly, before stopping herself. "I mean, yes, all right. That sounds good."

A chuckle escaped through my lips and I bent to kiss her, luxuriating in the way she whimpered as I pressed her mouth open. Licking and sucking at her tongue, nipping at her bottom lip. I was

faintly aware of the sound of papers hitting the floor as she grabbed for the lapels of my suit coat, pushing herself flush against me.

I rumbled a moan, unable to control the impulse to press her against the wall of the lift, grabbing beneath her thighs to hoist her up. My fabric covered cock rutted against her center. I swallowed each and every one of her moans as I fucked her through our clothes, pulling back to watch her face.

She was so fucking beautiful.

“Are you going to come for me like this, pet?” I asked, our moans mingling, echoing through the small space.

Her eyes rolled with my next thrust, thighs tightening around my hips as I squeezed her ass in my hands, pushing her harder against me with every movement. When she didn’t respond I pulled one hand back, giving her a swift spank.

“Yes, Sir,” she cried. “So close.”

I pressed my forehead against hers, trying to stop myself from coming in my trousers but I thought it might be a lost cause. I was too close and she was like the sun, beckoning me in. I would burn, but I would die happy.

She came with a scream, her eyes squeezing shut as her thighs clamped around me. I groaned, biting my tongue to try to stop my release as she shuddered, her cheeks red and flushed, hair wild. I slowed my pace, even though my body was screaming to continue. I was so fucking hard my legs were shaking.

Carefully I set her on her feet then looked her in the eye. She was still panting, eyes bright, all the fear and anxiety from a few minutes ago forgotten.

“Kneel,” I commanded.

Without hesitation she dropped to her knees, already reaching for the placket of my trousers. I pet her head softly, lovingly.

“That’s a good girl,” I crooned. “Already knows how to take care of her Dom.”

Her cheeks flushed red as she drew me out. I gathered up her hair into one of my hands, cupping her face with the other one.

“Open, darling,” I instructed. “Stick out your tongue.”

She complied, sitting back onto her heels as I placed the tip of my cock on her tongue. I moved my hand from her face to my cock – it wouldn’t take long. Especially not with the way she gazed up at me beneath her lashes, a vixen in the guise of a golden princess.

“You look so beautiful like this, balancing my cock on your tongue.”

I stroked myself, my mouth agape as I slid the head of my cock against her tongue again and again until my orgasm erupted through me. Come splattered across her mouth, sliding down her

throat as she struggled to swallow with her mouth open. But like the good girl she was, she didn't move even as her eyelids fluttered and her moans mingled with my own.

"Clean me," I said.

Immediately she licked away the last of my spend before tucking me back into my trousers and doing up the buttons, all while my come clung to her lips and cheeks. I kept her hair back as she brought her fingers to her face, gathering it up and licking it off her hands.

"That's my girl," I said, hauling her to her feet by her hair and kissing her roughly. "Feeling better?"

She nodded as I let go of her hair, stroking her face before sliding my hands down her neck and over her shoulders.

"Yes... much better, actually," she answered.

I smiled, stepping back.

"Turn around," I said, summoning the hair tie I'd thrown to the floor.

She complied, summoning her own papers and quill, and I took my time gathering her hair back up onto the top of her head, twisting it into a knot similar to the one she had done and wrapping the elastic around it. When I was done I bent to kiss the space behind her ear.

"There you go, perfect."

Hitting the button to release the lift, I smoothed a hand over the front of my shirt, adjusting my tie and trying to fix my hair. She watched me with a small smile on her face that radiated to her eyes and back again.

Yes, she was just like the sun. Warm and vital and all the things one needed to blossom and grow.

Right before the lift came to a stop at my floor I closed the space between us again, pulling her into an embrace and kissing her softly.

"Tonight, seven o'clock," I whispered.

She nodded as I stepped away, a blush once again staining her cheeks. As the lift doors opened a few people stood there impatiently but I merely shrugged in their direction.

"Maintenance issue," I said by way of explanation, before calling over my shoulder. "Have a great rest of your day, Hermione."

Fuck, I couldn't wait for tonight and all the wicked things I had planned for her.

Chapter 14

Hermione

I knelt on the cushion beside the door in only my knickers, palms up, knees wide, staring at the glossy floor of the landing beneath me and the black leather riding crop resting on it.

The commotion in my mind was deafening as I knelt, trying to keep in the forefront of my mind the last hour and a half. The gorgeous dinner Draco had provided for us, the light small talk we had participated in about Gin's quidditch schedule, his hopes for her season, and the updates on the new legislation I was trying to pass with Theo. How eventually he'd asked to negotiate the scene about to take place.

I knew the basics of what would happen. I would pick out an implement for him to use from the wall, though he had a right to change it if I had chosen something too intense for a novice, I would kneel and wait for him with whatever I chose in front of me. Then, he would restrain me at some point in the room or perhaps multiple points. I'd agreed to it all, asking questions about each implement on the wall and its use so I could make an informed decision.

From the moment I'd entered the room I'd longed for the silence, for the floaty weightlessness I'd felt last night – but I couldn't find it. Rationally I understood that I needed more than to be in the room, I needed *him*, but for some reason here, alone, I began to panic until my shoulders were shaking and my fingers trembled. Faces skittered past my mind's eye like dead leaves falling from a tree. That acidic burning scorched through me until my chest ached and my eyes pricked uncomfortably. I needed to control it, needed to find the switch to turn it all off.

The door slid open and the soft click of his dragonhide shoes jolted through me. He was here, it would begin, and this cacophony of noise that was strangling me would be lessened.

Or would it? What if I'd become desensitized to it after last night?

I stared at the tips of his shoes, gleaming in the candlelight, as I assumed he was staring at me. The riding crop in front of me vanished.

"Look at me," Draco commanded, and though his Dom voice soothed the rough edges of my chest, my mind still raged.

Yet I obeyed, looking at him as if I were lost in a storm at sea and he the life raft. Close, but just out of reach. He looked at me for another moment, nodded to himself, before walking down the steps and away a few paces, before he patted his thigh.

"Come," he said, before settling himself on the black leather couch near the fire.

My whole body trembled as I fell forward onto my hands, following him to the sofa and kneeling up before him. But he shook his head, gesturing for me to stand. As I did, he grabbed my wrist, throwing me over his lap as he had last night, though I was able to rest on my forearms.

“I can hear your mind screaming from here,” he whispered. “So I’m going to take care of it before we play further. Do you consent?”

The noise that escaped through my throat was somewhere between a whimper and a cry. The walls I’d built were cracking, bulging with the weight of whatever lay beyond it. Panic and anxiety seeped through until my neck was hot and I could feel my pulse in the crooks of my elbows, behind my knees.

“Y-yes, Sir,” I managed, my eyes squeezing shut.

“Good, there’s no need to count. We’ll do twelve and see how you feel.”

Draco brushed the hair from my face, closing one hand over the nape of my neck in a way that, yes, felt dominant but also supportive, *grounding*. His other hand smoothed down my spine, over both cheeks, trying to relax my taut muscles.

It’s a lost cause, I wanted to say. *Don’t waste your time. I should just go. I don’t –*

His hand came down with a resounding *smack* and I arched, trying to push myself up onto my forearms. The grip on my neck stopped me and before I could so much as breathe, his hand came down again on my other cheek before smoothing away the sting.

With each slap my mind quieted and though my body jerked, I felt myself relax for the first time since last night. It was as if he were siphoning poison from a wound, bleaching blood from a white rag. The feeling left in the wake of the noise in my head wasn’t emptiness, it was peacefulness.

“Color, darling?” he asked as his hand massaged my pink skin.

“Green, Sir,” I sighed. “Thank you, Sir.”

Draco gently pulled me up until I was seated on my knees beside him on the couch, his hands stroking my shoulders and arms.

“Ready to continue?” he asked, grey eyes searching mine.

I nodded, feeling steady and calm.

“Yes, Sir. I’m ready,” I replied.

He leant forward, giving me a light kiss on my mouth before drawing back – as if he was trying to control himself – and pushing to his feet. I slid off the cushions and onto the floor, following behind him as he walked away once he patted his thigh again. It was strange how comfortable it already felt, how *right*, to be crawling behind him towards the back left corner of the room where restraints hung from the wall.

“Kneel up,” he said, stopping beside a table that came up to his hip. I could just see the tip of the riding crop I’d chosen hanging off the end.

He reached into the hidden pocket of his waistcoat, withdrawing his wand and flicking it. I jumped, feeling my hair plait itself down my back. He’d told me as much upstairs, that it was

safer to have hair out of the way so it didn't tangle with the restraints, but I couldn't help but be impressed by his spell work.

There was a bitter part of my mind that wanted to chime in: *he's had a lot of practice to get good at those spells with other witches* .

"Stand up, pet," he continued.

Draco held two strips of soft looking leather in his hand, silver buckles dangling off one side. His hair was slightly mussed, eyes dark as he looked me over before flicking his wand again and vanishing my knickers to the rack beside the door. Then, with his free hand, he tucked a stray curl behind my ear.

"Wrists out."

I complied, extending my arms forward, focusing on the confident, practiced way he buckled the first cuff around my wrist – sliding a finger between my skin and the cuff to check the tightness – rather than focusing on the red scar on my left forearm. He completed his movements with the other, fingertips brushing over the angry words reverently, making me shudder. Then, slowly, almost *lovingly* he pressed a kiss to the cursed wound.

It was the first touch I'd received there since it had happened. Even at Shell Cottage, Fleur had shied away from it when she had been healing me. Ron had made me cover it while we had been together. It resisted any glamor, so I had taken to wrapping a bandage around the scar. Even Viktor had recoiled at the sight.

Perhaps it spoke to my eagerness to be with Draco or maybe the way he made me feel that I hadn't even thought to cover it. It truly had never crossed my mind. And now, here he was, kissing the wound his Aunt made, and each kiss held an apology – though he didn't need one. *He* had stopped her, he had made it all stop.

Then and now.

...

Draco

She was beautiful, every bloody inch of her was beautiful. From the crown of her head to the tips of her toes, from her big brain to the shattered pieces of her soul that anyone could see if they spent even a second truly looking. It was an honor to be here with her, an honor that she was placing her trust in my hands, an honor to see her like this.

Without a word I straightened, guiding her over to the ropes dangling from the pulley system and threaded the soft black cords through the silver buckles on her suspension cuffs. Once I had been satisfied they wouldn't come loose, I went to the excess rope looped against the gold anchor point on the wall.

"Ready, pet?" I asked, excitement tinging my tone.

Her eyes sparkled as she looked at me, a small smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

“Yes, Sir,” she answered.

Before I pulled on the rope I paused.

“Tell me your safe words.”

She took a breath, rolling her shoulders back like I’d seen her do a million times in class before answering a professor’s question.

“Red for stop, Yellow for pause, and Green for go,” she recited at top speed.

“That’s my girl.” I grinned at her, before pulling on the ropes.

Her arms were smoothly tugged overhead. I gave another pull just until she was on the tips of her toes.

“Are your shoulders all right?” I asked, wanting to be sure she was as comfortable as she could be.

Hermione nodded, a wide smile drawing across her face. She liked this.

“Yes, Sir, thank you.”

“Good.”

I moved back to the table where I’d vanished the crop to, weighing it in my hands for a moment. It was a perfect choice, the exact implement I would have chosen for her.

Slowly I stepped back into her line of vision, enjoying the way her breasts were thrust forward and up. Unable to resist, I swiped my tongue across one of her rosy peaks before sucking it deeply into my mouth. Her moan rumbled through me as she teetered on her toes, but I let her struggle with her balance while I sucked, nibbling lightly on her nipple before I pulled off with a *pop*. She was panting, eyes bright, the gold standing out against the brown as she looked at me.

I moved the crop up, sliding the wide leather tongue over her cheekbones and across her mouth. Her lids fluttered as I slid it down her neck and between her breasts. Circling one, then the other, before pulling back and softly flicking the tress across the nipple she surely had thought I’d forgotten.

Her gasp was small, more one of surprise than from the sting and I cataloged it as I snapped it against her other peak. She jerked in the bonds, her head hanging back as I worked a rhythm between them, faint pink marks from the tongue blossoming across her olive skin. My cock was aching at the sight.

I stepped back to observe her. She tilted her head forward, eyes dark and cheeks pink, but she didn’t look overheated or in danger of fainting as sometimes happened when individuals were in upright suspension.

“Green, Sir,” she said without my asking.

Stroking her cheek, I smiled.

“Very good, pet. Thank you.”

Gently I slid my hand down her face, over her neck, pausing on the marks against her breasts before I circled behind her, letting my hand trace the curve of her hip. I snapped the crop forward, a pink line immediately dewing across the curve of her cheek. *Fuck* it was gorgeous the way her skin reacted, almost as gorgeous as the sounds she was making.

...

Hermione

The sting was delicious, quick and biting, but didn't linger the way I expected.

My moans had started small as he had worked over my breasts, but by the time he'd moved to my backside they had grown louder. Mind solely focused on the sensation, on the sound of the leather hitting my skin.

Yet as I danced there on the tips of my toes, my shoulders began to ache and my head spun. I tried to fight the dizziness as he rounded in front of me again and I blinked slowly.

“Color, darling,” he said.

“Yellow, Sir,” I murmured instinctually.

Immediately the crop left my skin and he stepped forward, hands under my hips to pull me from the ground to remove some of the weight from my arms.

“What needs to be adjusted?” he asked seriously, grey eyes moving over the cuffs and ropes overhead.

I shook my head.

“My shoulders, they're starting to...” But before I could finish the sentence, he had pulled out his wand, flicking it towards the pulley system and the ropes had sprung from the coil, slowly lowering my arms until they landed around his shoulders.

Disappointment echoed through me and a small voice in my mind told me I'd ruined it – ruined the scene. It had felt so good, I hadn't wanted it to end but then I had to open my mouth.

“Thank you for telling me,” he said, kissing my cheeks while he kept one hand around my waist, the other in my hair. “I'm so proud of you for saying something.”

Some of the disappointment melted away at his words as he vanished the ropes and cuffs from my wrists. I wrapped my arms tighter around him, loving the feeling of the expensive fabric of his shirt and waistcoat against my tender breasts, the feel of his leather belt biting into my inner thighs. He kissed my cheeks, my neck, my shoulder and back up again, walking us away from the suspension rack.

Gently he placed me on my feet, brushing the curls from my face and placing a lingering kiss to my lips.

“Would you like to continue?” he asked, massaging my shoulders.

I nodded eagerly.

“Yes, I’m sorry for –”

“No,” he snapped. “Never apologize for using your safe words, Hermione. That’s what they’re there for. There may be times where I might use them as well, would you want me to apologize?”

Biting the inside of my cheek I shook my head and he smiled.

“No, of course not,” I murmured.

His lips brushed mine once more, thumbs pressing into my upper arms to force the tight muscles to relax.

“Of course not,” he echoed. “Just as I don’t want you apologizing for using them, understand?”

“Yes,” I breathed. “I understand, Sir.”

“Good,” he praised before stepping back and patting the spanking bench beside him.

It looked almost like a tiny picnic bench with its one tall black leather cushion and two shorter cushions on either side. With a flick of his wand the height of the sides lifted slightly.

“Rest your torso here,” he instructed, sliding his hand along the middle cushion. “Your knees go here, on the sides.”

As I got into position, I had to admit it was surprisingly comfortable. There was a silver bar beneath that I was easily able to grab hold of, though I imagined if he wanted to, he could also restrain my wrists to it. From this position he also had clear access to my ass and thighs without having to worry about my straining.

I heard, rather than saw, him move back to the wall of implements. Before I could ask, I felt the tickling slide of leather straps against my back, swirling down to my cheeks and back up again.

“This, pet, is a flogger,” he explained, his voice dropping low. “It’s one of my very favorite tools.”

He dragged the flogger up one thigh then down the other before it disappeared. I took slow, shallow breaths, trying to calm the anticipation before I felt the sting of the leather against my behind.

It was a different sensation than the crop, less localized – the feeling spreading out until warmth pooled in my belly as the flogger cycled over each cheek and each thigh. I pressed my face to the warm leather, my toes curling with each strike.

“It looks like you like it too, pet,” he growled. “You’re making quite the mess of my bench.”

A whimper escaped my lips as the flogger cascaded over my left ass cheek, my hips canting as if to follow the movement.

“Is my girl needy?” Draco asked as the leather stung against my right cheek.

My answering moan was loud, almost guttural.

“ *Yes, Sir* ,” I groaned, trying to rub my clit against the bench but finding no friction.

The flogger hit my thigh next and I felt another gush of need trickle down onto the bench.

“Tell me what you need, pet,” he commanded.

“Your tongue,” I cried without thinking as the leather hit my other thigh. “Please, please, Sir, I need your tongue.”

The flogger fell to the floor with a *thump* and not even a second later I felt the flat of Draco’s tongue glide across my entrance.

“Good girl,” he praised between licks. “Hold on tight to the handle and do not move. If you move you don’t get to come. Say that you understand.”

I nodded frantically.

“I understand, Sir,” I gasped as his tongue delved into my core.

My hips wanted to buck, I wanted to push myself closer to his face, but I fought the urge even as a wail escaped between my lips. As his tongue worked my entrance, his thumb brushed against my clit, the metal ridge of his ring massaging again and again across the sensitive bud.

I was sweating, shaking in an effort not to move as the pressure within me built. It was hot and thick, the need for him. I wanted more than his tongue, I wanted his cock, wanted to see his naked body covered with those tattoos. Wanted him moaning too.

My orgasm crashed over me, a scream ripping from my lungs as he kept pace until I was squirming, trying to release myself from his hold.

“ *Draco, Draco, Sir, yes, please, Sir, Draco, Thank you, Gods, yes.* ”

Chapter 15

Draco

Forever.

I thought perhaps, I could do this forever.

Hermione was laid on her front on the sheets, her hair a riot of long curls against the silk as I sat beside her, smoothing pain relief potion over her shoulders and down her back.

“I just can’t seem to get a definite idea of what the Wizarding World did with the lycanthropic population before 1970,” she murmured, frustration tinging her words.

“Is there nothing in the archives?” I asked, knowing it was a stupid question.

If there was a stone to be unturned, Hermione would have gotten her hands on it by now.

She shook her head and I plucked the curls from her back where they stuck to the potion.

“No,” she huffed, as if the lack of information was a personal insult. “Apparently during the war *that bitch* got rid of hundreds of volumes about magical creatures and how the Ministry interacted with them. She was trying to rewrite history as if they had always been our enemies.”

That bitch, I knew, was Dolores Umbridge.

“So go to the other archive,” I said simply, thumbs digging into the muscles on her neck.

She shifted and I saw her brows draw together.

“What do you mean, other archive?” she snapped.

I chuckled, pulling my hands back so she could push herself onto her forearms.

“I mean, why don’t you go to the Wizarding Library at Oxford and look at their archives,” I clarified, trying to keep the smug tone out of my voice.

She groaned, rolling her eyes before she plopped down onto the bed again.

“Oh, yes, the Wizarding Library at Oxford with a five year waitlist, how could I have forgotten.”

Oh fuck, this was going to be good. It also fit perfectly with the plan that had been formulating in my mind. I wanted this to be more than just scenes, more than just domination – I wanted to take Hermione Granger on a date.

What better place to start than giving her this? I knew as far as dates went it wasn’t entirely conventional, especially given that the moment she stepped foot into the place I wouldn’t see her

again until closing time when I would have to drag her out by the hair, but *still* . For her, that was the equivalent to a five star meal.

“I can take you,” I said conversationally.

“Ha-ha, very funny,” she groaned.

“No, truly, Hermione. The Malfoys helped build the library, we still donate tons of galleons every year. That means I get unrestricted access to the archives and library whenever I want.”

She pushed to a seat with a squeak.

“ *What? Really? And you’d... you’d take me?*”

I nodded, enjoying the flush that darkened her cheeks and the way her breasts moved with each excited breath.

“Of course,” I said too quickly. *I’d do anything for you* , I wanted to add. But I cleared my throat, unbuttoning one of the fastenings of my collar.

Her eyes tracked the movement, dipping over my Azkaban prisoner tattoo and what little she could see of the script on my chest. Without another word I pushed her back onto the bed, encouraging her to lay again on her front so I could continue to work.

“How many tattoos do you have?” she asked, eyes bright and jumping slightly as I dug into a knot at the tip of her shoulder blade.

Sliding my hands down to her low back I couldn’t help but smirk at the low moan she made when my fingertips brushed the pink marks across her ass.

“A lot,” I replied.

She lifted onto her forearms and looked over her shoulder.

“Really? Out of all the words in the English language you could have chosen to answer that question you chose *a lot* ?”

I shrugged, pausing to swipe more potion from the container before smoothing my hands over her reddened ass cheeks. Her hiss turned into another moan and she dropped back to the bed.

“I’ve never counted,” I answered truthfully. “But it’s a lot. I have them on both arms, across my chest, my back, and down one leg.”

She hummed as I switched to her other cheek.

“Can I see them?”

I paused, surprised. At this point in my life I so rarely stepped outside of a kink relationship, it had felt second nature not to disrobe. Fuck, for the last ten years I’d almost always kept my clothes on. It was one of my biggest kinks that had, perhaps, turned into a defense mechanism. Deep down I knew the reason: part of me felt that I was more desirable in my Dom persona than just as Draco Malfoy.

When I didn't answer immediately, she pushed back up onto her elbows and looked at me, her eyes suddenly deep with concern.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have presumed..." her voice trailed off.

I shook my head, resuming my work, sliding my hands down to her pink thighs. I could do this *for her*.

"Don't apologize," I said. "It's just... I haven't shown anyone in a long time."

She blinked, confused.

"I thought you had a girlfriend only a year ago?" she asked tentatively.

I shrugged, focusing my attention on her calves, not wanting them to be sore from her time suspended on her tiptoes.

"I don't think it ever crossed her mind," I said darkly before shaking my head.

No, I had no desire to continue this conversation into dangerous waters. And, Circe bless her, Hermione seemed to pick up on that fact. A soft smile tugged at the corner of her mouth and she reached a tentative hand to close over my wrist, her thumb brushing against one of the constellations tattooed there.

"Well, if you ever want to show me, I'd like to see them," she said softly, almost shyly before she laid her head back on the bed.

I rubbed the last of the potion into her skin before taking a deep breath.

"I want you to see them," I said just as softly.

Perhaps this would be aftercare for me too in a way depending on her reaction.

"Sit up," I ordered, before stopping myself. *No, Draco, this was not a scene*. "That is, if you'd like to."

I didn't want this to be a scene. I wanted her to see *me*, not just the Dom side of me. But still she scrambled to a seat with her legs out in front of her, eyes alight like a kid – or Potter – in front of Quality Quidditch Supplies.

Slowly I stood from the bed, my eyes never leaving hers as I began to unroll my cuffs. Her teeth bit into her lower lip, obviously trying to hide her grin as she watched. I'd long since lost my tie and waistcoat during the night's activities and pulled my shirt from where it was tucked into my trousers. I took a deep, steadying breath, trying to quell the vulnerability fluttering inside my chest.

Fuck... well... Here goes nothing.

...

Hermione

I was trying my damndest not to jump up and down like a kid on Christmas day.

Draco's eyes were hot as his long fingers, clad in those silver rings, reached for the pearlescent buttons of his custom shirt. I could see a slight tremble in his fingertips as he slid the first button free of the hole.

Why was he so nervous? What in the world could have possibly happened to make him feel this way?

To be honest, I knew very little about his past relationships. He had never brought Astoria – his most recent relationship – around us for pub nights or Sunday dinners, even though they had been together for almost a year. I realized now that she'd been more of a sub than a girlfriend and from the way Pansy occasionally referred to her as *that venom spitting bitch* I assumed things hadn't ended well. Now I wanted to find Astoria Greengrass (and whoever else he'd been with) and perhaps throttle her around the face for whatever she might have done to make Draco feel this way.

Finally he reached the last button, opening the fabric slowly and letting it fall to the floor. My gasp echoed throughout the room and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Draco," I breathed. "They're *beautiful*."

Yet beautiful didn't even begin to describe them. I'd seen his forearm tattoos many times but never past his elbow. A man like Draco Malfoy almost never wore t-shirts and I didn't think I'd ever seen him in one. Even in his Quidditch gear, the gauntlets and padding hid the majority of his skin. But *gods*, now I thought it was an insult to eyeballs everywhere that no one got to look upon this masterpiece. That wasn't even to mention his body, all cut muscle and fine lines, his pale skin a gleaming contrast to the tattoos on his skin and the scars he'd acquired from his life.

His right arm was a patchwork of different black and grey pieces, from the smattering of devils snare that wrapped around his wrist and spread out onto his hand, curling around the protection rune inked there, to the winding snake across the top of his forearms nestled into an arrangement of narcissus flowers, to an ornate dagger on his bicep surrounded by black smoke in which I could just make out a mask, to. Across his right collarbone, in flowing, ornate script was the latin phrase: *mors tua, vita mea*.

Your death, my life.

It was one of the few tattoos that had been discussed in our friend group after he had gotten it done. Theo, I knew, had a matching one across his left collarbone. They had gotten them to signify their freedom from the Death Eater regime, from Voldemort.

His left arm held the night sky, stars twinkling in different constellations against his skin. Swirls of black and midnight blue cascaded from his wrist, up his shoulder, and over his chest. I made a small appreciative noise as I looked. He'd rotated his forearm so I could see the inside, the faded black skull and snake almost completely hidden by the swirling black night. I'd known from talking to Theo about different magical cures that the skin there refused to take on ink or glamor, but Draco didn't seem to need it.

“One constellation, or star, for each of my Black family members,” he said softly, dragging his fingertips up and over his shoulder. “Sirius, Andromeda, Regulus.” He took a deep breath. “Bellatrix and... me.”

My brows pulled together, pulse beginning to thrum in my ears.

“Why would you include Bellatrix?” I asked, trying to keep the surprise out of my tone.

But he only smiled sadly, his fingertips brushing the constellation near his bicep.

“Because once she was merely a girl who made the wrong choice. Just as Regulus had before he tried to fix everything. Just like Sirius and Andromeda before they made choices for the light. I honor my family and, in that honor, I forgive them for their past.” He looked back at me then, a fierce heat in his eyes. “I forgave Bellatrix for myself, not for her. So I could heal and move past what she had done.”

Words hung in the air between us, unspoken, unsure. My pulse roared in my ears before I saw my wall, stacking the bricks up higher against the torrent of emotion. I could almost hear him asking me silently.

Have you forgiven her? Have you healed? Have you moved past what she did to you? To us?

But he didn’t speak it. Instead, he touched the large rune inked in the center of his chest, over the deepest *sectumsempra* scar. The rune was simple, in many ways it looked like an arrow with two points stacked on top of the other, though the left side of the points were missing.

“*Os*,” he said, though I hadn’t needed him to tell me.

“You got the symbol for *God* tattooed on your chest?” I raised a brow in a way I hoped was playful. “That confident in your abilities?”

He rolled his eyes and I was grateful when a smile turned up his mouth.

“Cheeky witch,” he said, grabbing my ankle and tugging me to the edge of the bed. His hands threaded through my hair, tilting my head up. “That’s not the only meaning of the rune and you know it.”

My breath hitched in my throat as he leant down, his lips ghosting over mine.

“What is the other meaning of the run *Os*, Miss Granger?” he rumbled low.

Heat flooded my belly, arousal starting to slip between my thighs as he tugged harder on my hair.

“Hope,” I answered breathlessly.

He nodded, slotting his mouth over mine and kissing me until I was sure I was going to combust.

“That’s enough show and tell for one night,” he growled, parting my thighs and pushing me back onto the bed.

“But Draco,” I groaned.

“Less talking pet, I need a little midnight snack,” he whispered, before devouring me whole.

Chapter 16

Hermione

My mind kept replaying our last conversation from the night before.

“How far do you want this to go?” Draco asked, brushing my hair from my face as I nuzzled into his bare chest.

I sighed contentedly as his fingertips began to massage my scalp.

“What do you mean?” I asked sleepily.

“Well,” he started, his voice suddenly lacking a small bit of his usual confidence. “Do you want us to keep this to the bedroom or do you want more?”

I thought, perhaps, there was something else lingering around his question, but I told myself it was merely wishful thinking.

“Are you asking if I want you to dominate me outside of your sex dungeon?” I asked, trying for levity.

He chuckled, lips pressing against my forehead for a moment.

“I suppose that is what I’m asking. I want things to be clear between us, Hermione. No misunderstandings – especially considering what I did in light of this afternoon.”

I thought about it for a long moment. Thought of how he grounded me that night at the pub last week, how that afternoon he’d taken all of my fears and scattered them like my papers in the lift.

“I think I wouldn’t mind a light version of 24/7 Total Power Exchange,” I said finally, my stomach curling into knots. “That is... if you do.” Hastily I added. “And of course, as long as it doesn’t interfere with work.”

Draco pulled me closer, lips brushing my temple, my cheek, my nose.

“That’s what I want too,” he said softly.

But I was already falling asleep. He was saying something else, but I couldn’t quite understand the words.

Now I was wondering if that was a good idea as I sat at the booth at the pub, waiting for Blaise and Ginny to get back with our first round of drinks. Draco and the rest of them hadn’t arrived yet and the calm, self-assuredness I’d felt last night in his arms had burned away into the fire of anxiety.

What if I'd come on too strong? What if he'd felt trapped into saying yes?

What if? What if? What if?

Just then the door of the Leaky swung open and Draco strode through, heavy black outer robes dusted with the early December snowfall. His pale cheeks were rosy from the cold but his eyes were heated as he spotted me from across the room.

Earlier in the evening, Dominus had been waiting on the perch beside the charmed window we used for post, a beautiful wax sealed envelope tied to his leg. Inside had been a thick folded bundle of parchment labeled *Dominant/submissive Contract* but it was the small scrap of paper that had caught my eye:

Pet, wear the black sweater dress from two Sunday dinners ago. No knickers or you'll be punished. – D.L.M.

I had stared at the note for a full two minutes before spotting the small postscript at the bottom:

Please read this contract thoroughly and be ready to discuss tomorrow. I'm looking forward to seeing my girl tonight.

That was all it had taken to send me tearing off into my closet, downright shocking Gin and Blaise when I was ready before them.

Draco strode into the pub with an easy grace, his eyes locked on me. A blonde witch tried to stop him, but he didn't so much as acknowledge the hand she'd placed on his arm. It was as if he was a shooting star on a trajectory no one could stop.

As he walked, he drew his hands up and slowly, finger by finger, pulled off his black leather gloves. *Gods*, I couldn't understand why they were so appealing, but combined with his white-blond hair, his all-black suit, outer robes, complete with the black gloves made him look like a fallen angel.

"Hello, pet," he rumbled as he stopped at our usual booth, his grey eyes heated to a dark silver.

"Hello, Sir," I replied breathlessly.

We stared at each other for a long moment while he tucked his gloves into his pockets and shrugged out of his robes, revealing the perfectly tailored black suit. I wanted to moan while his eyes raked over the cowl neckline of my black sweater dress and the way it hugged what little he could see of my body. The dress had been a bit nicer than what I would normally wear to the pub, but next to him we would look like we matched in a way... almost like we belonged *together*.

I wondered if he planned it that way.

Did he want me as I wanted him? Or was this all wishful thinking?

A slow smirk pulled up the side of his face as we stared until I took a shaky breath.

“Damn, Gin, I think this time I might be pregnant,” Blaise said, cutting through the moment. “We’ve been standing here for at least a minute trying to talk to you both.”

My shoulders relaxed and I exhaled loudly, gratefully taking the proffered firewhiskey from Gin who slid in beside me.

“Sorry,” I said quickly.

“That’s my spot, Red,” Draco said.

The grin Ginny flashed at him was enough to show that she had known perfectly well.

“Just wanted to see if you’d stake your claim, *ferret*,” she quipped, sliding out to take a seat next to Blaise.

Draco rolled his eyes as he hung up his coat and slid into the booth beside me. It didn’t take long for Theo to arrive, dragging Charlie in by the hand, with Pansy and Harry following close behind.

“Hello, my darlings,” Pansy greeted, stopping to kiss us all on the cheek.

She reached me last, placing delicate fingers below my jaw to look at me.

“This is a witch who looks well and thoroughly satisfied, Draco,” she commented as if she were talking about the weather. “Nicely done.”

I blushed, batting her hands away when she tried to “fix” my hair.

“Ah! Pansy, get off.”

Theo wagged his eyebrows at me from across the table where Blaise currently had him in a headlock.

“You. Have. A. Husband,” Blaise was scolding him. “Leave my girlfriend *alone!*”

Ginny was reaching over Blaise for Theo, her hands scrunching in the air.

“Oh! But! He’s just so pretty, Blaise! Let me play with him, just for a little while!”

Thick, burly arms wrapped around my shoulders as Charlie leant down to embrace me.

“Hullo, ’Mione,” Charlie said. “You all right?”

I smiled at my favorite dragon tamer as he pulled away.

“I’m great, Charlie. So happy you could join us tonight, I thought you weren’t coming back from the reserve until Friday?”

Charlie shrugged, taking the glass of mead Draco handed him with a nod before clinking his glass against Draco’s.

“That’s right, but *this one* .” He gestured to Theo who had just managed to slip out of Blaise’s grasp. “Gave me an offer I just couldn’t refuse.”

Charlie’s blue eyes sparkled for a moment with so much excitement part of me wanted to ask what the offer was, but I figured it was probably better not to. Especially given I was apparently the most sexually bland person in our friend group. He gave me one more squeeze before circling the table to sit beside Theo while Pansy settled on the chair beside the bench.

Pansy and Harry were deep in discussion so I took a moment to breathe, sipping at my firewhiskey before stealing a glance at Draco. He was listening to whatever Gin was telling him about her most recent practice, the aristocratic lines of his face serious with his concentration. But as I watched, his hand slid across my knee where it was crossed away from him, and tugged until my legs separated.

I bit the inside of my cheek as his hand gripped me tighter, possessively, all the while he asked Gin a question about the reserve players of the Harpies. But I couldn’t seem to follow their conversation, not with the way his fingers were slowly sliding up the inside of my thigh.

Gods , here? Now? No, no way.

Instinctually I squeezed my thighs together tightly, trying to stop his trajectory upwards, but his hand was too large and he was too strong. With barely any effort he pulled my legs apart again, then gave a small slap to the inside of my thigh. His message was crystal clear:

Behave.

Suddenly the room was too bright, regardless of how dim it was. The sounds too loud, voices nasal and screeching in my ear drums. My breath started in quick pants and I tried to focus on something – *anything* – to keep me afloat. I had read the contract, knew he was merely doing what we had agreed upon, especially when I had skimmed through the documents to see they were items we had already discussed and sent back a confirmation with Dominus.

But I thought it could have been his lack of attention, the way he’d been speaking to Gin as if I didn’t exist – didn’t matter.

Draco’s hand disappeared from my thigh, his arm wrapping instead around my shoulders and pulling me into his side.

“Focus on the glass in your hands,” he said quietly. “Feel how the bottom is cold, where the whiskey and the ice cube are, but the top is warm from your skin.”

As he spoke, I found myself able to focus on what he was describing.

“Take a breath, darling,” he said, his voice like a caress.

I took a breath.

“Very good, I’m so proud of you,” he praised, pressing a kiss to my temple.

A small smile curved my mouth, burning away the dark feeling pounding on the other side of my walls. His thumb stroked my arm while his other hand brushed my curls from my face so he could tilt my head towards him.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly beneath the din of conversation around us.

I assumed the rest of the group was doing their best to give us space – *for once* . Shaking my head, I placed my hand on his thigh and squeezed.

“It’s okay – *I’m* sorry. I just…” his hand cupped my cheek, thumb brushing against my bottom lip, silencing me.

“There is never any reason to apologize for that, darling,” he said firmly. “I think I know what the problem was, but later I’d like for us to discuss it further so it doesn’t happen again, yes?”

Warmth bled through my chest and all the stimulation around us smoothed out. It was fine, he wasn’t mad, and I was safe, here, in his arms. Draco smiled at me, bending to brush his lips against mine in a chaste kiss that was broken by the sound of spluttering.

“Fuck, Hermione, really?” a voice I would have preferred never to hear again screeched.

We both turned towards the voice and a stone dropped into the pit of my stomach. Ron was standing beside Charlie, a hand on his older brother’s shoulder, while staring at me and where Draco’s arm still rested across my shoulders. Charlie’s hand closed over Ron’s wrist, pulling his hand off but keeping a hold of it.

“It’s none of your business, Ron,” Gin spat from across the table.

I was frozen to the spot as red seeped through Ron’s cheeks, his ears turning bright pink.

“After everything that has happened – after everyone I lost – you would choose *him*?” He stared at me for a moment, but I couldn’t speak. Invisible hands had wrapped around my throat, constricting my airway. My mouth opened, then closed. “What? Decided to become some Death Eater slag since nobody else would take you?” he sneered, pointing at Draco.

Charlie pushed to his feet, jerking Ron’s arm while Harry rose as well.

“That’s out of order Ron,” Harry said firmly. “Draco is no more a death eater now than I – ”

I thought I was going to be sick, my stomach churned violently and the noise within my mind was almost deafening. My heartbeat pulsed in the crooks of my elbows, behind my eyes, giving a rhythm to the words I could hear in my head, the list of names in my mind I needed to tune out. I could barely hear Draco as he calmly slid from the booth, buttoning his jacket with all the grace and smoothness of an aristocrat.

Ron’s voice was more than a reminder of what he had said to me, more than the way he’d treated me in our relationship. The pointed comments about my clothes, my hair, my weight, the

expectations he had that I wasn't achieving. It was his voice, screaming through the castle for Fred. His wand shaking as he tried to kill Rowle but was unable to produce the curse. It was my voice, my lips forming the incantation and killing the Death Eater for him, to save us.

The way a small piece of my soul had chipped away, never to be found again.

"I'm only going to say this once," Draco said, his voice dropping low as he moved in front of Ron. It was his Dom voice but different, edged with the promise of pain. "Say whatever you like about me." He stepped closer to Ron while Harry stepped back, positioning himself beside Draco. "But you will keep Hermione's name off your tongue or I will remove it for you."

Ron spluttered again, taking an unconscious step back while Charlie held him in place.

I felt rather than saw Gin slide in beside me, her hand wrapping around my wrist.

"I want to leave, Gin," I said through the din in my head.

Her response wasn't audible over the sounds of Ron yelling.

"He just threatened me! Harry! You need to arrest him!"

"Funny, Ron, but I seem to have gone temporarily deaf," Harry replied.

Ginny was tugging on my arm, pulling me from the booth while Blaise stepped up behind us, no doubt shielding me from Ron's view.

Gone were the days of Hermione Granger standing up to Ron Weasley, of berating him for his poor conduct and terrible manners. Because the thing was, no matter how wrong he might have been... I couldn't blame him. If I could go back and do the battle all again, if I could have saved just one more life in the place of my own, perhaps then I would have been redeemed.

Perhaps it was preferable to the din inside my head, and the feeling of bugs crawling across my skin, and the way I couldn't seem to breathe in enough air.

The scent of cedar and spice surrounded me – *Blaise*, I realized – before the world spun on the spot and we landed inside the flat, my knees buckling in his arms.

...

Draco

"He just threatened me! Harry! You need to arrest him!" the Weasel cried in his nasal tone.

I didn't take my eyes off the git, but I could sense that Potter was close behind, with Theo and Pansy just on my other side. Charlie was giving me a grin, as if he was enjoying nothing more than seeing his youngest brother receive a verbal lashing.

My pulse was pounding in my ears, but I was completely under control. I didn't give a fuck what this prat said about me but I did, however, take issue with what he had said about Hermione.

"Funny, Ron, but I seem to have gone temporarily deaf," Harry deadpanned.

“Do you understand me, Weasley?” I asked, stepping closer and forcing him to look up.

Internally I thanked my ancestors for my height.

“Fuck you, *Death Eater*,” he gritted through his teeth. “Fuck you and Her –”

My hand shot out, gripping him by the throat. His eyes went wide as he wheezed in a breath. I wasn’t squeezing hard, just enough for him to feel how easily I could crush his windpipe without even breaking a sweat.

A shimmer of magic bubbled around us and I knew Potter had just warded our area to stop any attention we might get.

“You know what one of the worst things is about being an only child?” I asked conversationally. “It’s that I become quite possessive of what’s mine. I struggle to share, always have, always will. Even Potter can attest to that at Sunday night dinners, can’t you Potter?”

Potter chuckled. “It’s true, I never can convince you to share whenever Pansy makes that trifle.”

“So, you see, when someone comes in trying to act as if they have a right to take what’s mine, to twist it and break it into something unrecognizable, I tend to act a bit... irrationally.” I squeezed the Weasel’s throat a little tighter to illustrate my point. His eyes widened further, as if the reality of his situation was just occurring to him. “Your goal with that little scene was to take what Hermione feels for me and change it into something that she should be ashamed of. She is *mine* and I protect what’s mine.”

The red from his cheeks and ears was slowly draining to a sickly pale as his eyes flicked from me, to Potter, to Theo, and back again. He couldn’t see his brother from where he was standing, but I saw Charlie’s wrist flex as he tightened his grip.

“We are all on to your game of trying to keep Hermione’s attention on you. To the sick satisfaction you get of knowing you still affect her. But that’s finished, *tonight*. The next time I so much as see the top of your mangey head on a Thursday night in this bar I’ll show you every bit of dark magic I ever learned from the Dark Lord and Potter will help me get away with it. Do you understand?”

He gave a short, jerky nod and I smiled my biggest, warmest smile.

“Say it.”

“I – I understand.”

I let go of his throat, patting him once on the cheek.

“Very good,” I mocked, before turning to Charlie. “Would you mind?”

Charlie nodded, a grin still on his face as he jerked Ron away.

“Come on, I think mum deserves a bit of a visit, don’t you?”

Ron's face paled further if it was possible and I knew regardless of whatever fear I'd just inflicted on him, the threat of his mother was even worse.

We stood there until both sets of red hair disappeared through the door before I sighed, running a hand through my hair while Potter clapped me on the shoulder.

"Proud of you, Malfoy. I was sure I'd have a mess to clean up in here. Though I assume you'll have your chance, I doubt he'll listen for long," Potter said. "Ron's stubbornness prevents him from letting things go."

"I don't know," Theo grumbled. "I bet we could still catch him before they disapparate."

I shook my head, turning to reassure myself that Hermione was okay, but froze when I saw the empty booth and chairs where she, Ginny, and Blaise had been sitting.

"Fuck," I cursed. "She's gone."

Chapter 17

Draco

I apparated with a *crack* on the doorstep of the Wizarding complex where Hermione and Red lived. It was more of a townhome split into flats, the large looming brick façade giving off a faint glow from the lights inside the windows.

The wards allowed me to enter through the front door and I took the stairs two at a time to the top of the landing where their faded blue door sat. I tried for the knob but it didn't turn. Before I could even lift my fist to pound on the wood, the door swung open and Blaise stood in the doorway, his face pinched with stress.

"Thank fuck," he said, grabbing me by the shoulder and pulling me in.

My heartbeat picked up, my stomach twisting with worry.

"Where is she?" I asked. "How is she?"

Blaise shook his head, running a hand over his short-cropped hair.

"She's in her room. She's... I don't know. If I didn't know her so well, I'd say she's fine, Draco, but she's too fine. It's scary how calm she is."

Occlumency.

I had only been here a handful of times, but I remembered where the room was well enough. We walked through the cozy living area with its worn grey sofa, sleek armchair Blaise had moved in last year, and telly. At the hall he squeezed my shoulder before turning to make his way into the kitchen.

Stopping in front of Hermione's door, I knocked once, unsurprised when it was Red's voice who called to enter.

The room was comfortably sized to fit a bed and a writing desk nestled in front of the window beside the bathroom door. The times I'd imagined what Hermione's bedroom would look like, I had always envisioned it as a smaller version of the Gryffindor dormitories – similar to the way my décor spoke to my Hogwarts house. But instead, it was painted a deep, sapphire blue. Cream accents dotted the space from her thick bedding, to the comfortable desk chair, to the gauzy curtains that hung over the windows.

Red was perched on the large bed beside Hermione, who was seated with her back to the headboard. She was still dressed in her black sweater dress, cheeks dry, and eyes vacant as she stared out the window into the nighttime streets of London. At my entrance, Red looked up, visibly relieved, before leaning over to kiss Hermione's cheek and slide off the bed. She gave my arm a grateful squeeze as she passed, before closing the door behind her on her way out.

“Hello,” I said softly, unbuttoning my jacket.

Hermione took a small breath, her pink tongue sliding across her bottom lip.

“Hello,” she replied, voice dead.

I shrugged off my jacket, draping it over her desk chair before slipping my shoes off and padding over to the bed. She made no reaction to these movements, in fact, I didn’t even know if she had seen them. Instead, she kept her gaze fixed on the window, her breathing shallow and silent.

“May I sit with you?” I asked, touching the space beside her to indicate where I would sit.

“I’m fine,” she answered.

“That’s not what I asked,” I said a bit more firmly.

Her eyes closed for a moment, before she nodded.

“Yes, you may sit.”

Slowly I climbed onto the bed, settling myself close enough that she could feel my warmth, but far enough that we weren’t touching. I remembered all too well what it felt like to close up my walls, to shut out the world. It was always so cold, lifeless, like an unending winter without the beauty of snow.

We sat in silence for a long time, merely breathing. I tried not to stare at her, instead looking out the window as she was. I took in the slanted roofs across the street, the flashing lights of automobiles further off in muggle London.

“It’s my fault,” she murmured so softly I wasn’t positive that was what she had said.

I turned to look at her. The vacant expression was still there, but there were cracks in her walls.

“What’s your fault?”

She took a deep breath, her shoulders dropping minutely.

“That Fred died.”

I froze, my mind whirling with the implication. Because I knew what happened in the final battle, knew that Fred had died from an explosion within the castle – an explosion she had no control over.

“How do you figure that?” I asked carefully.

Her eyes closed again and for a moment I wondered if she would cry, but when they opened no tears appeared on her cheeks.

“Because I’m the one with the solutions,” she explained in an eerily calm voice. “I’m the one the boys turned to when they were in trouble. I was the one who kept us alive in first year through

the poison room, the one who turned back time to save Buckbeak and Sirius, the one who solved the mystery of the Hallows, who saved the others from being tortured by your aunt.”

Her shoulders slumped, hands falling to her sides to clutch at the bedcovers.

“Hermione...” I said softly.

“It was my job to keep everyone alive – to keep Harry alive. And... even in that I failed.”

I blinked, the image flashing in my mind of Potter’s lifeless body being carried through the grounds. The Dark Lord’s screeching cry through the morning air:

HARRY POTTER IS DEAD!

I remembered clearly how her scream had echoed through the courtyard, her knees falling to the stones with a sickening crack. It had taken everything in me not to go to her, not to pull her into my arms and hold her together. *Surely someone will*, I had thought, but every single person had been too caught up in their own horror. Their priority had been Potter. The Chosen One.

Slowly, I placed my hand over hers on the bed, glad when she didn’t pull it away. Cold, so cold, freezing with the temperature of her occlumency walls.

“It was not your fault,” I said, squeezing when she closed her eyes and gave the tiniest shake of her head. “Hermione, listen to me, *it was not your fault*. You saved so many lives that day – mine included.”

The memory of her slicing jinx echoed through the room, her wide eyes as she’d jumped in front of me, free hand reaching back to grab mine. It had caught Dolohov by the throat, sending him reeling backwards before he could finish the incantation for the killing curse.

“I just...” she started, but I cut across her.

“How could anyone expect one witch, no matter how powerful, to protect hundreds of people? How could anyone place this burden on you?” I turned her to me, cupping her cheeks in my hands. “It was *not* your fault, love. Their blood is not on your hands.”

She leant into my touch as if she were starved for it, as if I were a life raft. I stroked her cheeks, sliding one hand back into her hair and guiding her head to my shoulder. I was not so foolish as to think that within one conversation she believed me, but I hoped that perhaps something I said would linger.

Hermione had saved countless lives that day, she was regaled as a hero, and rightfully so. To have her believe that the lives that were lost were her fault, that they hung so heavy on her soul, was heartbreaking.

“Thank you,” she whispered as she wrapped an arm around my chest.

I pressed a kiss to her hair, settling back more comfortably against the pillows with her in my arms as we both watched out the window as snow began to fall.

Hermione

At some point in the night Draco convinced me to dress for bed.

I stood in the middle of my bedroom watching Draco carefully pull down the bedcovers, folding them back and then turning to me and patting the mattress.

“In you get, love,” he said softly.

Love. It was the second time he’d used that endearment. The first time it had been a sledgehammer through my walls, the light of his words shining through the gaping hole before being swallowed by the darkness. This time, it lit a fire inside my chest, the heat spreading out through my limbs, circling my core.

Rationally I knew he didn’t mean it the way I was taking it. No doubt he viewed me like an injured animal, a bird with its wings broken. But I allowed myself to pretend, to believe that it was because he felt the same way for me as I did for him. That perhaps he had been in love with me for just as long.

“Are you leaving?” I asked, my voice hoarse though I’d barely spoken save for our brief conversation.

Draco rose to his full height, grey eyes assessing me with caution.

“Would you like me to leave?” he asked.

Was that pain in his voice? Pain clinging to the corners of his eyes and lips?

I shook my head, twisting the hem of the worn quidditch jersey I’d stolen from Harry back in sixth year. For a moment the words stuck in my throat and I felt like I was choking on them. What if he wanted to leave? What if this had pushed him away? He’d heard more from me tonight about the war and the guilt I held on to than anyone else had.

“No,” I finally said, so soft I was afraid perhaps he didn’t hear me. “I don’t want you to go.”

A gentle smile curved across his mouth, his eyes glinting in the dim light from the streetlamps outside. Then, he patted the bed again.

“Then I’m not leaving,” he said simply.

I nodded, sliding into the space he’d made for me but before he could tug back the covers, I stopped him with a hand on his wrist.

“Aren’t...” I swallowed. “Aren’t you going to get in?”

Draco blinked at me as if I’d suddenly spoken in mermish. Then, cautiously, he sat beside me on the bed.

“You’re going to sleep in a bespoke suit?” I asked, a hint of humor coloring my words.

With a bemused expression on his face he looked at me, one pale eyebrow raised.

“You certainly have a lot of opinions on how I should sleep in your bed,” he murmured before pushing himself back to his feet.

He made quick work of his waistcoat, moving to my chair to lay it neatly over his jacket. With his back to me, he pulled the tails of his shirt from his trousers, unbuttoning and then shrugging off the expensive fabric to give it the same treatment.

I gasped at the sight of the large dragon on his back. The gasp wasn’t so much one of surprise, nor of admiration for its beauty – though it was incredibly beautiful. It was how *familiar* the dragon looked. I knew the smooth texture of its long spines beneath my hands, the strangely warm pebbled sensation of its skin against my shins. If I closed my eyes, I was almost positive I could hear the beating of its wings, the gentle huffing of its satisfaction as it dipped one curled claw into the water we skimmed above.

On his back, the dragon was poised as if to land, feet tucked beneath it and wings spread wide and curving over his right shoulder. Its tail flicked, then curled around his thigh, the tip of it ending around his knee.

“It’s a Ukrainian Ironbelly,” he whispered.

“I know...” I breathed, wanting to skim my fingertips across its spines.

A small chuckle bubbled from him as his belt clanged open and he shucked the remainder of his clothing and folded them onto the chair until he stood in merely black underwear.

“Of course you do,” he said quietly, and I could tell he wasn’t making fun of me, merely remembering that I had first hand experience with that particular type of dragon.

Draco turned to me in the darkness, his pale skin gleaming faintly as he strode back to the bed like a man walking to battle. It clicked for me then that this was probably the first time in Morgana knew how long that he’d completely disrobed around someone else. Did he feel uncomfortable? Vulnerable?

“You’re beautiful,” I said softly as he approached, my eyes flicking from his face, to his tattoos, to the hard muscles of his body and back again.

His smile was shy as he slid into the bed beside me and somehow this felt more intimate than anything we had done together. Butterflies clamored in my stomach as he wrapped his arms around my shoulder, tugging me close and sliding a hand into my hair while I slung an arm around his chest, my fingertips tracing the latin phrasing on his collarbone.

We fit together perfectly, like lost pieces of different puzzles connected by fate and, for a little while, it was easy to imagine that we did this every night. Easy to imagine that we were snuggled up in the large four poster bed in his house, in a bedroom I’d never seen – but could safely assume was outfitted in silvers, emeralds, and blacks – and tomorrow would be a new day of routine, safety, and comfort.

And with that image in my mind, I quickly slipped into unconsciousness.

Chapter 18

Draco

Someone was screaming.

Was it me?

No. No it wasn't me, but I knew that scream. Knew I had to get to her, had to protect her – save her. She was mine. Mine to protect.

“No! Please!” she wailed. *“Choose me, kill me instead!”*

I jerked awake, my arms splayed wide as if to create a shield between the witch I needed to save and the enemy. It took me a second to register my surroundings, the dark blue walls, cream sheets, the soft glow of a street lamp outside. Not my house, *Hermione's*.

She was on her stomach facing away from me, her hand stretched out in a plea, a sob shuddering her body as a scream ripped through her lungs, forcing adrenaline to surge through my veins. The scream was not just one of fear, it was agony made tangible, it was a plea for mercy, a declaration of revenge, and the shattering of a soul all mixed into one.

“Hermione,” I said calmly, my hand sliding over her back.

But she didn't hear me, I knew she wouldn't. I was all too intimately acquainted with these dreams from not only myself, but Blaise, Theo, and Pansy. So I wrapped my hands around her upper arms, hauling her back to my chest to wrap my arms around her, smoothing the hair back from her sweaty brow.

“You're safe,” I said firmly. “It's 2008, the war has been won for ten years. Harry is alive, *you* are alive. You made it out.”

Another wail ripped through her throat, her back bowing, her lips forming around a name, but it wasn't Harry.

It was mine.

“DRACO!” she screamed. *“No! Draco! Please, take me – kill me instead.”*

My body froze. I knew what she was dreaming of, knew it was the scene in the manor right before I had stupefied Bellatrix. Bella had seen me raise my wand, noticed the tremor in my hand. Her knife was still slicing into Hermione's arm, just finishing the curve of the second *O* when she gasped.

You dare raise your wand at me, boy? For what? This filth?

She'd grasped her own wand then, even as she sliced the final *D* into Hermione's olive skin. But I hadn't cared – my pulse had pounded in my ears like a kettle drum, the words repeating over and over: *mine, mine, mine*. Letting her continue to hurt Hermione had never been an option, not with the way my heart was ripped apart with every scream, every drop of blood.

I'll kill you for this, boy. Cissa and Lucius should have made a spare.

But before she could slash her wand through the air to summon the killing curse, I'd blown Bellatrix back off her feet, knocking her unconscious and sliding across the shiny drawing room floor. The realization ringing in my ears in the silence:

I love her.

"I'm safe," I said to Hermione. "Hermione, love, I'm safe. I'm here. We're safe. She's dead."

I felt, more than saw, the moment she woke. Her trembling gasp as she took in the room, her muscles tensing then relaxing as her hands gripped my wrists.

"D – *Draco* ," she rasped.

"I'm here," I reassured, smoothing a hand up her arm and over her hair.

She spun in my arms, eyes wild, cheeks flushed as her fingertips traced the planes of my cheekbones, the line of my brow.

"You're here," she whispered, as if trying to convince herself.

I leant into her touch, pressing a kiss to her palm.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Hermione surged forward, her lips slotting over mine in a bruising kiss, clashing our teeth before I opened for her. My hands gripped her shirt, pulling her closer as she shifted, straddling my waist, her core hot on my stirring cock.

"Need you," she murmured against my lips, fingertips running down my chest.

I froze, even as her mouth slid to my jaw, my throat, her tongue flicking over the runes and numbers that made up my Azkaban tattoo.

"Draco, *please* ," she whimpered, her hips grinding down on my lap.

Draco, *Draco* , not Sir. She was asking for me, needing *me* , not my Dominant alter ego. It was all the reassurance I needed as I pushed her hair back from her neck, tangling my fingers into the nape of her neck to pull her back to press my mouth to hers again. Nipping and tasting her lips until I was bucking up into her, my cock rigid against her hot sex.

I grabbed for the hem of her jersey – that *fucking* jersey with Potter's name on the back, as if he had some claim on her – and pulled it over her head, leaving her naked and panting on my lap.

"I know, love," I said, my hands sliding over her breasts and up to cup her face. "I'm right here."

...

Hermione

I needed him like a fire needs oxygen, like the sea needs the moon.

His hands were bruising against my hips as he shifted us, laying me on my back so I was looking up into his gorgeous face. There was no hesitation in his eyes now, no wariness or uncertainty, merely my own need mirrored in his expression.

With one hand he tugged off his boxers, kicking them off to the floor before he settled again between my thighs. He rested his weight on his forearms beside my face, thumbs brushing against my temples before he kissed my eyelids, my cheeks, the slope of my neck. One large hand slid down to cup my breast, rolling my nipple between his index and thumb until sparks of pleasure rippled across my skin.

I'd dreamt my worst nightmare – it always started out as a memory. The memory of him saving me, but in the dreams he never gets the chance. Bellatrix is always too fast. Her cursed blade turns onto her nephew and it's him in my place on the floor while I stand in his, screaming for him.

When I'd woke to his voice, to his reassurances, and his arms around my body, there hadn't been any question of what I needed. There hadn't been a moment's hesitation to know that I needed to be as close to him as possible. I needed *him*, had needed him for so long it felt like that need was a part of my broken soul.

He kissed me gently, languidly now that he was between my thighs, while his hand slid down across my stomach, fingertips brushing through the cropped curls between my legs before dipping to trace the seam of my entrance. I keened, my back arching as one finger easily dipped inside before drawing up to circle my clit.

"Need to make sure you're ready," he panted against my mouth. "Want to make this good for you, my sweet girl."

I moaned, hips canting up to meet his fingers as he added one more, crooking them to brush against my g-spot. My toes curled, eyes fluttering as he pumped them slowly inside of me, the ridges of his ring massaging my outer walls as the heel of his hand pressed against my clit.

His mouth moved to the juncture of my neck and shoulder, biting, sucking, marking me – claiming me as his. It was that tiny bit of pain that sent me spiraling, my orgasm barely taking the edge off of my need as I shuddered, crying out his name until his mouth closed over mine once more, swallowing the sounds.

Suddenly his fingers disappeared, but before I could do so much as whimper, I felt the smooth tip of his cock press against my entrance and he drew back to look at me.

"Are you sure?" he asked in a rough whisper.

I nodded, whimpering with need but he shook his head.

“Say it, love. I need to hear you say it.”

“Yes, yes,” I said quickly. “Please, Draco.”

His eyes were dark, pupils blown as he slowly – *achingly slowly* – pushed inside one inch at a time. He was so large the stretch burned, but not in an unpleasant way. I found myself aching for it, welcoming it as he slid without resistance inside.

Full. I felt *so* full, so satiated, so satisfied. As if the universe began and ended in this moment, as if there had been no house rivalries. No blood purists. No dark wizards. No wars.

Just Draco and me. Together in this brand-new moment, in this brand-new *world* .

“Okay?” he asked, his voice rough.

I nodded, smoothing a hand down his back, down the dragon I’d rode out of Gringotts, before gripping his hip.

“Perfect,” I answered.

...

Draco

My whole life I thought I had known what perfection was.

I grew up with the best of everything. The best toys, the best education, the best clothes, the best friends. There was a satisfaction in knowing that perfection, for me, was a given. I was the perfect son, the perfect student, the perfect soldier... until I wasn’t.

Even with my failures, I thought I had a grasp on perfection. I thought I knew what it looked like, felt like, tasted like.

But I was so wrong.

This was perfection. This was harmony within one body. This was peace, control, comfort, and ecstasy wrapped into a singular moment. As I slid into Hermione, I thought I understood every syllable of the word, every curve of the constants, every sip of breath needed to form it.

She was so tight around my cock, her walls hot and slick, throbbing with her need as I tried to give her a moment to adjust to me. I could feel her hands rounding my shoulders, sliding down my chest, and back up again. As if she was memorizing each plane of my body, each scar, each mark of ink across my skin.

Slowly I rocked into her, moaning at the sight of her eyes rolling back. *Fuck* , it was too good. Better than I’d ever hoped, ever dreamed. And with every plea that fell from her lips, every *Draco, please* , I heard, something inside me that I thought was irreparably damaged was healed.

“Hermione...” I moaned, kissing her cheeks, the corner of her mouth. “You feel so fucking good.”

Her brows puckered as I thrust deeper, pulling from her another gasp as she clutched my biceps.

“So beautiful,” I groaned, bending to lick at one of her nipples. “So perfect.”

I reached back, my hand closing over her thigh to pull it up around my hip, giving me better access as I picked up my pace. She whimpered, her head pushing back into her pillows as I ground against her, leaning down to bite at the soft curve of her breast.

“Can you feel how perfect you are?” I asked. “How you were made for me?”

She moaned, her fingernails scrambling against my back.

“Yes, Draco. *Gods, yes.*” Her walls fluttered around me as I angled upwards.

Wrapping one arm more securely around her shoulders I pressed my forehead to hers, staring into her eyes as I fucked her slow. I wanted to show her this was more than just physical, that I was staking my claim. That now it was more than just in my manor, in *the room*, it was everywhere.

I wedged my hand between our bodies until I could stroke her clit. Her moan tore through me like a hurricane, her cunt clamping down until I saw stars and almost came.

“You’re mine now, you understand?” I growled, circling my signet ring to press into her clit, as if I could emboss my name onto her cunt. “Mind, body, and soul. You. Are. Mine.”

And I meant it. I wanted to give her everything, wanted to give her *all* of me.

She came with a cry, her back arching as I held her to me. I fucked her through her aftershocks, wanting to pull every shriek, every moan, out of her until she was panting. Once she began to quiet, I pulled out, flipping her onto her stomach.

The moment her chest hit the mattress she tried to hike her hips up, but I stopped her with a gentle hand on her hip, pressing her back down before I covered her with my body. Her head was tilted to the side, eyes bright and cheeks flushed as I covered her, entering her again with a groan.

I nipped and sucked at her shoulder, dotting her spine with kisses as I churned my hips. From this angle I knew I could find the spot to make her come again, to pull those breathy cries from her lips that would send me spiraling over the edge.

“*Fuck*, Draco,” she moaned, fingers tangling with mine on the bed. “I... I...”

I know, I wanted to say. I feel it too.

I kissed her cheek, the corner of her mouth, letting her feel my weight as I picked up the pace. *Gods*, she felt incredible. There was nothing I wanted more than to pause this moment, to revel in it. The look on her face as I pushed her towards one final orgasm, the way her teeth bit into her lower lip, her honeyed eyes locked on mine, hand squeezing my fingertips.

“One more, love,” I moaned. “Want to come with you, *need* to come with you.”

And when her walls fluttered, when she all but clamped down on my cock I thrust deep inside, crying out with my release. Her name was on my lips, my tongue, falling from my eyes in crystalline tears because I never thought I'd be here, now, with her.

I slowed my pace, trying to prolong the sensation until I couldn't take it anymore, pulling out and kissing her shoulder.

"Are you all right?" she asked as I brushed the hair from her face.

Her smile was warm, mingled with the contentment I felt as she kissed my palm.

"Better than all right," I answered softly. "I'm perfect."

Chapter 19

Hermione

“Draco?” I called, stepping through the floo into his empty traveling parlor.

I frowned, casting a quick *scourgify* over my clothes before looking around further and checking my watch. 7 o’clock – I was right on time... so where was he?

A few weeks had passed since that night in the pub. Though, I still laughed when thinking of the next morning after Draco and I had wandered into the kitchen to find Blaise and Ginny waiting with the expression of disappointed parents, and *The Standard Book of Spells Grade Five* opened on the table to the section: *Silencing Charms*.

We had fallen into an easy routine that felt anything but routine. Some wall had disappeared between us after that night and, though I knew I was reading into it more than I should, I hoped that perhaps soon we would take our relationship from merely in the bedroom into something more.

He’d taken me to the Wizarding Library of Oxford and, *Godric*, it had been incredible. All stained glass and dark wood with thousands of books full of knowledge at my fingertips. Even the smell of the old leather and parchment had been intoxicating. Draco had introduced me to one of the librarians who he had contacted beforehand to let him know what I needed.

The wizard – Kent, an older gentleman who looked to be in his sixties but was actually ninety-seven I found out later – had already pulled a plethora of documents from the archives for me to peruse and duplicate as needed. Draco stayed dutifully by my side, copying by hand different documents that were immune to the duplication charm and never once complaining.

Draco had all but dragged me from the library when it closed, taking me to a small café nearby for dinner. It was easy to pretend it was a date – that it had *all* been a date – but I was too afraid to ask. I didn’t want to burst the bubble we’d found ourselves in.

“Ah, Miss,” Ms. Barnes, Draco’s housekeeper, who strangely reminded me of Professor McGonagall, said. “Mister Malfoy apologizes for his rudeness and asked me to take you up to his office. He’s finishing just a wee bit of work.”

I blinked, surprised before I nodded.

“Oh, yes, of course. I suppose with the season underway...” I said softly, voice trailing off.

Why hadn’t he canceled if he was busy? We saw each other Wednesdays and Sunday nights, with the occasional extra dinner with Harry and Pansy or Blaise and Ginny. He could have sent an owl or floo called.

But then Ms. Barnes was instructing me to follow as we left the parlor, moving at a brisk pace through the front entrance of the manor and climbing the steps to the second floor I’d never

seen. As with the rest of the house it was all dark wood, silver chandeliers, and an array of landscape paintings.

We turned right at the stairs, stopping at the first door on the left where she gave the large ebony door a brisk knock before it opened magically.

“Miss Granger to see you, Mr. Malfoy,” Ms. Barnes said crisply, not waiting for his acknowledgement before turning and making her way back down the stairs.

Draco was seated behind a large obsidian desk, papers and folders littered the shiny surface. There was a large, arched picture window at his back giving an impressive nighttime view of the grounds of his estate. *The Shillington Estate*, he’d told me once, purchased after his release from Azkaban as Malfoy Manor had been seized by the Ministry. Narcissa and Lucius had purchased another, larger estate close by and they shared some of the grounds.

There were two, large black leather armchairs in front of his desk and I wondered if he had a lot of visitors. A hearth sat on his left, roaring with a warm fire, while on his right was a towering bookshelf with rows and rows of neatly organized books and documents.

Draco did not look stressed or disheveled however, and he didn’t look up as I came in.

“Good evening, pet,” he said in his low, rumbling tone, slicing his quill across a page and placing the parchment to the side to pick up another.

“Good evening, Sir,” I replied.

It was a Pavlovian experience now when I heard that tone. Immediately my body went soft, my mind just slightly quieter, and my core began to ache.

Draco pulled another parchment from the stack, his grey eyes skimming the page before he made a small note in the margin.

“Shut the door, clothes off,” he commanded.

Without hesitation I shut the large door before stepping to the side and placing my bag on the small table beside it. It was with practiced ease now that I disrobed, slipping off my shoes and toeing them beneath the table before removing my coat and neatly placing it on top of my bag. Wandlessly, I unzipped the dusty rose dress I’d worn to work, shimmying out of it, and giving it the same treatment as my coat.

“Knickers on or off, Sir?” I asked, turning to him.

Draco, again, did not look up, but a small grin pulled his cheeks.

“Off, pet. Thank you for asking,” he said, the rumble of his voice vibrating straight into my center.

Once I was completely naked, I turned, standing with my feet shoulder width apart and interlacing my hands behind my neck, elbows out wide. It was the position he’d taught me to take whenever I was unsure of what happened next, or if he had yet to give me an order.

“Come here,” Draco instructed, pointing to the spot to the right of his chair.

I kept my hands interlaced behind my neck, rounding the desk to stand beside the black leather chair he sat in. He had lost his suit jacket and waistcoat at some point, as well as his tie, and sat in only his button down and trousers, the cuffs of his sleeves rolled up to his elbows to show off the ink swirling on his skin.

“Kneel up, darling.”

I complied, lowering to my knees with practiced movements. When I settled myself, Draco pushed his chair back slightly, sliding his hand through my hair and encouraging me to rest my head on his thigh.

I sighed in contentment, no longer worried about why he hadn’t canceled or what our future might hold. He caressed my hair and face slowly, reverently, his eyes never straying from his work but I didn’t feel forgotten – I felt *beloved*.

It could have been minutes or hours later that his voice rumbled through the room. By that point my body was pliant, my mind calm, and all I was focused on was the movement of his hand in my hair, the occasional stroke of his thumb against my cheek or over my forehead.

“I need your help, pet,” he said, tapping my neck softly so I pulled my head away.

Draco pushed his chair back and I licked my lips at the sight of the bulge in his trousers.

“Take me out,” he commanded.

My hands closed over the placket, quickly undoing the fastenings and folding them open before diving into his silky trunks to withdraw his already ruddy cock. *Gods*, how I loved this cock.

“Stand up,” he continued.

I wanted to pout, but I stopped myself knowing that would get me nowhere. Instead, I complied, making my way to my feet before his hand slid between my thighs, fingertips swiping across my entrance.

“Already so wet for me,” he murmured. “What a good girl you are.”

My stomach flipped at the praise as he grabbed me by the hips, turned me to face the desk, and slammed me down onto his cock. I cried out, the pleasure mingling with the pain at the stretch of him. We’d had sex enough that I thought I’d be used to him by now, but each time he entered me was just as delicious as the first.

Assuming he wanted me to ride him, I rolled my hips, a small moan sliding through my lips at the feeling of him pressing against my front wall. But a small slap on my thigh froze me in place.

“No,” he snapped. “You’ll be punished for that later – you know better than to assume what I want.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” I said softly, the disappointment in myself curling in my chest.

One of his large hands smoothed down my back and that small gesture comforted the squirm of shame I felt at disobeying him. His lips pressed against my shoulder before he slid us closer to the desk.

It was a strange feeling, to sit with his cock inside of me but not move. I wanted to – *gods* – I needed to move. It was like an itch I couldn't scratch, the blossoming ache and need inside of me already becoming dizzying.

"Take a look at this budget, pet," Draco said, his voice calm as if I weren't currently impaled on his cock.

He held up one of the annotated parchments in front of me, his other hand firm on my thigh to keep me from moving. I felt myself dripping on his cock, sure that by now it was staining his trousers.

"Read it to me," he instructed.

I blinked but took the parchment into my hands, muffling a groan when I shifted to place my elbows on the desk.

"Interdepartmental Budget: Quidditch Division," I read breathily. Sweat dewed at the back of my neck as I squeezed my thighs together, trying to find any sort of friction, but another stinging slap cracked across my thigh, stilling me. "Quarter four, 2008." I continued. "Quidditch League Referees: 100 galleons per Ref."

Slowly I read through the budget, including his small annotations and questions in the margins until I was panting, barely able to understand a word. No, all I could focus on was the feeling of his cock inside of me, how full I felt. How I was sure that if I looked down, I could see the outline of it against my stomach. I couldn't, but with how it pulsed every so often when I stuttered over a word, it felt like it had doubled in size.

"What do you think?" he asked, his voice rougher than before.

I swallowed loudly. I could feel how damp his trousers were now from my arousal. Could feel how I had dripped onto the leather between his legs.

"I... I think... I think that the private mediwizard company is overcharging you," I ground out before my synapses fired a bit quicker. "They probably aren't paying their healers even half of this rate."

My hips rolled and a hiss slid through his teeth, another sharp slap on my other thigh echoing through the office.

"Did I tell you to move?" he asked, his voice low and dripping with tantalizing danger.

I whimpered; the ache was becoming so intense it was almost painful.

"N-no, Sir," I answered.

One hand slid up my spine, curling into my hair until he jerked my head back so I was looking at him. There was only a thin band of silver left around his eyes but it was the only indication that

he felt the same need I did.

“Beg for it,” he growled.

“Please, Sir. I need to fuck myself on your cock,” I immediately cried.

His lashes fluttered, but a menacing grin drew across his lips as the hand on my hair tightened.

“More.”

Small sparks of pain skittered down my neck and added to the ache while his other hand slid up my thigh, over my stomach, to close over my breast. He tweaked my nipple and my answering moan sounded feral in my ears.

“Sir, please. Please let me move, let me bounce on your cock. I’ll be so good for you, I promise. I’ll fuck myself just the way you like.”

His teeth dragged across my shoulder as I panted, still babbling incoherent pleas to move.

“Oh, darling. You beg so prettily,” he rumbled, leaning back to rest his elbows against the arms of his chair. “Go ahead, then. Fuck yourself on my cock.”

My whimper of gratitude was loud, needy as he let me go.

“Hands on the desk,” he directed.

I rushed to obey, my hands splaying out wide on the desk that I immediately used as leverage. Rolling my hips until my breathy whimpers turned into guttural moans. My eyes closed, luxuriating in the sensation of slamming down on his thick cock after warming it for so long.

My body was a flood of sensations and I was only acutely aware of the noises I was making, the desperate way I slammed my hips down before rocketing up. But I needed more, needed to rub my clit, for him to touch me.

The moans I made turned desperate, pleading.

“Enough, pet,” Draco said.

Though it was agony to do so, I stilled at once. His large hands wrapped around my waist, lifting me off in one swift movement as he slid his chair back from the desk. I tried to stifle my groan as his cock left me feeling empty but I didn’t succeed given the small chuckle from behind me.

“What did you do earlier, pet, that would stop you from being allowed to come like a good girl?” he asked in his low rumble.

I kept my hands on the desk, panting.

“I... I assumed what you wanted, Sir,” I answered.

He gave a small noise of agreement, hand smoothing up my back.

“Exactly, you thought you knew what was best for us. But that’s my job. In moments like that, when you try to take over, it means you don’t trust that I’ve set the right course. It means your submission is not fully given. *That* is why I’m punishing you, do you understand?”

My swallow was loud in the room with the click of my throat. Disappointment in myself squirmed in my chest, settling somewhere in my hollow belly.

“Yes, Sir, I understand,” I said, my voice cracking. “I’m so sorry, Sir.”

Draco shushed me with another soothing touch to my back.

“Thank you, darling. Now, lay that gorgeous body across my desk and wrap your fingers around the opposite edge.”

Immediately I obeyed, rising up to the balls of my feet so I could stretch my arms in front of me until my fingers curled across the edge farthest away. In this position my hip bones were flush against his desk, body taut, and I was already panting in anxiety and anticipation. After a moment, the wood against my hip bones softened from Draco’s cushioning charm.

“Thank you, Sir,” I said in a small voice.

There was another muttered incantation and I thought it might have been a summoning charm, but then all rational thought left me as I felt the scrape of bristles down my back and over the curve of my ass.

“How many do you deserve, pet?” he asked in a purr, gliding the bristles across my other cheek.

I tried to keep myself still, my fingers flexing on the wood.

“As many as you feel I need, Sir,” I replied, my eyes squeezing shut as he drew the brush down my thigh and behind my knee.

Another low, dangerous chuckle rumbled from him before he withdrew the brush, his other hand smoothing away the curls from my shoulders.

“Very good, darling,” he said. “We’ll start with twenty.”

Chapter 20

Draco

“You will count and thank me for each one, yes?” I asked.

Gods, she was dripping. I could see the slide of her need between her thighs, the way her hips jumped with each touch of the bristles against her oversensitive skin. Part of me had wanted to let her come, but it was better this way. She needed to understand that I was her Dom and, in moments like this, I had everything taken care of. That way she could just relax, let her mind rest, and just *be*.

“Yes, Sir,” she answered in that small voice.

I knew that she was more than likely punishing herself more than I ever could. It was why I’d set the number so low for a punishment. My disappointment was more biting than the crack of the flogger, my reprimands more painful than the flick of a cane.

“Tell me your safe words,” I said firmly.

She didn’t hesitate.

“Red and yellow, Sir.”

I gave her hip a gentle squeeze.

“Good girl,” I praised and watched as her body relaxed into the wood as I flipped the brush around so the wooden back would face her pert behind.

The brush whistled through the air, landing on the fleshy curve of her ass with a *thwack*. It left behind the most gorgeous square outline, the heat radiating through my fingertips as I smoothed my hand over the sting.

“One, thank you, Sir,” she said quickly.

And so it continued, left cheek, right cheek, left thigh, right thigh. When we broached twelve her breath was hitching, eyes wide open and I could have sworn tears clung to her lashes. At fifteen her voice cracked and I knew her emotional release was imminent. By eighteen I knew we were right on the precipice.

“*Red*,” she cried out instead of eighteen.

Immediately I vanished the brush, gathering her up into my arms.

“Good girl,” I praised, kissing her cheeks, her forehead. “I’m so proud of you, love. Thank you for using your safe word.”

She clung to me, her body trembling though it was pliant in my arms as I hooked my arms under her knees, careful to avoid her smarting behind. Wandlessly, I opened the door, striding across the second-floor landing and heading to my bedroom. The door swung open for me at my approach as I continued to whisper words of praise, of reassurance. I knew she had safe worded before she could cry, we'd grown close enough in the last few weeks that I knew she was afraid of any emotional release. And... if she wasn't ready, then I wouldn't force her.

The lamps in the bathroom burst into light as I stepped inside, the sentient magic of the manor had already filled the tub. I slowly lowered Hermione to her feet beside the large, clawfoot tub, dipping my hand into the water to check to ensure the temperature was perfect before summoning a phial of oil and relaxation potion from the nearby counter.

Lavender and chamomile swirled throughout the room and I watched her take a deep breath, her body relaxing further.

"Step in, love," I instructed, holding out my hand to assist her.

As her reddened ass hit the water, she let out a small hiss, but submerged the rest of the way until the water covered her shoulders. I gathered her hair, conjuring a pitcher of water and a soft cloth. I was glad now that I had purchased some of the hair products Red told me she used, summoning those as well.

I placed the items beside the tub and grabbed up the cloth after rolling my sleeves above my elbow, and dipped it into the water. Slowly, I began to wash her, the cloth moving over her chest and shoulders. Her wide brown eyes merely stared at me as I placed my hand out, palm up, before she laid her arm in it. I swiped the cloth down her shoulder over the little birds inked across her shoulder and collarbone, focusing on her elbow and the spaces between her fingers before repeating the movement with the other.

Once I was satisfied she was clean and a little of that lost look had left her eyes, I leant forward, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

"Slide forward, love, I'm going to wash your hair."

She nodded, sitting up and leaning forward enough to give me space. Summoning one of the stools beneath the countertop, I sat at the edge of the tub behind her, and grabbed the pitcher full of warm, fresh water I'd spelled to refill itself.

"Head back," I instructed in as soft a voice as I could, holding on to her shoulder for a moment and rubbing my thumb against her skin.

Hermione obeyed, her head tipping so I could pour the warm water over her curls until they were thoroughly saturated. Her hair was so long that a good portion floated in the water. I wondered how long she'd been growing out her hair. Had she cut it since the war? Was this another way for her to hold on to her guilt?

I worked slowly, methodically, trying with each movement, each pour of the water, each massage of my fingertips in her scalp, to infuse every moment with tenderness. To remind her that she was precious, *beloved*. That she deserved this level of care that she had – more than once – tried to refuse.

Once her hair was clean, I gathered the long, wet strands, twisting as much of the water out of it as I could before gathering it into a bun on the top of her head.

“Will you...” She cleared her throat. “Will you get in?”

I smiled, immediately standing to begin to extricate myself from my clothes.

“Of course, love,” I answered.

Once all my clothes were neatly placed on the counter, I slid into the warm water behind her, pressing a kiss to the sparrows on her shoulder while my hands slid down her arms, interlacing our fingers beneath the surface.

She tilted her head back onto my chest as I kissed up her neck, over her cheeks, to her temples. Her body was slick against mine, the round curve of her ass pressing against my cock that was beginning to pulse again with desire.

As if she heard my thoughts, she let go of my hands and turned in the water, cheeks flushed from the warmth.

“What do you need?” I asked, cupping her face in my hands, my thumb drawing across her lower lip.

Leaning into my touch, she lapped at the pad of my thumb before lightly biting down on it.

“You,” she said, her voice dark.

I wrapped my hand lightly around her throat, drawing her to me. My lips closed over hers, forcing her mouth open with my tongue while my other arm wrapped around her waist, lifting her to settle on my lap.

My cock was already hard, ready for her tight heat as she lowered down on me one inch at a time. Her head fell back, eyes squeezed shut and her mouth tipped open in a silent gasp.

“That’s it, darling,” I said softly, squeezing one of her breasts in my hand, my thumb rubbing across the peak until it hardened. “Use me.”

She rocked her hips slowly, experimentally in the water, her hands gripping my shoulders to give her leverage as she began to move. I continued to work her breast, leaning forward to suck the other into my mouth as my free hand slipped between us.

My fingers pressed against her clit, her gasp echoing through the bathroom as I drew circles against the tight bud. Her thighs began to shake as she moved quicker and I groaned around her nipple. I had almost come earlier in my office and I tried to stave off my release now – she needed to come, this was as much a part of her aftercare as it was mine.

Pulling my mouth off her nipple with a pop, I looked up at her. Her eyes were wide, gazing down on me with fire in them, cheeks flushed a deep red that was spreading across her chest, breasts bouncing with the movement of her hips.

“Kiss me,” I said, almost begging before she leant down to cover my mouth with hers.

I swallowed each moan, each tiny cry she gave as my fingers pressed harder against her clit. Her thighs were trembling, walls fluttering around my cock and I knew she was close. Nipping her lower lip, I murmured into her mouth.

“Come for me, Hermione.”

She exploded around me, her brows puckered and body clenching with the ferocity of her release until I was pulled along with it. I came with a roar, my head falling back against the edge of the tub as she continued to move, pulling from me every drop of my spend and I was seeing stars against the white ceiling above.

Time returned slowly as she kissed across my prisoner tattoo, over my shoulder where the tip of the dragon’s wings curled, her lips brushing the latin across my collarbone before sliding over the scars, over the brutal one across my heart and the rune there. I stroked her thighs, her shoulders, her cheeks, willing my breath and heart to calm.

“It’s time to get out,” I said finally.

She nodded, sliding off of me and away so I could step out first, grabbing one of the large towels at the counter to dry myself off quickly before getting another for her. I cast a quick warming charm on it before holding it out to her.

“Step out, love,” I said quietly, not wanting to ruin the gentle moment shimmering through the room.

Languidly she rose from the bath, the droplets of water cascading off her glorious body as if she were a goddess incarnate. For a moment, I felt the urge to fall to my knees and worship her, before she stepped into my embrace and allowed me to methodically dry her with the towel.

I kissed her shoulders, her neck, her forearms, her hands. Following each drag of the large, fluffy towel, kissing her stomach, her hips, her thighs. On my knees before her, I looked up into her face, her large brown eyes that stared down at me with unguarded affection as her fingertips brushed my fringe from my forehead.

Do you feel it too?

Finally finished, I threw the towel to the side and tugged her into my arms. She went willingly, resting her head into the crook of my neck while I leant down to kiss her temple, her wet hair.

“Come to bed,” I requested. The words were so intimate I couldn’t help but think of a reality where this was her home too. Where it was any other night.

She nodded into my chest as I guided her from the bathroom and I pulled back the covers for her. Immediately she nestled into me and I realized she’d cast a drying charm on her hair which now spilled across the pillow in soft waves.

“How do you feel?” I asked, leaning back to look at her face.

She shrugged and I watched her occlumency walls shut into place.

“Fine,” she answered, fingertips tracing one of the scars from the *sectumsempra* curse across my chest.

I kissed her forehead, holding her a little tighter to me, my fingertips skimming over the two birds at her collarbones.

“Are these your parents?” I asked quietly, desperately wanting to learn more about her.

She nodded, her soft sigh seeming to relax her further into my arms.

“They are...” she said, eyes closing for a moment. “I thought it best for them to be a little separate from everyone else... My two muggle casualties of the war.”

I brushed the two little birds again and she hummed contentedly.

“What happened to them?”

Her mouth tensed and I could see the moment her occlumency solidified. It was the way her brows smoothed, her shoulders dropped. The way her hands got a little colder against my skin.

Though I’d known she had obliterated her parents, it had been a part of her testimony after the war, I’d never found out what happened to them after. Part of me had assumed that she’d gone to find them and reversed the charm. Yet I’d never heard her talk about her parents and since we’d created this little friend group, she had spent every Christmas with Pansy and Harry.

“The charm couldn’t be reversed,” she said in an emotionless voice. “I tried everything, specialized healers, mind healers, even Theo went with me once.”

My brows pulled together. I’d never heard that he went to Australia with her.

“But in the end the spell was too ingrained in their hippocampus. To reverse it would have more than likely rendered them brain dead if it was successful. It was better to just...” She sighed. “Let them go.”

It made sense now why she still went round to the Burrow after her break up with Ron, why she clung to Ginny and Pansy and the rest of us.

“I’m sorry,” I murmured, pressing another kiss to her hair.

Her hand tensed against my chest.

“You’re... You’re the first person I’ve spoken that aloud to.” Her voice was lifeless, emotionless.

I watched the way her body trembled, unbeknownst to her, her muscles coiled to spring at any moment.

“The war is over...” I started slowly. “So why do you live each day as if you are going into battle?”

She didn’t answer me, but I could see the moment her occlumency shields shut further into place, the way she pushed the emotion and question from her consciousness for self

preservation. Because it was the truth, though parts of her mind had moved on so much of her had not. She was still very much that eighteen year old witch on the run with Potter, scrambling to keep him alive every single day.

“Hey,” I said quickly, tilting her chin up to look into her eyes. “Come back to me.”

She blinked and I watched the walls retract, watched the tension fill her eyes and mouth. Watched the way her shoulders tensed and her breathing picked up. All the tension she never knew she held unless she kept everything at bay or if she was in subspace.

“Who taught you occlumency?” I asked – it was a question that had been on my mind for a while now.

She stiffened, her finger pausing in the outline of the rune on my chest.

“Um... it was Professor Lupin,” she answered in a soft voice. “Sixth year and then much more intense instruction before we went on the run.”

“Why?”

Hermione’s hand spread out against my chest and I thought I could feel a slight tremble in her fingertips against my heart.

“Because I was a mess... I couldn’t control my emotions. We were right on the cusp of war and all I could do was panic and try to prepare as much as I could. But the panic kept getting in the way of the preparation so... over Christmas Remus offered to teach me.” Her throat clicked with her swallow. “I was the best chance we had at helping Harry survive, I had to keep myself together for him.”

...

Hermione

Remus’ words still echoed in my mind. When I closed my eyes I could see us, seated at the worn dinner table at the Burrow, the windows black behind his shoulders and the house quiet with the rest of the sleeping group.

“If you don’t learn to control your fear, you’ll become a liability,” Remus said as kindly as he could, running a hand over his scarred and prematurely lined face. “Occlumency will help you with that.”

I grimaced, toying with the edge of the tea cup in front of me that still held the hours-old tea Mrs. Weasley had made me.

“But Harry said...”

Remus put up a hand.

“Harry’s mind is not as organized as yours nor did he feel particularly... motivated to close the connection between himself and You-Know-Who. You will find it easier, I suspect.”

“Are you an occlumens, Remus?” I asked.

He nodded, the lines in his face deepening.

“Why?” I paused. “Because of Sirius?”

I’d seen the way he’d collapsed in on himself after Sirius died, the way the light had left his eyes, even though he had found his mate, until one day it all seemed to disappear.

“Tonks is my soul,” Remus said in a voice that spoke of a lifetime of grief. Yet suddenly it all vanished and he sat before me calm and composed. “But Sirius was my heart.”

After that conversation I had allowed him to teach me the basics.

“I’m a natural occlumens,” I said.

Draco hummed, his hand sliding down my back and over the curve of my hip.

“Do you not think your occlumency is the thing holding you back?” he asked carefully, holding me tighter to him when I stiffened.

I couldn’t disagree more.

“No, Draco.” I took a deep breath, calming myself. “Occlumency is the thing holding me together.”

Chapter 21

Hermione

“Are you going to this tomorrow?” Draco asked.

I jumped, almost upsetting the cup of tea at my elbow and righting it before it could spill all over the parchment I was reading. It had been a little over a week since I’d safe worded and two days since the full moon and the first tests were done on the improved wolfsbane.

The trial had been a success, all seven betas from a few of the larger packs around Britain had not transformed at moon rising and none reported any of the usual side effects leading up to the night either. I’d asked to be there to observe, but Theo and the rest of the team at St. Mungo’s had forbidden it, given the high risk. Instead, Theo had kept extensive notes – what I was reading now – as well as offered to let me look at a few of his memories in his pensieve over the weekend.

“Hm?” I asked, trying to rub the sting away from my eyes.

Draco strode further into the room, brandishing a silver and blue invitation at me, a few snowflakes fluttering to the floor from the parchment.

“Are you planning on attending the paltry excuse for a gala the Ministry is putting on once again?” he drawled.

I rolled my eyes, of course *he* thought the gala with its fine decorations, quality food, and impressive music was paltry.

“You say that like Christmas doesn’t happen every year,” I replied, trying to avoid the question. “Or that the gala isn’t always on the 23rd.”

He chuckled, looking back at the invitation.

“They could at least send the invitations out a bit earlier, even if it is always on the same date. So, are you going?” he asked, bringing me back to his point.

Biting the inside of my cheek, I looked back down at the parchment in front of me for a moment. To be perfectly honest, regardless of how nice the food was and how much I enjoyed the decorations, the galas were exhausting. I rarely got to spend any time with Draco and the rest of them, instead having to stomp around the room like a show pony to shake hands with every important person.

Though I had to admit Harry had it even worse, the way people even now tended to cry all over his expensive dress robes. But Harry carried the burden so well – better than I ever did – allowing whoever it was to cry out their grief, whispering words of comfort and strength to them.

I guessed that's what happened when prophecy delineated you as the savior of the Wizarding World. You adapted.

"Allow me to rephrase," Draco said, placing his hands on the desk and framing the papers. His voice had dropped low and I shivered, looking up into his grey eyes. "You're going to the Ministry Yule Gala."

He leant forward, a smirk on his face as his sweet breath swirled across my lips.

"With me," he finished, eyes twinkling.

"With you?" I repeated, shocked.

Draco nodded, lifting one of his hands off the desk to stroke my cheek.

"We're going to get all dressed up," he started.

"You're *always* dressed up," I grumbled.

He raised a brow before continuing.

"And we are going to go to this gala, drink all of the Ministry's finest firewhiskey, eat all of their food, and I am going to protect you from the wolves."

I blinked at him in surprise.

"The wolves?"

He nodded, hand slipping into the back of my hair and releasing my bun with a whispered charm.

"The old Ministry hags who paw you like you're a discount rack at Madam Malkins and the stuffed-up toads who leer at you like you need to grovel at their feet regardless of what you've accomplished," he whispered darkly. "One look from me and they'll go running."

I had to admit, that *did* sound nice.

"Okay," I said breathlessly. "I'll go with you."

Draco pressed his lips to mine in a chaste kiss before drawing back and sliding a hand through his hair. I wanted to ask him if this was a date or if it was a scene, but the words got stuck in my throat.

"Do you have a dress?" he asked after a moment's contemplation.

I shrugged – I'd been planning on wearing one of my old dresses. His grey eyes twinkled for a moment before they rested on the papers in front of me.

"How many times have you read through Theo's notes?" he asked in an expectant tone.

We'd had a large celebration at the pub last night for the success of the wolfsbane and I'd been even more surprised this morning when a large bouquet of roses had appeared on my desk.

There'd been no note, but I assumed they were from Pansy, Blaise, and Draco – they were similar to the roses that always appeared on my birthday as well.

“This is my fifth read through,” I said slightly defensively, covering a hand over the parchment in fear he might take it from me.

Draco glanced at the dark window to my right before drawing out a pocket watch from his waistcoat.

“Finish this read and then I want you to put it to the side for the night,” he said in that dominant tone of his that made my toes curl. He stepped around my desk and I pushed my chair back to look up at him as he slid his hand across my throat, holding me in place. “You’ll eat a good dinner – a *real* dinner, pet, not the popcorn I know you and Red eat sometimes on weekday nights – and go to bed early. Do you understand me?”

Warmth curled in my insides as I looked up at him, feeling all at once helpless and empowered in his gaze.

“Yes, Sir,” I answered immediately.

This was the part of our arrangement I liked the most – beside the mind-blowing sex and the way the tumult in my mind quieted – it was how cared for he made me feel. But more and more I had started to worry about when the arrangement would end. When he would find a witch that he wanted for more than just the lifestyle or when his mother would finally put her foot down and arrange a marriage contract.

“Good girl,” he praised, this time giving me a lingering kiss before rising to his full height and buttoning his suit coat. “I’ll pick you up tomorrow, five o’clock. We can floo together.”

With another stroke of my cheek he left the room, the swirl of his cologne lingering long after he’d left. I’d done as he had instructed, tearing myself away before I could read Theo’s notes for a sixth time and apparated back to the flat. Completely shattered, I’d forgotten to stop on my way home for food. I sighed as I’d entered, deciding to forgo dinner anyway, Draco would never find out. Slipping off my shoes beside the door, I called out to Blaise who, at this point, was staying at the flat regardless of if Ginny was here, and stopped with a jolt in the doorway of the kitchen.

“Yup,” Blaise said, popping the *p* as he drew his hands across the table laden with takeout containers. “It’s official, Draco is in love with me. Why else would he provide this impressive spread?”

There was a small, folded piece of parchment laying across one of the steaming containers. When I opened it, I immediately recognized his neat cursive.

Eat, pet. – D.L.M.

p.s. Tell Blaise his favorite is in the tin marked with an X.

...

Draco

“So you’re telling me,” Theo said between large bites of pasta. “That you’re officially taking Granger to the Ministry Gala?”

I sighed, swirling my wine in my glass for a moment.

“We’ve been dating for a few weeks now,” I said before taking a long sip.

“Does Mione know that?” Charlie asked with a chuckle, spooning a bit more pasta onto his husband’s plate.

Myself and Pansy had come round to Theo’s for an impromptu dinner after I’d dropped off food at Hermione’s flat.

Earlier this evening it had been no surprise to find Blaise as I’d stepped through the floo into her living room, sprawled out on the sofa and watching some Christmas program on the telly. He’d eyed the parcels in my hands speculatively for a moment before moving to help me sort them out on the table.

“Not coming to Theo’s tonight?” I’d asked him.

Blaise had shaken his head before running a hand over his face.

“Nah, figured I’d keep Hermione company since Gin’s away this weekend.”

Gratitude had swirled through my chest like a windstorm as I’d slapped Blaise on the back, telling him to make sure my witch got an early night, before ducking back through the floo to Charlie and Theo’s townhome.

“Of course she doesn’t know they’re dating,” Pansy said with a theatrical sigh, bringing me back to the present and holding out her glass for me to fill.

I leant across the table with the bottle, eyebrows raised.

“What do you mean, *of course she doesn’t*?” I asked.

Pansy gave me a sympathetic look while she took a sip of her wine.

“Mione has always been a very... literal person,” Charlie said when it looked like Pansy wouldn’t respond immediately. “If you haven’t said explicitly that you’re dating, she probably assumes the worst.”

Theo nodded sagely before shoveling another ravioli into his mouth.

“I practically had to send her a howler to convince her we were friends,” Pansy said, stealing one of Charlie’s raviolis and popping it into her mouth.

Charlie rolled his eyes good naturedly before reaching into the center of the table and spooning some more onto her plate.

“Oh no, thank you. I’m full,” Pansy said with a grin before she stole another off of him.

“But we talked about it...” I said slowly. “I asked her if she wanted more and she said...”

My voice trailed off, remembering what *exactly* her response had been.

Are you asking if you want to dominate me outside of your sex dungeon?

That hadn't been what I had been asking, and though she'd agreed to blur the lines a bit between bedroom and the outside world, I'd never explicitly asked her on a date.

“Fuck,” I muttered, pushing my face into my hands. “What do I do?”

Pansy patted me gently on the arm before scooping up a ravioli from my plate, continuing to ignore the fresh ones on her own.

“Well, first, I'd make it clear that the gala *is* a date, and then once you've brought her home to that kinky little sex dungeon of yours I'd make it clear that you're bloody in love with the witch.”

Chapter 22

Hermione

I stared at the note in my hands that I'd just pulled from the large wrapped package on my desk in complete and utter bewilderment while Dominus perched on my shoulder, hooting softly.

No, I wasn't fooled by that shrug yesterday so I bought this for you.

Yes, with my money.

No, it was not too much.

Yes, you are worth it.

No, I will not take it back.

Don't panic, love. I'll know if you do.

- D.L.M

He'll know if I panic?

Blaise cleared his throat behind me and I jumped, turning to see him leaning against the doorframe and wiggling his fingers at me in greeting.

"On a scale of one to ten – with one being a cozy library day and ten being riding out of Gringotts on a dragon – how stressed are you right now?"

I brandished the note at him.

"You knew about this?" I huffed.

Blaise rolled his eyes as if to say *I know everything* before gesturing to the package behind me. Dominus gave one final hoot before pushing off my shoulder and out through the charmed window.

"Don't make a fuss, you know you won't win either way," he drawled before checking his watch. "Go on, start getting ready, it's quarter to four." When I didn't move towards the ensuite he strode into the room, grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me bodily towards the bathroom. "Off you pop. And if I hear a single..." He made an exaggerated show of gasping for air. "I'm busting in there with positive affirmations."

My face paled. To an outsider it might have sounded like a joke, but Blaise was incredibly serious about his affirmations. Many a morning I'd been cooking breakfast while hearing him repeat them in the hallway bathroom mirror.

I am worthy.

I am redeemable.

I am a devastatingly handsome specimen of magical being.

The one time Gin had said something remotely negative about herself in front of him, he had dragged her into the bathroom to stare in the mirror to repeat the words back to him.

With a wave of his wand, the small bathtub began to fill with water. Blaise gave my shoulder a light squeeze before turning to leave the room.

“Get naked, Granger. You never know when he might show up.”

An hour later I stood in front of the bathroom mirror applying the last of the beauty charms to my face to ensure my makeup didn't run. I had to admit, over the years I'd significantly improved in all things beauty related – it also didn't hurt having Pansy “*what do you mean you don't know what lip liner is*” Parkinson as one of my closest friends.

By the time I was finished, my hair was falling down my back in loose waves, one side pulled back with a silver hairpin Theo had bought me two birthdays ago. After spotting the color of the dress – black, *of course* – I'd opted for a dark red lip, employing the strongest charms Pansy had taught me after to ensure it wouldn't move.

I moved to my bedroom to slip into the dress, not the least surprised at how it fit like a glove. The top was thin strapped, with a slight cowl neckline that dipped enough to show cleavage but still appropriate enough for a Ministry party. The bodice was tight, stopping at my waist to flare out into a wide skirt with a daringly high thigh slit on the right side. When I zipped up the back and stepped into my tallest black heels, just for a moment I imagined I could be worthy to be on the arm of Draco Malfoy, heir apparent of the Malfoy line.

But then I remembered that *he* had bought this dress – that he'd spent Godric knows how many galleons on it and I began to panic. My blood roared in my veins, the riot of noise in my head increasing until I wanted to slap my hands over my ears. And above it all, I could hear the distinct sound of someone saying:

You don't deserve it. You shouldn't even be here right now.

“Breathe, love,” a low voice rumbled from behind me.

I hadn't even realized I'd closed my eyes until I opened them, startled to see Draco standing behind me in the full length mirror in my bedroom. Slowly, he turned me around to face him and I wanted to groan at the sight of his devastatingly tailored black dress robes.

“Draco,” I said, my mouth already moving with the speed of a fiendfyre. “I can't accept this dress, it's too expensive – especially considering how many galleons it probably cost to get it done at the last minute. I mean, there's no way you didn't order this last night and the fabric is so

lovely, it probably cost a fortune. I bet if I take it off very carefully we can return it and we can just forget about the gala all together.”

As I spoke, Draco shrugged out of his black outer robes and carefully laid them on the desk chair nearby before walking back to me.

“Have you charmed your makeup not to run?” he asked when I took a deep breath.

The question, so far off topic, unsteadied me.

“Yes, of course I have,” I snapped. “My hair is also charmed not to ruin either until I release the spell. But that’s *beside* the point. This is too much.”

Draco pulled himself up to his full height, grey eyes burning.

“Kneel,” he commanded firmly, cutting off my next sentence.

My mouth audibly snapped shut, and though after a moment I continued my monologue of all the reasons why he shouldn’t have spent the money on me, my legs bent and I found myself kneeling on the floor. The expensive black dress pooled around me.

“It’s really not right for you to –”

The next words were cut off when he grabbed my face. His hands weren’t rough, but they also weren’t as gentle as they usually were. With his other hand he unbuttoned the placket of his trousers, pulling out his already hard cock.

Confusion rippled through me. Did he want a blow job *now* ? When I was trying to talk to him?

“I am going to talk and you are going to listen,” he said firmly in that low tone I loved. “And, knowing you, you will struggle not to talk over me like a herd of rampaging hippogriffs, therefore, you need something to keep your mouth occupied.”

His fingers pressed on two points at my jaw and my mouth automatically opened. Carefully he slipped himself inside, tip nudging the back of my throat until I gagged and my mouth watered. Though he slightly pulled back, he didn’t completely pull out, merely allowing me a moment to recover before sliding back in. But when I tried to purse my lips and suck, he gave my cheek a light slap.

“No,” he corrected. “You’ll just sit here with my cock in your mouth, understand?”

As best I could I nodded, my eyes already starting to water as my jaw ached.

“Take a breath,” he instructed.

I did, my body relaxing a little bit with the realization that I could breathe.

“Good girl,” he praised, before his voice turned into steel. “Now, I’d like to remind you of two very important things. The first is that I am exceedingly, disgustingly wealthy. I could buy you hundreds – no *thousands* – of nice dresses like this and my accountant would not even bat an eye. In fact, he’d probably ask why I wasn’t buying you more.”

My body jerked slightly with my inclination to say something and though I wanted to pull myself off him, his hand came around the back of my head, firmly holding me in place.

“The second and much more important thing is that you *deserve* it. I realize that you spent your whole adolescence plodding behind Potter and that spattergroitted git, wiping their chins and holding their hands while they never once had a care in their minds about your well being. Somewhere along the way you got the impression that the only thing you were good for was what you could offer others.”

His eyes flashed silver, face turning fierce with his emotion, even as one of his thumbs gently brushed my cheek.

“You deserve so much more than a nice dress, Hermione. You deserve to be spoiled, to be waited on hand and fucking foot. You deserve to never have to wonder for the rest of your life whether or not you are worthy of the love, affection, and care given to you.” He paused, his eyes growing soft, the look there so compassionate, so heart wrenching that something twinged uncomfortably in my chest. “The dress isn’t the problem, is it, love?”

At his words, cracks in my walls began to form and the twinge in my chest turned into an ache I couldn’t quantify. I knew he didn’t expect me to respond, but I closed my eyes, trying to stifle whatever it was that was pounding against my mental walls, begging to be let in. But I felt his thumb tracing the line of my jaw, the hand in my hair tightening slightly in a silent command to open my eyes which, after a moment, I obeyed.

“No, it isn’t about the dress. The dress is the vehicle in which you can place your insecurities, your fears, and your perceived failures. It’s a metaphor for the trauma that has created a world in your mind in which you are the villain.”

No, no, no. This was too much. My skin began to crawl with the unnamed emotions slipping through the cracks of my walls, my heartbeat roaring in my ears.

“Breathe,” he commanded.

I breathed. The expression on his face changed once more from that soul crushing compassion back to the fierce, dominant look that steadied me. As if he could see that I had hit my limit without even signaling my safe word.

“Good, you’re being *so good* for me, pet,” he said, dropping his voice even lower. “Warming my cock like this for me. Such a perfect mouth to go with a perfect witch.”

At his praise the tumult in my mind quieted slightly and I felt my body relaxing as the hand on my hair gripped even tighter than before.

“I’m going to fuck your mouth now, darling.” Slowly, he began to piston himself in and out. “I need you to drink me all down and not spill a drop on this beautiful dress that you *deserve* to wear. Once I’m done, you’re going to button me up, kiss me, and we’ll be on our way, understand?”

Once again, I nodded the best I could while my mouth was wrapped around his throbbing cock. This was what I needed – not his kind words and affirmations. I needed him to use me, to dominate me, to make the world go quiet.

“Hands behind your back,” he directed. “Unless it becomes too much, in which case tap my thigh.”

The moment I grabbed my elbows behind my back, Draco moved. His hips thrusting forward, the blunt tip of his cock nudging the back of my throat until my eyes watered. But he didn’t relent, his groans deep and rumbling as he fucked my mouth.

“Fuck, pet, look at you,” he groaned. “Letting me use you like this when we know you’re really a goddess incarnate.”

Something fluttered low in my belly at his words, at the way he couldn’t take his eyes off my face as he continued. I breathed through my nose best I could, forcing myself to relax my jaw and tongue, giving in completely to the sensation of him holding me up.

“Yes, just like that, darling,” he praised. “Give over to me.”

My body relaxed further, mind going completely silent in my submission. It was the most luxurious feeling in the world to know that Draco had everything taken care of. All I needed to do was breathe.

He came with a cry, my name falling from his lips as I tasted his salty and sweet come shoot down the back of my throat. I swallowed quickly, lapping at him to ensure none dropped from my mouth to the dress beneath us.

Once he began to soften, Draco pulled back, panting heavily. His hair was slightly mussed, cheeks pink and eyes bright as I carefully tucked him back into his trousers and did up the placket.

He held out his hand, assisting me to my feet while smoothing out the wrinkles in the skirt with a charm. With my shoes on, we were a little closer in height and it was easy to lift onto my toes to press a kiss to his mouth. His arms wound around my waist, pulling me up to him, forcing my lips apart so he could taste himself on my tongue.

I was dripping for him, squeezing my thighs together needily as one hand splayed across my backside while the other slid to my throat. Holding me to him as if he were afraid in another moment I would be gone. We kissed for a long moment and I felt myself settle more into the relaxation only Draco could provide. With him, I was safe, cared for – even if I knew it wasn’t love.

Well... at least not for him.

Chapter 23

Draco

The Ministry gala as always, was atrocious with its charmed ceiling of falling snow, tacky chandeliers dripping with never-melting ice, and semi-sentient snowman who took our outer robes.

Last year I'd found a clump of slush inside the inner pocket.

Hermione and I stepped through the doors of the transfigured hall on level three and I watched as her eyes lit up. From her perspective, perhaps, the décor was not gaudy – but *festive*. However, as the son of Narcissa Malfoy, there was no way I'd ever admit to enjoying the on-the-nose décor of the holiday season.

"Mione! Draco!" Potter called from where he leant against a small bar charmed to look like half of an igloo. He turned back to the bartender, gesturing for two more, I placed my hand low on Hermione's back and guided us over.

"Blimey you two look amazing!" Potter said with a glassy look in his eye, obviously on his second firewhiskey of the night.

"Thanks, Harry," Hermione said with a blush.

Pansy suddenly appeared beside *the Chosen Git*, as I affectionately called him the deeper he got into his cups, dragging Theo and Blaise along behind her.

"Tell *them* what you just told me," Pansy commanded Theo, her eyes alight with humor.

Theo's grin was so wide it was threatening to take over his entire face. He was outfitted in the usual bespoke robes for occasions like these, having opted for dark green – no doubt to match his husband's eyes (absent due to a new hatchling at the reserve). Beside him, Blaise was similarly outfitted, though in sapphire blue instead of green, and wearing an identical grin.

"Just found out that Cormac McLaggen's been sacked," Theo wheezed into his firewhiskey.

Beside me, Hermione's mouth popped open, her eyes alight with a similar excitement now. I had to admit if there was one person that held a candle to the Weasel git's antics, it was McLaggen.

"Why?" Potter gasped with humor.

Theo began laughing so hard Hermione took his drink in fear it would spill over all of us.

"Because... he... got caught..." Theo tried to say between his wheezing laughter. "With his... *trousers down* ... in a broom cupboard..."

My brows pulled together as I looked to Blaise, silently asking for clarification.

“You know how he chases after every tail he can get, yeah?” Blaise said, able to hold it together enough to speak in coherent sentences. “Well, a few of the secretaries on level six had enough and set up – what do muggles call it? A *sting* ?” He looked at Hermione and Potter.

“A sting operation, yes,” Hermione said, her cheeks pulling higher with her smile. “Where they set up a perpetrator in the hopes he’ll be caught committing a crime.”

Theo snapped his fingers, pointing at her.

“Exactly,” Blaise said for Theo when he lost it again. “I guess they needed proof from the Ministry of their sexual harassment claims so... They set up a time to shag in a broom cupboard and then sent Jones instead.”

Jones, as the head of the Ministry’s Wizarding Resources Department, was a ruthless seventy-four-year-old witch with a mean streak.

“*Salazar* ,” Pansy cursed.

“That was all the proof needed,” Blaise finished.

Theo clasped Blaise on the shoulder in an effort to keep himself upright.

“Granted, it wasn’t *big* proof,” Theo quipped.

The group erupted into laughter, pulling a fair bit of attention our way – especially when wizards and witches around us realized that two-thirds of the *golden trio* stood in our midst.

“Fuck,” Potter muttered, the relaxed, glassy expression suddenly vanishing off his face as he tried unsuccessfully to smooth down his hair. “Shall we, Hermione?”

At his words, I tugged her closer to me, sliding my hand around her hip.

“I think I’ll stick with her this year, Potter. See if I can’t shorten the walk about time,” I all but sneered.

Potter blinked at me for a moment as if he’d never thought about *not* giving almost all his free time at the gala to people weeping over him and trying to touch his scar. But then he checked in with Hermione, who gave him a small nod, before offering his arm to Pansy to begin the rounds.

“Drink up, love,” I said to Hermione. “I plan to get you through this next part in less than a quarter of an hour.”

Hermione’s grin widened as she drank the remainder of the firewhiskey in her glass before placing it on the icy bar beside us. Theo leant forward, kissing her on the cheek while Blaise saluted the both of us.

“My lord, my lady,” Blaise intoned deeply, before both of our friends dropped into groveling bows.

“What a *pleasure* to have been in your company,” Theo cooed at our shoes.

I rolled my eyes while Hermione giggled and ruffled Theo's curls, pulling an indignant cry from him about how long it had taken to achieve the perfect curl pattern tonight, before I led her into the crowd.

Fifteen minutes had been a *generous* estimation. One look at me and the majority of the usual cogs in the wheel of the Ministry merely greeted us with a "*Hermione Granger!*" Followed by a wide eyed, "*Draco Malfoy?*" Only a few pushed through their initial shock to engage in conversation, most being either individuals Hermione or I worked with or people too daft to understand that they weren't wanted.

After a polite conversation with Minister Shacklebolt, who hugged Hermione in a very paternal way and gave me a look that imparted without any doubt that he would hold me personally responsible for her wellbeing, I took her by the hand and guided her to the dance floor.

"I have to admit, you were right," Hermione sighed with relief as I pulled her into my arms.

"Of course I'm right – I'm *Draco Malfoy*," I teased, intoning my name with the same level of surprise that we'd heard on the lips of almost every witch or wizard tonight.

Her laugh rippled through me like dancing flames in a fire. *Gods* she was beautiful, her hair shining down her back in soft waves, the way her gown clung to her breasts and the brief view of her thigh I got as we had walked about the room. But it wasn't just that – it was the way she spoke to every person as if they were her friend, regardless of how they greeted *her*.

How she took one codger's rant about how we should be "*leaving those mangy mutts to their own devices rather than trying to help them*" in stride, calmly explaining the nuances of lycanthropy and human kindness until the man had blanched and committed to a donation for her department.

And now here she was, dancing in the arms of *Reformed Death Eater Draco Malfoy*, staring up at me like I could do no wrong in the world. As if there had been no war, no pain, no loss, just us.

It was time to bring her up to speed. Time to explain to her in clear, distinct terms what we were – what I wanted. Fuck, most importantly what *she* wanted. I didn't want any misunderstanding left in our way.

Because Hermione Granger was mine and I was hers.

"Hermione," I started, my thumb brushing the exposed skin of her back.

She shivered, her eyes closing softly before opening again.

"I want you to know –" I started, but immediately was cut off.

"Hey, Mione. Draco, mind if I cut in?" Potter said, panting slightly.

He looked distinctly disheveled – that was to say, *more* disheveled than usual. Hermione looked at me questioningly for a moment before taking in Potter's panicked expression.

"What's wrong, Harry?" Hermione asked.

“Where’s Parks?” I interjected before he could explain, scanning the room for her.

Potter gave a frantic look behind him before answering, “Went to the ladies and this absolute *spider monkey* of a witch just grabbed me.”

I shook my head. Pansy should have known better than to leave Potter without an escort.

“It’s okay, Draco,” Hermione said soothingly, already dropping her hold on me. “I’ll dance with Harry until Pans gets back. Shouldn’t be too long.”

Sighing with annoyance, I finally acquiesced, passing her into Potter’s anxious arms while he muttered a quick “*Cheers, Malfoy*” .

As I stepped to the edge of the dance floors, I tried to see if I could find Blaise and Theo in the crowd. They usually kept close to the bar or buffets, preferring to squeeze the absolute most out of the Ministry events as they could. Last year, Theo had left with his robe pockets full of coconut prawns – something I still didn’t understand given he had enough money in his vaults to build and run his own fried prawn restaurant on a whim if he wanted to.

“Draco Malfoy,” a voice purred.

Ice jolted through my veins, my stomach swooping low with sudden nausea as I placed that voice. I didn’t need to look to my right to see the form of Astoria Greengrass standing all too close beside me. In fact, I preferred not to.

“Astoria,” I replied coldly.

She chuckled, stepping slightly closer and in front of me.

“Was that Hermione Granger I saw on your arm?” she asked all too innocently.

At the mention of Hermione, I looked at her. Astoria was the embodiment of pureblood breeding with her sandy blonde hair pulled back in an elegant chignon and emeralds dripping off her neck as if they were choking her. The gown she wore was much more traditional than many of the witches here, with its long-daggered sleeves and full skirt.

Astoria had allowed her parents to groom her in a way her older sister Daphne (who had, in fact, run away with a muggle named Antonin last year and I happened to send quite the extravagant wedding present to) hadn’t. At first, I hadn’t seen it, allowing myself to be taken in by her charm, her delicate manner. She walked with a queen’s posture but a Death Eater’s mind, something she’d hidden from me for the first eight months of our relationship. I had wrongly assumed she would have been just like Daph.

She’d slipped, of course. They always do in the end. She’d become more of a sub than a girlfriend, preferring to arrange scenes rather than dates until I had become merely her Dom. But the final nail in the coffin had been on one of the rare evenings when we had been out to dinner and I’d seen Hermione and Potter on one of their occasional outings across the restaurant.

“*Disgusting,*” Astoria had muttered under her breath.

“Excuse me?” I asked, tracking her gaze over to Hermione where she was laughing at something that Potter had said.

Hermione’s head was tipped back, curls shimmering in the torchlight, her laugh loud enough that even through the din of the dining crowd I had heard the sparkle of it.

Astoria had paused for a moment, assessing me coolly before making a decision.

“Honestly, I know you’re... friends... with her but really – a place like this shouldn’t allow her kind in here.”

Rage had bubbled hot and thick beneath my skin.

“I don’t think I understand your meaning,” I said firmly, trying to force the words out of her.

Because the truth was, I wasn’t surprised. In the eight months we had been together I didn’t love her, didn’t even feel any strong affection for her. I knew it wasn’t right – wasn’t fair – but I had been just trying my damndest to get over the witch a few tables over from us.

Her reply had been all I had needed to walk away from her. I didn’t need to think of it now, didn’t *want* to think of what she’d said now. The mere memory of that night made my magic begin to sing in my veins. It wanted to lash out, to protect, to defend. Though, I was ashamed to say I hadn’t put her in her place, I’d merely stood from the table and left her there, walking out into the crisp winter air and disappearing to Theo and Charlie’s place.

“What do you want?” I asked her now.

Her grin was calculating, cold as her hand slid up the front of my robes.

“Oh, I merely wanted to congratulate you on your new blood traitor status,” she sneered in a very ladylike manner I was sure was taught to her in finishing school.

And it was odd, though I’d gone the first seventeen years of my life fearing that term, it suddenly was music to my ears.

I gave her my most satisfied, charming grin possible, wrapping my hand around her diamond covered wrist.

“Ah yes. You’re right,” I said calmly, leaning forward. “Blood traitor and *proud*.”

When I rose back to my full height, I jerked her hand off of me and took a step back, conjuring a handkerchief to wipe the hand I’d touched her with.

“Now get the fuck out of here, Astoria,” I snapped coldly.

The witch stared at me like she might start screaming, but then appeared to think better of it, striding off into the crowd to no doubt find whatever poor Ministry sod had brought her here tonight. My eyes combed the dancers for Hermione and Potter, ready to take my witch back regardless of *the Chosen Git’s* needs, but my heart dropped into my stomach as Potter stood in the middle of the dancers, staring towards the doors that led towards the floos.

“Potter, *Potter* ,” I called, pushing through the dancers to get to him. “Where is she?”

He looked back at me then, those disturbingly bright green eyes filled with apologies and pain I couldn’t understand.

“She um...” Potter swallowed, running a hand through his hair. “Well, fuck, she saw you with Astoria and sort of...”

I stared at him for a moment before the pieces clicked into place.

“I tried to get her to stop, I mean – it was pretty bloody obvious to me that whatever was going on between you two wasn’t pleasant but she... well...”

“Spit it out, Harry,” I snapped, my panic too tangible to even acknowledge that I’d used his given name.

Potter took a deep breath, gesturing towards the hall of fireplaces.

“She left.”

Chapter 24

Hermione

“It’s okay, Draco,” I said soothingly. “I’ll dance with Harry until Pans gets back. Shouldn’t be too long.”

Draco glanced between us; frustration obvious in his expression. Whatever he’d been about to tell me was important enough that Harry’s plight with handsy witches didn’t particularly appear to take precedence in his mind.

Thus far, it had been the most enjoyable gala I’d ever experienced with the Ministry. Draco had been by my side every step of the way, his presence deterring most from doing more than greeting us. Usually by the time the dancing began I had a pounding headache, the cacophony of noise in my ears so loud I could barely hear what people were saying. Not with all the talk of the war, the pointed questions about my *experience growing up the way I did*, and backhanded compliments.

It had been a relief to see that Ron hadn’t attended this year. Usually the Ministry extended invitations to prominent members of the community, including quidditch players, and in the past he’d taken it upon himself to attend. Those galas had been even more torturous.

“Thanks, Mione,” Harry said gratefully, pulling me into some semblance of a waltz.

Though Pansy had taught Harry much in their years together, his dancing was still lacking. I tried to keep myself from dissolving into a fit of laughter the fourth time he tried to follow instead of lead.

“Godric, Harry – how does Pansy put up with you?” I asked, pulling him in the proper direction.

Harry blushed, his eyes skirting the crowd over my head.

“Honestly? I’ve got no clue,” he answered sheepishly before his eyes fixed on a point to the left of us. “Oh *shit*. ”

I looked towards whatever he was referencing. My heart pounded in my ears, stomach churning as Astoria Greengrass approached Draco. Gods, but she was beautiful with her sleek updo, opulent gown, and glittering neck of emeralds. It was as if she was gliding on air, a ribbon in the wind, the way she moved towards him.

As she stood next to him, speaking low in his ear, I couldn’t help but notice how *right* they looked together. A pureblood prince and princess perfectly matched in every way. Shame coiled hot and sticky in my chest as I thought of how I must look beside him. Bushy, big brained, know-it-all Hermione Granger could never hold a candle to the beauty on display.

“Hermione...” Harry said, his voice sounding strangely distant.

Astoria circled Draco like a hawk with its prey until she was standing in front of him. His grey eyes lowered to hers and... *Circe*, was that heat in his eyes? I didn't know the circumstances surrounding their breakup, though I knew that no one liked to mention Astoria. I had assumed that she had cheated on him, but perhaps she'd seen the error of her ways.

Blood roared in my ears as her hand slid up his chest and gods, he just let her keep it there. I'd thought once that Draco and I fit together like pieces of two different puzzles destined to find each other... But how could I ever hope to hold a candle to one of his own adjoining pieces?

Cracks rippled through my walls, except they weren't cracks, they were wide holes that I couldn't fill. My hands, no my *body*, shook with the realization that whatever I had thought Draco and I had... it wasn't lasting. It wasn't forever. It wasn't love.

Standing before him was the type of witch he deserved, one that didn't have to be given expensive dresses or pumped up with compliments. A witch who knew her worth and was unapologetic in taking up her space. Because Draco was so much more than a pretty face, than the heir of his family. Draco was a wizard, a man, who had crawled from darkness hand over hand into the light. He had pulled himself from his blood purity ways, from his damning beliefs and created change for *good*. No longer did he live in the shadow of his failures, of his mistakes, of the war. Whereas I could not seem to find what direction in which the light might shine.

I was a witch that would have been better off memorialized on one of the countless plaques that lined the walkway of Hogwarts. Because for all the good I may have done, it was never good *enough*.

I could live for a thousand years and I would never be able to do enough to cleanse my soul of all those I couldn't save.

The thought was like a *bombarda* blasting through my mental walls.

Draco's hand curled around Astoria's wrist and I felt bile rise in my throat as he grinned at her. I wanted to get out of here – no I needed to get out of here before the dam broke. It was so much more than Draco and Astoria, so much more than some strange, unrequited romance we'd fallen into. I could feel my walls breaking, could feel the monster on the other side of the door.

"Harry," I said quickly. "I'm actually not feeling well. I'm going to go get some fresh air."

Without waiting for a response, I turned towards the doors that led to the corridor of temporary floos for the party, ignoring whichever friend it was that called after me. I couldn't stop. No, not when it felt like my skin was flaking off piece by piece and the roaring of the dark monster in my mind was shattering my eardrums. Reflexively I brought my hands to my ears as if it could quell the noise as I stepped into the first fireplace and called out my address.

Stumbling through the hearth I tore at the bodice of the gown, unable to find enough oxygen to supply my brain with what it needed. I gripped the edge of the couch as I felt the stones of my mental wall fall. Desperately I tried to remember all Remus had told me about control, about boxes, about shelves full of books, but I couldn't find it. Not without oxygen, not without Remus there to guide me. He'd helped me put these walls in place, helped me build them brick by brick to keep Harry safe. To keep Harry *alive*. I needed Remus.

But Remus was dead.

They all were dead. Remus, Tonks, Fred, Dobby, Sirius, Moody, Lavender, the list went on and on. Each one a mark on my soul of those I couldn't save.

By the time I reached my bedroom the dress was shredded, pieces of the expensive fabric falling to the floor while others still clung to me. I stumbled to the bathroom, unseeing as I scrambled for the light, reaching for the countertop.

Water, I needed water. I needed to get this makeup off my face, cancel these beauty charms. I needed to... I needed to...

The last stone fell and all the emotions I'd tried to keep at bay rippled through my consciousness like a shockwave.

Pain.

Sadness.

Emptiness.

Loneliness.

Weariness.

Grief.

The faces of those we lost swimming in my mind.

I failed you. I wanted to scream. *I failed you.*

I saw Remus and Tonks, so still and peaceful in death, their hands only centimeters apart hanging off their respective cots. I saw Lavender Brown, barely recognizable, laid out in the great hall before Padma gently laid a sheet across her body.

The grief, the pain, the sadness was a tidal wave but also an inferno. A tornado and a black hole. Fiendfyre and the cruciatus. Scalding tears pooled in my eyes, burning me like acid before they fell down my cheeks.

My hands gripped the countertop, the faint sound of marble cracking as I gasped for air, as the burning tears dripped. I would do anything, *anything* not to feel this again. I would give up my magic, give up my breath, give up my life to put it all back where it had come from.

And suddenly I could see it all too clearly – the way it should have gone. The cursed blade sinking down into my soul, releasing me from this world. But *he* had saved me and why? Out of guilt? Out of some misplaced responsibility because I was a schoolmate being tortured in his house?

I was nothing, no one. Merely a solution to a problem, a logical brain, a means to an end. .

The scream tore loose from my lungs before I could stop it, echoing throughout the bathroom until the sound of glass shattering replaced it in my ears. Sharp, stabbing pain pattering across

my skin that I welcomed with relief. Here was what I needed, here was what I *deserved* . But then, in the rippling silence, another voice echoed into the room.

“Hermione...” Draco said softly. “Let me in.”

Chapter 25

Draco

I'd stepped through her floo as she'd scrambled into her bedroom, her hands clawing at her gown. Fear gripped me hearing her panicked breaths, the way it sounded as though she couldn't get enough air, the way she fell over herself in an effort to find somewhere safe.

Her bedroom was a wreck by the time I entered it. Her bedside lamp knocked over, some of the black fabric of her gown littered across the floor, her shoes thrown off, a pot of ink overturned and quills scattered on her desk.

She stood in her bathroom, the dress tattered and torn, but still clinging to her body. Her knuckles were white against the countertop as her eyes squeezed shut, tears beginning to roll down her cheeks.

"Hermione, love," I said, trying to cross the threshold of the bathroom to go to her but I couldn't.

Her magic barred me from entering. It was wild, strange magic – not her usual controlled conjuring and I wondered if she was even aware she was doing it. But then my eyes widened, stomach dropping as the white marble beneath her hands began to crack, plumes of dust puffing into the air as her tears fell faster, breaths turning into sobs as her hair crackled with magic.

And then, she screamed.

Her scream was horrifying, it was the sound of the cruciatus curse, the sound of Crabbe crying out as fiendfyre consumed him, the same sound I'd heard so many times echoing off the walls of my own bedroom. It was the sound of a decade of grief clawing its way out of her lungs.

The mirror exploded with her magic, as did the window behind her, a storm cloud of glass ricocheting off the walls, the glass of the shower, and the ceramic of the tub. Yet it was contained within the room, some sharp pieces bouncing off the magical boundary she'd created. It felt like it took hours for all the glass to fall to the floor. Hermione stood there bloodied and barefoot in her destroyed bathroom, gulping in air as if she was just now able to breathe.

"Hermione..." I said as gently as I could. "Let me in."

She stared at me for a moment as if she didn't recognize me, her expression frantic, deep crimson gashes across her cheeks and forehead, peppered across her chest, arms, and legs. What remained of her dress was now littered with holes, magic sparking across her skin and rippling through her hair. As she shifted her weight, I heard the glass crack beneath the soles of her bare feet and winced.

"Hermione, love, it's me. It's Draco," I reassured. "Let me through."

The air shimmered in front of me, the magical barrier dissolving. Tentatively I took a step across the threshold, watching the way her shoulders began to shake, the way her chest heaved in the air, the tears that continued to drip off her cheeks, tinged with her blood.

“It’s all right,” I said, moving slowly, afraid at any moment she might move too fast and hurt herself further.

Glass cracked beneath my shoes as I took one step, then another, until I was close enough to embrace her, but I stopped myself. I didn’t want to push myself upon her if she wasn’t ready for it.

But then her hands outstretched, grabbing the front of my shirt, staining it red.

“ *Draco...* ” she rasped, the expression in her gaze so broken I wondered if she was trying to convince herself I was really here.

My hands covered hers for a moment, careful of the shallow cuts on the backs of them, before I moved to touch an uninjured part of her cheek.

“I’m here, I’m right here,” I murmured quietly, stroking her face.

She gasped, the sound strangled through her tears as she clawed at the front of my robes in a desperate attempt to get closer to me, her feet moving over the shards below us.

I closed the distance, wrapping my arms gingerly around her, wandlessly dislodging the glass that clung to her hair that was now sticky with her blood.

“ *Draco* ,” she cried, her face pressed into my chest.

Her knees gave out, but she didn’t need to hold herself up anymore. I was here, I had her, and I was never going to let her fall. I ran my hand over her hair, shushing her quietly as she continued to sob, her body seizing with the ferocity of her grief. I’d known she’d locked it all away, had understood it on an intellectual level, but to *witness* it...

To witness it was more than heartbreaking – it was soul shattering.

“It’s okay,” I tried to comfort her. “You don’t need to hold it in anymore.”

Names slipped through her lips. *Remus, Tonks, Fred*. On and on, the list of the dead that she had memorized in the last ten years. Each one a mark on her soul as if she’d raised her wand to kill them herself. She repeated them over and over until I found myself speaking them with her.

Remus

Tonks

Fred

Moody

Dobby

Lavender

Colin

Ted

On and on. And with each repetition, her body relaxed. With each name spoken the weight appeared to lift from her shoulders until I was completely holding her up as she cried into my chest.

“It was not your fault,” I said softly into her ear. “Their blood is not on your hands.”

She shivered, her hands clenching into my shirt before she released them, fingers spread wide across my chest.

“I know,” she said, her voice muffled by my shirt.

The words sounded like they slipped through her lips unconsciously.

“Say it,” I urged her gently. “Say it again.”

Her next breath rattled her chest.

“Their blood is not on my hands,” she repeated.

“Again love.”

“Their blood is not on my hands.”

Pride swelled in my chest at her words as she repeated them again, broken through her sobs.

“Good, that’s so good, Hermione,” I praised. “I’m so proud of you, love.”

Behind me, I heard a muttered curse and knew Blaise and Theo must have followed close behind. I couldn’t imagine what the scene looked like from their perspective – thousands of shards of glass littering the floor and countertop, the chill of the winter wind blowing from the now broken window. Blood was splattered around the room from the force of the blast, and though they could probably only see a little of her lower half, it would be clear it was hers.

“*Reparo*, ” they incanted softly together, their wands pointing at the glass on the floor.

I leant down, curling an arm beneath Hermione’s knees to draw her feet from the floor as the glass went flying in all directions. There were still small pieces missing from the mirror, but once the countertop was cleared, I muttered the same charm to repair the marble before carefully setting her on the edge.

“Hermione, love, is it alright if Theo takes a look at your cuts? We need to get the glass out of it.”

She stared blankly at me for a moment, the tears continuing to stream down her cheeks, as if she was so startled by what she had just realized it had rendered her silent once more, before Theo

slowly padded across the threshold. He stopped just shy of her bare knees, his hands and wand up where she could see them.

“Hi, best friend,” Theo said in a tone I’d rarely heard from him – it was *pain*, pain and grief and sadness all rolled into one. “Alright if I impress you with my healing skills?”

But she didn’t smile, instead she shook her head, eyes closing.

“*Draco*,” she whispered.

My heart squeezed at my name once again on her lips as Theo nodded before turning to me.

“The incantation to remove anything from her skin is *purus*,” he instructed, before showing me the wand movement. “You’ll need to go over each cut, but it looks like the majority of it is in her feet.”

“I understand,” I said as calmly as I could.

Theo gave another sad look at Hermione, before walking back towards Blaise.

“We’ll be close by if you need us,” Theo said to me, before they both left the room.

Slowly I worked over her, extracting the bits of glass from her skin and healing the wounds left behind. We would need to get her some dittany in the next twenty four hours, but I thought even without it she probably wouldn’t scar too badly. She was silent for a long time, seeming merely content to stare at me as I worked, until I knelt to inspect her feet.

“Where did you leave Astoria?” she asked in a rasping tone.

The question surprised me a little, but it didn’t halt my progress.

“In hell, where she belongs,” I answered calmly, before repeating the incantation on the deep cuts on her feet.

Hermione shifted above me and I looked up to see her tears had stopped, some sort of... resignation present across her features.

“You... you should be with her,” she said, her voice almost dead but it wasn’t because of occlumency, I could see that.

I could see the sadness in her expression, the way her shoulders curled in on themselves.

“No, I shouldn’t,” I replied before healing another of the cuts on her arch.

She tried to pull her foot from my grasp but I refused to let go.

“I saw you...” she swallowed loudly. “I saw you with her.”

That made me pause. I looked back at her then, my voice dropping low.

“What is it you believe you saw?”

At the question, she appeared to collapse in upon herself further, her skin paling beneath the streaks of blood left behind.

“I saw a witch worthy to be on your arm... I saw the kind of life you deserve to live,” she said in a small voice.

I shook my head, slowly rising to my feet.

“But you see, Hermione,” I started. “You couldn’t be further from the truth. Because she is a lacquered fruit, gleaming and sparkling on the outside but rotten at her core.”

Hermione blinked at me in confusion.

“Do you know why we broke up?” I asked, to which she gave a small shake of her head. Of course she didn’t. I hadn’t told her and I was sure no one else would have wanted to broach that subject. “Because she still believed that stupid blood purity shit that started the war. Because, even more importantly, one night we were in the same restaurant as you and Potter having dinner and she called you a *mudblood* .”

...

Hermione

It was strange, how silent my mind was.

I’d heard every piece of glass drop to the floor, every breath Draco had taken, every gasp of breath in my lungs.

My mind was a battlefield, a wreckage of stone walls, smoldering ancient ruins crumbled into dust. Bodies strewn across the marble floors while the faintest rays of dawn broke across my mental sky. In the silence that followed, without the din of ghosts screaming inside my mind, it was easier to see what Draco had been saying, that though I felt guilt for those who had been lost... there had been no way for me to save them. And though I would have thought that the roaring would have begun again immediately, it was quiet, as quiet as it had been after the battle had been won, as it had been in those moments after Voldemort had fallen.

Quiet, but not quite peaceful.

Draco stared at me, obviously waiting for some sort of a response. But what could I say? How could I put into words how it didn’t matter if Astoria specifically was wrong for him, there was someone out there that was.

“Tonight, she came to congratulate me on my blood traitor status,” Draco continued after a moment’s pause. “And do you know what I said to her?”

I shook my head, fingertips curling around the countertop to steady myself against the intensity of his gaze. His face and shirtfront were streaked red with my blood, tie askew and hair mussed.

“I told her I *was* a blood traitor – and proud of it.” He stared at me for a long moment and I knew he was truly *seeing* me. Seeing the resignation, the fear, the shame, the guilt, the grief that roiled inside of me.

Draco’s hands closed over my knees; his silver rings muted in the light with the blood on his hands as he squeezed once.

“Hermione, you can try all you want to convince me that you’re not right for me. You can break everything in here again. Shatter the mirrors, crack the plaster, break my bones. But I’m not leaving – you can’t make me leave.”

I just stared at him, the question falling from my lips before I could stop it.

“*Why?*” I asked, desperation plain in my voice.

His smile was soft as it tugged at his cheeks, as his hands drew up to cup my face and he leant closer until his lips were only a breath away.

“Because I love you,” he answered, right before he kissed me.

Chapter 26

Hermione

That couldn't be right.

Draco pulled away, his grey eyes silver as he stared down at me, thumbs rubbing across my still damp cheeks.

"I love you, Hermione Jean Granger," he repeated. "I have loved you since bloody third year when you punched me in the face, even though I didn't know it then. I loved you when you were bushy haired and desperate for knowledge, I loved you when you were traipsing through the forests in search of a way to destroy the Dark Lord, I loved you when you were..." He took a deep breath. "I loved you when you were screaming on my drawing room floor. That was when I knew I loved you. *Fuck*, didn't you ever wonder why I couldn't stand for you to be hurt? Didn't you ever wonder why I stopped her?"

Tears slipped through my lashes once more, but it was true – I had wondered. I wondered all the time. But the idea that he had done it because he loved me had never once crossed my mind. Yet still, I recoiled from the thought, trying to push it away, trying to stop the hope that wanted to soar up through my veins and into my shattered soul.

"Didn't you wonder why I stayed at the Ministry past my parole? Why I didn't just buy my own damn team to manage? Why I showed up to each and every fucking pub night and every Sunday dinner for the last six godsdamned years? Why I couldn't take seeing you run away every time that freckled git came around?"

I shook my head, my hands gripping his wrists as the tears brimming in his eyes spilled across his cheeks. No, he couldn't cry because if he cried then it meant that it was real. If he cried it meant that he was telling me the truth. It meant that he really did love me the way I loved him.

"I stayed at the Ministry to be close to you, Hermione. I showed up twice a week to see you, to be near you, to listen to you talk about your passions, to watch the way your hands moved when you went on about the things you were working on. To bask in your fucking glorious light that still shone regardless of the darkness still lingering inside of you," he said, taking a deep breath to steady himself. "I love you, Hermione. I've loved you since I was fourteen and no matter what you say I'm not going anywhere and you know why?"

I swallowed loudly, clearing my throat.

"Why?" I asked.

His smile this time was triumphant.

"Because I know you love me too."

With those words something inside me released, a final wall I hadn't known I built came crumbling down until all the love I had for him came pouring out. It spilled through my eyes, my lips, through my fingertips as I threw my arms around his neck.

"I love you," I said frantically. "*I love you, I love you, I love you.*"

He laughed, his joy sparkling in the sound.

"I know you do," he answered, pulling me tight to his chest. "I know you do."

...

An hour later the last of the blood had been washed from my skin and hair. I was standing in the middle of my bathroom while Draco methodically dried me, pressing kisses to every healed spot on my body.

Though I knew that this silence was a brief respite from the noise inside my mind, I couldn't help but wonder if there was a reason for it.

"I think..." I said hesitantly. "I think perhaps my occlumency was preventing me from healing."

Draco paused for a moment before unwrapping the large towel turban I'd made atop my head, my wet hair spilling down around my shoulders and back.

"What makes you say that?" he asked in a would-be casual voice that made it clear he agreed.

I took a deep breath, staring at the white and black tiles beneath my bare feet.

"Because once I felt, the noise stopped. I know it's not gone forever but I think trying not to feel was the problem, wasn't it? It's like a dam – a muggle contraption built to restrict water flow," I clarified. "The water doesn't stop running, it doesn't stop pounding against the dam and if it's not built properly the water will find a way through. I think it's the same... I think I took what Remus taught me to survive the war and turned it into – I don't know, a crutch?"

Draco stopped squeezing the water out of my curls for a moment.

"Hermione... it was a skill you learned to keep yourself alive – you *and* Potter. It's completely understandable that you took that skill and turned it into a coping mechanism."

My eyebrows pulled together at his use of the term.

"Coping mechanism..." I repeated softly.

He went back to work on my hair.

"It's when —"

"No, I know what it means," I said, cutting across him. "I just... I never thought of it that way."

Draco pressed a kiss to my bare shoulder.

“Have you thought about seeing a mind healer?” he asked tentatively, throwing the towel into the hamper against the far wall.

I stilled, reeling for a moment. The honest answer was – *yes and it terrifies me* . My throat clicked as I swallowed, my eyes still trained on the tiles between my feet until his came into view. He had taken off the majority of his clothing until he had been barefoot and shirtless, insisting on bathing me even though I hadn’t put up a fight. Now his knuckle pressed beneath my chin, pulling my face up to his.

“It’s not something I’m asking you to decide tonight, or ever even,” he said gently. “But perhaps take some time to think about it. Put together a pro/con list.”

His grey eyes twinkled with his joke, but it wasn’t a bad idea.

After a moment he leant down, pressing a gentle kiss to my mouth, his index finger sliding up to press against my jaw while his hand bracketed my throat. At the contact of his lips on mine, my body blossomed into life in a way I hadn’t experienced before. Everything was so tangible, so close, no walls between us and all I wanted was *more* .

A moan slipped from my mouth to his as I wound my arms around his middle, pulling myself closer to him. His free hand slid around my waist, his fingers splayed wide across the curve of my behind.

He nipped at my bottom lip and obediently I opened for him, his tongue tangling with mine, stealing my breath until I was panting, that familiar ache returning between my thighs. I needed him in a way I hadn’t needed anyone before. It wasn’t just for comfort, it wasn’t for satisfaction or to feel complete. It was to consummate the feeling between us, to take the words we had finally spoken to one another and put them into the most basic of actions.

“I want you to make love to me,” I whispered against his lips.

Draco pulled back, his eyes searching mine while the corner of his mouth pulled up into a lopsided smile.

“Oh, my darling, it would be an absolute *honor* ,” he answered, before scooping me into his arms and pulling me from the room.

...

Draco

It appeared that Blaise and Theo had set her room to rights before leaving.

As quickly as I could, I made my way to her bed, lowering her onto the fluffy cream-colored bedding before flicking my fingers at the bedroom door with a locking and silencing charm, ensuring no one would come wandering in to check on her.

Hermione was laid out against the pillows, her damp hair streaming around her, chest heaving. Though I’d healed her, a few shiny scars still littered her body, especially on her chest and arms,

that would need to be looked at soon. But not now – right now I had other plans.

Never taking my eyes off her, I unbuttoned the placket of my trousers, hooking my thumbs into the waist of them and my trunks before pushing them to the floor. Her eyes darkened as she took me in, pushing herself up to her hands when I approached the bed, reaching for me in the same moment I reached for her.

We came together like the tide meets the shore, crashing over one another, consuming each other. Her hands were everywhere, roaming over my face, my chest, my waist, my hips, and back again. As if she were trying to convince herself that it was real, that I was here and that I loved her.

I kissed her deeply. My hands wrapped around her waist, lifting her effortlessly to push her back further onto the bed before following. My lips never left hers while I settled between her thighs, her arms wrapping around my neck.

She tasted like springtime, like hope, like the way casting my patronus felt.

A breathy moan escaped her lips as my hand trailed down to her breast, plucking and twisting it between my fingertips as her back bowed. Her hot center was pressed against my rapidly hardening cock and I couldn't resist the urge to rock against her, sliding myself through her growing need.

“*Draco*,” she moaned into my mouth as I thrust again and again, my erection sliding against her clit.

My lips left hers, peppering kisses across her cheeks, her eyelids, her brows.

“I love you,” I whispered before capturing her mouth again.

She gave another whimper. My hand dipped lower, pushing between our bodies to replace my cock, fingers sliding easily inside of her. Her head pushed back into the pillows, eyes closing with the sensation as I curled them towards me.

“Eyes open, love,” I said softly – a request, not a command.

Quickly her eyes fluttered open as my thumb circled her clit. Her orgasm came fast, her walls clamping down on my fingers as I strummed inside of her, trying to wrench every gasp, every moan that fell from her lips. Her fingernails scrambled across my shoulders, my upper arms, her body rocking forward against mine while she cried out before her mouth closed over the bottom rune of my prisoner tattoo. Kissing, nipping, sucking, as if she were trying to pull the ink from my skin.

Before she had a chance to calm, I withdrew my hand and slipped inside of her. Groaning at the sensation of her wet, tight heat around me. *Gods*, it was so different now, with the words spoken between us.

Hermione's eyes locked on mine as I withdrew to the tip, her lips swollen and mouth agape. I grabbed her knee, hitching her leg higher around my hip before slowly pushing in once more, our moans intertwining in the room.

“You’re mine,” I said softly, reverently, as I began to slowly make love to her.

A gentle smile tugged at the corners of her mouth, tears beginning to sparkle in her eyes as she finally understood the weight of the words.

“And you’re mine,” she answered just as full of awe.

My answering smile was wide, encapsulating all the joy I felt in this moment as I tilted my pelvis upwards, rocking my hips so the head of my cock would stroke her front wall.

“Yes,” I all but growled. “Yes, I am.”

Her mouth covered mine once more, more desperate, needier than before. Fingers sliding through my hair, down my face, over my chest as I worked her. But just as I felt her begin to flutter around me, I pulled out, flipping us over until she was on top.

Steadying herself with her hands on my chest, Hermione tentatively rocked her hips. Her head fell back, curls spilling across her low back as she did.

Fuck .

“You’re glorious,” I groaned, my hands sliding up to cover her breasts, to roll her nipples between my fingers.

Then I leant up, capturing one in my mouth, taking over the pace from her as she bent her head down to meet mine, pressing kisses into my hair. Her hand slid through the back of it, down my neck, over my shoulders, holding me to her.

As she braced her shins on the mattress, I thrust up into her, over and over, moving from one breast to the other, my free arm around her waist.

“Oh, *yes* ,” she cried. “Yes, Draco. Please – don’t stop.”

I pulled back to gaze up at her, at the spots of pink blossoming on her high cheekbones. Her hair flowing around her like a honey brown veil.

“Come for me, love,” I moaned. “Come *with* me.”

We both fell apart at the same moment, our mouths colliding as I felt myself explode inside of her, swallowing each other’s moans. I flipped her over onto her back once more, fucking her through the aftershocks until we were panting, our bodies sticky with sweat.

“I love you,” she whispered softly when we stilled, her fingers brushing my fringe off my forehead.

“I love you,” I answered, pressing a kiss to her temple.

Her eyes sparkled for a moment as she looked me over.

“Does...” She swallowed. “Does this mean we’re dating now?”

I rolled my eyes while my thumb brushed across her collarbone.

“Hermione... we’ve *been* dating – for the last three weeks at least,” I answered slightly exasperated.

Her expression turned from surprise to confusion to stubbornness in one second flat.

“No...” she said slowly.

I chuckled.

“Yes...” I mimicked her tone. “I took you to the Wizarding Library –”

“That was for research!”

“We went on a *double date* with Pansy and Harry –”

“We always go to dinner with Pansy and Harry!”

“I’ve had you come to dinner – I never have people for dinner over there –”

“How was I supposed to know that?!”

“I sent you flowers after your wolfsbane success –”

“No! Those were from you, Theo, Blaise, and Pansy! They were the same...” Her eyes went wide with the sudden realization. “They were the same flowers I get every year for my birthday.”

I felt a blush slide over my cheeks and I nodded.

“I signed their names to the card because I didn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable. But... they’ve always been from me.”

Tears welled in her eyes and it was so striking, how quickly the emotion came to her now with her walls down. I knew this was merely a respite, the eye in the storm of her healing, but it was beautiful to see.

Gently, she cupped my cheek, thumb tracing the line of my cheekbone.

“I love you, you great big idiot,” she murmured, leaning close.

“I love you, you bushy haired know-it-all,” I answered. “And to answer your question: yes, we are dating. Officially, *seriously* dating.”

Chapter 27

Hermione

The roar of the pub was loud in my ears as we entered, Draco holding the door open behind himself for me – knowing that I preferred for him to enter first. His hand was firmly interlaced around mine, the smooth leather of his gloved finger stroking the inside of my wrist as he led me into the crowd.

I was more relaxed than usual heading into the Leaky on a Thursday night, but I knew that had less to do with my emotional upheaval from last week and more to do with what we'd done before we'd come here.

The marks across my wrists and ankles were still there from where he'd secured me to the spanking bench, hidden beneath the glamours I'd hastily cast before we had left. He'd tied me to the bench, having positioned it so that I had a perfect view of him seated on his throne-like chair, where he stroked his cock to the sight of me, trussed up and helpless and at his mercy.

Intellectually I had known that he was waiting to see how long it took for me to break, for me to beg him to touch me, to spank me, to kiss me. I'd tried to fight it as long as I could, but the sight of him, sprawled out like a king, fisting his cock and moaning with his grey eyes on me had turned me into a quivering mess. When only a quarter of an hour had passed, I was pleading for him.

"Please, Sir, *please, please, please*," I begged.

His hand hadn't stilled on his cock, his voice dark and rough as he'd asked, "Please, what, pet?"

"Please, have your way with me, Sir," I'd whimpered.

His eyebrows had raised slightly as his gaze tracked across my body.

"But what if what I want is to watch you panting and needy, chained to my spanking bench, hmm? What if what I want is for you to get so desperate you try to grind that perfect pussy of yours against the leather, knowing you'll never find release without me?"

It had come to that only ten minutes later while I tried to keep my frantic begging to myself, even though I knew it was what he wanted, until he was standing right behind me, fucking his fist until he came across my thighs and ass, before gathering his spend and slowly pushing it inside of me.

The flogging he'd given after that, with his come still smeared across my skin, had sent me catapulting into subspace.

We'd made it to the pub a little late, given the aftercare we'd provided for each other, but I felt more grounded, calmer than I usually did.

“Finally!” Theo cried, jumping up from his usual spot and pushing Draco out of the way to enfold me in a vice-like hug. “How are you, gorgeous?”

Once Draco and I had dressed the night of my breakdown, I had finally let Theo check me over again to ensure we hadn’t missed any cuts or glass. He had applied dittany to some of the scars on my face, neck, and legs, but a few on my chest and arms I’d asked to be left untreated – I wanted a reminder of what happened when I locked it all away. What happened when I gave over to the fear of *feeling*.

“I’m good, Theo,” I replied, giving him a squeeze.

“Have time to take a look at the list I sent you?” he asked as he slung an arm over my shoulders, pulling me along behind Draco.

I nodded, my stomach twisting with the image of the list of mind healers I’d asked him for where it was currently sitting on my desk, and Theo beamed.

“Let’s have lunch tomorrow and we can sit down to talk about it, yeah?”

“That sounds great,” I said with a smile before Blaise pulled me out of his grasp.

“Ah, my favorite golden girl,” Blaise exclaimed.

“You act like you didn’t see me this morning,” I laughed as he pulled me in for a hug.

Blaise shrugged. It had been clear that what they had witnessed had shaken both him and Theo deeply. Though they didn’t tiptoe around me, they’d both been more attentive than usual, and that wasn’t even taking Ginny into consideration.

The morning after the gala, she’d flooded in from Istanbul completely outfitted in her quidditch kit, crushed me into her arms for a long hug, told me she was proud of me, and then turned right back around and flooded out. Blaise had sheepishly admitted to sending her an emergency long-distance owl the night before.

Since then, we’d had a number of floo calls but I was looking forward to her coming home on Monday.

“Hello, darling,” Pansy said as Blaise passed me to her, kissing me lightly on both cheeks before holding me at arm’s length. “Do you need oxygen? How much have the boys been smothering you?”

Draco, Theo, and Blaise all made indignant noises behind me, but I shook my head.

“Maybe just a little. But it’s nowhere near as bad as your husband,” I answered in a mock whisper.

“Hey!” Harry shouted hotly behind me. “A bloke has a right to sleep on his best mate’s couch when they’re in crisis!”

It was true. Harry had flooded in right as Blaise and Theo had left my bedroom. When we’d come out later to have Theo check me over, Harry had been there, his eyes wild and fearful as he

looked me – and my new scars – over. They'd filled him in on what had happened and once Theo had finished with his diagnostics, Harry had crushed me into a hug.

"I blamed myself too... for so long."

"Oh Harry, it wasn't your fault."

"Wasn't it? Voldemort was after me, Hermione. He killed so many to get to me."

"But you couldn't control the actions of a madman. That blame doesn't rest on you."

"Then why do you think it rests on you?"

We had stared at each other for a long moment before we both dissolved into tears, finally coming together to grieve, to cry over the trauma and horror we had witnessed when we had been mere teenagers.

"Personally, I enjoyed our slumber party," Blaise muttered as he downed the last of his firewhiskey. "Potter can whip together a mean charcuterie board."

Pansy gave my arms one last squeeze before Theo gave a great cry behind us.

"GIN!" he bellowed.

We all turned to see a bright mane of fiery red hair pushing through the throng over to us. Ginny's face was tinged pink with the cold, a look of excitement on her face as she first hugged, Theo, then Draco.

"Congratulations on the last match," Draco complimented in his usual smooth manner. "Those Irish beaters didn't stand a chance."

"Thanks mate," she said brightly.

Draco visibly shuddered.

"Don't call me mate, Red," he grimaced.

Ginny's expression brightened further.

"Okay then, bestest friend in the whole wide world!" She turned to a group of wizards behind us. "Oi! Take a look at this guy! He's my best f—"

Her words were cut off by Draco's hand clamping over her mouth and dragging her away from the group.

"My apologies, gentlemen. She's a recent escapee from the Janus Thickey Ward," Draco drawled, thrusting her bodily towards myself and Pansy.

Gin wrapped her arms around both of us, pulling us in for a hug.

"Match got rescheduled due to a lightning storm," she said by way of explanation when she pulled back.

I smiled at her, my eyes moving over the group of friends – no, *family* – that surrounded me. Warmth spread throughout my chest at the realization that these people wouldn't have wanted me to merely be a memorial plaque on the grounds of Hogwarts, they missed me when I was absent, cherished me when I was present, and loved me through the good and the bad.

“Oh fucking hell,” Harry cursed. “Hermione, just, go sit down.”

We all turned to see Ron step through the door, his expression turning sheepish as his gaze settled on us.

Draco was already sliding off his outer robes in a very business-like fashion, handing them to Theo as if he were his right-hand man, who neatly hung them on the adjacent rack.

“What did I say? Tongue removed or was it eyeballs?” he asked Blaise calmly.

“It was tongue, mate,” Harry called.

“Is he truly that daft that he just continues to show up?” Pansy murmured in disbelief.

Gin shook her head in frustration. “Honestly? I have no idea.”

My heart pounded in my ears, but I knew what I had to do. I couldn't – no, *wouldn't* – continue to dance around this and I wouldn't allow others to fight my battles.

“Draco,” I said softly, placing a hand on his arm. “Let... let me.”

His grey eyes found mine, widening in surprise before his hand cupped my cheek.

“You sure?” he asked just as gently, all previous rage forgotten for a moment.

I nodded, pressing a kiss to his palm before I stepped away, towards Ron.

As I approached, Ron's eyes widened in shock, ever so often flicking over my shoulders to the mob that had no doubt formed behind me.

“Hello, Ron,” I said as calmly as I could manage.

“Er... hello,” he replied, voice awkward.

I breathed out a sigh.

“Listen, I don't know why you keep showing up here on Thursday nights but I need you to know that if it's to try to get a rise out of me, it won't work anymore.” He opened his mouth to interrupt, but I raised my hand to silence him. “I get that Harry is your friend too, but Ron – you *never* reach out to him. You never try to see him or even Ginny unless it's during our usual pub night. You've become so wrapped up in your quidditch stardom that you think everyone should be falling all over themselves to spend time with you while those who knew you – who *loved* you – don't even recognize you anymore.”

His expression soured at my words.

“I'm who I always have been, Mione,” he retorted.

Sadness trickled through my chest, through my poorly built new walls.

“No, Ron, you’re not. But neither am I. Nor is Harry, or Ginny, or Charlie. The war *changed* us, Ron – all of us. And...” I took a deep breath, steadying myself. “And I refuse to be a scapegoat for your pain any longer. You said things to me that are *unforgivable*, that hurt me so deeply I wish I could put it into words.” He tried to speak again but I cut across him. “I’m saying this for *me*, not for you. I’m done with you, Ronald Weasley. Show up on Thursday nights all you want, I don’t care – I’m not leaving. But here’s the thing...”

I stepped slightly to the side, gesturing to Draco who leant against the table with all the calm confidence he possessed, arms crossed over his chest. At my glance, he raised his chin slightly, a deadly smile crossing his face.

“I may not care that you show up but Draco? Draco certainly will.”

Ron spluttered for a moment.

“So what, now you’re just some Death Eater whore?”

I turned back to him, a wide grin on my face.

“Oh yes, Death Eater whore *and proud of it.*”

Epilogue One: Draco | One Year Later

Epilogue One: One Year Later

Draco

My dragonhide shoes clicked as I walked across the marble of the library, stopping only for a moment to place a marker in one of the many books left open, lest Hermione lose her place, before halting in front of the large bookshelf tucked away against the far wall.

I took a deep breath to calm my excitement, sliding a hand through my hair. All the preparations were set for tomorrow, though I'd had to wrangle an unbreakable vow from Theo to ensure he wouldn't spill the details to Hermione.

A year had passed since that night I'd told her to stop, commanded her not to run from her fears. *Salazar*, I hadn't thought a year would make a difference – but I had been completely wrong.

There were the little changes, like the manor I lived in, for instance. It was the addition of Hermione's vast collection of books in the library, her fluffy blankets she'd taken to curling up in by the fire, the once unused bedside table in the bedroom overflowing with parchment, journals, and quills. The way the walls were not just lined with priceless art, but with photographs of her, me, *us* – all right, and Theo, Charlie, Blaise, Red, Pansy, and Potter too. Our family.

She had finally agreed to move in with me two months ago, though she'd been practically living here full time before. But she had insisted that we *take things slow*, ensuring that we actually loved each other before jumping straight in to moving in together. No matter how many times I told her that it was pointless – we had been in love with each other since Hogwarts – she countered:

“You've waited fourteen years, love, you can wait a little bit longer.”

Well, I was done waiting now. The ring I'd designed – with help I begrudgingly accepted from Potter and Red – was currently burning a hole through the safe in my office. I'd taken to checking on it two, maybe three – okay at least *ten* – times a day before Blaise placed a stinging jinx on the box if it was touched more than once every two hours.

At the thought of the ring in the safe upstairs, my pulse beat rapidly against my chest. I shook my head, taking another deep breath before my fingers found the familiar, worn book and pulled it, revealing the stone walkway and the dark red door.

My witch, I knew, was on the other side – waiting for me.

I made my way slowly down the steps, wondering where I would find her tonight. We'd negotiated this scene beforehand – Hermione had found she quite liked the negotiation aspect of the lifestyle once she'd built up enough confidence for it. I found myself wondering why she never thought of a career as a barrister.

My hand rested for a moment on the gold door knob, taking another slow breath before I turned the handle and stepped into the room.

There she was, kneeling at her spot beside the door in perfect repose. Her eyes were trained on the ground, knees wide apart, palms up on her thighs. Her hair curled around her shoulders. The haircut had been a recent decision after a particularly long and difficult session with her mind healer.

It had taken almost three months of continued support, mild pushing, and a few tantrums on Theo's end for Hermione to finally take the plunge into mind healing. She'd canceled at least three appointments with Healer Thornton before finally showing up and the following night we'd celebrated with a quiet dinner at the manor with our friends. For the first time since I'd moved in, the house had been filled with laughter, light, and what I can only qualify as banshee screaming in the form of Theo when he had stumbled across the hidden door that led down into *the room*.

Thank Salazar for proper warding.

I took my time now observing Hermione. In many ways it was a different witch kneeling at my feet. One who was learning to listen to her emotions, to ask for what she needed, but also learning to set important boundaries.

Stroking her head lightly, I walked fully into her line of vision.

"Always so perfect for me, pet," I murmured before stepping away again. "Follow."

Immediately she fell forward onto her hands and knees, following as I made my way down the steps and into the play area. I'd already set out our equipment for tonight, my attention landing on the soft red rope coiled atop the small table beside the suspension area.

"Kneel up," I instructed.

Hermione sat back on her heels; her eyes were bright with excitement as she looked up at me. In the light from the torches, I could still see the shimmer of a few scars on her arms and chest from that night in the bathroom of her old flat. They were beautiful to me, mainly because I thought everything about her was beautiful, but also because of what they represented. It was the first time she had ever lifted the burden of guilt off herself. If she wanted that moment memorialized in scars across her skin, just as other difficult moments in her life were, who was I to judge?

Carefully I unwound the rope, bringing it closer to her.

"Tell me your safe words, darling," I requested, kneeling on the floor in front of her.

She took a small breath, her pink tongue darting across her lower lip.

"Red and yellow, Sir," she answered immediately.

"And what are you now?" I inquired.

Her smile was blinding. "Green, very green, Sir."

I stroked her cheek with the back of my knuckles once. “Good girl.”

Hermione shivered – she was so responsive in everything we did. Dominating her was like a dream because, *gods*, to have such a powerful witch place that level of trust in my hands, it was humbling. That was the thing so many people didn’t understand about the dynamic – it wasn’t just power exchanges and impact plays – it was trust. It was understanding that though the Dom might be in control, it was the sub who had all the power.

She had all of it and then some.

“Attention,” I commanded.

At once she stood, her feet separated hips width apart with her arms relaxed at her sides. I stroked the side of her thigh softly, watching the goosebumps left in my wake.

“Lovely,” I praised, pressing a kiss to her leg.

Slowly I began tying the rope around her thighs, eventually encouraging her to lay on her back so I could bind her calves to the existing knots. With each slide of the rope, each knot, she relaxed further until her eyes were soft. In moments like this, it made my heart ache to look at her. To know that even now, these moments were some of the only times she had as a respite to the pain and guilt she still carried with her.

“You’re doing so well, my sweet girl,” I praised. “Letting me tie you up like this. You’re staying so still for me.”

Her body melted as I repeated the ties on her other leg, eventually creating the intricate harness on her chest that left her breasts exposed but restrained her arms behind her back.

“Now remember, I can remove these ropes in less than a moment, love,” I said firmly. “All you need to do is use your safe word. When your mouth is occupied, you’ll send up red sparks – understand?”

Without my prompting, red sparks danced at her fingertips close to the back of her shoulder.

“Very good, pet.”

Once the final touches were complete on my Shibari work and I was satisfied nothing was restricting her blood flow, I summoned the suspension chains from the ceiling. It was quick work to attach them to her harness.

I locked eyes with her for a moment, a soft, contented smile on her lips as she looked at me. I couldn’t help but brush a little bit of the hair from her eyes, leaning forward to press a kiss to her mouth.

“I love you,” I said softly.

“I love you too, Sir,” she replied.

With a flick of my wand, she was raised off the ground. Once she reached the proper height for tonight’s activities, I stopped the crank, checking to ensure the harness and chains were safely

locked into position before moving to grab everything I needed for the first act of the show.

From how she was suspended, face up towards the ceiling, her knees were spread wide, body weight comfortably balanced between the anchor points on the chains. She looked comfortable, her body relaxing into the binds even further. A swell of gratitude swirled through my chest before I stepped closer, weighing the muggle vibrating toy in my hand.

I pressed it tight against her clit before securing it there with a sticking charm, but I didn't turn it on, content merely to watch her cheeks redden and eyes grow a little more alert. But then I circled her, my hands gliding over her skin and the ropes slowly, maddeningly.

"How does it feel, pet, to be completely at my mercy? To know I could do all sorts of depraved things to you and you would just have to..." I paused, leaning down until my lips were against her ear. "Take it." I straightened back up again. "I could force you to come over and over until your body ached and you screamed for mercy."

And that was exactly what I was going to do.

"What do you want, pet?" I asked darkly, hand skimming across one breast but not enough to satisfy her need for touch.

She took a deep breath, obviously trying to calm herself.

"To please you, Sir," she answered in a breathy tone.

A chuckle slipped through my lips as I rewarded her with a gentle slap to her breast.

"You are such a good girl, darling, and you know what happens to good girls."

With a flick of my wand the muggle toy began to buzz. Her eyes grew wide with the sensation – I knew it was her first time experiencing something like this and I devoured her expression. The way her brows pulled together, nipples peaked, her abs tensing beneath the intricate design of the ropes. I stood back, merely content to observe as a sheen of sweat dewed across her forehead, as her cheeks flushed and she bit the inside of her cheek.

"None of that," I corrected. "I want to hear you, pet."

Her first orgasm took her, her body shaking until she began to swing lightly on the chains. It was music to my ears, the sound of her moans, the cry of *Draco, Draco, Draco* echoing off the walls.

I stroked her face gently.

"You come so prettily, darling," I praised. "But you need more, don't you?"

She was panting, her body fruitlessly trying to move away from the still buzzing toy, but still, she nodded obediently. With one hand, I unfastened the placket of my trousers, withdrawing my already weeping cock and moving around to stand at her head. My other hand cupped the back of it, allowing her to rest the weight of her head in my palm.

Her abs began to tense again, her next orgasm already building.

“Open,” I commanded firmly.

She did, her head tipping back as I slid my cock between her lips, her jaw relaxed and ready. I groaned at the sensation of her hot mouth around me, drawing shallow strokes inside her, careful not to go too deep given the position of her throat. With the hand that wasn’t supporting her head, I flicked one of her nipples, her answering groan vibrating through my cock until I had to withdraw.

Fuck, it was a beautiful sight, the way her chest, beneath the red ropes, flushed, her cheekbones dotted with the same blush, eyes bright as her body began to tremble.

“Color?”

She bit her lip, her thighs beginning to spasm before she gave the loveliest little groan.

“G-g- *green* , Sir,” she cried.

The moment her mouth opened again, I slipped back inside as her second orgasm careened through her body, her moans almost bringing me to the edge until I forced myself to withdraw again.

“You’re doing so well, darling,” I praised, tucking myself back inside my trousers.

Her whimper was pleading, eyes slightly glassy as she watched me walk down the length of her body.

“Did you know that this toy is on the lowest setting?” I asked in a conversational tone, stopping beside her thigh and pressing my hand against her low belly.

At the pressure, her head tipped back, eyes closing as a feral groan ripped from her chest.

“Ask me to turn it up,” I instructed darkly.

She lifted her head, cheeks deeply flushed as her chest heaved.

When she didn’t immediately speak, I gave a sharp spank to an exposed part of her thigh.

“Please, Sir,” she groaned deeply. “T-turn it up.”

My answering smile was wicked, I knew, as I pulled my wand from my waistcoat and flicked it once, the buzzing of the toy increasing in volume as she screamed, her third orgasm tearing through her like a fiendfyre.

Her body fought against the restraints as she came, tears streaming down her cheeks as she convulsed again and again. I knew she was reaching her limit, I could see it in the set of her jaw, the cries she gave as the toy continued to vibrate. So, after a few more glorious seconds, I flicked my wand again, the silence ringing in the room as the buzzing ceased immediately.

“Such a good girl,” I said softly, removing the sticking charm from the toy and sending it floating back to the table. “So good for me.”

I stroked my hand over the ropes on her stomach, the barest bit of space at her sternum allowed me to press gently there, grounding her.

“Tell me your color, love,” I continued, my thumb stroking her skin.

She took a deep breath, her body shaking with the effort.

“Yellow, Sir.”

I nodded, unsurprised.

“Good girl,” I praised again. “Thank you for telling me.”

With another twist of my wand, the suspension system slowly lowered her to the ground before I vanished the ropes. In their place were gorgeous, intricate designs that crisscrossed around her body. Hermione stretched experimentally, her eyes still slightly glassy as she looked up at me.

“You are so beautiful,” I murmured, leaning down to scoop her into my arms. “So beautiful and all mine.”

Her arms flung around my neck as she pulled herself closer, pressing a kiss to the exposed tattoo on my collarbone.

“*Forever*,” she breathed.

Epilogue Two: Hermione

Chapter Notes

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

*Epilogue Two: **Hermione***

Gods, I thought perhaps this library might be my favorite place in the world.

Besides *the room* , of course.

And our bedroom.

And our bathtub.

Alright and perhaps this very secluded part of the grounds that Draco liked to...

Regardless, the point was that I thought that the Wizarding Library of Oxford might be one of my top ten favorite places in the world.

A few weeks ago I'd reached a dead end in my work trying to end the final restrictions on the rights of wizards and witches with lycanthropy to seek employment and had asked Draco if we could return to the library to look once more at the archives. He'd taken me a few times since then, especially when I'd been asked to give my professional opinion on the current dragon hunting laws being upheld in Albania. But each time we walked through the magically concealed doors, it was as if I was walking through them for the first time.

The experience was slightly different, I had to admit. The first time I'd walked through the double doors to view the stained glass cathedral-like windows depicting ancient, historical wizarding events, tears hadn't sprung to my eyes the way they did now. The awe I'd felt at seeing row after row of priceless, gorgeous books filled with vast knowledge had been muted by my occlumency walls.

But now? Now I was able to stand, gazing at the dark walnut shelves and rows of tables with the proper reverence. It also helped that I currently held hands with the one wizard who had made it all possible.

Draco had been an incredible support over the last year, there for me in those terrifying moments where my emotions bubbled over and I shattered all the windows and plates in the dining room, or the time we'd been walking through Diagon Alley and I'd heard a cackle straight out of my nightmares. Draco had been affected as well, grabbing my hand and apparating us away from the Bellatrix-like mirth before I fell apart at the seams.

"Miss Granger, Mr. Malfoy, a pleasure to see you again," the old archivist, Kent, greeted us with his now familiar Irish lilt. "I've already pulled some new texts for you over at your usual spot."

After exchanging the usual pleasantries about the weather, the state of affairs at the university, and some polite inquiries about his grandchildren, Kent left Draco and me to our own devices.

Greedily, I eyed the stack of parchments, journals, and texts in front of me, only slightly aware of Draco's exasperated sigh.

"You don't have to stay if you don't want to," I said gently. "I know I get a bit... *engrossed*."

Draco chuckled, running a hand through his hair before unbuttoning his suit coat and gracefully seating himself in one of the chairs before the mountain of information.

"I'm here to help, love," he replied. "Put me to work."

We spent the next hour or so in companionable silence. A few times I'd had to stop myself from trying to pull my hair up into a bun on top of my head, realizing that my hair was now too short for that typical action. Draco's knee occasionally bounced, whether in frustration or boredom I wasn't sure, while he dutifully copied the more fragile notes from a sixteenth century text onto fresh parchment.

"Do you remember the first time I brought you here?" he murmured softly, mindful of those around us.

Only half-listening while I skimmed an eighteenth-century periodical, I hummed my acknowledgement of his question.

"You were like a first year in Zonko's for the first time and trying desperately to hide it beneath your usual professional propriety and yet all it took was a look at one of these..." His long finger came into view in front of me, his signet ring glinting in the light as he tapped the periodical in front of me. "For you to lose all decorum and begin hyperventilating with excitement."

I rolled my eyes, turning the page carefully.

"You really didn't need to conjure a paper bag for me, I would have been fine," I mumbled, distracted.

He chuckled and I heard his clothes shift as he leant back in his chair, the weight of his gaze on me was tangible as I gingerly turned another page.

"It's always been a beautiful sight, to watch you in your element," he said with affection. "And so fucking adorable to know that you had no idea what was going on – no idea that you were actually on a date with me." He leant closer until I could feel the warmth of him against my arm as he dropped his voice into a low whisper. "You were so oblivious to what was happening then, just as oblivious as you are now."

My brows pulled together in confusion as I finally looked up, first at the clock across the far wall that said it was getting close to seven in the evening, before finally turning my attention to him. A small gasp wrenched through my lips, before my fingertips came to my mouth to stifle it, at the sight Draco not seated, but *kneeling* beside me, a small sapphire ring box balanced in his left palm, his right fingertips holding open the lid to expose the large, pear-shaped opal, seated atop a delicate gold band, the curved bottom of the stone lined with sparkling diamonds.

“Hermione, I have loved you since I was a boy, loved you through the good times and the bad – through a bloody war – and never once has that feeling wavered. The last year has been beyond my wildest dreams, I never once thought in a million lifetimes I would be lucky enough to have my affections returned. For someone like me, someone who lived in the darkness for so long, to have been found worthy of you, a witch who embodies the light even in her darkest moments... I cannot even begin to think what I could have done to deserve it but you will never hear me questioning it. I’ve had the privilege of watching you face your fears, witnessing your growth, your strength, your passion.”

My breath caught in my throat, tears welling in my eyes as he stopped, taking a deep breath to try to control the rising emotion in his voice.

“I know you said you wanted to take things slow, but respectfully – fuck that. You are my soul match, my love, my best friend, and the person I can’t imagine living a single day without. I love you *unendingly*. Will you do me the extreme honor of being my wife?”

The expression on his face was so open, so hopeful, his grey eyes glistening with the tears threatening to spill over, that I couldn’t stop the small little hiccup of emotion that bubbled through my throat. I nodded, a watery smile pulling at my cheeks as his face broke into a blinding smile.

“Say it, love,” he breathed.

I swallowed loudly, my fingertips falling from my lips.

“Yes, Draco, I’ll marry you.”

With shaking fingers, he plucked the ring from the box, immediately vanishing it to grasp my left hand and slide the gorgeous, glittering ring onto its intended finger. He kissed the ring softly before capturing my face in his hands and closing his mouth over mine.

Our tears mingled on each other’s cheeks as I wrapped my arms around his neck, only vaguely aware of the clapping echoing throughout the library from the wizards and witches that had witnessed the moment.

We broke apart before he pressed his lips to mine again and again, a giggle bursting through me with the unbridled joy of the moment.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you,” I answered as he pulled away, his thumb running over the opal on my hand.

He pulled me swiftly to my feet, nodding at Kent who had already come over with a bright smile on his face to handle the documents before us.

“Come on, we’ve got somewhere to be,” he said excitedly, helping me back into my cloak before pulling me toward the exit.

Only a few minutes later, we arrived in front of the quaint little café we had gone to after our first visit to the library. I groaned internally at how *obvious* it had been now that he’d taken me on a date, with the café’s soft, romantic lighting, gentle music, and delicious French food. He

held the door open for me, his hand low on my back guiding me inside. The hostess at the front grinned at us widely, obviously already in on the secret, and guided us to whatever table Draco had reserved.

A cacophony of sound greeted us as we turned the corner into the deserted restaurant. Well, deserted save the large group of our friends standing at the single round table in the center of the space.

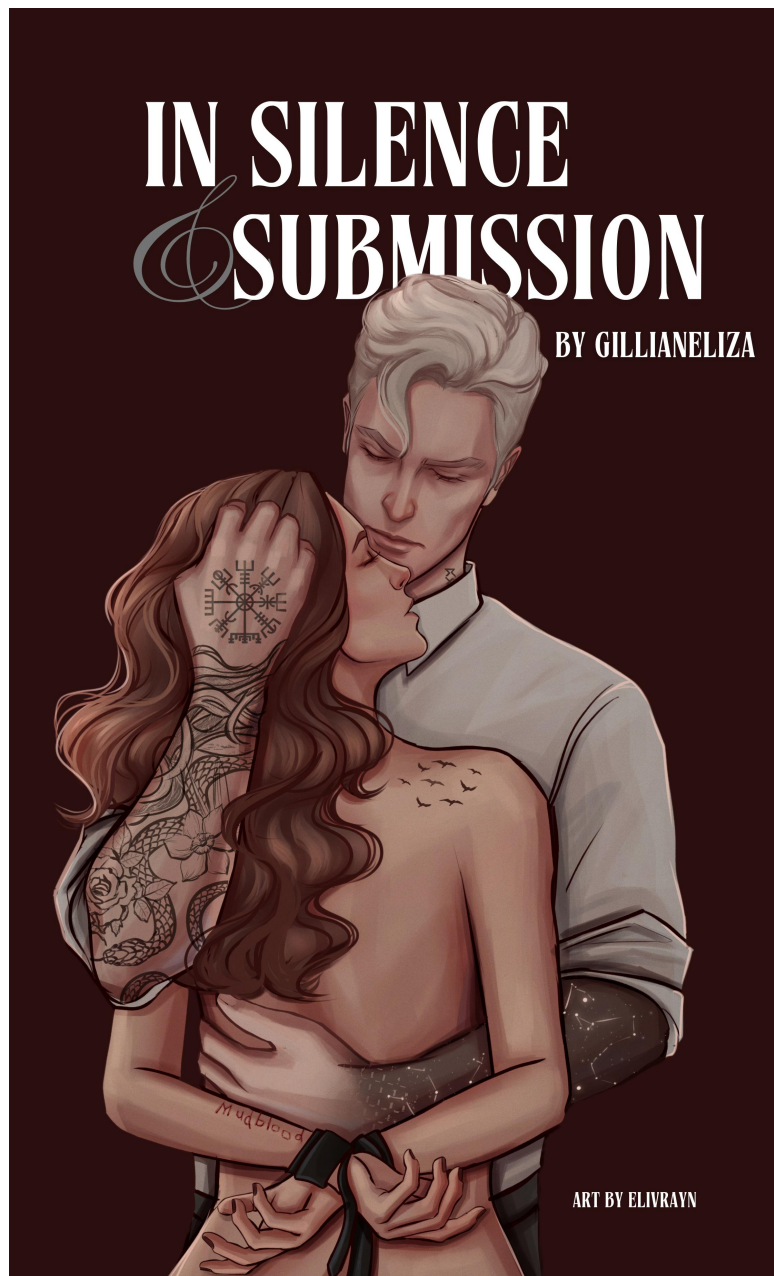
“Congratulations!” Harry, Pansy, Blaise, Ginny, Theo, and Charlie all cried at once, converging upon us to bestow many kisses and hugs.

As I felt myself being passed from one friend to another, each embrace more tearful than the next, in that moment I realized that it wasn't that I didn't feel the pain of the past. It wasn't that I had forgotten all the hardships and horrors that had brought us to this moment.

It was that, in spite of it all – in spite of the danger, the trials, the horror, the trauma that all of us had witnessed, we still could feel the acute joy that came with moments like this.

We had survived.

But now? Now we would thrive.



Chapter End Notes

I can't believe it's over! Thank you so, so much for going on this journey with me. The idea for this fic originally came about as a challenge put to me by [hellodarknessdarling](#) to see if I could write a short, all smut no plot fic for our friend [thebiglittlelibrary](#) & somewhere along the way it transformed into this.

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by [Beatificbean](#), [ETL_Echo_Audiobooks](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!